

Bambi and The Chopper: Episode 3

M.I.A.

by Martin Flett

The Chopper enters the 19th hole of the golf course to find the bar deserted, except for the barman and one drinker in the far corner. Chopper glances through the window at the car park and is puzzled by the strange silver car parked outside, its doors wide open and looking more like the wings of one of the seagulls circling overhead than actual doors. A man is loading the boot with his golf clubs.

‘I see you’ve noticed our Pierce,’ says the barman. ‘He pops in from time-to-time in that odd vehicle of his; not sure where he comes from.’

‘Yeah,’ The Chopper replies, ‘we sort of met on the course.’

A couple of seconds of silence pass, allowing Chopper to gather his thoughts.

‘Hey, I don’t suppose you’ve seen another guy in here have you? Shorter than me, maybe looking as bewildered as I am right now?’

‘Nope, sorry,’ the barman says. ‘Not been anyone else in here today, save you, Pierce and that character in the corner.’

The Chopper looks again at the lone figure at the furthest table. The light is low and he can’t make out any distinguishing features.

‘Who is he?’

‘Not sure. He came in about ten minutes before you arrived, never seen him before. Seems to be a bit of a day for that, eh?’ The barman chuckles.

Chopper realises this can’t be a coincidence and knows he will have to talk to the stranger in the corner, see if he knows anything about Bambi’s mysterious disappearance. But there’s an ominous feeling in his stomach: something about the man’s body language, or the way he’s deliberately chosen the only dark part of the pub to sit in, is making Chopper feel uneasy.

Slowly and deliberately, without looking up, the stranger calls out, ‘Perhaps,’ he says, pausing for effect, ‘you might fancy another pint?’

That does it: no one uses *their* phrase, at least not so emphatically. This guy must know something. But he doesn’t need to reply; the stranger has already signalled to the barman for a pint and is now offering the seat opposite him. The Chopper obediently sits down and a pint of ale arrives in front of him.

‘So what do you know about my friend? And how do you know it?’ Chopper is surprised by his own directness. ‘I’m sorry, I’m...’

‘...The Chopper. At least, that’s what I’ve heard,’ the stranger interrupts.

‘How do you know so much?!’

‘It’s my job to know. Anyway, that’s not what we’re here for.’

‘Bambi,’ Chopper says. ‘You know something about Bambi.’

‘Yes. I know something about Bambi.’

An hour later and The Chopper is back outside with little more information than he had to begin with. The stranger in the bar had continued to be cryptic to the point

of irritation, but an address was a start: Park Lodge, Vernon Road, Scarborough. How the stranger knew this, he wouldn't say, he just 'heard it', apparently, like everything else. But there was an authority about him that made Chopper trust him anyway and besides, he had nothing else to go on so now he was in the back of a taxi, heading for the centre of Scarborough.

Fifteen minutes later, The Chopper arrives at the slightly shabby looking bed and breakfast, walks through the door, and is confronted by someone who he instantly knows is going to be very important.

It could have been her briefcase and the authority with which she liaised with the hotel's hostess. Or perhaps it was the way she pulled her pen from her inside pocket, efficiently clicking it into action before signing her name on the register with a flourish.

Of course, it could have been her long blonde hair and tall figure, hugged by a short black dress, with legs that Chopper couldn't help noticing went all the way from the floor to her ... body.

Or, it could've simply been because she was a 'her'.

The girl (*she's definitely a lady*, thinks Chopper) finishes with the hostess, turns around, looks straight at The Chopper and smiles widely. He has the strangest feeling he recognises her from somewhere, but the feeling is quickly swamped by some other feelings as she begins to walk towards him – other feelings like excitement, a horniness that has been lying dormant too long for its own liking and so has decided to 'arouse' itself, and, of course, nervousness. Lots of nervousness.

'I recognise you!' she says.

Why does everyone around here seem to know me? he thinks.

The lady continues, 'Yeah! Can't place you though ... there's normally someone with you, right?'

'Yeah, Bambi,' he replies without thinking. *Bambi!* His partner's name from his own lips jolts his brain and Chopper catches himself for a second. *Best not get too distracted by this chick*, he thinks. *My man's still missing.*

'So, you staying here too?' the tall lady asks.

Chopper pauses, and the hostess catches his eye.

'There's a room available if you want it, sweetie,' she says.

'Then, yes,' he replies, decisively. 'I will stay. This'll be a good base for us. For me, I mean. Yes, me.'

'Us?' the lady questions, smiling with one side of her mouth, 'You said 'us' - you have someone else with you?'

'No ... No! Not like that. I just need to find my...' He loses his thread as the lady steps a little closer, into his personal space, and that nervousness comes back.

'We should get outta here...' she whispers into his ear.

'But I still need to...'

Then, she slips her fingers between his, and practically drags Chopper back into the street.

In an otherwise deserted part of town, a DAF 600 careers down a side street, scattering litter in its wake. Even if there were any onlookers, they could never

have made out the face of the driver through the motion-blur. That thing is, somehow, seriously moving.

The unknown driver is a man, wearing aviator sunglasses and sawing at the wheel to avoid the glass bottles, larger boxes and occasional stray cats that cross the vehicle's path. His face is sheer determination; a man on a mission, making his way from the golf course as if life depended on it. And perhaps it did.

The Chopper had managed to convince his new companion to check out the fun fair on the sea front. It was the best he could think of: somewhere Bambi might be, but at the same time a plausible place to take the lady. But now he was actually having fun.

'You wanna ride the Ferris Wheel?' he asks the lady while munching on an ice cream, melting in the baking summer heat.

They've so far been on the dodgems and the waltzers – wisely saving the ice cream till *after* that one – and the romance of the big wheel seems a perfect next-stop.

The lady doesn't respond – Chopper is getting used to that – she just assumes control, takes his hand, and heads towards the queue for the ride. She is smiling though, albeit secretly, as if to herself. He takes this as a good sign.

After the Ferris Wheel, during which The Chopper is sure he missed the opportunity for a first kiss, the couple walk along the promenade. Chopper is still trying to chat, but each new piece of information he offers about his life is met with a firm, yet friendly enough, 'I know'. The omniscience of this town's population is really bothering him, especially since he knows absolutely nothing about the woman he is with. *I like that, though*, he tells himself. *There's something about her mysteriousness, even if I'm not getting much change from my investment so far.*

Seemingly reading his thoughts, the tall lady points out the crazy golf course up ahead.

'We should totally play a round. Of golf, I mean. Well, to begin with, then, if you're lucky, I might let you play around...'

Chopper's not sure he understands, but this tantalising lady has once again made the decision about their futures. She walks backwards, laughing, and beckons seductively with one finger for him to follow.

But The Chopper can only watch in horror.

She steps off the kerb, into what was a clear road. But, at that precise moment, a car, with its overworked engine screaming and sounding more like some kind of racing lawn-mower than a car, speeds out of an alleyway. A cloud of litter and dust spews into the main road, engulfing the vehicle and obscuring the driver's view as he struggles against the squealing tyres, before charging down the road towards them.

It was undoubtedly an accident: with his sunglasses and the smog he'd brought from the alley, there was no way the driver could have seen her. The only question was why he was in such a hurry. And why didn't he stop?

The Chopper just stands, dumbfounded, looking down at the broken body on the tarmac in front of him. As she lies there, blood leaking from the side of her head, that tall lady who'd been such a paradigm of power all day is unrecognisable: suddenly fragile, helpless and in need, she motions for Chopper to come closer.

He leans in and offers to help, to stop the bleeding, to do ... something. But she weakly shakes her head. It's too late.

'He's after you,' she utters, breathlessly. 'The Puppet-Master ... he wants to take you down. And Bambi...' the woman falters, trying to force the words out of her failing lungs, 'Bambi's...'

But it's no good; her last breath escapes her parted lips and that final sentence hangs, forever unfinished.

Chopper doesn't move for at least five minutes; he can't seem to remember how, until, in the distance, he hears a police siren. Somewhere in his overwhelmed mind he reasons that it's probably unrelated but there's no way he wants to be found by the Fuzz in a foreign town next to the dead body of someone who is essentially a stranger. He looks up and notices a pub just across the road.

'I should call an ambulance,' he says out loud to himself. 'It's probably for the best.' And he sets off, crossing the road shakily and slowly.

Once in the pub, he explains to the barman what happened and, with appropriate urgency, the barman phones for an ambulance. Then, noticing Chopper's distress, he pours him a pint 'on the house'.

'I only wanted to find my partner...' Chopper says, dazed, dejected and defeated.

The following morning, The Chopper opens his eyes. He is lying on the floor of some sort of room made of rough wooden beams. Light chinks through the beams, and the full force of the sun, streaming through the open doorway, burns his retinas, amplifying the crushing pain in his head. He is aware that, once again, he has awoken with someone watching him.

Bambi, sitting cross-legged opposite Chopper, looks across at his partner and smiles.

'This is a cool tree house, man. We should hang out here more often.'

To be continued...