

URBAN PARANOIA BY JOHN CULLEN

Chapter One: IF YOU A TALKING HEAD MOTHERFUCKER

Have you ever thought about what your last words will be before you die? A man's dying words are his most important. It's what the living will remember him by. Maybe you should think about yours.

I can't quite recall when my life spiralled out of control. But I clearly remember the day that I had the grim realisation that my life was in the fucking toilet pan. Depression is a curse. I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. It robbed me of everything: My happiness, mental stability, dignity and almost my family.

On a hot day in August 2012 I found myself truly lost in the gruesome city of London, a city that had been my home all my life, a city that was slowly squeezing the life out of me, like a snake killing a rat. I had only slept for a couple of hours and after an argument with my wife, I had left my home and jumped on a bus. There was no destination in mind, I just jumped onto the first bus that swung by as I was walking.

I found shelter in The Earl of Lonsdale pub in Notting hill gate. I bought a drink and went to a secluded booth for privacy.

The heat was sweltering that day. I felt like a ghost. It wouldn't take a lot to make me cry and it didn't. I was shaking from the lack of sleep and my stomach felt sickly because I hadn't eaten. I saw an image in the paper that I had bought that destroyed what was left of my fragile soul. It was an image of a mother crying over the murder of her son. The young man had been murdered brutally in a phone box. The mother's pain captured in that bleak photograph was the tipping point. It was her pain. So much fucking pain! I sobbed uncontrollably in that oak booth. I sobbed for the mother. I sobbed for the child who had lost his life. I sobbed for humanity. I sobbed for myself. Nobody could see me, but I didn't care if they did. I had nothing to hide. My life was broken. People mocking me for crying would be the least of my problems that day.

As I began to compose myself, the girl from behind the bar came over to see if everything was ok. As I wiped my wet face with my polo shirt, I gestured that I was heading to the bar to order another drink. She could obviously see my pain. With one hand she took the money I had gripped in my sweaty palm and with the other hand she pushed my shoulder to sit back down. She returned with my beer and laid my change on the table. It was the milk of human kindness that I sorely needed at that precise moment. I will never forget that gesture. I drained my drink to a bubble stained glass and got up and left.

Walking into the street, the sunlight was way too strong for me to take in my shaky state. Across the road from the pub was a phone box. I darted across and hid inside it. Inside that phone box I completely unravelled. I started crying uncontrollably. I cried for myself. I cried for the grieving mother in the newspaper. I cried for the dead son. I cried for my wasted life. I cried for my damaged

head that had been wrecked by ecstasy tablets and copious amounts of alcohol and marijuana. I cried thinking about my dead end job. I cried for my ruined marriage. I cried for my wasted life. I tried to compose myself but it was no use. The more I tried to stop, the more I cried. It was horrible. I was trapped in that fucking phone box. The smell of piss inside the phone box burned my nostrils. The pictures of slags on escort cards reminded me of the ugly society that I was trapped in. I dried my eyes and zipped up my Harrington jacket. I was wearing my blue one because I had to throw my black one away a few days before. It was too hot to have a jacket on, but I needed security. I headed back out amongst the animals.

Walking around the streets in a daze I made a strange connection. I thought of the classic video game 'Pac Man'. I realised that my modern day life in London was like being trapped a Pac Man video game, everyday being a new level. I was constantly rushing around a dark environment consuming things at fast pace and avoiding ghosts. Ghosts were like my enemies. People either chasing or being chased in my work environment or outside in my private life. I could hear the sound effects in my head:

CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP!

I walked for miles deep in thought. The night started to draw in and I unzipped my Harrington, so I could feel the cool night breeze. I was taking a trip down memory lane without realising it.

I walked all over north London by foot that evening, swigging from a small bottle of Captain Morgan. I walked through Oxford Street, through Kings Cross, down into Camden, along Belsize Park and onto Swiss Cottage. I walked all the way to Shoot up Hill and headed to a house. I hadn't been there in years, many years. Time had thundered on and I had forgotten the street, the house and all the memories it held. The house looked lifeless. It was empty.

Staring up at those cold black windows, I saw the past. I remembered my childhood. My best friend had lived there and I spent countless happy hours running around the garden in summer or playing Amiga computer games in winter. The nineteen eighties seemed a million years ago now. I missed the nineteen nineties. My hazy memories of those glorious decades fell into two categories: Bitter, angry resentment or blissful happy recollections.

Looking at the house, it made me feel warm to see it still looked the same. A red front door with frosted windows, a doorbell with a faded picture of a bird on it, the chips and marks on the bricks were just as I remembered them. I started to laugh as it occurred to me that my life had changed so much, but the house hadn't changed one bit!

For that brief moment I was happy. It all disappeared in a flash when I looked back up at the cold, black windows. The emptiness was horrible to witness as the house had been so full of life many moons ago. I could see slightly through the bottom front room window with the light from the towering lamppost above me. I could see all the marks on the wall where the photos had been removed and I could see the empty light socket hanging sadly, pining for the lampshade and light bulb it once knew. What a fucking terrible shame.

I heard the door of the house next to it open.

'Anything I can help you with?' a plump woman in pink dressing gown asked me suspiciously.

'No. Just taking a trip down memory lane,' I said taking another swig from my bottle and placing it back in my Harrington. She moved closer to me and squinted.

'I know you from somewhere. I'm sure of it.'

'I used to know the family that lived here. I was friends with the children,' I replied.

'Jason!' she gasped. 'Is that you?!'

She couldn't quite believe it. It was Mrs Solomon.

I confirmed it was me. She told me I looked good and a bit of extra weight suited me as I was skinny as a child. I wanted to tell her she had got old and fat, but that wouldn't have been polite after such a nice compliment.

She explained what happened to the Hadley family since I'd last seen them in nineteen ninety six. Time had been cruel. Joseph, the father had been become very ill and was nursed by his wife Claire for a few years. The children; Martin and Jessie, had gone off to university and were doing well for themselves and both now living out of London. Joseph had passed away a year ago and Claire wanted to move away to be nearer her grandchildren. The last time Mrs Solomon had seen any of the children, it was Jesse, handing the house keys to an estate agent and driving away looking distant.

I took another swig from bottle and offered some Mrs Solomon who laughed, shook her head and politely declined. I told her I was now working in security and said goodbye. Time waits for no man. Time kicks man in the balls and laughs. Everything decays and rots in the end I suppose, even our own lives.

I realised that my life had to change, but I couldn't figure out how.

My life to be honest was a fucking mess. The night security job I was doing was easy but dull. I would spend evenings walking around a decaying shopping centre in North London. Armed with a torch and a crackling radio, I had time to think. Too much time if you ask me.

My memories were the catalyst for my depression. I had hours walking around thinking about how it had all gone so wrong and going over the grim, sad, drunken events that had taken place during my life. I could remember the people, the arseholes who had made me realise that world is a sewer. I so badly wanted to block out these awful memories. Everything felt so fucking pointless. I was walking around a decaying shopping centre that was full of rats, rubbish and rusted metal railings. The broken sewer pipes let out a grim smell from a dimly lit under pass. I always called it 'devils breath'. It was like Satan was letting us know that he was always there, lurking in the shadows.

The lights in the centre car park were high up on sixty foot poles. The dull glow was a reminder of the absence of light, not only in the shopping centre, but in my own life.

Some nights, my shift would end at two or three am. I would wonder over to the all night supermarket. Seeing the bright lights after walking around in darkness would send me into daze. I wonder down all the empty isles, walking past the miserable looking staff.

All these slaves with blue collars.

Slaves like me.

All of us....Trapped in one massive Pac man game.

CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP!

CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP!

Armed with a can of gut rotting booze, I headed to the housing estate across the road. The door was always open or the tradesman entry button would buzz you in. The spiral staircase took you down to a dead end. At the bottom of the stairs, I would gulp down the cans of warm beer, one after another, each can blocking out the memories and voices, blocking out the fucking horrible, cuntin' past. I had two albums on my mp3 player. I had the Monte Cross soundtrack to 'A Clockwork Orange' and the Underworld album 'Second Toughest in the Infants'.

With the Monte Cross soundtrack blasting away on my headphones, I would stare at the grey brickwork at the bottom of the stairs. The music was so unspeakably evil and dark. The visions in my head were dark. Way too dark to ever put down into print. As the morning drew in I would stagger onto a bus and go home.

Falling into bed was my only relief from the nightmarish world that existed outside. I had vivid dreams. Some were bad, twisted, disturbing visions of the past, present and future. Sometimes I would dream of sparsely populated havens in New Zealand. I would see acres of open land, nobody around for miles. They were beautiful dreams. They were visions of the life I wanted. I still to this day dream of being a recluse. I don't like people. I don't like the world. It's too gruesome and ugly for me to be able to deal with. The world makes me feel sick. Most days I feel sick from the pit of my stomach.

Sometimes I could hear my father and wife talking outside my bedroom door. They sounded worried. One sentence my father uttered broke my heart forever.

'We need to have him sectioned. He's as mad as a shit house rat.'

I cried into my pillow. He was right. I had lost my mask of sanity a long time ago. At work it was slowly slipping away. My colleagues could see I was falling apart. I broke two of my fingers punching a coffee vending machine violently when it fucked up my order. Another time an old woman had nearly run me over. From her window she had called me an idiot. I waited until she had parked and locked the vehicle, then I grabbed a piece of broken railing and smashed the ugly cunts windows in. The CCTV was on the fritz. It felt good watching that old boot sobbing into a hanky. Breaking her jaw and kicking her down some stairs would have felt far better.

What was I becoming?

My healing process took a while. I had to block out the awful memories. I discovered podcasts and stand-up comedy. Getting sick leave from work left me with a lot of time in my hands. I would spend my time listening to stand up. I became fascinated by what makes us laugh. It seemed the more I listened to Joe Rogan, Charlie Murphy or Joe Diaz, the more I began to see what makes people laugh – Memories. The more gruesome the memory, the funnier it was.

There was one story that will remain with me until the day I die. It was Charlie Murphy recounting an unfortunate encounter in a restaurant with a crippled American football player called Darryl Stingley. Darryl was openly insulting Charlie's younger and famous brother Eddie. Charlie Murphy confronted Stingley and threatened to physically assault him if he continued to insult his brother. The story was sad, horrifying and fascinating; all at the same time. He called Stingley 'A Talking Head Motherfucker'.

This was where I got my inspiration from. I decided to write about the talking head motherfuckers I had dealt with during my lifetime. I put pen to paper and began writing.

My desire to escape the city hasn't dulled on bit. I still hate living in London. I still hate the population of the once great city. Watching comedy sitcoms and films, it seems we laugh at those desperate to escape from their surroundings or those who wish to change their life. A case point would be 'Only Fools and Horses'. The story is more tragic when you break down its plot mechanics. You have a couple of working class plebs who aspire to become wealthy businessmen. Yet in every episode, they fail miserably. They always end up back Nelson Mandela house. Defeated and no nearer to improving their dull lives. We as human beings laugh at tragedy.

I watched a film called 'Ferris Buellers Day Off'. It made laugh. It's about a boy who fakes sickness to get a day off school. He goes into the city with two friends and causes all sorts of mayhem. Why did he do this? The answer is simple: To escape, to escape going to school. His life felt mundane. Ferris has an unforgettable quote:

LIFE MOVES PRETTY FAST, IF YOU DON'T STOP AND LOOK AROUND ONCE IN A WHILE, YOU MIGHT MISS IT.

This is a great quote given by a great actor. As I was researching the film and the quote, I stumbled across something that really stopped me in my tracks and made me realise what is important in life. It was a photograph. It was a grainy black and white photo of Mathew Broderick doing promotional press for the film in nineteen eighty six. Wearing a stripy shirt and goatee beard, he had a look in his eye; Happiness. He looked happy. That's what we all secretly want deep down. It's what I have really craved my whole life.

To be respected.

To be accepted.

To be loved.

To be happy.

It's all I ever wanted. It's my misery keeps me prisoner in the Pac Man game.

CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP!

CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP! CHOMP!

Right now as I write, Kendrick Lamar is quietly playing away on the stereo as the rain lashes down outside. Christmas is only eight weeks away. Its four am and I'm writing my final words. I can hear the

rain falling down the drain and slipping into darkness. Kendrick is singing about being a sinner and seeking forgiveness. There are times in your life that you realise some sins are simply unforgivable. Even in the eyes of our lord.

So here we are. These are memories, a dark, twisted mirror image of the past. My very own pain and embarrassment laid out on paper, naked and shameful. This is the truth. These are my own warped visions.

In closing may I say that every wanker, cunt and bitch I have come across has, in some way, inspired me to put pen to paper. To quote a great man:

IF YOU A TALKING HEAD MOTHERFUCKER AND YOU'VE FORGOTT THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE. IMA HOLD A MIRROR UP AND LET YOU SEE WHATS GOING ON.

Welcome to this hall of mirrors. Bask in your own dark, twisted reflection.

Welcome to Urban Paranoia.

Chapter Two: THE COCKNEY COKE HEAD

People always ask me why I have a problem with cocaine. Not a problem in the sense of shoving it up my hooter, but more a case of being visibly annoyed when I'm in a place when it's happening around me. I have to confess; I think it's a fucking horrible drug. The vibe you can pick up when in a place where it's going on is strong, a nasty vibe that seems to be detectable to those not on the drug itself. 'The Coke vibe' as it's been described by others, stinks. That uneasy feeling you can pick up in a bar or pub when it is going down is nasty. That's the best descriptive word for it: Nasty. Nasty, nasty cocaine.

It's the way people talk when they are on it, aloof, offensive and smug. They snort white lines in filthy toilet cubicles for their own pleasure on a night out, completely unaware of the annoyance they cause others. Coke and wankers go hand in hand, if you ask me, horrible fuckers, the lot of them. Ecstasy makes you dance, weed make you mellow and booze makes you talkative.

Cocaine makes you cuntish.

I had little experience with the drug of choice for arseholes, until I met 'The Cockney Coke Head'. He had the body of pig and a huge head. His head was HUGE. It resembled a medicine ball perched on the shoulders of an Oompa Lumpa . He looked like a fucking cunt. He WAS a fucking cunt.

Where to begin this rather vile specimen? Was it the nasty, racist misguided patriotism that lurked in this thick skulled sorry excuse for a man? The lack of basic listening skills he sadly didn't have, that is, unfortunately, required for the basic art of conversation? Maybe the fact he seemed to deeply resent the slightest hint of intellectual prowess I may or may not have indeed possessed at the time. I

personally think it was his illusions of grandeur that made this 'geezer' a truly horrifying experience to have to deal with. He was a white bread piece of shit from Bermondsey that believed he was above me. People who are aloof quite frankly piss me off. They always have. But nothing is worse than a man who is thick as pig shit trying to outsmart you and succeeding when your guard is down. Revenge is indeed a sin, but sometimes in life, it happens to preserve ones dignity... and preserve ones sanity. The path of the righteous man, as Samuel L Jackson would say.

I first met Darryl around the time Spurs sold Justin Edinburgh to Portsmouth.

Darryl had come into my work environment as a senior manager and immediately made an impact, but not in a good way. He was convinced he was step above all of us. Any opportunity to speak to this man was met with a curt reply of 'yeah-ok-yeah-right-fine-yes-yep-good' each one worded reply cutting you off as your sentence was being finished. He had absolutely no faith in what you were saying without LISTENING to what you were saying first! Frustration doesn't even begin to explain my exasperation with his below par communication skills. Any interaction was a painful, soul destroying experience.

So why did I have to interact with this moron I hear you ask? The world of 'Diamonds Bathroom Supplies' was a rather claustrophobic one. They believed that a team that worked closely together achieved together. Personal space was frowned upon. We always seemed to be in each other's way.

I loved the company. I have to admit they were a good company to work for most of the time, but it did manage to attract some absolute scum bags. All manner of low lives have passed through the dark ranks of the mighty business at some point in time, each one trying to outdo the everyone else, boost their own status, try to convince themselves that their job is important. They want to convince you they haven't failed in life. They want to convince themselves that their position in bathroom supplies is satisfying and fulfilling. They make a difference to this dark crippled planets progressive future and boost the struggling economy by supplying fat ladies with porcelain tubs to shit into. They make a difference! Don't forget it, they certainly don't! So next time you're washing the root of your fragrant anus on a pristine white bidet just remember who had to treat their fellow workers with condescending contempt to supply you with bathroom equipment to keep your lower parts smelling fresh.

Darryl had been brought in from another branch by the cockney wide boy boss, Roy, who wanted him and Steve aka the good old boys to sort things out. Steve was an 'Oil Merchant' and coke head to boot. I didn't like him either, but my main vitriol was fuelled by Darryl. He was a class A cunt in my eyes. Everything about this big headed arsehole annoyed me. The way he looked at you with contempt. The way he constantly picked his nose when writing an email or ordering stock. It was disgusting.

His sinus was a source of frustration for all his work colleagues. So much blow had shot up his hooter over the years that it was leaking, causing him to sniff and snort and it made everybody cringe in pure disgust. He of course was fucking oblivious to daggers being thrown at him. He didn't even get the hint when a colleague lost control one morning.

'For Fucks sake Darryl! Pleeeease. Spare us!' Mark yelled, slamming his fist against the teak wood desk in frustration.

If he wasn't snorting, his finger was knuckle deep inside his monkey shaped skull. Spending a few minutes in the office and hearing him was a vomit inducing experience. I would often miss breakfast if I knew we would have to share the office together. I had come close to vomiting once before as he started up the nasal freak show. I'd rather go hungry feel stomach acid burn the back of my throat! Eating in the staff room was a like a game of roulette. If he was already in there, I would double back and hit the chicken shop across the road.

I couldn't bear to be near him. The big round face, those beady eyes and his sinus straight from the bowels of hell. I often wondered about the bacteria harboured on his fingers. Sometimes I would wonder in amazement how far that finger could go up into his nostril. Up to the knuckle certainly, he could probably go up to the elbow! How much of it was spread across the building? Slathered on the telephone receiver, splashed across the computer keyboards, smeared on door handles. All of it from his abused hooter and transported via his Short, chubby fingers. I never saw him wash hands once. The bacteria that this man must have spread was no mean feat. I came to the conclusion that it would be safer to lick the inside of a toilet bowl in a public convenience, than shake the bastard's hand.

Another thing about Darryl was his habit of trying to stitch up colleagues. He made kissing up to the boss an Olympic sport. He did this by grassing up colleagues when the boss was present, to belittle them and bolster his own profile. I ask you, loyalty? This guy would fuck his own mother over for chance to gain brownie points. What a dick!

But what I hated most about Darryl was the way he treated the cleaners who would come in the morning to undertake tasks cockney arsewipes would deem below them. One particular incident made my blood boil. Most of the geezers who cleaned the selling floor before we opened, had poor English speaking skills. They were immigrants from Africa and India mostly. They had come to England to make a better life for themselves and their family. Cleaning is not the road to riches by any means, but it's a job that doesn't require a lot of speaking. I witnessed Darryl give a cleaner tongue lashing for absolutely no reason what so ever. For simply leaving some boxes in the path of a fire escape.

'Do you know how quickly a fire can spread?' he bellowed at the poor chap. 'I've told you again and again. Are you thick or something? I can have your fucking job mate. Fucking watch it!'

The poor chap was inconsolable and apologised repeatedly.

Suddenly Darryl was an expert of health and safety. Suddenly he was protecting OUR safety? I saw it for what it was, the nasty, racist, white boy telling off the humble black man pushing a dirty mop around a show room floor. Darryl was letting him know what a piece of shit he was. How utterly worthless he was. He wanted to humble the poor bastard doing the job he would never be caught dead doing. Furthermore Darryl was letting him know how much he hated black people. It was as clear as day for everybody to see, a few boxes in front of an exit door? Please....

From that moment on I saw him for what he was: An ignorant piece of shit.

Over the course of our two year working relationship, I witnessed Darryl's racist leanings start to reveal itself.

Darryl had awoken a deeply unsettling realisation deep inside of me. I could kill another human being. I could point a gun at him and shoot him. The real tragedy would be that the bullet would be more valuable than his worthless life.

This was a walking/talking personification of the word 'Creep'...

I started to understand what I was dealing with pretty quickly. I fantasised daily about hurting this prick. Did you ever happen to catch a surreal creep show from the nineties called Twin Peaks? No? In a nutshell it was about an FBI agent investigating the death of a young all American teenage prom queen. As it turns out she (and other young ladies) are murdered by a demonic long haired hippie spirit called 'BOB'. One scene I watching one night stuck deeply in my memory and strangely became a fantasy. Allow me to paint a rather vivid picture. Bob has possessed the body of a local business man. Our killer is standing in his living room putting on surgical gloves. The record he was listening to has come to an end and is now stuck in the scratchy final groove. The stuck groove is providing an eerie soundtrack to the impending doom about to transpire. His young teenage daughter enters the room completely unaware her father is about to murder her in a deeply unpleasant way. Our possessed psychotic host then batters his young, beautiful daughter to death, slowly.

I dreamed of killing Darryl. He playing the role of the venerable young girl, me playing the psychotic killer in rubber gloves possessed by the omen. A vinyl record stuck in its final groove in the background as I butchered this horrible cunt. Chance would be a fine thing.

Our relationship was to be strained even further when we went on a Christmas night out. Roy had sensed that morale was low in his staff and thought that a drink up in a swanky bar might raise our spirits.

We were meeting in a place called The Duke of York which was a pub that had been converted into a swish bar. I met another colleague called Martin at The Elephants Head pub in Camden before heading to the Christmas piss up. He also hated Darryl and a few pints to settle our nerves were in order.

'He'll have the marching powder on the go,' Martin said with a sly smile, as he ordered two pints. 'Guarantee it!'

'And Roy is going to pretend it's not happening,' I said, bitterly.

'Yeah, but how blatant will he be in front of the guvnor?' Martin said, deep in thought, pondering his own question, looking up at the ceiling.

'As the booze kicks in he'll get more obvious. I'm wondering how many sly digs he'll hit me with as his rotten little ego inflates with the coke?'

'You think so?'

'Definitely. Let's finish up and head down,' I said sombrely.

Entering The Duke of York was depressing. Drinking with fucking twats tends to bring out those dark feelings inside me, funny enough. As we pushed through the crowd, I saw Roy, Darryl and Steve. They had a big table reserved. They looked awkward sitting on that big table reserved for 15 people in a busy bar all by themselves. Three spare pricks, I thought to myself.

'Stupid Millwall wankers,' I said through gritted teeth, forcing a smile over at Roy and the boys.

Roy looked relieved we had turned up.

'Evening Gentlemen! Where's everybody else?'

'Just running late I expect,' I reassured the boss, not convincingly.

Avoiding you cunts, I thought to myself.

Seeing Darryl and Steve sitting there talking amongst themselves, looking disapprovingly and me and Martin was making me feel annoyed already and we had only just arrived.

'Either cunt mouths off and they'll fucking see what happens!' I yelled in Martins ear, over the cheesy house music playing on the dodgy sound system. We got some drinks and sat down. We all made small talk, hoping and praying the rest of the team would show up, if they were even going to show up at all.

Looking at Darryl I could see he'd been at the powder already. His face was red and a thick bead of sweat was trickling down the side of his fat fucking face.

Roy was asking myself and Martin about our past times and was he was surprised to hear I had a fondness of books.

'What sort of stuff do you like Jason? I'm partial to footballer biographies and stuff,' Roy enquired, taking a genuine interest.

'Fiction.. nonfiction.. biographies... Not so much sports stuff but some, the Jimmy Greaves book was pretty good.'

'Couldn't put it down Jason. I read the Georgie Best one also. It was brilliant'

'Yeah, the Maradonna one was also pretty good. Some shocking...'

I was cut off mid-sentence by Darryl.

'Books? Who the fuck reads books?' he said a disgusted tone.

'Evidently not you Darryl.' I replied back. The coke was in control of his mouth already.

'You fink you're the nuts, dontc'ha mate?! You fink your clever, but you're a piss head mate. Always hungover at work, always mouthing off.'

'Why don't you fuck off to the bogs with your boyfriend to snort more coke!' I replied, anger rising in my chest.

Roy started choking on his pint in shock at my response, splashing beer on his shirt and across the table.

'Erm, Jesus, eerr, Jason,' he was spluttering and gasping for air. 'Take it easy mate. We're on a night out mate, remember? Martin, take Jason to the bar and grab in another round,' Roy responded, finally catching his breath and nervously handing over a twenty pound note.

Martin looked delighted to be handed hard currency by the boss. Steve and Darryl were not even looking at me, they were glaring at the table with a very sour expression on their ugly faces. It looked like they were sucking lemons. You know the look I'm talking about. The 'I-Have-Never-Been-So-Offended-In-My-Whole-Life' look. The cheek of it, Roy knew what the score was with Darryl and Steve. Cockney wide boys from his corner of the earth who liked football, being racist and eating fried food. As they were from a different generation, he wasn't too clued up on coke, but trust me, he knew the score. By saying it out loud, I had caused embarrassment and I didn't care. Ignorant bastard needing telling, I thought to myself. We headed over to the bar and got more drinks. I saw the door open and the rest of our workmates walked in.

'Thank god!' Martin said, I'd never heard him sound so relieved in all my life. I ignored the two twats for the rest of the night and got drunk.

My social relationship with Darryl would take a much more artistic turn as time went on. We put the Christmas hostilities behind us and tried to keep the peace with one another. He still would make digs and snide comments but things had improved enough to feel comfortable at work again. Steve had left and maybe he had realised that everybody hated his fucking guts.

The Lord Nelson was our local watering hole. It wasn't the best pub in the area, but it was the closest to work. The pub made small fortune from our staff and always welcomed us with open arms. The jukebox was real horrorshow and had the best hip hop, indie and seventies rock. The only downside of the place was the toilets. They stunk to high heaven. On a warm summers day you could smell them from outside. We would joke with the bar staff about kitting out their bogs at a discount price! Aside from the stinking toilets, Frankie the landlord ran a tight ship and would turn a blind eye to the occasional joint being smoked in the beer garden. One thing he didn't like was cocaine and he made that clear to us.

'Doobies-OK. Coke-NO WAY!'

We all played ball, but Darryl paid no attention. It's not like he would be rumbled as he never shared, except with Steve, when he came to visit. They'd have a pint, then make a point of saying they were moving onto somewhere better. I didn't mind. It is a free country after all.

Martin sometimes would inform us that Darryl was in his 'Office'. By this he meant in the toilet cubicle having a good snort. It was our in-joke. '

'There goes Darryl and Steve doing bid'ness in their office!' Martin would say in a dodgy American accent. That always made laugh. One thing that didn't make me laugh was the walls of the toilet

cubicle. Things were being written on one side, some very nasty things: Racist slogans, Swastikas, National Front logos. I had no proof that it was Darryl and Steve, but I had a hunch, put it that way.

As the weeks went on, the slogans got nastier:

'FUCK ALL YOU PAKI CUNTS'

had been written in Bold, Black letters. They had graduated from biro to magic marker pen. Below that there was more:

NIGGERS=CROOKS

Grabbing a biro I crudely attempted a reply:

PROFUND

I waited a few days to see if there was a response.

It came:

CUNT

Again, written black marker pen. I enjoyed the rest of my night. Little did anybody know I was plotting something beautiful. Somebody was going to feel my wrath. I would wait and catch the bastard.

On busy Thursday night we all convened to the pub for a pay day drink. Whilst taking a piss, I saw Darryl from behind as he was zipping up his trousers. I looked at his back pocket. There was something poking out.

THERE IT WAS.

A BLACK MAGIC MARKER PEN!!!

GOTCHA!!!

YOU FUCKING PIG IGNORANT RASCIST CUNT OF A HUMAN BEING.

The evidence had fallen right into my hands.

Game. Set. Match.

The next day was Friday and as always, an end of week drink up was on the cards. During my lunch break I headed to an art shop nearby. It was run by old hippy lady. She was happy to help with my 'Art Project'.

With a big collection of thick marker pens, I selected two of them and dumped the rest in a bin. I had an early finish at four pm. Everybody else would be clocking off at six pm. This was perfect. I had ample time to hit the pub on my own. It was a perfect amount of to decorate the cubicle.

Four pm arrived.

SHOWTIME!

Heading into the empty pub, I ordered a well-earned pint. Jodie the barman was on and didn't look happy. He was a six foot brother. We would trade hip hop albums and argue about the merits of The Notorious B.I.G and Tupac Shakur. I knew immediately what he was going say.

'Jason, you seen that cubicle?'

'Yeah, Jodie, fucking horrible,' I said sombrely.

'I'd love to catch the cunt doing it.'

'It isn't me!' I said trying to lift his spirits.

'Well, you're always boozing with Martin and playing Biggie on the jukebox, So I guessed that!' he laughed. 'Any ideas who it is?' he said continued, looking conspiratorially at me.

'I think you know,' I said, raising an eyebrow, Sean Connery style. He looked back over the bar and smiled.

As I finished my first pint, I decided to relieve myself. I walked straight to cubicle and closed the doors behind me.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

Two sides of the inside cubicle were blank. I had two blank canvases. It was time to paint my very own Chapel. Grabbing one of my markers I drew two people having sex in the doggy style position. A big muscle bound black man and a white woman. Darryl's girlfriend Emma, who we occasionally saw, had a distinctive hairstyle. A short black bob cut. I made sure the girl in my picture had THAT haircut. I had a speech bubble coming from the girl's gob: 'My boyfriend has a small cock' and I drew a speech bubble coming from the black guy's mouth: 'White pussy tastes the best'.

In big black letters I wrote:

FUN AND GAMES IN SOUTH BERMONDSEY!!

I spun around to the other blank wall and started drawing quickly.

A mathematical equation was next. I drew a fat pig and then drew a plus sign. Then I added a bag of white powder with 'coke' written on it. Next there were two big black lines for the equal's symbol. Then I drew a Millwall football club shirt and wrote 'CUNT' in massive letters. Under that I put my judgement:

WHITE TRASH. FUCKING SCUMBAGS.

I spun around and pulled down the toilet seat cover. It's off white (yellow) canvass was perfect for my words:

SNORT OFF THE SEAT? LICK THE BOWL YOU CUNT!

I slammed the seat cover back up. Someone outside the cubicle was taking a piss. I waited for them to finish. The door of the bogs closed. I continued. On the toilet seat, I put my finishing touch:

LICK IT YOU WHITE CUNT. LICK IT YOU FUCKING SCUMBAG!!

I unbolted cubicle and darted out. Heading to the back of the pub, I strolled into the empty beer garden and tossed the magic markers over the fence. I Disposed of the smoking gun.

I ordered a new pint and sat down at a table by the window. I couldn't wait for the rest of the gang to show up.

Martin was the first to show up, then the rest of the team. I had forgotten about it until I saw Jodie, with a huge smile, motioning to Martin from behind the bar. They both headed to the toilets. At that moment, Darryl walked in with Steve. Martin and Jodie came out of the bogs laughing hysterically, collapsing into the fruit machine. It was just a matter of time. Keep a straight face, I thought, don't give the game away. Even when Martin and Jodie were looking over, I stared out of the window smirking to myself.

I suddenly saw Bermondsey's finest head to their office. Every inch of me was on a knife edge.

I waited.

The door of the toilets slammed opened with a huge bang that startled the whole pub, the two lads came storming out in a rage.

'WHAT A FUCKING CHEEK! WHAT FUCKING CUNTS DRINK IN THIS FUCKING DUMP?!' Darryl was yelling, shaking with rage.

'You seen them fucking bogs?' Steve said looking me directly in the eye. This was the biggest test of my life. I wanted to explode into fits of laughter, but couldn't risk it. Steve didn't work for the company anymore and most likely would want to smack me on the chin should I crack a smile. I never broke eye contact and held his look.

'Nah mate,' I said calmly.

I walked into the toilets and collapsed into fits of laughter. It took five minutes to compose myself and I headed back out to see Darryl and Steve leaving, shouting loudly.

'Beers fucking shit, full of cunts, lets head back to the manor. Get a proper drink!' Darryl's fists were still clenched in rage.

Good I thought, fuck off. A pat on the back from Jodie was a subtle acknowledgement that my art work had been of a good standard and appreciated. A good night was had by all. Especially by yours truly!

Things calmed down and nobody had sussed I was the artistic vandal in the pub. Martin knew and the others suspected, but nothing was ever said. What could be proved? Darryl was just as guilty as me. I had just hit harder. I had half a brain and my wit had cut sharper.

He was still being a pain in the arse, still snorting and still sticking the knife when the boss was around. It must be said he was getting better.

There was news on the horizon that a new branch of Diamonds Bathroom supplies was opening a few miles away. Me and Martin had thrown our hats into the ring for positions there to escape 'The Nazis' and were delighted to have been accepted. Escape to victory, I thought! Brilliant!! It was only a couple weeks left and I was running the clock down. The last two weeks I hoped would be plain sailing and they pretty much were, apart from on last blip.

We were in the midst of a brutal heat wave and our air conditioning had completely shut down. It wouldn't have been a big problem, if we were not trading in a converted warehouse with NO WINDOWS. It was great in winter as it was snug and warm, but in summer it became a massive oven that trapped heat. Without air conditioning, it was unbearable. Coupled with shirts and ties, it was horrific. The feel of sweat constantly rolling down your legs, back and neck was so uncomfortable.

Roy had supplied everybody with cans of deodorant to mask any whiffs. The petty cash box was open to all staff, so we could supply angry customers with cold cans of coke from the vending machine when they lost their temper and complained. Freebies were thrown in with purchases. If things couldn't get worse, our toilets packed up completely. It wouldn't have been a problem if our toilets were not by the showroom floor. Just imagine coming into a showroom to buy a new toilet or bath and smelling sewage! Air fresheners were masking the stench of backed up toilets, but making the air thick and unbreathable. Working that showroom floor was akin to drowning in a bottle of cheap perfume. With the chemical taste in our mouths and shirts stuck to our backs like wet towels, we were close to closing for a couple of days. The firm that fixed our building had gone under, we were destitute. Head office had asked us to find another Maintenance company, until they found a new one themselves. Darryl had suggested his mates firm from Bermondsey. They were due on a Tuesday and I was told, they would make our problems disappear. I got a call at work on Monday night.

'Awight mate, Its Mick.'

'Mick?'

'Mick, Darryl says you got problems with your toilets and air con?'

'Ah yes!! The toilets are backed up and air con has just stopped working completely,' I said in hope.

'We're in a bad old way.'

'Sounds nasty mate.'

'Yeah, it's bad. Listen can you make sure you those long pipes to unblock the bogs. The old firm would come out without the equipment and return, just to charge us twice.'

There was a pause.

'You the boss there?'

'One of them.'

'Where's Darryl?'

'He's out.'

'Be there Tuesday Morning mate.'

I took his word for it. What a fool I was.

Tuesday came and went. So did Wednesday. By Thursday morning I was fuming. So was everybody else. Darryl told me he was hitting a cafe for breakfast. At 10.45 a blue van showed up. A burly, bald bloke with glasses and bad breath walked into the show room.

'Ello mate, where's Darryl?'

'Your here to fix bogs and air con?' I said relieved.

'That's right. Where's Darryl?'

'In the cafe getting breakfast.'

'Bweakfast sounds good. I'm starving. Biwl, you want some breakfast mate?' he said turning around to a lanky chap in a boiler suit. 'Bit a bacon n eggs?'

I suddenly saw what was going on. It was a fucking scam!

'Nevermind breakfast! Fix the toilets!' I snapped.

'We gotta eat, ain't we?! And besides, we ain't got the pipes for the bogs.'

'WHAT DID I TELL YOU ON THE PHONE??!!' I shouted.

'Easy mate! Calm down. What caf' is Darryl at?'

He was getting smart with me. I knew exactly what to say next.

'It's just across the road, can't miss it. I'm off to call Michael Jacobs.'

'Who's Michael Jacobs?' he said looking puzzled.

'Area manager for Diamonds Bathroom supplies. I'm informing him there's a fucking scam going down and the customers are complaining!'

'Awight mate, take it easy!' he said, seeing I wasn't playing around.

'Biwl, take the van back and grab the pipes. I'll look at the air con while you grab the bits. Bring us a sandwich back,' he said realising the severity of the situation. I watched him trundle off to fix the air con. What a Dickhead!

Darryl came back and shot me some dirty looks whilst talking to Mick. I ignored him. I didn't care anymore. It was nearly over. Martin reminded me that we only had a few days left. I was grateful to Martin for the timely reminder.

Finally, the last day arrived. Getting ready to leave felt really good. It was time to move on to pastures new.

As me and Martin said goodbye to the team, I felt sad. The office that had been my prison cell suddenly looked large, spacious and welcoming. It also looked like my past. I was going to miss this old dump I thought to myself.

Roy made a speech and pretended he was sad to see me and Martin go. Cake and champagne was dished out to everybody, jokes were told and stories exchanged. Roy shook my hand.

'You'll be fine over there. Gus is good bloke and a treasured mate. He'll lead to you great things.'

'Thanks Roy, I appreciate the good word you put in for me,' I said, looking him dead in the eye. For all his faults, he was a good manager.

'No mate, you did that yourself. Gus told me you interviewed very strongly.'

I could see Darryl twitching from the corner of my eye. I was in no doubt that he was uncomfortable that I was receiving praise. He was such a jealous cunt.

'Roy, can I have a half hour to take Jason and Martin to the boozer for a quick pint? Say thanks for all the hard work?' Darryl said quietly in the guv'nors ear.

'Sure,' Roy shrugged.

Now I was confused. Why was my arch nemesis buying me a beer? What the fuck was he up too?

Martin looked at me, scratching his head. He was thinking the same thing.

It didn't take long for the penny to drop. As we plonked our pint glasses on the table, Darryl was choking his down. He made small talk about football to Martin, ignoring me. I was doing a spot of people watching. I timed Darryl down that beer in eight minutes. He stood up and said goodbye as he was darting out through the empty pub.

'He's off to the betting shop, it was all a rouse!' I laughed loudly.

'Typical! Fucking typical!' Martin said watching the pub door close, shaking his head.

I turned to him and smiled.

'Look at this way, he's a prick! And he's got a head like a fucking medicine ball.'

Chapter Three: THE INTELLECTUAL DON

London is a city of character. Much of its architecture is old and breath-taking at the same time. I personally find the city dull and lifeless. I hate the overpriced shops, I hate that it's overpopulated, I hate the fact it's considered a city of culture when it clearly isn't. It's a massive sham. The mean spirited population of London are a soul destroying experience to deal with. London is full of

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