



Chronophobia#1 – The Desadomy Element

By Thomas Stakeman

*“That which hath been is that which will be. And that which has been done is that which will be done.*

*So there is nothing new under the sun.”*

**Book of Ecclesiastes, Old Testament**

*“Hail guest, we ask not what thou art.*

*If friend we greet thee hand and heart.*

*If stranger such no longer be.*

*If foe our love shall conquer thee.”*

**Inscription on the two White Towers on the A23 London Road marking the Northern boundary of Brighton**

*“[The Victorians had] the determination to build great and costly [clock] towers which were by and large without functional justification. The provision of a public clock was certainly more important in the days when the mass of the populace did not normally possess watches...but this can hardly explain the provision of elaborate structures to support the clock.”*

**‘Victorian And Edwardian Town Halls’ – Colin Cunningham**

## Prologue

### The Accident

The man sat in the tree in the darkness. He noticed the road was long, straight and empty. It was a dual carriageway, that most anachronistic of highway terms dating back to the days of horse and carriages, but irreplaceable as names for roads go due to there being no simpler way to state its purpose using less words.

He noticed the centre of the road was covered by a grass verge, sporadically dotted with bushes of varying states of repair. How their density depended on how many children at the nearby secondary school had brushed past them to cross the road, rather than use the crossing designed to slow down speeding traffic from the roundabout at the nearby northern end of the road.

Cars would speed from this roundabout, negligently ignoring ‘Slow – child’ signs until reaching this crossing. But not at this moment. At three in the morning, the road was empty, the plastic ice cream wrapper blowing westerly across it its only pedestrian.

Until the tall man in the distance approached. The man in the tree noticed he walked nervously, putting a sweeping stroke into his stride, so it seemed the power went into his left step and his right leg was legally required to follow. His clothes were odd. He wore a suit with a cut not seen for several decades, a neck tie and a mackintosh. He looked as if he had used a mix of charity shops frequented by particularly elderly people to create a fancy dress costume of a Cold War reporter mixed with biting 1970s fashion sense. His

hair was dark, wavy and parted. He walked with a confidence accompanied by an evident sense of fear and weariness.

The man in the tree observed him reach the easterly side of the road, look left, then right and then cross crisply to the central reservation, stopping between an aubergine-coloured bush and a withered horse chestnut stump.

A brown attachment to his left wrist chimed softly at this point. He lifted up his sleeve to reveal a dome-shaped device, flattened at the top with a rectangular shape protruding outwards towards his fingers. It was held onto his wrist with large, wide leather straps. The tall man looked concerned at what he had seen or heard from this device. He shook his head and muttered: "I'm out of time." It was the only sounds at that point anyone who had been there would have heard. The man in the tree did. He watched the tall man step off the reservation towards the far side of the road.

People in accidents are always heard to say, "He stepped out of nowhere", or, "the car came out of nowhere". The huge lorry, which ran over the tall man and killed him did exactly that. There were no cars, lorries, bikes, buses or any vehicles travelling down that road at the time the tall man crossed the final carriageway.

And yet a large red and blue lorry, weighing 36 tonnes, hit the tall man straight on as he stepped out. His body slammed vertically into the large radiator grille, his last view being the 'VOLVO' sign in the centre of the grille. His skull caved in as the truck hit him at 36mph, his body dragged straight under, and spinning around as it hit the tarmac so that his legs and spleen were sent under the truck cabin's rear wheels. As the wheels went

over the tall man's lower torso, his legs, pelvic bones and lower spine were crushed; organs were pushed into and through others and bones were cracked or pushed sideways through the man's skin. The truck swerved at this point so the right hand side wheels of the freight compartment now went over, in succession, the remains of the body. The skull was now crushed, the insides forced systematically out into the ruts of the tyres. His ribcage was flattened liked a collapsing deckchair. The device around the tall man's wrist was shattered into several hundred pieces. It emitted one last chime as it was crushed. The lorry was nowhere to be seen.

The road was silent. The man sat up 30 metres above the accident in the branch of a tree brushed slowly the straightened sleeve of his dark leather coat as if to signify something had been achieved. He lowered this arm, which had been raised to point in the tall man's direction as he had crossed the road. On his wrist was a similar device to the one the tall man had worn. He tapped the device and the rectangular section at the front retracted back into the stunted dome-shaped section. He clambered down the tree, dropping the last 10 metres with his long coat sweeping up behind him. He landed softly, his leather boots seeming to glide the last few inches, as if time slowed to let him land gracefully. He crossed the empty road, and walked over to the remains of the tall man. He stopped, and took out from under his jacket a chain around his neck with a black crucifix attached. He quickly bowed his head and kissed the black crucifix before returning it under his shirt again. He walked up to the body, which had been smeared over a long streak of the road. He looked closely at several bits of the remains of the tall man before putting on a black leather glove. He knelt down and scooped up the remains of the man's wrist device before putting them into his pocket. As he walked away, he stopped only to spit on the crushed skull. The road was again, empty of all human life.

Six Years Earlier – 3AM

Charles Toynford, Chaz to his mates, was in a rush as he tried to get to his last delivery of the night. He had to get his Volvo lorry to drop off deliveries to a Tesco supermarket in Shoreham, West Sussex and subsequently, his depot outside Brighton. The problem was that the A27, the large road from the west to there, was still closed due to floods. The police were using the diversion as a chance to stop nighttime lorries & check the hours lorry drivers were working, his mate Clem had warned him earlier that day. Chaz had already worked more hours than his tachometer showed and the police would be able to work out this easily from his delivery sheet. He wanted to be home soon in Hassocks, outside Brighton as he recently had started to distrust his wife, Nadine these last few weeks – there had been strange phonecalls that she answered oddly, the phone had been going dead when he picked it up and she wasn't using her usual perfume he had bought her in Fuerta Ventura seven years ago. Spending two hours with Sussex's finest boys in blue wouldn't give him a chance to try and catch her at it, whatever 'it' was. He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

He pulled off the A27 as it started to go through the wealthy housing estates at the back of the Sussex town of Worthing, and cut down through what would have once been a rural village. During the day, this would have been too busy, but at this deserted time of night he could take the huge vehicle down the long straight road pass the village towards the seafront without meeting another vehicle. From there, he could take the coast road to Shoreham.

He brought the huge vehicle around the wide roundabout on the other side of the newer houses south of the village and accelerated hard as he thought of Nadine again. Could it be Del, their next-door neighbour she was involved with, or perhaps she'd caught up with her estate agent, ex-husband again, Simon? Simon had been back around the estate agents in Hassocks again that was part of the three he managed as area manager. Chaz accelerated again at the thought of Simon sneaking into *his* house, the house that he had worked all these hours, driving all these night to pay for....

There was a flash of blue light & a loud 'CRACK' as Chaz felt something impact hard into the front of the outside of his cabin. Whatever it was went straight down and under his wheels. He swore, broke hard and the vehicle swerved, listing violently to one side. As it did, he felt the rear left wheels bump up as they went over something. He brought the vehicle back under control and parked up on the central grass reservation. He jumped down from his cab and ran back up the street to where he had felt the impact. There was nothing. Absolutely nothing.

"Impossible." He said to himself, shaking his head. He had definitely hit something big, bigger than a dog. A child? No, he was sure he had seen the top of a..... head, before it got dragged under. A man? He spun around – the body hadn't been catapulted anywhere and it had felt like it had been dragged all over the road.

So where was it? Had he imagined it? All these long days and nights, the relentless hours on the road, worries over Nadine. No – he *had* definitely run over something. There was no question. It must be trapped up on the underside of the Volvo! This was going to harder to explain to the police than illegal hours.

He got his torch from his cabin and shone it all over the road. Nothing except tyre tracks. He gambolled back to the lorry and methodically checked underneath. Nothing. He walked around the wheels that he had felt rise up over the body. Body? There was nothing, not even in the ruts of the tyres. There was just a faint smell of diesel oil and the heat of the tyres and brakes. Mystified, he walked back to his still-running cab. He got in and pulled off. "I must be going mad," he said to himself in his drivers' door mirror, "Something can't be there one minute and not the next." He accelerated, slowly this time towards the seafront, his heart racing still painfully, and adrenaline pumping through his veins.

The man in the black leather jacket watched, unnoticed from back up in the tree once again.

"I think," he said, smiling to himself, "You'll find you are wrong, my friend."

## Chapter 1

### The Burning Of The Clocks

There was one place left to tag that Denni hadn't got to yet. The rest of Preston Park had been covered in their graffiti signatures, nearly leading to arrest on several evenings, but now Ray Hadley felt he had trumped his mate from down the road from where he was living in foster care.

Along with numerous other teenagers, several gangs and even two accountants from London, they had plagued the town of Brighton over the last two years (when Ray had been ten), annoying police and residents by tagging walls, cars, trains and even one pensioner. The local press had campaigned to catch them, the police had offered rewards to catch '*DENOTE*' and '*D-Ley*' but to no avail. Denni (real name Dennis Otterly, and in the year above Ray at school) had finally raised the stakes the highest yet by getting a bit of Brighton Pavilion daubed with his tag. Ray realized he would have to now not choose somewhere just dangerous to tag too, but would have to do the tag in a situation that caused more danger than Denni's latest offering.

And now he thought he had it. Tonight, as part of Brighton's Christmas activities, was the 'Burning of the clocks' parade where, as a winter hangover from Brighton festival, crowds gathered in Preston Park to celebrate the shortest day of the year ending by burning large paper machier clocks that they marched with through the North Brighton Park in a vaguely pagan event. The park was a wide, slightly sloping park that traffic in and out of Brighton to or from London went past. It sloped up to the eastern side where

there was a spread out wood, and in the centre of this, a terracotta-coloured park clock from the late Victorian age.

The clock was based on a set of grey steps, and students would gather at its base in the summer months to barbeque, get drunk and get to know each other more. In winter months, tramps could be found wrapped in blankets and newspapers asleep at its base. Its two-tone terracotta and red-brick walls, medieval-style doors and ground floor plaques were unloved, engraved with graffiti, and on occasion, sprayed with urine, whether dog or human. As it sloped upwards, it rose 60 feet over the park, and its four clock faces showed different, but equally incorrect times, except of course, twice a day, when they were, briefly, correct. They hadn't worked as long as Ray could remember, and it was from looking at these on the bus the previous day to his school in Patcham (Ray hadn't been able to get into the nearest school to him, from his home in Herbert Road, and his foster parents were unwilling to appeal on his behalf, so he went two miles to school instead everyday) that he had come up with his idea to beat Denni.

Tagging appealed to him as he loved the challenge of the risk of being caught, and the speed with which you had to produce your design (Ray thought little of those who called tagging 'art') – it was more about the adrenaline, the constant need to get somewhere more daring, which appalled more pensioners, and then onto your next one. His foster parents, Sian and Jon never really cared what he got up to: he could wander off for days and they never noticed. It had been like that with Sandy and Jack before, in Ovingdean, and Tamsin and Rob before, and so on and so on. No one had ever really cared about Ray and so Ray didn't really care about anyone. His schoolteachers, if they had been asked unofficially, mostly saw him as destined for a young offender's institution, then

prison. So did his endless round of foster parents. He tried his best to live to their expectations. Teachers or social workers that showed an interest soon gave up – Ray did have plans but didn't want anyone interfering. He didn't show anyone his abilities were much greater than they knew because he was too clever for that – show ability at school and your life was marked out. Ray wanted to trundle by for now and then planned to travel – and sail the world. He had tried sailing with the only foster father he had ever clicked with – Anthony, who had taken him out from Shoreham sailing club before he had to give up Ray as he and his wife were separating. Ray had loved the exhilaration of the speed of the *Lazer* dinghy, the angle you leaned at, but most of all the silence once you got out to sea. When you went out as far as the end of Brighton's Palace Pier, everything went silent and you were away from your worries, bullies, teachers, uncompleted homework and people that didn't want to know you. You were too busy concentrating on the next tack or gybe – you felt you were existing away from the mass of human society, and existing out of time.

This was what drew Ray forward to the entrance of Preston Park now on this December night – life was pointless, he had worked out – you live, you die, you get forgotten. So – get through this stage of your life and then go out to sea as soon as you're old enough and spend your days somewhere timeless – the sea – an endless mix of adrenaline and nowhere. You couldn't make a difference, you couldn't leave anything behind for long after you die – so what difference does it make if you tag buildings when you are here – and make people remember something outrageous – for a while. And this tag would be outrageous. People were going to remember what he did tonight for a long while.

Ray and Denni had tried to climb the clock tower in the park many times, but had failed. Ray was going to tag the roof of the clock tonight as the procession marched past – his biggest ever – and then set the clock below on fire so that everyone saw the tag before the clock burned down. Talk about the burning of the clocks! It was a useless old clock as well – never worked, and you couldn't even get inside it – its one door was always locked and no one ever entered or left it.

So now it would be destroyed – and everyone at the procession would see his tag before it burned down – it would be in the local papers tomorrow – and Denni would have to beat that! Ray smiled as he walked through the rose garden towards the clock, trampling on the bushes rather than walking on the grass. His rucksack was full of spray paints, white spirits and rags and some matches, as well as karabiners, a rope and crampons for climbing. He had stolen this climbing gear from the cupboard at school that he knew kept these in since going out with the climbing club at school (Denni had paid for him – his foster parents never would have). He had mastered tricky climbs swiftly and now reckoned he could take on the clocktower – but without being seen? Adds to the risk, he said to himself quietly as he came out past the tennis courts. In front of him was the clock tower. Ray grinned to himself.

The park was still quiet enough not to notice a curly brown-haired twelve-year-old of slender build in dark jeans & sweater with a rucksack make his way towards the clocktower through the trees in the dark December night. Ray had decided that climbing up the far, more sheltered, easterly face would mean he would be less likely to be seen. He could then swing around to the westerly face to tag the roof. He was also dressed in the rock climbing boots he had also pilfered from the store. His brown eyes had a

purposeful sparkle in them as well as their usual look of melancholy, emanating a wisdom and confidence not befitting a twelve year old.

Nobody noticed a dark-clothed boy of near teenage years climb a red brick gothic style clocktower, even though Ray had needed to upend a park bench lengthways to get him up to the first level. Once there, he kicked the bench away and luckily, it landed without too much noise in the long grass – the right way up. As it had landed this way, it looked as though it merely had been moved for an impromptu gathering, and no one took any further notice. He was now lying across an angled roof decoration, with another level about a metre above, with two decorative gargoyles either end. Ray managed to lift himself onto this level, with his knee on the flat jetty, his hand on the gargoyle for grip. He was able to catch his breath for a minute.

Less comforting though, were the levels of pigeon excrement on the upper levels of the clock. Ray was currently lying across the first flat level of outwards jutting tiles, with one hand and leg below and one above to steady his grip, which was already slippery due to the guano. Getting vertical would be a problem as there were fewer handholds than he anticipated. He would have to improvise.

He took a sharp metal spike out of his pocket and slammed it in tight between a crack between the side walls on the level he was standing on and the wooden window sill side of the opaque windows on the second level. Using a loose bit of slab he jammed the spike in hard enough to take his weight. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a weed had grown between cracks in the masonry long enough to form a woody stem. He moved his knee to balance on the spike and lifted himself upright by pulling on the branch and

twisting his knee so that his leg slid upright and he could slowly stand up. Wincing with the slight pain of metal jarring into kneecap, he managed to stand reflecting that he owed his success to the branch not falling out and sending him falling a dozen foot below.

Holding onto the branch, he roped the climbing rope under the large looped belt loops on his jeans with his other hand. This is where it got trickier – he now looped the length of the climbing rope into a long loop and swung it upwards. It took twelve attempts but he eventually managed to get the loop around the metal supports sticking out from the corners of the clock's walls. He then used the rope to pull himself up to the corner and stuck his knees into the support – it was rusty and painful. He pulled himself round to stand on the straight metal lever on top of the support and repeated the trick with the clock hand ten foot further above him – the quarter-to hand had been easier than the one at 11 o'clock. The only problem was as it was more vertical than the hour hand and thinner as a minute hand – this meant there was more chance that the hand could snap if it was rusty after all these years. The clock had read quarter-to-eleven ever since Ray had come to this park as a small child with his foster parents at the time who had lived in the big tower block to the west of the road alongside the park. This meant the clock had probably not been maintained for nearly ten years – if not longer.

He took a chance and tightened the rope, using it to pull himself up and vertically climb the clock's third level. He was short-to-medium build, slim and wiry, ideal for climbing and his upper-body strength was good for someone of his age. The decorations helped as he climbed higher – the Victorian designers of the clock loved their elaborate panels and chaotic patterns, and these presented Ray with increasingly easier footholds. He was also able to lever himself into position by pushing out with his arms and legs against the sides

of the clock that branched out from the clock face. Eventually, he was able to stand on the clock arm itself. As things were seeming to go well, however, he heard a disturbance and saw a group of sixth formers on their way to a winter's evening of drinking games walking up the path by the back of the clock tower who would undoubtedly see him. He threw the rope up to the corner balustrades on the corner of the fourth level of the clock, leaned forward, using a good foothold, slackened the rope with one hand and prepared to swing around to the north side of the clock.

Just as he was about to make the swing, the combination of his weight on the clock hand gave out and the clock hand gave way. He swung around the clock, and the final part of the swing launched him up slightly. As the rope came loose, he was able to grab one hand onto the outcrop of stones, which announced the start of the fourth level of the clock. The rest of his body slammed into the stone corner side of the clock wall causing him nearly to lose grip on the outcrop. Some remote part of his brain recalled a silent movie star called Harold Lloyd who had once been in a similar predicament in one of his movies.

Emitting a volley of swear words, Ray grasped hold of the next level with both hands and an effort to ignore his bruised ribs. He tried failingly to maintain a hold due to the levels of pigeon guano and realized he was about to slip down and fall over twenty feet. As the weight pulled down on his arms, he let one arm go and dropped his rucksack. He now had no way to go up further except using the rope around his waist. He grabbed hold again with both hands and felt his muscles increasingly ache. There was now no way he could tag the clock but he could at least set it on fire with the matches in his pocket. Ray

was determined that now he had managed to climb this high, it was important to leave his mark in some way. And a fire was certainly one hell of a mark, wasn't it?

He looked up. The level above him was the top level of the clock and narrowed out to a steeple, covered by a metal roof with a spire above. It had the effect of looking like a strange battle hat from the Civil War, or an ancient wooden lighthouse top. Underneath the tin roof were a panel of wooden weatherboard slits on all sides, like in a weather centre. Sliding his feet vertically into the slight apertures that became columns on the corners of this clock face, he was able to support his weight again. For the moment. With one hand, he took off the rope around his waist and threw a section of it over his shoulder. He then undid his belt buckle from his jeans and slid off his belt. Thankfully it came off easily. Using a method he had seen to survive being trapped down a well, he straightened his legs to walk up the sides of the clock face wall – inch by inch he moved upwards, helping himself by pulling upwards with his one attached hand.

With one last spurt of strength, he leaped up, so that his free hand holding his belt buckle raised above the ledge. Quick as a flash, he stuck his hand forward so that the belt buckle was pushed through the slits on the level above. He then fell. This was the moment of truth – if the buckle twisted, then it would be wider than the gap between the slits and would lock behind them. If it didn't he would fall to injury, or possibly death.

The buckle locked. The wooden slits groaned and more pigeon detritus and dust fell down but it held. Ray grabbed hold of his belt and climbed up it. On reaching the wooden slits, he climbed up further by putting his hands underneath each and pulling tight. Then Ray's luck changed. The seventh slit up cracked as he pulled back on it. His

reaction was to let go and lean in the opposite direction – forward. As he headbutted the wooden slits, they buckled and collapsed inwards – Ray fell through them into an explosion of wood, clock machinery, splinters and frightened pigeons. He tumbled as if doing forward rolls, head first into another floor of wood, which too, promptly gave way. As he fell he blacked out, coming to a stop by landing on a wood floor.

One side of his brain felt hazy and somehow *grey* coloured. His leg was twisted badly under him, he remembered much later and he felt warm blood trickling from a cut on his head and from his nose. His ribs felt broken and he could only see intermittently the lit lightbulb that was now swinging above him. A lightbulb?

“You were supposed to be here seventeen minutes ago,” a voice said from the other side of the light, “and just look at the mess you’ve made.”