

The Camera Never Lies

By Keith Jenkins

This next tale is based on a true story. I have used a certain amount of poetic licence but the gist of the story is true. Be careful out there!

The pub was fairly busy for a Tuesday, but it took no time for Trev to spot his mates. They were at their usual end of the bar; Stevie perched on the bar stool, holding court, whilst John, Dave and Bones listened with differing degrees of interest.

'There he is,' said Stevie, nodding towards Trev. 'What you having, Trev? Usual?'

'Yeah. Bud please, Stevie,' he replied, before nodding at the others. 'Alright boys, how's it hanging?'

A small chorus of acknowledgements greeted his question, before Bones spoke up. 'So Trev, had a couple out of Dicky's, I hear?'

'Yeah, Bonesy. Sunday night. A 19 and a 24. Well chuffed, mate. That's a good result for there at the mo. Cheers Stevie.' He lifted the proffered pint and took a long swallow. 'Lovely. Needed that mate. Yeah, had one at midnight and the other an hour or so later. That lake is so dark at night, blacker than Satan's arsehole!'

A cough and splutter of lager/snot issued from John's nose at the description, and laughter rang out from the others at their mate's misfortune. 'Bastard!' snorted John, whilst wiping his face with a bar cloth.

'Steady fella,' said Stevie, 'don't want anybody accusing us of snorting the stuff!' More laughter rang out and they fell into their usual Tuesday evening routine. This evening, however, Trev had centre stage and regaled the others with his tales of derring-do from the previous night.

'It's lovely during the day; you know that, Dave,' Trev continued. 'Beautiful scenery, peaceful, just birdsong and the odd deer whistling in the woods. But it's one of those strange lakes, it don't get a sunset. 'Cos you're fishing in such a wooded valley, and on the west bank, it goes from dusk to dark like someone's dropped a curtain.'

'Bloody spooky, if you ask me,' declared Stevie, who hadn't been asked. 'Even when I popped down to see you Sunday afternoon, it had that...I dunno... that strange 'feel' about it. Like there was something...weird.'

'Woooooo!' wailed Bones, waving his hands in the air. 'Who you gonna call?'

'Piss off!' said Stevie, unused to being the butt of the joke in their little group.

Trev laughed along with the others, but he more than any of them knew what Stevie meant. On more than one occasion he'd woken on a pitch black night, convinced that he'd heard a footfall, or a voice, or any number of things that could have awoken him. He normally lay there, stretching every nerve to try to sense more, but nothing ever came. Come the first light of dawn,

however, all was lovely and the fears of the previous night dispersed as quickly as the mist rising from the lake.

'Well, I gotta say boys, it wasn't much fun having to take those pictures in the dark last night,' he continued. 'I had to go up to the old hut and use that as a backdrop, otherwise the photos would have been shit. Only took a couple of each side, though. I weren't gonna stay outside too long.'

'You must be mad!' declared Dave. 'If it's so scary, why do you still fish the bloody place?'

'Cos they're stunning bloody fish, Dave! You've seen Lenny's photos. There are some stonkers in there, mate, and I plan to get myself one, spooky or not.' With that, he drained his glass and ordered up another round.

The evening took its usual meandering course after that; football, women, fishing, women, TV, women, women on TV, women who fished, women who played football. It was all very intellectual and highbrow, punctuated by regular bursts of laughter.

As 'last orders' were called, Trev took a film canister out of his pocket and gave it to Bones. 'Do us a favour, Bonesy. Get these developed for me, will yer?' Bones worked in a camera shop and could get the film developed quicker than most, but it was a dying trade.

'Bloody hell, Trev, when you gonna get yerself a digital jobbie?' drawled Stevie.

'You know me, Stevie; Old School, mate. I like to hold the photo in my hand, not have to lug a bloody computer around to see it. Or, worse still, look at it on a bloody phone.'

'Oh, 'ere we go,' said John. 'Trev's on his anti-digital soapbox again.'

'No he's not,' said Trev. 'It's just, well, you know. They're phones, for phoning people...' A chorus of jeers drowned him out and he swore profusely as they batted his head with their palms. 'Alright, alright,' said Trev, holding up his hands in defeat. 'But I'm just saying...no, no, just kidding!' They left the pub, laughing and joking before saying their farewells.

'I'll have the prints for you Thursday, Trev,' Bones said as he jumped in the back of Dave's car.

'Cheers mate, I'll see you here.'

Two days later the scene was much the same. Stevie seated, regaling all with another tall tale. Dave, John and Bones in differing states of attention. After a while, Stevie interrupted his latest tale. 'What's the time? Trev's late, ain't he?'

Looking up at the clock, Dave said 'Half nine. Yeah, he is a bit. Not sure what he was up to today. Might have been working up town.'

The conversation continued for another half an hour, but was then interrupted by a phone ringing. 'Sorry boys,' said Bones, reaching into his pocket and retrieving his phone. Looking at the phone, he nodded, then answered. 'Alright Trev, where are you mate?'

'Tell him I've bought him a bloody pint,' Steve growled. Bones waved his hand, indicating the need for quiet.

'Bones, hello mate. Sorry I couldn't make it. Got off early so I came over the lake,' came Trev's reply.

'Oh, right mate. Any good?' asked Bones whilst making a 'fishing' sign to the others.

'Oh yeah, Bones, very, very good. I've just had one of the big linears, boy. Absolute pearler. Looks about thirty five. Gonna do the pics in a mo, then I'm off. Might get to the pub. I'll give you a call in a mo.' With that he rang off, and Bones relayed the conversation to his mates who all nodded and raised their glasses in approval.

'Oh, that reminds me,' said Bones. 'I've got his photos here. Not looked at 'em yet,' and with that he fished a small envelope out of his inside pocket and opened it up. He took out the photos and skimmed through the first dozen, which were shots of the lake, a distant deer, Trev's missus and two of the floor. 'Here we go,' he said, as he reached the first of the fish pictures. These were in daylight, and were obviously of an 18lb common that Trev had caught a month earlier. After a couple of these there was a poorly framed night time shot of a mirror, followed by another, slightly better framed picture.

'That must be the 19. Pity it's overexposed,' said John.

Bones then got to the next fish, the bigger one, and shuffled through the four pictures to see if they were any better. 'Looks a bit better. Oh well, he'll be happy with 'em, I'm sure.'

Just as he went to slide them back into the envelope, John put his hand on Bones' arm and said, 'Hold on, what's that?' He took the photos and pointed to the first one. 'That. Look.'

Over Trev's shoulder was a faint glow. 'What's that?' said John again. He slid the photo aside and they looked at the next print. The glow was brighter, and seemed to have features, like the face of the moon.

'Bloody hell!' said Stevie. John carefully carried on with the 'slide' show, and there were audible gasps as the third print was revealed. There was no longer a blurred glow behind Trev; now there was a distinct image; an image of a face. The features were still slightly blurred, but there was no doubt that they were the features of someone's face.

There was no sound from the four of them. They just stared at the image, unmoving, mouths slightly agape. John looked at each of them individually, as if to see if they were ready for the final 'reveal'. Having got a silent acceptance, he pulled the last print from behind the third, and before any of them had a chance to gasp, Bones was reaching for his phone.

All was silent for a second before Bones broke it, urgently. 'Trev! Trev! For God's sake mate, answer the bloody phone!'

'He'll take more photos this time, won't he?' said Dave, rhetorically. 'It's a bloody thirty; he'll want to get the best shot he can.'

'Come on mate, answer the bloody phone,' said Bones, pressing Redial once again. The others stared helplessly, willing the phone to be answered, then Bones' eyebrows raised and he held up a hand. 'Trev? Trev! You there mate?'

The ring tone had stopped, the phone had been answered, he was sure of it. 'Trev? You there mate?' A whisper? Was that a whisper? A voice? It sounded like the sougning of cold wind through skeletal trees. Bones' eyes widened, then he wrenched the phone from his ear, and dropped it onto the bar as if it were on fire.

'Fuck! Fuck!' He stared at the phone as if expecting something to crawl out of it. The others were frozen with fear. They had no idea what had happened at the other end of the line, but their friend's ashen face told them that it wasn't good.

Next to the abandoned phone, the fourth print stared back at them. The face now took on a spectral aspect, looking for all the world like someone wearing a 'Scream' mask. But it wasn't. It was so not. The eyes were, if anything, red. The mouth opened in a snarl; rancid teeth scattered about like ancient gravestones. And to the left, a raised hand held something glinting and partly out of shot.

'What, Bones? What happened?' asked John for all of them. Bones turned and stared at them, as if he'd heard a ghost.

'Farewell,' he said. 'That's all it said, just 'Farewell'.' With that he turned and made for the door, followed by the others, but way, way too late.