

WOLFGANG

a novel in 5 volumes

by Will Lorimer

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VOLUME 2

BEWARE OF THE FOBY



The erstwhile Laird was running a coffee shop, ‘Strictly half an hour,’ his mate promised as he left him in charge of ‘Caffeinated Contentment™’. Empty then, the place was now filling up with regulars desperate for their early morning fix. As a barista, Wolfgang was a complete failure, even though he was giving his all. He knew the general terms, beyond the basic black & white and instant of his parents, but what the difference was between a cappuccino *wet* and *dry* he hadn’t the remotest idea? Then there were the new espresso sub-divisions. So far, he had been asked for a *lungo*, a *quad* and a *no fun*, and he suspected there would be a lot more. Likewise, Americano, which now he learned could be *double tall*, *doppio*, *flat white*, *half-cut*, *skinny*, *half*

and half and *with legs*. And that wasn't even including the confusingly named muffins, glowing like radioactive space debris in the glass counter display. So hazardous, apparently, a hairnet and protective gloves, were de rigueur and special steel tongs required to dole them out. Never mind the *honey buns*, *stroop waffles*, *salt donuts*, *jam beignets*, *raspberry croissants*, *almond biscotti* and *strüdel poodles*, in a separate compartment, and dispensed with sterilised pincers. Ice cream had similar precautions, and was served in scalloped dollops, which looked quite small to his eyes, for all the portions were described as *super-sized*. There was an electronic till with a display with luminous little pictures of the above that responded to his finger. Everyone had cards instead of cash, or black devices which they waved at the till which somehow charged for their order. What the fuck? He was only doglegging it in Wales, following a forking path traced on his 4d map reader, en route to meet up with his Inuit amanuensis, and resume dictating his novel, but instead he was running a coffee shop.

5 years refurbishing a castle in the remote wilds of the Kingdom and the World had clearly moved on. Who were these people? His last time in this hill town they were either scrawny

sheep farmers subsidised by the RU, or malnourished hippies hiding away from the apocalypse subsisting on benefits and beans, not these branded types, sporting soft clothing bearing the slogans of organizations, nations and penal regimes Wolfgang had never heard of, wires dangling white buds in their ears. Neither were there any ashtrays, or indeed any smokers unless he counted two puffing away outside. It was a puzzle. What was this *lifestyle*, so prominently featured on the glossy cover of the 'Caffeinated Contentment™' brand magazines scattered about? Exactly how did that differ from a life? And what were all those devices they were intently tapping, collectively sounding like an insect colony. Were they beaming electronic messages, invisibly through the air? Perhaps not so invisibly, Wolfgang reconsidered, out the corner of his eye catching a glimpse of zipping trails shimmering in the smoke free Welsh air, reminding him of the fox fire he would sometimes see, coursing the strings, late at night working on his map back at the castle. Only when he squinted, these luminous strings, though faint, were actually evident in day light, and seemed to be converging on the radio mast on the hill top, framed in the window of the cafe.



Amazing the changes, he shuddered, trying not to focus on the busy lines of data crossing the room, some actually streaming through his innards. To distract himself from what wondering which vital organ the electronic messages might be messing with at that moment, he turned his attention back to the customers, lounging on their sofas like snooty Lords and Ladies in a select club for the Gentry or perched on stools hunched at the high tables, which anyway hardly merited the term, being more like flat-backed cockroaches on attenuated legs reflected in the deep gloss of the specially imported African *lignum vitae* floorboards which showed up every spec of dirt and squashed jam muffin under the cockroach tables. That all being

part of the style of the so-called design ethic of Caffeinated Contentment™, as the manager, a former employee at the castle had explained, before running out of the door to answer a ‘call’, which Wolfgang suspected was not one of nature brought on by his double tall skinny mocha, for he had noticed there was a toilet in the back of the coffee shop, (disconcertingly for *both* sexes!) but rather was a telephone call on his mate’s black device, which had chimed exactly like Big Ben striking the hour before he left so hurriedly. It was almost as disconcerting as learning of the latest unpleasant murder the day he hurriedly departed the Castle, after signing a pre-divorce agreement, negotiated by Jaws his lawyer, on whom he was now dependant on funds. Just making it over the new Scappa Flo bridge before the border



was closed, reduced to driving a second-hand banger, which had broken down in Wales.

Fortunately however, a couple of nice regulars – girls actually, who disconcertingly referred to themselves as ‘guys’, had taken pity on Wolfgang, and were helping out behind the counter making the intricacies of the espresso machine look easy, which had not been the case when Wolfgang had hardly been able to see the first customers for gusts of steam, as he pulled at the levers like a demented church organist playing a Bach fugue to a congregation of the damned. As it was the mid-morning rush of caffeine heads from new businesses which, since Wolfgang’s last visit, had popped up like hallucinations brought on by magic mushrooms in the formerly boarded shops

of the high street, selling windsurfing gear, scented soaps, gastronomic consumables - craft cheese, leek beer and such like, queuing for coffee *to go*, (another new term on Wolfgang) was snaking out the door, (which confusingly was opened by depressing a pad at the side) where there seemed to be some sort of disturbance with the smokers.

Wolfgang felt a nudge on his arm from Rachel, one of the girl/guys, at his side, who he now understood he was supposed to think of as his co-worker, behind the counter.

'I think you better go help old Nick.' She pointed one of her star speckled fingernails, at the door, 'that's him just outside. He's always complaining about something,' she shrugged, smiling sweetly. 'But it takes all kinds, dunnit.'

'Can I help you sir,' Wolfgang said, smiling insincerely down at the lanky man folded into the electric assisted wheelchair, who appeared to be a recent convert to the new order sweeping rural Wales, his greying hair pulled back in a lank pony tail, hanging over the astrakhan collar of his smart tweed jacket, which was unbuttoned, and clearly a new purchase, unlike his worn yellow waistcoat, stained green

corduroy trousers, and scuffed brown brogues, the laces undone on one shoe.

‘About time,’ he snarled, looking up, ‘can’t you café fiend people do something about that bloody ramp.’

‘What’s wrong with it? Wolfgang enquired with genuine curiosity, since he associated shop doorways with steps, and wanted to know more.

‘Too steep for the servos of my new e-zippy,’ The man said, tapping a gloved driving hand to the battery of his sleek electric wheel chair, which appeared to have been designed in a wind tunnel. ‘This disabled access is borderline illegal.’

‘Sorry to hear that Sir. Assuredly, I will pass your complaint on to the management,’ Wolfgang said insincerely, while wondering how a perfectly functional doorway could, at the same time, be borderline disabled *and* illegal, as he smoothly steered the wheelchair past the queue.

‘Stop here.’ The man ordered abruptly, waving towards the toilet area at the back of the shop. ‘Park the e-zippy there, when you are ready, I’ll have a half and half mocha and organic Alvera sweetener, with a buttered malted toasty, crème cheese and a slice of lime on the side. I’ll be in my usual place,’ he

pointed to a sagging yellow sofa, which fortunately was unoccupied.

‘But won’t you need your wheel chair?’ Wolfgang asked, restraining an urge to stuff the grumpy old fart back down into his seat, as he rose from it.

‘In case you were wondering, I am not disabled,’ the man, who was surprisingly tall, said drawing himself up haughtily, and looking down his flute of a nose at Wolfgang, ‘Just vertically challenged, that’s all.’

Yes, it was a rude awakening to a very changed world out-with the Kingdom, Wolfgang had in the heartlands in Wales, but a good preparation for his arrival in the big city where his amanuensis impatiently awaited him. The castle, and the moonshine of a buccaneering past, fading in the mists of a Kingdom that time forgot, as the bright colours bled out on the tapestry that Brünhida wove after their marriage, and the shooting star which was supposed to represent him, plunged to earth, before emerging on the far side of the horizon into the brash light of this brand new day.

SESSION #1



Wolfgang resumed his surveillance of his amanuensis. Behind the raised lid of his expensive new laptop computer, with its double head eagle icon glowing evilly, she was filing her nails again. By rights, by now they should be stumps. Long even strokes, back forth, back forth, it was endless. Christ it was hypnotic. Rasp rasp. Like a woodman's saw, and about as long.

Where was he? French windows half open onto a small curved balcony, browning leaves falling from the lower branches of autumnal trees above. Below the Victorian scrollwork of the

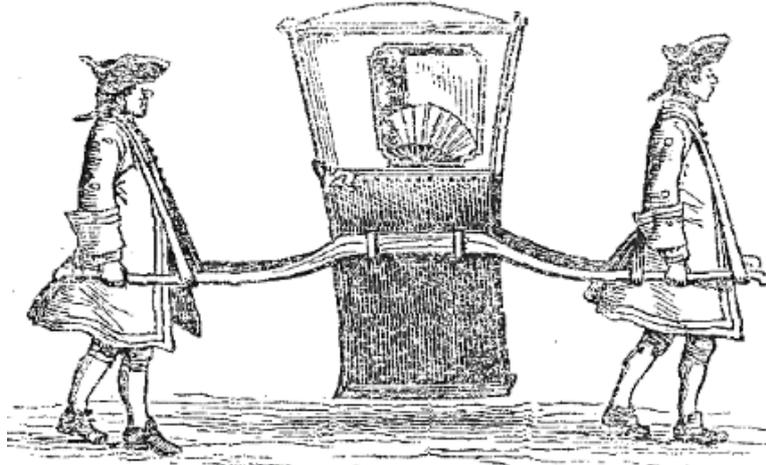
balcony's rusting balustrade, the red roof of a double decker bus going past. London then.

Closer, a low building across the road, slates slick with rain, the sky the same grey as the day he took occupancy, following a serendipitous encounter in the heart of the City, a couple of miles away.



Seven Dials had showed up green orange on his 4d map reading device, offering a confluence of possibilities, something he guessed was to do with its seven cross roads. The fact it was the 7th day of the month, was another success indicator. A connection to Caffeinated Contentment™, back in Wales, albeit across the several centuries, was further suggested by a plaque above the basement doorway of the Three Cheers pub, which was on either the seventh or the first corner of the

intersection, depending on which way he turned his forking schematic and adjusted the scale to fit the page of his London A-Z. According to the legend, the pub was the smallest in England, and occupied the site of the gentlemen's club where coffee was first drunk back in the 17th century. The name of the pub derived from the habit of the original doorman of shouting into the London fog, as the last three honourable members, finally staggered out of the club, 'three chairs, three chairs for the Gentlemen,' whereupon six footmen carrying three sedan chairs appeared from the surrounding streets, before the gentlemen went their separate ways, carried in the sedan chairs.



Sedan-chair.

Wolfgang seated on one of only three reproduction sedan chairs, all the limited space of the dimly lighted basement pub would allow, when the only other customer, a tall gaunt man in a cashmere coat, pushing past his table, upset the erstwhile laird's drink. That led to Wolfgang graciously accepting another from the stranger who he took to be a property agent of some kind from the large bunch of keys jangling at his waist, inside his unbuttoned silk lined cashmere coat. But there was more, when he returned from the bar, and leaned in, to set down the glasses on the table, his broad shoulders looming over the lamp seemed to spread bat wings, before he sat down in the sedan chair opposite.

Wolfgang got a glimpse of gold in a half-cracked grin as the man introduced himself, 'every wune knows me round heah, as Plain John,' he laughed, 'that's because Oi'm such a pain, when you geyt to know me.' He smiled, almost threateningly, 'three cheahs,' he said, raising his pint glass. 'Heah's mud in your eyes, cock!'

'And in yours,' Wolfgang rejoindered, not sure if he had just been insulted.

Done for introductions, Plain John went on, plain as plain, explaining he was in need of distraction from disquieting news he had received about his boss.

‘Serious?’ Wolfgang raised an eyebrow.

‘With the amount involved, I recon sow.’ Plain John nodded. ‘Roight now, ‘e’s on trial mate, yea, on trial,’ he nodded again, as if confirming the matter to himself, ‘for embezzlement, that’s wot.’

‘At the Old Bailey?’ Wolfgang immediately sensed a high stakes court drama, from the man’s plain tone.

‘Na, sumwheah else,’ Plain John shook his head.

‘Moscow?’ Wolfgang hazarded, suspecting that Plain John’s employer was a wealthy foreign national.

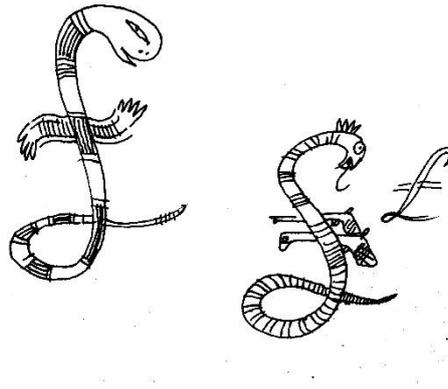
‘You got it in one, mate, got it in one.’ Reaching a hand into the breast pocket of his coat, Plain John glanced up at the no smoking sign, above the empty bar, cracked the cellophane of the cigarette pack with a practiced broad thumb that might have belonged to a strangler, disposed of the foil with a flick, drew an untipped cigarette and lit it with a gold Dupont lighter.’ Help yourself mate,’ he said, waving a meaty hand and a clutch of rings, not plain, at all, indeed practically knuckledusters, at the

open pack on the table, took a deep draw on his cigarette, settled back in his sedan chair, his exhalation, expanding like a UFO settling down over the table lamp between them, the blue smoke casting a spooky glow over the proceedings.

‘Care to ‘ear a story, mate?’ he said, only his eyes, under the hood of the sedan chair, shining like two coins in the darkness. Gold or brass, it was hard to tell.

‘Got all afternoon if it’s a good one,’ the author replied from the shadows of his chair.

It was a long story, with few salient details, in the telling, but all the more interesting for it, when Wolfgang learned of the recently vacated, terraced house that needed ‘warming’, one of several properties owned by a Russian oligarchs currently on trial in Moscow charged with embezzlement of billions of roubles from state funds. Owed for back wages, and left in charge of the properties, the upshot Plain John clearly was embittered and didn’t foresee his former employer returning to London any time soon.



'A hundred nicker', in the form of two crisp £50 notes, passed under the table, an underhand move Wolfgang felt was expected, but thought unnecessary - given the barman was outside clearing the tables on the street. Anyone that asks, he is to say he is the caretaker, but no names, can be mentioned. Wolfgang understands exactly, and understands nothing. Sitting in a red Alpha Romeo coupe, that is anything but plain, parked outside a terraced Victorian townhouse, Plain John hands over the key to the front door, says he might pop by once in a while, for some 'fings' he keeps in a basement locker, but apart from that Wolfgang is free to use all the rooms. Plain John is pleased, and writes down the number of his *'Dog and bone'*, which Wolfgang understands to mean his black telephone device he keeps in his coat breast pocket, which Plain John says he is only to call from a phone box, and only in case of emergencies. He