

Laurie Healy

THE GREAT ESCAPE

'Flat tyre,' offered Brian straining to peer down at the offending wheel, his gaze fixed uselessly on the flat bottom of the tyre.

It was the middle of a dark and lonely night, they were stuck on a reasonably deserted road beside a forest and he knew there was nothing he possibly could do.

Brian was a proboscis monkey and a very smart proboscis monkey at that but even with all that brainpower changing a car tyre was beyond his capability. He had spent years surreptitiously learning how to drive the zookeeper's car and now it would seem he should have spent at least some time on possible maintenance issues as well but alas, best laid plans and all that.

But if he had, they might not be in this pickle.

'Flat tyre,' growled Archie prowling around restlessly. 'Looks more like flat everything.' Archie waved a large paw at the back of the ute. Archie was starting to lose his shit. He was a cranky old lion at the end of his tether. This was his one last chance to escape that festering zoo and it looked like the plan had been hijacked by sheer incompetence.

Brian raised his gaze to take in the whole picture.

'Well yes.' he agreed reluctantly looking at the back of the ute to where a hippo was standing highly embarrassed, completely through the tray reducing the zookeeper's car height considerably and squashing most of the good bits that make the car go out from under to where they don't work near as well.

'That could also be a problem I suppose,' he mused, idly playing with his bulbous nose.

'You suppose.' Archie replied barely holding his temper in check 'Whose idea was it to bring Fatso anyway,' he growled menacingly rounding on Brian.

'Don't call me fat,' wheedled Petunia defensively from inside the tray of the ute. 'I'm not fat. I'm just got big bones.'

'Big bones, hah. Big bloody everything,' Archie replied unkindly.

'He called me fat.' Petunia started to cry. 'Make him stop. Make him stop, Brian,' she pleaded between sobs.

“Now look what you’ve done,” Brian aimed at Archie quietly trying to patch up the problem. ‘Fat lot of good you are.’

‘Did some-one say fat again?’ Petunia wailed in anguish while still standing through the car. ‘I’m not fat. I’ve got a hormone imbalance which makes me put on a little weight.’

‘Yeah. Yeah. Whatever,’ Archie added offhandedly. ‘Look why don’t you just stay in there while Brian and I sort this problem out. Try not to wreck anything more with that great big fat arse of yours.’

Petunia wailed helplessly and crunched her way out of the car to the side of the road away from the others where she continued with her sorrow unabated. The ute was now a disaster. Way beyond anything man or animal could rectify.

Brian sighed and played with his nose. ‘Big help.’

‘I heard that,’ Petunia cried.

‘Not you,’ Brian explained while glaring at Archie.

Archie just prowled about unrepentant. No way he was apologising to that useless lump of lard.

‘Why did we invite her anyway?’ he breathed to Brian.

‘Like I’ve explained before. We needed her to push the car until we were far enough away from the zoo so when we started it up it would not wake everyone up. That’s why.’

He continued on, the words arrow sharp and nasty. ‘If someone else hadn’t been so bloody high and mighty and just for once decided to help out and use his considerable strength and push the car for themselves we wouldn’t have needed her in the first place.’

‘Don’t get up me, big nose,’ Archie warned. ‘I’m not called the king of the jungle for nothing.’

‘Not much bloody jungle about here,’ Brian spat as he climbed up one of the trees to weigh up his options. He was thinking about moving on, make his way through the trees before the sun came up and leave this sorry lot behind.

‘Hoy. Where do you think you are going, honk face?’

‘I’m outta here. Oh, and where I come from honk face is a compliment.’

Archie roared his frustration.

‘Well that’ll wake the neighbours, stupid,’ Brian advised from the safety of the tree. One more shake of his head and he was gone, hand over hand dancing through the trees.

Archie roared again and again.

Petunia wailed continually trying to hide her bulk on the other side of the road away from Archie's roars. She was offended but also feeling a pang of guilt. One night, when Brian had secretly advised her of their breakout plans he had asked her weight, but like every respectable lady, she had massaged the figure a little, just a little bit, you know. How was she to now that the zookeeper's car couldn't carry her? It looked sturdy enough and she was just a dainty hippo in her prime. She was at a loss what to do. Brian had fled leaving her with Archie who was just roaring and roaring. She had never liked him anyway, too noisy, too stuck up. She didn't know what to do. What would become of her? She just wished Archie would shut up.

Archie wasn't going to shut up. Actually, Archie wasn't going to do anything. He was too old and grumpy to develop a plan. He wasn't running, he wasn't hiding, but most of all he wasn't going back to that zoo. A red bloodlust had come over him, something in his genes and he let it race all through him. It was the call of the wild.

'I'm the king of the jungle,' he roared proudly awaiting his fate.