

Tam eased his arm carefully out from under her warm body and tentatively emerged from the cocoon of the duvet. He picked up his phone from the bedside table and tiptoed out of the bedroom. It was five o'clock in the morning and, being early March in Edinburgh, still pitch black outside. Tam stumbled into the sitting room and was just about to install himself on the settee when he noticed a mound of blankets and remembered their pal Percy had crashed out the night before rather than face the uphill cycle home.

He had no choice but to make the unheated kitchen his centre of operations. He pulled on an old Aran jumper and some jeans and mismatched socks and sitting at the table, his feet propped against the opposite chair, he typed in the address of the online auction site. It was less than an hour before the auction ended. Six in the morning was certainly a curious time to pick for the bids to end but the seller was in Australia where presumably it was a much more sensible time of day.

Offline, Tam checked the Wi-Fi on his phone, switched on but no signal. No need to panic, he grabbed the tablet, nothing, the old laptop held together with duck tape, no signal. He checked the modem, the light was red and solid. He yanked the plug out of the wall, counted one thousand, two thousand . . . thirty thousand, power on, still nothing. OK backup plan, Internet café, library.

Not at 5 a.m.

There had to be internet somewhere in the city. The cooker clock showed 0511. Tam slapped his forehead with the palm of his hand. Of course, the tram! First departure York Place 0529.

He stole quietly back into the sitting room and carefully lifted Percy's keys off the floor. He headed out the flat door, down the tenement stair and out onto the still icy street.

Percy’s bike was locked to the railings, the long chain lovingly intertwined around the wheels, frames and fence. There were two distinct frames expertly - at least Tam hoped they were - welded together. Percy’s great-great grandfather, a schoolmaster in Kegworth, had joined what had once been two tandems into a magnificent quad bike. Speeding around the hairpin bends of Nottinghamshire on a Friday after school had helped him blow off steam after another week battling with the school board.

Tam had only ever been a passenger on the contraption while Percy steered but it hadn’t looked that hard, at least not from where he had been sitting. At this hour of the morning Easter Road was mercifully clear of traffic and only a couple of food delivery vans pulled out in front of him as he turned into London Road. He safely negotiated the roundabout at the top of Leith Walk by crouching low and tilting the quad in what Tam felt was the style of a TT racer, past the Playhouse and around the final roundabout he saw the tram pulling into the stop. His plan was going to succeed! The Edinburgh Trams Customer Service agent hovered in the vehicle doorway and Tam fished into his pocket for money to buy the ticket.

No wallet! A trickle of cold sweat ran down his back.

He patted his pockets desperately but, no money, only his phone. He quickly connected to the tram Wi-Fi and found the auction. The price was still within his budget, he would just have to hope the last minute bidders were slower than him.

*Clang, clang* the doors closed and the tram trundled off along York Place. Tam leapt back on the quad, balanced the phone in one hand and steered with the other just managing to stay in touch with the Wi-Fi signal but had no free hand to refresh the screen and see how the auction was going. The phone half slid out of his hand as he turned the bike past the Portrait Gallery and pedalled uphill to St. Andrew Square. The incline wasn’t steep but with only one

hand on the handlebars and a gearless bike made for four, Tam was struggling to keep up with the tram.

'Have youse nae pals?' A couple of squaddies looking like they were on their way back from a night out, yelled at Tam from the gardens in the middle of the square.

'Gisa shot.'

'Help me pedal?' Tam said hopefully.

The lads lurched onto the back of the bike and began to pedal. The tram headed down the hill to Princes Street. Tam now had more power but as the squaddies whooped and hollered from the back, a lot less stability. Where was their commanding officer when you needed him?

The tram paused at the Princes Street lights and Tam took the time to hit refresh and confirm the auction was still on course. As they passed the Overseas Club a woman dressed in pilot's uniform stepped briskly out onto the pavement. She caught Tam's eye and taking in his unruly crew couldn't resist slinging her bag across her shoulders and jumping onto the last seat from where Tam could hear her barking brisk orders at the hapless squaddies to pedal fast and in an orderly fashion. With the power and order behind him Tam was easily able to keep up with the Wi-Fi signal as the tram pondered along the tranquil streets.

'I'll need to leave you at Haymarket,' the pilot yelled to Tam. 'I've a plane to catch. The passengers get upset if I'm late for work.'

'Aye nae bother. Thanks for your help.'

Tam was feeling quite relaxed as they all headed into Shandwick Place. He used the West End stop as a chance to shake out his fingers which had become cramped clutching the phone over the top of the handle bar.

As they approached Haymarket, Tam was getting ready to say good bye and thanks to his pilot when he noticed that the tram tracks dipped down and away from the road. As the pilot stepped onto the tram with a smile and a wave, the doors closed and the vehicle, rapidly picking up speed, disappeared.

Tam hung his head and felt his spirits plummet as his great scheme had come to nought. He signalled to the squaddies to turn the quad around, trying to cross the tracks at a right angle as instructed by the man from the Council.

*Clang, clang.*

Hey, hey,' the squaddies cheered as the York Place bound tram arrived at the stop.

They were back on.

As the unstable, but no less enthusiastic, trio chased the tram back along Princes Street, Tam put in his first bid. Immediately it was beaten. He waited a couple more minutes watching the clock on his phone until he was sure it was the last 15 seconds of the auction. As the tram and the quad with only three men sped back down North St. Andrew Street, he bid again. *Auction over. Congratulations! You have won!*

'Ya beauty!' Tam raised both arms in the air, looked skywards and closed his eyes, victorious. The quad had picked up speed on the downhill and now without its driver to steer it around the corner to York Place was heading straight for Dublin Street. The side of the front wheel clipped the bollards at the top of the street, the force of the impact was too much for the elderly bike, one quad became two tandems, Tam and the squaddies flew in different

directions, part of the frame skidded down the cobbled street, the wheel still spinning in the air as it came to rest beside an elderly red Honda.

On the other side of the street in the gutter a mobile phone beeped, *congratulations on winning the auction for an antique engagement ring. The seller will be in touch to arrange secure delivery.*

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