

25. The Nigel Zone #25: Being Conned



Photo taken by the author, 2025, supplied by an *sshole

You are traveling through another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind. A journey into a confusing land whose boundaries can only be imagined. Your next stop, the Nigel Zone!

I present a 58 year old man, an over forty year career in healthcare, an existential breakdown, ccPTSD, autism, a journey into finding his real self. A search for individuation. A rollercoaster ride of emotions, experiences, and falling over with an absence of balance. It's late afternoon, autumn is underway, and a personal black swan event, for this is the Nigel Zone....

I was walking down the country lane on my way home, a nice walk and round trip to the pharmacy to stock up on my prescriptions. Intent in my own thoughts, listening to music through my noise cancelling earphones, I did not hear or notice the man parked in a dark SUV at the entrance to the gated property off of the lane. Dark hair, perhaps in his late forties, he was hanging out of the driver's window gesticulating with an atlas. Touching the right earbud to stop the music, and the left to switch off the noise cancelling, I approached him. Writing this now, I wish I had just carried on walking, in my *own* world, safer from the cruel world we all are forced to live in.

He ascertained I spoke English and he was clearly Italian. And apparently lost. Pointing to the map he asked how he would get to the airport, he had a flight to Dubai that evening. I pointed back up the road to the main road and outlined the drive from there, it was not that far and would be signposted on the motorway as he got closer to the city. He was profusely grateful, thanking me persistently, and as I turned to restart my journey home, he said, 'Let me show you my thanks, come I give you something, here come around,' and he gestured for me to go to the passenger door. I hesitated, 'No, honestly, it's fine, just turn back and follow as I outlined,' and I started to move away. 'You're a fifty-four, maybe a fifty-six? I have some coats and jackets, Italian, I'm in fashion. Please, just a few minutes, you get in, I'll show you.'

Now, when you read or see accounts of this predicament people are describing how alarm bells were going off, an irritation of their intuition, or a strange tickle between their shoulders. Nothing, none of that, a complete absence of warning and caution. He seemed friendly, plausible, smiling and relaxed. First mistake. Then the second mistake, I pulled open the passenger door of his dark SUV and got in (I know right, *what was I doing?!?!?*), sitting down in the plush leather seats, putting my pharmacy bag into the footwell, and my walking stick resting against the interior door hinge. Turning to face him he

was already pulling some plastic wrapped coats from the back seats, then facing me with them in his lap. He also had a leaflet showing his wares, 'AC Milano', and quoted various prices, all outrageously expensive, for the different outer garments. 'They're samples, but if I go through customs they'll tax me, so I give them to you,' he encouraged. Third mistake, if they're free, from a total stranger, then there is a catch, always a catch. No alarm bells, no intuitive irritation. 'No, sorry, I can't accept them,' I protested, 'that's way too much for just giving you directions, thanks anyway,' and I could feel myself edge back to the open passenger door.

'Please, you'll do me a favour, otherwise I have to get rid of them. Here, I give you not just these, but also another bag full,' and with that he pulled a black bag of coats from the rear, adding them to the pile on his legs. 'See, this is a suede one, feel that, and these are rain jackets, all Italian, well made!' I felt the suede as I had suddenly become the world's leading expert, 'Yes, very nice,' and I looked a bit more enquiringly at the tempting apparel he had placed in front of me. He quoted more ridiculous prices, and of course that upped the temptation. And he was very grateful. Fourth mistake, I was falling for his patter. He was putting all of the plastic bagged cloth treasures into two black shopping bags. Returning his smiling gaze to me, he proffered his business card, 'And when you are in Milano, you contact me, we do dinner or something!', and I smiled in return, holding his card, 'Yes, love Milano, great city, haven't been there in some years, I must admit,' and looking down at his card, noting the name, 'Aurelia, oh, I like that name.' Fifth mistake, I was falling for his story, friendliness, allowing the connection to be established deeper. And no, no bells, klaxons, or sirens.

'Well, are you sure? That's a ridiculous value, far too much,' I said, and he responded again, 'But they tax me, you know.' I looked at him, 'How much tax?' He frowned, 'Thirty-five percent,' he said sadly. I looked astonished, 'That's outrageous!', I exclaimed. Aurelia pushed the two bags to me, making me grab them. Mistake six, ensnared. 'Well, that's awfully good of you, it really is,' I stated, starting to back out from the passenger seat. 'Um, wait, um, could you help me out, just one more thing?', he asked, a more serious note in his Italian accented voice. 'How do you mean?', I responded. Seventh mistake, further ensnared. This rabbit wasn't even struggling in his jaws, dumb. 'I need to drop this rental off, but my cards, all my cards are blocked,' and he was suddenly holding what appeared to be a contract with the Sixt name and logo under my nose, but not open sufficiently for me to discern any details. 'You'll be able to just drop this off at the airport,' I glibly retorted, again, not quite getting what he was inferring. 'I'll need to pay about sixteen hundred, I don't have enough cash', and he showed a wad of hundred euro notes from his trouser pocket.

'How much do you need?', eighth mistake, I was practically putting the wire noose around my own neck now. Calculating in my head, I added, 'I can give you two hundred, if that helps?' He looked disappointed, 'Ah, but I need more, you could manage more, perhaps?', and he looked at me conspiratorially, as if deciding how to slice up this trapped rabbit. With the same rabbit. 'Hmm, well, it's a bit tight these days, I'm divorced, you know, all of that,' I pathetically attempted to wriggle a little in his trap, but it was hardly discernible from the rabbit just taking a breath. 'Could you manage five hundred, perhaps, then I have the whole amount?', he needed me further. Ninth mistake, the rabbit was getting resigned to its fate, like they do in the wild when that serene calmness comes over them, acknowledging the inevitable. 'That's a stretch, to be quite honest,' but he had me, and I am sure he knew it. 'I could go to four hundred, perhaps,' the rabbit was in its last struggles. 'Maybe a bit more, you can't manage five hundred, then I have what I need?'

'Okay, then four hundred and fifty, I'll stretch to that, okay?', I was haggling, the rabbit negotiating a way out of the situation. 'Yes, yes, then yes, that would be good, thank you, thank you so much!', he exclaimed, gripping my hand. 'I don't carry cash on me, though, we can do electronic transfer?', I suggested. 'You don't have cash, no, it would be easier?', Aurelia asked questioningly. 'No, sorry, and there's no ATM here, they took them away some time ago,' as I proffered my smartphone. A bit of too-ing and fro-ing with our mutual bank apps, but I couldn't get a signal. Tenth mistake, should have

been listening to divine providence jumping in, but even though I had a little niggle of doubt, I persisted in trying. 'Sorry, no signal here, it's a bit of a black spot,' I finally stated on the matter. 'Oh, well, can I take you to an ATM, perhaps?', with a hint of desperation now. Eleventh mistake, I didn't pick up on the slight drop of his facade, the need for money being more than just the Sixt bill he said he was facing.

Before I knew it, I was pulling the seatbelt to click in, and he was making a u-turn on the road. We chatted about Milano and Italy, kids and all the usual drivel that two strangers exchange. As we drove further down the main road I noted a signal. 'You can park down on the right, where those cars are parked,' and he altered the trajectory of the car accordingly. We fiddled with our mutual bank apps and the deed was done, an instant transfer of four hundred and fifty euros to his Revolut account. 'Thank you, I drive you home,' he suggested. 'No, it's okay, I need to walk for my back,' I answered, wanting to leave. 'He started making another u-turn, back the way we had driven. More innocuous conversation, turning into the road where I met Aurelia. 'Your satnav not working then?', I asked him, to which he answered, 'It's a rental, it was extra.'

'You drop me here, that's fine, thank you,' I said with more strength to my request. 'No, no, I drive right to your home,' he insisted. A little further on, 'Here we are,' I said, making sure we didn't go to my apartment block entrance. I never let anyone I didn't know see where I lived, an old habit.

He said his thank yous again (and again), turning the car around as I walked around a building with the two bags. As his car faced back the way he had come, back the way he had captured me in his web, he reached out his hand through the open window and we shook. 'I pray for you every night,' he said as he drove off.

I made sure he had definitely left and made my way to my apartment. A little later I checked out the free booty, and *of course* nothing fit. Checking the business card, *of course*, all the details were fiction. And, finally, even later than Custer's back up soldiers, the feeling of unease, of realisation and some certainty of being hoodwinked. A quick online search for, '*Italian leather jacket con artist*' found a number of hits, such as this [one](#). A well known scam, and I had gone along with it at every turn.

Stupid dumb*ss doesn't describe me sufficiently. I was so embarrassed and feeling like a first prize winner at the Darwin Awards 2025. The following day, I reported it to my bank and the police, not having any illusions that my money would be returned, but even if there was a slim chance he could be stopped from conning anyone else, well that would be a little recompense. It started to only sink in then, and it has left me even more hypervigilant, wary and wanting not to go out. Ever.

I believe this is what's known as a cautionary tale, and I have left a few details out for my own safety, and brevity, but sadly, yes, every word is true, it happened two days ago. Putz. Friends, the bank, and the police were very understanding, it can happen to anyone, you have a good heart, etc. Yet, these criminals can see me coming from kilometres away, like I have a neon sign above me saying, 'The Mark'. Fecking eejit.

Needless to say, if I ever saw him again, I would like to give him a fixed, non-flexible colonoscopy with my walking stick....

And you're leaving, you're being pulled back into reality, a rational world of sense and logic. Until the next time you return, to the Nigel Zone.