Mo had his arm wrapped around Handsome Frank, planting a kiss on his forehead. “Love you guys,” he said. “Always been there for me... like family – and I don’t mean my old man. Frank, I don’t even care that you’re so ugly that when you were born the doctor took one look at you and slapped your parents.” There was silence for a moment before laughter roared through the enclosed space like water bursting through a dam. Cozza doubled up in a coughing fit, banging on the side of the van, while Mo and Frank put their foreheads together and shouted, phlegm speckling each other’s faces.

“Turn that up!” shouted Frank, recognising a familiar tune on the stereo. Cozza leaned into the front seat. “This is more like it!” he said, bouncing up and down.

“I like this lot,” said Mo. “What are they called? Madness? Yeah.” He started moving his arms up and down then broke into song. “Baggy trousers da, da, da, da, da.”

The other two joined in with the moves, the van rocking as they let off steam, hammering fists into the roof and singing along to the chart hit. When the music petered out they calmed down again. “What time is it?” asked Mo.

Cozza looked at the clock on the dash. “Shit, it’s getting on for half past two. We got a way to go yet.”

“No sweat,” said Mo. “Should be perfect if we leave now provided the traffic ain’t too bad.”

“Can I travel shotgun?” asked Handsome, waving the sawn-off around. Cozza clambered past the others and threw the doors open, coming face to face with a burly, balding figure in a leather jacket.

“Hey,” said the stranger, his voice betraying the trace of a foreign accent. “You all OK in there? I heard...”

Kaboom! The man looked down to see a dark patch spreading over his stomach, staining the white jumper he wore under his jacket. Drained of colour, his face bore a perplexed expression. Sinking to his knees like a footballer in a slow motion replay, he fell backwards onto the gravel, eyes fixed on the blinking sun that flickered through the idyllic glade.

It seemed like minutes before anyone reacted, Cozza breaking the silence. “Fuck!” he said, staring at Frank, who was holding the still-smoking firearm so tightly his knuckles were white.