



# Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:6:00

## Wrecclesham

Author: Cassy Allen

Easing the giant cream cannister from the rusty hold of the *Panama Queen*, the crane driver was being very cautious as he switched from 'lift' to 'swing' on his console 40 feet up in his shabby cabin. The oval tube at the end of his chain hooks might look pretty innocuous, but the crane operator had been warned by the dock manager that this wasn't one to drop. Peering down through the glass floor beneath his feet, he could see the black and yellow hazard warning signs – he could barely make out the skull and razor-wire motif from this distance, but his brain knew it was there.

Pausing the swing across, he stopped all motion for three minutes, to let the load settle on the chains and stop its liquid back-and-forth motion which mocked the care he had tried to take as the capsule was swung across the decking and dock. Below, dock gangers wearing protective hazard suits were moving around the load, making semaphore signals to him as he gently manoeuvred in imperceptible degrees above the waiting articulated truck. The lorry had a steel protective cage into which he had to slot the package. Again, he paused for perfect stillness. "Come on Dave, get an effing move on!!!", he heard Mick call up. He smiled, and waited just another 10 seconds – because he could – and then started to lower the cream capsule smoothly down onto the flatbed cage. Hands were suddenly shot into the air, palm up, and he stopped the lower while the gangers eased the final positioning. Dave got the signal to drop the last few centimetres, and he felt the crane cab rock slightly

backwards as the taut chains went slack. She was in. He reached for his thermos, while the gangers released the chain-swings from their load.

“Nicely done, Mick,” said Kip Barnes, Dock Manager. “How quick can we get this one off the premises?” He hated the responsibility of the hazardous cargoes, and the sooner it left his yard, the better. Mick pointed to the gangers as they strapped the tube to the semi-circular steel receptacle on the flatbed. “They’re a good gang, Kip. Soon be up and away”.

The driver of the artic was not in a hazard suit. For him, this was just another day with R P Stevens and Sons; a load was a load, be it trusses, new earth moving dumpers, sewage containers, or cream tubes fresh from the docks. He checked the time, cursing below his breath that he was unlikely to reach Sizewell C before midnight at this rate. One of the gangers was giving him a thumbs up, so he kicked back up off the cab fairing and walked along the length of the flatbed, superficially checking the eight double-tyres on the driver side, and the ratchet-strapping holding the tube load into its safety cage. He checked the rear for any worrying leakage from the circular exit cap, held tightly closed by greased nut caps. All good. The Hazchem notice for the UK was legal on back and sides, and all looked well as he checked the nearside. Rounding the front he reached up for the cab door, and swung himself into the worn leatherette of the driving seat. The gangers were wiping their hands, and gathering packaging, tidying the portside in readiness for the next offload. Suddenly, they heard a pistol crack metal groan, and in the silence that followed Mick said, “OK lads, it’s just settling. Back to work, its one heavy mother that tube”. There was laughter, and Mick saluted the truck driver, who started the engine, and very slowly the wheels began to turn.

Below the old holding cage on the back of the flatbed, the last remaining sound weld pinning the cage to the trailer, showed an infinitesimal pressure crack which a blind man would have been glad to see.

Rawlins was giggling to the Eagles as they poured out 'Hotel California' in the comfy driving cab. Getting the load on was always the niggly bit, he thought. He could only wait while the 'yard birds' did their job, whether with fork lift, hoist or crane. He had no control, and hated just having to mark time. Now, to get this lot up to Sizewell sometime before midnight, he'd be doing well, and he could just picture driving up to the sleepy Security guard, and the annoyance of the offloaders that he hadn't turned up at a more sociable hour. But on duty they would be, irritated or not, for this load apparently could not be left to simmer overnight. Rawlins never enquired overmuch about what a container held – his job was just the A to B, and that he could do. Pretty well in his estimation.

Traffic was slowing on the A3 North, and he could see the tail lights stretching redly ahead. Quickly he shut the Eagles off and turned on the local radio TDS, it was nearly half past the hour, so there should be a traffic report fairly soon. He eased down the gears and assessed his options. There was confirmation of the delay from the Traffic Wiz's .. "can't see much from our cameras, but we have reports of an overturned vehicle on the north side of the A3 just before the Hindhead Tunnel, looks like it might be a long one folks..." The voice had the disinterested merry bonhomie, that only someone not in the queue could have.

Deciding quickly, he turned the wheel and took the slip ramp for Bordon and Farnham, he'd catch the Hogs Back and then M3 off the A331. No worries. The big load drove smoothly past Bordon, gently taking roundabouts, he was on the outskirts of Farnham now, coming down Wrecclesham Hill, the mini-roundabout..... "Shit !!!! The railway bridge ! He wouldn't make it. Quickly he jerked the wheel right to take the rig up Weydon Lane. The cab turned the corner. The flatbed did not.