

# Zeppelin

A Short Story

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‘What d’you think they’re *really* doing in there?’

It’s a game they play once a week. They drive into town for vape juice and vinyl – feeding her nicotine addiction and his lust for Led Zeppelin.

Town, or just Norwich. That’s what they still call it after thirteen years. Not *the city*, which is what the locals say. Old habits.

Halfway in, they pass the model-railway shop. It’s been there for decades. They went in once, just to see. All trains and tracks and tiny trees, and a dedicated space where you could get a cup of tea and do your model planning. And so many staff. She wasn’t buying it, not in this day and age. Not with Amazon and eBay. Monstrous overheads. They’d left, giggling, bantering about where the bodies were buried.

‘Double-oh gauge.’

‘What?’

‘That’s the code. You say “double-oh gauge” and they show you the real money stuff – machetes and machine guns.’

He laughs and takes his hand off the gear stick. Slides it over to just above her knee. She’s the love of his life and these moments warm him – the easy companionship. They never argue, always find a way to work out the hard stuff. There’s nothing he couldn’t tell her.

A few miles on, it’s the cane shop’s turn.

‘Come on – who buys cane furniture anymore? Or who buys *enough* to keep a place like that afloat?’

They decide it’s Norfolk’s premier drug-trafficking centre. She says the scare quotes on the signage give it away.

‘*All types of “cane” furniture sold here.*’ She reads it out loud, holding up two fingers on each hand when she gets to the middle word. He glances at her and winks.

‘I’ll take four grams,’ he says. ‘Norwich is breaking bad!’

They park in St. Giles, grab an early lunch from a café in the lanes, then mooch around together for half an hour. He doesn’t fancy looking at shoes and electronic ciggies, and she’s not interested in flipping through boxes of old records, so they agree to meet back at the car in an hour.

He watches her head off towards Imelda’s, a spring in her step. Apparently, the shoes are delicious, though expensive. Worth every penny, she says. And why not? She works her backside off for her business, and they don’t lead an extravagant life. Her fancy shoes give her pleasure, and that makes him happy.

He makes his way to the second-hand record shop and pushes through the door. Sal’s on the till.

‘Zeppelin.’ It’s their code word.

Sal leads him round the back, down some stairs and past a tower of junk vinyl. Says: ‘Just in.’

The Makarov is compact. Not great on accuracy but the hit will be close-range. And he likes the integrated suppressor.

He pays, places the pistol in a concealed pocket in his jacket, and picks up the plastic bag Sal’s prepared. He walks his fingers through the album sleeves so he can crow about them in the car – Skynyrd, Moody Blues, Sinatra, more Zeppelin. Eclectic.

There’s nothing he couldn’t tell her.

There’s plenty he doesn’t.