

Del

Del

by Peter Watson  
watson@physics.carleton.ca

## Del

If you are a fan of the BBC series, *Fools and Horses*, you might think Del was a diminutive of Derek. Alternatively, it might occur to you that Del would be short for Delia, or maybe Delilah, or possibly Dolores. You would be wrong.

Being an academic does not have many perks, but you do get to go to nice places for meetings. Lake Louise is one: in low season (meaning February) the Chateau provides conference space, and so you can listen to new ideas all morning, break at noon to go skiing or snowshoeing or skating or lying in bed, get back for 5 o'clock and have more talks and discussions that go through till 10. Nice work, if you can get it.

On the second day, I took the shuttle across the valley to the slopes and lined up for the Glacier chair. As I turned round to wait for it to catch me, a woman wearing a cowboy hat and outsize sunglasses skied up and sat down beside me.

“Hi, I’m Dana. Should be at work but such a fabulous day I’m playing hooky. First time here? I’m a mountain guide, can I show you a thing or two? Gotta love the mountains!” and she rattled on for a couple of minutes before I could get a word in sideways. Lake Louise is huge, and mountain guides are volunteers who ski with newbies to show them around. I felt I did not really need one, but who is going to turn down the free company of an attractive woman?

She took me down *Wiwaxy* which is a delightfully named easy run. We graduated to *Juniper Jungle* and then she told me I was ready for *Paradise Bowl*, which is a thousand vertical feet of moguls and bumps and turns. The cowboy hat made her easy to follow: I was amazed it stayed on. All the time she kept up a constant chatter about, well, everything.

Lake Louise closes early: the upper lifts stop at 3.30. The trick is to have as much vertical as possible when that happens, so you can extend your last run of the day as late as possible. She timed it perfectly, so we were at the top of *Whitehorn Mountain* just as the *Summit T-bar* closed. From there you can pick up the *Downhill* course: 2 minutes of unadulterated terror if you are doing it at 110 clicks as the real racers do it, but even taking ten minutes over it has its thrills.

## Del

She was way ahead of me when we got to the bottom: instead of waiting, she skied over to the outside terrace and had a couple of beers ordered before I caught up. Her skis were leaning against the table, and she looked at them critically.

“Shit, shit, shit. Look at that.” The skis were splitting apart just below the bindings. “Fucking things are delaminating. Only one season old. Shit, shit, shit. My fault, I suppose. Treat my skis just as rough as I treat my men. Shit, shit, shit.”

I sat down at the table, with a horrible vision of a delaminated man rushing through my head. Our beers arrived before I could inquire further: the pathetic little sleeve glasses which hold twelve ounces so that Albertans do not drink to excess.

“Got to go home.” she said

“Coming back?” I asked, “I’d love another day with you.”

“Gotta be in Calgary: can’t get up here for another two weeks.”

I did some rapid calculations in my head. The last day of the conference was on the following Tuesday, I had a non-refundable air-ticket out of Calgary for the next day. “How about Tuesday night: I could meet you somewhere.”

“OK, the Candy Bar at 7 p.m. We’ll go on from there and I’ll show you a really good time.” She passed over a napkin with her phone number on it “for emergencies: won’t be any.” I salivated openly as she walked away from the table.

Easy enough to skip the last evening of a conference: it is usually a so-called banquet, but all the important people have already left and all you get is one miserly glass of cheap champagne and a series of platitudinous speeches. I packed up, checked out and went down to the bus terminal, which doubled as a dry-cleaners, to catch the 3.30 bus.

“Ah,” said the clerk “You must have been looking at the winter time-table. We switched over to the summer timetable this week: the bus went through at 2.30.”

“For God’s sake.... can I get a later one?”

“Well, the next one goes through at 9 a.m. tomorrow.”

“No good: anything else I can do?”

“Well, you could get a taxi.”

## Del

Two burly men walked up to the ticket window and went through precisely the same conversation, laced with rather more expletives. The clerk slammed the window shut.

“Well,” I said, “we could try to find a taxi.” It turned out to be very easy: there was one parked right outside the store.

“Ah yes,” said the driver, “a lot of people make that mistake. I can take you in. \$300 for the three of you.”

The drive down from Lake Louise is beautiful as you wind your way down along the Bow River valley. The sun was out, the peaks were covered in glittering snow and all was right with the world as we drove through the foothills and the journey seemed to pass in a flash. I checked in and rode the elevator up to my room on the 24th floor, with a stunning view over downtown Calgary and out to the Rockies beyond. Plenty of time, so I ran myself a bath.

As I stripped off, there was a knock at the door. I turned off the water and answered it, with a towel wrapped around my waist. Dana was there, wearing a bright yellow jump-suit and her trademark sunglasses and cowboy hat.

“Hi, hon, thought I would drop by and welcome you to Calgary. Told the desk clerk I was staying with you and had locked myself out of my room. Not sure he believed me.”

“Well, I would believe you, any day of the week. And I was just going to have a rest before we met up.”

“You do look as though you are dressed to give me a big welcome. Certainly don’t want to disturb your beauty-sleep.” and she pushed me back on the bed, which bounced up and down.

“Just here to make sure you relax.” and she climbed on the bed beside me so it bounced up and down some more. She rolled down the top of her jump-suit: as I hoped, she was naked underneath.

“This is going to be fun, kiddo.” and she stood up, pulled off the jump-suit and jumped back on the bed which bounced up and down again. She threw herself on top of

## Del

me with abandon, saying "Prepare yourself for a bumpy ride" ... said the driver and we hit another pothole.

"Fucking road-works all the way into Canmore: adds at least an hour on to the journey." and I watched a long line of single file traffic snaking off into the distance through the pouring rain.

My dream of Dana evaporated into the reality of sitting squeezed between two bulky males for a long uncomfortable ride. But all things come to an end, and a couple of hours later the driver dropped us off at the Holiday Inn.

"So sorry, sir," said the desk clerk, "two conventions in town: we are totally booked out."

The story next door at the Alberta Inn was the same, but the third time is a charm as we all know.

"Yes, two rooms left. Mind you, they may not be precisely what you are looking for: we only have the two bridal suites left. Afraid it's \$650, but you do get 2 free glasses of champagne."

The sinking feeling in my stomach was turning into a Titanic-sized hole, but I seemed to have very little negotiating room left.

"OK." I took the room key, went up to the room and ran myself a bubble bath. At least Dana will be impressed with what I've laid on for her. I called her phone number, but there was no reply. It didn't surprise me since she would already have been on her way.

I was at the Candy Bar with plenty of time to spare. Packed, but I found room at the bar where I could watch the door. Without her hat and glasses, I was not quite sure I could recognize Dana, so I examined every woman who came into the bar closely. No sign of her by 7.15, still no sign of her by 7.30. I called her number again.

"Hello, hon, really looking forward to our date."

"So, will I see you soon?"

"Not tonight, hon, it's next Tuesday, remember? I've got another hot date tonight." and she hung up the phone.

## Del

I did not exactly slink back to the hotel, but the spring in my step was distinctly missing. I sat down in the bar and ordered a Scotch.

“\$12, sir,” said the waiter, “special rate since there is a convention in town. But the service is included, so you don’t need to tip me.”

I finished it and walked down the street to the liquor store: a mickey of Scotch cost the same as one shot in the bar. I rode the elevator up to my room and turned on the TV, searching for the porn channels. A flashing sign came up on the screen: “Due to communications issues, no pay-TV channels are available.”

I phoned the front desk in a rage and was rapidly passed up the chain of command.

“I am so sorry, sir,” said someone claiming to be the manager “we find ourselves personally upset that we cannot meet your full expectations that you are entitled to have for a 5-star hotel. So, sir, to apologize, I have personally ordered a bouquet of roses for you and your lovely bride AND breakfast tomorrow is on us.”

Drinking a full Mickey of Scotch is not good, and the hangover is even worse. Since you ask, Del is short for “delaminated” as in the phrase “delaminated elderly gentleman.”

Del