



THE ALLIGATOR ON THE ITCHEN NAVIGATION MYSTERY

Vera had just let Truffles off the leash when she noticed the ukelele leaning against the tree. Beside it was a small black bag with a badge sown to it which said 'Route 66'. She thought the items might belong to a bus driver, though the 66 through Shawford had been abandoned years ago just after the railway station opened.

"Here Truffles," she called looking along the path to where the river curled towards the water works. "Here Truffles, Truffles, Mint Imperial, Mint Imperial Truffles."

The promise of a mint imperial normally had Truffles trotting round the corner as fast as his terrier legs could carry him. She put the mint imperials back in the plastic bag with the pooper scooper and walked on.

As Vera came to the corner she was knocked into the nettles by a young man pedalling for all he was worth on a bicycle with pencil thin tyres. "That's torn it," said Gordon, pulling up sharply to inspect his bent front wheel and the tear in his lycra shorts.

"Help me up young man," called Vera from the nettles. Gordon reluctantly laid down his bike, held out his hand and helped Vera to her feet. "Have you seen my dog Truffles?" she asked rubbing her arms with a dock leaf.

"A little dog?"

"A terrier, he's answers to Truffles."

"He's round the bend, paddling in the water . . . Look I must dash, I'm due at Mansbridge by five" And with that Gordon was off pedalling his wonky bike for Brambridge.

Vera never found Truffles that afternoon, just a pair of boots on the bank and a digital camera close by. When Eastleigh Police inspected the camera they discovered a single photograph of an alligator. "Chap must have come back from a holiday in Florida," concluded PC Tom Shed, "no sign of him or the dog Maam."

Vera was distraught, who would she share her mint imperials with now?

