



**NOBODY
SAW NO
ONE**

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SAW NO
ONE**

STEVE TASANE



WALKER
BOOKS

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*For Rosie, my beautiful muse,
soul sister and fiercest critic*

1. HOT DOGS

This tale ain't about me, Citizen Digit, even though I'm a walking story myself. Why d'you think everybody calls the Digit a master storyteller? Because I'm the Complete Works, is why.

Listen up to the Mystery of Alfi Spar – a saga of lost identity, crime and cold bloody murder, thrilling to the earhole.

I'm stage centre of this tale, naturellement, so – twist my arm and break my legs – I'll begin at the beginning, with me assistificating *ComputerWorld* Oxford Street with their security measures.

In other's words, Citizen Digit is out on a shoplifting expedition.

What's the best bit about liberating goodies from shops, you may ask? It's the joy of removing the impossible. Like the Magician and his Vanishing Ladyfriend, Citizen Digit can make things disappear at the drop of a hat.

Imagine something so big you can hardly lift it, never mind shoplift it; something so masstastic you wouldn't

be able to get it out the shop without an in-store Sherlock holding the door open for you like you was the Queen of Windsor herself huffing and puffing with a – yes indeedly – a freshly shoplifted flat-screen TV.

Picture it: said flat-screen TV covering all of Citizen Digit's handsomeness, up higher than his head, all screen, zero face. One pair of legs beneath, eight sticky fingers clutching the edges. I'm a proper forklift.

Not possible I hear your mumblifications. *No one can steal a TV without getting spotted.*

Ah, but the trick ain't not getting spotted. The trick is not getting *noticed*. Skulk around looking all shift-kneed and the Sherlocks will be onto you straight away. Pick up the TV and walk straight out with it, nobody'll bat an eyeball.

The best bit ain't even when In-store Sherlock opens the door for you on account of seeing you in such struggles, and you say *Thanks very muchly*.

What the Digit loves most comes two seconds later, when the door swings shut behind you. The first steps along the pavement. The whole world is the empty space behind your back. That heart-stomping moment with no hand grabbing your shoulder. No *Oi!* from behind. Just one big black hole that could swallow you up.

Two more steps. Three steps.

Four steps, and the Digit has gone supernova.

If it wasn't for the fact that getting caught Sucks with a capital S, I'd take a big bow for a mid-pavement

ovation. The whole of Oxford Street ought to rattle their jewels, point their phones and post the Master Thief's gorgeous fizzog all over YouTube. But in this instance, that would defeat the purpose. Gotta make do with blending in, walking away with a brand-new flat screen. Surfing the heart-stomp. Wotta buzz.

On this particular incidence, the nanosecond our story begins, Citizen Digit ought to be lifting lightweight. iPads is what the Digit prefers. iPads is just as valuable as flat screen TVs, only your arms don't ache.

But Virus ordered a flat screen at the last moment. Virus is what you'd call my *Line Manager*. He's immediately superior. Says we need a flat screen or two to pull the punters in. "It's visually big, my poppet," says old Virus. "Little iPads don't catch the punter's eye. We'll wire it up, stand it in the middle of the display. It'll look magnificent."

Yeah, but the Digit's breaking into sweatiness from the labour. That ain't cool. The Sherlocks can sniff sweat. *Notice* you.

Still, no such thing as a perfect crime. And I'm outta there before they can sniff twice. Thank you *ComputerWorld*, I do believe my duty is done.

This is when I run into Alfi Spar.

I acquainted Alfi when I was in Care. Tenderness House Secure Unit they called it, like it was a hotel for nervous peeps with sensitive skin. Alfi was one of the WhyPees.

For your inf: *WhyPees = YPs = Young People = kids*. Kids like me and Alfi who aren't able to be cared for by normal Groans – that's grown-ups – because of our Behavioural Difficulties.

Alfi Spar had worse Difficulties than any other WhyPee in the world. Alfi is a Born Loser. He's a squealer also, and a whingebag. How he actually became a best friend of sorts is a mystery because Citizen Digit is particularly particular about his bruvs.

I'm too soft, that's my trouble. Citizen Softness, that's me.

I'm toughing myself up as from now. Ain't even going to mention Tenderness House no more. I'll tell you why: the point-dot of a second the truth comes out of the Citizen's mouth, the Authoritariacs label it a lie. It's a CryWolf22 situation, ain't it? Citizen Digit is a proven thief and rascallion. Therefore if he speechifies anything, it is automatically a lie. So I ain't going to say nothing more about it. The world is going to have to find out the truth about Tenderness House Secure Unit by some other means. Forget I mentioned it.

Alfi's the one obsessed with making mentions of things. Squealer-Boy's issue is that he makes Accusations with Malice. It's a good job nobody's ever given him a whistle 'cos he'd never stop blowing it. Any time he thinks the Groans have broken any rules, he makes an official complaint to the SS – that's Social Services, yeah? Always harpifying about lousy carers he's had over the

years. He's like CryWolf222222. You wouldn't believe the kind of accusations he's made:

Theft, corruption, drug-dealing.

And other stuff we daren't accuse them of. Stuff that's true but seems too untrue to be true, and therefore cannot be happening.

So you make your exit, don't you? Shift yourself to a different reality. That way it ain't happening no more.

Looks like Alfi Spar finally wised up too.

Which is how come prodigal shoplifter Citizen Digit is achieving the unheard impossible of lifting a flat-screen TV in barefaced daylight, and Alfi's sitting there on his flattened cardboard box, *Homeless & Hungry* sign, hat on the pavement with 20p in it, a busker with nothing to busk. Everybody can see him, all shiverish on that soggy cardboard, scratched and bruised and sorry for himself. It's just that nobody cares, is all.

Alfi Spar was always sussless. Here he is, straight outta nowheresville, messing up my tidy life. *Again.*

Boomf!

The flat screen shatters into a trillion pieces as it hits the pavement. Seven years' bad luck.

Now everybody's staring at us.

"Oi! You!" In-store Sherlock comes bouncing out the shop, all purple-face and sweat-stink.

"Leg it!" I'm instructing Alfi, who's demolishing precious seconds gathering up his begging hat that ain't even worth the 20p nesting in it.

“Byron?” He blurts out my name. My Not-Name. Always a blabber, Alfi Spar.

“Run, Squealer-Boy!” I’m tugging him up by his chicken-wing arm.

I hate getting spotted. It’s utterly ruinatious.

On the other hand, I *love* leading the Sherlocks a merry dance.

So I tighten my grip on Alfi Spar’s wishbone and shuffle my tush to the Oxford Street Boogie. Triple-time, for your inf. *Beep beep* pedestrianistas, here we come!

I’m frozen on this pavement, even on top of a flattened box and wrapped in this blanket I found. I stink too. Honking. Got to get a dog, to snuggle up to, keep me warm.

In an hour and a half all I’ve had is 20p in me hat. Can’t no one read? Homeless & Hungry. Can’t no one see us? I’m getting nasty looks, so I know they can. But I’ve been trod on enough times. No sorries. Everyone rushing to the next shop. I should be shopping. I should have an iPad. I should have a dog. A hot dog.

It’s me first time in this city.

The only other city I been to is Bradford, the nearest big place to the village where I lived six months wi’ me foster family, the Barrowcloughs. I thought Bradford were big, big as you could get. But London is a hundred Bradfords all crammed up. It’s no surprise I’m starved. No one eats in London. London eats you.

What’s that make me, then?

A crumb.

Scran. I've had none since yesterday – a hot dog that turned me stomach. I had to do an emergency poo in some bushes in a park. A bloke in uniform spotted us, chased us off. You're never invisible when you're trying to poo.

Could anyone do a poo and stay invisible?

Yeah. Byron could do a poo in the middle of Oxford Street and make it so no one 'ud see.

Byron were one of the Tenderness YPs. A master-thief. A bad 'un. A magician. He could make things disappear with a click of his fingers. But Tenderness House en't Hogwarts. It "caters for the well-being and emotional development of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds".

Only a muppet 'ud cop that.

Tenderness crams up all the most criminal kids from everywhere, lads and lasses, so they can all teach each other their tricks – lock-picking, car-jacking, bag-snatching, you name it. If you ever need a grade-A tutor to run a workshop on credit card scams, just visit Tenderness House.

Course, I en't no crim. Not Alfi Spar. It in't nicking, picking things outta bins. People've had enough to eat, is all.

I think I stink. Pooh! Yeah, I defo stink. I had to scarper before wiping, din't I, when I were squatting in the bushes. Folk look round – what's that pong? Looking for dog poo on their shoes. But it en't dog poo. It's me, Alfi Spar, homeless and hungry on the streets of London.

The day I arrived, a lorry driver dropped us off. He had

ham sarnies. He must o' known I were starving, 'cos I were slobbering like a dog. He wanted us to move away from me window seat, sit in the middle seat, next to him, begging for scraps.

Four hours I'd stood on that hard shoulder, trying to thumb a lift. Loads o' cars beeped at us or had passengers staring out the window, laughing at us freezing in the road. Then Mr Trucker saw us and stopped, helped us up into his cab. He kept swivelling his eyes off the road and patting me leg.

"How old are yer?" he said.

"Sixteen," I lied.

I'm fourteen really, but Byron taught us that. "Whatever age you're at," he'd say, "always say sixteen. Even when you're nineteen. Sixteen is the appropriated age. 'Specially when you're fourteen. Stay wise, yeah?"

Byron's a year older than us, but you'd think he were grown-up, the way he goes on.

I reached London and scrounged half a sarnie, wi' the trucker patting me knee any excuse he had, even though I were proper skanking. Everyone always goes on about me nice smile. It's me fortune, they reckon. Half a sarnie, leastways.

I were beginning to get freaked out, wondered whether I'd have to jump out. This weren't exactly the point of fleeing from Tenderness, were it?

What were Byron's fabulous advice back then?

Smack 'em in the goolies and run.

That's more or less what he did, Byron, in't it?

Me an' all. I followed his example.

It were a relief when the truck hit Central London.

Relief for about thirty seconds, that is. Central London, with a million people trampling, crushing, pushing and tutting, swallowing you up.

Just as mad as everybody made out it is.

I found some card and borrowed a pen to make a sign, cupped me hands, raised me eyes. Looked for a friendly face, but all I saw was legs. Hours of them.

So I hung out by bins. If you pull the grub out quick enough, it's hardly touched the rotten stuff at the bottom. It's winter too, so stuff won't go off soon as it's dumped. You could call it dining out.

Pizza slices. Bags o' chips. Noodles. All sorts of scraps. I did half an afternoon round one bin. It really in't nicking. But a copper give us dirty looks, started strolling over, so I were out of there.

If they catch us, they'll send us back. And if I end up back at Tenderness, I'm a dead lad. Governor Newton'll get his hands on us.

Call me Norman he used to say. So t'other kids used to call him Call-Me Norman. But not to his face.

Never mess with Norman. Never.

I'm sticking wi' begging. Begging's all right, even if no one gives you owt. It makes you ... not exactly invisible – just not worth bothering with.

I will eat. I will. I'll get another hot dog, a fresh 'un.

I'm going to get a proper dog too, with thick fur like a woolly blanket and hot doggie breath like the hand-driers in public loos. A hot tongue, to lick me face clean.

I'm going to get a little hairy terrier, like the dog in The Wizard of Oz. I'll fight the monkeys. Kill the witches. I'm going to— "Byron?"

He clatters over the top of us. Summat massive shatters all over the pavement and I duck me head under me arms. A flat-screen TV? Really? Two hundred miles from Tenderness House and the most insane of all the YPs bumps into us on Oxford Street, with a security bloke right after him, shaking his fist. Just great.

He starts pulling us up.

Should I go with him?

No. Yes.

Yes, I should. No, don't.

The security guy pulls us an' all. They grab an arm each. I'm torn. How come I always get seen by people I don't want seeing us?

Byron were the only mate I had at Tenderness. At least, when he weren't looking out for Number One.

I twist me wrist free of the security guy's sweaty grip, and before me brain knows it, me legs are running again, alongside me so-called friend.

Byron catches me eye as we run, winks at us.

I wish he wun't do that. Whenever he does that winking business, it means a bad moment is going to take a sharp turn for the worse.