

### The Skag Boys, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Mother Superior

The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling. Ah wis jist sitting thair, focusing oan the telly, tryin no tae notice the cunt. He wis bringing me doon. Ah tried tae keep ma attention oan the Jean-Claude Van Damme video.

As happens in such movies, they started oaf wi an obligatory dramatic opening. Then the next phase ay the picture involved building up the tension through introducing the da'stardly villain and sticking the weak plot thegither. Any minute now though, auld Jean-Claude's ready tae git doon tae some serious swedgin.

— Rents. Ah've goat tae see Mother Superior, Sick Boy gasped, shaking his heid.

— Aw, ah sais. Ah wanted the radge tae jist fuck off ootay ma visage, tae go oan his ain, n jist leave us wi Jean-Claude. Oan the other hand, ah'd be gitting sick tae before long, and if that cunt went n scored, he'd haud oot oan us. They call um Sick Boy, no because he's eywis sick wi junk withdrawal, but because he's just one sick cunt.

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watch it. Ah'd be too fucked by the time we goat back, and in any case it wid probably be a few days later. That meant ah'd git hit fir fuckin back charges fi the shoap oan a video ah hudnae even goat a deek at.

— Ah've goat tae fuckin move man! he shouts, standing up. He moves ower tae the windae and rests against it, breathing heavily, looking like a hunted animal. There's nothing in his eyes but need.

Ah switched the box oaf at the handset. — Fuckin waste. That's aw it is, a fuckin waste, ah snarled at the cunt, the fuckin irritating bastard.

He flings back his heid n raises his eyes tae the ceiling. — Ah'll gie ye the money tae git it back oot. Is that aw yir sae fuckin moosey-faced about? Fifty measley fuckin pence ootay Ritz!

This cunt has a wey ay makin ye feel a real petty, trivial bastard.

— That's no the fuckin point, ah sais, but withoot conviction.

— Aye. The point is ah'm really fuckin sufferin here, n ma so-called mate's draggin his feet deliberately, lovin every fuckin minute ay it! His eyes seem the size ay fitba's n look hostile, yet pleadin at the same time; poignant testimonies tae ma supposed betrayal. If ah ever live long enough tae huv a bairn, ah hope it never looks at us like Sick Boy does. The cunt is irresistible oan this form.

— Ah wisnae . . . ah protested.

— Fling yir fuckin jaykit oan well!

At the Fit ay the Walk thir wir nae taxis. They only congregated here when ye didnae need them. Supposed tae be August, but ah'm fuckin freezing ma baws oaf here. Ah'm no sick yet, but it's in the fuckin post, that's fir sure.

— Supposed tae be a rank. Supposed tae be a fuckin taxi rank

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Money-grabbin bastards . . . Sick Boy muttered deliriously and breathlessly tae hissel, eyes bulging and sinews in his neck straining as his heid craned up Leith Walk.

At last one came. There were a group ay young guys in shell-suits n bomber jaykits whae'd been standin thair longer than us. Ah doubt if Sick Boy even saw them. He charged straight oot intae the middle ay the Walk screaming: — TAXI!

— Hi! Whit's the fuckin score? One guy in a black, purple and aqua shell-suit wi a flat-top asks.

— Git tae fuck. We wir here first, Sick Boy sais, opening the taxi door. — Thir's another yin comin. He gestured up the Walk at an advancing black cab.

— Lucky fir youse. Smart cunts.

— Fuck off, ya plukey-faced wee hing oot. Git a fuckin ride! Sick Boy snarled as we piled intae the taxi.

— Tollcross mate, ah sais tae the driver as gob splattered against the side windae.

— Square go then smart cunt! C'moan ya crappin bastards! the shell-suit shouted. The taxi driver wisnae amused. He looked a right cunt. Maist ay them do. The stamp-peyin self-employed ur truly the lowest form ay vermin oan god's earth.

The taxi did a u-turn and sped up the Walk.

— See whit yuv done now, ya big-moothed cunt. Next time one ay us ur walkin hame oan oor Jack Jones, wi git hassle fi these wee radges. Ah wisnae chuffed at Sick Boy.

— Yir no feart ay they wee fuckin saps ur ye?

This cunt's really gittin ma fuckin goat. — Aye! Aye ah fuckin am, if ah'm oan ma tod n ah git set oan by a fuckin squad ay shell-suits! Ye think ah'm Jean-Claude Van Fuckin Damme? Fuckin doss cunt, so ye are Simon. Ah called him 'Simon' rather than 'Si' or 'Sick Boy' tae emphasise the seriousness ay what ah wis sayin.

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Mother Superior. Watch ma fuckin lips. He then turns and stares intae the back ay the taxi driver, willing the cunt tae go faster while nervously beating oot a rhythm oan his thighs.

— One ay they cunts wis a McLean. Dandy n Chancey's wee brar, ah sais.

— Wis it fuck, he sais, but he couldnae keep the anxiety oot ay his voice. — Ah ken the McLeans. Chancey's awright.

— No if ye take the pish oot ay his brar, ah sais.

He wis takin nae mair notice though. Ah stoaped harassing him, knowing thit ah wis jist wastin ma energy. His silent suffering through withdrawal now seemed so intense that thir wis nae wey that ah could add, even incrementally, tae his misery.

'Mother Superior' wis Johnny Swan; also kent as the White Swan, a dealer whae wis based in Tollcross and covered the Sighthill and Wester Hailes schemes. Ah preferred tae score fi Swanney, or his sidekick Raymie, rather than Seeker n the Muirhoose-Leith mob, if ah could. Better gear, usually. Johnny Swan hud once been a really good mate ay mines, back in the auld days. We played fitba thegither fir Porty Thistle. Now he wis a dealer. Ah remember um saying tae us once: Nae friends in this game. Jist associates.

Ah thought he wis being harsh, flippant and show-oafy, until ah got sae far in. Now ah ken precisely what the cunt meant.

Johnny wis a junky as well as a dealer. Ye hud tae go a wee bit further up the ladder before ye found a dealer whae didnae use. We called Johnny 'Mother Superior' because ay the length ay time he'd hud his habit.

Ah soon started tae feel fucking shan n aw. Bad cramps wir beginning tae hit us as we mounted the stairs tae Johnny's gaff. Ah wis dripping like a saturated sponge, every step bringing

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because he wis blocking ma route tae Johnny's and the skag. He wis struggling fir breath, haudin grimly oantay the railing, looking as if he wis gaunnae spew intae the stairwell.

— Awright Si? ah sais irritably, pissed off at the cunt fir haudin us up.

He waved us away, shaking his heid and screwing his eyes up. Ah sais nae mair. Whin ye feel like he did, ye dinnae want tae talk or be talked at. Ye dinnae want any fuckin fuss at aw. Ah didnae either. Sometimes ah think that people become junkies just because they subconsciously crave a wee bit ay silence.

Johnny wis bombed ootay his box whin we finally made it up the stairs. A shootin gallery wis set up.

— Ah've goat one Sick Boy, and a Rent Boy that's sick n aw! he laughed, as high as a fuckin kite. Johnny often snorted some coke wi his fix or mixed up a speedball concoction ay smack and cocaine. He reckoned that it kept um high, stoaped um fae sittin around starin at waws aw day. High cunts are a big fuckin drag when yir feeling like this, because thir too busy enjoying their high tae notice or gie a fuck about your suffering. Whereas the piss-heid in the pub wants every cunt tae git as ootay it as he is, the real junky (as opposed tae the casual user who wants a partner-in-crime) doesnae gie a fuck about anybody else.

Raymie and Alison wir thair. Ali wis cookin. It wis lookin promising.

Johnny waltzed over tae Alison and serenaded her. — Hey-ey good lookin, whaaat-cha got cookin . . . He turned tae Raymie, whae wis steadfastly keepin shoatie at the windae. Raymie could detect a labdick in a crowded street the wey that sharks can sense a few drops of blood in an ocean. — Pit some sounds oan Raymie. Ah'm seek ay that new Elvis Costello, bit ah cannae stoap playin the cunt. Fuckin magic man, ah'm telling ye.

— A double-ended jack plug tae the south ay Waterloo

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tae score fae him. It always surprised us that Raymie wis intae smack in such a big wey. Raymie wis a bit like ma mate Spud; ah'd eywis regarded them as classic acid-heids by temperament. Sick Boy hud a theory that Spud and Raymie wir the same person, although they looked fuck all like each other, purely because they never seemed tae be seen together, despite moving in the same circles.

The bad-taste bastard breaks the junky's golden rule by pitten oan 'Heroin', the version oan Lou Reed's *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*, which if anything, is even mair painful tae listen tae whin yir sick than the original version oan *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. Mind you, at least this version doesnae huv John Cale's screeching viola passage oan it. Ah couldnae huv handled that.

— Aw fuck off Raymie! Ali shouts.

— Stick in the boot, go wi the flow, shake it down baby, shake it down honey . . . cook street, spook street, we're all dead white meat . . . eat the beat . . . Raymie burst intae an impromptu rap, shakin his erse and rollin his eyes.

He then bent doon in front ay Sick Boy, whae had strategically placed hissel beside Ali, never taking his eyes oaf the contents ay the spoon she heated over a candle. Raymie pulled Sick Boy's face tae him, and kissed him hard oan the lips. Sick Boy pushed him away, trembling.

— Fuck off! Doss cunt!

Johnny n Ali laughed loudly. Ah wid huv n aw had ah no felt that each bone in ma body wis simultaneously being crushed in a vice n set about wi a blunt hacksaw.

Sick Boy tourniqued Ali above her elbow, obviously staking his place in the queue, and tapped up a vein oan her thin ash-white airm.

Went me tae dae it? he asked

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sucking up about 5 mls through the needle, intae the barrel ay the syringe. He's goat a fuckin huge blue vein tapped up, which seems tae be almost comin through Ali's airm. He pierces her flesh and injects a wee bit slowly, before sucking blood back intae the chamber. Her lips are quivering as she gazes pleadingly at him for a second or two. Sick Boy's face looks ugly, leering and reptilian, before he slams the cocktail towards her brain.

She pulls back her heid, shuts her eyes and opens her mooth, givin oot an orgasmic groan. Sick Boy's eyes are now innocent and full ay wonder, his expression like a bairn thit's come through oan Christmas morning tae a pile ay gift-wrapped presents stacked under the tree. They baith look strangely beautiful and pure in the flickering candlelight.

— That beats any meat injection . . . that beats any fuckin cock in the world . . . Ali gasps, completely serious. It unnerves us tae the extent that ah feel ma ain genitals through ma troosers tae see if they're still thair. Touchin masel like that makes us feel queasy though.

Johnny hands Sick Boy his works.

— Ye git a shot, but only if ye use this gear. Wir playin trust games the day, he smiled, but he wisnae jokin.

Sick Boy shakes his heid. — Ah dinnae share needles or syringes. Ah've goat ma ain works here.

— Now that's no very social. Rents? Raymie? Ali? Whit d'ye think ay that? Ur you tryin tae insinuate that the White Swan, the Mother Superior, has blood infected by the human immunodeficiency virus? Ma finer feelins ur hurt. Aw ah kin say is, nae sharin, nae shootin. He gies an exaggerated smile, exposing a row ay bad teeth.

Tae me that wisnae Johnny Swan talkin. No Swanney. No fuckin way. Some malicious demon had invaded his body and poisoned his mind. This character was a million miles away fae

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so easy going, that he eywis goat lumbered washin the strips eftir the fives at Meadowbank, and nivir, ivir complained.

Ah wis shitein it that ah widnae git a shot here. — Fuck sakes Johnny, listen tae yirsel. Git a fuckin grip. Wuv goat the fuckin hirays here. Ah pulled some notes ootay ma poakit.

Whether it wis through guilt, or the prospect ay cash, the auld Johnny Swan briefly reappeared.

— Dinnae git aw serious oan us. Ah'm only fuckin jokin boys. Ye think thit the White Swan wid hud oot oan his muckers? Oan yis go ma men. Yir wise men. Hygiene's important, he stated wistfully. — Ken wee Goagsie? He's goat AIDS now.

— Gen up? ah asked. Thir wis eywis rumours about whae wis HIV and whae wisnae. Ah usually jist ignored thum. Thing is, a few people hud been saying that about wee Goagsie.

— Too right. He's goat the full AIDS likes, bit he's tested positive. Still, as ah sais tae um, it isnae the end ay the world Goagsie. Ye kin learn tae live wi the virus. Tons ay cunts dae it withoot any hassle at aw. Could be fuckin years before ye git sick, ah telt um. Any cunt withoot the virus could git run ower the morn. That's the wey ye huv tae look at it. Cannae jist cancel the gig. The show must go oan.

It's easy tae be philosophical when some other cunt's goat shite fir blood.

Anywey, Johnny even helped Sick Boy tae cook up and shoot home. Looking at Sick Boy's thick, juicy, dark-blue wiring, he paraphrased the auld Carly Simon song: — You're so vein, you probably think this hit is about you . . . , lovin every minute ay it.

Just as Sick Boy wis about tae scream, he spiked the vein, drew some blood back intae the barrel, and fired the life-giving and life-taking elixir home.

Sick Boy hugged Swanney tightly, then eased off, keeping his



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Swanney, how ah love ya, how ah love yah, my dear old Swanney . . . The adversaries ay a few minutes ago were now soul-mates.

Ah went tae take a shot. It took us ages tae find a good vein. Ma boys don't live as close tae the surface as maist people's. When it came, ah savoured the hit. Ali wis right. Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace. Ma dry, cracking bones are soothed and liquefied by ma beautiful heroine's tender caresses. The earth moved, and it's still moving.

Alison is tellin us that ah should go and see Kelly, who's apparently been really depressed since she hud the abortion. Although her tone's no really judgemental, she talks as if ah hud something tae dae wi Kelly's pregnancy n its subsequent termination.

— How should ah go n see her? It's goat nowt tae dae wi me, ah sais defensively.

— Yir her friend, ur ye no?

Ah'm tempted tae quote Johnny n say that we wir aw acquaintances now. It sounds good in ma heid: 'We are all acquaintances now.' It seems tae go beyond our personal junk circumstances; a brilliant metaphor for our times. Ah resist the temptation.

Instead ah content masel wi making the point that we wir aw Kelly's friends, and questioning why ah should be singled oot fir visiting duties.

— Fuck sake Mark. Ye ken she's really intae ye.

— Kelly? Away tae fuck! ah say, surprised, intrigued, and mair than a wee bit embarrassed. If this is true ah'm a blind and stupid arsehole.

— Course she is. She's telt us tons ay times. She's eywis oan about ye. It's Mark this, Mark that.

Hardly anybody calls us Mark. It's usually Rents, or worse, the

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Sick Boy's been listening in. Ah turn tae him. — Ye reckon that's right? Kelly's goat a thing about us?

— Every cunt under the sun kens that she's goat the hots fir ye. It's no exactly a well-kept secret. Ah cannae understand her, mind you. She wants her fuckin heid examined.

— Thanks fir tellin us then cunt.

— If you choose tae sit in darkened rooms watchin videos aw day long, no noticing what's going on around ye, it's no up tae me tae fuckin point it oot tae ye.

— Well, she nivir sais nowt tae me, ah whinge, biscuit-ersed.

— Ye want her tae pit it oan a t-shirt? Ye dinnae ken much about women, do ye Mark? Alison sais. Sick Boy smirks.

Ah feel insulted by that last remark, but ah'm determined tae treat the issue lightly, in case it's a wind-up, doubtlessly orchestrated by Sick Boy. The mischief-making cunt staggers through life leaving these interpersonal booby-traps fir his mates. What fuckin pleasure the radge derives fae these activities is beyond me.

Ah score some gear fi Johnny.

— Pure as the driven snow, this shit, he tells us.

That meant thit it wisnae cut *too* much, wi anything *too* toxic.

It wis soon time fir us tae go. Johnny wis gabbin a load ay shite intae ma ear; things ah didnae want tae listen tae. Problems about whae hud ripped off whae, tales ay scheme vigilantes making every cunt's life a misery wi their anti-drug hysteria. He wis also babbling oan about his ain life in a maudlin sortay wey, and spouting fantasies aboot how he wis gaunnae git hissel straightened oot n take oaf tae Thailand whair the women knew how tae treat a gadge, n whair ye could live like a king if ye had a white skin n a few crisp tenners in yir poakit. He actually sais things a loat worse thin that, a loat mair cynical and exploitative. Ah telt masel that's the evil spirit talkin again, no the White Swan. Or

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sounding like they were arranging another skag deal. Then they got up and trooped ootay the room thegither. They looked bored and passionless, but when they didnae come back, ah knew that they'd be shaggin in the bedroom. It seemed, for women, that fucking was just something that you did wi Sick Boy, like talking, or drinking tea wi other punters.

Raymie wis drawing wi crayons oan the wall. He wis in a world ay his ain, an arrangement which suited himself, and every other cunt.

Ah thought aboot what Alison hud said. Kelly hud jist hud the abortion last week. If ah went and saw her, ah'd be too squeamish tae fuck her, assuming that she'd want us tae. Surely though, there would still be something there, gunge, bits ay the thing, or even a sortay rawness? Ah wis probably being fuckin daft. Alison wis right. Ah didnae really know much aboot women. Ah didnae really know much aboot anything.

Kelly steys at the Inch, which is difficult tae git tae by bus, n ah'm now too skint fir a taxi. Mibbe ye kin git tae the Inch by bus fae here, bit ah dinnae ken which one goes. The truth ay the matter is, ah'm a bit too skaggy-bawed tae fuck n a bit too fucked tae jist talk. A number 10 comes, n ah jump oan it back tae Leith, and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Throughout the journey ah gleefully anticipate the stomping he's gaunnae gie that smart cunt.

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### *Junk Dilemmas No. 63*

*Ah'm just lettin it wash all over me, or wash through me . . . clean me oot fae the inside.*

*This internal sea. The problem is that this beautiful ocean carries with it loads ay poisonous flotsam and jetsam . . . that poison is diluted by the sea, but once the ocean rolls out, it leaves the shite behind, inside ma body. It takes as well as gives, it washes away ma endorphins, ma pain resistance centres; they take a long time tae come back.*

*The wallpaper is horrific in this shite-pit ay a room. It terrorises me. Some coffin-dodger must have put it up years ago . . . appropriate, because that's what ah am, a coffin-dodger, and ma reflexes are not getting any better . . . but it's all here, all within ma sweaty grasp. Syringe, needle, spoon, candle, lighter, packet ay powder. It's all okay, it's all beautiful; but ah fear that this internal sea is gaunnae subside soon, leaving this poisonous shite washed up, stranded up in ma body.*

*Ah start tae cook up another shot. As ah shakily haud the spoon ower the candle, waitin for the junk tae dissolve, ah think; more short-term sea, more long-term poison. This thought though, is naewhere near sufficient tae stop us fae daein what ah huv tae dae.*

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Third time lucky. It wis like Sick Boy telt us: you've got tae know

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importance ay preparation. He could be right. Anyway, this time ah've prepared. A month's rent in advance oan this big, bare room overlooking the Links. Too many bastards ken ma Montgomery Street address. Cash oan the nail! Partin wi that poppy wis the hardest bit. The easiest wis ma last shot, taken in ma left airm this morning. Ah needed something tae keep us gaun during this period ay intense preparation. Then ah wis off like a rocket roond the Kirkgate, whizzing through ma shopping list.

*why?*  
Ten tins ay Heinz tomato soup, eight tins ay mushroom soup (all to be consumed cold), one large tub ay vanilla ice-cream (which will melt and be drunk), two boatils ay Milk of Magnesia, one boatil ay paracetamol, one packet ay Rinstead mouth pastilles, one boatil ay multivits, five litres ay mineral water, twelve Lucozade isotonic drinks and some magazines: soft porn, *Viz*, *Scottish Football Today*, *The Punter*, etc. The most important item hus already been procured from a visit tae the parental home; ma Ma's bottle ay valium, removed from her bathroom cabinet. Ah don't feel bad about this. She never uses them now, and if she needs them her age and gender dictate that her radge GP will prescribe them like jelly tots. I lovingly tick off all the items oan ma list. It's going tae be a hard week.

Ma room is bare and uncarpeted. There's a mattress in the middle ay the flair with a sleeping-bag oan it, an electric-bar fire, and a black and white telly oan a small wooden chair. Ah've goat three brown plastic buckets, half-filled wi a mixture ay disinfectant and water for ma shite, puke and pish. Ah line up ma tins ay soup, juice and ma medicines within easy reach ay ma makeshift bed.

Ay took ma last shot in order tae git us through the horrors ay the shopping trip. Ma final score will be used tae help us sleep, and ease us oaf the skap. Ah'll try tae take it in small, measured

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stomach and an irrational panic attack. As soon as ah become aware ay the sickness gripping me, it effortlessly moves from the uncomfortable tae the unbearable. A toothache starts tae spread fae ma teeth intae ma jaws and ma eye sockets, and aw through ma bones in a miserable, implacable, debilitating throb. The auld sweats arrive oan cue, and lets no forget the shivers, covering ma back like a thin layer ay autumn frost oan a car roof. It's time for action. No way can ah crash oot and face the music yet. Ah need the old 'slowburn', a soft, come-down input. The only thing ah kin move for is smack. One wee dig tae unravel those twisted limbs and send us oaf tae sleep. Then ah say goodbye tae it. Swanney's vanished, Seeker's in the nick. That leaves Raymie. Ah go tae bell the cunt fae the payphone in the hall.

Ah'm aware that as ah dial, someone has brushed past us. Ah wince fae the fleeting contact, but have no desire tae look and see whae it is. Hopefully ah'll no be here long enough tae need tae check out any ay ma new 'flatmates'. The fuckers dinnae exist fir us. Nae cunt does. Only Raymie. The money goes doon. A lassie's voice. — Hello? she sniffs. Has she goat a summer cauld or is it the skag?

— Is Raymie thair? It's Mark here. Raymie has evidently mentioned us because although ah dinnae ken her, she sure as fuck kens me. Her voice chills over. — Raymie's away, she says.

— London.

— London? Fuck . . . when's he due back?

— Dinnae ken.

— He didnae leave anything fir us, did he? Chance wid be a fine thing, the cunt.

— Eh, naw . . .

Ah shakily pit the phone doon. Two choices; one: tough it oot, back in the room, two: phone that cunt Forrester and go tae Muirhoose, get fucked aboot and ripped oaf wi some crap gear.

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intae the the box. Any port in a storm, and it's raging in here behind ma face.

An auld boot gies us the evil eye as ah pass her oan the wey doon the bus. No doubt ah'm fuckin boggin n look a real mess. It doesnae bother us. Nothing exists in ma life except masel and Michael Forrester and the sickening distance between us: a distance being steadily reduced by this bus.

Ah sit oan the back seat, doonstairs. The bus is nearly empty. A lassie sits across fae us, listening tae her Sony Walkman. Is she good looking? Whae fuckin cares. Even though it's supposed tae be a 'personal' stereo, ah kin hear it quite clearly. It's playing a Bowie number . . . 'Golden Years'.

*Don't let me you hear you say life's takin' you nowhere —  
Angel . . .*

*Look at those skies, life's begun, nights are warm and  
the days are yu-hu-hung . . .*

Ah've goat every album Bowie ever made. The fuckin lot. Tons ay fuckin bootlegs n aw. Ah dinnae gie a fuck about him or his music. Ah only care about Mike Forrester, an ugly talentless cunt whae has made no albums. Zero singles. But Mikey baby is the man of the moment. As Sick Boy once said, doubtlessly paraphrasing some other fucker: nothing exists outside the moment. (Ah think some radge oan a chocolate advert said it first.) But ah cannae even endorse these sentiments as they are at best peripheral tae the moment. The moment is me, sick, and Mikey, healer.

Some auld cunt, they're always oan the buses at this time, is fartin and shitein at the driver; firing a volley ay irrelevant questions about bus numbers, routes and times. Get the fuck oan or fuck off and die ya foostie auld cunt. Ah almost choked in silent rage at her selfish pettiness and the bus driver's pathetic

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auld bastards? When she finally gits oan the auld fucker still has the cheek tae have a gob oan her like a cat's erse.

She sits directly in front ay us. Ma eyes burrow intae the back ay her heid. Ah'm willing her tae have a brain haemorrhage or a massive cardiac arrest . . . no. Ah stoap tae think. If that happened, it would only haud us back even mair. Hers must be a slow, suffering death, tae pey her back for ma fuckin suffering. If she dies quickly, it'll gie people the chance tae fuss. They'll always take that opportunity. Cancer cells will dae nicely. Ah will a core ay bad cells tae develop and multiply in her body. Ah can feel it happening . . . but it's ma body it's happening to. Ah'm too tired tae continue. Ah've lost all hate fir the auld doll. Ah only feel total apathy. She's now ootside the moment.

Ma heid's gaun doon. It jerks up so suddenly and violently, ah feel it's gaunnae fly oaf ma shoulders ontae the lap of the testy auld boot in front ay us. Ah haud it firmly in baith hands, elbays oan ma knees. Now ah'm gaunnae miss ma stoap. No. A surge ay energy and ah get oaf at Pennywell Road, opposite the shopping centre. Ah cross over the dual carriageway and walk through the centre. Ah pass the steel-shuttered units which have never been let and cross over the car park where cars have never parked. Never since it was built. Over twenty years ago.

Forrester's maisonette flat is in a block bigger than most in Muirhouse. Maist are two stories high, but his is five, and therefore has a lift, which doesnae work. Tae conserve energy ah slide along the wall oan ma journey up the stairs.

In addition tae cramps, aches, sweats and an almost complete disintegration ay ma central nervous system, ma guts are now starting tae go. Ah feel a queasy shifting taking place, an ominous thaw in ma long period of constipation. Ah try tae pull masel together at Forrester's door. But he'll know that ah'm suffering. An ex-skag merchant always knows when someone is sick. Ah



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get what ah need, ah don't see the sense in advertising it tae him any mair than ah can help.

Forrester can obviously see the reflection ay ma ginger hair through the wired and dimpled glass door. He takes an age to answer. The cunt has started fuckin us aboot before ah even set foot in his hoose. He disnae greet us wi any warmth in his voice. — Awright Rents, he sais.

— No bad Mike. He calls us 'Rents' instead ay 'Mark', ah call him 'Mike' instead ay 'Forry'. He's calling the shots awright. Is trying tae ingratiate masel tae this cunt the best policy? It's probably the only one at the moment.

— Moan in, he tersely shrugs and ah dutifully follow him.

Ah sit oan the couch, beside but a bit away fae a gross bitch with a broken leg. Her plastered limb is propped up on the coffee table and there is a repulsive swell of white flesh between the dirty plaster and her peach coloured shorts. Her tits sit on top of an oversized Guinness pot, and her brown vesty top struggles tae constrain her white flab. Her greasy, peroxide locks have an inch of insipid grey-brown at their roots. She makes no attempt tae acknowledge ma presence but lets oot a horrendous and embarrassing donkey-like laugh at some inane remark Forrester makes, which I don't catch, probably concerning my appearance. Forrester sits opposite me in a worn-out armchair, beefy-faced but thin bodied, almost bald at twenty-five. His hair loss over the last two years has been phenomenal, and ah wonder if he's goat the virus. Doubt it somehow. They say only the good die young. Normally ah would make a bitchy comment, but at this moment in time ah would rather slag ma granny aboot her colostomy bag. Mikey is, after all, my man.

In the other chair next tae Mikey is an evil-looking bastard, whose eyes are on the bloated sow, or rather the unprofessionally rolled joint she is smoking. She takes an extravagantly theatrical

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rodent faces. They are not all bad. It's this boy's clothes that gie him away, marking him oot as wide-o extraordinaire. He's obviously been residing in one ay the Windsor group hotels; Saughton, Bar L, Perth, Peterhead, etc., and has apparently been there for some time. Dark blue flared troosers, black shoes, a mustard polo-neck wi blue bands at the collar and cuffs, and a green parka (in this fuckin weather!) draped ower the back ay the chair.

No intros are made, but that's the prerogative of my baw-faced icon, Mike Forrester. He's the man in the chair, and he certainly knows it. The bastard launches intae this spiel, talking incessantly, like a bairn trying tae stay up as late as possible. Mr Fashion, Johnny Saughton ah'll call the cunt, sais nothing, but smiles enigmatically and occasionally rolls his eyes in mock ecstasy. If ye ever saw a predator's face it wis Saughton's. The Fat Sow, god she is grotesque, hee-haws and ah force oot the odd sycophantic chuckle at times ah gauge tae be roughly appropriate.

After listening tae this shite for a while, ma pain and nausea force me tae intervene. My non-verbal signals are contemptuously ignored, so ah steam in.

— Sorry tae interrupt ye thair mate, but ah need tae be pittin ma skates oan. Ye goat the gear thair?

The reaction is over the top, even by the standards ay the crappy game Forrester is playing.

— You shut yir fuckin mouth! Fuckin radge. Ah'll fuckin tell you whin tae speak. Just shut yir fuckin erse. You dinnae like the company, you kin git tae fuck. End ay fuckin story.

— Nae offence mate . . . It's aw tame capitulation oan ma part. After all, this man is a god tae me. Ah'd walk oan ma hands and knees through broken gless fir a thousand miles tae use the cunt's shite as toothpaste and we baith know it. Ah am but a

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ridiculously flawed concepts. Furthermore, it obviously aw being played fir Johnny Saughton's benefit, but what the fuck, it's Mike's gig, and ah asked tae be dealt a shite hand when ah dialled his number.

Ah take some more crass humiliation for what seems like an eternity. Ah get through it nae bother though. Ah love nothing (except junk), ah hate nothing (except forces that prevent me getting any) and ah fear nothing (except not scoring). Ah also know that a shitein cunt like Forrester would never pit us through aw this bullshit if he intended holding out on me.

It gies us some satisfaction remembering why he hates us. Mike was once infatuated wi a woman who despised him. A woman ah subsequently shagged. It hadn't meant a great deal tae either masel or the woman concerned, but it certainly bugged the fuck oot ay Mike. Now most people would put this doon tae experience, ye always want what ye cannae have and the things that ye dinnae really gie a toss about get handed tae ye oan a plate. That's life, so why should sex be different fae any other part ay it? Ah've hud, and brushed oaf, such reverses in the past. Every cunt has. The problem is that this shite's intent oan hoarding trivial grievances, like the fat-chopped malignant squirrel that he is. But ah still love him. Ah huv tae. He's the boy holdin.

Mikey grows bored wi his humiliation game. For a sadist, it must huv aw the interest ay sticking pins intae a plastic doll. Ah'd loved tae have given him some better sport, but ah'm too fucked tae react tae his dull-witted jibes. So he finally sais: — Goat the poppy?

Ah pull oot some crumpled notes fae ma poakits, and wi touching servility, flatten them oot oan the coffee table. Wi an air ay reverence and all due deference tae Mikey's status as The Man, ah hand them ower. Ah note for the first time that the Fat Sow has a huge arrow drawn oan her plaster in thick black

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HERE. Ma guts dae another quick birl, and the urge tae take the gear fae Mikey wi maximum force and get tae fuck oot ay thair is almost overwhelming. Mikey snaffles the notes and tae ma surprise, produces two white capsules, fae his poakit. Ah'd never seen the likes ay them before. They were wee hard bomb-shaped things wi a waxy coat oan them. A powerful rage gripped us, seemingly coming fae nowhere. No, not fae nowhere. Strong emotions ay this type can only be generated by junk or the possibility of its absence. — What the fuck's this shite?

— Opium. Opium suppositories, Mikey's tone has changed. It's cagey, almost apologetic. Ma outburst has shattered our sick symbiosis.

— What the fuck dae ah dae wi these? ah sais, without thinking, and then brek oot in a smile as it dawns oan us. It lets Mikey off the hook.

— Dae ye really want me tae tell ye? he sneers, reclaiming some ay the power he'd previously relinquished, as Saughton sniggers and Fat Sow brays. He sees that ah'm no amused, however, so he continues: — Yir no bothered about a hit, right? Ye want something slow, tae take away the pain, tae help ye git oaf the junk, right? Well these are perfect. Custom-fuckin-designed fir your needs. They melt through yir system, the charge builds up, then it slowly fades. That's the cunts they use in hoepitals, fir fuck sakes.

— Ye reckon these then, man?

— Listen tae the voice ay experience, he smiles, but mair at Saughton than at me. Fat Sow throws her greasy head back, exposing large, yellowing teeth.

So ah dae jist as recommended. Ah listen tae the voice ay experience. Ah excuse masel, retire tae the toilet and insert them, wi great diligence, up ma arse. It was the first time ah'd ever stuck ma finger up ma ain arsehole, and a vaguely nauseous

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spots. Two particular beauties; these ones really have tae be classified as boils. One oan the cheek, and one oan the chin. Fat Sow and I would make an excellent couple, and ah entertain a perverse vision ay us in a gondola oan the canals ay Venice. Ah return doonstairs, still sick but high fae scoring.

— It'll take time, Forrester gruffly observes, as ah swan back intae the living-room.

— You're tellin me. For aw the good they've done ah might as well huv stuck thum up ma erse. Ah get ma first smile fae Johnny Saughton for ma troubles. Ah can almost see the blood aroond his twisted mooth. Fat Sow looks at us as if ah had just ritually slaughtered her first born. That pained, incomprehensible expression ay hers makes us want tae pish ma keks wi laughter. Mike wears a very hurt I-crack-the-jokes-here look, but it's tinged wi resignation through the realisation that his power over me has gone. It ended wi the completion ay the transaction. He was now nae mair tae me than a lump ay dug shite in the shopping centre. In fact, considerably less. End ay story.

— Anyway, catch yis later folks, ah nod ower tae Saughton and Fat Sow. A smiling Saughton gies us a matey wink which seems tae sweep in the whole room. Even Fat Sow tries tae force a smile. Ah take their gestures as further evidence that the balance ay power between me and Mike has fundamentally shifted. As if tae confirm this, he follays us oot ay the flat. — Eh, ah'll see ye aroond man. Eh . . . sorry about aw the shite ah wis hittin ye wi back thair. That cunt Donnelly . . . he makes us dead jumpy. A fuckin heidbanger ay the first order. Ah'll tell ye the fill story later. Nae hard feelins though, eh Mark?

— Ah'll see ye later Forry, ah reply, ma voice hopefully cairryin enough promise ay threat tae cause the cunt a wee bit unease, if no real concern. Part ay me doesnae want tae burn the fucker doon though. It's a sobering thought, but ah might need

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By the time ah hit the bottom ay the stair ah've forgotten aw aboot ma sickness; well almost. Ah can feel it, the ache through ma body, it's just that it doesnae really bother us any mair. Ah know it's ridiculous tae con masel that the gear is making an impact already, but there's definitely some placebo effect taking place. One thing that ah'm aware ay is a great fluidity in ma guts. It feels like ah'm melting inside. Ah huvnae shat for about five or six days; now it seems tae be coming. Ah fart, and instantly follow through, feeling the wet sludge in ma pants with a quickening of ma pulse. Ah slam oan the brakes; tightening ma sphincter muscles as much as ah can. The damage has been done, however, and it's gaunnae git much worse if ah dinnae take immediate action. Ah consider going back tae Forrester's, but ah want nothing mair tae dae wi that twat for the time being. Ah remember that the bookies in the shopping centre has a toilet at the back.

Ah enter the smoke-filled shop and head straight tae the bog. What a fuckin scene; two guys stand in the doorway ay the toilet, just pishing intae the place, which has a good inch ay stagnant, spunky urine covering the flair. It's oddly reminiscent ay the foot pool at the swimming baths ah used tae go tae. The two punters shake oot their cocks in the passage and stuff them intae their flies wi as much care as ye'd take putting a dirty hanky intae yir poakit. One ay them looks at us suspiciously and bars ma path tae the toilet.

— Bog's fuckin blocked, mate. Ye'll no be able tae shite in that. He gestures tae the seatless bowl fill ay broon water, toilet paper and lumps ay floating shite.

Ah look sternly at him. — Ah've goat tae fuckin go mate.

— Yir no fuckin shootin up in thair, ur ye?

Just what ah fuckin needed. Muirhoose's Charles Bronson. Only this cunt makes Charles Bronson look like Michael J. Fox.

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— Away tae fuck. Ma indignation must have been convincing, because this radge actually apologises.

— Nae offence meant, pal. Jist some ay they young cunts in the scheme huv been trying tae make this thir fucking shootin gallery. We're no intae that.

— Fuckin wide-o cunts, his mate added.

— Ah've been oan the peeve fir a couple ay days, mate. Ah'm gaun fuckin radge wi the runs here. Ah need tae shite. It looks fuckin awfay in thair, but it's either that or ma fuckin keks. Ah've nae shit oan us. Ah'm fuckin bad enough wi the bevvvy, nivir mind anything else.

The cunt gies us an empathetic nod and unblocks ma way. Ah feel the pish soak intae ma trainers as ah step ower the door ridge. Ah reflect oan the ridiculousness ay saying that ah hud nae shit oan ays when ma keks are fill ay it. One piece ay good luck though, is that the lock oan the door is intact. Fuckin astounding, considering the atrocious state ay the bogs.

Ah whip oaf ma keks and sit oan the cold wet porcelain shunky. Ah empty ma guts, feeling as if everything; bowel, stomach, intestines, spleen, liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and fucking brains are aw falling through ma arsehole intae the bowl. As ah shit, flies batter oaf ma face, sending shivers through ma body. Ah grab at one, and tae ma surprise and elation, feel it buzzing in ma hand. Ah squeeze tightly enough tae immobilise it. Ah open ma mitt tae see a huge, filthy bluebottle, a big, furry currant ay a bastard.

Ah smear it against the wall opposite; tracing out an 'H' then an 'I' then a 'B' wi ma index finger, using its guts, tissue and blood as ink. Ah start oan the 'S' but ma supply grows thin. Nae problem. Ah borrow fae the 'H', which has a thick surplus, and complete the 'S'. Ah sit as far back as ah can, withoot sliding intae the shit-pit below ays, and admire ma handiwork. The vile

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tae look at. Ah am speculatively thinking about this as a positive metaphor for other things in my life, when the realisation ay what ah've done sends a paralysing jolt ay raw fear through ma body. Ah sit frozen for a moment. But only a moment.

Ah fall off the pan, ma knees splashing oantae the pishy flair. My jeans crumple tae the deck and greedily absorb the urine, but ah hardly notice. Ah roll up ma shirt sleeve and hesitate only briefly, glancing at ma scabby and occasionally weeping track marks, before plunging ma hands and forearms intae the brown water. Ah rummage fastidiously and get one ay ma bombs back straight away. Ah rub off some shite that's attached tae it. A wee bit melted, but still largely intact. Ah stick it oan toap ay the cistern. Locating the other takes several long dredges through the mess and the panhandling of the shite ay many good Muirhoose and Pilton punters. Ah gag once, but get ma white nugget ay gold, surprisingly even better preserved than the first. The feel ay water disgusts us even mair than the shite. Ma brown-stained airm reminds us ay the classic t-shirt tan. The line goes right up past ma elbow as ah hud tae go right aroond the bend.

Despite ma discomfort at the feel ay water oan ma skin, it seems appropriate tae run ma airm under the cauld tap at the sink. It's hardly the maist extensive or thorough wash ah've had, but it's aw ah can stand. Ah then wipe ma arse wi the clean part ay ma pants and chuck the shite-saturated keks intae the bowl beside the rest ay the waste.

Ah hear a knocking at the door as ah pull oan ma soaking Levis. It's the sense ay wetness oan ma legs, again, rather than the stench, which makes us feel a bit giddy. The knocking becomes a loud bang.

— C'moan ya cunt, wir fuckin burstin oot here!

— Haud yir fuckin hoarses.

Ah wis tempted tae swallay the suppositories, but ah rejected



### In Overdrive

stuff oan them tae suggest that ah'd no doubt huv a hard time keeping them doon. As ah'd shot everything oot ay ma bowels, ma boys were probably safer back thair. Home they went.

Ah goat some funny looks as ah left the bookies, no sae much fae the pish-queue gang whae piled past us wi a few derisory 'aboot-fuckin-time-n-aws' but fae one or two punters whae clocked ma wasted appearance. One radge even made some vaguely threatening remarks, but maist were too engrossed in the form cairds, or the racing oan the screen. Ah noted Elvis/Bronson was gesticulating wildly at the telly as ah left.

At the bus stop, ah realised what a sweltering hot day it had become. Ah remembered somebody sais that it wis the first day ay the Festival. Well, they certainly got the weather fir it. Ah sat oan the wall by the bus stop, letting the sun soak intae ma wet jeans. Ah saw a 32 coming, but didnae move, through apathy. The next one that came, ah got it thegither tae board the fucker and headed back tae Sunny Leith. It really is time tae clean up, ah thought, as ah mounted the stairs ay ma new flat.

### In Overdrive

I do wish that ma semen-rectumed chum, the Rent Boy, would stop slavering in ma fucking ear. There's a set of VPLs (visible

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Yes! That will do me fine! I am in overdrive, over-fuckin-drive. It's one ay these days when ma hormones are shooting aroond ma body like a steelie in a pinball machine, and all these mental lights and sounds are flashing in ma heid.

And what is Rents proposing, on this beautiful afternoon of vintage cruisin weather? The cunt has the fuckin audacity tae suggest that we go back to his gaff, which reeks of alcohol, stale spunk and garbage which should have been pit oot weeks ago, tae watch videos. Draw the curtains, block out the sunlight, block out your own fucking brainwaves, and deek him sniggering like a moron wi a joint in his hand at everything that comes on the pox-box. Well, non, non, non, Monsieur Renton, Simone is not cut out to sit in darkened rooms with Leith plebs and junkies rabbiting shite aw affie. *Cause ah wis made for lovin you bay-bee, you wir made for lovin me . . .*

. . . a fat hound has waddled out in front ay the lemon wi the VPLs, blocking my view of that subliminal rear with her obese arse. She has the fuckin cheek tae wear tight leggings — totally and completely oblivious to the delicate nature of Simone's stomach!!

— There's a slim chicky! ah sarcastically observe.

— Fuck off ya sexist cunt, the Rent Boy sais.

Ah'm tempted tae ignore the bastard. Mates are a waste of fucking time. They are always ready to drag you down tae their level of social, sexual and intellectual mediocrity. I'd better dismiss the rage though, in case he thinks he's got one up on us.

— The fact that you use the term 'cunt' in the same breath as 'sexist', shows that ye display the same muddled, fucked-up thinking oan this issue as you do oan everything else.

That scoobies the cunt. Eh sais something biscuit-ersed in reply, in a pathetic attempt tae salvage the situation. Rent Boy 0, Simone 1. We both know it. *Renton, Renton, what's the score*

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colour, creed and nationality present. Oh ya cunt, ye! It's time tae move. Two oriental types consulting a map. Simone express, that'll do nicely. Fuck Rents, he's a doss bastard, totally US.

— Can I help you? Where are you headed? ah ask. *Good old-fashioned Scoattish hoshpitality, aye, ye cannae beat it, shays the young Sean Connery, the new Bond, cause girls, this is the new bondage . . .*

— We're looking for the Royal Mile, a posh, English-colonial voice answers back in ma face. What a fucking wee pump-up-the-knickers n aw. *Simple Simon sais, put your hands on your feet . . .*

Of course, the Rent Boy is looking like a flaccid prick in a barrel-load ay fannies. Sometimes ah really think the gadge still believes that an erection is for pishing over high walls.

— Follow us. Are you going to a show? Yes, you can't beat the Festival for bringing out the mantovani.

— Yes. One of the (china) dolls hands us a piece ay paper wi *Brecht: The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Nottingham University Theatre Group on it. Doubtless a collection of zit-encrusted, squeaky-voiced wankers playing oot a miserable pretension tae the arts before graduating to work in the power stations which give the local children leukemia or investment consultancies which shut doon factories, throwing people into poverty and despair. Still, let's git the board-treading ootay the system first. Fucking toss bags, don't you agree, Sean, ma auld fellow former milk-delivering mucker? *Yesh Shimon, I shink you may have a shtrong point thair.* Auld Sean and I have so many parallels. Both Edina lads, both ex-co-op milk boys. Ah only did the Leith run, whereas Sean, if ye listen tae any auld fucker, delivered milk tae every household in the city. Child labour laws were more lax then, I suppose. One area in which wi differ is looks. Sean is completely out-Sean in that department by Simone.

Now Rents is gibbering oan about *Galileo* and *Mother Courage*

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his uses. It's an amazing world. *Yesh Shimon, the more I shee, the less I believe.* You an me boash, Sean.

The oriental mantos depart tae the show, but they've agreed tae meet us for a drink in Deacons afterwards. Rents cannae make it. Boo-fucking-hoo. Ah'll cry masel tae sleep. He's meeting Ms Mogadon, the lovely Hazel . . . ah'll just have to amuse both chickies . . . if ah decide to show up. Ah'm a busy man. One musht put duty fursht, eh Sean? *Preshishly Shimon.*

Ah shake off Rents, he can go and kill himself with drugs. Some fucking friends I have. Spud, Second Prize, Begbie, Matty, Tommy: these punters spell L-I-M-I-T-E-D. An extremely limited company. Well, ah'm fed up to ma back teeth wi losers, no-hopers, draftpaks, schemies, junkies and the likes. I am a dynamic young man, upwardly mobile and thrusting, thrusting, thrusting . . .

. . . the socialists go on about your comrades, your class, your union, and society. Fuck all that shite. The Tories go on about your employer, your country, your family. Fuck that even mair. It's me, me, fucking ME, Simon David Williamson, NUMERO FUCKING UNO, versus the world, and it's a one-sided swedge. *It's really so fucking easy . . .* Fuck them all. *I admire your rampant individualism, Shimon. I shee parallelsh wish myshelf ash a young man.* Glad you shed that Sean. Others have made shimilar comments.

Ugh . . . a spotty fucker in a Hearts scarf . . . yes, the cunts are at home today. Look at him; the ultimate anti-style statement. Ah'd rather see ma sister in a brothel than ma brother in a Hearts scarf n that's fuckin true . . . *ay oop, another strapping lass ahead . . . backpacker, good tan . . . mmmm . . . suck, fuck, suck, fuck . . .* we all fall down . . .

. . . where to go . . . work up a sweat in the multigym at the club, they've got a sauna and a sunbed now . . . get the muscles toned up . . . the smack heebie-icebies are now just an

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best fuck? Why me, of course. I might even find something at the club. The dynamics are magic. Three groups; women, straight guys and gay guys. The gay guys are cruising the straight guys who are club bouncer types with huge biceps and beer guts. The straight guys are cruising the women, who are into the lithe, fit buftie boys. No bashturd actually getsh what they want. Exshept ush, eh Sean? *Preshishly Shimon.*

I hope ah don't see the buftie that cruised us the last time ah wis in. He told me in the cafeteria that he had HIV, but things were cool, it was no death sentence, he'd never felt better. What kind of a cunt tells a stranger that? It's probably bullshit.

Sleazy fuckin queen . . . that reminds us, ah must buy some flunkies . . . but there's no way you can get HIV in Edinburgh through shagging a lassie. They say that wee Goagsie got it that way, but I reckon that he's been daein a bit ay mainlining or shitstabbing on the Q.T. If ye dinnae get it through shootin up wi the likes ay Renton, Spud, Swanney n Seeker, it's obviously no got your name on it . . . still . . . why tempt fate . . . but why not . . . at least ah know that ah'm still here, still alive, because as long as there's an opportunity tae get off wi a woman and her purse, and that's it, that is it, ah've found fuck all else, ZERO, tae fill this big, BLACK HOLE like a clenched fist in the centre ay my fucking chest . . .

## Trainspotting

### Growing Up In Public

Despite the unmistakable resentment she could feel from her mother, Nina could not fathom what she had done wrong. The signals were confusing. First it was: Keep out of the way; then: Don't just stand there. A group of relatives had formed a human wall around her Auntie Alice. Nina could not actually see Alice from where she was sitting, but the fussing coos coming from across the room told her that her aunt was in there somewhere.

Her mother caught her eye. She was staring over at Nina, looking like one of the heads on a hydra. Over the there-there's and the he-was-a-good-man's Nina saw her mother mouth the word: Tea.

She tried to ignore the signal, but her mother hissed insistently, aiming her words across the room at Nina, like a fine jet: — Make more tea.

Nina threw her copy of the *NME* onto the floor. She hauled herself out of the armchair and moved over to a large dining table, picking up a tray, on which sat a teapot and an almost empty jug of milk.

Through in the kitchen, she studied her face in the mirror, focusing on a spot above her top lip. Her black hair, cut in a sloping wedge, looked greasy, although she had just washed it the night before. She rubbed her stomach, feeling bloated with fluid retention. Her period was due. It was a bummer.

Nina could not be a part of this strange festival of grief. The whole thing seemed uncool. The act of casual indifference she displayed at her Uncle Andy's death was only partly feigned. He had been her favourite relative when she was a wee lassie, and he had made her laugh, or so they all told her. And, in a sense, she could remember it. These events had happened: the joking, the tickling, the playing, the indulgent supply of ice-creams and

### Growing Up In Public

emotional connection to Andy. To hear her relatives recount these days of infancy and childhood made her squirm with embarrassment. It seemed an essential denial of herself as she was now. Worse, it was uncool.

At least she was dressed for grief, as she was constantly reminded by everyone. She thought that her relatives were so boring. They held onto the mundane for grim life; it was a glum adhesive binding them together.

— That lassie never wears anything but black. In ma day, lassies wore nice bright colours, instead ay tryin tae look like vampires. Uncle Boab, fat, stupid Uncle Boab, had said that. The relatives had laughed. Every one of them. Stupid, petty, laughter. The nervous laughter of frightened children trying to keep on the right side of the school hardcase, rather than that of adults conveying that they had heard something funny. Nina consciously realised for the first time that laughter was about more than humour. This was about reducing tension, solidarity in face of the grim reaper. Andy's death had put that topic further up the list of items on the personal agenda of every one of them.

The kettle clicked off. Nina made another pot of tea and took it through.

— Nivir mind, Alice. Nivir mind, hen. Here's Nina wi the tea, her Auntie Avril said. Nina thought that perhaps unrealistic expectations were being invested in the PG Tips. Could they be expected to compensate for the loss of a twenty-four-year relationship?

— Terrible thing whin ye git problems wi the ticker, her Uncle Kenny stated. — Still, at least he didnae suffer. Better than the big C, rottin away in agony. Oor father went wi the ticker n aw. The curse ay the Fitzpatrick. That's your grandfather. He looked at Nina's cousin Malcolm and smiled. Although Malcolm



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— Some day, aw this ticker stuff, n cancer n that, will aw be forgotten about, Malcolm ventured.

— Aw aye. Medical science. How's your Elsa by the way? Kenny's voice dropped.

— She's gaun in fir another op. Fallopian tube job. Apparently what they dae is . . .

Nina turned and left the room. All Malcolm seemed to want to talk about were the operations his wife had undergone to enable them to produce a child. The details made the tips of her fingers feel raw. Why did people assume that you wanted to hear that stuff? What sort of woman would go through all that just to produce a screaming brat? What sort of man would encourage her to do that? As she went to the hall, the doorbell rang. It was her Auntie Cathy and Uncle Davie. They had made good time from Leith out to Bonnyrigg.

Cathy hugged Nina. — Oh darlin. Whair is she? Whair's Alice? Nina liked her Auntie Cathy. She was the most outgoing of her aunts, and treated her like a person rather than a child.

Cathy went over and hugged Alice, her sister-in-law, then her sister Irene, Nina's mother, and her brothers Kenny and Boab, in that order. Nina thought that the order was tasteful. Davie nodded sternly at everybody.

— Christ, ye didnae waste any time getting oot here in that auld van Davie, Boab said.

— Aye. The by-pass makes a difference. Pick it up just ootside Portobellah, git off jist before Bonnyrigg, Davie explained dutifully.

The bell went again. This time it was Doctor Sim, the family GP. Sim was alert and businesslike in stance, but sombre in expression. In his bearing he attempted to convey a measure of compassion, while still maintaining a pragmatic strength in order to give the family confidence. Sim thought he wasn't doing

### Growing Up In Public

him like groupies around a rock star. After a short time Bob, Kenny, Cathy, Davie and Irene accompanied Dr Sim upstairs.

Nina realised, as they began to leave the room, that her period had started. She followed them up the stairs.

— Stay oot the wey! Irene, looking back, hissed at her daughter.

— Ah'm just going tae the toilet, Nina replied, indignant.

In the lavatory she took off her clothes, starting with her black, lacy gloves. Examining the extent of the damage, she noted that the discharge had gone through her knickers but had not got into her black leggings.

— Shite, she said, as drops of thick, dark blood fell onto the bathroom carpet. She tore off a few strips of toilet paper, and held them to her in order to stem the flow. She then checked the bathroom cabinet but could find no tampons or sanitary towels. Was Alice too old for periods? Probably.

Soaking some more paper with water, she managed to get most of the stains out of the carpet.

Nina stepped tentatively into the shower. After splashing herself, she made another pad from bog-roll, and quickly dressed, leaving off her pants which she washed in the sink, wrung out, and stuffed into her jacket pocket. She squeezed the spot above her top lip, and felt much better.

Nina heard the entourage leaving the room and going downstairs. This place was the fucking dregs, she thought, and she wanted out. All she had been waiting for was an opportune moment to hit her mother for cash. She was supposed to be going into Edinburgh with Shona and Tracy to see this band at the Calton Studios. She didn't fancy going out when she was on her periods, as Shona had said that laddies can tell when you're on, they can just smell it, no matter what you do. Shona knew about laddies. She was a year younger than Nina, but had done it twice,

## Trainspotting

Nina had not been with anyone yet, had not done it. Almost everyone she knew said it was crap. Boys were too stupid, too morose and dull, or too excitable. She enjoyed the effect she had on them, liked seeing the frozen, simpleton expressions on their faces as they watched her. When she did it, she would do it with someone who knew what they were about. Someone older, but not like Uncle Kenny, who looked at her as if he was a dog, his eyes bloody and his tongue darting slyly over his lips. She had a strange feeling that Uncle Kenny, despite his years, would be a bit like the inept boys that Shona and the rest had been with.

Despite her reservations about going to the gig, the alternative was staying in and watching television. Specifically, this meant *Bruce Forsyth's Generation Game* with her mother and her silly wee fart of a brother, who always got excited when the stuff came down the conveyor belt and recited the items quickly in his squeaky, quirky voice. Her mum wouldn't even let her smoke in the living-room. She let Dougie, her moronic man-friend smoke in the living-room. That was alright, considered to be the subject-matter of light humour rather than the cause of cancer and heart disease. Nina however, had to go upstairs for a fag and that was the pits. Her room was cold, and by the time she'd switched on the heating and it warmed up, she could have smoked a packet of twenty Marlborough. Fuck all that for a laugh. Tonight, she'd take her chances at the gig.

Leaving the bathroom, Nina looked in on Uncle Andy. The corpse lay in the bed, the covers still over it. They might have closed his mouth, she thought. It looked as if he'd expired drunkenly, belligerently, frozen by death as he was arguing about football or politics. The body was skinny and wizened, but then again, Andy always was. She remembered being tickled in the ribs by these persistent, ubiquitous, bony fingers. Perhaps Andy was always dying.

### Growing Up In Public

the top section of a chest of drawers. Alice's undies were in the next one down. Nina was startled by the range of underwear Alice had. They ranged from outsized garments which Nina held against her, and which almost came down to her knees, to skimpy, lacy briefs she could never imagine her auntie wearing. One pair were made of the same material as the black lace gloves Nina had. She removed the gloves to feel the pants. Although she liked these ones, she picked a pink flowery pair, then went back into the bathroom to put them on.

When she got downstairs, she noted that alcohol had displaced tea as the gathering's principal social lubricant. Dr Sim stood, whisky in hand, talking to Uncle Kenny, Uncle Boab and Malcolm. She wondered if Malcolm would be asking him about fallopian tubes. The men were all drinking with a stoic determination, as if it was a serious duty. Despite the grief, there was no disguising the sense of relief in the air. This was Andy's third heart attack, and now that he had finally checked out, they could get on with their lives without jumping nervously whenever they heard Alice's voice on the phone.

Another cousin, Geoff, Malky's brother, had arrived. He looked at Nina with something she felt was akin to hate. It was unnerving and strange. He was a wanker though. All Nina's cousins were, the ones she knew at any rate. Her Auntie Cathy and Uncle Davie (he was from Glasgow and a Protestant), had two sons: Billy, who had just come out of the army, and Mark, who was supposed to be into drugs. They were not here, as they hardly knew Andy or any of the Bonnyrigg crowd. They would probably be at the funeral. Or perhaps not. Cathy and Davie once had a third son, also called Davie, who had died almost a year ago. He was badly mentally and physically handicapped and had lived most of his life in a hospital. Nina had only seen him once, sitting twisted in a wheelchair, mouth open and eyes vacant. She

### Trainspotting

Shite. Geoff was coming over to talk to her. She had once pointed him out to Shona, who said that he looked like Marti from Wet Wet Wet. Nina hated both Marti and the Wets and, anyway, thought that Geoff was nothing like him.

— Awright, Nina?

— Aye. It's a shame about Uncle Andy.

— Aye, Whit kin ye say? Geoff shrugged his shoulders. He was twenty-one and Nina thought that was ancient.

— So when dae ye finish the school? he asked her.

— Next year. Ah wanted tae go now but ma Ma hassled us tae stey.

— Takin O Grades?

— Aye.

— Which yins?

— English, Maths, Arithmetic, Art, Accounts, Physics, Modern Studies.

— Gaunnae pass them?

— Aye. It's no that hard. Cept Maths.

— Then whit?

— Git a job. Or git oan a scheme.

— No gaunnae stey oan n take Highers?

— Naw.

— Ye should. You could go tae University.

— Whit fir?

Geoff had to think for a while. He had recently graduated with a degree in English Literature and was on the dole. So were most of his fellow graduates. — It's a good social life, he said.

Nina recognised that the look Geoff had been giving her was not one of hate, but of lust. He'd obviously been drinking before he had arrived and his inhibitions were lowered.

— You've really grown, Nina, he said.

### Growing Up In Public

— Fancy gittin oot ay here? Ah mean, can ye get intae pubs? We could go ower the road fir a drink.

Nina weighed up the offer. Even if Geoff talked student shite, it had to be better than staying here. They would be seen in the pub by somebody, this was Bonnyrigg, and somebody would talk. Shona and Tracy would find out, and would want to know who this dark, older guy was. It was too good an opportunity to miss.

Then Nina remembered the gloves. Absentmindedly, she had left them on the top of the chest of drawers in Andy's room. She excused herself from Geoff. — Aye, awright then. Ah'm jist gaun up tae the toilet.

The gloves were still on top of the chest. She picked them up and put them in a jacket pocket, but her wet pants were there so she quickly removed the gloves, and put them in the other one. She looked around at Andy. There was something different about him. He was sweating. She saw him twitch. God, she was sure she saw him twitch. She touched his hand. It was warm.

Nina ran downstairs. — It's Uncle Andy! Ah think . . . ah think . . . ye should come . . . it's like he's still thair . . .

They looked at her with incredulous expressions. Kenny was first to react, springing up the stairs three at a time, followed by Davie and Doctor Sim. Alice twitched nervously, open mouthed, but not really taking it in. — He wis a good man . . . nivr lifted his hands tae me . . . she moaned deliriously. Something inside her drove her to follow the herd upstairs.

Kenny felt his brother's sweaty brow, and his hand.

— He's burnin up! Andy's no deid! ANDY'S NO DEID!

Sim was about to examine the figure when he was pushed aside by Alice, who, having broken free of her constraints, fell upon the warm, pyjama-clad body.

— ANDY! ANDY, KIN YE HEAR ME?

Andy's head bobbed to the side, his stupid, frozen expression

### Trainspotting

dangerous psychotic. Men and women cooed and made soothing noises at her as Dr Sim examined Andy.

— No. I'm sorry. Mr Fitzpatrick is dead. His heart has stopped, Sim said gravely. He stood back, and put his hand under the bedclothes. He then bent down and pulled a plug out of the wall. He picked up a white flex and pulled a hand switch which was attached to it, out from under the bed.

— Someone left the electric blanket on. That explains the warmth of the body and the sweating, he announced.

— Dearie me. Christ almighty, Kenny laughed. He saw Geoff's eyes blazing at him. In self-justification he said: — Andy would be pishing hissels. Ye ken whit a sense ay humour Andy had. He turned his palms outwards.

— You're a fuckin arse . . . thirs Alice here . . . Geoff stammered, enraged, before turning and bolting from the room.

— Geoff. Geoff. Wait the now, mate . . . Kenny pleaded. They heard the slamming of the front door.

Nina thought that she would piss herself. Her sides ached, as she struggled to repress the spasms of laughter which shook through her. Cathy put her arm around her.

— It's awright darlin. There ye go hen. Dinnae worry yirsel, she said, as Nina realised that she was crying like a baby. Crying with a raw power and unselfconscious abandon as the tensions ebbed from her body and she became limp in Cathy's arms. Memories, sweet childhood memories, flooded her consciousness. Memories of Andy and Alice, and the happiness and love that once lived here, in the home of her auntie and uncle.

## Victory On New Year's Day

### Victory On New Year's Day

— Happy New Year, ya wee cunt! Franco wrapped his arm around Stevie's head. Stevie felt several neck muscles tear, as stiff, sober and self-conscious, he struggled to go with the flow.

He returned the greeting as heartily as he could. There followed a round of Happy-New-Years; his tentative hands crushed, his stiff back slapped, his tight and unresponsive lips kissed. All he could think of was the phone, London and Stella.

She hadn't phoned. Worse, she hadn't been in when he phoned. Not even at her mother's. Stevie had gone back to Edinburgh and left the field clear for Keith Millard. The bastard would take full advantage. They'd be together right now, just like they probably were last night. Millard was a slag. So was Stevie. So was Stella. It was a bad combination. Stella was also the most wonderful person in the world in Stevie's eyes. That fact made her less of a slag; in fact, not a slag at all.

— Loosen up fir fuck sakes! It's New fuckin Year! Franco not so much suggested, as commanded. That was his way. People would be forced to enjoy themselves if necessary.

It generally wasn't necessary. They were all frighteningly high. It was difficult for Stevie to reconcile this world with the one he'd just left. Now he was aware of them looking at him. Who were they these people? What did they want? The answer was that they were his friends, and they wanted him.

A song on the turntable drilled into his consciousness, adding to his misery.

*I loved a lassie, a bonnie, bonnie lassie,  
She's as sweet as the heather in the glen,  
She's as sweet as the heather,  
The bonnie purple heather,  
M...*



## Trainspotting

They all joined in with gusto. — Cannae beat Harry Lauder. It New Year, likesay, Dawsie remarked.

In the joy of the faces around him, Stevie gained a measurement of his own misery. The pit of melancholy was a bottomless one, and he was descending fast, falling further away from the good times. Such times often seemed tantalisingly within reach; he could see them, going on all around him. His mind was like a cruel prison, giving his captive soul a sight of freedom, but no more.

Stevie sipped his can of Export and hoped that he could get through the night without bringing too many people down. Frank Begbie was the main problem. It was his flat, and he was determined that everyone was going to have a good time.

— Ah goat yir ticket fir the match the night, Stevie. Intae they Jambo cunts, Renton said to him.

— Naebody watchin it in the pub? Ah thoat it wis oan satellite, likesay.

Sick Boy, who'd been chatting up a small, dark-haired girl Stevie didn't know, turned to him.

— Git tae fuck Stevie. You're pickin up some bad habits doon in London, ah'm tellin ye man. I fucking detest televised football. It's like shagging wi a durex oan. Safe fuckin sex, safe fuckin fitba, safe fuckin everything. Let's all build a nice safe wee world around ourselves, he mocked, his face contorting. Stevie had forgotten the extent of Sick Boy's natural outrage.

Rents agreed with Sick Boy. That was unusual, thought Stevie. They were always slagging each other off. Generally, if one said sugar, the other said shite. — They should ban aw fitba oan the telly, and get the lazy, fat fucks oaf their erses and along tae the games.

— Yis talked us intae it, Stevie said in resigned tones.

The unity between Rents and Sick Boy didn't last.

### Victory On New Year's Day

might make mair games this season thin ye did the last one, Sick Boy sneered.

— You've goat a fuckin nerve ya cunt . . . Rents turned tae Stevie, then flicked his thumb derisively in Sick Boy's direction. — They wir callin this cunt Boots because ay the drugs he wis cairryin.

They bickered on. Stevie would once have enjoyed this. Now it was draining him.

— Remember Stevie, ah'll be steyin wi ye fir a bit in February, Rents said to him. Stevie nodded grimly. He'd been hoping Rents had forgotten all about this, or would drop it. Rents was a mate, but he had a problem with drugs. In London, he'd be straight back on the gear again, teaming up with Tony and Nicksy. They were always sorting out addresses where they could pick up giros from. Rents never seemed to work, but always seemed to have money. The same with Sick Boy, but he treated everybody else's cash as his own, and his own in exactly the same way.

— Perty at Matty's eftir the game. His new place in Lorne Street. Be thair sharp, Frank Begbie shouted over at them.

Another party. It was almost like work to Stevie. New Year will go on and on. It'll start to fade about the 4th, when the gaps between the parties start to appear. These gaps get bigger until they become the normal week, with the parties happening at the weekend.

More first foots arrived. The small flat was heaving. Stevie had never seen Franco, the Beggar, so at ease with himself. Rab McLaughlin, or Second Prize, as they called him, hadn't even been assaulted when he'd pushed up the back of Begbie's curtains. Second Prize had been incoherently drunk for weeks now. New Year was a convenient camouflage for people like him. His girlfriend, Carol, had stormed off in protest at his behaviour. Second Prize hadn't even realised that she was there in the first

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had at least a chance of hearing the phone. Like a yuppie businessman, he'd left a list of the numbers where he was likely to be at with his mother. She could pass these onto Stella, if she phoned.

Stevie had told her how he felt about her, in that ugly barn of a pub in Kentish Town, the one they never usually drank in. He laid his heart bare. Stella had said that she would have to think about what he said, that it had really freaked her out, and was too much to handle right now. She said she would phone him when he got back up to Scotland. And that was that.

They left the pub, going in separate directions. Stevie went towards the tube station to get the underground to Kings Cross, sports bag over his shoulder. He stopped, turned and watched her cross the bridge.

Her long brown curls swished wildly in the wind, as she walked away clad in her donkey jacket, short skirt, thick, black woollen tights and nine-inch Doctor Martens. He waited for her to glance back at him. She never turned around. Stevie bought a bottle of Bell's whisky at the station and had arsed the lot by the time the train rolled into Waverley.

His mood hadn't improved since then. He sat on the formica worktop, contemplating the kitchen tiles. June, Franco's girlfriend, came in and smiled at him, nervously fetching some drinks. June never spoke, and often seemed overwhelmed by such occasions. Franco spoke enough for both of them.

As June left, Nicola came in, being pursued by Spud, who trailed behind her like a faithful salivating dog.

— Hey . . . Stevie . . . Happy New Year, eh, likesay . . . Spud drawled.

— Ah've seen ye Spud. We wir up the Tron thegither, last night. Remember?

— Aw . . . right. Hang loose cathoy. Spud focused, grabbing a

### Victory On New Year's Day

God, no, thought Stevie. Nicola is so easy to talk to. I'm going to pour my heart out . . . no I'm not . . . yes I am.

Stevie started talking. Nicola listened indulgently. Spud nodded sympathetically, occasionally indicating that the whole scene was 'too fuckin heavy . . .'

He felt that he was making an arse of himself, but he couldn't stop talking. What a bore he must be to Nicola, to Spud even. But he couldn't stop. Spud eventually left, to be replaced by Kelly. Linda joined them. The football songs must be starting up in the front room.

Nicola dispensed some practical advice: — Phone her, wait for her tae phone, or go doon n see her.

— STEVIE! 'MOAN THROUGH YA CUNT! Begbie roared. Stevie tamely allowed himself to be literally dragged back into front room. — Fuckin chatting up the mantovani in the fuckin kitchen. Yir fuckin worse thin that smarmy cunt thair, the fuckin jazz purist. He gestured over at Sick Boy, who was necking with the woman he'd been chatting up. They had previously overheard Sick Boy describe himself to her as 'basically a jazz purist'.

*So wir aw off tae Dublin in the green — fuck the queen!  
Whair the hel-mits glisten in the sun — fuck the huns!  
And the bayonets slash, the aw-ringe sash  
To the echo of the Thomson gun.*

Stevie sat gloomily. The phone would never be heard above this noise.

— Shut up the now! shouted Tommy, — This is ma favourite song. The Wolfetones sang *Banna Strand*. Tommy crooned along with some of the others.

*oan the lo-ho-honley Ba-nna strand.*

### Trainspotting

fuckin great Hibby. James Fuckin Connolly, ya cunt, Gav said to Renton who nodded sombrely.

Some sang along, others tried to maintain conversations above the music. However, when *The Boys of the Old Brigade* came on everybody joined in. Even Sick Boy took time off his necking session.

*Oh fa-thir why are you-hoo so-ho sad  
oan this fine Ea-heas-ti-her morn*

— Sing ya cunt! said Tommy, elbowing Stevie's ribs. Begbie stuck another can of beer in his hand and threw his arm around his neck.

*Whe-hen I-rish men are prow-howd ah-hand glad  
off the land where they-hey we-her born*

Stevie worried about the singing. It had a desperate edge to it. It was as if by singing loudly enough, they would weld themselves into a powerful brotherhood. It was, as the song said, 'call to arms' music, and seemed to have little to do with Scotland and New Year. It was fighting music. Stevie didn't want to fight anyone. But it was also beautiful music.

Hangovers, while being pushed into the background by the drink, were also being fuelled. They were now so potentially big as to be genuinely feared. They would not stop drinking until they had to face the music, and that was when every bit of adrenalin had been burned away.

*Aw-haun be-ing just a la-had li-hike you  
I joined the I-hi-Ah-har-A — provishnil wing!*

The phone rang in the passage. June got it. Then Begbie snatched it out of her hand, ushering her away. She floated back into the living-room like a ghost.

### Victory On New Year's Day

. . . Franco put the receiver down, — . . . whae ivir the fuck ye are . . . He went through to the front room. — Stevie. Some fuckin lemon oan the blower fir ye. Fuckin bools in the mooth likesay. London.

— Phoa! Ya cuntchy! Tommy laughed as Stevie sprang out off the couch. He had needed a pee for the last half-hour, but hadn't trusted his legs. Now they worked perfectly.

— Steve? She had always called him 'Steve' rather than 'Stevie'. They all did down there. — Where have you been?

— Stella . . . where have ah been . . . ah tried tae phone ye yesterday. Where are ye? What are ye daein? He almost said who are you with, but he restrained himself.

— I was at Lynne's, she told him. Of course. Her sister's. Chingford, or some equally dull and hideous place. Stevie felt a euphoric surge.

— Happy New Year! he said, relieved and brimming over.

The pips went, then more change was put into the machine. Stella was not at home. Where was she? In a pub with Millard?

— Happy New Year, Steve. I'm at Kings Cross. I'm getting on the Edinburgh train in ten minutes. Can you meet me at the station at ten forty-five?

— Fuckin hell! Yir jokin . . . fuck! There's nowhere else in the world ah'll be at ten forty-five. You've made my New Year. Stella . . . the things ah sais the other night . . . ah mean them more than ever, ye know . . .

— That's good, because I think I'm in love with you . . . all I've done is think about you.

Stevie swallowed hard. He felt tears well up in his eyes. One left its berth and rolled down his cheek.

— Steve . . . are you okay? she asked.

— Much better than that, Stella. Ah love you. No doubts, no

## Trainspotting

about, Steve, this is no fucking game . . . I'll see you at quarter to eleven . . . I love you . . .

— I love you! I LOVE YOU! The pips went and the line died.

Stevie held the receiver tenderly, like it was something else, some part of her. Then he put it down and went and had that pee. He had never felt so alive. As he watched his fetid pish splash into the pan, his brain allowed itself to be overwhelmed with delicious thoughts. A powerful love for the world gripped him. It was New Year. Auld Lang Syne. He loved everyone, especially Stella, and his friends at the party. His comrades. Warm-hearted rebels; the salt of the earth. Despite this, he even loved the Jambos. They were good people; just supporting their team. He'd first-foot a lot of them this year, irrespective of the result. Stevie would enjoy taking Stella around the city to various parties. It would be brilliant. Football divisions were a stupid and irrelevant nonsense, acting against the interests of working-class unity, ensuring that the bourgeoisie's hegemony went unchallenged. Stevie had it all worked out.

He went straight into the room and put The Proclaimers' *Sunshine On Leith* on the turntable. He wanted to celebrate the fact that wherever he went, this was his home, these were his people. After a few grumbles, it struck a chord. The catcalls at the previous record's removal were muted at the sight of Stevie's exuberance. He slapped Tommy, Rents and Beggar around vigorously, sang loudly, and waltzed with Kelly, caring nothing about people's impressions of the obviousness of his transformation.

— Nice ay ye tae join us, Gav said to him.

He was still high throughout the match, whereas for the others it went drastically wrong. Again he became distanced from his friends. First he couldn't share their happiness, now he couldn't relate to their despair. Hibs were losing to Hearts. Both

### Victory On New Year's Day

away. Sick Boy's head was in his hands. Franco glared malevolently over towards the dancing Hearts supporters at the other end of the ground. Rents shouted for the manager's resignation. Tommy and Shaun were arguing about defensive shortcomings, trying to apportion blame for the goal. Gav cursed the referee's masonic leanings, while Dawsy was still lamenting Hibs' earlier misses. Spud (drugs) and Second Prize (alcohol) were bombed out of their boxes, still at the flat, their match tickets good for nothing except future roach material. None of this mattered for the moment, as far as Stevie was concerned. He was in love.

After the match, he left the rest of them to head to the station and meet Stella. The bulk of the Hearts support were also headed up that way. Stevie was oblivious to the heavy vibes. One guy shouted in his face. The cunts won four-one, he thought. What the fuck did they want? Blood? Obviously.

Stevie survived some unimaginative taunting on the way up to the station. Surely, he thought, they could do better than 'Hibby bastard' or 'fenian cunt'. One hero tried to trip him from behind, egged on by baying friends. He should have taken his scarf off. Who the fuck was to know? He was a London boy now, what did all this shite have to do with his life at the moment? He didn't even want to try and answer his own questions.

On the station concourse, a group marched over to him. — Hibby bastard! a youth shouted.

— You've goat it wrong boys. Ah'm a Borussia Munchengladbach man.

He felt a blow on the side of his mouth and tasted blood. Some kicks were aimed at him, as the group walked away from him.

— Happy New Year boys! Love and peace, Jambo brothers! he laughed at them, and sucked his sour, split lip.

— Cunt's a fuckin heidcase, one guy said. He thought they were going to come back for him, but they turned their attention



### Trainspotting

— Fuck off back tae yir ain country.

They made a chorus of ape noises and gestures as they left the station.

— What charming, sensitive young men, Stevie said to the woman, who looked at him like a rabbit looks at a weasel. She saw another white youth with slurred speech, bleeding and smelling of alcohol. Above all, she saw another football scarf, like the one worn by the youths who abused her. There was no colour difference as far as she was concerned, and she was right, Stevie realised with a grim sadness. It was probably just as likely to be guys in green who hassled her. Every support had its arseholes.

The train was nearly twenty minutes late, an excellent performance by British Rail standards. Stevie wondered whether she'd be on it. Paranoia hit him. Waves of fear shuddered through his body. The stakes were high, the highest ever. He couldn't see her, couldn't even picture her in his mind's eye. Then she was almost upon him, different to how he thought of her, more real, even more beautiful. It was the smile, the look of emotion reciprocated. He ran the short distance to her and held her in his arms. They kissed for a long time. When they stopped, the platform was deserted and the train was well on its way to Dundee.

## It Goes Without Saying

### It Goes Without Saying

Ah hears the searin racket comin fae outside the room. Sick Boy, crashed oot in the windae bay next tae us, shoots tae alertness like a dug thit's heard a whistle. Ah shudder. That noise cut right through us.

Lesley comes intae the room screaming. It's horrible. Ah wanted her tae stoap. Now. Ah couldnae handle this. Nane ay us could. No now. Ah never wanted anything mair in ma life than fir her tae stoap screamin.

— The bairn's away . . . the bairn's away . . . Dawn . . . oh my god . . . oh fuckin god, wis aboot aw ah could pick ootay the horrible sound. She collapses oantae the threadbare couch. Ma eyes stick oan a brown stain oan the wall above her. Whit the fuck was it? How did it get there?

Sick Boy wis on his feet. His eyes bulged oot like a frog's. That's what he reminded us ay, a frog. It was the wey he sort ay hops up, becomes suddenly so mobile fae a stationary position. He looks at Lesley for a few seconds, then nashes through tae the bedroom. Matty and Spud look around uncomprehendingly, but even through thir junk haze, they ken thit somethin really bad's happened. Ah kent. Christ, ah fuckin knew awright. Ah said whit ah always sais when somethin bad happens.

— Ah'm cookin up in a bit, ah tell them. Matty's eyes bore intae us. He gies us the nod. Spud stands up and moves oantae the couch, sittin a few feet fae Lesley. Her heid's in her hands. For a minute ah thought thit Spud wid touch her. Ah hoped he would. Ah'm willing um tae dae it, but he jist stares at her. Ah knew, even fae here, thit he'd be focusing oan the big mole oan her neck.

— It's ma fault . . . it's ma fault, she cries through her hands.

## Trainspotting

remember hearing um say for a few days. Obviously, the cunt's spoken ower this period. He must huv, surely tae fuck.

Sick Boy comes back through. His boady's strainin, seemingly fae the neck, as if against the limits ay an invisible leash. He sounds terrible. His voice reminded us ay the demon's in the film *The Exorcist*. It shit us up.

— Fuck . . . some fuckin life, eh? Somethin like this happens, what the fuck dae ye dae? Eh?

Ah've never seen um like this before, and ah've kent the bastard practically aw my life. — What's wrong Si? What's the fuckin score?

He moves towards us. Ah thought he wis gaunnae kick us. We're best mates but we've hit each other before, in drink or rage when one ay us has wound the other up. Nowt serious, jist sort ay lashing out in anger. Mates kin dae that. No now though, no wi me startin tae feel sick. Ma bones wid huv splintered intae a million fragments had the cunt done that. He jist stood ower us. Thank fuck. Oh, thank you Sick Boy, Simon.

— The gig's fucked. It's aw fuckin fucked! he moans, in a high, desperate whine. It was like a dug that had been run ower and wis waiting fir some cunt tae pit it oot ay its misery.

Matty and Spud haul themselves up, and go through tae the bedroom. Ah follow, pushing past Sick Boy. Ah can feel death in the room before ah even see the bairn. It wis lying face doon in its cot. It, naw, she, wis cauld and deid, blue aroond the eyes. Ah didnae huv tae touch her tae ken. Just lyin thair like a discarded wee doll at the bottom ay some kid's wardrobe. That wee. So fuckin small. Wee Dawn. Fuckin shame.

— Wee Dawn . . . ah cannae believe it. Fuckin sin man . . .  
Matty sais, shakin his heid.

— Fuckin heavy this . . . eh, likesay em, fuck . . . Spud pits

### It Goes Without Saying

— Ah'm fuckin right ootay here, man. Ah cannae fuckin handle this.

— Fuck it Matty! Nae cunt's leavin here the now! Sick Boy shouts.

— Stay cool man. Stay cool, sais Spud, whae sounds anything but.

— We've goat fuckin gear stashed here. This street's been crawlin wi the fuckin DS for weeks now. We fuckin charge oaf now, we aw fuckin go doon. Thir's polis bastards every fuckin where ootside, sais Sick Boy, strugglin tae compose hissel. Thoughts ay polis involvement eywis concentrated the mind. On the issue of drugs, we wir classical liberals, vehemently opposed tae state intervention in any form.

— Aye, but mibbe we should git the fuck ootay here. Lesley can git the ambulance or polis once wuv tidied up and fucked off. Ah still agreed wi Matty.

— Hey . . . mibbe wuv goat tae stick wi Les, likesay. Like, mates n that. Ken? Spud ventures. That sort ay solidarity seems a bit ay a fanciful notion in the circumstances. Matty shakes his heid again. He'd just done six months in Saughton. If he wis done again, that wid be him well fucked. Ootside though, there were pigs cruising about. At least that's how it felt. Sick Boy's imagery had got tae me mair thin Spud's pleas tae stick thegither. Flushing aw our gear down the lavvy was just not on. Ah'd rather get sent doon.

— The way ah see it, sais Matty, is thit it's Lesley's bairn, ken? Mibbe if she'd looked eftir it right, it might not be deid. How should we git involved?

Sick Boy starts hyperventilatin.

— Hate tae say it, bit Matty's goat a point, ah sais. Ah'm startin tae hurt really badlv. Ah iist want tae take a shot and fuck

## Trainspotting

bastard's barking orders at every cunt in sight, whither they take any notice or no.

Spud sais: — We cannae, likesay, leave Les here on her puff, that's eh, ah mean like, fuck. Ken what ah mean?

Ah'm looking at Sick Boy. — Whae gied her the bairn? ah ask. Sick Boy sais nothing.

— Jimmy McGilvary, Matty sais.

— Shite it fuckin wis, Sick Boy dismissively sneers.

— Dinnae you play Mister-fuckin-innocent, Matty turns oan me.

— Eh? 'Moan tae fuck! Whit you oan about? ah respond, genuinely fuckin perplexed at the bastard's outburst.

— You wir thair Rents. Boab Sullivan's perty, he sais.

— Naw man, ah've never been wi Lesley. Ah'm tellin the truth, which ah realise is a mistake. In some company people will always believe the opposite ay what ye tell thum; particularly whair sex is concerned.

— How come ye wir crashed oot wi her in the mornin at Sully's perty?

— Ah wis fucked man. Ootay ma box. Ah couldnae huv goat a stiff neck wi a doorstep as a pillay. Ah cannae remember the last time ah hud a ride. Ma explanation convinces them. They ken how long ah've been using heavily and what that kin mean in the shaggin stakes.

— Like, eh . . . somebody sais it wis . . . eh, Seeker's . . . Spud suggests.

— Wisnae Seeker, Sick Boy shakes his heid. He puts a hand oan the deid bairn's cauld cheek. Tears are fillin in his eyes. Ah'm gaun tae greet n aw. There's a constricting tightness in ma chest. One mystery has been solved. Wee Dawn's dead face looks so obviously like ma mate Simon Williamson's.

Then Sick Boy pulls up his jaykit sleeve, showing the weeping

### It Goes Without Saying

expression which he always uses when he wants people tae fuck or finance him. Ah almost believe him.

Matty looks at him. — C'moan Si. Dinnae jump tae the wrong fuckin conclusions. Whit happened tae the bairn's nowt tae dae wi the skag. It's no Lesley's fault either. Ah wis oot ay order saying that. She wis a good mother. She loved that bairn. It's naebody's fault. Cot death n that. Happens aw the time.

— Yeah, likesay, cot death man . . . ken what ah mean? Spud agreed.

Ah feel thit ah love thum aw. Matty, Spud, Sick Boy and Lesley. Ah want tae tell thum. Ah try, but it comes oot as: — Ah'm cookin. They look at us, fuckin scoobied. — That's me, ah shrug ma shooders, in self-justification. Ah go ben the livin-room.

This is murder. Lesley. Ah'm fuckin useless at these things. Less than useless in this condition. Of negative utility. Lesley's nivir moved. Ah feel thit ah should mibbe go and comfort her, pit my airm aroond her. But ma bones feel twisted and scraped. Ah couldnae touch anybody right now. Instead ah babble.

— Really sorry Les . . . naebody's fault though . . . cot death n that . . . wee Dawn . . . barry wee bairn . . . fuckin shame . . . fuckin sin man, ah'm tellin ye.

Lesley lifts her heid up an looks at us. Her thin, white face is like a skull wrapped in milky clingfilm; her eyes are rid raw, circled wi black rings.

— Ye cookin? Ah need a shot Mark. Ah really need a fuckin shot. C'moan Marky, cook us up a shot . . .

At last ah could be ay some practical help. There were syringes and needles lying aw ower the place. Ah tried tae remember which works wir mine. Sick Boy says that he'd never, ever share wi any cunt. That's shite. Whin yir feelin like ah am, the truth is thit ve dinnae care too much. Ah take the nearest, which at least

## Trainspotting

send a deputation ay statisticians doon tae Leith, because the laws ay probability urnae operatin properly here.

Ah produce ma spoon, lighter, and cotton balls as well as some ay this fuckin Vim or Ajax thit Seeker has the audacity to call smack. Wir joined in the room by the punters.

— Back oot ma fuckin light boys, ah snap, gesturing the cunts away wi backward sweeps ay ma hand. Ah know ah'm playing at being The Man, n part ay us hates masel, because it's horrible when some cunt does it tae you. Naebody though, could ivir be in this position and then deny the proposition thit absolute power corrupts. The gages move a few steps back and watch in silence as ah cook. The fuckers will huv tae wait. Lesley comes first, eftir me. That goes without saying.

## *Junk Dilemmas No. 64*

— *Mark! Mark! Answer the door! Ah ken yir in thair son! Ah ken yir in thair!*

*Its ma Ma. It's been quite a while since ah've seen Ma. Ah'm lyin here jist a few feet fae the door, which leads tae a narrow hallway which leads tae another door. Behind that door is ma mother.*

— *Mark! Please son, please! Answer the door! It's yir mother, Mark! Answer the door!*

### Her Man

*which makes it difficult, almost impossible, tae ever actually tell her. But ah love her nonetheless. So much that ah don't want her tae have a son like me. Ah wish ah could find her a replacement. Ah wish that because ah don't think change is an option fir us.*

*Ah cannae go tae the door. Nae chance. Instead, ah decide tae cook up another shot. Ma pain centres say that it's yon time already.*

*Already.*

*Christ, life doesnae get any easier.*

*This smack has too much shite in it. You can tell by the wey it's no dissolving properly. Fuck that cunt Seeker!*

*Ah'll have tae look in oan the auld lady and the auld man sometime; see how thir daein. Ah'll make that visit a priority; eftir ah see that cunt Seeker, of course.*

### Her Man

For fuck sake.

— Wi just came oot fir a quick drink. This is pure fuckin mental.

— Did ye see that? Fuckin out of order, Tommy sais.

— Naw, fuckin leave it man. Dinnae git involved. Ye dinnae ken the score, ah sais tae um.

Ah saw it though. Clear as day. He hit her. No a fuckin slap or nowt like that, but a punch. It wis horrible.



## Trainspotting

at her again. Naebody bothers. A big punter at the bar wi long blond corkscrew hair n a rid coupon looks ower n smiles, then turns back tae watch the darts match. No one ay the boys playin darts turns roond.

— Is that eighty? Ah point tae Tommy's nearly empty gless.

— Aye.

Whin ah git tae the bar, thuv started again. Ah kin hear thurn. So kin the barman n the corkscrew-heided cunt.

— Gaun then. Dae it again. Gaun then! She's tauntin um. Her voice is like a fuckin ghost's, shriekin n that, bit her lips dinnae seem tae be movin. Ye only ken it's her because the sound's comin fae ower thair. The fuckin pub's nearly empty tae. We could've sat anywhere. Of aw the places tae sit.

He punches her in the face. Blood spurts fae her mooth.

— Hit us again, fucking big man. Gaun then!

He does. She lets oot a scream, then starts greetin, and hauds her face in her hands. He sits, a few inches away fae her, starin at her, eyes blazing, mooth hingin open.

— Lovers' tiff, the corkscrew-heided cunt smiles, catchin ma eye. Ah smile back. Ah don't know why. Ah just seem tae feel like ah need friends. Ah'd nivir say this tae any cunt, bit ah know thit ah've goat problems wi the bevvv. Whin yir like that, yir mates tend tae keep oot yir road, unless they've goat problems wi the bevvv n aw.

Ah look ower tae the barman, an auld guy wi grey hair n a moustache. He shakes his heid n says something under his breath.

Ah take the pints back. Nivir, ivir hit a lassie, ma faither often telt us. It's the lowest scum thit dae that, son, he sais. This cunt thit's been hittin the lassie, he fits that description. He's goat greasy black hair, a thin white face n a black moustache. A wee ferret-faced fucker.

Ah dinnae want tae be here. Ah iist came oot fir a quiet drink.

### Her Man

kind ay thing makes us want a wee whisky. Carol's away tae her Ma's. No comin back, she sais. Ah came fir a pint, bit ah might jist git pished yit.

Tommy's breathin heavily n lookin tense as ah sit doon.

— Fuckin tellin ye Secks . . . he sais through grinding teeth.

The lassie's eye is badly swollen and shuttin. Her jaw's swollen n aw, and her mooth is still bleedin. She's a skinny lassie n she looks like she'd snap intae pieces if he hit her again.

Still, she cairries oan.

— That's yir answer. That's eywis yir answer, she spits oot between sobs, angry n feelin sorry fir hersel at the same time.

— Shut it! Ah'm tellin ye! Shut the fuck up! He's nearly chokin wi anger.

— Whit ye gaunnae dae?

— Ya fackin . . . He seems ready tae punch her again.

— That's enough mate. Leave it. Yir oot ay order, Tommy sais tae the guy.

— It's nane ay your fuckin business! You keep oot ay this! The boy points at Tommy.

— That's enough thair. Come on now! The barman shouts. The corkscrew-headed cunt smiles and a couple ay the darts boys look ower.

— Ah'm makin it ma fuckin business. Whit you gaunnae fuckin dae aboot it? Eh? Tommy leans forward.

— Fuck sake Tommy. Cool it man. Ah half-heartedly grab his airm, thinkin ay the barman. He frees it wi a quick shake.

— You want yir mooth punched? the boy sais.

— Think ah'm gaunny jist sit here n lit ye dae it? Fuckin wide-o! Ooutside then cunt. Cu-mauuggghnn! Tommy sort ay sings tauntingly.

The boy's shitein hiss. He's right tae. Tommy's quite a tidy  
cunt

## Trainspotting

— That's ma man! That's ma fuckin man yir talkin tae! Tommy's too shocked tae stoap her as she leans ower an digs her nails intae his face.

Everythin happened eftir that. Tommy stood up an punched the boy in the mooth, the guy fell back oaf his seat ontae the flair. Ah wis up n straight ower tae the corkscrew-heided cunt at the bar. Ah tanned um in the jaw n grabbed a haud ay his fuckin curls, haulin his heid doon, n bootin him a couple ay times in the face.

Ah think he blocked one wi his hands, n ah doubt if the other hurt the cunt, cause ah'm wearin trainers. He swings wi his airms, brekin ma grip. Then he backs away, face beamin rid n confused. Ah thought the cunt would huv me then, he could've easily, but he jist stands thair n opens oot his hands.

— What's the fuckin score?

— It's a big joke tae you, eh? ah sais.

— Whit ye talkin aboot? The cunt seems genuinely scoobied.

— Ah'll phone the polis! Git ootay here or ah'll phone the polis! the barman sais, pickin up the receiver fir effect.

— Nae hassle in here now boys, a big, fat cunt fae the darts team sais, threateningly. He's still goat his arrays in his hand.

— It's nowt tae dae wi me mate, the corkscrew-heided cunt sais tae us.

— Mibbe ah goat it wrong likesay, ah tell um.

The woman and her man, thame thit caused the whole fuckin problem, we wir jist oot fir a quiet drink, ur skulkin oot ay the door.

— Fuckin bastards. That's ma man, she shouts tae us as they leave.

Ah feel Tommy's hand oan ma shoodir.

— C'moan Secks. Lits git ootay here, he sais.

The fat cunt fae the darts team, he's goat a rid shirt on the park

### Her Man

— Dinnae come in here n cause bother, pal. This isnae your local. Ah ken your faces. Yous ur mates wi that rid-heided cunt n that Williamson laddie, the one wi the ponytail. These cunts ur fuckin drug-dealin scum. We dinnae want that fuckin trash in here.

— We dinnae deal fuckin drugs, pal, Tommy sais.

— Aye. No in this fuckin pub ye dinnae, the fat cunt goes.

— C'moan Stu. S no they boys' fault. It's that cunt Alan Venters n his burd. They're mair intae drugs thin any cunt around here. You ken that, this other guy wi thin fair hair sais.

— They should be daein that kind ay arguin in the hoose, no in a pub, another guy sais.

— Domestic dispute. That's whit it is. Shouldnae be botherin people thit ur jist oot fir a drink wi aw that, Fair-hair agrees.

The worse bit is gitting ootside. Ah'm shitein masel in case wi git follayed. Ah'm walkin fast, while Tommy's haudin back.

— Stall the now, he sais.

— Fuck off. Let's git ootay here.

We move doon the road. Ah look back, but nae cunt's left the pub. We see that mental couple up ahead ay us.

— Ah want a wee wurd wi that cunt, Tommy sais, ready tae start eftir thum. Ah clocks a bus comin. A 22. That'll dae us.

— Fuck it Tommy. Here's a bus. C'moan. We run tae the stoap n git oan the bus. We go upstairs tae the back, even though wir only gaun a few stoaps.

— How's ma face? Tommy asks us whin we sit doon.

— Same as usual. A fuckin mess. That burd improved it, ah tell um.

He looks at his reflection in the bus windae.

— The fuckin slag, he curses.

— The pair ay fuckin slags, ah sais.

That wis fuckin ace ay Tommy hittin the boy, likes, n no the

## Trainspotting

burd. Whit Carol sais is shite. She says thit ah used violence oan her, but ah nivir hit her. Ah jist held oantae her so thit we could talk. She sais restrainin is like hittin, it's still violence against her. Ah cannae see that. Aw ah wanted tae dae wis tae keep her thair, tae talk.

Whin ah telt this tae Rents, he sais thit Carol wis right. Eh sais she's entitled tae come n go as she wants. That's shite though. Aw ah wanted tae dae wis talk. Franco agreed wi us. It's different whin yir in a relationship, we telt Rents.

Ah felt sick n nervous oan the bus. Tommy might've felt the same, cause we nivir spoke any mair. The morn though, we'll be in some boozer wi Rents, Beggar, Spud, Sick Boy n aw thame, boasting like fuck.

## Speedy Recruitment

### 1 — Preparation

Spud and Renton were sitting in a pub in the Royal Mile. The pub aimed at an American theme-bar effect, but not too accurately; it was a madhouse of assorted bric-à-brac.

— Fuckin weird man though, likesay, you n me gittin sent fir the same joab, ken? Spud said, slurring at his Guinness.

### Speedy Recruitment

— Yeah, ah'm likesay happy steyin oan the rock n roll the now man, ken?

— Trouble is though Spud, if ye dinnae try, if ye blow the interview oan purpose; the cunts tell the dole n these bastards stoap yir giro. Happened tae us in London. Ah'm oan ma last warnin doon thair.

— Yeah . . . me n aw man. What ye gaunnae dae, likesay?

— Well, what ye huv tae dae is tae act enthusiastic, but still fuck up the interview. As long as ye come across as keen, they cannae say fuck all. If we jist be oorselves, n be honest, thill nivir gie either ay us the fuckin joab. Problem is, if ye just sit thair n say nowt tae the cunts, thir straight oantae the dole. Thill say: That cunt jist cannae be bothered.

— It's hard for me man . . . ken? It's difficult tae git it thegither like that, likesay . . . ken? Ah git sortay likes, pure shy, ken?

— Tommy gied us some speed. What time's yir interview again?

— No till half-two, likesay.

— Well, ah'm at one. Ah'll see ye back here at two. Ah'll gie ye ma tie tae pit oan, n some speed. Buck ye up a bit, let ye sell yirsel, ken? So let's get tae work oan they appos.

They placed the application forms on the table in front of them. Renton's was already half-completed. A few entries caught Spud's eye.

— Hey . . . what's this man, likesay? George Heriots . . . you went tae Leithy man . . .

— It's a well-known fact thit ye nivir stand a fuckin chance ay gittin anything decent in this city if ye didnae go tae a posh school. Nae wey though, will they offer a George Heriots FP a porterin joab in a hotel. That's only fir us plebs; so pit doon something like that. If they see Augies or Craigy oan your form

## Trainspotting

### 2 — Process: Mr Renton (1.00 p.m.)

The trainee manager whae welcomed us wis a mucho spotty punter in a sharp suit, wi dandruff oan the shoodirs like piles ay fuckin cocaine. Ah felt like takin a rolled up fiver tae the cunt's tin flute. His biscuit-ersed face and his plukes completely ruin the image the smarmy wee shite's tryin tae achieve. Even in ma worse junk periods ah've nivir had a complexion like that, the poor wee bastard. This cunt is obviously along for the ride. The main man is the fat, stroppy-lookin gadge in the middle; tae his right thirs a coldly smiling dyke in a woman's business suit wi a thick foundation mask, who looks catalogue hideous.

This is a heavy-duty line-up for a fuckin porter's joab.

The opening gambit wis predictable. The fat cunt gies us a warm look and says: — I see from your application form that you attended George Heriots.

— Right . . . ah, those halcyon school days. It seems like a long time ago now.

Ah might huv lied on the appo, but ah huvnae at the interview. Ah did once attend George Heriots: whin ah wis an apprentice joiner at Gillsland's we did some contract work there.

— Old Fotheringham still doing his rounds?

Fuck. Select from one of two possibilities; one: he is, two: he's retired. Naw. Too risky. Keep it nebulous.

— God, you're taking me back now . . . ah laugh. The fat gadge seems tae be happy wi that. It's worrying. Ah feel that the interview is over, and that these cunts are actually going tae offer us the joab. The subsequent questions are all pleasantly asked and unchallenging. Ma hypothesis is fucked. They'd rather gie a merchant school old boy with severe brain damage a job in nuclear engineering than gie a schemie wi a Ph.D. a post as a cleaner in an abattoir. Ah . . .

### Speedy Recruitment

hard times, and he wants tae help us oot. A gross miscalculation Renton, you radge.

Thank fuck for spotted dick. A fair assumption tae make, considering every other part of him seems tae be covered in zits. He gets tae nervously ask a question: — Ehm . . . ehm . . . Mr Renton . . . ehm . . . can you, ehm, explain . . . eh, your employment gaps, ehm . . .

Can you explain the gaps between your words, you doss wee cunt.

— Yes. I've had a long-standing problem with heroin addiction. I've been trying to combat this, but it has curtailed my employment activities. I feel it's important to be honest and mention this to you, as a potential future employer.

A stunning *coup de maître*. They shift nervously in their seats.

— Well, eh, thank you for being so frank with us Mr Renton . . . eh, we do have some other people to see . . . so thanks again, and we'll be in touch.

Magic. The gross git pulls down a wall of coldness and distance between us. They cannae say ah didnae try . . .

### 3 — Process: Mr Murphy (2.30 p.m.)

This speed is el magnifico, likesay. Ah feel sortay dynamic, ken, likesay, ah'm really lookin forward tae this interview. Rents sais: Sell yirsell Spud, n tell the truth. Let's go for it cats, let's get it on . . .

— I see from your application form that you attended George Heriots. The old Heriots FPs seem to be rather thick on the ground this afternoon.

Yeah, fat-cat.

— Actually man, ah've goat tae come clean here. Ah went tae Augie's, St. Augustine's likesay, then Craigy, eh Craigroyston,



## Trainspotting

likesay? As soon as suit n tie dudes see Heriots or Daniel Stewarts or Edinburgh Academy, they kinday get the hots, ken. Ah mean, would you have said, likesay, ah see you attended Craigroyston?

— Well, I was just making conversation, as I did happen to attend Heriots. The idea was to make you feel at ease. But I can certainly put your mind at rest with regards to discrimination. That's all covered in our new equal opportunities statement.

— It's cool man. Ah'm relaxed. It's jist that ah really want this job, likesay. Couldnae sleep last night though. Worried ah'd sortay blow it likesay, ken? It's jist when cats see 'Craigroyston' oan the form, they likesay think, well everybody thit went tae Craigie's a waster, right? But eh, ye ken Scott Nisbet, the fitba player likesay? He's in the Huns . . . eh Rangers first team, haudin his ain against aw they expensive international signins ay Souness's, ken? That cat wis the year below us at Craigie, man.

— Well, I can assure you Mr Murphy, we're far more interested in the qualifications you gained rather than the school you, or any other candidate, went to. It says here that you got five O Grades . . .

— Whoah. Likesay, gaunnae huv tae stoap ye thair, catboy. The O Grades wis bullshit, ken? Thought ah'd use that tae git ma fit in the door. Showin initiative, likesay. Ken? Ah really want this job, man.

— Look Mr Murphy, you were referred to us by the Department of Employment's Jobcentre. There's no need for you to lie to get your foot in the door, as you put it.

— Hey . . . whatever you say man. You're the man, the governor, the dude in the chair, so tae speak, likesay.

— Yes, well, we're not making much progress here. Why don't you just tell us why you want this job so desperately that you're prepared to lie.

— Ah need the hireys man.

### Speedy Recruitment

— I see. But what specifically attracts you to the leisure industry?

— Well, everybody likes tae huv a good time, a bit ay enjyiment, ken? That's leisure tae me man, likesay. Ah like tae see punters enjoy themselves, ken?

— Right. Thank you, the doll wi the makeup mask sais. Ah could sortay like, love that babe . . . — What would you see as being your main strengths? she asks us.

— Er . . . sense ay humour, likesay. Ye need that man, goatay huv it, jist goatay huv it, ken? Ah'll huv tae stoap sayin 'ken' sae much. These dudes might think ah'm a sortay pleb.

— What about weaknesses? the squeaky-voiced kitten in the suit asks. This is one spotted catboy; Rents wisnae jokin about the plukes. We have a real leopard cub here.

— Ah suppose man, ah'm too much ay a perfectionist, ken? It's likesay, if things go a bit dodgy, ah jist cannae be bothered, y'know? Ah git good vibes aboot this interview the day though man, ken?

— Thank you very much Mr Murphy. We'll let you know.

— Naw man, the pleasure wis mine. Best interview ah've been at, ken? ah bounds across n shakes each cat by the paw.

### 4 — Review

Spud met Renton back in the pub.

— How did it go Spud?

— Good catboy, good. Possibly too good, likesay. Ah think the dudes might be gaun tae offer us the job. Bad vibes. One thing though, man, ye wir right aboot this speed. Ah never seem tae like, sell masel properly in interviews. Cool times compadre, cool times.

— Let's huv a drink tae celebrate yir success. Fancy another

Relapsing

### Scotland Takes Drugs In Psychic Defence

Ah couldnae mention the Barrowland gig tae Lizzy. No fuckin chance ay that man, ah kin tell ye. Ah had bought ma ticket when ah got ma Giro. That wis me pure skint. It was also her birthday. It was the ticket or a present for her. Nae contest. This was Iggy Pop. Ah thought she'd understand.

— Ye can buy fuckin tickets fir Iggy fuckin Pop but ye cannae buy me a fuckin birthday present! That wis her response. See the cross ah've goat tae fuckin bear here man? Pure madness, ma man. Dinnae git us wrong. Ye can see her point. It's ma ain fault though, like ah sais, ma ain fault. Pure naive, that's Tommy here. Auld fuck the wind. Ah lead wi ma chin aw the time. If ah wis a wee bit more, what's the word? duplicitous, ah would have said nothing about the tickets. Ah get too excited, and pure open ma big mooth far too wide. That's fearless Tommy Gun for ye. Pure sucker.

So ah havenae mentioned the gig since. The night before the event Lizzy tells us that she pure fancies going to the pictures to see that *The Accused*. She tells me that her that was in *Taxi Driver* is in it. Ah don't really fancy the film; too much hype and publicity. That's really besides the point though, if ye ken what ah mean, cause ah'm sitting here wi the Ig gig tickets in ma tail. So ah'm

### Trainspotting

— Eh, cannae the morn. Ah've got the Iggy Pop gig at Barrowland. Me and Mitch are gaun through.

— So ye'd rather go tae a concert wi Davie fuckin Mitchell than the pictures wi me. That's pure Lizzy. The rhetorical question, the stock-in-trade weapon ay burds and psychos.

The issue's become, like, a pure referendum on our relationship. Ma instinct is tae be upfront and say 'yes', but that would probably mean bombing out Lizzy and ah'm addicted tae having sex wi her. God, ah love it. Daein it fae behind as she groans softly, her pretty head resting on the yellow silk pillow-cases in ma gaff; the ones Spud knocked for us oot ay the British Home Stores in Princes Street as a flat-warming present. Ah know ah shouldnae be disclosing aboot our life, man, but the image of her in bed is so strong that even her social coarseness and permanent sense ay outrage fail to weaken it. Ah jist pure wish that Lizzy could always be like she is in bed.

Ah try tae murmur seductive apologies, but she's so harsh and unforgiving: sweet and beautiful only in bed. The permanent viciousness of that expression will force out her beauty long before it should disappear. She calls me all the fuck-ups under the sun, then a few more for good measure. Poor old Tommy Gun. No longer the greatest fighting soldier; now the greatest shiteing soldier.

It's no Iggy's fault. Cannae really blame the boy, ken? How wis he tae know when he stuck the Barrowland doon oan his itinerary, that he'd cause punters, whae he doesnae even ken exist, aw this hassle? Pure freaky whin ye think aboot it. Still, he's just another straw on the back of the camel. Lizzy's the pure steel woman. Ah'm happy though. Even Sick Boy's jealous ay me. Being Lizzy's boyfriend does confer status, but fame costs, as they say. By the time ah leave the pub, ah am in no doubt of my lack of worth as a human being.

At home ah take a line of speed and guzzle half a bottle of

### Scotland Takes Drugs In Psychic Defence

him if he fancies coming round tae watch a Chuck Norris video. Rents is off tae London the morn. He spends more time doon there than he does back here. Something tae dae wi giro-drops. The cunt's in some kind ay a syndicate wi these punters he met when he worked on the Harwich-Hook of Holland cross-channel ferry, years ago. He's gaunnae see the Ig at the Town and Country while he's in the Smoke. We toke some grass and laugh our heads off as Chuck kicks fuck out of commie antichrists by the dozen, that constipated and stoical expression never leaving his face. Straight, this is unwatchable. Stoned, it's pure unmissable.

The next day ah've got terrible mouth ulcers. Temps, Gav Temperley, whae's moved intae the flat, says that it serves me right. Ah'm killing myself with speed, he tells me. Temps says that I should have a job, with my qualifications. Ah tell Temps that he sounds a lot more like ma mother than any friend is entitled tae. You can see Gav's point though. He's the only one working, for the fuckin dole, and he's always getting tapped up by the rest ay us. Poor Temps. Ah think me n Rents kept him awake last night as well. Temps resents dole-moles having a good time, like all workies do. He pure resents being hit for info by Rents every day, about claim procedures.

It's tae my mother's ah go, tae tap some cash for the gig. Ah need dosh for the train fare as well as drink and drugs. Speed's my drug, it goes well with drink, and ah've always liked a drink. Tommy the pure speed freak.

My Ma gives me a lecture on the dangers of drugs, telling me what a disappointment ah've been to her, and tae my dad, who, although he doesnae say much, really worries about me. Later when he comes in from work, he says while my Ma is upstairs that she mightnae say much, but really worries about me. Frankly, he tells me, he's really disappointed in my attitude. He

## Trainspotting

most fucked-up punters on drugs I know are pish-heids, like Secks. That's Rab McLaughlin, the Second Prize. He's blown the fucking lot, man.

Ah tap the cash and meet Mitch in the Hebs. Mitch is still seein that lassie Gail. It's obvious though, that he's no gittin his leg ower. Listenin tae um fir ten minutes, ye kin pure read between the lines. He's in a pure bevvying mood, so ah tap some cash off ay um. We tan four pints ay heavy then get on the train. Ah dae four cans of Export and two lines ay speed during the journey to Glasgow. We down a couple in Sammy Dow's, then get a taxi to Lynch's. After another two pints, might've been three; and another line of speed each in the bog, we sing a medley of Iggy songs and go ower tae the Saracen Head in the Gallowgate, opposite the Barrowland. We drink some cider and wine chasers, dabbing frantically at salty speed in silver foil.

All ah can see is a blurred neon sign when ah leave the pub. It is pure fucking freezing here, I kid you not my man, and we move towards the light and into the ballroom. We head straight for the bar. We have more drinks at the bar, although we can hear that Iggy's started his set. Ah rip off my torn t-shirt. Mitch lines up some Morningside speed, cocaine, on the formica-top table.

Then something changes. He says something tae us about money which ah don't catch, but ah can feel the resentment. We have a heated, slurred argument, exchanging punches, ah don't recall who strikes the first blow. We cannae really hurt each other or feel force on our fists or bodies. Too wasted. Mind you, ah step up a gear when ah sees the blood flowing fae ma nose onto my bare chest, and ower the table. Ah get Mitch's hair in a grip and ah'm trying tae smash his heid against the wall, but ma hands are so numb and heavy. Someone pulls me off, and throws us out the bar, down a passage. Ah get up, singing, following the music into the packed hall of sweating bodies, pushing and

### The Glass

acknowledge my assailant, still pure jostling to the front. Ah'm pure jumping aroond at the front of the stage, a few feet away from The Man. They are playing 'Neon Forest'. Somebody slaps me on the back saying, — You are mental, by the way, my man. Ah sing out, a twisting, pogo-ing mass of rubber.

Iggy Pop looks right at me as he sings the line: 'America takes drugs in psychic defence'; only he changes 'America' for 'Scatlin', and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence than all the others have ever done . . .

Ah cease my St Vitus dance and stand looking him in stunned awe. His eyes are on someone else.

### The Glass

The problem wi Begbie wis . . . well, thirs that many problems wi Begbie. One ay the things thit concerned us maist wis the fact thit ye couldnae really relax in his company, especially if he'd hud a bevvy. Ah always felt thit a slight shift in the cunt's perception ay ye wid be sufficient tae change yir status fae great mate intae persecuted victim. The trick wis tae indulge the radge without being seen tae be too much ay an obviously crawling sap.

Even so, any overt imp



### Trainspotting

constantly changed wi the cunt's moods. Friendship wi Begbie was an ideal preparation for embarking on a relationship wi a woman. It taught ye sensitivity, an awareness ay the other person's changing needs. When ah wis wi a lassie, ah usually behaved in the same discreetly indulgent wey. For a while, anyway.

Begbie and masel hud been invited tae Gibbo's 21st. It wis an RSVP job, wi partners. Ah took Hazel, n Begbie took his burd, June. June wis up the stick, but wisnae showin. We met in a pub in Rose Street, which was Begbie's idea. Only arseholes, wankers and tourists set fit in Rose Street.

Hazel n me hud a strange relationship. We'd been seeing each other on and off now for about four years. We have a kind ay understanding, that when ah'm using, she just vanishes. The reason Hazel sticks around wi me is because she's as fucked up as me, but rather than get it sorted oot, she denies it. Wi her it's sex thit's at the root ay it rather than drugs. Hazel and I seldom have sex. This is because ah'm usually too junked tae be bothered, and in any case she's frigid. People say that there is no such thing as frigid women, only incompetent men. That's true to an extent, and ah'd be last cunt under the sun tae make any great claims fir masel in that department — ma abysmal junky track record speaks fir itself.

The thing is that Hazel wis fucked as a wee lassie by her faither. She once telt us this when she wis really oot ay it. Ah couldnae be much use, cause ah wis oot ay it as well. When ah tried tae git her tae talk aboot it later, she wisnae havin it. Every time since has been a disaster. Our sex life always has been. After k.b.ing me for ages, she'd eventually let me shag her. She'd be tensed up, gripping the mattress and gritting her teeth, while I did what I had to do. Eventually, we just stopped. It was like sleeping wi a surfboard. All the forenlay in the world couldn't

### The Glass

dae it for her. Anywey, Hazel and I had a strange pact. We used each other in a social sense, that's the only way to decribe it really, tae project this veneer of normality. It's a great cover-up for her frigidity and ma junk-induced impotence. My Ma and faither lapped Hazel up, seeing her as a potential daughter-in-law. If only they knew. Anywey, ah had called up Hazel, in order tae get her tae accompany us oan this night oot; two fuck-ups thegither.

The Beggar had been bevvyin before we met up. He looked seedy and menacing done up in a suit, the wey draftpaks do, indian ink spilling oot from under cuffs and collar onto neck and hands. Ah'm sure Beggar's tattoos move intae the light, resentful at being covered up.

— How's the fuckin Rent Boy! he rasps loudly. Appropriateness hus nivir been the cunt's strong point. — Awright doll? he sais tae Haze. — Lookin fuckin smert. See this cunt here? He points at me. — Style, he sais, enigmatically. Then he elaborates. — This is a useless bastard; but he's goat style. A man ay wit. A man ay class. A man not unlike my good self.

Begbie always constructed imaginary qualities in his friends, then shamelessly claimed them for himself.

Hazel and June, who didn't really know each other well, wisely struck up a conversation, lumbering me wi the Beggar, the General Franco. Ah realised that it hud been a long time since ah'd drank wi Begbie oan ma ain, withoot other mates tae offer occasional respite. Alone was stressful.

Tae get ma attention, Begbie smashes an elbow into ma ribs with such ferocity that it would be construed as an assault, were it not between two companions. He then starts telling us about some gratuitously violent video he's been watching. Beggar insists on acting the whole fuckin thing oot, demonstrating karate blows, throttlings, stabbings, etc., on me. His explanation

## Trainspotting

We're drinking on a balcony bar, and our attention is caught by a squad of nutters entering the crowded pub below. They swagger in, noisy and intimidating.

Ah hate cunts like that. Cunts like Bebgie. Cunts that are intae baseball-batting every fucker that's different; pakis, poofs, n what huv ye. Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It's nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan-wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.

Bebgie's gaun oan about Julie Mathieson, whae he used tae huv the hoats fir. Julie always hated him. Ah really liked Julie, maybe that's why. She wis a really good punter. She hud a bairn whin she wis HIV, but the bairn wis all-clear, thank fuck. The hoospital sent Julie hame in an ambulance wi the bairn, wi two guys dressed in sortay radioactive-proof suits — helmets, the lot. This wis back in 1985. It had the predictable effect. The neighbours saw this, freaked, and burnt her oot the hoose. Once ye git tagged HIV, that's you fucked. Especially a lassie oan her puff. Harassment followed harassment. Eventually, she hud a nervous breakdown and, wi her damaged immune system, wis easy prey fir the onset ay AIDS.

It wis last Christmas thit Julie died. Ah nivir made the funeral. Ah wis lyin in ma ain puke oan a mattress in Spud's gaff, too fucked tae move. It wis a shame, cause Julie n me wir good mates. Wi nivir shagged or nowt like that. Wi baith thought it wid change things too much, like it does in male/female friendships. Sex generally makes them intae real relationships, or ends them.

### The Glass

oan smack. Maist lassies dae. It seems tae bring oot the best in them. It always seems tae gie, before it takes back, wi interest.

Begbie's epitaph tae Julie is: — Fuckin waste ay a good bit ay fanny.

Ah fight back the urge tae tell um what a fuckin waste ay a silver bullet he'd be. Ah try no tae show ma anger; it'll achieve nothing except a burst mooth fir me. Ah go doonstairs tae git another round up.

These draftpak cunts are at the bar, jostling each other, and every other fucker. Getting served is a nightmare. A mosaic shell ay scar tissue and indian ink, ah presume that there's some cunt inside it, is screaming: — DOUBLE VODDY N COKE! DOUBLE FAAHKIN VODDY N COKE THEN CUNT! at the nervous barstaff. Ah focus on the whisky bottles on the gantry, trying everything in ma power tae avoid makin eye contact wi this radge. It's like ma eyes huv a life ay thir ain, involuntarily turning tae the side. My face reddens n tingles, as if in anticipation ay a fist or a boatil. These cunts are damaged fucking goods, nutty boys of the highest order.

Ah take the drinks back, the nips first fir the women, then the pints.

Then it happens.

Aw ah did wis put a pint ay Export in front ay Begbie. He takes one fuckin gulp oot ay it; then he throws the empty gless fae his last pint straight ower the balcony, in a casual, backhand motion. It's one ay they chunky, panelled glesses wi a handle, n ah kin see it spinnin through the air oot ay the corner ay ma eye. Ah look at Begbie, whae smiles, while Hazel n June look disorientated, thir faces reflecting ma ain crippling anxiety.

The gless crashes doon oan this draftpak's heid, which splits open as he faws tae his knees. The boy's mates assume battle stances, n one ay them charges ower tae this other table n panels

## Trainspotting

Begbie's oan his feet, n racing doon the stair. He's right in the middle ay the flair.

— BOY'S BEEN FUCKIN GLESSED! NAE CUNT LEAVES HERE UNTIL AH FIND OOT WHAE FLUNG THAT FUCKIN GLESS!

He's barkin orders at innocent couples, shoutin instructions at the bar staff. Thing is, the draftpak cunts ur lappin this up.

— S awright mate. We kin handle this! Double Voddy n Coke sais.

Ah cannae hear whit Begbie sais, but it seems tae impress Double Voddy. Then the Beggar goes tae the barman: — YOU! PHONE THE FAAHKIN POLIS!

— NAW! NAW! NAE POLIS! shouts one ay the draftpak psychos. These cunts've obviously goat records the length ay yir airm. The perr cunt behind the bar's shitein hissel, no kennin whit tae dae.

Begbie stands erect, neck muscles tensed. His glare sweeps around the bar n up tae the balcony.

— WHAE SAW ANYTHIN? YOU CUNTS SEE ANYTHIN? he shouts at a group ay guys, Merchant school, Murrayfield type cunts, who ur crappin themselves.

— No . . . one guy wobbles out.

Ah gits doon, telling Haze n June no tae move fae the balcony bar. Begbie's like a psychopathic detective oot ay an Agatha Christie whodunit, cross-examinin every cunt. He's blowin it; it is so fuckin obvious. Ah'm doon thair, stickin a fuckin bar-towel oan the draftpak's split heid, tryin tae stem the blood. The cunt just growls at us, n ah dinnae ken whether that's um showin gratitude or ready tae stomp ma baws, but ah cairry oan.

One fat cunt fae the group ay psychos goes up tae this other group ay guys at the bar n sticks the heid oan one ay them. The place goes up. Lassies scream, guys issue threats, push each other

### The Glass

some bodies tae git back up the stairs tae Hazel n June. Some cunt gubs us oan the side ay the face. Ah hud half-saw it fae the corner ay ma eye n moved away n time, so ah didnae git the fill force ay it. Ah turn roond and this radge's sayin: — Come ahead wide-o. Come ahead.

— Way tae fuck ya radge, ah say, shakin ma heid. This gadge's ready tae come, but his mate grabs his airm, a good thing, because ah'm no ready fir him. The cunt looks a wee bit tidy, like he could punch his weight.

— Fuckin stey ootay it, Malky. It's fuck all tae dae wi that boy, his mate sais. Ah move oan smartly. Haze n June come doon the stairs wi us. Malky, ma assailant, is panelling some other cunt now. A gap has cleared in the middle ay the flair n ah steer Haze n June through it towards the door.

— Mind the burds, pal, ah say tae these two guys whae ur about tae swedge, n one dives for the other one, allowing us tae slip past. Ooutside the bar in the Rose Street precinct Begbie n this other cunt, it's Double Voddy, ur bootin fuck oot ay this perr bastard oan the deck. — FRAAHNK! June gies oot a blood-curdling scream. Hazel's edging away fae me, tuggin at ma hand.

— FRANCO! C'MOAN! ah shout, grabbin his airm. He stoaps tae examine his work, but brushes ma grip oaf. He turns tae look at us, and fir a minute, ah think he's gaunnae panel us. It's like he doesnae see us, doesnae recognise us. Then he goes: — Rents. Nae cunt fucks wi the YLT. Thuv goat tae fuckin learn that Rents. Thuv goat tae fuckin learn that.

— Cheers pal, sais Double Voddy, Franco's accomplice in slaughter.

Franco smiles at him, and boots the cunt in the baws. Ah felt it.

— Ah'll gie ye fackin cheers, ya cunt! he sneers, smacking Double Voddy in the face, knocking him ower. A white tooth

## Trainspotting

— Frank! What ur ye daein! June shrieks. We're pulling the cunt doon the road as polis sirens fill the air.

— That cunt, that cunt n his fuckin mates back thair, that's the cunts thit fuckin stabbed ma brar! he shouts indignantly. June looked beaten down.

That wis bullshit. Beggar's brother, Joe, was stabbed in a fight in a pub at Niddrie years ago. The fight wis ay his ain makin, and he wisnae badly hurt. In any case Franco and Joe hated each other. Still, the incident had provided Begbie wi the spurious moral ammunition he needed tae justify one ay his periodic drink and angst fuelled wars against the local populace. He'd git his one day. Nothing wis surer. Ah jist didnae want tae be aroond whin he did.

Hazel and ah fell behind Franco n June. Haze wanted tae go. — Thirs something wrong wi him. Did ye see that guy's heid? Let's git ootay here.

Ah found masel lyin tae her, tae justify Begbie's behaviour. Fuckin horrible. Ah jist couldnae handle her outrage, n the hassle thit went wi it. It wis easy tae lie, as we all did wi Begbie in our circle. A whole Begbie mythology hud been created by oor lies tae each other n oorsels. Like us, Begbie believed that bullshit. We played a big part in making him what he was.

*Myth: Begbie has a great sense ay humour.*

*Reality: Begbie's sense ay humour is solely activated at the misfortunes, setbacks and weaknesses ay others, usually his friends.*

*Myth: Begbie is a 'hard man'.*

*Reality: Ah would not personally rate Begbie that highly in a square-go, without his assortment ay stanley knives, basebaw bats, knuckledusters, beer glesses, sharpened knitting needles, etc. Masel n maist cunts are too shite-scared tae test this theory, but the impression remains.*

*Tommy once exposed some weaknesses in Begbie, in a square-go. Gave um a good run for his money. did Tam. Mind you, Tommy's...*

## The Glass

*Reality: They fear him.*

*Myth: Begbie would never waste any ay his mates.*

*Reality: His mates are generally too cagey tae test oot this proposition, and oan the odd occasion they huv done so, huv succeeded in disproving it.*

*Myth: Begbie backs up his mates.*

*Reality: Begbie smashes fuck oot ay innocent wee daft cunts whae accidentally spill your pint or bump intae ye. Psychopaths who terrorise Begbie's mates usually dae so wi impunity, as they tend tae be closer mates ay Begbie's than the punters he hings about wi. He kens thum aw through approved school, prison n the casuals' networks, the freemason-aries that bams share.*

Anywey, these myths gie us the basis tae rescue the night.

— Look Hazel, ah ken Franco's uptight. It's jist thit they guys pit his brar Joe oan a life-support machine. Thir a close fairmlay.

Begbie is like junk, a habit. Ma first day at primary school, the teacher sais tae us: — You will sit beside Francis Begbie. It wis the same story at secondary. Ah only did well at school tae git intae an O Level class tae git away fae Begbie. Whin Begbie wis expelled n sent tae another school en route tae Polmont, ma performance declined, and ah wis pit back intae the non-certificate stream. Still, nae mair Begbie.

Then, when ah wis apprenticed as a chippy wi a Gorgie builder, ah goes along tae Telford College tae dae ma national certificate modules in joinery. Ah sat doon tae ma chips in the cafeteria, whin whae comes along but that cunt Begbie, wi a couple ay other psychos. They wir oan this specialist course in metalwork fir problem teenagers. The course seemed tae teach them tae manufacture thir ain sharp metal weapons ay destruction rather than have tae buy them fae the Army n Navy stores.



### Trainspotting

the freshers ball, beating tae a pulp some four-eyed, middle-class wanker he imagined wis starin at um.

He really is a cunt ay the first order. Nae doubt about that. The big problem is, he's a mate n aw. Whit kin ye dae?

We quicken our step and follay them doon the road; a quartet of fucked-up people thegither.

### A Disappointment

Ah minded ay the cunt. Fuckin sure n ah did. Ah used tae think he wis a fuckin hard cunt, back it Craigie, ken? He fuckin hung aroond wi Kev Stronach and that crowd. Fuckin bams. Dinnae git us wrong like; ah thoat the cunt wis fuckin sound. But ah mind, thir wis one time some boys asks the cunt whair he fuckin came fae. This boy goes: — Jakey! (that wis the cunt's name like), ur you fae fuckin Grantin or Roystin? The cunt goes: — Grantin is Roystin. Roystin is Grantin. The bastard went right fuckin doon in ma estimation eftir that, ken? That wis back it the fuckin school though, ken? Fuckin yonks ago now.

Anywey, the other fuckin week thair, ah wis doon the fuckin Volley wi Tommy n Secks, ken Rab, the Second Prize, likes? This cunt, this Jakey cunt, the big fuckin radge boy fae Craigie, he comes intae the pub. He nivir fuckin lits oan tae us. Ah mind ay smashin loads ay fuckin crabs tae bits wi stanes wi that cunt.

### A Disappointment

Anyway, the cunt's mate, this fuckin plukey-faced wide-o, goes tae pit his fuckin money doon fir the baws it the table. Fir the pool, ken? Ah sais tae um: — That cunt's fuckin nixt mate, pointin tae this wee specky gadge. This wee cunt's goat his fuckin name up oan the board, but he wid've jist fuckin sat thair n said fuck all if ah hudnae fuckin spoke like.

Ah wis fuckin game fir a swedge. If the cunts hud've fuckin come ahead it wis nae problem like. Ah mean, you ken me, ah'm no the type ay cunt thit goes lookin fir fuckin bothir likes; but ah wis the cunt wi the fuckin pool cue in ma hand, n the plukey cunt could huv the fat end ay it in his pus if he wanted, like. Obviously, ah wis cairryin ma fuckin chib n aw. Too fuckin right. Like ah sais, ah dinnae go lookin fir fuckin bother, but if any lippy cunt wants tae start, ah'm fuckin game. So the wee specky cunt's pit his fuckin dough in, n he's rackin up n that, ken? The plukey cunt jist sits doon n sais fuck all. Ah kept ma eye oan the hard cunt, or at least he wis a fuckin hard cunt it the school, ken. The cunt nivir sais a fuckin wurd. Kept his fuckin mooth shut awright; the cunt.

Tommy sais tae us: — Hi Franco, is that boy gittin lippy? Ye ken Tam, he's no fuckin shy, that cunt. They fuckin heard um like, these cunts; but they nivir fuckin sais nowt again. The plukey cunt n the so-called hard cunt. N it wid've been two against two, cause you ken Second Prize; dinnae git us wrong, ah lap the cunt up, but he's fuckin scoobied whin it comes tae a pagger. He's pished ootay his fuckin heid n he kin hardly haud the fuckin pool cue. This is fuckin half-past eleven oan a Wednesday mornin wir talkin aboot here. So it wid've been fuckin square-gos. But they cunts sais fuck all. Ah nivir fuckin rated the plukey cunt, but ah wis fuckin disappointed in the hard cunt, or the so-called hard cunt, like. He wisnae a fuckin hard man. A fuckin shitein cunt if the truth be telt, ken. Big fuckin

## Trainspotting

### Cock Problems

It's fuckin grotesque tryin tae find an inlet. Yesterday ah hud tae shoot intae ma cock, where the most prominent vein in ma body is. Ah dinnae want tae get intae that habit. As difficult it is tae conceive ay it at the moment, ah may yet find other uses for the organ, besides pishing.

Now the doorbell's going. Fuckin hell. That bastard shite-arsed fuck-up of a landlord: Baxter's son. Auld Baxter, god rest the diddy cunt's soul, never really bothered about the rent cheque. Senile auld wanker. Whenever he came roond, ah wis charm personified tae the auld cunt. Ah'd take oaf his jaykit, sit um doon, and gie um a can ay Export. We'd talk about the hoarses and the Hibs teams ay the fifties wi the 'Famous Five' forward line ay Smith, Johnstone, Reilly, Turnbull and Ormond. Ah knew nowt about hoarses and Hibs in the fifties, but as they wir auld Baxter's only talking points, ah became well-versed in both subjects. Then ah'd rifle through the auld gadge's jaykit poakits n help masel tae some cash. He eywis carried a massive wad aroond wi um. Then ah'd either pey um his ain cash, or tell the poor bastard thit ah'd already squared the cunt up.

We even used tae phone up the auld gadge if we were a bit short. Like when Spud n Sick Boy crashed here, we'd tell him a tap was leaking or windae wis broken. Sometimes we'd even break the windae oorsels, like when Sick Boy threw the auld black n white telly through it, and git the docile cunt tae come roond so's we could rifle um. Thir wis a fuckin fortune in that cunt's poakits. It goat so's thit ah wis feart no tae rip um off, in case some fucker mugged um.

Now auld Baxter has gone tae the great gig in the sky; replaced by his hospice-humoured bastard ay a son. A cunt who expects

## Cock Problems

— Rents!

It's no the landlord. It's Tommy. What the fuck does the cunt want at this time?

— Haud oan Tommy. Jist comin.

Ah shoot intae ma knob for the second consecutive day. As the needle goes in, it looks like a horrible experiment being conducted on an ugly sea-snake. The gig is getting sicker by the minute. The rush wastes nae time in racin tae ma box. Ah git a magic high, then think ah'm gaunnae puke. Ah under-estimated how pure this shite wis, and took a wee bit too much in that shot. Ah take a deep breath and get it thegither. Ah feel as if a thin stream ay air is comin in tae ma boady fae a bullet hole in ma back. This is not an OD situation. Calm doon. Keep that auld respirator going. Easy does it. This is nice.

Ah stagger tae ma feet, n let Tommy in. *That wisnae easy.*

Tommy looks offensively fit. Majorca tan still intact; hair sun-bleached, cut short and gelled back. Gold stud and hoop in one ear; mellow sky-blue eyes. It has to be said that Tommy's a fairly handsome cunt wi a tan. It brings oot the best in him. Handsome, easy-going, intelligent, and pretty tidy in a swedge. Tommy should make you jealous, but somehow he doesnae. This is probably because Tommy doesnae have the self-confidence tae recognise n make the maist ay his qualities; nor the vanity tae be a pain in the erse about them tae every other cunt.

— Split up wi Lizzy, he tells us.

It's hard tae work oot whether congratulations or commiserations are in order. Lizzy is a shag extraordinaire, but has a tongue like a sailor and a castrating stare. Ah think Tommy's still tryin tae sort oot his feelins. Ah kin tell that he's deep in thought because he husnae telt us what a daft cunt ah am tae be usin, husnae even mentioned the state ah'm in.

Ah struggle tae show concern through ma self-centred smack

## Trainspotting

— Dinnae ken. If ah'm bein honest, ah'll miss the sex maist. That n like, jist huvin somebody, ken?

Tommy needs people a loat mair thin maist.

Ma endurin memory ay Lizzy is fae the school. Me, Begbie n Gary McVie wir lyin in the Links at the bottom ay the running track, away fae the beady eyes ay that bastard Vallance, the housemaster, a Nazi cunt ay the highest order. We took up that position so's we could see the lassies race in thir shorts n blouses, n accumulate some decent wanking material.

Lizzy pit up a game race, but finished second tae the lanky strides ay big Morag 'Jam Rag' Henderson. We wir lyin oan oor stomachs, heids propped up oan elbays n hands, watchin Lizzy struggle along wi the expression ay vicious determination which characterised everything she did. Everything? Once Tommy's over his loss, ah'll ask him about the sex. Naw ah winnae . . . aye ah will. Anywey, ah hears this heavy breathin and turns tae notice Begbie slowly swivellin his hips; starin at the lassies, gaun: — That wee Lizzy MacIntosh . . . total wee ride . . . fuckin shag the erse oafay that any day ay the week . . . the fuckin erse oan it . . . the fuckin tits oan it . . .

Then he lets his face faw doon oantae the turf. Ah wisnae as wary ay Begbie then as ah am now. He wisnae the main man in they days, jist another contender, n he wis also a bit shy ay ma brar, Billy, at the time. Tae some extent, in fact tae every extent, ah cynically lived oaf Billy's reputation, bein a closet sap. Anywey, ah pulled Begbie ower oantay his back, exposing his spunk drippin, earth-dirty knob. The cunt hud surreptitiously dug a hole in the soft turf wi his flick knife, and hud been fuckin the field. Ah wis pishin masel. Begbie wis n aw. The cunt wis lighter in they days, before he started tae believe his ain, and it must be said, oor, propaganda aboot him bein a total psychopath.

— Ya dirty cunt, Franco! Gary sais.

### Cock Problems

Ah'm nearly endin masel as Gary goes radge; standin up n bootin the sole ay Begbie's trainer. Then he storms away in the cream puff. Whin ah think about it, this is really a Begbie rather than a Lizzy story, though it wis her brave performance against the Jam Rag that precipitated it.

Anywey, whin Tommy copped fir Lizzy a couple ay year back, maist cunts thought: Lucky fuckin bastard. Even Sick Boy has never shagged Lizzy.

Amazingly, Tommy still husnae mentioned smack. Even wi ma works lying aw ower the place, n he can probably tell that ah'm pretty bombed. Normally Tommy's daein a bad impersonation ay ma auld lady in such circumstances; yir killin yirsel/pack it in/ye kin live yir life withoot that garbage, and other such shite.

Now he sais: — What does that stuff dae fir ye Mark? His voice is genuinely enquiring.

Ah shrug. Ah dinnae want tae talk about this. Thirs cunts wi degrees n diplomas at the Royal Ed n the City peyed tae go through aw this counselling shite wi us. It's done fuck-all good. Tommy's persistent though.

— Tell us Mark. Ah want tae ken.

But then, when ye think about it, mibbe mates, whae've stuck by ye through thick n thin, usually fuckin thin, deserve at least an attempt at an explanation, if the counsellors/thought polis get one. Ah launch intae a spiel. Ah feel surprisingly good, calm and clear, talkin about it.

— Ah don't really know, Tam, ah jist dinnae. It kinday makes things seem mair real tae us. Life's boring and futile. We start oaf wi high hopes, then we bottle it. We realise that we're aw gaunnae die, withoot really findin oot the big answers. We develop aw they long-winded ideas which jist interpret the reality ay oor lives in different weys, withoot really extending oor body ay worthwhile knowledge, about the big things, the real

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relationships tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless. Smack's an honest drug, because it strips away these delusions. Wi smack, whin ye feel good, ye feel immortal. Whin ye feel bad, it intensifies the shite that's already thair. It's the only really honest drug. It doesnae alter yir consciousness. It just gies ye a hit and a sense ay well-being. Eftir that, ye see the misery ay the world as it is, and ye cannae anaesthetise yirsel against it.

— Shite, Tommy sais. Then: — Pure shite. He's probably right n aw. If he asked us the question last week, ah'd huv probably said something completely different. If he asks us the morn, it wid be something else again. At this point in time though, ah'll hing wi the concept that junk'll dae the business whin everything else seems boring and irrelevant.

Ma problem is, whenever ah sense the possibility, or realise the actuality ay attaining something that ah thought ah wanted, be it girlfriend, flat, job, education, money and so on, it jist seems so dull n sterile, that ah cannae value it any mair. Junk's different though. Ye cannae turn yir back oan it sae easy. It willnae let ye. Trying tae manage a junk problem is the ultimate challenge. It's also a fuckin good kick.

— It's also a fuckin good kick.

Tommy looks at us. — Gies a go. Gies a hit.

— Fuck off Tommy.

— Ye sais it's a good kick. Ah pure wantae try it.

— Ye dinnae. C'moan Tommy, take ma word fir it. This jist seems tae encourage the cunt mair.

— Ah've goat the hireys. C'moan. Cook us up a shot.

— Tommy . . . fuck sake man . . .

— Ah'm tellin ye, c'moan. Supposed tae be fuckin mates, ya cunt. Cook us up a shot. Ah kin fuckin handle it. One fuckin shot isnae gaunnae hurt us. C'moan.

Ah shrug n dae as Tommy requests. Ah gie ma works a good clean, then ah cook up a light shot and help him take it.

### Traditional Sunday Breakfast

rollercoaster ride man . . . ah'm fuckin buzzin here . . . ah'm jist pure buzzin . . .

His reaction is shitein us up. Some cunts are just so predisposed tae skag . . .

Later, when Tommy comes doon and is ready tae go, ah tell um: — Yuv done it mate. That's you goat the set now. Dope, acid, speed, E, mushies, nembies, vallies, smack, the fuckin lot. Knock it oan the heid. Make that the first n last time.

Ah said that because ah wis sure the cunt wis gaunnae ask us fir some tae take away wi him. Ah've no goat enough tae spare. Ah've *never* goat enough tae spare.

— Too fuckin right, he sais, flingin oan his jaykit.

When Tommy's gone, ah notice fir the first time thit ma cock's itchin like fuck. Ah cannae scratch it though. If ah start scratchin it, ah'll infect the bastard. Then ah've goat some real problems.

### Traditional Sunday Breakfast

Oh my god, where the fuck am I. Where the fuck . . . I just don't recognise this room at all . . . think Davie, think. I can't seem to generate enough saliva to free my tongue from the roof of my mouth. What an arsehole. What a cunt . . . what a . . . never again.



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Please.

Don't let this be happening to me. Please. Surely no. Surely yes.

Yes. I woke up in a strange bed in a strange room, covered in my own mess. I had pished the bed. I had puked up in the bed. I had shat myself in the bed. My heid is fucking buzzing, and my guts are in a queasy turmoil. The bed is a mess, a total fucking mess.

I take the bottom sheet up, then remove the duvet cover and wrap them together; the pungent, toxic cocktail in the middle. It's bundled into a secure ball, with no sign of leakage. I turn the mattress over to conceal the damp patch, and go to the toilet; showering the crap off my chest, thighs and arse. I now know where I am: Gail's mother's house.

Fucking hell.

Gail's mother's. How did I get here? Who brought me here? Back in the room, I see that my clothes are neatly folded. Oh christ.

Who the fuck undressed me?

Try tracing back. It's now Sunday. Yesterday was Saturday. The semi-final at Hampden. I had got myself into some fucking state before and after the match. We've no chance, I thought, you never do at Hampden against one of the Old Firm, with the crowd and the referees firmly behind the establishment clubs. So instead of getting worked up about it, I just decided to have a good crack and make a day of it. I don't want to think about the day I made of it. I don't even remember whether or not I actually went to the game. Got on the Marksman bus at Duke Street with the Leith boys; Tommy, Rents and their mates. Fuckin heid-bangers. I remember fuck all after that pub in Rutherglen before the match; the space-cake and the speed, the acid and the dope, but most of all the drink, the bottle of vodka that I downed before we met in the pub to get onto the bus to get back into the

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Where Gail came into the picture, I'm no really sure. Fuck. So I get back into the bed, the mattress and duvet seeming cold without the sheets. A few hours later, Gail knocks at the door. Gail and I have been going out together for five weeks but have not yet had sex. Gail had said that she didn't want our relationship to start off on a physical basis, as that would be how it would principally be defined from them on in. She'd read this in *Cosmopolitan*, and wanted to test the theory. So five weeks on, I've got a pair of bollocks like watermelons. There's probably a fair bit of spunk alongside that pish, shite and puke.

— You were is some state last night David Mitchell, she said accusingly. Was she genuinely upset or playing at being upset? Difficult to tell. Then: — What happened to the covers? Genuinely upset.

— Eh, a wee accident Gail.

— Well, never mind that. Come downstairs. We're just about to have breakfast.

She left, and I wearily got dressed and tentatively crept down the stairs, wishing I was invisible. I take the bundle down with me, as I want to take it home and get it cleaned.

Gail's parents are sitting at the kitchen table. The sounds and smells of a traditional Sunday breakfast fry-up being prepared are nauseating. My guts do a quick somersault.

— Well, someone was in a state last night, Gail's Ma says, but to my relief, teasingly, and without anger.

I still flushed with embarrassment. Mr Houston, sitting at the kitchen table, tried to smooth things over for me.

— Ah well, it does ye good tae cut loose once in a while, he commented supportively.

— It would do this one good tae be tied up once in a while, Gail said, realising a minor *faux pas* as I raised ma eyebrows at her, unnoticed by her parents. A wee bit bondage would do me fine.

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feet on the kitchen floor. — . . . Ah made a bit of a mess of the sheet and the duvet cover. Ah'm going tae take them home and clean them. Ah'll bring them back tomorrow.

— Aw, don't you worry about that, son. Ah'll just stick them in the washing machine. You sit down and get some breakfast.

— Naw, but, eh . . . a really bad mess. Ah feel embarrassed enough. Ah'd like tae take them home.

— Dearie dear, Mr Houston laughed.

— Now no, you sit down, son, ah'll see tae them, Mrs Houston stole across the floor towards me, and made a grab for the bundle. The kitchen was her territory, and she would not be denied. I pulled it to me, towards my chest; but Mrs Houston was as fast as fuck and deceptively strong. She got a good grip and pulled against me.

The sheets flew open and a pungent shower of skittery shite, thin alcohol sick, and vile pish splashed out across the floor. Mrs Houston stood mortified for a few seconds, then ran, heaving into the sink.

Brown flecks of runny shite stained Mr Houston's glasses, face and white shirt. It sprayed across the linoleum table and his food, like he had made a mess with watery chip-shop sauce. Gail had some on her yellow blouse.

Jesus fuck.

— God sake . . . god sake . . . Mr Houston repeated as Mrs Houston boaked and I made a pathetic effort to mop some of the mess back into the sheets.

Gail shot me a look of loathing and disgust. I can't see our relationship developing any further now. I'll never get Gail into bed. For the first time, that doesnae bother me. I just want out of here.

## Junk Dilemmas No. 65

### *Junk Dilemmas No. 65*

*Suddenly it's cauld; very fuckin cauld. The candle's nearly melted doon. The only real light's comin fae the telly. Something black and white's on . . . but the telly's a black and white set so it was bound tae be something black and white . . . wi a colour telly, it wid be different . . . perhaps.*

*It's freezing, but movement only makes ye caulder; by making ye more aware that there's fuck all you can do, fuck all you can really do, tae get warm. At least if ah stey still ah can pretend to masel ah have the power tae make masel warm, by just moving aroond or switching the fire oan. The trick is tae be as still as possible. It's easier than dragging yourself across the flair tae switch that fuckin fire oan.*

*Somebody else is in the room wi us. It's Spud, ah think. It's hard tae tell in the dark.*

*— Spud . . . Spud . . .*

*He sais nothing.*

*— It's really fuckin cauld man.*

*Spud, if indeed it is the cunt, still says nothing. He could be deid, but probably no, because ah think his eyes are open. But that means fuck all.*

## Grieving and Mourning In Port Sunshine

Lenny looked at his cards, then scrutinised the expressions on his friends' faces.

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— Two fuckin aces!

— Spawny bastard! You spawny fuckin cunt Renton. Lenny slammed his fist into his palm.

— Jist gies that fuckin loot ower here, Billy Renton said, raking up the pile of notes that lay in the centre of the floor.

— Naz. Chuck us a can ower then, Lenny asked. When the can was thrown over he missed his catch and it hit the floor. He opened it, and much of its contents gushed over Peasbo.

— Moantae fuck ya doss cunt!

— Sorry Peasbo. It's that cunt, Lenny laughed as he pointed at Naz. — Ah sais tae um tae chuck us a can ower, no tae fling it at ma fuckin heid.

Lenny rose and went to the window.

— Still nae sign ay the cunt? Naz asked. — The game's fucked without the big money.

— Naw. The cunt's patter's fuckin rotten, Lenny said.

— Gie the cunt a bell. Find oot whit the fuckin story is, Billy suggested.

— Aye. Right.

Lenny went into the lobby and dialled Phil Grant's number. He was upset at playing for this toytown stake. He would have been well up by now if Granty had shown up with the money.

The phone just rang.

— Nae cunt's in, or if they are, they arenae answerin the fuckin phone, he told them.

— Ah hope the fucker husnae absconded wi the fuckin loot, Peasbo laughed, but it was an uneasy laugh, the first open acknowledgement of a collective unspoken fear.

— Better no huv. Cannae stick a cunt thit rips oaf his mates, Lenny snarled.

— Whin ye think about it though, it's Granty's poppy. He kin spend it oan whit he likes, Jackie said.

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— Away ye fuckin go.

— In a wey though, the cunt won it fair n square. Ah ken what we agreed. Build up a big kitty wi the club money tae add a bit ay spice tae the caird games. Then divvi up. Ah ken aw that. Aw ah'm sayin is thit in the eyes ay the law . . . Jackie explained his position.

— It's aw oor poppy! Lenny snapped. — Granty kens the fuckin Hampden roar.

— Ah ken that. Aw ah'm sayin is thit in the eyes ay the law . . .

— Shut yir fuckin mooth ya stirrin cunt, Billy interjected, — wir no talkin about the eyes ay the fuckin law here. Wir talkin about mates. If it wis up tae the eyes ay the fuckin law you'd huv nae furniture in yir hoose ya gypo cunt.

Lenny nodded approvingly at Billy.

— Wir jumpin tae fuckin conclusions here. Might be a perfectly good reason as tae why the cunt isnae here. Mibbe he's goat held up, Naz suggested, his pock-marked face taut and tense.

— Mibbe some cunt's mugged the cunt n taken the poppy, Jackie said.

— Nae cunt wid try tae mug Granty. He's the kind ay cunt thit mugs cunts, no gits mugged fae thum. If he comes in here pullin a stunt like that, ah'll tell um whair tae fuckin go. Lenny was in a state of some anxiety. This was the club money they were talking about.

— Jist sayin thit it's daft tae be cairryin that type ay cash aroond. That's aw ah'm sayin, Jackie stated. He was a little frightened of Lenny.

Granty had not missed a Thursday night card session in six years, unless he was on holiday. He was the reliable lynchpin of the school. Lenny and Jackie had both missed periods through

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the time they had all gone to Loret De Mar on holiday together, as teenagers. Now older, they generally went in smaller groups, or with wives or girlfriends. The strange mixing up of the card money and the club money occurred a couple of years ago when they were drunk. Peasbo, then the treasurer, jokingly threw in a wad of the club money as his stake. They played with it, for a laugh. They liked the feel of playing with all that money, got such a buzz from it, that they divvied it up and played pretend games with it. Whenever they decided that they were into serious saving, they would stop playing cards for 'real' money, and play for 'club' money. It was just like playing for monopoly money.

There were times, particularly when someone 'won' the entire pot, like Granty last week, that the bizarre and dangerous nature of their actions crossed their mind. They were mates though, and it was generally assumed that they would never do the dirty on each other. However, logic as well as loyalty underpinned this assumption. They all had ties in the area, and could never leave it for good, and not for just the £2,000 in the kitty. Leaving the area was what it would mean if one ripped off the rest. They told themselves this over and over again. The real fear was theft. The money was more secure in a bank. It had been a silly indulgence gone mad, a collective insanity.

The next morning there still no sign of Granty, and Lenny was late signing on.

— Mister Lister. You only live around the corner from this office, and you only have to sign on once every fortnight. It's hardly an excessive demand, Gavin Temperley, the clerk, told him in pompous tones.

— Ah understand the position ay your fuckin oafice, Mister Temperley. But ah'm sure thit yill take intae consideration thit ah'm a fuckin busy man wi several flourishin enterprises tae look eftir.

### Grieving and Mourning In Port Sunshine

— Aye. Ye'll need tae gie us a bung though Gav. Ah'm fuckin brassic until this rent cheque hits the mat the morn.

— Nae problem.

Lenny went down to the pub and sat at the bar with his *Daily Record* and a pint of lager. He considered lighting a cigarette, then decided against it. It was 11.04 and he'd had twelve fags already. It was always the same when he was forced to rise in the morning. He smoked far too many fags. He could cut down by staying in bed, so he generally didn't get up until 2 p.m. These Government cunts were determined, he thought, to wreck both his health and finances by forcing him up so early.

The back pages of the *Record* were full of Rangers/Celtic shite as usual. Souness spys on some fucker in the English second division, McNeill says Celts' confidence is coming back. Nothing about Hearts. No. A wee bit about Jimmy Sandison, with the same quote twice, and the short passage finishing in mid-sentence. There's also a small space on why Miller of Hibs still thinks he's the best man for the job, when they've only scored three goals in the last thirty games or something like that.

Lenny turned to page three. He preferred the scantily clad women the *Record* featured to the topless ones in the *Sun*. You had to have some imagination.

From the corner of his eye he spotted Colin DalGLISH.

— Coke, he said, without looking up from his paper.

Coke pushed up a barstool alongside Lenny's. He ordered a pint of heavy. — Heard the news? Fuckin sad eh?

— Eh?

— Granty . . . ye didnae hear? . . . Coke looked straight at Lenny.

— Naw. Wha . . .

— Deid. Potted heid.

— Yir jokin! Eh? Gies a fuckin brek ya cunt . . .



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— Ticker. Boom. Coke snapped his fingers. — Dodgy hert, apparently. Nae cunt kent about it. Perr Granty wis workin wi Pete Gilleghan, oan the side likesay. It wis jist about five, n Granty wis helpin Pete tidy up, ready tae shoot the craw n that likes, whin he jist hauds his chist n cowps ower. Gilly gits an ambulance, n they take the perr cunt tae the hoospital, but he dies a couple ay ooirs later. Perr Granty. Good cunt n aw. You play cairds wi the guy, eh?

— Eh . . . aye . . . one ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet. That's gutted us, that hus.

A few hours later, Lenny was guttered as well as gutted. He'd tapped twenty quid off Gav Temperley for the sole purpose of getting rat-arsed. When Peasbo entered the pub late afternoon, Lenny was slurring into the ear of a sympathetic barmaid and an embarrassed and sober-looking guy in a boilersuit with a Tennent's Lager logo on it.

— . . . one ay the nicest fuckin cunts ye could hope tae meet . . .

— Awright Lenny. Ah heard the news. Peasbo grabbed one of Lenny's broad shoulders heavily. A firm grip, to ensure that *one* of his mates was still there, and to make a partial assessment of his level of drunkenness.

— Peasbo. Aye. Still cannae fuckin believe it . . . one ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet n aw . . . He turned slowly back to the barmaid and refocused his gaze on her. With his thumb protruding from a clenched fist, he then pointed over his shoulder at Peasbo. — . . . this cunt'll tell ye . . . eh Peasbo? See Granty? One ay the nicest cunts any cunt could ivir hope tae meet . . . eh Peasbo? Granty? Eh?

— Aye, it's a real shock. Ah still cannae believe it man.

— That's it! One day the boy's here, now wir nivir gaunnae see the perr cunt again . . . twenty-seven year auld. The game's

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— Granty wis twenty-nine, wis eh no? Peasbo quizzed.

— Twenty-seven, twenty-nine . . . who gies a fuck? Jist a young boy. It's his burd n that wee bairn thit ah feel sorry fir . . . ye git some ay they auld cunts . . . Lenny gestured angrily over to the corner across to a group of old guys playing dominos. — . . . they've hud thair lives! Long fuckin lives! Aw they dae is moan like fuck! Granty nivir complained aboot fuck all. One ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet.

He then noted three younger guys, known as Spud, Tommy and Second Prize, sitting across the other side of the pub.

— N they fuckin junky mates ay Billy's brar. They cunts, aw fuckin dyin ay AIDS. Killing thumsels. Serves the cunts right. Granty fuckin valued life. They cunts ur flingin thairs away! Lenny glowered over at them, but they were too into their own conversation to notice him.

— C'moan now Lenny. Keep the heid. Nae cunt's sayin nought against nae cunt. They boys ur awright. That's Danny Murphy. Harmless cunt. Tommy Laurence, you ken Tommy, n that guy Rab, Rab McLaughlin, used tae be a good fitba player. Man United he went doon tae. They boys ur sound. Fuck sakes, thir mates ay that mate ay yours, the boy thit works fir the dole. What's his name, Gav.

— Aye . . . but these auld cunts . . . Conceding the point, Lenny switched his attention back over to the other side of the room.

— Ah, come oan Lenny, fuck it. Harmless cunts, no botherin anybody. Down that pint, n we'll go roond fir Naz. Ah'll bell Billy n Jackie.

The mood was gloomy round at Naz's flat in Buchanan Street. They had turned away from the issue of Granty's death, onto the subject of the outstanding cash.

— The Friday before divvy day n the cunt fuckin snuffs it.

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— No much we kin dae about it, Jackie ventured.

— Like fuck thir isnae. That dough gits divvied every fuckin year, the fortnight before trades. Ah've booked Benidorm oan the strength ay that. Ah'm fuckin brassic without it. Sheila'll huv ma baws fir a game ay pool if ah cancel oot. Nae fuckin wey man, Naz declared.

— Too fuckin right. Ah feel sorry fir Fiona n the bairn n that, obviously. Any cunt wid. Goes without sayin, likes. Boatum line is, it's oor fuckin poppy, no hers. Billy said.

— It's oor ain fuckin fault. Ah knew somethin like this wid happen, Jackie shrugged.

The doorbell went. In came Lenny and Peasbo.

— S awright fir you, ya cunt. You're fuckin flush, Naz challenged.

Jackie didn't respond. He picked up a can of lager from the pile Peasbo had dumped on the floor.

— Fuckin terrible news, eh boys? Peasbo said, as Lenny morosely slurped on his can.

— One ay the nicest cunts ye could hope tae meet, Lenny said.

Naz was grateful for Lenny's intervention. He was ready to commiserate about the money, when he realised that Peasbo had been referring to Granty.

— Ah ken ye shouldnae be selfish at a time like this, but thirs the question ay the poppy tae sort oot. Divvy day's next week. Ah've goat a hoaliday tae book. Ah need they hireys, Billy said.

— Some cunt you Billy, eh? Kin we no fuckin wait until the perr cunt's still no warm before we go oan aboot aw that shite? Lenny sneered.

— Fiona might blow the fuckin lot! She'll no ken it's oor dosh if nae cunt tells her. She'll be gaun through his fuckin things, n it'll be, aye, aye, what's this? Nearly two grand. Tidy. Then she'll be oaf tae the fuckin

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— Yir patter's fuckin abysmal, Billy, Lenny told him.

Peasbo looked gravely at Lenny, who could feel a betrayal coming on.

— Hate tae say it Lenny, but Billy's no far wrong. Granty didnae exactly keep Fiona in the lap ay luxury, great cunt as he wis likesay. Ah mean, dinnae git us wrong, ah'd nivir hear a word said against the cunt, but ye find two grand in yir hoose, ye spend first, n ask questions eftir. You would. Ah'm fuckin sure ah wid. Every cunt wid, if the fuckin truth be telt.

— Aw aye? Whae's askin her fir it then? Fucked if ah'm gaunnae, Lenny hissed.

— We aw will. It's aw oor poppy, Billy said.

— Right. Eftir the funeral. Oan Tuesday, Naz suggested.

— Awright, Peasbo agreed.

— Aye, Jackie shrugged.

Lenny nodded in a weary compliance. It was, he conceded, their poppy . . .

Tuesday came and went. Nobody could work up the bottle to say anything at the funeral. They all got drunk and offered more laments to Granty. The cash issue was never mentioned until late on. They met, with evil hangovers, the following afternoon, and went to Fiona's place.

Nobody answered the door.

— Probably steyin at her Ma's, Lenny said.

The woman from the flat across the landing, a grey-haired lady in a blue print dress, came out.

— Fiona left this mornin boys. Canary Islands. Left the bairn at her Ma's. She seemed to enjoy breaking the news.

— Tidy, Billy muttered.

— That's that then, Jackie said with a shrug which was a bit too smug for the liking of most of his friends. — No much we kin dae about it.

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sprawling down the stairs. He managed to break his fall by grabbing the banister, and looked up at Billy in horror from the bend in the stair.

The rest of them were almost as shocked as Jackie by Billy's actions.

— Easy Billy. Lenny grabbed Billy's arm, but kept his gaze on his face. He was anxious and intrigued to find out the source of his outrage. — Yir ootay order. S'no Jackie's fault.

— Aw is it no? Ah kept ma fuckin gob shut, but this smart cunt's pushed us far enough. He pointed at the still prostrate figure of Jackie, whose rapidly swelling face had gained a new furtiveness.

— Whit's the fuckin score here? Naz asked.

Billy ignored him, and looked straight at Jackie. — How long's it been gaun oan Jackie?

— Whit's the cunt oan about? Jackie said, but his watery voice lacked assurance.

— Canary Islands ma fuckin hole. Whair ur ye meetin Fiona?

— You're fuckin tapped Billy. Ye heard whit the wifey sais, Jackie shook his head.

— Fiona's ma Sharon's fuckin sister. Ye think ah go aroond wi ma fuckin ears shut? How long ye been fuckin pokin her, Jackie?

— That wis a fuckin one oaf . . .

Billy's outrage filled the stair, and he could feel it growing, swelling, in the breasts of the others. He stood over Jackie like a booming Old Testament god, scorning him in his judgement.

— One oaf ma hole! An whae's tae fuckin say thit Granty didnae ken? Whaes's tae say it wisnae that thit killed um? His so-called best fuckin mate, shaftin his burd!

Lenny looked at Jackie, shaking with anger. He then looked at the others, their eyes blazing. An unspoken contract was forged between them in a split-second.

Jackie's screams reverberated around the stairwell, as they

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to protect himself and, through his fear and pain, hoped that there would be something left of him to move out of Leith, when the ordeal was over.