

# **Hunting Captain Henley**

**Ken Pratt M.A.**

**VOLUME 1: Scotland's Fascist Voice - a commentary.**

**VOLUME 2: Hunting Captain Henley - a novel.**

**Submitted for the degree of Ph (D) to the University of Glasgow,  
Department of English and Scottish Literature and Language.**

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## Abstract

The term post traumatic stress is routinely used to describe the psychological experiences of soldiers returning from war. It is used here to describe the effects it has on the families of PTS victims, in particular children.

*Hunting Captain Henley* is a novel which explores the long term effects of a father's post traumatic stress on a son's (intellectual) development. It tracks the progress of the narrator from childhood to adulthood as he sets about tracking down the (English) Royal Signals Captain who allegedly bullied his dad into shooting Arab civilians during the Ismaelia police uprising at Suez in 1951. In his 1919 book *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* G. Gregory Smith first coined the phrase Caledonian Antisyzygy to spotlight the zigzag of contradictions at the heart of Scottish Literature, especially under the stress of foreign (in particular English) influence. The term has since been used to point at the schizophrenia at the heart of Scottishness. The novel considers the dual influences of the English (language) on Scottish writing and families.

As a prologue to the book a commentary is provided. *Scotland's Fascist Voice* addresses the unexplored area of the present-day fascist consciousness in Scotland. It does so by firstly acknowledging Scotland's role in the creation of the British Empire then delineates a developing contemporary identity borne out of that imperial experience. It examines the significance of *The Raucle Tongue*, hitherto uncollected prose by Hugh MacDiarmid, in particular his *Plea for a Scottish Fascism*. The remaining chapters of the commentary explain the significance of a form of cultural repression at work in Scottish society and showcase the fascist style mindset and its incumbent voice. It is concluded that as both victims and perpetrators of Empire Scots must now acknowledge this duality of experience and carry forth its impact on both our language and identity into the 21st century.

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## Critical Component Introduction

THIS CRITICAL component is a commentary on a novel entitled *Hunting Captain Henley* which is about a young Scots boy traumatised by his dad's British Army experiences in Suez in 1951. The novel is split into the childhood narrative (1st person) shifting to the adult narrative (3rd person) as he sets about tracking down the Royal Signals English Captain who allegedly bullied his dad into shooting Arab civilians during the Ismaelia police uprising.

I will demonstrate how to use Caledonian Antiszygy to create a novel that works equally across the genres, as a study of a man's moral and mental disintegration, a state-of-the-nation address and a political thriller. By jarring the genres and coalescing the discordant voices of standard English and colloquial Scots, as well as shifting through the first, second and third person narrative voice, the novel attempts to take New Scottish Renaissance Literature into fresh psychological territory: one which addresses the unexplored area of the present-day fascist consciousness in Scotland. It is partly, as Deleuze & Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus*, "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."

The term 'Caledonian Antiszygy' was first coined by G. Gregory Smith in his 1919 book *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*. Smith described Scottish Literature as "remarkably varied" and said it becomes, "under the stress of foreign influence, almost a zigzag of contradictions." It has also been used to point to the schizophrenia at the heart of Scottishness (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 2004). While it could be argued that the union of opposites, of holding contradictory positions together in one mind, can be traced to

poets from Blake to Coleridge, it is at the very edge of the 'Z' in Scotland's literary 'zigzag' where the thrust of this critical component begins. Hugh MacDiarmid used the term to express his desire to be "whaur extremes meet." It could be argued it was MacDiarmid himself who first connected the idea of 'Caledonian Antisyzygy' to his 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism.' It is, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the course of this thesis, from the mist of a contradictory temperament, that clear fascist thinking emerges. But while the debate about 'Caledonian Antisyzygy' has, to date, been confined to literature, I have attempted to widen its context to examine its effects on a specific part of the Scottish population: the collaborationist working class, those described by one of Kelman's protagonists in *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) as "a bunch of bastarn imbeciles" (p.180). In essence *Hunting Captain Henley* attempts to create the literary voice of Kelman's imbecile: fuelled by 'Caledonian Antisyzygy,' it becomes the educated, often bizarre and bewildering voice of Scottish fascism.

Billy Queen is symbolic not only of the micro-fascism of everyday life: of the band, the gang, the sect, the family; but also the 'emotional fascism' brilliantly described in Mabel Berezin's *Making The Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (1997).

In the creation of Billy I have attempted to demonstrate how the narrator's straight sense of childhood Scottishness gets corrupted as the full details emerge of what happened to his father, resulting in the adult narrator developing an almost schizophrenic sense of national identity which oscillates between Britishness and Scottishness. On the one hand Billy feels revulsion at empire, on the other there is a fierce pride in fatherland. In the early chapters this simple contradiction is apparent but it is only in the middle section of the novel, when his diverse attitudes are telescoped into single phrases, that a new narrative voice emerges: one which cannot be reproduced in English alone. I'm experimenting with the idea of shifting from 1st to 2nd then, as the novel concludes, into 3rd as the identity crises (and the hunt for Henley) escalates. My aim is to show his progression away from himself and into the

assimilated voice of the ruling class. In that sense Billy only truly ever finds 'linguistic sanity' in the middle section of the novel, when Caledonian Antisyzygy is at its height.

Throughout the following sections I will contend that the psychological consequences of this shift can be quite extreme. The voice I am referring to is that of the Scottish upper working class, those who see themselves as working in collaboration with the lieutenants of the ruling capitalist order. I refer to them as the people who unflinchingly attach themselves to the state, without question. They often tell their stories in a chaotic, extreme, imprecise way. Their telling is riddled, arguably, with a kind of meaningful but misplaced sense of self. It is an isolated voice which impersonates, is sarcastic, is English, and Scottish, is confused. The small electronics businessman with a factory in Cambuslang and Texas uses it when referring to his Scottish workforce. He says, "I'm tellin ye, they are lazy bastards and ye cannae trust them - the minute ye turn you're back they're either stealing or skiving." The owner of a small taxi firm in Glasgow, when speaking about his drunk passengers, says, "I'd hing these bastards high. They've nae respect for property. Some of them spew and piss on the back seat. They should be shot." When you hand him his fare he replies, "Thank you kind sir. It's been a pleasure speaking to you." Then there's the female owner of the hairdressing salon who backed the war in Iraq and wants to take steps to deport all asylum seekers. She says, "They (asylum seekers) get everything that's gon. It's high time we had a government who stood up for its ain kind." While these examples are clearly circumstantial they highlight that the voice in question is not necessarily only expressive of the working class solidarity Cairns Craig attaches to the narrative voice of Kelman. That is not to say that working class solidarity does not exist, only to proffer that its voices are multifarious, complex expressions. In 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman,' Cairns Craig writes:

Unity of voice replaces unity of political or social purpose as the foundation of solidarity: the text *enacts* at a linguistic level what it

points to as absent in the world, a communality that transcends the absolute isolation of the individual human being. The fulfilment of working-class values that can no longer be completed in politics or in history is completed *textually* - resisting the arrest of solidarity and of political action by a linguistic substitution that insists on unity even as it presents disunity. (p.130)

Craig's description of unity of voice is a contentious one because what he is actually describing is a voice born out of conflict, sculpted in the overthrow of the standard third person narrative and reflecting the anarchic politics of its creator. Kelman's objective is not necessarily to build a new linguistic order but to allow disorder to flourish. It is within this undefineable framework that other imaginative opportunities become apparent.

I will argue that *Hunting Captain Henley* experiments with this register, and in so doing, advances its content to a state of extreme expression which has little to do with unity or solidarity but is instead representative of a voice which oscillates between an expression of Britishness and Scottishness, working-class and middle-class. Within this framework there can exist a fascist and, sometimes, a racist content. I use these terms separately because they are not always congruent in the sense that racism implies an intrinsic or genetic inferiority. Fascism, it could be argued, instead instigates a heightened sense of 'political emotion' for all people within a country, built around extreme nationalist sentiment. Yet it is not merely the 'politically active' fascist voice that is the stuff of the following thesis: it is the psychological micro-fascism of Billy's everyday existence within the context of a semi-militaristic family drenched in the sub-conscious squalor of empire. Nor is it necessarily the obtuse, ugly racism of the street that is dealt with. It is, rather, a more subtle 'cultural racism', the remnants of which are to be found in the modern master-maid relationship within the ex-pat communities in Dubai for example.

While other Scottish writers move between first and third person narration, sometimes to suggest fragmentation of the self (as in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, 1993) or to convey a self that only fully exists in the eyes of others (Maria Tambini in Andrew O'Hagan's *Personality*, 2004) *Hunting Captain Henley* attempts to 'stabilise' the disintegration of personality, to normalise its negative effects within the framework of an intrinsic 'empire of the mind.' In doing so I intend to demonstrate that in destabilising the authoritative narrative voice some Scottish writers such as Kelman, Janice Galloway and Alasdair Gray create an opportunity for experimentation.

One result of this experiment is the creation of a chaotic narrative style which I use to explore the growing fascist sensibilities of the narrator. Such sensibilities, I will argue, are a realistic potential consequence of the double-consciousness present, for example, in Janice Galloway's characters in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1995) a dual consciousness built on the back of the transition of the working-class into the middle-class through education and the condition of Scottish identity within a United Kingdom. It is during this shift that a form of alienation is born (as with Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Chris Guthrie), a transient existence which, I will argue, is central to the formation of the fascist *sposati* (displaced) consciousness and voice. This consciousness (or the human basis for fascism as I later refer to it) is not only built on both physical and linguistic 'uprootedness' but is also the product of ongoing obscure mystical sentiments and nebulous desires that remain unidentified but strong (the narrator's obsession with 'The Vertex' for example). In an early section of the critical component I will explore the links between 'automation conformity', or Marxist alienation, and the growth of Scottish authoritarianism. With reference to the works of Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, and T.W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1984), I will then explain how this embeds itself into a highly charged emotional language rippling with resentment.

The creation of this voice in my creative piece will sit alongside historical references which, arguably, go some way to filling the gap left by the 'cultural amnesia' cultivated alongside

misconceptions of Scottishness. It will challenge the work of new Black Scottish and Asian writers such as Sheila Puri and Leela Soma who portray Scotland only as a colonised and not a colonising country. This ‘blind side’ to emerging Scottish culture is, I will argue, just as prevalent in our white communities as it is in our Asian and Black ones. With reference to the work of Niall Ferguson and Tom Devine I will show how Scotland’s colonial past, for example, played a major role in the creation of the British Empire. As part of the critical component I will show how both historians renamed it The Scottish Empire to illustrate the substantial part played by Scots in its development. I have placed my narrator at the centre of this historical perspective to give a literary voice to the type of working class Scots who helped to make the Scottish Empire possible. There is one important caveat to this. Billy Queen did not participate in this, his father did. But it is the narrator’s struggle to re-enact, to almost ventriloquise his dead father’s voice, which creates his weird fascist psychology. I will then compare this often brutal historic role with contemporary, and often misleading, positive images of national identity. Using academic sources and examples from popular culture I will then illustrate the ‘cultural paradox’ that often exists within Scotland’s national psyche, a paradox embodied in Billy Queen throughout *Hunting Captain Henley*. With reference to primary sources I will argue that some Scots often choose to see England as the xenophobic coloniser as a way of conveniently disguising their own colonial past. In short, Scotland’s role as coloniser is largely forgotten in popular consciousness and culture. In conclusion I will argue that the roots of this national self-deceit is partly found in Scotland’s often uneasy relationship with England and in our understanding of our own struggle against a colonial power.

In essence my main focus is on how identity is ‘constructed’ socially and how this occurs in the novel through register, voice and narrative point of view. Billy Queen is a construction which collapses as the novel progresses. In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir suggests “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.” (p.12) In the context of Billy Queen he

is 'constructed' by his uncle and by his upbringing to develop a series of destructive masculine traits, such as violence and misogyny. Similarly he is not born British but becomes British, not born a racist, becomes racist. Billy's father is also a 'construction' of colonialism in that he was expected, not only to go to Suez, but to do 'the Scottish thing' and open fire under orders from Captain Henley. In other words it is imperialism which effectively defines what 'the Scottish thing' is. In *Gender Trouble* the theory of masquerade is relevant for Billy's 'perceived Britishness' in the adult section of the novel. It infiltrates his language, which becomes a reflective third person voice, hopefully to the extent that the reader asks himself: is it Billy who is actually saying this as opposed to a combination of Billy, his father, his uncles and, of course, Henley himself? The narrator's consciousness is such that he senses he is sub consciously being made to say things in a way which partly feels appropriate but is also alien, so he chooses to comment on his own experiences as someone apart from himself. He constructs different names for himself, Private Queen, Queenie, Billy, This Soldier. As he spirals downwards into a full identity crisis the narrator's ventriloquism increases, adding to the sense of loss of identity:

Aye. Expwowing. Private Queen could never get to grips with that particular term. Exploring. He's sure it's a throwback to the days of The Raj or summat. A British imperialist term. Let's go and explore India or even Afwica if we fuckin feel like it, ok. Who the fuck do they think they are anyway, David Livingstone? And Billy he's thinking about Scotland's part in all this now. We went to build bridges, to duff up the local population and to shag the natives, while our English cousins went expwowing. That was the agreement, man.

In *Gender Trouble* (1999) Judith Butler observes, “such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.” ( p.136). This argument would, in effect, decriminalize Billy in the adult section. The idea that it’s not his fault or his father’s fault but the fault of a greater force (in this case colonialism) is a consistent theme throughout the novel. Billy is born the son of a soldier whose mental illness is a product of an army incident which happened only because of British imperialist ambitions. Uncle Ron teaches English to the armed services in Dubai and is economically dependent on the British presence there. Even the books Billy reads at university relate to colonialism. All these factors, combined with the invasive voice of Captain Henley in his consciousness, are manifestations of the effects of colonialism on people around the narrator and on Billy himself.

In *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (1978), Francis Hart examines further the psychological effects of a dual national identity. Hart points out that in Edwin Muir’s *The Three Brothers* (1931) the protagonist David Blackadder “awakens to the horrifying polarities of Scottish life.” He writes:

In a world where Scots is spoken, David’s long, impressionistic reflections and dreams are in English, recalling the strange bifurcation of communication and thought, of experience and feeling, which Muir found symptomatic of the emptiness at the centre of Scottish culture. For David as for Muir, Scotland offered only painful psychic polarities and cultural options either frightening or stagnant. (p.211)

In *Hunting Captain Henley* Billy’s options are equally limited. His only escape from it is found in the momentum of the search for Henley himself. Without this drive to reach the root

cause of his father's illness, the narrator will ultimately succumb to the social and cultural restraints placed on being born Scottish working class then becoming educated. This does not become an all embracing, enlightening experience culminating in a fluid hybrid identity where the narrator is at ease in his complex dialectal condition. It is not a text where Scottish colloquial speech merges neatly with the voice of standard English. It is an awkward consciousness reflected in the often jarring, jagged nature of the narrative.

In 'The Politics of Narrative', Liam McIlvanney makes the point that in effect "Kelman's novels are first person narratives told in the third person." (p.203) Kelman's narrative technique, claims McIlvanney, in which there is no distinction between narrative voice and dialogue, is an attempt to keep faith with his characters. He points out, however, that for Kelman the rejection of the biased and elitist third party voice is "an urgent, political act," (p.203) or as Kelman himself says it is "getting rid of a whole value-system" (Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman' (p.4). It is the emergent narrative voice after the removal of this system which forms the starting point for my experiment. I will use this narrative voice to explore Scotland's contemporary fascist consciousness. This is the (sub)conscious not only of the extreme nationalist, but of those emotionally attached to the idea of 'fatherland', a concept steeped in, some would argue, almost spiritual, certainly mystical, ideas of dignity, pride, honour, and above all, one private nation filled with passionate people bonded by a sense of the 'extended social family', one with an intense sense of civic duty to the nation state. It is often a politically incorrect consciousness, willing to accept the charge of racism in favour of clarity and indigineous Scottish unity.

I touched earlier (p.4) on the idea of unity and how Kelman's third-person narrative voice, that relates the facts of the world, merges into the reflective third-person voice that interprets characters' states of minds and also merges into the dialogue. Far from creating unity, in *Hunting Captain Henley*, I am trying to demonstrate that the shift from the first person narrative, through the second, and into the reflective third-person voice (not dissimilar to

Kelman's technique), far from generating solidarity, is just as likely to generate a 'linguistic anarchy' from which 'chaotic identity' is created. Within this chaos the character spirals into a fascist consciousness obsessed with 'clarity of mission'.

Sometimes when you wake up in the morning you can't be bothered doing anything. But there are other times, like this morning, when your thinking is clear and clean. You were going to say as clear as ice but then ice isn't clear at all, not when you think about it. It is a solid mass of complications, trapped bubbles and so on. The clarity you are concerned with is of the purest variety - black clarity, infinite solitude. You have options. We all do. Choice is what living here in a western democracy is all about. Except, instead of creating clarity it encourages chaos, confusion, catastrophe if you want it.

*Hunting Captain Henley* (p.83)

In Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Roy Strang's imaginary hunting partner Sandy Jamieson is an exaggerated establishment figure and an archetypal white hunter or, as Roy describes him, "a former professional sportsman and an experienced hunter of man eating beasts" (Welsh, 1994:4). Jamieson is intrinsically racist and conservative in his outlook. Despite this, the narrator consistently shows his feigned respect for him by code-switching from Scots to Received Pronunciation during their surreal journey to the Emerald Forest Park. In the heat of the desert, Roy occasionally drops his linguistic guard, reverting to his natural language which is colloquial Edinburgh. As they discuss the merits of picking up two attractive female hitchhikers, for example, Roy says: "Plenty of opportunity tae get a ride... I mean, plenty of opportunity to enjoy the consort of attractive young ladies after we take care

of business” (Welsh, 1994:119).

This passage is of particular interest in terms of *Hunting Captain Henley* because it demonstrates the ‘openness’ of the experiment. Just as the conditions for the sexist voice are allowed to exist by Roy’s regular code-switching, the same can be said for the racist voice; in other words the ‘political malleability’ of language is clearly demonstrated. It also shows that, in this case, code-switching from Standard English to Scots in no way incurs a change of political mindset. The union of the ideas being expressed remains the same. This is not to suggest that language does not form a political consciousness, only to point to the idea that the unification of different dialects often cements the same type of political consciousness. In *Hunting Captain Henley* the closer the narrator gets to Henley the more influential the voice of Henley (and the voice of higher authority becomes). As the plot moves on it is clear that the relationship between Billy’s father and Captain Henley was more complex than first imagined, that both were tied to empire, and that the language of class is not so much a struggle between ‘higher and lower authorities’ or between ‘the vernacular’ and ‘Standard English’ but an agreement between men: sensitive, malleable, ever changing. It is this realisation that is the essence of this particular heart of darkness, Billy’s realisation that his dad has been in bed (linguistically) with Captain Henley all along.

Part of my motivation for doing this PhD is to use creative means to explore what it actually means to be an upper working class Scot. Dealing on a day-to-day basis with students it struck me there is a serious gap in young Scottish consciousness not dissimilar to that of young Germans who know of the Holocaust but prefer not to talk about it. There is a collective ‘cultural amnesia’ at work here. It is the one which is unaware, for example, of Scotland’s often brutal role in empire, the one which opts to see itself only as the colonised. This extends to a form of blame directed at England. It extends to areas of popular culture immersed in simplistic arguments: the English are football hooligans; the Tartan Army are fun-loving; everybody loves the Scots in Spain; they hate the English etc. The point is that

some theoretical arguments (especially Marxist thought) also suffers from a similar cultural amnesia (some might say moralistic and patronising) attitude to ideas of Scottishness. Some contemporary Scottish writing therefore becomes cosily customised to represent a new Scottish consciousness which conveniently marries Scots and English vernacular and so both live happily ever after in sickness and in health in the context of the New Scottish Parliament and democracy for all. It is my contention that Scottish writing is more diverse and complex than that.

To conclude this introductory section it is worth mentioning two books, one by the scholar Manfred Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity* (1984), and the other, *Modernism And Nationalism* (2004) by Margery McCulloch. The former is wide-ranging and general, focusing on the “problematic self consciousness” (p.1) surrounding Scottish Identity. Malzahn acknowledges the vastness of themes and meanings in Scottish novels, yet, bizarrely, continues his search for one meaning, one national identity, from all of the literature he analyses. In one way this author’s empirical search is similar to Billy Queen’s fictional search in *Hunting Captain Henley*. It is ‘Mission Impossible’ because literature is genetically universal and because both Billy’s dad and Captain Henley were actively involved in the maintenance of empire. In his essay in McCulloch’s *Modernism and Nationalism*, ‘The Predicament of the Scottish Writer’, Edwin Muir compares Scottish and Irish Literature, concluding that “Ireland produced a national literature not by clinging to Irish dialect, but by adopting English and making it into a language fit for all purposes.” (p.43) Scotland, he contends, does not possess “an organ for the expression of a whole and unambiguous nationality.” (p.43) Indeed it is the presence of this extreme ambiguity which I hope to show is the very essence of Billy Queen’s descent into ‘identity crises’ and then, like his father before him, mental illness.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1984) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari note:

Forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. No one is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality; those who are belong in special institutions.

*Hunting Captain Henley* demonstrates the converse. It is as Billy Queen's narrative (the third person) moves closer to Henley's Standard English that his alienation is complete and the psychological breakdown occurs, the narrator alone in a leper colony in deepest India, face to face with Henley in the new colonial world he has created.

Finally, it should be noted that the appendices attached to this thesis are representative of some of the published journalistic work generated during the research process. In Appendix One, 'Our Secret War' (2007), I have told the real story of my own father's colonial experiences. In Appendix Two, 'Class War in Clydebank' (2008), some fascist voices from my home town are recorded. And in Appendix Three 'Child Killers of The Congo' (2008), the extreme effects of war on children are highlighted.



## Chapter One Scotland's Empire

Imperial Scotland. What a strange ring they have, these words in conjunction. They evoke no memories; they call up no mental images: they stir no pulse. They fall meaningless upon the ear, a paradox with a plain implication of absurdity.  
(Gibb, 1937: 4)

I FIRST discovered the term 'intellectual myopia' in the essay 'Oppression and Solidarity' (*Some Recent Attacks. Essays Cultural & Political*) by James Kelman. In this work Kelman points to the 'intellectual myopia' of a black writer/academic visiting Glasgow who, during a discussion about the "historical culpability of white people in relation to black people" fails to acknowledge, as Kelman describes it, the "everyday brutalities the British state perpetrates on sections of its own people, its so called white brothers and sisters" (Kelman, 1992:73). While it is true that thousands of Scots had been sent as indentured labourers to the West Indies by Cromwell after the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, it is also the case that many prospered to become slavers themselves. The historian and author of *Origins of Scottish Nationhood* (2004) Neil Davidson says:

For peasants displaced by rationalisation or outright clearance, the Empire provided a way out, a means to a livelihood increasingly denied to them in the home country itself. Whether the Empire was considered as a proving ground or an escape route, two roles were particularly important for both Jacobites and Highlanders; one as the soldiers responsible for conquering new territories and

defending old possessions, the other as the settlers responsible for colonising them.

Two points strike me about the above paragraph. On the one hand there is Kelman's idealism, the notion that ordinary Glaswegians were the victims of an evil, brutal ruling class. On the other is Davidson's historical realism, the contention that ordinary Scots played an active role in their own economic survival during this period, and used the links with empire to achieve this.

In this section I will contend that the former is an over simplification of the white working class Scottish experience and that the same type of people were actively and willingly involved in the creation of the British Empire, forced into it by poverty and desperation maybe, but conscious participants nonetheless. It is this myopic 'idealisation' of the working class (common among many left wing theorists) that mystifies a clear interpretation of history and creates the 'cultural amnesia' I refer to in the Introduction to this critical component. The monophonic discussions I refer to clearly exist not only in literary criticism but in history and journalism also. The award winning left wing Australian journalist John Pilger writes: "Journalism is about looking behind facades and not accepting the consensus view or official version of events" (Pilger, 2006).

He continues:

It is about not accepting the official version of history. There is a facade to Australia and behind it is a rapacious history, especially with regard to the Aborigines. There is a campaign now in the Australian media about domestic violence among Aborigines. It is so hypocritical. This is a country that has had a big relationship with alcohol and domestic violence. I know it. But they are using that as another stick with which to beat the Aborigines, which is quite

shameful. (Pilger, 2006)

Pilger's position vis a vis the Aborigines tends to assume an idealised vision of the innocence of that particular group, a facade in itself. Closer to the truth is the fact that, like white Australians, there is a problem with alcohol abuse and wife beating among Aborigines. The formula repeats itself in Scotland in the media coverage of asylum seekers. There are concerns about racism among the indigeneous white Scots population in certain neighbourhoods, directed at the ethnic minority families. While this may be a valid concern in some instances, what isn't said is that racism is quite common among some asylum seekers, a fact that goes unreported. When writers and journalists, like politicians, claim to represent the viewpoints of any group of people an instant misrepresentation or over simplification of the wider human experience occurs. This is the limitation of journalism. Yes, there's racism, the Ku Klux Klan, fascism, within the Metropolitan Police. But there's also racism in the Irish Republican Movement, the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Conservative Party and in the asylum seeking community.

Before further analysing Davidson's position I will consider the term 'conscious participants' in more depth. Some left wing theorists may argue that Scottish racism results from an Empire which forced them into a subordinate position and exploited them as much as they were 'required' to exploit others. This, in some ways, is similar to the position which argues that British soldiers, for example, are press ganged into serving their country, that they are innocent men and women shipped off to fight a distant imperial war not of their making. Although press ganging in the literal sense no longer exists it is true to say that more subtle psychological forms of press ganging exist in today's Britain. My own father (the inspiration for my fictional project) left home to escape the desperation of a broken relationship with his father (my grandfather). But this monographic representation of his motives is an over simplification of the truth. He was a young man. He felt invincible. He sought adventure overseas. And he probably did feel patriotic as indeed many soldiers do. In this sense the

army, and the British involvement in Suez (imperialism) provided a way out. He made the conscious choice and, going by his letters home, it was, at the time, the right choice for him. *Hunting Captain Henley* is therefore an attempt to fill in the gaps left by the partially accurate left wing position. Yes the tobacco lords exploited the ‘poor folk o Glescae’ and yes, the British Army exploited my dad, but both were conscious participants, economically restricted yes, but participants nonetheless. This partial coverage of history is relevant because it is partly responsible for fuelling this thesis. The gaps that exist create the confusion which lead to the alienation of the fictional character Billy Queen in *Hunting Captain Henley*. In essence the chaotic identity (and language), the hybrid mix of Scottishness/Britishness, working class university education and the not knowing who Henley is ( in relation to his father)- this is what leads to breakdown and the deconstruction of his entire self. As the novel progresses it is not so much the unravelling of the facts of his father’s involvement in empire which horrifies. It is the intellectual vacuum of a system which wants Billy to believe his father was not to blame, that the Aborogines are not at fault, that asylum seekers are not racist, that ‘the guid working folk oh Glescae’ didn’t play a part in slavery - this is the real horror, the real psychological terror, an attempted cover-up that leads to breakdown.

In the course of my research on empire the absence of empirical details about the common folk who did take part struck me as strange, yet probably not surprising considering the historical and journalistic facades that exist.

Neil Davidson’s position as a historian is of particular relevance to this thesis not because of what he has become but because of what he had to battle against to make his historical points.

He says:

When I first suggested that there might be a connection between the Scottish nation and the British Empire, four years ago in *The Origins*

*of Scottish Nationhood*, the suggestion was met with outrage in some quarters of the left, on the grounds that the Scots had no special role in the British Empire and that, if we had, it was because the English made us do it: in other words, the ‘we were only obeying orders’ defence, which, apart from being a lie, is not particularly flattering to the Scots. Far from being in any sense a victim of imperialism, Scotland was, as an integral part of the British state, a major component of one. Nor was it a ‘junior partner’ - a thesis whose main function is to evade Scottish responsibility for the nature of the British Empire. (Davidson, 2004)

This ‘we were only obeying orders’ defence is similar to the position of some culturally and academically prioritised Scottish writers who write only from a position of oppression or innocence. While some historians have at least caught up (Michael Fry’s *The Scottish Empire* (2001) and Tom Devine’s *Scotland’s Empire* (2004) to name two such texts) the intellectual myopia or cultural amnesia of Scotland’s literary intellegensia still persists. Davidson says: “The argument that we shouldn’t talk about these things, in the new dawn of devolution, but concentrate on the positive side of our history is all the left ever does” (Davidson, 2004). It is clear, therefore, that unless we confront, and this is the responsibility of this thesis, some of the negative aspects of Scottish culture, then we will fail to progress in an enlightened frame of mind.

*Hunting Captain Henley* is designed to force the fascist narrator to face up to his own family’s and Scotland’s unsavoury connections with empire. While at university Billy Queen discovers, for example, that in July 1857 Colonel John Neill, born in Ayr and educated at Glasgow University, forced Hindus to lick up the blood and gore from the dead bodies of

British women and children mutilated during the Indian Mutiny at Cawnpore. He then hanged them. As he did so Neil said “the word of God gives no authority to the modern tenderness for human life.” (Fry, 2001:198) In *The Scottish Empire* Michael Fry writes: “In his lust for revenge Neil was none too scrupulous in dealing with the evidence for or against those he doomed. It seems clear that he did condemn some innocent men” (Fry, 2001: 198). At Lucknow, the 93rd regiment, the Sutherland Highlanders, exacted further brutal revenge. Fry writes: “The Scots were astonished to find themselves up against female negro slaves who ‘fought like wildcats’, but these they were cut down along with the rest.” During the carnage, Fry notes, “a silent, well-read Highlander known to his mates as Quaker Wallace, was reported to have slain 20, reciting verses of the 116th psalm as he drove his blade into their bodies.” (Fry, 2001:199)

In his essay ‘The Culture of Migration: Scots as Europeans 1500-1800’, Christopher Smout criticises contemporary Scottish culture for failing to represent what he calls Scotland’s “martial tradition” - or “the willingness to be a paid fighter in an army, which stretches in unbroken sequence from the Hundred Years War to the Gulf War,” and which is “a critical and underestimated aspect of Scottish cultural history” (Smout, 1997:27).

The building of the Scottish Empire was, at times, a brutal business. Colonial Scots often ruled with an iron fist. From Canada to Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand the Scots dictated policy in church, education, politics, journalism, management, craftsmanship, butchery, and farming. In *The Scots Overseas* (1983) Gordon Donaldson writes: “All in all, the success of the Scots abroad was not exaggerated by Sir Charles Dilke when he wrote, ‘In British settlements, from Canada to Ceylon, from Dunedin to Bombay, for every Englishman that you meet who has worked himself up to wealth from small beginnings without external aid, you find ten Scotchmen. Whereas the Irishman crosses the seas ‘in sorrow and despair’, the Scot does so ‘in calculating contentment’.” (Donaldson, 1983: 62)

Many Scottish authors contributed to Scotland’s idea of itself as the ardent coloniser, some in

pamphlets to encourage emigration to Canada for example. In *Scots in Canada* (1911) John Murray Gibbons writes:

I am the land that listens; I am the land that broods,  
Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline water and woods;  
I wait for the man who will win me, and I will not be won in a day;  
And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle, suave and mild,  
But by men with the hearts of Vikings, and the simple faith of a child.

In this poem Canada is clearly the land that ‘listens’ to the Scottish colonising voice. Canada is an empty, feminine space waiting to be filled by Scotsmen.

In a speech at the Word Power Books Fringe Festival (August 2004) entitled ‘Enlightenment Myths and Highland Realities’ historian Neil Davidson underlined that by the mid-18th century 60 per cent of British imports regularly came from Bengal and that trade was controlled by a small number of merchant agencies. At their height in 1803, says Davidson, there were only twenty-three based in Calcutta, of whom the six most important were dominated by Scots. In the East India Company in 1772 Scots represented one in nine of its civil servants, one in eleven of its common soldiers, and one in three of its officers. Davidson continues: “It was not ‘English capitalism’ which caused the bones of countless Bengalis to bleach in the sun, but a fully integrated British capitalism in which the Scots played a leading role.” He concludes:

The attitudes fostered by our imperial role survive today. The militarism, racism and xenophobia that so disfigure Scottish society - overlaid and strengthened by our very own traditions of Protestant bigotry - are not superficial aspects which can be discarded by the establishment of border posts along the Tweed. It is complacency of the highest order to imagine that secession from England, without a deeper transformation of values, will remove the darker side of our national psyche: in a nation formed by empire it could scarcely be otherwise. The imperial legacy will not be expunged without our conscious intervention (Davidson, 2004: 6)

The point is that Scottish workers aren't exempt from the holistic human experience. Writers and artists too confront extremism and brutality in their subject matter. In *Some Recent Attacks* Kelman correctly points to the 18th century Glasgow merchants who made their fortunes as slavers. Kelman writes: "In the Caribbean they owned huge plantations and forced people to work on them for nothing. They were slavers." (p.49). But like so many other left wing versions of history Kelman's analysis then stops. It doesn't ask who physically forced them to work for nothing. So who actually cracked the whip? It is the very white Scottish working class that Kelman refers to, I refer to them as the lieutenants of empire, those who were directly involved in this. In 1817, ten years after the abolition of the slave trade, the Scots in Jamaica still held more slaves than the average white. The slave Registration returns for that year show that, in the parishes sampled, Scots comprised 23.5 per cent of the white population, but owned 32.4 per cent of the slaves. (Davidson, 2004: 116).

The idea that ordinary white Scottish people are culpable in relation to black is one further explored by the black Caribbean British journalist Darcus Howe. In an article for *The Sunday Herald* he talks about his life as a child on a sugar plantation in Trinidad where a Scots overseer was in charge. He writes: "He straddled a horse, whip in hand, overseeing indentured Indians. My mother told me he was from a place called Scotland 'a rather bleak place' she said, and one that produced very cruel people. 'The English are gentlemen and the Scots are brutes'" (Howe, 2002: Seven Days). Howe argues that the Scots were especially brutal in maintaining their superiority over the natives because they themselves had experienced "second-class citizenship" to the English in the colonies. He writes: "In the hierarchy of labour in Caribbean slavery, the Scots were central to the organisation and production of sugar. The English kept their hands rather clean and left the physical brutality to Scottish overseers. They put down slave revolts with a savagery never experienced in the world of work" (Howe, 2002: Seven Days). While this may provide a counter argument that Scottish racism resulted from an Empire which forced them into a subordinate position and exploited

them as much as they were 'required' to exploit others, there is no denying the breadth and intricacy of the Scottish colonial experience.

Howe makes another valid point. He argues that the Scots were not born cruel but that when it comes to its own representation of itself Scotland "has been rather bold in unburdening itself of the virus of racism stored in its head over the centuries" (Howe, 2002: Seven Days). The Scots invented racism, he claims, and it was their involvement in slavery and colonialism which "transformed the Scottish personality" (Howe, 2002: Seven Days).

This state of self-denial arguably manifests itself in many ways. In June 2002 the SNP commissioned a System 3 poll to firmly refute what it regarded as a completely misleading impression created by a previous poll published six weeks before, one which shocked politicians of all parties. The previous poll of 530 people by Scottish Opinion showed that "large numbers of Scots hold racist views", claiming that almost half of Scots would "back moves to return immigrants to their country of origin." By contrast the SNP System 3 Poll of 931 people showed that 80% of Scots believe people in their country should have "equal rights and fair treatment regardless of colour, creed or country of origin." (Sunday Herald, June 2002).

Scotland's colonial self-denial can even be found in its national anthem, Flower of Scotland. The song represents Scotland as a small, innocent nation battling against the English bully to protect its "wee bit hill and glen." Unlike Rule Britannia (written by Scots poet James Thompson) there are no references to the colonial supremacy which the Scots played such an integral part in. This belief that the English are and have been colonial oppressors while the Scots are internationally loved has filtered into the consciousness of many young people today. The idea that it wasn't the British Empire but the English Empire and the Scots were only colonial victims is, in some quarters, a well established mindset, as is the idea that nobody likes the English, everybody loves the Scots. Indeed, the Scottish Nationalist Hugh MacDiarmid once said:

The extraordinary consensus of opinion in Scotland against the English on the score of their greed, stupidity, their cruelty, their snobbery is thoroughly well founded and arises basically from the fact that the English, like their cousins the Germans, have a 'herren volk' tradition and are intolerably arrogant and overbearing (Daiches, 1977, 189).

This comment is interesting because it sheds light on Scotland's need to focus on the negative characteristics of the English before it can create a representation of itself. The implication is that if the English are all of the above then the Scots certainly are not. Yet the archives of The Church of Scotland, for example, illustrate the arrogant snobbery and racism of that institution. One of the reports in the archives of the general assembly in the 1930's attempts to define Scottishness as "A law abiding, thrifty and industrious race (the Scots) is being supplanted by immigrants whose presence tends to lower the social conditions, and to undermine that spirit of independence which has so long been a characteristic of the Scottish people" (Ferguson, 2002:17). The committee's convener, the Rev Dr John White goes on to talk about "the menace of the Irish race", and accuses Irish immigrants of being part of a "papist conspiracy to subvert presbyterian values". Scotland, he added, was "overgorged with Irishmen (Ferguson, 2002:18).

Scotland's representation of itself is therefore ambiguous, as is the case with many national identities. In *Ethnicity and Language* (1997) Gerry Smith writes: "The identity of Indian and other people in Britain is complicated by a history of colonial relations, and this in turn is linked with the other major form of response to modern immigration." (Smith, 1997: 260) Yet while India was a distant colonial land with vastly different religions and cultures, Scotland was a near neighbour, genetically and, after the Union of 1707, economically and politically connected. In this sense the Scots idea of themselves is further complicated by this nearness, this sameness to the coloniser. So any definition or clarity of national identity becomes an internal psychological struggle, plagued by contradictions and even hypocrisy. In *The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland* (1983), Hugh Trevor-Roper

argues that, “the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention.” He also writes: “Before the later years of the 17th century the Highlanders of Scotland did not form a distinct people. They were simply the overflow of Ireland.” He also argues that the West of Scotland was “racially and culturally” (Roper, 1983: 235) a colony of Ireland. In today’s Scotland many people, especially in the West, celebrate their Irishness, whether Unionist or Republican. Many simply celebrate Britishness. It could be argued that Glasgow Rangers Football Club, for example, flies the Union Jack to underline its allegiance to the crown and its colonial history.

Scotland’s history is riddled with ambiguity of feeling about its national identity, especially since the Act of Union in 1707. In some instances, for example, Robert Burns expresses a British patriotism.

Be Britain still to Britain true,  
Amang oursels united;  
For never but by British hands  
Must British wrangs be righted.  
(The Dumfries Volunteers, 1795)

Yet in others he clearly sides with Jacobite sentiment. In his poem ‘Address to the De’il’ (1784) for example the highland garden plant ‘ragweed’ which is also called ‘Stinking Billy’, is introduced. It is named after William (Billy), the Duke of Cumberland, infamous for his ruthless treatment of the survivors of the Battle of Culloden.

In *Scotland and The Union* David Daiches repeatedly refers to this “cultural ambiguity”, or to “the paradoxes of Scotland’s urban culture” (Daiches, 1977: 190). He talks about “this kind of ambivalence of feeling among Scotsmen, a mingled desire to be British and to be known as Scots” (Daiches, 1977: 190). He writes: “Even in the Victorian years when so many Scots went out to govern the Empire there remained signs of this disorientation in uncertainty about identity. The whole process of what might be called Balmoralisation, with the associated

burgeoning of the tourist trade in tartanry and the mixing up of all of this with the kilt, whisky, haggis and the Road to the Isles, represented an extraordinary distortion of the history of Scottish culture and an ignorant confusion of wholly separate elements in that history ” (Daiches, 1997:191). Daiches describes Scottish gentility as being “a curiously defensive posture stemming from a simultaneous attempt to repudiate the vulgarities of vernacular Scots, demonstrate the advantages of social propriety, and assert a Scottish presence” (Daiches, 1997:191).

Perhaps this awkward stance partly explains the point of this part of my critical component. Scotland as coloniser, brutal or otherwise, is a role which is scarcely, if at all, represented in today’s popular culture. Since researching this section I have repeatedly come across the terms “paradox”, “ambiguity” and “uncertainty” about Scotland’s “representation of itself”. Concluding his pre-devolution essay ‘Scotland - The Brand: Heritage, Identity and Ethnicity’, David McCrone points out that “there is considerable suspicion of cultural presentations of Scotland, and still more of their commercial exploitation” (McCrone, 1997:50).He writes: “Scotland is a stateless nation in which there is very little democratic control over the means of its own cultural reproduction. Its capacity to shape its representation is severely limited. Until such time as this is regained, then the charge that Scotland exists simply as a ‘land of dreamtime’ will remain.” (McCrone, 1997: 50).

It could be argued, however, that current trends in Scottish national identity reflect not just our relationship with England but our experiences as both coloniser and colonised. In *National Identity In Post Devolution Scotland* (2002) Ross Bond and Michael Rosie combined an analysis of the Third Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, conducted in 2001, with findings from other recent surveys. According to their results Scotland’s representation of itself is contentious. They write:

Whilst it seems that Britishness is declining as a popular or prioritised national identity it should not be concluded that Britishness is

necessarily 'declining' in absolute terms, since a very large proportion of people in Scotland profess to hold at least a dual sense of national identity." The researchers then say "there has been a substantial strengthening of Scottishness" pointing out that "it could be that we have entered a post devolution period in which a consistently high, and perhaps growing, number of Scots will allow no room for Britishness in their own national identity." They conclude by saying: "National Identity still matters, but not to the extent and in the manner that we would perhaps expect" (Bond, Rosie, 2002:37).

In conclusion, the conflict between Scottishness and Britishness is, arguably, partly responsible for Scotland's confused and often non-existent colonial self-image. While Flower of Scotland celebrates a defensive battle against English colonisers, the world famous Edinburgh tattoo celebrates Scottish militarism and subsequent colonial glory. While both aspects represent different periods and aspects of Scottish history it is the former which takes precedence in today's national psyche, the latter becoming confused with romanticised heather, bagpipes and glens imagery, mystifying the harsh reality of Scotland's calculating, and often brutal role in the creation and maintenance of The Scottish Empire.

## Chapter Two

### Cultural Repression

IN *Hunting Captain Henley* the narrator sets out on a journey, a personal, physical journey to find Captain Henley, who he believes has persecuted his father. But it is also an intellectual journey, a journey of rational discovery in which Billy Queen uncovers the real facts behind his father's relationship with Henley, proving that empire was very much a two-way deal between the Captain and the Private, between Scotland and England.

In the section 'Scotland's Empire' I argued that some historians have recently taken this path (see Davidson, Devine, Fry) but that these were exceptions not rules. In this chapter of the critique I will examine the reasons behind cultural amnesia, arguing that if imperialism or fascism isn't openly acknowledged in today's Scotland one must deduce there is a 'repressed fascism' at work in Scottish culture.

In *Being Scottish* the Glaswegian Pakistani writer and anti-racist campaigner, Robina Qureshi, touches on this very point. She writes:

I now accept that this society rejects us but doesn't want to admit its complicity. I know the anger I feel at being given stupid justifications for injustices by people claiming to be intelligent and more superior. What a veneer. At least admit your racism. The history of Scotland is a whitewashed one that forgets the sponging off poorer countries that Scotland did during its colonialist era. As for this oath of allegiance they are talking about for new 'immigrants' - what a disgrace. An oath

of allegiance to a deeply racist society?

(p.217)

Unlike Billy Queen, who is reared in the overtly racist environment of Uncle Alex and the Dubai ex-pats, and so has to deal with his own cultural inheritance, the effects of institutionalised racism are, arguably, more subtle and therefore more dangerous in the dormant consciousness of many white Scots. This invisible fascism manifests itself in various ways: in the silence of our politicians in Edinburgh who, as Michael Gardiner notes in his introduction to *Modern Scottish Culture*, “show an unwillingness to rethink a neo-colonial foreign policy.” (p.1) While our savagery is acted out on foreign fields we continue in our economically stable environment to turn a blind eye to the reality of the human condition. Apart from Irvine Welsh, who parodies the loyalist-unionist explorer ethic in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1996), Scottish writers have largely ignored the potential fascist mindset of Scottish culture. There are, presumably, many complex reasons for this. In his *Essays on Censorship* (1996) J. M. Coetzee suggests that “by not admitting that it exists, self-censorship aligns itself with lies and spiritual corruption.” (p.36) Self-censorship apart, in his essay ‘Divergent Scottishness’ Douglas Dunn writes:

There is an atmosphere of “political correctness” which encourages social narrowing in favour of a working-class, left wing, vernacular authorship. More than a hint of perverse cultural censorship can be detected in the critical favouritism of the day; and as it is one which denies the full identity of the country, it can be considered serious. Here too, though, overstated leftist, radical, conservative and nationalist tactics can be understood. They are resistant and self-

protective as well as lashing out at political opponents. Instinctively or by design, they counter further inroads on local or Scottish phenomena of one kind or another, while, in the case of recent Glasgow fiction, an identity and a dignity have largely been created as if for the first time.

(p.150 *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies*)

While Dunn's comments are of obvious interest to this critical component, his argument does not go far enough. What, for example, is the full identity of the country? How does cultural censorship survive and manifest itself? And if we accept that cultural censorship is at work, what are the consequences for new or emerging Scottish writers in the wake of what is commonly known as the Glasgow Renaissance? As discussed in the previous chapter on the fascist voice we surely must accept that extremist thinking, in many forms, left or right, can grip any society, including Scottish society. We need look no further than the spread of anti-Englishness for example. In *Being Scottish* (2002) the diplomatic editor of *The Sunday Herald*, Trevor Royle writes:

When I came to Scotland there was a dichotomous attitude about the southern neighbour which stopped short of xenophobia but still simmered unpleasantly below the surface. On a sunny day people would remark with an air of self-congratulation that it was raining in England, a classmate showed no embarrassment in claiming that the air seemed fresher once the train had crossed the bridge at Berwick, and I remember being at the receiving end of a bashing for no other reason than my accent annoyed my attacker.

(p.234)

In the absence of any other, rightly or wrongly, *Hunting Captain Henley* tries to explore this mindset in depth, not as lightweight parody, but as a profound, meaningful and prosaic expression of the narrator's experience of being Scottish and with it, a hardened sense of anti-Englishness.

Over in the English camp Leon and his dad have built this big dam with all these wee paper Cross of St George's fluttering on top. I ask Uncle Alex if we can build a better one, a Scottish one. But he's like this, fuck off ya wee prick.

I just sit in the sand and dig ma ain wee hole.

A couple of hours later I retreat to the sand dunes with the binoculars to watch the North Scottish Sea, swirling, birling, bubbling grey and white it was, overrunning their moats, smashing into their poofy turrets, angry, vicious, attacking, wave after wave after wave, until there was nothing except big choppy currents slapping into each other, sizzling like lava.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, P.31)

In *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (1989) Beveridge and Turnbull argue that Scottish intellectuals have largely ignored the local upper working class suburban culture (of Billy Queen) simply because it carries little prestige. But the roots of this cultural repression *are* examined, for example, by Tom Nairn in *Break-up of Britain* (2003). He portrays popular culture in Scotland as deviant and deformed. It is, he writes "an especially mindless popular culture revolving in timeless circles," - a place where popular culture is condemned to develop

“in a crazy fashion.” (p.57) He writes:

Instead of the normal experience of nationalist culture, the Scots had only their remarkable assemblage of heterogeneous elements, neurotic double-binds, falsely honoured shades, and brainless vulgarity.  
(P.57)

The voice of Billy Queen has evolved blindly, invisibly unchallenged, and unrepresented. The roots of his neurosis express themselves through *diglossia*, a doubling of dialects. In *Modern Scottish Culture* Michael Gardiner notes:

In Scotland, a child can go to school to receive an education which is highly British, being trained away from his native dialect, then go home, switch dialects and go back to talking about concerns more specific to himself as a Scot - effectively changing national orientation a number of times a day.  
(P.13)

Billy Queen’s diglossia can be linked to a form of ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’, a term first used by G.Gregory Smith in his study *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919) and subsequently taken over by MacDiarmid as one of the key terms in his concept of Scottish national identity. It is meant to describe the schizophrenic nature of Scottish identity and the bringing together of opposites. But while *the way* in which members of this culture express themselves are examined, the content of what they are actually saying is partially ignored. This analysis of content, evoked via the creation of Billy Queen, is a new part of the debate, specifically concerned with the fascist consciousness expressed during the experience

of Caledonian antiszygy. In terms of exploring it from the inside Scottish writers have largely ignored the potential fascist mindset of Scottish culture. In *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* Beveridge and Turnbull note:

An inferiorist discourse here reinforces a particular kind of leftist politics, according to which the working class is essentially an oppressed group with little or no understanding of its situation, a repository of false consciousness.

(P.12)

In terms of Scotland's development during the Enlightenment period it could be argued that the seeds of Billy Queen's false consciousness and subsequent fascist mindset and that of his uncles were 'genetically sown' then.

One consequence of the Enlightenment tradition of scepticism (as explored by David Hume) for example is that of 'cultural surveillance', or the ability to place individuals relative to some kind of visual map. In *Hunting Captain Henley* Uncle Alex is obsessed with 'monitoring situations,' a tradition followed by Billy himself as he tracks Henley's son Lance to a university campus in London.

Occasionally you need luck in this tracking game, this bounty hunting it's a tiresome business - it takes you to the edge of logic, to the who,why,where and when of your very existence. You walk along a row of parked cars, glancing inside each of them for the scantiest of leads. Where is he? Who is he? What does he drive? Does he drive? The Jaguar can't be his, too flash. What about the The Cherokee Jeep? No way. Lance is never a family man. The bashed in Mini? Could be.

It's British. Practical. Historic. Perfect for an -up-and-coming academic like Lance.

(P.129)

As shown in the previous chapter there is much evidence to prove that the working classes can affiliate themselves to the extreme right (fascism) although to read cultural accounts of Scottish life one would think being Scottish somehow eliminates you from even considering the possibilities of fascism within Scotland, a strange intellectual position for a country central to the spread of British imperialism to find itself in. It is, of course, this very disorientation which leads the narrator in *Hunting Captain Henley* across the world to India in search of an explanation. Like an orphaned child he has to know who his parents really are. His search may be basic, his objectives crassly esoteric, but for Billy this represents a new start, an opportunity to dispense with the confusion of his childhood. Once achieved he may at least be able to settle into adulthood, to play an independent and forthright part in the world, knowing who he really is and where he should be going.

Robina Querishi's point (see p.27) about a repressed racism being present in today's Scotland is an interesting one no-less because it captures the zeitgeist of elements of ethnocentrism (the thinking of nations as discrete groups or 'races') at work within certain mindsets in Scotland. In *Modern Scottish Culture* Michael Gardiner writes:

Much of the confusion over the very possibility of national cultures arises from a confusion between these two ways of using the national adjective - let's call them the concrete use ('British passport') and the multiculturalist use ('Scottish style') Racism is inevitable if we slide between them.

(P.6)

The root of this confusion can arguably be traced to the Enlightenment period where a 'unique' Scotland took part in an Anglo British style globalisation. As part of the Union Scotland effectively surrendered Romantic nationalism opportunities in favour of 'British opportunities'. Enlightenment Anglocentrism led to what Marinell Ash called a 'strange death of Scottish history'. This, as discussed in the previous chapter, leads to various forms of cultural amnesia, another component in the cultural repression which results in silence around the theory of the potential fascist nature of the Scottish psyche. One argument suggests the Scots invented scientific racism, paving the way for imperialist development within the empire. The 'body snatchers' Burke and Hare, for example, are in many ways, a strong example of this - colonised Irish settlers digging up bodies to sell to the Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox - who published *The Races of Man* in 1850. But if Scotland did invent racism why is its potentially fascist psyche seemingly buried today? In the introduction to this thesis the point is made that in the history of the Spanish Civil war only the Scots of the International Brigade are remembered, the fascists forgotten. At the heart of Tom Nairn's *Break-up of Britain* is his discussion on tartanry and its role in national consciousness, it forms part of his 'deviant and deformed' perspective on popular Scottish culture. In *The Bulletin of Scottish Politics* (1998) Lindsay Paterson describes tartanry as the only set of signs Scots have at their disposal for the construction of a meaning of themselves and their country. He describes it as 'a bit of an opiate' and 'an ideology to help people to adjust to their environment' (p.130): ideal compensation for material deprivation. In *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* Beveridge and Turnbull write:

This is unfortunate, since these symbols offer no way of criticising existing society. They function, instead, to mystify; they prevent Scots from seeing themselves, their history and social reality with any clarity, and provide comfort and escape and false reasons for pride and

satisfaction.

(P,13)

The idea that popular consciousness is dominated by tartanry, football, drink and mindless religion, is of interest to this critical component because, again, it clouds the existence of ‘other consciousness’, including that of racism and fascism. The main thrust of Beveridge and Turnbull’s argument is that the Scottish intellegensia is repeatedly guilty of accepting this ‘damning conception of national culture’ . It is, arguably, as a result of this acceptance, that the polarisation between popular consciousness and the intellegensia exists, resulting in, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the unheard fascist voice within elements of the Scottish petite bourgeoisie.

One theory which attempts to explain the psychology of this cultural repression is Inferiorism (see *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p.4) In essence it argues that our writers, journalists, critics and academics are (consciously or subconsciously) so heavily influenced by ‘colonial values’ that they are too ready to accept given images or explanations of Scottish subculture. In other words, the argument goes, even the ‘fascist consciousness’ and imperialist propaganda advertising values are beyond the thinking of the everyday man and woman whose frame of mind is dulled by consumerism, soaps, and football opiates. The concept of inferiorisation, developed by Fanon in his description of the effects of external control in the Third World offers strong insights into the Scottish predicament. According to Fanon, a colonised people is subjected to a process of mystification. Pivotal to this is the repeated belittling of the colonised culture which is viewed as backward and inferior. Fanon writes: “Every effort is made to bring the colonised person to admit the inferiority of his culture.” (*The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p.5) This argument is then taken up by what Beveridge and Turnbull describe as the *evolues*, those natives who try to escape from their so called backwardness by desperate identification with the culture of the metropolis. It is during

this process that cultural amnesia occurs and the process of stereotyping (kilts, tartanry) begins. Whether or not this description fits elements today's Scottish Intellegensia is another question, what it does highlight, however, is, arguably, the misrepresentation of the Scottish experience, including the potential of the fascist consciousness within that experience. Ironically, it is (partly) the antithesis of Fanon's argument which, in the Scottish case, is most relative to the 'fascist consciousness' perspective. An adaptation of Fanon's argument to fit the Scottish model would suggest that the colonialist (unionist) position sees the Scots as a brutish, illiberal, vicious people, capable of the type of behaviour evoked in *Hunting Captain Henley* and that only the guiding, tolerant, decent hand of the English (the colonial culture) can reform the potentially barbarian Scots. Two points can be developed from this. Perhaps *Hunting Captain Henley* is, partly, a direct result of the creative use of the 'evolves mentality'. Contrary to this interpretation, however, is the fact that the brutish nature of Henley himself is clearly documented in the narrative during a series of flashbacks to the 1950's Suez Canal, the point being that both colonised and coloniser are capable of savagery.

The 'Braveheart' phenomenon, the simplified perception that highland clans lived in peace before the English colonisers brutalised them is, arguably, a dangerous over simplification of the human experience. As history shows, murderous clan warfare existed in Scotland long before this event. It is a notion again reiterated at the beginning of Ken Loach's brilliant cinematic evocation of beautiful brutality in *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, (2006) where the fascist Scots Black and Tan colonisers participate in the raping and pillaging of an apparently peaceful Southern Ireland, a rural utopia where the indigenous Irish apparently know no evil, see no evil, until the evil Brits arrive, many of them brutalised by their prior experiences at The Somme.

Loach's film is of note to this critical component not only because it is one of the few artistic representations of the vicious colonising Scot at work, but because it clearly highlights the vulnerability of those Irish Republicans who chose to oppress their own people after

signing an agreement with the British government. The infectious nature of the fascist temperament is subtly conveyed as the habits and attitudes of the oppressor become those of the oppressed, a theme central to Billy Queen's self discovery during the hunt for Henley. The anti-English thugs who bullied Trevor Royle are, at least, visible in their acts. But it is the invisible fascism at work in Robina Qureshi's experience, its institutionalised silent relation, the repressed fascist consciousness of the masses, which remains largely unexplored - that is the potential catalyst for a new cultural energy waiting to be unleashed on a country whose empire has folded in on itself. In a discussion in *Revolving Culture: Notes from the Scottish Republic* (1994) about the work of the Glasgow artist Ken Currie, Angus Calder writes:

Currie's art connects with the doubts and despairs of a Scottish population which may be on the verge of mass retreat into private bitterness and apathy, may be about to throw up from the hopeless lives of young unemployed people, very nasty, quasi-fascist, or actually fascist, forms of blind revolt.

P.(256)

In better economic times New Labour's world may date Calder's point, but the oppressed twisted figures in Currie's paintings still capture those momentary moods of resentment in a country increasingly lacking direction and leadership, a Scotland unclear of its true colonial history, its real role in the world today. It is within the violent triangle of Billy Queen's imaginary vertex that the real battles are raging. Win or lose, his new national identity will be forged with his eyes wide-open, unblinded by an ever increasing political correctness which ignores one aspect of who we really are.



### Chapter Three The Fascist Voice

IN THE introduction to this thesis I used the term ‘cultural amnesia’ to describe some Scots’ attitudes to Scotland’s involvement in British colonialism. In ‘Wyndham Lewis’s Fascist Imagination’ Reed Way Dasenbrock writes: “If we read only what we see as sharing our values, as embodying ‘correct perspectives’ on issues of race, class, and gender, then we close ourselves off to much of the enduring expression of the world’s cultures.” (p.97) *Hunting Captain Henley* is designed to reflect certain nuances within Scottish life which, I contend, are often discussed but which are not clearly defined. They may also be described as a relatively unexplored mindset, the anti-asylum seeker hairdresser, the pro-capital punishment taxi driver, the anti-workforce electronics businessman. In May 2006 the local elections in England saw the British National Party win 46 seats. According to the BBC, Barking Labour MP Margaret Hodge was criticised for saying that during the campaign 80% of white families were “tempted” by the BNP. (bbc.co.uk, extreme politics, 11.3.07) Yet in Scotland the extreme right has failed to progress, despite the fact that fascist style mindsets are present in many areas of Scottish life. They may be quite large in number, yet their voices remain relatively obscure. It is this very obscurity, on a wider level, which my thesis attempts to shed light on.

In *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus (Mass Psychology of Fascism)* (1933) Wilhelm Reich writes: “My character-analytic experiences have convinced me that there is not a single individual who does not bear the elements of fascist feeling and thinking in his structure.” (p.80). Reich used a psychosocial interpretation to explain fascism in terms of sex and economics, defining it as “a political psychology of the masses who were frustrated in their

attempts at rational solidaristic action.” (p,78) Between both World Wars Reich interviewed German people tempted by fascism and concluded that Nazism appealed to “obscure mystical sentiments and nebulous desires that remained unidentified but strong.” (p,79) When transposed into contemporary Britain (and for this thesis Scotland in particular) parallels can be drawn not only with mass expressions of sectarianism but with individual experiences relating to isolation and the fear of freedom (a condition examined later in this section). In *Hunting Captain Henley* both Uncle Alex’s anti-Englishness and Uncle Ron’s anti-Catholicism are apparent, but it is the combination of factors, I will argue, which leads to the true fascist consciousness and the subsequent effect upon language and the emergence of the fascist voice.

In *Fergus Lamont* (1970), Robin Jenkins clearly evokes the frustration of his well educated narrator when he boards the train to Oban. But it isn’t the cold third-class compartment alone which fuels the narrator’s anger. It is also his frustration at having to think about changing the way he speaks to accommodate his fellow ‘boor’ passengers that leads to his extreme feelings:

I travelled to Oban in a third-class compartment which was not well heated. I made considerable efforts to speak as an equal to my companions. Unfortunately, I could not quite so soon decide what aspects of my upper-class Anglicised accent to shed and with what egalitarian Scotch crudities to replace them. Small wonder then that I found myself at times mumbling morosely to those shivering boors.  
(p.235)

The here and now of institutionalised fascism is examined by Chris Shute in *Compulsory Schooling Disease: How Children Absorb Fascist Values* (1993). Shute specifically refers to the psychological damage done to children who are taught to suppress their own phonetic

spelling in favour of Standard English, a scenario particularly relevant to colonised people who become, as Shute puts it, “cheap imitations” of the English (p.45). Shute’s theory is not sociolinguistic in nature (his points are generally linked to teaching methods) but it is this predicament of imitation which, I contend, leads to the alienation from original culture required for the fascist consciousness and, in turn, the fascist voice to develop. In the context of novel writing, when the authoritative third person narrative is challenged (as in the work of James Kelman), new opportunities of expression arise. In the case of *Hunting Captain Henley* I will demonstrate how this new expression is essentially reactionary in nature. As Shute points out, fascism is not dead. It is, in his experiences as a teacher, at the heart of institutional organisation. And it is the present state of its Scottish manifestation which is at the heart of this thesis.

In *The Nature of Fascism* (1968) G Germani discusses what he describes as a common trait among Italian fascists before and during the 2nd World War. He points to their ‘uprootedness’ and goes on to explain how a process of displacement is ‘the human basis of fascism’. Fascists were seen as *sposati*, Italian for ‘displaced’. This hypothesis is of note to my thesis for two reasons. While it describes the physical, transient human condition required for the cultivation of fascism, a linguistic parallel can also be drawn. As the novel progresses Billy Queen not only becomes physically displaced, from Scotland to Dubai and back, from Hamilton to university and to London and India, but his original narrative voice is also displaced, leading to the identity crises that is in some cases central to the Scottish condition. Early in the novel we see the effects this displacement has on young Billy’s consciousness as he is shifted to Dubai.

WE LEFT them there, Esther pretending to hit Paterson over the head  
with a golf club and ma dad, oot for the day, standin at the gate wae  
his hons in his poackets, cheerio son, see you soon, says he. I

squeezed my nose against the taxi window and waved to them all, each and every one of them. But it was my dad I wanted. I wanted him to put my hand into his coat pocket and hold it tight the way he used to when we walked to the shop for sweets and a paper. When they were out of sight I faced the front. I couldn't see out of the front window properly for Uncle Alex's big black brylcreemed hair. He used to be a Teddy Boy. Now here we were - going to The Gulf together. He never spoke to me during the journey. I didn't care if he ever spoke to me again in my whole life.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p.46)*

Although there is no obvious sign of a fascist consciousness at work, there is disillusionment at being uprooted. Of linguistic note is Billy's use of the word 'together'. Not only is he geographically and emotionally uprooted, but he refuses to use his usual West of Scotland term 'the gither'. This refusal becomes the root cause of his teenage and eventually adult linguistic displacement. Later in this section I will illustrate the link between this and the development of his pure fascist consciousness. It is this very awkwardness, this displacement of what is perceived to be the norm, that, I will argue, creates the correct environment for the development of the fascist mind. That apart, I also contend that this awkwardness, far from not being normal, is precisely the psychosociolinguistic process that many Scots experience.

While Germani's physical displacement theory is of use, both this and linguistic displacement as I have called it or linguistic assimilation formed through cultural assimilation as Gramsci refers to it, are not in themselves sufficient to explain the development of the fascist consciousness. Other ingredients are required. In *Moral Indignation and Middle Class*

*Psychology* (1938) Svend Ranulf examines the definition of human resentment. In particular he analyses this in relation to the petite bourgeoisie and shows how it expresses itself, especially in this social group, as a casual inflicting of punishment. It isn't merely cruelty that is the essence of this, it is the disinterested manner in which the cruelty is executed that is central. In Chapter Four of *Hunting Captain Henley* Ranulf's resentment theory is combined with Germani's physical displacement theory to create the fascist mindset foundation. In Dubai, Billy is physically displaced from Scotland. This in turn produces the feelings of insecurity necessary for resentment and the subsequent innocuous punishment of the Philipinno maid Shamal. To further refine the theory the punishment scene is sculpted using the narrator's reaction to his own linguistic displacement as the catalyst for violence.

I go inside for a minute to put on Uncle Ron's white helmet and gun belt - the one he got in Hong Kong. There's a cane sitting by his bed. I tuck it under my arm and march up and down in front of the mirror - just like Captain Henley auld boy. Outside it rests nicely under Shamal's chin.

- Do you miss home Shamal? I asks her.

She jerks at the handcuffs, trying to get free.

- Where's yer ma?

- My ma? she asks.

- Aye, yer ma, says I.

- I don't understand you, she says.

- Your mother. What does she wear? Back in the Philippines, what does she wear?

- I don't have a mother, she says.

- Everybody has a ma, says I. Is she deid?

- What do you mean?

- Is. She. Dead?

- I don't know. I haven't seen her since I was a child. She went away.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p.97)

While it is widely accepted that there is no single all embracing fascism, there are patterns which emerge in all cases. At an early stage in the novel young Billy is exposed to the glorification of violence (a regular variable in the development of the fascist consciousness) when Uncle Alex speaks in glowing terms about “pre-emptive strikes” and about the Glasgow boxer Bennie Lynch who always hit first and asked questions later. (Chapter 2) The fascist emphasis on hierarchy, on order, on obeying also plays a strong part in Billy's early consciousness. This is represented in the pace and style of the orders issued by Uncle Alex and at the very start of the novel.

My Uncle Alex speaks like this, dae this, dae that. Hey. You. Kimere.  
Gon get me chips. Hey. Listen. Kimere ya wee cunt. Take this right,  
get yersel a sweet. Listen. Don't forget. Yer a Queen. Now cummon.  
Hey. Kimere. A man's a man for aw that. Listen. Listen tae me. Ok?  
Right. On yer way.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p.1)

But it is Billy's high levels of automation conformity, as defined by D. Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) which contributes most to Billy's fascist nature. His dual consciousness (repeatedly expressed in his language) leads to a partial loss of identity and a resultant tendency to conform to the expectations of others around him. This, combined with a form of missionary universalism, expressed by his unerring quest for Henley, exemplify the

fascist temperament at work.

In Dieter Noll's *Adventures of Werner Holt* (1960) the hero's adventures follow a recognisable pattern comparable to *Hunting Captain Henley*. Werner, like Billy, strives to prove his masculinity by impressing a male peer group.

One afternoon at the Country Club Uncle Ron passes me handcuffs and a baton and tells me to pretend I'm arresting Indians. He laughs when I march the waiter around the tennis court and push him into the swimming pool. The guy can't swim, but that doesn't matter because when I hear the applause of the other ex-pats I know I've done the right thing.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p. 78)

It is the insecure element of his masculinity which is of interest to this thesis. In 'My Sex The Revolver' John Milfull writes: "It is not female sexuality which is the ally of Fascism, but the fear of it, and the attempt to compensate this sense of male inadequacy through the construction of a male myth of power and dominance." (p,181) Uncle Ron has been created as a conduit to this frame of mind. He teaches Billy to beware of women, especially foreigners and Catholics. But behind the facade is an inadequate male, trapped in his own cultural contradiction, turning his own insecurity into brutality. In *Henry de Montherlant* (1992) Richard J. Golsan, referring to Alice Kaplan, writes: "This desire to eliminate entirely the role of the female in the process of procreation, is frequently a part of what she describes as "fascist fantasy narratives." (p,156) This, combined with what Janet Perez describes in *Fascist Models and Literary Subversion* (1992) as "an attitude of scornful superiority" (p,134) constructs the basis of the fascist mindset. Perez's scornful superiority is built into *Hunting Captain Henley* at regular intervals to illustrate this very point.

Outside the walking wounded limp around. Injured in body. Limping, twisted, hunched, gargoyles peering from the gutters: one gesticulates at me, filthy rain water splashing onto its white shell suit. Wounded in spirit, the ingrained frown mark splitting its forehead, the mouth contorted slightly to the left, a walking stroke victim drenched in the squalor of the city's filthy sewers. Poleaxed by conscience they peer into cheap shoap windaes, pointless gifts for poor offspring their preferential objective, reflecting the grief of their dull and desperate demeanours.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p,67)*

Earlier in this section I mentioned Billy's 'linguistic displacement' as a cause of his initial alienation. This 'displacement from the norm' is central to Martin Heidegger's theory in *Sein und Zeit* (1927). According to Heidegger, instead of modernity freeing human consciousness from the church and feudalism, it creates a new set of restrictions, the subjugation of its members to technology and the collective will. Under this tyranny, Heidegger argues, humans are deprived of their individuality. Humans therefore 'fall' from being at one with themselves into an inauthentic existence. During this process, language also undergoes a change. Instead of unveiling the real human experience, language hides it behind an institutionalised social discourse. Within this discourse repetition plays a part in the expression of the dehumanisation process. We see examples of Heidegger's theory today, in robotic call centres, or in the language of retail shop assistants who have been led to believe it is their shop. Heidegger points out that people become confused and detached from reality in this environment. While Heidegger argues that 'institutionalised social discourse' is responsible for this process it is my specific contention that in Billy Queen's case detachment from reality

occurs as he moves towards use of the third person voice or, in terms of plot, as the search for Captain Henley escalates. Heidegger writes:

The human being stands as part of an everyday collective under the sway of others. It is not itself, the others have taken away from it. The will of the others regulates the daily possibilities of the human being's existence. These others are not particular others. On the contrary, any other can replace them... The who is neither this one, nor that one, not oneself, not a few and not the sum of all. The 'who' is the neuter, the 'one' (das Man).

(*Sein und Zeit* p.126)

But it is not within Heidegger's negative description of modernity that the nuts and bolts of the Fascist voice are found. It is, instead, within his recommendations for change that the essence of it is located. In the emergence of Fascism he saw a way of restoring meaning to the world. In 'Heidegger's Doubling of Myth' (p,14) Kathryn Brown says that by walking alone the leader can "free the German people from tyranny" and "effect a revolution in language" through which the "empty speech of everyday communication will be replaced by the clarity of meaningful language." In *Hunting Captain Henley*, I demonstrate how this process occurs in the narrator as he, alone, uses increasingly emotive and philosophical language. His language is inspired not just by being alone but by feelings of having no responsibilities to anyone other than himself.

In 'Fascism and the Hypertrophy of Male Adolescence' (p,172) Silke Hesse creates a theoretical model for the ideal, young fascist male. She says he has "outgrown the family of his childhood and has not yet acquired new commitments; he is responsible for no one but himself. This makes him more mobile than other members of society. Secondly, he is still at a

formative stage in which he seeks role models to imitate.” Billy’s role models are Henley and his father and his resulting diction, of course, is this hybrid concoction of Scots and Standard English, at times presented in an imitative, exaggerated way. It is upon Heidegger’s grounds of emptiness and disillusionment that these thoughts, this language takes root. In the following extract Billy feels so alone that he spends time questioning his own consciousness. His imitative role models are so varied that they borrow and merge a cross-section of registers:

You can hear a pin drop in your own consciousness. Naw ye cannae,  
ya prick, what are you on about? How can you hear a pin drap in  
your ain consciousness - don’t be ridiculous boy, eyes to the front,  
march in good order, dae as yer telt - ya fuckin, whatdoyoucallit,  
pretentious brainwashed cheeky chappie prone to the use of literary  
 clichés passed doon tae you fae yer forefathers.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p.178)*

In ‘Fascists of the Final Hour’ Robert Castillo analyses the poetry of Ezra Pound and, in so doing, offers us a detailed picture of the style of the fascist voice. In his own explanation Pound observed that Dante’s *Inferno* evoked the “aimless turmoil and restlessness of humanity” in the “whirling and smiting wind” smacking against those who had failed to govern their emotions (SR, 133, 130). The idea of one man standing against this torrent, finding a pivotal position in its midst, is central to the style of expression used to describe this experience. It is in conjunction with this model that Billy’s repeated references to ‘chaos’ take hold. Castillo writes: “Whether aesthetic or natural, objective or subjective, Pound’s vortex is a patterned energy characterised by the organisation of dynamic forces into an intense formal unity focused on a single point or node.” (p.120)

Pound’s vision of fascism is that of a patterned energy emerging through the staunch and

powerful fascist will, a way of seeing nature as a bubbling cauldron of contradictions, yet ordered and hierarchical in every possible way. It is this obsession with order created from chaos that drives the energy of Billy Queen's narrative. In the following extract the narrator explains how even the confusion caused by alcohol is eventually rationalised throwing his perceptions into an even clearer light where order is ultimately achieved.

THERE ARE always two sides to a story, just as there are always two sides to one's demented fucking identity. The duality of man is, indeed, a mystery to you. But it is the conflicting fundamental values of the Scottishman which intrigues you most, that enigmatic variable as changeable as the cuntin' array of pressure systems which rape the moonscape north of Crainlarich. It is often induced by a regular injection of alcohol poisoning but this is a mere supplement to the chemical intrigue and experimentation already raging around the interior of your temporal lobe rhythm. It very often begins with a semi-comatose condition sparked by drink. The start then progresses through the ranks of sobriety until it becomes a condition, a way of seeing things, a third eye reflecting who you really are. The host must deal with the chaos of the party, restore order, before his ability to stay human dissipates forever. It is this ability which secures the victory.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p136)*

To be more specific it is not merely energetic creativity born from chaos which forms the backdrop to the fascist consciousness and thus language but a certain type of creative paranoia on the narrator's part. Reed Way Dasenbrock describes Wyndham Lewis's entire

body of work as “a fiction of paranoia” (p,93). He goes on to describe Lewis’s “paranoid aesthetic” (*Wyndham Lewis’s Fascist Imagination*, p.96) In *Hunting Captain Henley* this creative paranoia is deliberately taken to extremes not only to convey the necessary depth of Billy’s isolation but to underline his own mental deterioration. In Chapter Nine for example, he is convinced the security forces have hired a room next to his in his London bed and breakfast accommodation.

The methodical thump squeak thump squeak of the headboard against the wall has stopped now. You wonder why they chose to let you hear them fucking in such a manner. And the giggling beforehand, pretending to be my mum and Uncle Alex. The left-wing authorities of the Blair Brown cohort probably sent them to keep an eye on you - maybe it wuz the wee Wrangler rucksack on the shooder that roused their attention, and the one-way train ticket to London too. That woman in the ticket office at Glasgow Central looked too intelligent to be there. Too much rouge to be real. Now you have the two youthful shaggers to contend with - as if Henley wasn’t enough.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p,212)

This concept can be applied more generally to the foundation of fascism which plays on the idea that inferior bloodsuckers are to blame for the moral deterioration within society. It was necessary therefore to produce something, somebody, for Billy Queen to rail against in order to create the required tension within which his progressive alienation from first through to second and third person could be evoked. The winos in the close are to blame. The English are to blame. Catholics are to blame. Women. Asians. Blacks. As Alice Miller has argued in *For Your Own Good* (1980) Germans often saw themselves as good and pure by connecting

adverse traits to the character of The Other (The Jew) (p.94). In *Kindheitmuster* (1993) by Christa Wolf, for example, Nelly's image of "The Jew" provokes disgust in the child (p.112) Wolf's work is of further interest because, while she calls her book a novel and uses the name Nelly and the third person singular "sie" to speak of her past self (a child of Nazi Germany) and "du" (you) to interrogate the present self, the book is based on autobiographical material, and the narrator discusses the difficulty of saying I. While this may arguably be explained as a problem of conscience it is worth highlighting because the complete antithesis is the case in Billy Queen's development. Unlike Nelly, Billy doesn't have a problem with the use of I - indeed it is as he becomes detached from it via the second person to the third person narrative that his true fascist character begins to fully develop. In *Kindheitmuster* Nelly connects the face of a Jewish boy with a sexual threat and with her fear of spiders, lizards and toads. As they invade her space she merges them with her image of Jewishness and perceives them all as equally threatening. What is interesting here is the manner in which the narrator intervenes and questions the dichotomy between self and other. This constant reflection on the process of writing fuels the crises which lead to the break down of language where the narrator feels it is impossible to tell a coherent story. In the introduction to this thesis I described this process as "linguistic anarchy". It is during this process of questioning and doubt that, in Billy's case, the seeds of the fascist consciousness are sown. In some instances it manifests itself in a form of anti-intellectualism where the narrator repeatedly questions his own thought processes:

You rip the remaining clothes from the wardrobe, civvy street stuff,  
and immediately bin it - the minimalist approach to life makes you feel  
clean - free from the clutter that drags one into the complex capitalist  
quagmire in which we exist.

Shut it prick.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p,187)*

Throughout this section I have explored some theories relating to the fascist consciousness and its effect on language. I will conclude by suggesting that while the explanations, concepts, and theories are multifarious and often contradictory, they reflect the complexity of the here-and-now of fascist language. In August 2005 US Journalism Professor Mike Niman was a keynote speaker at the Chatutauqua Institute's Hall of Philosophy. During his speech about the Iraq war, entitled "War Propaganda and The Language of Fascism", he said: "If you look at most of the rhetoric about the war, it's really an appeal to emotions, not reason. This is the language of fascism." In 'Fascist Language in The Adams Cantos of Ezra Pound' (Journal of American Studies of Turkey, 1995: (p,61-72)) Nick Selby describes Pound's language as "a language in which word and world are forced together, where no gap is admitted between aesthetic and political judgements. Such language becomes, as Walter Benjamin would argue, a language of fascism." In *Hunting Captain Henley* I will demonstrate how the narrator's emotionally charged quest is truly connected to the political culture of his father's colonial past and, when both collide, a new literary energy is formed, born from the linguistic chaos of Scots and English side by side.



## Chapter Four

### Renaissance Scotland

IN THE nineteenth century Scots were becoming recognised in stereotypical ways. They relied upon sentimental images of Scotland, what Hugh MacDiarmid referred to as the debased tradition of Burns. The Scottish Renaissance, guided by MacDiarmid, proposed a virtual demolition of Scotland's accepted cultural identity. He rejected anything that might straightjacket creativity and called for "an assault upon the intellectual and emotional conventions of his era." (Riach, 2005). Today's equivalent could be the rejection of mass media culture and its incumbent messages. It could also be, for example, the rejection of political correctness in all its forms, the rejection of The Scottish Government's narrow anti-racism campaign on the basis that it fails to inform the public that racism is a cross-cultural phenomena. Today's literary equivalent of the sentimental images of the nineteenth century could be the bleak urban backdrop to Kelman's writing or what has been labelled the satanic kailyard prose of Welsh, Warner, Hird and Legge, representations of working class youth in its depraved glory. One distinction can be drawn however. Unlike their Renaissance ancestors the new generation of Scottish writers do not directly engage with the economic or political life of the nation. It could therefore be argued that they cannot be described as Scotland's New Renaissance writers and that they have arrived at a literary and philosophical impasse. MacDiarmid also came to a dead end. Alan Riach (2006) writes: "The fact that so much of Scotland's cultural history was hidden from him and had to be rediscovered reflects the

disintegration of the national culture in the project of British imperialism. With the rise of the British Empire, two things happened to Scotland: it became invisible, and it became internationally recognisable in stereotypes and caricatures.” (p.2, ‘The Scottish Renaissance’) To overcome this impasse MacDiarmid had to grasp the thistle. He addressed the fascist consciousness. And was therefore able to destroy idle, stereotypical images of the nation. In *Hunting Captain Henley* Billy’s search is almost symbolic in a way of MacDiarmid’s intellectual journey. The answers aren’t readily available to him as they are not readily available to the new generation of Scottish writers. They had to be rediscovered. Just as Billy has to rediscover his father’s relationship with Henley. Billy’s search is made easier, in some ways, by the physical manifestations of his father’s post traumatic stress. It guides him into the investigation. His father’s almost schizophrenic behaviour is virtually symbolic too of the idea of ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’. I first came across this term when I read Dietmar Bohnke’s *Kelman Writes Back* (p.26). It was first used by G. Gregory Smith in his study *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919) and subsequently taken over by MacDiarmid as one of the key terms in his concept of Scottish national identity. It is meant to describe the schizophrenic nature of the Scottish soul and the bringing together of opposites. Having read many critics of Scottish Literature the idea wasn’t new to me, just the term. As Dietmar Bohnke writes “what consequently emerges is a cultural identity that has instability at its very core, the self-divided Scot, the basic duality of Scottishness.” (p.26) It then struck me that although most Scottish writers and critics are familiar with this idea, I hadn’t come across any detailed, definitive breakdown of what it actually means. Smith puts positive spin on the term. He describes it as “a reflection of contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability.” (p.92) Smith stops short at examining ‘the restlessness’ he describes, nor does he explore in depth the constituent elements of the contrasts. In ‘Scott and Scotland’ (1936) Edwin Muir argues that the Scottish consciousness is divided, that “Scotsmen feel in one

language and think in another; that their emotions turn to the Scottish tongue and their minds to a standard English.” Logically speaking, if there is a schizophrenic nature at the heart of the Scottish soul then we firstly need to define ‘schizophrenic’ to examine the condition in more depth. The Collins Dictionary (2001) definition is - “behaviour that seems to be motivated by contradictory or conflicting principles; denoting a personality disorder characterised by extreme shyness and oversensitivity” (p.1346) It should be noted that the term ‘disorder’ is a value judgement which fails to consider issues such as the creation of otherness or the idea that out of the differences comes creativity. The word ‘extreme’ in this context is also of particular value to this critical component.

In an earlier chapter I argued the case that that the petit bourgeoisie of today’s Scotland are not given a proper voice in literature and that what they say, and how they say it, is largely ignored or forgotten. I also proffered that what they say and how they say it is often extreme, indeed fascistic, and that this temperament could be linked to Scotland’s historic and often brutal involvement in the creation of the British Empire. Why haven’t writers seen this extremism? Why, for example, isn’t it reflected in the so called working class realism of James Kelman’s fiction? The search for an answer to this question led me to conclude that a strong element of censorship and, more alarmingly, self-censorship, is perhaps at work among writers and critics in Scotland. The severity of this situation should not be understated. In his *Essays on Censorship* J.M. Coetzee says “by not admitting that it exists, self-censorship aligns itself with lies and spiritual corruption.” (p.36)

In her essay ‘Queerspotting’ (Spike Magazine, Nov 1999) Zoe Strachan refers to a new generation of Scottish writers as the ‘satanic kailyard’ school. She uses this term to describe authors such as Welsh, Warner, Hird and Legge, authors writing about Scottish urban working class youth in its depraved glory. But even here, Strachan argues, the self-censor is at work. Berthold Schoene writes:

Scotland is still waiting for the emergence and subsequent ‘coming out’ of a generation of angry young men who, unafraid of their own feelings, would dare contest the misogynous and homophobic rules of the ‘Emotional Establishment’ inside.

(Schoene, “Angry Young Masculinity”, in Whyte ed, 1995)

The point is, not unlike the fascist temperament examined in *Hunting Captain Henley*, homosexuality is also a victim of repressed self-censorship. The consequences of this for Scottish Literature are serious because it leads to an almost monolithic representation of life here. At the end of the nineteenth century the “kailyard” was represented by writers such as J.M. Barrie, F.R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren. It painted a romanticised version of rural life in Scotland. In ‘Scott and Scotland’ (1936) Edwin Muir makes the point that Sir Walter Scott’s predicament as a writer stemmed from “his days in a hiatus, in a country which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it” (p.82). It could be argued that the Act of Union and the British Empire partly resulted in the invisibility of Scottish culture. Writers of the Scottish Renaissance such as Edwin Muir, Neil Gunn and William Soutar examined this in various ways but the general idea of the Renaissance was that it was wrong to associate the term ‘Scottishness’ with a set literary form or to confine it. In his essay ‘Divergent Scottishness’ Douglas Dunn addresses this point about confinement in today’s Scottish writing when he talks about the atmosphere of “political correctness” which encourages “social narrowing in favour of a working-class, left wing, vernacular authorship.”

Dunn continues:

It is in danger of becoming more than an antiquated but a disabling handicap in Scottish fiction, and literature as a whole, that its writers,

critics and readership could fall for a vision of society which cannot exist without an act of cultural or actual exclusion. What is to be done with Scottish writers who refuse to subscribe to the average pieties of socialism, dialect, poverty, Glasgow, Edinburgh, small-town life, rural predicaments or nationalism? No more pertinent question of Scottish writing could be asked. A question more to the point of Scottish life in general could not be asked, if, that is, there is a width of mind willing to *include* rather than dismiss the nature of the country and those who live here.

(p.157, *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies*)

As with any society ‘the people who live here’ are diverse in character and intellect. If we accept this idea then we must also acknowledge the extremity of character that accompanies it. In his description of ‘the Glasgow man’ in *The Heart of Scotland* (1934) George Blake says the Glasgow man is “downright, unpolished, direct and immediate. He has the furious quality of the Scot in its most extreme form. He can be terribly dangerous in revolt and as terribly strong in defence of his own conception of order.” This man could be the perfect fascist. He is, as MacDiarmid described him in his ‘Plea for a Scottish Fascism’ a “lawless believer in law, a rebel believer in authority” (p.86) Today’s Scottish Renaissance writer must re-engage with that spirit if it is to connect with as Margery McCulloch calls it in her introduction to *Modernism and Nationalism* (McCulloch, 2004:xiii) “the regeneration of the social, economic and political life of the nation.” While Scottish Renaissance writers such as MacDiarmid openly discussed fascism as a form of super-successful nationalism, (‘Programme For A Scottish Fascism,’p. 37) post World War two, it was most often rejected as a dangerous political philosophy and apparently forgotten. Four points should be made here. The Scottish fascist spirit MacDiarmid sought isn’t dead. It beats in the heart of many Scots. (see *Hunting*

*Captain Henley*) But it is a spirit that has been ignored because of its post Hitler political incorrectness. Thirdly, its heart is not purely that of the racist British or English National Party. It is one which stands for clarity of Scottish identity, for an intelligent, highly organised, no-nonsense decency which overrides the brute instincts often associated with other debased forms of fascism. It is also one which connects with Alan Riach's point in 'The Scottish Renaissance' (2007) that "Scots became both the victims and the perpetrators of Empire itself." (p.2) Fourthly, it is a frame of mind which today's 'satanic kailyard school' arguably hide behind a conscious or sub-conscious self-censorship.

Unlike today's new generation of Scottish writers Scottish Renaissance writers of the 1920's and 30's clearly engaged with fascism. They did so through publications like *The Modern Scot* which regularly reviewed and encouraged the overtly fascist poetry of Roy Campbell. In 'Literary Lights' (1934) Lewis Grassie Gibbon described the publication as "literary Fascism." He wrote: "It seems as if all the Fascist undergraduates of Scotland these days are hastening, in pimples and a passion for sophistication, to relieve themselves of a diarrhoeic Johnsonese in the appropriate privy of *The Modern Scot*." (p,14). While Gibbon's contempt for the trend is clear, the point is that Scottish Renaissance writers at least recognised its presence, minus the effects of self-censorship arguably present today. In *Scottish Scene* (1935) Grassie Gibbon noted, "The various Scots nationalist parties have large elements of Fascism within them." Some of the writers creative output was backed by social commentary denigrating Irish immigrants to the West Coast of Scotland. In 'The Future of the Scots' (1927) George Malcolm Thomson described the Irish presence as "a barbarian invasion." He warned of the Scots "being eclipsed' by a people "alien in race, temperament, and religion." He wrote: "To-day every fifth baby born in Scotland is a little Irish Catholic. And, most sinister and significant of all, one-third of the crimes committed in Scotland are the work of Irishmen." (p,19). In *Scotland in Eclipse* (1930) Andrew Dewar Gibb wrote: "Wherever knives and razors are used, wherever sneak thefts and mean pilfering are easy and safe,

wherever dirty acts of sexual baseness are committed, there you will find the Irishman in Scotland with all but a monopoly of the business.” (p,22). While this may be an outdated mindset, in *Hunting Captain Henley*, Billy Queen embraces the tradition passed down to him from his Uncle Alex. On a bus journey through Glasgow’s East End he notes:

Outside, the walking wounded limp around. Injured in body. Limping, twisting, hunched, gargoyles peering from the gutters: one gesticulates at me, filthy rain water splashing onto its white shell suit. Wounded in spirit, the ingrained frown mark splitting its forehead, the mouth contorted slightly to the left, a walking stroke victim drenched in the squalor of the city’s filthy sewers. Poleaxed by conscience they peer into cheap soap windows, pointless gifts for poor offspring their preferential objective, reflecting the grief of their dull and desperate demeanours.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p.132)

Billy may not be alone in his bleak vision of the condition of Glasgow in 2007. But it is perhaps now a politically incorrect observation, a minor snapshot of one Scottish Renaissance tradition still alive today. The essence of any tradition is its *continuity*. As is arguably the case with many young Scots, politically incorrect observations form part of their hidden national consciousness. And, like Billy’s, it is a consciousness often passed down from generation to generation. Today’s politicians cannot connect with it because the present is their *point de depart* or because the forces of political correctness seem too powerful to tackle. Many will not examine the past to uncover what elements of it exist today in the national consciousness. But where the politicians fail, it may still be in the grasp of New Renaissance writers and artists to prevail in its free expression.

As I said in the introduction to this thesis it is the inclusion of the petit bourgeoisie that is partly the aim of my creative project. It is the willingness to confront the cultural amnesia and inward looking unreal visions of Scotland and the disfigured and incomplete historical references (that working class writers must essentially come from a purely left wing perspective) As shown in previous chapters there is much evidence to prove that the working classes can affiliate themselves to the extreme right (fascism) although to read cultural accounts of Scottish life today one would think being Scottish somehow eliminates one from even considering the possibilities of fascism, a strange intellectual position for a country central to the spread of British imperialism to find itself in. It is, of course, this very disorientation which leads Billy Queen in *Hunting Captain Henley* across the world to India in search of an explanation. Like an orphaned child he has to know who his parents really are. His search may be basic, his objectives simple, but at least it's a start. Once achieved he may at last be able to settle into adulthood, to play an independent and forthright part in the world, knowing who he really is and where he should be going. If Billy is a metaphor for Scotland then the parallels are obvious. He feels disconnected and, like MacDiarmid setting off on the creation of *The Renaissance*, he has to firstly identify the historical inaccuracies of Scottish identity before building the new foundation. We crave a route, we need identity but as writers we aren't about to narrate anything, because its not our job to tell, only to reflect. In his essay 'The Politics of Narrative in the Post-war Scottish Novel' Liam McIlvanney writes:

For those seeking to root their fiction in working-class culture the novel has figured as an instrument of subjection, a malign polity, a bad constitution. The problem for working-class novelists has been that, as ultimate rulers of these polities, they cannot abdicate. They can seek to expose their absolutism, but they cannot destroy it. As a

result, the novel can envisage freedom but it cannot *narrate* that freedom.  
(p.207)

From the beginning then Kelman has been writing not so much out of a literary tradition as against one. But until we (the new breed of writers) can admit who we really are (just like Billy in *Hunting Captain Henley*) then we will always struggle with our sense of identity.

If the fascist voice has been ignored by writers, then it is also my contention the literary critics have largely ignored the highs and lows of the creative process. They are, in short, almost the equivalent of public relations people putting positive spin on the Scottish Renaissance writers. The common contemporary context is that it's fine to write in Scottish dialect, to rebel or break away from the established English literary hierarchy which is based along old imperialist lines in which the working class voice, for example, is not properly represented. But this should not mean we ignore our own imperialist past. Hugh MacDiarmid wrote 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism' (1923) and "Programme for a Scottish Fascism' (1923). This is the spirit of the Scottish Renaissance, a spirit which assaults the intellectual and emotional conventions of the era. Within Scottish literature and within Scottish literary criticism censorship and suppression already exist. It is not a 'burning of books' style censorship. It is more subtle, a form of self censorship as journalists refer to it. In *Radical Renfrew* (1990) Tom Leonard writes:

In fact the spread of the right to vote in Britain paralleled the spread of the right to literacy, in that both were allowed within formal codes whose names acknowledged the supremacy of the status quo which must not be challenged: Her Majesty's Government, Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Schools, *The Queen's English*. The rights and values of monarch and aristocracy were sown into the definitions of what the people's new entitlements to personal expression actually were.

(p.xxi)

This passage is interesting because a similar dictate could be written to describe the new era of freedoms post the Scottish Parliament. It might read something like we are all entitled to freedom of expression provided we stay within the increasingly tight boundaries of political correctness. It could be argued this is anathema to the creative process, a point hinted at in the biog. to Alan Bissett's *The Incredible Adam Spark* (2005). Speaking of the author the biog. writer writes "by day he is a mild mannered tutor of creative writing at Glasgow University" (p.5). The implication here is that by night Alan Bissett turns into something different. There is nothing mild mannered about the creative process. By night he creates a nuisance character who finds it difficult to tell the difference between fun and vindictiveness, between good and evil. In some ways Adam Spark is a metaphor for Scotland. Who are we? Where are we going? Isn't this supposed to be what we're about? Where is our portrait of an artist as a nasty man?

In *Some Recent Attacks* James Kelman points to his failure to find literature from his own class, spoken or written in a realistic way. Any attempts at representation were false because they were being written by elitist writers. Some might argue that Kelman hasn't looked hard enough. But he describes it as a 'conspiracy of silence' (p.45)

My point is that a similar conspiracy of silence may exist among some so called new Renaissance Scottish writers and critics who do not creatively engage with the spirit of the Renaissance, which argued there could be no regeneration of the nation's artistic culture without the regeneration of its political life. If this was the case there would be evidence of correspondence between our present writers and Scotland's current First Minister for

example. Many of the writers have broken free to write in their tongue, free from the so called restraints of the old order which critics have described as an English based literary establishment built along imperialist lines. But without political engagement it could be argued this is a false dawn, an opportunity squandered by subjects of fashion and literary vogues. The language of the Glasgow Renaissance critics is interesting because it cleverly envelopes this new conspiracy of silence. Kelman's characters, for example, aren't lonely, isolated, bitter, the perfect fodder for fascist thought. They instead 'represent', a "unity of voice" or "a communality that transcends the absolute isolation of the individual human being." (Cairns Craig, p.130)

As I said in the introduction to this critical component I am not for a minute claiming that working class solidarity does not exist, only to proffer that its voices are multifarious, complex expressions created by a wide spectrum of writers in all sorts of mixed creative circumstances, driven by fear, idealism, disillusionment, love, hate and so on. The variety available is censored, restricted to represent a diluted radicalism and thereby weakened. This censorship stems from the same roots as journalistic self censorship where journalists write what is expected of them, not what is there, because they realise their work will be edited accordingly anyway. To stay on side journalistically is to stay on the side of the advertisers and money men who make newspapers tick financially. Similar restraints exist in publishing, yes even in fiction.



## Chapter Five The Gramsci Perspective

FOR ANTONIO Gramsci the masses' mastery of the standard form of Italian and the development of logical thinking were inextricably linked. In *Selections From Cultural Writings* (1985) David Forgacs notes how Gramsci argued that, for the Italian people, "Moving from a local to a national language, from oral to written culture and from 'simple common sense' to 'coherent and systematic thought' were all moments of a process of acculturation which was at the same time a process of self-mastery and political liberation." (p.345) But it is this very cultural assimilation which denies the narrator's freedom in *Hunting Captain Henley*. Indeed, far from liberation, Billy Queen's political and cultural imprisonment ensues. Clearly, Gramsci's purpose was to explore the links between dominant and subaltern cultural forms, as he saw it, in dynamic terms, as they act upon each other historically. What he fails to examine in any depth however, are the levels of coherent thought already present in the transient consciousness of the peasant class he refers to. The term 'cultural assimilation' is important to my experiment because it is this very process which drives the narrative. Gramsci points to linguistic change in early 20th century Italy as radiating outwards from a source of diffusion. In *Lingua intellettuale egemonia in Gramsci* (Bari 1979, p.164) Franco Lo Piparo argues that Gramsci's idea of hegemony was based around this linguistic change occurring from high-prestige to lower-prestige speech communities, from dominant socio-cultural groups over subordinate ones. Piparo's thesis argues the case that Gramsci's vision of relations between a hegemonic culture and a subaltern culture can be seen "as relations of direction through the exercise of prestige securing active consent, rather than as relations of domination by coercion and passive consent." (p.164) In *Hunting Captain Henley* it is the

discovery of the nature of this active consent of Billy's father which reveals to the narrator the extent of Scottish involvement not just in the adopting of Standard English but, alongside this linguistic assimilation, in the very creation of The British Empire. It is the fluid nature of language, its very malleability, that compels Gramsci to see it as a weapon of social change, another method of smashing existing hegemonic relations in favour of new ones involving the masses. For him, it is within this unpredictable network that freedom and opportunity for change exists. Within the experiences of the Glasgow Renaissance writers, in particular within the narrative structure of James Kelman, there may exist a unity of voice which is the foundation of solidarity or, in Janice Galloway's case, a dual consciousness created by the transition of the working-class woman into the middle-class woman.

While the critique of this transition may represent part of Gramsci's vision, it is equally valid to argue that such a dual consciousness, symbolised by a similar narrative framework in *Hunting Captain Henley*, reverberates with grinding unease, becomes a jarring, jagged psychological restlessness, a clash of linguistic concoctions generating contradictory messages, schizophrenic chaos and reactionary responses.

In Chapter 2 of *Hunting Captain Henley* we witness the earliest signs of young Billy's attempts to rationalise his predicament. He does so in a performative way, mimicking English Simon on the beach at Whitley Bay:

Simon I says I know your name because I heard your mother calling it, Simon, do you want to build a dam with me Simon The Surfer, look if we dig a trench all the water flows into it and we can stop The North Sea from assaulting the poor families on the beach. Mmmm, yeah, all right, he says, dropping his surf board on the sand, is the tide coming in or what? Looks that way, look at the frothy waves crashing in, you mean the white horses, yeah the white horses Simon if that's what

you feel you want to call them. Doesn't matter if it smells as long as it stops those white horses eh Simon, dig, dig, dig deep, deeper, mix the dry sand with the wet stuff, makes it all stick together, look this is Durham castle says Simon The Surfer, look this is Edinburgh Castle, says I, as the swirling water surrounds us dragging his surfer's board with it.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p.47)*

This early excerpt demonstrates the unease that develops during the confrontation of Standard English and colloquial Scots. Young Billy tries to take control of both and it is within this framework that his own linguistic assimilation is born and with it his psychological restlessness develops. As the next section demonstrates, some theorists believe this restlessness is at the heart of the fascist consciousness, the tension that is created and the resulting assimilation are the beginnings of the new fascist voice. Later in the paragraph, his reference to 'poofy turrets' exposes a Scots male working-class linguistic code which equates Englishness with homosexuality and effeminacy.

A couple of hours later I retreat to the sand dunes with the binoculars to watch the North Scottish Sea, swirling, birling, bubbling grey, and white, overrunning their moats, smashing into their poofy turrets, angry, vicious, attacking, wave after wave after wave, until there was nothing except big choppy currents slapping into each other, sizzling like lava.

*(Hunting Captain Henley, p.48)*

The unease created by the linguistic assimilation therefore begins to express itself

homophobically and Anglophobically. When this assimilation is combined with the culture of destructive criticism (similar to that experienced in the presence of Uncle Alex), added to the overt racism of the Dubai ex-pats and the anti-catholicism of Uncle Ron, then the conditions are right for the cultivation of the fascist consciousness.

### What is the Fascist Consciousness?

In *Selections from Cultural Writings* Gramsci analyses the influence of French Romantic Serials on the creation of the fascist mindset. He points to Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* (1842), in which a large town full of honest working people turn into the 'petit bourgeois'. The place becomes a den of inequity, a haven for the cultivation of the social monsters we see in the shape of Uncle Alex and the ex-pat community in the Dubai setting of *Hunting Captain Henley*. In Sue's Paris and among the ex-pats in Billy's Dubai, there is no political correctness, no rules to dictate civilised behaviour. Overt racism is applauded. War is promoted as a source of entertainment, something to be celebrated. Hegemony also takes root. This is the setting in which the fascist mentality is cultivated. With it there is a kind of chaos, a social breakdown where the torment of Shamal, the Phillipino maid is normal. While definitions of 'normal' human behaviour are experimented with, the linguistic structure of the narrative is designed to redefine normality and the voice of authority. It is at this point, in harmony with the setting and the characterisation, that the changes underway in Billy's linguistic developments begin to exert themselves. The Standard English third person narrative is routed in favour of a new authority, a hybrid mix of first and second person, ultimately

destructive. While Kelman's narrative voice invites this type of advance, it generally does so in the context of a working class setting. *Hunting Captain Henley* transposes the idea onto the petit bourgeois then activates direct political content (absent in Kelman) onto the page to create an examination of what certain people are actually saying and how they are saying it. It is my hypothesis that the Scottish petit bourgeois of *Hunting Captain Henley* not only have the capacity for fascism but express such beliefs in a confused way. This is the unbalanced imagination, the psychological restlessness of Italian fascists like Mario Gioda, Massimo Rocca and Robert Farinacci, Mussolini supporters instinctively hostile to left-wing idealism but lacking ideological vision or political skill. *Hunting Captain Henley* is therefore an attempt at a mongrel mix of genres, a postmodernist experiment designed to reflect the confused consciousness of a new breed of Scottish petit bourgeois, free yet still repressed, moneyed, yet quivering with fury. Uncle Alex may be racist but he admires the Sheikh, he admires the fascistic aspects of Islam. He is a walking talking embodiment of the contradiction in terms that is the Scottish petit bourgeois.

In *Language and Social Identity* (1982) John J. Gumperz writes:

Wherever two or more communities maintain prolonged contact within a broad field of communication, there are crosscurrents of diffusion.

The result is the formation of *Sprachbund*, comprising a group of varieties which coexist in social space as dialects, distinct neighbouring languages, or special parlances. Persistent borrowing over long periods creates within such groups similarities in linguistic structure, which tend to obscure pre-existing genetic distinctions.

*Language and Social Identity* (p.46)

It is within this framework, where Gumperz's "pre-existing genetic distinctions" still exist,

that racism is born and the roots of the racist voice can be found. Within Billy Queen's family there is a subconscious 'language loyalty' at work. Uncle Alex is British first, Scottish second, yet he's staunchly proud of his accent. The cultural disorientation of this experience curbs direct political action or demands for language reform. It is only when this consciousness is found that the displacement of the established elite is possible. It is only as Billy unravels the mystery of Captain Henley that such political clarity presents itself. But the subconscious response to linguistic domination can, according to Susan Gal manifest itself in many ways, including resistance, contestation, conflict, indirection and subversion, and, in its worst examples, chauvinism, such as knee-jerk anti-English feeling. In *Language, Race and White Public Space* (see *Linguistic Anthropology, A Reader*, p.452) Jane H. Hill develops the point further. In her study of Puerto Rican linguistic marginalization she argues that such subversion (as a consequence of ambiguous Spanish and English assimilation) can result in people not being able to speak at all because they are so anxious about their competence. In *Hunting Captain Henley* the sarcastic mimicking of the educated English voice of Lance Henley is arguably an equivalent linguistic consequence of subconscious domination. "You sit back down on the summer seat. It's damp. But who cares? He must be a jolly good sport, wearing a New Zealand shirt, the all Blacks eh?" The term 'jolly good' is rarely used in working class Scottish vernacular except in a mimicking sort of way. But it could be argued that such use always occurs in the shadow of domination and in response to it. The construction of Billy Queen's narrative can, in some ways, be compared to the oral lyric poetry of the Bedouin of Egypt's Western desert. Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) explains that the dominant ideology is one of honour, autonomy, self-mastery, personal strength, and sexual modesty. But as Susan Gal writes in 'Language, Gender and Power,' "the poems directly violate this code of honour and implicitly criticise it by expressing the feelings of dependency, emotional vulnerability, and romantic longing condemned by the official view" (p.114). The point is, there is a subversive discourse at work designed to represent those

excluded from the mainstream. It is not, however, a spontaneous outpouring of feeling. Susan Gal continues:

This poetry of subversion and defiance is not only tolerated but culturally elaborated and admired because of the paradoxical intertwining of official and dissident discourse. The oral poetry reveals a fundamental tension of Bedouin social and political life that, while valuing and demanding autonomy and equality between families and lineages, demands inequality between the genders and generations within families. This verbal genre of women and youths reveals the contradictions of the ruling ideology. (p.426)

In *Hunting Captain Henley* Billy's use of mock Received Pronunciation (RP) could be seen as a form of "racist discourse". But its profound anti-Englishness can, arguably, only be truly appreciated by those who understand the complexities of the depth of cultural differences that exist between those who speak in the West of Scotland vernacular and 'The English'. In a similar way the use of Mock Spanish by white American English speakers 'Hasta la vista baby' requires a quietly acknowledged understanding of who the speaker is referring to. It is only possible to "get" Hasta La Vista Baby if one has access to a representation of Spanish speakers as treacherous. Jane Hill (1999) takes the argument a step further. She writes:

In order to "make sense" of Mock Spanish interlocutors require access to very negative racialising representations of Chicanos and Latinos as stupid, politically corrupt, sexually loose, lazy, dirty, and disorderly. They must first possess profoundly racist images of historically Spanish-speaking populations. Mock Spanish may be an

exceptionally powerful site for the reproduction of White racist attitudes. (p.455)

In other words, if Mock Spanish is seen as a very powerful weapon for the reproduction of White racist attitudes then it could be argued, the sardonic use of Standard English by a vernacular Scots speaker is an equally potent tool for the reproduction of White Scottish anti-English racism, a form of racism that often categorises The English as ‘snobby’ or ‘arrogant’ or, from a Middle Class Scottish perspective as ‘hooligans’ and ‘lager louts.’ Gramsci refers to this a “transformist hegemony”. Interpreting Gramsci, Raymond Williams writes: “Its construction results in a national process aimed at homogenising heterogeneity fashioned around assimilating elements of heterogeneity through appropriations that devalue and deny their link to the marginalised others’ contribution to the patrimony” (Williams 1989:435) . Unlike the Mock Spanish example, however, the roots of Standard English reach much deeper into the Scottish consciousness. In Billy Queen’s case, it is the sheer depth of this relationship that leads to the development of ‘the fascist consciousness’ as expounded in the previous chapter.

Billy, like many Scots children, is unable to break through what Jane Hill describes as “the dominant voices of racism”.(p.134) According to Hewitt (1986) even those linguistic games played by young people who light-heartedly and self mockingly borrow racist vocabulary from one another to create an antiracist atmosphere, in many cases, fail to survive adolescence and become subsumed in the white adult dominant racist voice. In section two of the novel, as Billy educates himself to degree level, he also becomes a bit of a loner. His physical isolation is less damaging than the isolation of the soul he experiences as an increasingly educated form of Standard English dictates his learning. While this spiritual isolation is pivotal to the development of the fascist consciousness, so too is his yearning for the language of his own family, the language, more precisely, of the fatherland. The German scholar and diplomat

In *On The Languages of The South Seas* (1828) Wilhelm von Humboldt once wrote:

The spiritual traits and the structure of the language of a people are so intimately blended that, given either of the two, one should be able to derive the other from it to the fullest extent. Language is the outward manifestation of the spirit of people: their language is their spirit, and their spirit is their language; it is difficult to imagine any two things more identical.

(p.67)

The experience is further described by Nancy C. Dorian as “ a core spiritual concept framed in the heritage language which becomes impossible to express with clarity or depth of meaning in another tongue.” She continues: “Much of this clarity or depth is inescapably diminished or lost when a people replaces its ancestral language with another.” (p.42) Another term for this process is ‘linguistic genocide’. The United Nations describe this as “prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group.” (*The Convention of The Crime of Genocide: Article Three, 1948*) In *Hunting Captain Henley* the ‘linguistic psychological’ effects of this process manifest themselves in Billy’s obsessive search, but contrary to much of what has been written about this process, he does so not from a conscious feeling of inferiority but from a position of strength and superiority borne out of his childhood experiences of ‘proud Scottishness’ and the ‘pre-emptive strike’ mentality of Uncle Alex and the white ex-pats in Dubai. The balance of vernacular Scots and Standard English is one in which the former dominates the latter. In other words, the marriage of vernacular Scots and Standard English has resulted in a new establishment, and not necessarily one where West of Scotland dialect lives happily alongside Standard English, but one where the syllabic structure and jagged

rhythmic patterns of Billy's speech wrestles with the Standard English. This is not a smooth literary process but an ugly battle where his own way of saying things grinds against the process of assimilation:

Where do you go, what do you do? You just keep on walking in a southerly direction like that Laurie Lee cunt in *As I Walked Out One Mid-Summer's Morning*, except it would be Mid-Sommer's morning in your case, not having any of that rural poverty stricken English superiority complex here, me and my violin writing poetry in prose among the sun savaged Spaniards. Henley ya fuck. You're getting it.

What gives you the right of way on this path?

Naw but, keep going, all the way to Portsmouth, down to Cadiz and further still to Malaga if you felt like it. Anywhere but here. Maybe fuckin buy some oranges, liaise with some of the auld brown shirts and work your way back up north, a new tribe, bringing order and respect where chaos reigns.

(*Hunting Captain Henley*, p.241)

The above excerpt is of interest on a number of levels. Firstly, it physically or geographically distances Billy from the old working class tradition of socialism, pointing to the fascist or brown shirt route 'north' as the new solution to society's problems. Secondly, at a linguistic level it is designed to shape actual ideas. In other words, people from Scotland may organise it into concepts and may see special significance in it because their speech community may agree to organise it in this way - it would then become codified in the patterns of their language.

This idea was explored by the *Whorf Hypothesis of Linguistic Relativity and Linguistic*

*Determinism* (1956) Benjamin Lee Whorf asserts that “users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world” (Whorf 1940b:61).

It is this very hypothesis which opens the door to many possibilities, including that of a new radical political and cultural action, maybe even the sort of democratic and cultural environment in which we hear the real voices, the real hidden consciousness of our communities.

### The Wearing of The Greatarmycoat

In *The Ego and Id* (1923) Sigmund Freud demonstrates the link between mourning the death of a loved one and ego formation. While Freud’s work embraces many other themes, this particular aspect is of note in relation to the development of the narrator’s consciousness in *Hunting Captain Henley*. After the death of his father in Chapter Five, Billy takes to wearing his old army coat. He even starts to talk like him, incorporating the term, “says I” into his speech patterns. Freud argues that the ego envelops the ego of the dead loved one into the structure of its own. This process involves taking on the characteristics of the dead loved one and sustaining him or her through what Judith Butler describes in *Gender Trouble* (1999) as “magical acts of imitation” (p.73). The narrative structure of the dual consciousness present in Janice Galloway’s work is the ideal berth from which to explore Butler’s acts of imitation because it offers Billy the opportunity to imitate not just an imperialist consciousness but the specific imperialist consciousness of his Scottish father, a working-class Scot with petit

bourgeoisie tendencies. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes:

This identification is not simply momentary or occasional, but becomes a new structure of identity; in effect, the other becomes part of the ego through the permanent internalisation of the other's attributes. In cases in which an ambivalent relationship is severed through loss, that ambivalence becomes internalised as a self-critical or self-debasing disposition in which the role of the other is now occupied and directed by the ego itself. (p.74)

In *The Ego and Id*, Freud notes that by taking flight into the ego, love escapes annihilation (p.178). This is not only Billy's way of dealing with his father's death. It also fashions the way he walks and talks. On one level he mimiks, but on another level he actually becomes. Once becoming, he begins to recognise the full identity of his father, his true relationship with Henley, and with it, the full details of Scotland's imperialist role, alongside England, in the creation of the British Empire. It is the unification of Freud's ego formation theory and areas of Gramski's theory on linguistic assimilation, combined with the ideological setting of Billy's upbringing, which leads to the creation of his identity and, ultimately, the fascist consciousness within.



## Conclusion

In ‘Gnawing the Mammoth: History, Class and Politics’ (see *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies*,) (1993) Christopher Harvie writes: “Scotland, by losing - or rather failing to trace - its history in the nineteenth century, had become agoraphobic: it was terrified of resuming contact with great economic and social projects.” (p.190) Harvie’s hypothesis is relevant because, in the first section of this critical component, I have argued that Scotland is also afraid to trace and face its colonial past. It suffers from a form of cultural amnesia within which unresolved syndromes are at work. To complicate matters, a one-sided, left-wing adaptation of the complex colonial experience has attempted to permeate popular consciousness. It is one which conveniently forgets to inform ‘the people’ that it was, in part, ‘the people’ who became slavers in the 18th century. And it is an intellegensia and media that will not acknowledge that racism already exists among some sections of the asylum seeking community in Scotland for example.

While some contemporary historians (Neil Davidson and Michael Fry for example) have tried to set the record straight, other sections of the intellegensia in Scotland are reluctant or have failed to do so. What then occurs is a form of ‘intellectual myopia’ which results in the over simplification of the white working class Scottish experience. This is one of the sources of the cultural amnesia mentioned above and it, in turn leads to monophonic discourse, not just in Scotland, but in a worldwide context also. The Australian journalist John Pilger’s idealised left wing view of the oppressed Aborigines is another case in point. His contention that a bias media campaign is underway to tarnish them as drunks and wife-beaters detracts from the hard facts that many are, indeed, drunks and wife-beaters. It is this partial

interpretation of the holistic human experience which leads to the confusion and disorientation of Billy Queen in *Hunting Captain Henley*.

Indeed had Billy read the black Caribbean journalist Darcus Howe's article 'Racist Scots? No Surprise', (*The Sunday Herald* 2002) he may have saved himself years of angst in his search to uncover the real truth about Henley and his father. In the piece Howe argues that the Scots invented racism and that although Scots are not born cruel, when it comes to its own image and representation of itself Scotland has been "rather bold in unburdening itself of the virus of racism stored in its head over the centuries" (p.22). Yet Billy's experience as a child leads him to believe the English Captain Henley was to blame for his father's condition. And that, subsequently, 'The English' are to blame for most things. This one-sided representation of Scottish/English relations is only properly scrutinised when Billy grows up in the course of his wide and varied international search. Only then does he begin to rationalise his father's many stories, including the time he struck an Arab woman on the face with the butt of his army rifle. The point is, it is only by his own conscious intervention that his imperial legacy can be expunged. The alternative is to nurture a state of denial leading to convenient cultural amnesia. I have used Gramsci to show that the process of linguistic assimilation is not always a unifying experience. In so doing I have attempted to illustrate how it can instead result in the creation of a hybrid language which reverberates with grinding unease creating a jarring, jagged psychological restlessness, a clash of linguistic concoctions generating contradictory messages, schizophrenic chaos and reactionary responses. Gramsci's analysis of cultural assimilation suffers from what I refer to as 'the Braveheart syndrome of modern Marxism'. Some Marxist theory starts from a point that assumes 'the complete innocence of the clans' who lived a utopian existence before the evil English appeared. Similarly, some branches of Marxist thought assumes innocence on the part of the working class British soldier press-ganged into duty for empire. What Gramsci and other Marxists fail to examine in any depth, however, are the levels of coherent thought already present in the transient consciousness of

the peasant class he refers to. In his essay 'Smashing The Cistern: The Acid Test of Irvine Welsh's Short Stores', Willy Maley refers to this as "the moralistic and patronising approach to representations of the working class present in Marxist thought." While aspects of Marxist theory have been invaluable to the construction of this thesis it is surely now incumbent on left-wing intellectuals to consider the complexities of human nature outwith the theatre of class struggle in which some are entrenched.

Billy's problems don't end there, however, because his enlightenment leads to further isolation within a society which, largely, fails to recognise his interpretation of what he knows to be the truth. While he reflects on the idea that he is, in-fact, the son of a mass murderer who slaughtered innocent Arabs, his uncles and family friends and neighbours prefer to remember Billy's dad as someone who was only doing their duty for king and country. It is this polarisation from the wider community which accentuates his continuing alienation.

All of the above represents the historical backdrop to the remainder of the critical component. Born within this framework is the character's dual identity and hybrid language, a linguistic formation which must adapt to the ambiguity of its identity. While such duality is already well documented in the annals of Scottish Literature, it is specifically a theory of the creation and development of the fascist voice within this context (the unresolved syndrome) which dominates the next section, a Scottish fascist voice which, partly due to the cultural amnesia touched on above, has been left so far unexplored.

Any discussion of fascism is a dangerous one. Today, in common usage, the word "fascist" does little more than conjure up visions of nihilistic violence. It is used to disparage and defame. In Scotland it is regularly used by teenagers in particular to describe parents, policemen, politicians and teachers: anyone in a position of authority. In terms of popular culture it often refers to skinheads, football hooligans and the BNP. The negative karma surrounding the word fascist is perhaps not surprising given the word's heritage. It is a heritage of usage made commonplace during the Second World War when it became a generic

term encompassing both Mussolini's Fascism and Hitler's National Socialism. But as James Gregor points out in *Mussolini's Intellectuals* (2005) this misplaced definition should be left as an artefact of the war. Italian Fascism at least should now be understood, writes Gregor, to be "a movement predicated on a reasonably well articulated belief system that engaged the rational commitment of many" (p.47). It is, indeed, within the context of 'united Scottish communities' that I have tried to redefine the 'Scottish fascist consciousness' and, as I explained in my introduction, it is one that is often (not always) devoid of racist intention. It is a fascist voice with no insight into the idea of "class struggle," but one built on unity between the classes exemplified by a host of 'bridging' groups and 'sub-cultures' reaching across and up to create a dignified and harmonious Scottish unity. In this sense, I have attempted to resurrect the true spirit of MacDiarmid and those cultural fascists of 1930's Renaissance Scotland, arguing it is this 'literary spirit' with which we must grapple and refine if we are to become true Scottish Renaissance writers of the 21st century.

If common 'civic unity' is a constituent building block of 'political fascism' then alienation plays a part in the creation of the 'emotional fascism' which, I have argued, contributes to the fascist voice. This contradiction remains central to Billy Queen's 'unresolved syndrome.' The passion and intensity of feeling he has for his father is a highly taut personal struggle which isolates him throughout the novel yet it is contrasted with the strong sense of unity and togetherness he experiences among the ex-pat community in Dubai. Both of these elements form the raw materials of the narrator's complex personality which is further complicated by the friction present in his hybrid language. It is only towards the end of the novel when Billy merges with Henley in the leper colony that emotion and language truly unite, creating the complete fascist voice. This is Giovanni Gentile's (1930's Italian fascist intellectual) "particularity" of individuals fusing into an "immanence" giving expression to the culture, economics, politics, and history of a people. The process of fusing a nation into an almost unbreakable union requires, as Gentile predicted, the presence of a man, or a minority of men,

“who represent the tendencies already apparent in a people,” (Rome: La Voce, 1920, p,71).

In Scotland today I have argued this fusion has already taken place. One consequence of this is what I have described as life in ‘the invisible empire’, a place where unspeakable and often silent understandings have grown outwith the tenets of democracy. It is within these zonal sub-cultures that fascist consciousness exists. As a resident and indigineous Scot who regularly moves in and out of these zones: the golf club, the bowling green, the social club, I stand by the empiricism of this part of my thesis. Slightly more contentious is my argument that a clearly defined ‘fascist voice’ has emerged as a result of that consciousness. In Archie Hind’s *The Dear Green Place* (1966) the despairing Mat blames his failure as a writer on the ‘Glasgow tongue’, calling it ‘a language which was not made to range, or explore, or express, a language cast out of the absence of possibility, a reductive, cowardly, timid, snivelling language cast out of jeers and violence and diffidence” (p.79). Being ‘cast out of the absence of possibility’ is the very alienation I have tried to explore throughout my thesis. It is, however, only when this alienated voice becomes educated and then is emotionally reunited with the authoritarian voice responsible for its alienation in the first place, that the real fascist voice emerges. It is, in turn, when the form of this voice merges with the content of the ‘raw materials’ of the fascist consciousness outlined above, that the experiment is complete. As with most working class, educated Scots, I have experienced my own mini ‘identity crises’ in the course of my research. How does the well educated Scot re-connect with the emotional context of the working class from whence he came? It is through years of experimentation and socialisation in the bowling clubs and pubs that I have fused the educated voice to the temperament described by Mat Craig. I have then transported both (in a unified form) back to confront the English voice which, I have argued, was partly responsible for its initial shape. While the emotional ‘reunion’ of both is cast as a ‘fictional experiment’ in *Hunting Captain Henley* it should not be forgotten its foundation is based on a real investigation into the English officer who really did bully my dad into shooting and killing innocent Egyptians. It

was my own alienation. My own diffident voice. My own educated voice. It is also my own strangely pacified response when I hear the voice of Henley in other, real life, everyday situations: a pacification fictionally exemplified by Billy's morphine induced consciousness at the end of the novel.

Like the narrator's journey to India, writing this thesis has also been an intellectual journey, during which I have explored what I've referred to as the 'cultural amnesia' at the heart of Scotland. It has been a long journey, one in which, at times, it seemed my intellectual intentions were overtaken by events. The National Theatre of Scotland's brilliant production *Black Watch* (2007) took the country by storm. Based on interviews conducted by Gregory Burke with former soldiers who served in Iraq, the production reflected the same psychological torture experienced by my dad after Suez. What made it special for me was its refusal to shirk from the raw reality of the part played by our troops in Iraq. In his *Plea for a Scottish Fascism* MacDiarmid himself pointed to the spirit of the Scottish soldier returning from battle as the one which had the power to fashion a fascist consciousness in Scotland. Although *Black Watch* stopped short of examining this aspect, it nonetheless perfectly presented the raw materials MacDiarmid wanted to mould in his imagined utopia of a new Fascist Scotland.

There were other startling developments too. Ken Loach's brilliant cinematic evocation of beautiful brutality in *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* (2006) (written by Paul Laverty) was surely more than a sympathetic look at Republicans in early 20th century Ireland, and two brothers torn apart by the anti-British rebellion. The film also depicts the work of the fascist Scots and English Black and Tans, torn and twisted after their experiences at The Somme, as they rape and pillage parts of Ireland. More importantly (for this thesis) the film momentarily examines the relationship between a bullying English sergeant and a Scots private who obeys him before both men proceed to beat up a Republican suspect (engine driver) at a train station.

There have been, of course, intellectual developments too. In his essay on literature and diversity 'Border-Crossing: New Scottish Writing,' (2007) Willy Maley points to emerging Scottish Asian writers who consider Scotland to be a colonised rather than a colonising country. Maley politely describes this as "complicating the picture of Scotland" before acknowledging the 'Scotland as a colonising country too' perspective. If my thesis achieves anything it is to at least try to counter the 'cultural amnesia' of what may be considered over simplistic perceptions of Scottishness. In my chapter on Cultural Repression, I have questioned the cultural psychology of such deductions. As Robina Qureshi says, we should at least admit our racism, as should Pakistanis.

As an ex-newspaper reporter I have sometimes had to wrestle with the conflict between fact and fiction in my novel. There are times during this project when I have strayed back into print journalism as a way of defending my thesis, as a way of empirically proving my points. In July 2007 I visited Hollybush House in Ayr, run by the charity Combat Stress. The work of Carolyn and Gary Walker (Head of Clinical Services at Hollybush House) is not only groundbreaking in that it tackles the effects of post-traumatic stress on the children of war veterans, it also proved to be an extremely emotional, and valuable source for my thesis, one where I could listen to the voices I'd tried to capture in my fiction. I'd gone there to somehow confirm to myself that my own experiences didn't matter: that they were merely isolated childhood machinations that should be left in the past or, at least, left in the fictional form of *Hunting Captain Henley*. What I discovered was a horrific catalogue of present tense psychological trauma suffered by the sons, daughters and wives of war veterans. My editor at *The Big Issue* Scotland wrote the headline 'Our Secret War' (2007,p.14). I agreed with her. This is, in-fact, Scotland's Secret War, a world where loved ones live in silence, shouldering the stress of dads newly returned from Afghanistan, The Falklands and Northern Ireland. In those wives and children I'd found living examples of the enforced 'cultural amnesia' I'd theorised about. Not only that, I'd discovered that fear and loyalty played their parts in these

kids choosing to bottle up the experiences of their fathers. To me this was more than just a piece of investigative journalism. It was an intellectual investigation, one in which I rediscovered the schizophrenic temperament and voice of fascism. Filled with emotion, these men weep, then hate and love with equal intensity, their war time experiences driving them to impassioned pleas for a better Scotland. At times their semi-hallucinatory states are peppered with weird foreign words and place names. They speak of family, of love and war, of nation and loyalty. I'd found the voice of my father. It was the one that haunted me as a child and inspired me as an adult. When I wrote my introduction to the piece there were times when I could barely differentiate between its factual content and the opening chapters of *Hunting Captain Henley*. It read:

THE NIGHT I broke his arm he was writhing around the bed spitting expletives about an English officer called Captain Henley. It wasn't the first or the last time I was to encounter Henley. But this had been a particularly violent flashback featuring a plethora of Egyptian words and place names: Port Said, Ismailia, El-Omari, Maadi. To this day the words stick in my head: demy (town) niwt (village) set maat (place of truth). My mum and I regularly struggled with his almost supernatural strength as he battled with his torturous Egyptian demons visible only to him. Even when the bone snapped that night he flailed it around wildly: normal pain a mere pawn in his mission to rid the room of the evil he thought existed.

As I pieced the story together using late night conversations about his experiences in The Royal Signals in 1951, I came to hate Henley. But I was told not to say a word incase people thought my dad was mental. The enforced silence drove me into my 'boys own' game of revenge against the posh Englishman who'd tormented my dad so much. I

exacted revenge on him as I played with my toy British Commando soldiers on the mantelpiece, subjecting him to an array of agonising injuries and death. He was the one with the pistol and the binoculars. I pressed his head against the white hot bar of the electric fire watching him melt onto my mother's best carpet.

To me at least Henley was an English coward. Fresh from Sandhurst he subjected the other Scots soldiers in my dad's regiment to systematic humiliation. The Jocks were fair game in his view.

Whenever there was a nasty or dangerous mission, he always sent my dad and his pals. I'd sit cross-legged on the living room carpet listening to his late night stories about Henley, relieved it was a talk night, not a fight night. His reminiscences took me into another world: a place where cruelty was common. There was the story about Henley refusing to give the men water rations as they dug a latrine in the blazing desert sun. Then there was the time during a billet inspection he ordered my dad's mate Scobie to empty his locker with letters from his mother. In front of the men he poked a hole in one of the letters, dangling it on the edge of his cane. 'I didn't think Jocks *could* write, he said sarcastically, adding, 'at least not in the Queen's English anyway.' As the story went, Scobie hit him before serving detention and a series of beatings.

There were other developments which, in a way, overtook the writing of this thesis. Earlier in this chapter I said the locations for my research were the golf clubs, pubs and bowling clubs of what I've described as 'the upper working class'. I wanted to prove in concrete terms that the extreme solutions voiced to Scotland's problems were not merely the stuff of fiction in

*Hunting Captain Henley*, or restricted to ‘special institutions’ like Hollybush House, but that they actually existed in real life, on our streets, in our parks, in our housing schemes. I wanted to experiment with the idea of *actualising* the fictional ‘political positioning’ of Uncle Alex and Uncle Ron in *Hunting Captain Henley*. That very opportunity arose when I met Dannie Lennie. Dannie is chairman of the Dalmuir Multi-Tenants and Residents Association in Clydebank, where I presently live. Dannie is pals with men like welder Terry Hamilton and electrician Jim Campbell. He told me about a form of ‘class war’ that was emerging in Clydebank. As Dannie himself said, it survived Hitler’s Blitz and Thatcher’s economics, but residents are turning vigilante because their town is becoming a ‘dumping ground’ for Glasgow’s social underclass. Dannie knows the flats in the area well and says he has witnessed a ‘degrading’ decline in living conditions. It was the pitch and tone of Dannie’s language (and that of his friends) which led me to interview them in some depth. What I discovered was a language ( and a mindset) that is rarely if ever reported in the mainstream press. They are the men who define an almost ‘old fashioned’ working class pride for the entire nation. They too are bristling with emotion: anger at the political correctness of a society they feel restricts their human rights, their right to free speech, in favour of the new influx of ‘junkies’ and ‘wasters’ who repress them in their communities. Dannie wants to ‘round them up’ and imprison them on a remote island off the West Coast of Scotland. He isn’t the only one. Other men, sick at what they see as the repeated infringement of decency in what used to be a proud community, speak of even more radical solutions. Their language isn’t just the fictional language of Uncle Alex or Uncle Ron in *Hunting Captain Henley*. It is the marginalised language of many men in Scotland today. It is the fascist voice of the new culturally repressed. The story I wrote, entitled ‘Class War in Clydebank’ (Big Issue: January 2008) failed to capture the true emotion of the voices. In some ways, it represents the real limitations of journalism in its failure to capture the intensity of these mens thoughts and opinions.

In his description of 'the Glasgow man' in *The Heart of Scotland* George Blake says the Glasgow man is "downright, unpolished, direct and immediate. He has the furious quality of the Scot in its most extreme form. He can be terribly dangerous in revolt and as terribly strong in defence of his own conception of order" (p.112) This man could be the perfect fascist. He is, as MacDiarmid described him in his 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism' a "lawless believer in law, a rebel believer in authority."

In the course of researching this thesis I have carried this quote from MacDiarmid close to my heart. Many of the men I have befriended on the golf courses and bowling clubs (the last place you might expect to find revolutionary politics) fit the description well. Scotland is the home of golf, and many club golfers are sticklers for the rules. The Royal Scottish Golf Union laws are fiercely, some may argue fanatically applied. Yet incumbent on every golfer is the requirement to play the game in his own style, free from any restraints. It is that rebel spirit which is welcomed in most of our clubhouses. It is then a fiercely individualistic sub-culture which demands the same standards from everyone for the greater good of the club. It is also a bringer together of the classes: a place where men weekly cast aside class differences to overcome the often harsh Scottish weather and to share a dram and a chat in the warmth of the clubhouse afterwards. Where else could a dentist, a plumber, a doctor, and an electrician engage in steamy debate about the state-of-the-nation? And where else is the refreshing zest of political incorrectness allowed to flourish? To me, these men represent MacDiarmid's 'rebel believers in authority.' Rightly or wrongly, their views have been sidelined, dangerously marginalised by a Scottish Government obsessed with political correctness and driven, it often seems, by a desire to 'neuter the intellect' of the Scottish male.

As a writer I have at least tried to re-engage with that spirit. Other writers should too. It is our responsibility to fill the gap left by our weak willed politicians and those mainstream journalists chained to self-censorship. This has to happen if we are to connect with, as Margery McCulloch calls it in her introduction to *Modernism and Nationalism* (2004) "the

regeneration of the social, economic and political life of the nation.” (p.xiii). The Scottish fascist spirit MacDiarmid sought isn’t dead. It beats in the heart of many Scots. (see *Hunting Captain Henley*) But it is a spirit that has been ignored because of its post Hitler political incorrectness. Also, its heart is not purely that of the racist British or English National Party. It is one which stands for clarity of Scottish identity, for an intelligent, highly organised, no-nonsense decency which overrides the brute instincts often associated with other debased forms of fascism. It is also one which connects with Alan Riach’s point in ‘The Scottish Renaissance’ that “Scots became both the victims and the perpetrators of Empire itself.” It is this duality of experience which the new generation of Scots must surely acknowledge and carry forth with them into the 21st century.

# **Hunting Captain Henley**

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Department of English and Scottish Literature and Language.**

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## Chapter 1

### A Womb With A View

AND THAT'S it. You're squeezed out your mother's womb into the West of Scotland and there's no going back, is there? Too right there's no. Billy Queen. Son of James and Sheonagh. Done. Then there's the squealing, the anger and frustration. Frustration? Frustration at what? At what boy? Get a grip of yourself laddie. As the military authorities marched across No Man's Land and the bagpipes wailed and the blood and the snot shot out. Straighten up lad. Eyes front ya cunt. March in good order. Dae as yer telt. And that's it. Life and death. Life and fuckin death ya bamstick ye.

My Uncle Alex speaks like this: dae this, dae that. Hey. You. Kimere. Gon get me chips. Hey. Listen. Kimere ya wee cunt. Take this right, get yersel a sweet. Listen. Don't forget. Yer a Queen. Now cummon. Hey. Kimere. A man's a man for aw that. Listen. Listen tae me. Ok? Right. On yer way.

He pats me and shakes me, straightens me up, ruffles ma hair, slaps me quite gently on the neck, tweaks ma cheek, pushes me forward oot the door doon the path oot into the street. Doon at the streetlamp the shadows wait, Paterson, Davis and Beano. I notice Beano has a German strip on.

'Aw right Queenie ya wee cunt, empty yer pockets or forever hod yer peace', says Paterson, snotters on top of his big rubber lip.

'I've no got a piece.'

‘No that kinda piece, ya wee shite. Peace as in imagine awra people. Livin life in peace.

He slaps ma ear.

‘Leave him you,’ shouts Beano. ‘His da built a wall for us.’ ‘Aw right wee man, on yer way, right.’

I’m no gon back hame, not with Uncle Alex there. Him and his chips. He’s only there because my dad is in hospital. He will be out soon, I know he will, then everything will be all right. My dad was in the British Army in 1956. He told me something happened to him and that’s why he has to go into hospital. Something about an English officer who tried to put him down but my dad hit him back and got into trouble, big trouble. I hate the English. So do maist people in our street.

I walk it down to Hamilton instead, all the way from Hillhouse, down past the Jock Stein pitches, past the bowling green, down through Wellhall cemetery, past Philips factory and down past The Peacock Cross. It takes about forty minutes. It’s no ma fault I don’t have enough money for the bus fare. There’s this man in our street. He says we should just steal things if we don’t have money because that’s what the catapultists do, or the capitulists or something.

There’s a shop at the top cross I want to tell you about right. It’s an old building with a wee entrance that sells Juicy Fruit and The Daily Express. Upstairs there’s aw these dear toys, train sets and battleship models. There are boys, maistly with their dads, snobby wee guys wae money. The soldiers are in neat, rectangular boxes on a shelf: the Africa Corps, British Commandos, German Infantry, Japanese, American, Russian. Photographs on the box show them in battle so you can see their colour and shape without even opening it. The Japanese are yellow with mad bulging eyes and bayonets, the Americans khaki brown with 5 medics in the corps. But it’s the Germans I want. They’re dead hard looking, as if they cannae die. Inside the jacket they go, sticking out like a giant bar of Toblerone. The old wooden stairs creak as I

tiptoe towards the exit, passing the knight in shining armour at the door and out into the precinct where all the civilians run for cover from a big rain storm.

That night I sneak behind the setee and place the box against the wall. Mum and Uncle Alex are watching a crap John Wayne movie on the telly. There's somethin funny about thae two. He's forgotten about the chips for a start. I leave the box there for a second and crawl out of my trench into the open, just in time to snatch the last bit of Mars Bar my mother had sliced into ten equal pieces as a special Saturday night treat. Back in my hidehout behind the setee I lift the box and smell it. It smells rich, like a mix of thick cardboard and Juicy Fruit.

Back out in the open nobody says a word. Uncle Alex keeps looking at my mum and she kids on she disnae see him. But I know she does. The two of them don't even speak to me. Our two bedroomed, floodlit fenced council house is better than the The Comrie tenements. Uncle Alex says the people in them are fuckin junky scum. It's in the hoose Uncle Alex shows me how to hit first and ask questions later. A 'pre-emptive strike', he calls it.

'Look at Hiroshima,' he says. 'Bang. Nae questions. Nae poofin about.'

He shows my brother Lewis and I old black and white films of this boxer from Glasgow called Benni Lynch. The guy comes straight out of his corner on the bell in round one and thumps the other guy almost before he gets off the stool.

'That's whit ah mean by a pre-emptive strike,' says Alex.

He also tells me about the fitba. I've tae 'rummel them up' and put ma foreheid on top of the defenders, stare him oot aw the time.

'It's like two stags,' says Uncle Alex. 'The strongest will stand its ground and the weakest will run. That's ma fitba philosophy.'

He makes Lewis and me practice on the livingroom floor at night. Just the two of us pressing heads and shouting at one another. I learn phrases like 'your teas oot cunt,' 'don't fuck wae me,' and, 'you're fuckin deid bastard, get it'. 'GET IT' is to be said louder than 'you're

fuckin deid bastard' and ye hiftae push the other guy in the chest while yer sayin it.

A few weeks later I'm playing centre-half for the school in the Shinwell Cup and when this centre-forward guy tries to tackle me I'm like this, throwin the ball in his face, squarin right up to him, touch me again cunt and you're fuckin deid. The boy turns round and hits me right in the face.

'Yer no daein it right,' shouts Uncle Alex from the touchline. 'You forgot to say GET IT!'

That night, he buys me a bottle of Irn Bru and a Mars Bar and he's like this, 'Don't forget, you're from the same background as the Baxters and Laws of the world. That's whit makes you special. Never forget it. Nobody is ever going to push you around. Put that incident oot yer mind. Think ahead tae the next game. And make sure you dae it right next time.'

I'm not that good at football, not the way Uncle Alex wants me to play it.

My mum says I'm a Queen tae the core. I hiv the high forehead and the blond hair, the freckles and the broad, squashed looking nose wae the big nostrils. She says I have a Roman nose and Uncle Alex says aye coz it roams aw ower his fuckin face. Alex also calls me 'nigger nose,' 'rasta face,' and 'cunt features.' I have a pear shaped head with a chin that is pressed right into my chest and big pointy ears like Mr Spock from Star Trek and a big a cow's lick with brown plastic sandals from Woolworths.

I want to tell you something about my mum. She tells lies.

The next Saturday I walk into Macgregors again and steal the British Commandos. That night I line both armies up on the mantelpiece above the electric fire. The British officer with the binoculars and the pistol leads the attack from the television end. But I make sure the Germans are well dug in behind the clock and birthday cards, cover for my guys and good for the flat-bellied machine-gunner. I can't speak German but my accent is ok for what I have to say. VAIT, says the German officer. Hold your vire. Vait. Ze British vill attack at sunrise, zey always do. Vait and see. Have vaith in me men. I vill see you through this and you will be back in Berlin bevore Christmas. The British chap is more polite and big headed. OK

chaps. Listen up. We must make our way along this mantelpiece and through those damned birthday cards to secure our mission. Now Gerry may well be dug in behind the lighter but if we can make early progress up and over the old ashtray then there's no reason why we can't be marching down Leicester Square within days. Chin up men. I'll lead the way. Forward. I have no ammunition so I use the nail of my right forefinger to plunk them down. First to get it were some ordinary looking Commando chaps with sten-guns. They stand sort of sideways. I make sure an early grenade is lobbed in from the German side exploding towards the back of the British. PPCHEEWW! PPCHEEW! AOW! AOW! Sandy old boy we've been hit. Quick take cover! Roger's bought it. Took a forefinger right on his napper. Then the German machine gunners open up. TWFUHHHTUT, TWFUHHHTUT, TWFUHHHTUT, picow, picow, picow, arrrrgh.

Taking cover behind my dad's cigarette packet the British officer comforts one of his dying men. Wilfred old chap. I'll tell Charlotte you died like a hero. Hang on in there old bean. It's not over until the fat lady sings. Wilfred dies. Braving the German machine gun fire the officer picks him up and places him inside the fag packet, the perfect burial place for such a brave Britisher. He wraps the guy up in the the silver wrapping of the Embassy Tipped. Goodnight my brave Wilfred. Sleep tight. We will win this damn battle for you if for nothing else. To make it real one or two Germans have to die as well. It's the guy who's kneeling that gets it first. ARRGH. Schweinhund, he shouts, as he falls off the mantelpiece and into the electric ring of the fire. One commando sees his chance for revenge. He slides down the stone fireplace and flicks the switch. Burn, you Nazi pig, he screams, as the bar glows bright red and the plastic melts, the smell of war wafts around the livingroom. A big explosion rips apart Uncle Alex's birthday cards, one falling from the mountain top into the fire. Burn you birthday card coward. You and your Best wishes from Mary, Tom and the kids! The British officer charges the German lines on his own. Pitchow! A single bullet hits him in the chest. Dead. The rest of the men jump the mantelpiece over onto the television. Then it's across the back of dad's

armchair, up onto the window sill and over onto the stereo.

‘What the hell is that smell?’ asks my mum when she enters the battlezone with shopping bags. ‘Get out of here,’ I reply. ‘This is no place for a woman.’ She drops the bags on the livingroom floor and rushes over to switch the electric fire off, the plastic remains of a British commando toasting on the bar. I let rip one last big explosion behind British lines as I dodge her right hand which tries to slap the back of my head. Forget the troops. Now I have to escape as she comes roaring after me. The bathroom upstairs is the only place with a snib on the door so I go there, dodging her swear words as I scamper. Slapping my way upstairs I feel the near miss of a slipper mortar whipping past my right ear. The enemy is chasing me but, now slipperless, it is slow and out of artillery fire. Once safely dug in on the toilet seat I notice how she cleverly changes tactics. ‘Open the door’, she asks politely. ‘Just for a minute. I promise I won’t hit you,’ piiddummp! I feel a really hard hit to the right side of my face then another slap across the back of the head. ‘That’s. What. You. Get. For. Nearly. Burning. The. House. Down,’ she screams, her blows coming down on me in time with her shouting. I should have known. It was an ambush!

Back on the battlefield I make sure the English officer gets it. I stand on his heid so that his legs flick up to the toe of my burst training shoe. ‘No sa smart noo ur ye?’ says I, grinding his wee commando bunnet right into the shag pile.

My mum’s pal says she thinks I’m too old to still be playing at sodies, but I think I’m ok. I’m still only eight going on nine but I look a bit older. I read things tae. About the war and that. The old pit bing behind the house is a good battleground. There’s an old railway bridge next to it. You should see it man, covered in trees and black ash. On the other side is the farmer’s fields and the haunted house, a spooky old building that stands in the middle of a field. There’s a burn tae. I’m tellin ye man, ye can creep up it, right next tae the hoose. Then there’s the cows’ shite in the fields. They’re the landmines right. You could probably use them to torture your prisoners. Pick it up wae a stick and let them smell it.

I build an underground trench next to the railway line and cover it over neatly with chunks of grass. It's my very own Siegfried line, with wee tunnels so I can squirm around underground. Alone and invisible.

Inside I plank a torch and my *Hotspur* and *Victor* comics. I've also got some war books and some poems I found in my dad's wardrobe by this English guy called Wilfred Owen. There's one, called 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' or something. It's about all these wee guys getting killed and there's no funeral music, just the bang, bang, bang. Uncle Alex says I'm weird because I get big new words and use them, he says I don't sound right because I speak Scottish and use these words tae but I don't care about him when he slags me because he's not my dad. I can sometimes hear other boys who squeal around on top like Red Indians, waving sticks and stones. I just put my torch on and read, alone and invisible.

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

- Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

Back at the house I slip under the covers of my bed and the plastic torch beam wavers only when I turn the pages. I read *The Outcasts of St Oswalds* and *Danny Boyd*, the working class golfer. I know what my mum and Uncle Alex are up to. I can hear them in the next room, her giggles, his booming big voice, she's tiny tae, about five foot two and Uncle Alex is over six foot. 'Fuck me,' she says, then the bed posts thumping time and time and time again against the wall. I wish I was in a snobby middle-class family, like Wilfred, the guy who writes the poems - or like that English officer guy I tortured. I'd have my own converted loft. Up there nobody could get to me.

'Whit the fuck are you doing ya wee cunt?' says Uncle Alex shining his torch into my face.

You should see it. It's bigger than mine, a big black rubber thing. He's like this, 'What are ye up to eh? Hidin under the covers eh, havin a wank probably when your mother needs you next door. Get up,' says he, 'before I string ye up.' Then he's like this, feelin dead sorry for me. 'Yer dad's taken a turn for the worst in hospital. Just lie doon. Shut up. Here. There's some crisps. Yer mother's gon up to the hospital right now so you'll hiv tae learn tae fend fur yersel noo, like the survival of the fittest, like ah say.'

Next morning we go up to Hartwood Hill, just me and my mum, up to the mental hospital. She buys me some lemon sherberts for the bus. See ma mum, she's really nice sometimes. But sometimes I hate her, especially when she treats Uncle Alex as if he's my dad.

There are men and women around his bed. I don't know who they are. Never even seen them before. Just standing there with their airms folded. My dad is sitting in a chair staring up at the corner and my mum is speaking to the adults as if she knows them, calling them by their first names. One of the tall men is English. My mum doesn't know his name. He looks down at her because she's really small and he keeps looking at her as if he maybe fancies her, not even bothering about my dad.

My dad's pyjamas are stained. I've not to speak to him so I just sit on the edge of the bed watching him watching whatever he sees up in the corner. He's moving his lips. Whispering. Strange words. Something about kefa khered, kefa khered. Then he turns his head and looks straight at me, not at them, at me. 'They're experimenting on me Billy' says he. 'Who?' says I. 'They bastards!' says he, nodding at the big Englishman. The big man kids on he hasn't heard anything but I know he's listening. 'Who are you?' I want to ask. But I'm not allowed. When it's time to go the strange adults leave first. Then it's our turn. I'm not allowed to touch my dad so I just walk away and leave him staring at the corner of the ceiling saying the words kefa khered, demy demy, set maat, set maat, over and over and over again.

These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished

Memory fingers in their hair of murders:

That night Uncle Alex is acting aw big. He thinks he's special, thinks we're all special, The Queens. Different aye, special naw. One of ma pal's dads met him at a bowling club social night and he's like this, I'd string them up from every lampost. 'Who?' asks Charlie.

'Women,' says Uncle Alex, 'CND women, the feminist lesbian cows who are trying to take control of this country.'

Sometimes he thinks he's ma dad so he does. Mum says he's only trying to help but he gets right on my nerves sometimes, the way he tries to organise everything, as if he's the big sergreant guy. He wisnae even in the army. He brings all the weapons down from the loft, including my dad's old rifle he'd nicked after he left the Royal Signals. There are other 'defensive weapons' as he calls them - an old police baton Uncle John gave to him as a 40th birthday present, a baseball bat, an iron bar, and some cool commando knives. 'Makes Stalingrad look like a poof's picnic,' says Uncle Alex. 'We need to prepare for the onslaught Billy, if they know your dad's away, they might try their hand but we'll be ready, eh son? Don't forget, your dad's ma brother. We're aw in this thegither. Take that,' says he, handing me the baseball bat. 'Now march one two, march one two,' says he pushing me in the back, prepare to defend the Queen's castle!

Our house is like the Alamo. Before he was put in hospital, and after a big fight with the council, my dad built a high fence right round it. Uncle Alex makes it even better - he builds a wee tower next to the hut so we can stand on it and watch for the Junky Comrie Scum. He gets some big floodlights from a security pal of Uncle John's, you can flick them on and off from a switch in the wall next to dad's armchair.

He tapes all these war movies and documentaries and we sit and watch them all night. The World At War, The Great Escape, Colditz, The Wooden Horse, Zulu, The Battle of Britain, A Bridge Too Far, The Longest Day. One of his favourite moments is in Zulu when Michael Caine shouts at the Zulus. He's like this: C'mon. C'mon. What are you waiting for! When Uncle Alex is drunk he replays that bit over and over again. Sometimes he even drags

the TV up to the window and opens it. He's like this Cummon. Cummon. Then he goes, "Ah said cummoan ya fuckers come ahead."

He's no daft ma Uncle Alex. He's dead detailed aw the time. One night this guy on a BBC2 documentary was talking about the Arnhem landings in World War 2. The big BBC guy said that the 4th and 5th parachute regiment were among the first to be dropped into hostile territory. Bullshit, said Uncle Alex. The 4th and 5th were given strict orders to remain in the rear and to support the 2nd and 7th who were the first to be dropped. He sat up all night writing a letter to the BBC to point out their factual error. And he was dead happy when he received a reply from the producer which he showed to everyone in The Lariat.

Dear Mr Queer,

Thank you for you letter which highlighted the factual inaccuracy in our documentary *Behind Enemy Lines*.

While it is true to say this particular programme wrongly referred, out of context may I add, to the 4th and 5th parachute regiment, it should be made clear that the BBC did, in-fact, commission independent producers to make the film.

However, while we at the BBC are not at liberty to vet every researcher who works for independent film producers, we do strive for objectivity, balance, fair comment and accuracy at all times.

Rather as an artist may strive for perfection without ever obtaining it, so we at the BBC strive for fairness. As you correctly point out we failed on this occasion to achieve that aim and we are grateful to viewers like yourself for writing to us to point out this mistake.

Be assured every effort will be made in future to ensure the empirical integrity of our documentaries remains intact, keeping the BBC at the head of historical programming in the years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Terence Stripe,  
Programme Controller. War documentaries.

He showed everybody that letter. He'd take it out at all times of day and return it to the top drawer in the livingroom with a contented sigh. It wasn't until mum pointed out that they'd spelled his name wrongly that the shit really hit the fan. He sat down and wrote a letter back.

Dear Mr Tripe,

Thank you for your letter in which you incorrectly spell my name. It is in fact QUEEN as in Queen Elizabeth.

I want you to know that I don't like people getting my name wrong. It is plain ignorant so it is. In future I'd be much obliged if you would refrain from putting such tripe into your programmes and into your letters.

Yours faithfully,

Alex Queen

That night, after a few drinks, he comes into my room and locks me in a tiny cupboard beside the army gun in the loft. He leaves me there for ages sitting shivering in the dark. He thinks it's a game. That I like it. But I don't. I'm scared. More scared than I can ever say. This is what it's like when the enemy captures you, he shouts up from the livingroom, banging the baseball bat on the ceiling below me. Can you handle it? Can you? I hate Uncle Alex. He's a prick.

Next day he takes me down to Hamilton police station on a kind of unofficial open day for

relatives. Uncle John let me clap the police dugs. He puts me in handcuffs and puts me into the cell for a wee while just to let me see what it's like. The blanket on the bed is aw jaggy and it's cauld.

Back on the scheme I catch bees and torture them, keep their wings wet in the sticky jam jars, the cowards. Up at the Fifty Feet my pal Esther and I capture frogs and blow them up with straws watching them explode as cars drive over them. You should see Esther. He looks like Esther Ranzten out of *That's Life* with the big buck teeth and the blond hair. He has a long pointed face and the hair curves round his high cheek bones.

We build more dens. Then slide down the bing on freshly nicked breadboards from the bakers. We nick tumshies from the farm and carve our initials in the tarmac pavements when it's hot.

Everybody's intae the Bay City Rollers. And we dance in the nude. With our blue suede shoes. Wembley pitch invasions and platform shoes. We have Bazooka Joe T-Shirts, Subbuteo and Action Men. We play at football hooligans and pitch invasions. Up the park Beano even builds a kid-on stand from the bread boards. We wreck it, taking big runnies and pure smashin our feet through the thin parts of it.

That night Uncle Alex comes back from a job in West Kilbride. Although he is on invalidity because of his back, him and Uncle Jimmy disappear for days on end doing all sorts of jobs, working in quarries, on roofs, building walls, anything that brings in a bit of extra cash. He's raging when he comes in tae. He's heard that one of the neighbours has shopped him to the social and he isnae in the mood for taking prisoners ah can tell ye. It's a Friday night and we're watching *The Professionals* on the telly but he has other things on his mind. He's rocking back and forward in ma dad's armchair no even followin the Bodie and Doyle plot. Normally that Gordon Jackson has a soothing effect on him, as if he knows him or something. There's something sad about Uncle Alex. It's as if he thinks he's part of something big but he isnae, he's just a prick. 'You. Get up that fuckin loft and get me yer dad's rifle,'

he says. 'Leave the laddie alain,' says mum. 'A pre-emptive strike, like ah says, a pre-emptive strike,' he replies, ignoring her pleas. 'That wee wide cunt across the road is gettin it. He's deid fuckin meat. Nae cunt shops Alex tae the social. I fought for this fuckin country while tossers like him were fuckin aboot working in jewellers shoaps and the like.' I go and get the gun for him. He tries tae load it but it keeps jamming. Eventually he settles for the baseball bat which he cracks into our neighbour's head.

This wummin is shouting 'Kill the bastard, Alex,' as they roll about on the front grass. The guy is taken away in an ambulance and, by luck, Uncle John is on duty that night and gets one of his Masonic pals to take the statements. 'It wiz just like this,' Uncle Alex says. 'He came running across the front grass wae a baseball bat in his hand. I don't know what he has against me but there was madness in his eyes. Well I had to defend myself, ken, a pre-emptive strike, the best line of defence is attack so I tried to make him see reason. Then he jist lost the place and ended up wae blood drippin fae his heid.'

The guy got a fractured skull and nearly died in Hairmyres. But Uncle Alex was never charged. That night Uncle Jimmy came roon and a few pals fae The Lariat and we hid a wee party tae celebrate his victory.

He'd taped the theme tune to The Professionals which he played over and over again all night. It wiz great. We got big packets of salt and vinegar chipsticks and were allowed to drink strong shandies. My mum sang:

I  
Left  
My heart  
In Shan  
Fran  
Shisco  
Above

the blue

And

Windy Shees.

To go

Where

Little cable

cars

fly

halfway

to the stars.

The autumn leaves

May

Fill

The air

I don't care

Then, fur the finale, she walks ower tae Uncle Alex and touches his wrist gently.

My love waits there

‘Where Sheonagh, where!’

In Shan Franshisco.

Then Uncle Alex picks me up and twirls me round and says ‘Yer a Queen son, never forget it, a Queen among men.’ And my tongue is red raw and swollen wae the salt and vinegar and it’s magic. That night he slaps me in the head for raiding the fridge. But I don’t care. Coz I wiz a Queen so ah wiz. A Queen among men who knew the meaning of a pre-emptive strike.

That night I gets into bed with my torch and builds a wee wigwam wae the blankets. I hear him in bed with my mum but I cannae be bothered listenin tae their shagging sounds because if my dad was here he would load the gun properly and put a bullet through both their heads.

## Chapter 2

### Into Enemy Territory

WHEN I wake up the house is quiet. I stare at the ceiling where my model aeroplanes hang: Spitfires, Messerschmitts and Stukas. The RAF are outnumbered yet they still think they can win. But not in this war. Not in my war. Not after what the British did to my dad.

I push my right hand out of the bed for a big ball of plasticine on the bedside table and throw it at the three spitfires on the ceiling. It hits one of them, making it swing on its string, but it doesn't fall to the floor.

I open my book of poems. The first verse of one of them, called Arms and the Boy, feels right, so I whisper it to myself.

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

I can just about hear those two moving around in the next bedroom, so I whisper it again and again and again to drown out the sound, especially the one of my mum moaning and the thump, thump, thumping, of the headboard against the wall. I once found black stockings and suspenders in her wardrobe. Wonder if she has them on this morning?

If my dad was here things wouldn't be like this. He gave me an old gas mask for Christmas, a real First World War one. I sit up in bed and put it on. Then I build a tent with the sheets and sit in there looking at his old black and white army photographs. There's one, right, he's in a jeep in the desert with his khaki shorts on. He looks dead cool with his leg sort of hanging out the door as if he's just returned from an important mission behind enemy lines. That must have been taken before Henley made him dig the latrines. There's a man in one of the photographs who kind of looks like Henley, all smart with a stick tucked under his arm. In another photo he's pointing the stick at my dad, like pure ordering him about. Every time I see that one it makes me breathe dead quick, especially with the gas mask on.

It was like the time my dad took me to this big posh house in Hamilton to get his wages from his boss. I had to put my best jacket on and buckle the belt at the front. Then I had to stand with my hands by my side in the boss's hall while he got this wee brown envelope with money in it. The boss guy was smiling, like as if he was being dead kind to me. But he made sure he got a good look at my shoes, I remember that, as if they were dirty or something. It made me feel like I was in church with all the snobby people and us dead poor, and I started breathing quickly just like now, looking at Henley ordering him around.

At school that day I hear them talking about my dad. There's one guy called John Paterson. He lives three doors down from us except he has plenty of money. Wears a soveriegn ring and drives a red Chopper. Buys tonnes of Spanish Tobacco and Stroodles and even goes to concerts. He once gave me four pence for a frozen Quenchy Cup and when I took it he sniggered at me as if I was a beggar. It's ok for him, his dad works on the oil rigs - flies in big helicopters across the North Sea and gets paid a lot of danger money. I heard him telling Uncle Alex all about it at a Hogmanay party in his house, slipping John some money while he stood there, the legs apart, one hand in the pocket, like John Wayne or something. The Patersons are English tae. Uncle Alex punched the wall when he got in that night, 'Fuckers,' says he, 'coming up here, stealin the oil like that.'

Anyway, Paterson's like this, 'there's Eppie's son.'

'Better watch he doesn't take an eppie in class.'

'Whit's an eppie?' asks that wee blond wan Lorraine Sweeney.

'His dad takes them. My mum said that Mrs Smith told her her he foams at the mouth.'

'Whit like?' the wee Lorraine wan asks.

'Like this, like a mouthful of Cremola Foam,' says he, spittin and sleverin doon his chin.

What did I ever do to Paterson? And Sweeney tae, why does she laugh at my dad? I want to tell you something. See my dad? He disnae foam at the mooth. He jist stares at the corner and speaks in funny voices. Sometimes he sees something and he tries to attack it, and when it's all over, he just lies there and holds my hand and once he told me he loved me, but thae two don't know, they just walk about as if they're adults, as if they know what to do all the time. I just stand there on my own, staring at nothing.

At playtime I sees her roon at the bins. She's got her back against the wall as if she's about to be shot by a firing squad or something. I'd seen her there the day before getting a feel from big Derek Smith. I go up to her her but once I'm there I don't really know what to do. I touches her doon there anyway and she's like this, 'Stoap it Billy, stoap it, or I'll phone the polis,' and her breath smells of lentil soup tae. I runs away and she shouts after me, 'I'll see you here the morra, right.'

Later on, at hame time, I walks up the road wae Paterson. He walks over to this auld shopping trolley behind Galbraiths, he's dead brave him sometimes, just walks away with it as if it's his. I'm like this, 'Geez a shot.' And he's like this, puttin his haun oot, 'It'll cost you.' I dips into ma pocket and gies him ma last two pence, then he pushes the trolley down the hill so I cannae get it. It goes right onto the road tae and just misses a big bus. I run down after it but by the time I push it back up the hill he's away. So I just walk aboot with it myself then leave it.

Next day at school I turns up to see Sweeney but she's no there so I just walk away. I hate

they two. They think they own the place. She lives in the Comrie tae. Uncle Alex says it's full of giro junkies and damp flats. Yet she thinks she is somethin.

I just stand there in the rain till the bell rings.

That night I throw my last spitfire out the bedroom windae. The prize fighter plane cannae even fly, nosediving onto the back grass, smash!

I cannae sleep so I gets under the covers with my torch, my Victor, and Wilfred Owen. The house is quiet. But I keep thinking about my dad. He shouldn't be in hospital. They're experimenting on him. The authority ones. Like the smarmy look on the boss's face. And the big strange Englishman in the hospital eyeing my mum up and sniggering with the doctor because my dad was talking to himself about what happened to him in Egypt, and the weird words and everything.

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

Something *will* happen. I'll make sure it does.

I just creep downstairs and sneak out the back door. It doesn't take me long to get to the trench I'd dug up the bing behind our house. The bing is a crazy place. There's a deid alsatian up there, it's heid all smashed in with a brick. And there's bits of scud mags and empty beer cans. It's like the countryside except the sheep look dead scared. One of them got shot in the heid with an air rifle. You should see its eye man it's pure hingin oot.

It's freezing inside the trench but I don't care. One of Wilfred's poems is lying in the ash. I must have left it there the last time I was in my den.

I pick it up and switch on the wee blue torch. Dear Wilfred, I say, sorry for leaving your poem scrunched up like that. I promise I won't do it again, old boy, very uncaring of me. Sometimes I think Wilfred sounds like Henley. I'm not sure he means it. He just does old boy. Like the way people on this side of the bing sound different to them up the Wimpy scheme. There's a guy up there called Esther right. He's called Esther because he has buck teeth and blonde hair like Esther Rantzen out of That's Life. He's at secondary school and he's got his own chemistry set. He told me he could make a potion that would help my dad. Thing is, he would as well. Esther would shag his teacher. He'd even rob a bank if he could. It's getting light by the time I cross no man's land to the other side of the bing. It's not like my street. There's skateboards and safety helmets and Choppers. And the mums shout things like: Alistair your dinner's out, instead of, Jamesie fuckin movin it. I stop at the old scrapyard. Sometimes I do dead funny things, not funny ha ha, funny peculiar. Like this old car in the scrappie it looked no too bad so I sat in it for a bit, the smell of rust and that. I lay slumped over the big rubber steering wheel for a while, just to see what it would be like to be in an accident. It was a right old banger inside I'll say that for it. All the dials were smashed in as if someone had just put the boot right through them. There were green, red and yellow wires hanging from the dashboard and the passenger seat was just foam and bare steel. I twist my neck a bit and keep my eyes open to make it look real. See if the farmer came, right, he'd probably think I was a zombie or something. I can't stop thinking about Esther. The big teeth and the chemistry beakers. I try to put the thing into gear but it willnae work, the smashed windscreen and thousands of tiny bits of glass sticking to my coat like that, as if I really care. I keep thinking about my teacher, Ms Carmichael. She's the one who goes on holiday to places like Egypt near where my dad fought, acting the posh tourist and staying in fancy hotels. She told us she'd been there and when she asked if anyone knew where Egypt was I put my hand up. 'Please miss,' I said, 'my dad was there. It's near the Suez Canal. Captain

Henley told him to shoot some terrorists there and after he did as he was told they put him in prison.’ You should have seen her face. She went in the huff and then she said war was a bombinthenation. She pure wouldn’t look at me after that. Then I remember one of the poems. It’s about a teacher right. When all the soldiers leave for war she thinks its great. She waves to them all. Then when they return, all twisted and beat up, she just ignores them because it gives her a red neck.

Once more the teacher’s face clenched stern;  
For through the window, looking on the street,  
three soldiers hailed her. She made no return.

Esther’s dad is a teacher tae, well a lecturer guy. When I chap the front door he opens it with his big beard and round glasses and just looks at me as if I was a beggar. I don’t know why but every time I talk to him I feel the same way I did when the minister gave me a book prize at primary two. It was called ‘*Although He Was Black*’ and it was about this wee African guy who jumped into a pool, like Tarzan, to save a drowning white boy. The white boy had a shed and blond hair and he looked posh.

He keeps me in the hall and asks me questions, like an interrogation.

‘Is your father still in hospital? Your father. In hospital? He’s been idle for some time hasn’t he?’

‘What exactly is the matter with him?’

‘The war.’

‘Which war?’

‘The Suez War.’

He flicks through a book he’s holding and whistles. Then Esther shouts ‘just come up.’ His bedroom is like Dr Jekyll’s laboratory wae frothing beakers and smells. See Esther right, he

treats me as if I'm his wee brother. I don't know why, I think it's because he's in The Scouts and I'm in The Cubs and he likes the war and everything. He sits on his bed and plays *The House of The Rising Sun* on his guitar. There are scud mags on his flair and his mum disnae even bother. When he finishes he's like this:

'Aha, young William, and to what do we owe this pleasure this fine sunny morning?'

'How far away ur ye from a cure?'

'I have it right here,' he says, handing me a coke bottle. 'It's like Tegratol mixed with valium. Put a drop in his tea twice a day.'

They say that Esther is a chemistry genius. Like he's been in the papers and everything because he got the highest exam mark in Scotland. He even won a big competition. The stuff looks purple but I trust him and I tell myself I'm gonnae dae it, I'm gonnae put it in my dad's tea.'

'Where the fuck have you been?' says Uncle Alex when I get in.

'Naewhere,' says I, the troosers covered in black ash.

'Your mother's been worried sick about you. We were nearly phonin the polis.'

'So?'

'So? So, is it? I'll so you in a minute.'

He disnae hit me though, cause he knows my dad would kill him. He's sittin there eatin his tea, no even caring, and my mum sits there watching him with her chin resting in her hands.

'Billy kimere the snotters are trippin you,' says she, reaching out with her right hand.

'So?'

'Where wur ye?'

'Naewhere.'

'Kimere tae I wipe yer nose.'

'No.'

Uncle Alex scrapes his chair back on the bare linoleum floor.

‘I’m gaun for a pint.’

I wait until he’s well out of range and until my mum’s watching Crossroads, then I lift the hut key and sneak out the back grass.

My dad’s hut smells of creosote. Inside there are nuts and bolts and an old racer bike with twisted yellow handlebars. On a hook behind the door there’s an old army trenchcoat. I put it on and sit there on the worn carpet with oil stains on it. The roof has thin felt stretched across its beams. When it rains outside it sounds like nails falling instead of raindrops.

There’s a hole at the side which leads into the lining. I pulls out this old fag and a train ticket written in Arabic. On the back of the ticket are the handwritten words Ismalia Police. In the other pocket there’s an old black and white photograph of my dad sitting in an army jeep, and a letter. He looks dead cool in his shorts and khakis and has a big gallus smile on his face.

The letter reads:

Dear Mother,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I got your last letter and was pleased to hear about your new cleaning job at the hospital. As you can see from the photo the weather here in Egypt is red hot, thank God we’re out on patrol mostly at night - the wogs have been stealing cable and it’s our job to stop them.

I’ll send more money from my pay at the end of this month to help tide things over. Our new Captain arrived from Sandhurst last week, Captain Henley. He’s an Englishman from Surrey and when he came round the barracks during inspection he forced Tom Scobie from Motherwell to empty his locker with all his private letters in it. Then he picked one up with the end of his stick and dropped it into the bin. It was from his mother too. If he ever did that to one of your letters I’d kill him. Silly, arrogant man!

Got to go now as I'm on parade in five minutes. Lots of love. Your Duncan.

PS: I got a tattoo done in a market in Ismalia. It says Love Mother.

I scrunch the letter into the coat pocket then I lift the old black binoculars from the shelf. There's a baseball bat hanging up in the corner so I lifts that tae. Outside, I put the bat over my shoulder and climbs onto the wee watchtower looking down on baith The Jungle Derry and The Comrie. Looking through the binoculars I can see Ravenscraig in the distance, smoke billowing from its giant boilers. If there's a nuclear war that place will be the first to go. The Russians have it on their hitlist, I saw it on the news. There's a cauld wind from the east. I pull up the rough coat collar and dig my hands deep into the torn pockets. I feel like that guy Napoleon because the coat is too big for me but I don't care because I like it. I like using my forefinger and thumb to twist the grains of sand in the pocket and I can smell the desert from it, a stale dryness. I lift the binoculars again and scan the row of houses across to the south. I stop at Paterson's hut where his red Chopper bike is stacked high against the window, its thick rubber tyres pressed firmly against the glass. Calling my dad an eppie eh, we'll see about that I whisper to myself. I calmly scan right. He even has brand new breadboards stacked up at the back of the hut, not one but three or four. Behind the breadboards is an old bin.

Finding the matches is easy. My mum keeps a box of Scottish Bluebell in the kitchen drawer. I stroll inside, pull it out, and inspect it, running my finger across the rough spark surface and smelling that delicious deep charcoal aroma. I practice sparking one or two, dropping them into the kitchen basin when the flame burns down to the tip of my thumb and forefinger - a grain of desert sand glistens on my nail. I smell the damp smoke, like Guy Fawkes.

I'd nip outside and imagine climbing the first fence into our neighbours. Then I'd crawl on all fours across the grass, and wriggle through a hole in their wire fence. Within about fifteen to

twenty seconds I'd be deep in enemy territory - Paterson's back grass!

The tin bin behind the hut is the perfect place to take my mission a step further. If I could turn those breadboards into a kind of slow-burning brazier then the hut would probably go up as well. The old bin is filled with dry straw which, knowing him, he stole from the farm behind the bing – a perfect tinder box for the fire. And then there's the paraffin, a full bucket of it. I'd spark six matches one after the other, dropping them into the bed of straw. The flame would soon take hold as I sprinkle tiny drops of paraffin on the straw. It would go up a treat. The smell of the burning plastic bin reminds me of the British commandos I'd roasted on the electric fire in the house a few days before. I stand back and watch the flames which fly up in front of my face, catching an old paint splattered sheet as it does so. A breeze from the east fans it nicely as it climbs then spills across onto the roof of the hut. The flames whip and whoosh up onto the hut roof, slithering across the dried tar which runs across the felt like a natural fuse. WHOOOOOSH! Up she'd go.

At supper that night Uncle Alex and my mum and me watch the highlights of the home international match between Scotland and Northern Ireland. We stuff them 3-0. Joe Jordan scores with a terrific header. Problem is, England beat Wales 4-0 and now their goal difference is better than ours. It'll all hinge on the auld enemy clash at Wembley next week.

'We'll do them. Nae worries,' says Uncle Alex confidently.

'Get an early goal - a pre-emptive strike. Nae problem.'

Encouraged, I'm like this:

'Our midfield is better than theirs so it is. We can control them there. Get right into them and that'.

The ugly face of Jimmy Hill appears on the screen.

'Oh turn it aff Sheonagh, I can't stand that cunt,' says Uncle Alex.

'I hate him tae. He's thinks he's big.'

'He's a fuckin poof,' says Uncle Alex.

‘We. Hate. Jimmy. Hill. He’s a poof. He’s a poof!’

Uncle Alex picks me up and swirls me round the livingroom. He holds me right up to the ceiling and my head is spinning, he’s tickling me tae, and I’m squealing wae laughter.

‘Right, that’s enough,’ says mum.

Don’t know what’s eatin her all of a sudden. Spoiling it all like that.

‘We need to get packed.’

‘Where are we going mum?’

‘Whitley Bay.’

‘When?’

‘Tomorrow. It was a surprise.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘Deep in the heart of enemy territory,’ says Uncle Alex, lowering me back down to earth.

‘England?’

‘Correct.’

‘Why are we gon there?’

‘A wee holiday son. It’ll dae us good just tae get away for a wee while. Yer granny and grandad used to go there. Ye’ll like it Billy. Ye can build sandcastles on the beach,’ says mum.

‘Will they let us in?’ I ask. ‘The greedy guts English, will they let us in will they? Will they let us play on their sands mum?’

‘Don’t see why not, it’s our sand tae,’ says Uncle Alex.

‘How come?’

‘Because we’re all part of Great Britain.’

‘But I thought we were different fae them?’

‘We are. But we still have the same flag when we feel like it.’

‘Aye but we’ve got our ain flag,’ says I. ‘The St Andrew’s Cross.’

‘Or the Lion Rampant if we like a fight,’ says Uncle Alex, poking me gently in the ribs.

‘Dae that again,’ says I, taking advantage of his good mood.

‘What this?’ he says, poking me in the ribs.

I belt him right across the jaw using the palm of my hand, a right good stinger, hard enough to make sure it hurts, soft enough to no make it serious. He’s got a big surprised look on his face, as if he wisnae expectin it.

‘Oh ya wee shite. I’ll get you for that,’ he says, grabbing me around the waist.

‘It wiz a pre-emptive strike, like ah says, a pre-emptive strike,’ I shouts, wriggling loose, giggling and stumbling away from him, towards the livingroom door, into the hall with the Rabbie Burns statue, through the kitchen, out the door, up the back in ma bare feet singin:

‘We were all in the nude with our blue suede shoes singin doo wap be dooby do weh. With the juke box playin and everybody swayin we’re dancin the night away!’

Uncle Alex switches the floodlights on and I climb up onto the watchtower, pointing down across No Man’s Land into Paterson’s back grass.

‘Shang a lang! Shang a lang!’

The next morning I’m up early munching into a Caramel Wafer in front of Robinson Crusoe and a big glass of Cremola Foam for afters.

‘Right. You. Kimere. Quick. Move it,’ says Uncle Alex, after another night with my mum.

Sometimes I like Uncle Alex. Other times I hate him. Especially when he speaks tae me like that, as if he’s a big Colonel guy and I’m just a wee shite. Big Alex eh? Likes a good drink eh? One of the boys eh?

‘We’ll see about that,’ says I tae myself.

See that Robinson Crusoe guy, wae the torn trousers and the tree hoose, brilliant. I’m curling into the carpet, still in ma jammies, and the underfloor heating is great, because it means I can get stretched oot, straight if I want to, and I don’t have to wear a dressing gown or anything because it’s warm enough the way it is. My dad says these are great council houses, built to last.

THE BEACH at Tynemouth near Whitley Bay is long and white. Big frothy waves crash in fresh from Norway and the big St Mary's lighthouse gets cut off by the tide. You can walk out there but you better be careful you don't get cut off because the tide moves quickly and it can kill you if it sucks you out to sea.

We're all sittin on the beach, me, her, and him. Yer ma ain flesh and blood but I sometimes don't understand what makes you tick Billy. What makes me tick, says I, what makes me tick is wanting a wet suit and a surf board like that wee English guy over there, look that wan, runnin doon the beach into the watter. We can't afford it at the moment. How comes? Your Uncle Alex will dig a hole and you can call it a fortress, put flags round it and ye can have a choc ice if ye keep your nose clean. Uncle Alex strips to the waist and digs a hole down to the sewer pipes, phew what a pong, say the surfers as they pass by on their way to sea. Simon, I says, I know your name because I heard your mother calling it, Simon, do you want to build a dam with me, Simon The Surfer, look if we dig a trench all the water flows into it and we can stop The North Sea from assaulting the poor families on the beach. Mmmm, yeah, all right, he says, dropping his surf board on the sand, is the tide coming in or what? Looks that way, look at the frothy waves crashing in, you mean the white horses, yeah the white horses Simon if that's what you feel you wants to call them.

Doesn't matter if it smells as long as it stops those white horses eh Simon, dig, dig, dig deep, deeper, mix the dry sand with the wet stuff, makes it all stick together, look this is Durham castle says Simon The Surfer, look this is Edinburgh Castle, says I, as the swirling water surrounds us, dragging his surfer's board with it. I'm getting bored with this, says he. Oh you can't leave now, says I, not in the middle of the battle. What battle? This one, with the sea, this battle Simon. If you leave now then it becomes my dam not yours I say, putting the St Andrew's cross flag in the centre turret. Yeah but not before I knocks down the part I built he says, standing on Durham Castle.

I hates you Simon from Cornwall, take that, crack, goes the surfboard into his face. Mama,

mama, mama. I reckon your son needs his head lookin says the surfboard da, they're only boys for gods sake let them be says my mum, munchin a banana sandwich, the one that always had a crunchy grain of sand in it when the wind blew from the east.

You have to move fast when you're in enemy territory. It changes things. The way you walk. The way you talk. Up at the digs we have a great view. I'm out with the binoculars watchin the North Scottish Sea knockin all these wee guys off the pier. I run round to the Victoria Wine for a bottle of ginger but the woman there doesn't understand what I mean by ginger. 'Do you mean ginger beer pet?' she asks.

'No, ginger. Ginger,' says I.

We eventually agree on a bottle of Tizer which isne as good as the fizzy Irn Bru my granny used to give me. It's still no too bad, a nice fizz, but no the same.

Back down at the beach the English kids make a fool of my accent. I wish Esther was here. He'd sort them. But I'm on my own, outnumbered, I have to do my best. That guy Simon is still there, wae the surfboard and the wet suit. He's been at it all day, making a fool of the way I talk and not giving me a shot. I'm not sure what to do. So I wait until he's walking along the pier with the surfboard under his arm. He's right on the edge so it doesn't take much, just a wee nudge. He slides down the pier wall, the one with the rusty hooks and slimy seaweed. The North Scottish Sea, it swirls and splashes beneath him. He grabs one of the hooks and holds on. I just keep walking, right along the pier and up to the wee magic roundabout thing.

'Don't make a fool of the way I talk again, right,' says I, whispering to myself.

This man comes over and shouts at me, something about going back to Jockoland you little thug. Then Simon is pulled up and lead away, across the rocks and back to the beach where the rest of his family had camped.

I take Uncle Alex's binoculars and climb up the big sand dunes at the back of the beach where I can zoom right in on Simon and his family. They've got him wrapped in a blanket and he's

sitting on a deckchair sipping tea, his hands clasped around the cup and shivering and trembling, probably looking for his mum to kiss him or something and just as I think that she walks over and kisses him - he even gets a big hug from his dad who then starts washing the surfboard with a pail of seawater. Their windbreak has a big red and white cross of St George on it. I hate St George. Thinks he's big. Slayin the dragon an that.

Back at our HQ Uncle Alex is like this, handing me some loose change.

'Hey. You. Kimere. Ten Regal. A bottle of Irn Bru. A choc ice for your mum and a sweet for yersel.'

'They don't hiv Irn Bru doon here,' I says, but he's not listening, he never does.

'Irn Bru. Right. On yer way. Quick march.'

When I come back with some Tizer he skites my ear and my mum just laughs. Over in the English camp Simon and his dad have built this big dam with all these wee paper Cross of St George's fluttering on top. I ask Uncle Alex if we can build a better one, a Scottish one. But he's like this, fuck off ya wee prick.

I just sit in the sand and dig ma ain wee hole.

A couple of hours later I retreat to the sand dunes with the binoculars to watch the North Scottish Sea, swirling, birling, bubbling grey and white it wis, overrunning their moats, smashing into their poofy turrets, angry, vicious, attacking, wave after wave after wave, until there wis nothing except big choppy currents slapping into each other, sizzling like lava.



## Chapter 3

### Party Politics

‘HERE, TAKE this. Go doon tae The Raj Man’s and buy twelve packets of crisps,’ said Uncle Alex, handing me a fiver.

‘Whit fur?’

‘Fur the perty?’

‘Whit perty?’

‘The goin away perty.’

‘Whit goin away perty?’

‘We’re gon tae live in Dubai wae Uncle Ron.’

‘Since when?’

‘Since a long time ago. I thought your mother telt ye.’

‘Nut.’

First I’d heard of this. Him and me offski thegither like this. No way man. This has got tae be a wind-up.

‘Why are we gon tae Dubai, Uncle Alex?’

‘I’ve telt ye why, noo shut up and get doon tae Raj’s.’

‘Mum, ur we gone tae Dubai or sumthin?’

‘It’s for the best. Just you and Uncle Alex. Yer dad and I will come out and join ye if it

works out.'

'But why?'

'The doctors say the constant sunlight will help yer dad. You want him to get better don't you?'

'Aye but.'

'Aye but whit?'

'Why do I have to go first with Uncle Alex?'

'You have to get into the English speaking school at the start of term and it starts next week.'

'Aw mum. But I'm no English.'

'Where are we gonni live?'

'Wae Uncle Ron. He's got yer Uncle Alex a joab workin for the Sheikh.'

'Zat wan oh these rich guys wae the headdresses?'

'Yes it is. Listen Billy, it's a double celebration. Your dad is out of hospital.'

'Where is he? Why didn't you tell me?'

'You were sleeping. He's in the hut.'

'Why?'

'He just needs some peace and quiet.'

When I goes into the hut my dad is sitting there in his auld army coat. He's looking at some photos.

'Is that your army photos?'

'Kimere son,' he says. He takes me by the wrist and rubs my arm. 'How's it going palsie?'

'Fine. How's it gon wae you dad?'

'Yer dad's fine son. Don't worry about him. He's getting better now.' He flicks my chin with his finger. 'Cummon. Chin up. Be a good soldier.'

Was that *you* in the army?' I ask, pointing to one of the photos.

'Aye, that's me. Private Queen. The Royal Signals.'

‘Is that Captain Henley?’ I ask, pointing to this snobby looking guy in the background.

He shakes his head.

‘What did he dae to you?’

‘He never did anything to me, don’t be silly.’

‘Did you shoot somebody?’

‘Right palsie, cummon, that’s enough. I’m not supposed to say anything. It was just something that happened Billy. Something that happens between two men, between two countries.’ He takes my hand. Then he squeezes it. Not hard. Gentle. He’s kind of shaking. Then he stares up at the corner of the hut. He always does that. Just stares at it. As if there’s something up there. The doctor called it vertex syndrome or something. The vertex is up there, the triangle, in the corner. It speaks to my dad. He answers it back in Arabic.

Outside I keep seeing that vertex thing. I even see it at the fitba or when playing pool. I’m a wee snooker player, gathering the reds all up in the triangle, standing back, chalking my cue, ready to crack into them. Even when I write my lines at school I put them in a triangle shape. Carmichael doesn’t even notice it. She canni see the signs.

In the Raj Man’s ah slips a fly can of Coke into ma Parker poacket. Then I stans behind this blond wummin. It’s that John Paterson’s maw. Heard Uncle Eck callin her a wee dick tease.

‘Look, she says. You’d be better off in that queue up there.’

‘It’s busy up there as well missus’, says I, placing the vertex at the top of her forehead, the way a sniper lines up a head shot with a telescopic lense. It isnae, she says, folding her arms, the left leg at 45 degrees, the foot tapping on the flair. ‘It is.’ I says quietly.

She turns her back. Nice arse. Then I hears the voice of this Stanley Baker. Him and the Boer Scout from the movie Zulu. The main thrust of the Zulu attack is here, in the triangle, says Scout features. Then, like the horns of a bull, two giant pincers move around the vertex.

‘Where do you want me?’ I ask him.

- ‘You choose your own spot. It’s your country,’ replies Baker, his hand trembling on the
- barrel as he reloads his pistol.
  - The Raj Man isnae daft. I stares at the bridge of his nose when he catches me with the can.
  - Then I follows the long straight bone down to the intersection, a neat 45 degree angle.
  - ‘You thief. In our country we chop your thieving hands off. Ashman, phone his Uncle Alex.
  - Why you do this? Why? I tell you before ask and you will get. No take. Now I tell your
  - Uncle Alex. You in serious trouble.’
  - And he’s shakin me and as he’s shakin me I’m makin up this wee song - Bud bud dink dink
  - £2.99 Pakies con you all of ze time. You ask for lemonade they give you lime, bud bud
  - dink dink £2.99.
  - ‘Why the fuck did you dae it?’ asks the Uncle Alex, shakin me hard. ‘I geez ye a fiver and
  - that’s how you pay me back.’
  - ‘They forced me.’
  - ‘Who forced ye?’
  - ‘The Comrie?’
  - ‘The work dodgin Comrie?’
  - ‘Aye.’
  - ‘They held a big Swiss Army Knife tae ma throat and telt me tae steal it. It wisnae me.
  - Honest, Uncle Alex.’
  - ‘You better no be lyin tae me ya wee cunt.’
  - ‘I’m no, honest.’
  - ‘Did you see who they wur?’
  - ‘Aye.’

Then he marches me doon the street into Harry’s hoose. He’s an artist guy who does tattoos and everything and I’ve to describe The Comrie tae him. Uncle Alex is like this, Right Harry, get yer fuckin charcoal oot and dae yer best impression. Never mind this poofy Picasso shite.

It's detailed fuckin facial descriptions we need. We turned the drawings into wanted posters and, when it got dark, he took me oot and we pasted them on lamposts throughout the scheme. Then Harry goes and tells him he read in the local paper the 'Young Comrie' football team had received a new set of green and yellow New York Cosmos strips from social workers. The paper ran it big style right across the centre spread with the Comrie team smiling alongside their health visitors and social workers.

'JUNKY. FUCKIN. SCUM!' he screams, grabbing the paper, pushin it into my face.

'Can you see any of them there? Is that wan? Is it!'

It's pouring wae rain and pitch dark tae when he takes my hand and, wae Uncle John's old police baton under his suede jacket and a big industrial torch, he sets off, like Robocop, flashing it in the face of every passerby.

'Is that wan? Is that wan?' he's sayin, shining it right in their eyes, the black rimmed glasses steaming up, and the big serious face, the baton poking through the suede jacket with the tear on its sleeve. We didnae find them but when we got back The Raj Man invites us into the shoap after closing time.

'It's just like this Raj. You and me are different. But if this was Islamabad those junkie scum would be strung up, am I right? said Uncle Alex.

The Raj nods in agreement, handing me a cold can of coke from the fridge. What are we to do with such people? asks Mr Raj.

- 'String them up from the lamposts, I whispers, shining Uncle Alex's torch into the Raj man's
- neck.

Back up at the hoose the party hing is already startin. My dad's got the floodlights oan and ma maw's put all the chairs around the wall in a circle. Uncle John's old polis mates are in, sittin in the corner. That Country n Western music guy Kenny Rogers is singin that song about the sojer who canni shag his wummin because he's in a wheelchair. Uncle Alex has this kid on mike in his hand and he's singin away:

It wasn't me who started that old crazy Asian war.

But I was proud.

To go and do.

My patriotic chore.

Oh Ruuuubee.

Don't take your love to town.

Well it's hard to love.

A man whose legs.

Are bent and paralysed

And the wants and the needs.

Of a woman your age.

Ruby I realise.

But if I could walk.

I'd get my gun.

And put her in the ground.

Oh Ruuuubee.

Don't take your love to town.

'Gon yersel Alex!' they cry.

'By god that boy's some chanter.'

'Anyone else for a drink?'

'Mushy peas and vinegar?'

'Crisps anyone?'

'Whose next furra song?'

Then there's a bang at the door and in walks Gary Paterson, John's big cousin, Jesus he's comin tae get me I know he is, he was probably watchin me spyin on the hut. There's another Darryl guy with him from Bristol or somethin. He's got the crucifix oan tae. He disnae actually say it but I can hear Uncle Alex sayin oh no, a Tim and an Englishman tae. 'Yer late,' shouts one of Uncle John's police mates. 'Just off the rig,' says Paterson, the white t-shirt and jeans, the big muscles. Who invited them anyway? Now there's gonni be trouble, I can tell ye.

I look across at my dad. He's leaning forward in his seat like the way a football manager does with seconds to go. He's rubbing his hands as if he can't stand the tension of it all. The tension? What tension? Just the Darryl guy and Uncle Alex and my dad tae, glancing up at the vertex. Any minute now he's gonni go for it or maybe its Paterson he's aiming at. I'm tellin ye, he's gonni kill him. Thing is, Paterson's all muscles, my dad's just wee but when he takes a turn nothing like that matters. No matter the odds he'd still fight. Problem is, Paterson could probably kill him. Difference is when my dad takes a vertex turn he disnae see things the way we do, its like do or die, life or death, nae in-betweenies, whereas that Paterson's probably a bit oh a shiter.

'Give us That Old Black Magic,' Sheonagh.

'I heard somebody's going to The Gulf,' says Paterson, cracking open a can of lager.

'Boooo, cummon Sheonagh you can do it.'

'All right then, but only if you help me.'

My mum stands up and starts to sway, gently placing her hand on my dad's shoulder as she does so. Sarah Smith fae next door is eating the nuts. I don't drink, I'll just have sherry, says she, as Gordon Macdonald gets into the Grouse. At least they know my dad. They know he's no been well and they help my mum. They all love him. He does jobs for them, builds wall, installs kitchens. But it's this other wan that's the problem, the wan in the corner.

'Why are you off to Dubai?' asks Paterson in that semi-Scots accent, he's lookin at me and

Uncle Alex is sittin on the edge of a stool now. Why are we gon tae Dubai Uncle John? Shut up and bring Gordon here some watter for his whisky.

‘That old black magic, does something to me.’

Well done Sheonagh. Hey Gary that’s some heid you’ve got on that beer, all frothy it is. And Darryl’s tae, well foamy, ha ha ha, looks like a pint of candy floss that does. James’s turn. Mon Jimmy. Mair mushy peas anyone? There ye go, help yerself, plenty of vinegar there. And Jimmy, my dad’s old pal, has a wee pish stain, ye can see it there when he stands up to sing and Darryl and Gary, the Anglos, are havin a laugh, oi you you’re havin a laugh, you’re havin a laugh aincha? Just off the rigs, you, havin a laugh, at Auld Jimmy and the people in my father’s hoose.

And that Gary wan’s drawing his forefinger across his throat, just above the Adam’s Apple, starin right at me tae, shut it you he’s only scratchin. Naw but I bet he knows I was planning to burn his wee cousin’s hut doon. He’s daein it again. Mammy daddy, he’s gonni cut ma throat.

More of them come up the path. Big Stewart Henderson from the Lodge. Danny Smith the mechanic. Charlie Greig the butcher. Bert Anderson who once had a trial for Rangers. That woman Sandra who lost her husband to lung cancer – brought you some foam bath Sheonagh. I heard your Billy’s going to Dubai. Has Alex got a job over there or something? For the sheikh, he’s working for the sheikh is Alex, hey, Alex is going to work for the sheikh. Sheikh who? says the Darryl. Sheikh yer han, sheik a leg, har bloody har. No it’s actually Uncle Ron says Sheonagh. He works in a college teaching the English there, Alex has been asked to deal with security. Out comes the photo album. More peas anyone? We’ll be farting all night, shouts Danny Smith. That’s Ron there says she, pointing to this big cheesy looking guy with buck teeth in cricket clothes standing outside a pavilion. Where’s that, ooh The Country Club. Sarah did you hear that? The Country Club.

‘That’s one thing about Allah,’ says Uncle Alex to Bert Anderson. ‘Bang. Nae poofin about.

Steal something there. Chop. Off wae the hands. Hey Charlie geeza song.'

The northern lights of old Aberdeen mean home sweet home tae me.

The northern lights of Aberdeen are where I long tae be.

When I was a lad, a bonnie wee lad, my mother said to me.

'Too scared to stand and fight when the chips are down though,' says that Darryl wan, the crucifix dangling from his neck.

'Who?' asks Big Stewart Henderson.

'The Arabs,' says the Darryl wan.

The music stops. I look at my dad. He drops his head, rubs his palms. When he looks back up he's vertexing Darryl's heid, shaping it up.

'Yer arse,' says Big Stewart. 'Tommy Carlyle knew them. Just like Alex says. Nae poofin about. Nae weepin effigies.'

'Who the fuck is Tommy Carlyle?' asks the Darryl wan.

'Thomas Carlyle,' says Big Stewart, 'the Scottish philosopher.' He says that Scottish calvinists like us have more in common with masculine Islam than with feminine christianity,

'Wooo, hear that? Whit the fuck is big Stewart drinkin?' says Bert Anderson. Then he's like this:

'Hey hear that Alex, you're going to Dubai to help your protestant brethren, did you know that?'

I'm watchin Uncle Alex to see how he reacts tae this, another man havin a go at him, like two stags head to head eh? He's quite cool, takin it oan the chin, leaning back on the ropes. Then he's like this: 'Aye but it's true, the big man flew up to heaven on a white chariot. Clean, pure and strong. Just like us eh Stewart. He's a man's God. Not like that other greetin faced cunt Jesus.'

Uncle Alex turns and stares at Darryl's crucifix. I pull a cushion fae the couch and squash it into ma neck.

'Exactly,' says Big Stewart. 'What Carlyle understood is that religion is a matter of personal morality right. Personal fuckin choice. Ye stand alone in front of God, nae decorations, necklaces an that. Nae poofy emotional stuff. That's fur wimin. Constant forgiveness. That's fur Fenians. Plain and simple – that's whit Islam is aw about. Brave, genuine and just.'

'Stewart, whit the fuck ye oan about?' asks Bert Anderson.

'Hang on Bert, hang on, he's right enough,' says Uncle Alex. 'Any cunt steals somethin he gets his haun chopped aff. Right. Any cunt knobs somebody's wife or daughter they get their balls ripped, right.'

'Does that go for these greedy English cunts who come up here to steal our oil,' says the mechanic Danny Smith, uptight, giggling.

There's something brewing but that's no the point, the point is I needs to know and I needs to know now about Gary, is he in to get me, in here, to get me. I put the cushion back and walk up to him.

'Want another drink Gazza?' I says, 'want another drink mate?'

'Thanks, little man,' he replies. That cracks me up, him saying 'little man', its supposed to be wee man.

I pours it big and long for him that fizzy alchol lager. Do you want a heid on it? Uncle Alex, he wants a heid oan it. Gazza. Gary. He wants it - finishing it off with a wee circle at the top of the foam. Watching. It. Drip. Drop. Plump. Into the fancy fluted glass with the curve at the top of it. His nose dips into it and the Adam Apple working hard, glug glug. I'll top it up for you, there's still some in the can, I says, shaking it about to make sure it's nice and frothy for Gazza the Anglo oil worker to enjoy, drink it all up then ya greedy cunt says I tae myself looking at the V neck of his white T shirt, the big curly chest hairs tae.

I can tell he's angry. So is Darryl. He's touchin his crucifix with his finger, wonderin what

he's done wrong, thinking of something to say.

'I disagree with that,' he says. 'It's the Moslems who are cunts, not the English.'

Uncle Alex stands up and I know what's coming, like Benny Lynch the boxer, he's out his corner quick.

'Listen you, any cunt that's a pal of Allah is a pal of mine, right?' says Uncle Alex. 'And any cunt that takes the pish out of Islam is fuckin gettin it. And that goes for Creepin Jesus as well.'

I can see where Alex is comin from. He's standing up for Allah because he's going to work there. Quite right tae. If am gon there wae him I want tae be on the right side. Nae point in being affside wae the law in a foreign country. That English Darryl should watch his lip.

'Ya dirty wee English fenian bastard!' shouts Alex.

'Alex for god sake, that's enough, that's enough!' screams my mum.

I'll say this much for him I will, he stands up double quick and lays a right hard punch into the big square jaw of Uncle Alex does that Darryl wan. And just for a second I wonders which side to join coz although I agree with Uncle Alex I've always wanted tae hit him maself and it doesn't look as if he's gonni recover from that pre-emptive strike from crucifix man. He's lying flat on his back struggling tae get up off the canvas. Uncle John and Charlie Greig and my dad are intae it tae, trying tae hod baith of them apart.

'No Alex!' shouts mum. 'Oh my God!' screams I-don't-drink-I'll only-have-a-sherry, Sarah.

'Disgraceful,' says Gordon Macdonald, reaching for his jacket. 'Good luck in Dubai anyway Alex, see you later.' 'Haud him, haud him,' says mum to Charlie Greig the butcher and it takes three of them to hold Uncle Alex doon. 'I think you've overstayed yer welcome Jesus,' says Uncle John and the police boys twisting the Darryl wan's arm up his back. 'You as well Gazza, oot.'

I was glad tae see they two leave because I thought Gazza wiz after me. Uncle Alex is back on his feet.

‘I wiz gonni hit him honest,’ says I.

‘It’s aw right pal, you’re too young yet,’ says Uncle Alex, wiping the blood from his nose with a big white hanky.

‘But I’m ten, I could have got him for ye.’

I’m gettin right up close, lookin at the blood, seeing the pain in his eyes. I puts ma hand on the side of his face and clinches the flesh of his cheek between my thumb and forefinger, giving it a right hard wee squeeze and twistin it round tae make it hurt even more. He winces a bit. But I don’t want it to hurt *that* much because see Uncle Alex right, he probably did that to protect my dad. He knew that if he didnae my dad would have and then it really *would* have been a fight. A fight to the death.

‘Aw right Uncle Alex?’ I say.

‘Aye I’m fine, fine now, away and play wae yer pals.’

THAT NIGHT it’s just my mum and dad and me. Uncle Alex disnae come back. Probably because he knows my dad’s there. We get Fry’s Chocolate Cream and Irn Bru as a special treat and we get to watch The Battle of Britain on the telly. I’ve got no a bad fight going on between the Africa Corps and the British on the coffee table. I keep calling the English officer Henley, like take that Henley, pichow, pichow! And I keep looking at my dad to see if he notices. But he’s starin up at the corner as if there’s a big spider up there. Up by the vertex. I’ve got Esther’s potion in my pocket and I’m able to crawl round on the carpet and pour it into his whisky while he’s no lookin. It disnae dae any good. Later on, he stares at the vertex and talks to Henley, Captain Henley, yes sir, no sir, Ismaelia sir, Port Said. I’m like this, ‘Dad. It’s me. Billy. Who is Henley? Please tell me what he did, who is he? Please dad. Dad, it’s Billy, please, tell me what happened.’ There’s no answer. There never is. Whatever it is, this is his private war. Then, like a flash, he attacks my mum’s good lamp stand, the one she bought from BHS. He’s trying to get out the door, quick, you get his arms mum. She’s

sobbing, I can't stand that, the sound of her sobbing, 'please dad, dad, stop it, you're going to hurt yourself, please. Henley isn't here dad. He's away now. Look, look, there's nobody up there, honest, look.' That's how it is with me, him and Henley. We're aw thegither. The three of us, like the vertex, A, B, C, one, two, three. Me, you, and he. Him. The Englishman. I hold my dad's hand while Henley talks through him. His big posh voice orders baith of us aboot. We're in Ismaelia. In the barracks.

'And who might this be from Queen?' it says, lifting a photo from my dad's locker with the point of his officer's cane.

'It's a photo sir. Of ma ma.'

'And is ma ma in the habit of dressing for dinner or does she always look like a ballroom dancer, even in the street?'

He hits Henley. Right on the fucking jaw. Right where the jaw meets the chin. Smack!

'What has this one done?' asks another young officer, fresh from Sandhurst.

'Hit an officer sir,' replies sergeant major.

'Jock,' I presume.

'Very much so sir.'

'Where in Jockland?'

'Lanarkshire,' I believe.

'Why on earth didn't he join The Cameronians? They are much more suited to digging ditches.'

'Queen, officer on parade, why didn't you join The Cameronians Queen? Answer the officer.'

'Don't know sir.'

'He doesn't know sir.'

'He doesn't know, indeed. Well tell this horrible little man that what he should know is that the wogs are rioting near a small village north of here and that he'll be joining another band of disreputable Jocks to go and sort it out. Does he understand that sergeant major? Oh and by

the way, since he's so fond of punching people I want you to enter him for the regimental boxing championship tonight, then we'll see what he's really made of. Chin chin.'

Me, you and he. We fight that fight. Henley and him and me. In the desert that night him and Henley.

'Open fire Queen!'

'But sir, they're only bedouin.'

'They're not bedouin Queen. They're terrorists. Open your eyes man. I said fire!'

And so it is. That in the room I hold his hand while he sobs the sob. He didn't mean to kill them. It was Henley so it was.

Billy will be on desert watch  
A hundred-metre stare  
Waiting for the dawn to break  
When Henley won't be there

Billy will be on desert watch  
And as each bottle dries  
Very few will understand  
Why he sits and cries.  
(By Billy Queen jnr.)

And me and him. We cry. In each others arms. Until the sun comes up and its time to hear that Henley, he handed him over to the Egyptian police. To question him. About the murder. The mass murder. He spasms again. His chest goes all tight and the white knuckles. The vertex is back, this time it speaks Arabic; set maat, set maat, demy niwt, demy niwt. Together, him and me and Henley until the whispers from the kitchen appear. Uncle Alex he's like this, 'It'll be all right Sheonagh, you can come oot tae Dubai for a holiday, he's no gonni get oot of hospital for a long, long time and you'll have tae see Billy, you can come and

see him, use him as the excuse.’

She’s like this, ‘I don’t want ye to go.’ ‘I know that I know that,’ he says. ‘But it’s for the best. I canni turn this chance doon and it’ll be good for Billy, let him see how the other half live.’

In bed that night I shut my eyes tight. The squeaking of their bed lasts for only a few minutes. I can hear Uncle Alex grunting, but it’s the quiet sobbing of my mum after it I can’t stand.

• NEXT MORNING quite a few people turn up in the street to see us off. Esther is there.

He’s like this, handing me his home made medicine.

‘Tell your mum to give him it three times a day. Drop it into his tea. It’ll dissolve. Take care of yourself Billy.’

I don’t want to tell him it disnae work. In fact, I just want to hug him right there and then in the middle of the street. Him daein that for me, coz he’s ma pal, he’s a Scout and I’m a Cub. The big black taxi comes to take us to the airport. ‘God’s speed be with you,’ says Uncle John, the big hon oot, the glaisses steaming up in the rain. Even wee Paterson is there. Sitting on his Chopper, chewing the cinammon stick. He waves at me. As if everything is all right. Mrs Paterson tae, standin there wae the airms folded. Ma ma just hugs me, we’ll be ower tae visit ye soon says she. We leave them there, Esther pretending to hit Paterson over the head with a golf club and ma dad, oot for the day, standin at the gate wae his hons in his poackets, ‘Cheerio son, see you soon,’ says he. I squeeze my nose against the taxi window and wave to them all, each and every one of them. Even Henley. I think I see him. But it is my dad I really want. I want him to put my hand into his coat pocket and hold it tight the way he does when we walk to the shop for sweets and a paper. When they are out of sight I face the front. I can’t see out of the front window properly for Uncle Alex’s big black bry-creamed heid. He used to be a Teddy Boy. Now here we are - going to The Gulf together. He doesn’t speak to me during the journey. I don’t care if he ever speaks to me again in my whole life.



## Chapter 4

### Uncle Ron's War

DUBAI AIRPORT is packed with Indians, Pakistanis, and Afghans with big mad beards. Some have white turbans, others black, blue, orange, yellow. They're praying or sumthin. And skinny pink air hostesses with Thai Airlines on their hats tiptoe through the prayers like paradise birds I saw on that nature programme.

The sheikh is on every wall, the pointy beard and cheesy grin.

Uncle Ron lives in a place called Midrif, well away from the Indians ruining this city, says he. The villa hing has six bedrooms with a white stone wall around it. You should see the soldier ants crawling up it, phew, massive. There's a watchtower too. Uncle Ron gives me binoculars and a revolver without bullets.

'Look at the tall glass tower blocks of Dubai glistening in the distance,' says Uncle Ron.

The nearest villa is about half-a-mile away – that's where another ex-pat family live.

'You sit in the watchtower and lookout for Indians or Arabs invading us across the desert,' says I to our maid Shamal, then dive into the pool from the watchtower roof. Shamal does most things I tell her. She even pretends to die when I shoot her with the revolver.

You wouldn't guess Uncle Ron is a Queen. Dad says he's only a half brother or sumthin.

He's like Hen Broon fae The Broons, the big lanky duker wae the buck teeth. Drives a silver Volvo and has quite a posh voice, the safari shirt, the greasy hair and the breath tae. He hiz a red four by four Cherokee jeep for cutting across the desert and he hiz Shamal, from Davao in The Philippines. Shamal diz whitever she's telt. She's twenty-eight wae long black shiny hair and she walks about the gaff wae bare feet. Most of the time she looks dead unhappy, except when she plays with me. That's when she sometimes smiles. She's the same height as me.

Uncle Ron says not to trust it, don't encourage it, keep it in its place.

'You see Billy,' he says, 'we must keep our eyes on it. We can't turn our backs for a minute. She looks nice, but Shamal is a wild one, believe me.'

Uncle Ron is right up the sheikh's arse.

He trains people how to speak and how to teach The English. The sheikh sees the future as everybody speaking it.

'Think of the bearded one as an Islamic Santa Claus,' he says. 'He's on our side Billy, trust me.'

There are pictures of the guy wae a hawk on his shoulder or a race horse in the background, everywhere you look – the same cheesy grin.

'Do you know how to play backgammon?'

'No Uncle Ron.'

'Then I'll teach you,' says he.

'Tennis? Do you play tennis?'

'No Uncle Ron, then you must come to the tennis club at The Irish Village, we'll turn you into a little John Patrick McKenroe shall we?'

'Yes Uncle Ron.'

I plays Shamal at Monopoly and she pretends she's happy to lose but I sees her mouth all twisted so I tells Uncle Ron.

'Good lad,' says he.

'She's like a guy I punched in the playground, all upset,' I say to Uncle Ron.

'That's right,' he replies. 'That's precisely what she's like Billy, angry and devious. And you must answer her strictly and intelligently if she questions anything.'

'Yes I know,' says I.

Uncle Ron gives me his helmet and a gun belt which I wear around the house or when I'm on duty at the perimeter. One afternoon at the Country Club he passes me handcuffs and a baton

and tells me to pretend I'm arresting Indians. He laughs when I march the waiter around the tennis court and push him into the swimming pool. The guy can't swim, but that doesn't matter because when I hear the applause of the other ex-pats I know I've done the right thing. Guy Bulloch, the lab technician from Pretoria, gives me a bear hug. It crushes my chest. I sniffs the booze on his breath and the sweat on his hairy back. I hear his heart next to mine. 'We'll make an ex-pat out of him yit, won't we you little Scots git?' he says.

I drinks beer with him, 'Nae bother Guy' says I, 'bottoms up tae you tae.'

Back at the villa it's just me and Shamal. I'm still on a high fae the country club and I don't want the feeling to go away. I want mair hugs, mair applause, so I handcuffs Shamal to the perimeter fence. She just lets me dae it. It's as if she's frightened to say anything in-case Uncle Ron sacks her. This time though, there's nobody else there, nobody laughing or clapping. Just me and her.

I go inside for a minute to put on Uncle Ron's white helmet and gun belt - the one he got in Hong Kong. There's a cane sitting by his bed. I tuck it under my arm and march up and down in front of the mirror - just like Captain Henley auld boy. Outside it rests nicely under Shamal's chin.

'Do you miss home Shamal?' I asks her.

She jerks at the handcuffs, trying to get free.

'Where's yer ma?'

'My ma?' she asks.

'Aye, yer ma,' says I.

'I don't understand you,' she says.

'Your mother. What does she wear? Back in the Philippines, what does she wear?'

'I don't have a mother,' she says.

'Everybody has a ma,' says I. 'Is she deid?'

'What do you mean?'

‘Is. She. Dead?’

‘I don’t know. I haven’t seen her since I was a child. She went away.’

‘What kind of ma was she? Doing that to her child? You should be ashamed of her. Are you ashamed of her? Eh? Are you? Say yes and I’ll let you go.’

‘Yes, yes, of course I am, please, let me go.’

I unfasten the handcuffs and ask her to make me some lasagne and chips. She marches inside on the double, just like a real slave.

The lasagne is ok, a bit mushy, but tasty enough. Shamal stands at the sink with her back to me. She has a few mosquito bites at the bottom of her legs. Her hair is aw long and black and shiny but there’s a wee bald patch on her heid, like the wan on Paterson’s dug Trixie. I watch her sighing. She leans on the sink with both hands and sighs. She looks out the window and up at the sky and sighs. She thinks I don’t see her tae. But I dae. When I’m finished I lick my plate.

‘You have a very long tongue. Now no need for a dishwasher,’ she says, trying to smile. But you can tell she’s feart because I handcuffed her. That’s when I know I’ve done something right because of the way she looks at me now, all nervous. When I first met her she looked at me is if I was a wee boy, all nice and feeling sorry for me like Creepin Jesus himself. Now she knows the truth, it’s better that way.

You can smell Uncle Ron. When he comes in from work he’s all sweaty and his breath stinks. He sometimes gets sad, especially about his two sons in Portsmouth. Uncle Alex says their mother Olivia is a bad wummin. She’s an English teacher or a teacher of The English as Uncle Ron calls her. I overhears Uncle Ron saying she had an affair with one of her Arab students at the Aviation College and had to return to England with the boys.

That night Uncle Ron takes Shamal shopping to the Bur Juman centre. That gives me time to hang about the house on my own. I goes into her room. On the bedside table there’s a photograph of her mother and her back in the Philippines. Lying bitch. She told me her

mother had left ages ago. She was probably feart she'd give me the wrong answer and that I'd keep her handcuffed tae the fence. Her bra and knickers are lying on the bed. I sniffs the bra first. It's sweet and sweaty - the knickers are perfumey and sour. I rub them against ma baws and diz a wee dance in front of the mirror, like as if I'm a pole dancer or something. I cannae resist it. So I pulls aff ma troosers and slips into the knickers. Then on goes the bra. I dance aboot, touchin maself up, kidding oan I'm her. I walks over to her wardrobe and pulls out a slinky black dress number. I lie on her bed and rub it all over me, pulling it over my head, inhaling the smell. Unbeknown tae me Uncle Ron has security cameras in parts of the hoose. 'That'll teach you tae stop being a wee pervert,' says Uncle Alex who sits by the pool most of the day, waiting to start his security job. He thinks he's in wae the sheikh tae, but it's Uncle Ron who has the contacts, not him. He's just a hinger oan. Uncle Ron is only helping him because he's family, that's as far as it goes. 'Aye and fuck you tae Eck,' I whispers. 'You. Eck. Kimere. Aye you. Ya prick. Here. Kimere.'

One night the ex-pat men from the Midrif neighbourhood stay up to the wee small hours discussing politics. Sumthin aboot Iraq and Iran. I watches the countdown to war on the tv and Uncle Ron sets up a small ground-to-air missile launcher on the perimeter wall, one the sheikh gave him as a special gift. You should see it. It's a wee beauty. Every night I sit in my pyjamas, legs crossed on the floor, listening to it all.

'It's like this Alex, Dubai is a white man's city,' says Ron.

'We have the sheikh in our pockets. He refuses to fight Saddam single-handed so we sell him high tech weapons at fifty times the going rate to boost the guy's confidence. But the devil is in the detail. He can only use his new toys with our permission because his army don't know how to use the damn things. So after he hands over the cash, we still hold the key. Meantime he has his race horses and palaces, our boys in The Royal Navy here have a whale of a time, and everybody gets rich in the process. Trust me, Alex. New imperialism is still the best kept secret in Britain and, provided you work hard, it's people like you and little Bill there who

will benefit.'

Uncle Ron is nae bullshiter. I was in his room. He has all these photographs of him shaking hands with people from the British Council and The British Embassy. He even teaches The English to the sheikh's cousin.

'I understand that,' says Uncle Alex, emptying another cold beer into his glass. No a badheid, seen frothier.

Uncle Ron has mates in The Royal Navy. They come round and we watch movies like The Battle of The Bulge and Das Boot.

Das Boot is brilliant. The German U-Boats sitting in wait for the English battleships. 'Think yer big eh,' I says tae maself, 'Britannia rules the waves an aw that pish.' Well not in this war. Not in the U-Boat war.

One day I want tae grow a beard like the German submariners, and wear a big woollen polo-neck, better than they Russian shysters in Ice Station Zebra - scruffy bastards. Uncle Ron disagrees. He likes the English, probably because he makes money from them.

'They are the best sailors in the world,' says Uncle Ron, except for one thing – 'they need to improve their levels of literacy. That's where I come in. Be it Hong Kong, Dubai, Timbuktu, Uncle Ron will be there with his English for Servicemen courses.'

That night guys with bools in their mooth come roon to the hoose. From the MoD in London an that. They go into Uncle Ron's study but I presses my ear to the door and I hears them talking, sumthin about communication networks and the sheikh's security.

'This will involve state-of-the-art systems and high-tech surveillance systems,' says one of the chiefs.

'I understand that,' says Uncle Ron. Not a problem. Not a problem at all. See Uncle Ron, right, I bet he's doing more than just teaching them The English. He's into the arms trade or something but every time I ask him he won't tell me.

I wants to ask them about dad, hey you, aye you, why did you bully Private Queen, why did

you put him in prison near Port Said, ya fuckers, says I, I'm jock, dae ye think I'm a mug? When they leave I sneaks into the room. There are two books on his desk – Beyond Good and Evil and The Ten Habits of Really Successful People with framed certificates of him shaking hands with big rich Arab guys and Royal Navy admirals. There's even one of him playing polo with Prince Charles at the Country Club.

The next day he takes us to Bur Dubai for a burger then shows us round this luxury apartment in Golden Sands.

'This is yours if and when you need it,' he says to Uncle Alex. And we have complimentary space at the Jumeriah Beach Hotel if you feel like a massage.

'Look Alex,' says he. 'It's all here if you want it. But you need to work hard to earn it.'

Uncle Alex's like this, 'nae bother, nae bother, I'm working on the CV as we speak Ronald ma man.'

That night Uncle Alex catches me raiding the fridge and I thinks he's angry with me because I'm stealing but he's upset about sumthin else. 'Dae you like it here Billy? Dae ye? Tell the truth,' he says, and he's grabbin ma airm and shakin me and I'm like this, sawright, and I gets the feeling he hates it and he wants me to say the same thing. He's like this, 'Look I'm sorry for bringing your here palsie.' He *never* calls me palsie. My dad does. Not him. Then he goes: 'Will you forgive me? Will ye? Eh? Forgive me?' He keeps repeating himself. He's like, 'You. Forgive. Me?' It's as if he's dead nervous about Uncle Ron and his friends being too posh. He's frightened he won't fit in. 'God forgive me,' he says. 'I didnae mean tae do this tae ye - tae bring you here like this. It's no us. Is it Billy? Aw this country club and tennis thing - christ I dinnae think it wid be like or I'd never have brought you here. Honest, palsie. Never. Yer Uncle Ron is working for The English but I'll no be. I can tell you that right now. Never. It's like yer da wae that Henley cunt. Look what it did to him. Drove him aff his heid. Well I'll no be daein it.'

Next morning at the pool Uncle Ron's like this:

‘Look, I’ll get you fixed up here. But after that, it’s up to you, and his voice is trembling tae even to the extent that there might be a fight and I’m starting to look tae the vertex, his tennis racket cover, christ it’s a triangle, whoever heard of a triangular tennis racket tae fuck ye widnae be able to hit the ball back over the net without it going off in all sorts of strange directions, like my dad, strange directions, funny turns, shit, blessed fuckin Mary and Jesus tae. I know Uncle Eck wants to say who the fuck are you talkin tae but he disnae he just sits there and that’s no like him I can tell you.

Next day Uncle Alex starts his joab overseeing the building of wan of the sheikh’s new colleges. But it’s no enough because they tell him he hiz tae learn how to drive so he can transport the Indian wogs to and from the labour camps. Noo he hiz tae learn tae drive fur fuck’s sake. He storms oot, sayin he’s gon tae The Irish Village furra pint. Uncle Ron arrives home with dollops of sweat under his armpits and the breath, onions and garlic. His face is aw twisted and he’s like this, what are you cooking for young Billy and I tonight, Shamal? He makes me stand up and takes me to the outhouse where he stores his computers. There are maps of the world in there with aw the different countries coloured in and arrows drawn here and there. Iraq and Saudi Arabia have hunners oh arrows. He puts his airm aroon ma shooder.

‘What you must remember about people like Shamal is that they are different from you and me,’ says he. ‘They have different morals Bill. In fact they are probably one step away from being baboons. Do you know what that means, Bill? Do you understand what the consequences of that could be? Anarchy. Chaos. Inhumanity. Civil War. Destruction. Rape. Famine.’

He’s intae this big encyclopedia, pointing to a map of The Philippines. He holds my face to the page, the boney fingers pressing into my neck tae.

‘Look. This is where Shamal comes from. A place where child prostitution is virtually legal.’  
I stares at the page.

The Philippines

Area 300,00 sq km

Population 79 million

Capital Manila

Religion, Roman Catholic (92%) Muslims (8%)

GDP, US\$270.5billion

GDP per capita US\$3,500

Inflation 6.8%

Exports US\$25 billion

Imports US\$29 billion

‘Do you know what all that adds up to, Bill? Poverty. On a scale you and I can only imagine. Shamal is lucky to be employed by us here in Dubai. She has escaped her slum, her abusive father and her junkie mother. Now it’s up to you and I to make sure she understands that. She will do anything for you. Absolutely anything. But beware. Because if she ever gets the upper hand she will enslave you and I. That’s why we must keep the pressure up. Keep them in debt. We are their masters, not the other way around.’

He places his right hand on my shoulder and massages it with his long bony fingers, drawing the palm of his hand down the length of my arm. It makes me shiver.

‘Don’t forget Bill,’ says he. ‘Women don’t understand the definition of harmony. They are too busy bitching among themselves. Like the wogs. In the jungle with their tribes. Too busy spearing one another’s arses to see the bigger picture. That gives us, the white man, the chance to move in.’

He pulls the venetian blind open and hands me binoculars.

‘You watch them at funerals,’ says he. ‘They love it. It gives them the chance to flirt and get

randy. Death turns them on Bill. And so does evil.'

He's like a U-Boat captain now, guiding his periscope across to Shamal's quarters.

'Left a bit. Right a bit. Now look. Tell me what you see, Bill. Tell me what you see.'

He pulls the venetian blinds down and sits back in his black swivel chair.

I scan the room but all I see are her clothes scattered everywhere, including the bra and panties I'd worn the night before.

'It's a total mess Uncle Ron. She hasn't even cleared up her own room. Is it just Philippino slaves who are like that or all women Uncle Ron?'

A good question young Bill, he says, flicking through one of his books.

He clasps the hands in a triangle, touching his lips with both forefingers.

'Like most Philipinos, Shamal is a Roman Catholic, he says. A good Scots laddie like you must know what that means.

'Aye, Celtic an that. Irish.'

'She is entrenched in emotionalism. When you combine this with poverty and Roman Catholicism, you produce conscience and materialism.'

'What is emotionalism?' I asks. 'Is that Creepin Jesus crying on the cross and all that?'

'Exactly Bill. Just like women when they can't handle things. Let me put it this way Bill.

They use material goods to blackmail your emotions. And they dress their chapels up like their false emotions. Look at our churches. There are no weeping effigies and christ crying on the cross. It's all a smokescreen. A big pretence, a breeding ground for hypocrisy. That's why women in particular are attracted to it. It means they can sin and sin again. It's part of the Creeping Jesus philosophy. You see, men tend to call a spade a spade. But women won't admit to things. They pretend to their friends they don't have sex. Being a Catholic allows them to exist in a dreamlike state minus reality. Let me simplify. Suppose you, Sheonagh and Lewis were Catholics. Sheonagh buys Lewis a new computer then makes him feel bad because you don't have one. She exploits it in an emotional way and eventually uses it as a weapon to

get at Lewis. Even the food you eat is used as an emotional weapon. What about the starving babies in Sudan, they say. But is that your fault, Billy. Is it?’

He puts his feet up on the desk and I stares in silence at him, swinging in his chair, the buck teeth and long airms behind his heid.

‘There’s this wee guy back haim,’ says I, ‘John Paterson, he’s got a Chopper and tons of cash because his dad works on the oil rigs, it’s as if he’s always laughing at me and his dad’s pal’s a Catholic because he punched Uncle Alex before we came here.’

Uncle Ron nods. Then the phone rings back in the villa and he goes to answer it. But I stay in the outhouse for a while playing around, looking through his filing cabinets. In one there are different pictures of Shamal, sexy ones from a distance, as if he’s taken them with a zoom lense. He comes back into the outhouse and pulls out his war encyclopedia..

‘There are civil wars here,’ says he, pointing to various countries on the map. ‘And there are guerilla movements here, here, and here. We support this one here and we hate this one here. There’s going to be trouble here and that’s why we are sending aid there.’

‘Yes Uncle Ron.’

He’s quite agitated, the sweaty armpits and the heid trembling. His hand shakes tae.

He takes me out past the swimming pool and back into the kitchen where Shamal is cooking.

Uncle Ron walks over and spanks her bum then kisses her neck from behind.

‘It’s all right Bill,’ she likes it.

THAT NIGHT he takes me to the Lampsie Plaza to see The Longest Day. Uncle Ron buys ice cream and as the German sniper with the piercing blue eyes picks off the Americans one-by-one he leans across and whispers, those Americans are a real bunch of hybrid mongrels, wouldn’t you say so Billy? Yes Uncle Ron, that’s for sure. When the movie finishes we walk straight back into the foyer and buy another two tickets to watch it again. They deserve to be shot because they are so disorganised, says I to Uncle Ron, and he winks back at me. We’ll

make a soldier of you yet Billy, that's for sure,' says he.

After the movie we climb into his jeep and he takes us to The Golden Sands apartment. I sits outside on the balcony with the binoculars, zooming right in on HMS

Inverness and HMS Cumbria sailing out into the Arabian Gulf.

'We're keeping the Ayatollah in our sights', says he. And Saddam.'

'Iraq will be ours soon. Just wait and see.'

He's got some magic films in the apartment - The Great Escape, A Bridge Too Far, Bridge Over The River Kwai. I'm even allowed to eat the Thai takeaway he orders on the carpet while I'm watching the films. He just tells me to enjoy myself and that he has some business to attend to. A couple of young girls come to the door, like Africans with bright red lipstick. They go through to his study. When I go to the toilet I can hear them discussing something about money. By the time the film is finished, the African girls are leaving. I turn round quickly and see one of them kissing Uncle Ron on the cheek.

'Goodnight Bill,' he says. 'Don't stay up too late.'

'Goodnight Uncle Ron.'

THE NEXT day we drives down to Jebel Ali to go deep sea fishing with Uncle Alex. Shamal is there tae, tae carry the bags and bait. The boat is filled with rods of all shapes and sizes and it's stocked up with cold beer, fresh fruit and hot bread. Our wee Indian guide Azman looks like The Rajman's cousin, the thin airms, like Elephant Boy.

'He knows these waters better than anyone,' says Uncle Ron, as we shoot out into The Gulf. Uncle Alex lands a small shark and we pour beer over Azman's heid to celebrate. 'I know I am asking for a drink but not this way Uncle Ron,' he jokes, and we all join in, laughing like crazy. I nearly gets a big stingray but it pulls away, jerking the rod, bastard. Once we're well out of sight of land everything goes quiet, apart from the slapping of the waves against the side of the boat. Shamal just sits there, twisting one of the nets tightly around her hand. Uncle

Alex stands up with the shark under his right arm. As he pushes past her he puts his forefinger under her chin and tickles it. He thinks I cannae see him pulling her ear towards him like that.

She stares up at him, the head still, and the eyes tae, blacker than the deid shark's.

'HMS Inverness,' says Uncle Ron, pointing astern, the binoculars pressed to his eyes.

'I hope that bastard can see us because he's heading right this way,' says Uncle Alex. 'Hey you, gey him a hoot on yer hooter, he says to Azman.

'I am not giving him a hoot on my hooter because my hooter is not working sir.'

'Hoist the flag,' orders Uncle Ron.

'Whit flag?' asks Uncle Alex.

'The Lion Rampant, of course. Ahoy there, ahoy,' shouts Uncle Ron but Uncle Alex just sits there shaking his heid.

'Phew that was close,' says Uncle Ron.

'It wiz nawhere near us,' says Uncle Alex. Then he goes like this, 'Ya prick.'

I feel a bit sorry for Uncle Ron. He just tries to ignore Alex but you can tell he's not used to that sort of language. It kind of spoiled things for a minute.

'Fancy a dip,' says Alex, handing me a mask and snorkel. 'I'll be Jacques Cousteau, you can be his able assistant Phillippe.'

'Watch out for the sea snakes,' says Uncle Ron.

'Whit sea snakes?' says Alex.

'Those sea snakes,' he says pointing to long black wiggly things like eels.

'They're eels,' says Uncle Alex.

'Sea snakes,' says Ron.

'Fuckin eels.'

'Bloody sea snakes.'

'Eels.'

‘Sea snakes.’

‘Eels.’

‘Sea-snakes.’

‘Azman. What ur they? Eeels or sea snakes?’ asks Uncle Alex.

‘I think they are most probably sea snakes,’ says Azman.

‘Well there’s only wan fuckin wey tae find oot int there?’ says Alex, handing Shaba the mask and snorkel.

Azman looks at Uncle Ron.

‘I am not wanting to obey your order sir because if they are indeed sea snakes I will most likely encounter a very nasty bite.’

‘Well fuckin encounter a nasty bite then. Gon. Hurry up,’ says Uncle Alex.

‘Yes sir,’ says Azman, as if he’s in the army and Uncle Alex is his captain.

Uncle Alex looks away. He feels bad about issuing the order, I can tell.

You should see Azman. He’s being all deliberate as if to show us this is him climbing down off the boat, and this is him slipping into the water, and this is him about to be bitten by a sea snake. He just floats face down and one of the sea snake things glides past his right ankle and flicks its tail against it. Azman doesn’t react. He just quiteely swms across to the ladder and climbs back up.

‘I can certainly confirm that they are indeed sea snakes,’ says Azman, clambering back on board.

‘How can you prove it?’ asks Uncle Alex.

‘Look. Look at my ankle. It has been bitten. Ah, ah. It is very, very painful.’

‘You grazed that on the boat ya cunt. Sea snakes my arse,’ says Uncle Alex, cracking open another cold beer.

Back at the Jebel Ali hotel we joins a dune driving expedition and we all have to dress up as famous explorers.

‘You can be Lawrence of Arabia,’ says Uncle Ron

‘I’ll be David Livingstone. Alex you’re Jules Verne.’

‘Jules Verne my arse,’ says he. ‘There’s no way I’m dressin up like some poofy middle-class cunt.’

In the desert near the Omani border we see vultures attacking a crippled baby camel. Some of the people in the group are horrified.

‘We must shoot it,’ says they. ‘We cannot allow this to continue. It’s inhumane.’

‘They’re only nature's scavengers at work,’ says Uncle Alex, his voice angry now. ‘It’s the survival of the fittest out here. You’ve goat tae understand that aboot life Billy. The survival of the fittest.’

Back at The Irish Village everyone is talking about war. Uncle Ron says The Ayatollah is rattling the sabre again and that we have to help Saddam and Iraq to put him in his place. The Royal Navy boys are on red alert and the government has issued warnings instructing ex-pats to take extra security measures and to beware of terrorist attacks. Iranian terror groups are said to be hiding out in Dubai and everyone is on edge.

‘Bloody terrorist filth. I’d hang the bastards,’ says Uncle Ron. ‘Nuke them. A pe-emptive strike,’ says Uncle Alex.

Guy Bulloch from Pretoria pours half of his beer into my glass.

‘What would you do Lawrence of Arabia you little Scots git?’ says he.

‘I’d nuke them tae, cut their balls off and hang them fae the lampposts.’

‘Hey Ron, did you hear that?’ says he. ‘Little Bill here wants to cut their balls off.’ Uncle Ron stares at me, the heid tremblin he’s so proud.

The next day I’m left in the villa alone. Just for a laugh I gets the key to the wine cellar.

Behind the wine crates I finds a filing cabinet. Inside it there are document things with Top Secret and British Army Intelligence written on them. There are old maps and bits and bobs of surveillance equipment including letters from the Foreign Office with lists of contact

numbers and addresses in places like Kabul and Karachi. Uncle Ron seems to be quite a top guy. There are even photographs dated 1979 of him with these Mujahadeen guys in Afghanistan. In one photograph he's sitting like a tribesman high in the snow capped mountains near the Kyber Pass. The big phoney is pretending to shoot a machine gun, the big ugly grin and the buck teeth tae. I hears the door opening upstairs and by the sounds of it it's Uncle Alex and Uncle Ron.

'Nae disrespect tae you Ron but this place jist isnae for me,' says Uncle Alex. 'I canni explain it. I just feel claustrophobic.'

'Come to the cricket club,' says Ron.

'Cricket? Cricket's fur bufties.'

'No. It's the Darjeeling Cricket Club. You can sit and have a few beers. You don't have to play. We're playing England tonight. A Scotland/England clash. You'll enjoy it.'

I quickly changes back intae ma ain claithes and locks the cellar door behind me. They're too wrapped up in their chat tae know I was ever in the cellar. That's what I like about Dubai - you seem tae get away wae more things.

'Get ready Billy,' says Ron. 'We're going to play cricket at Darjeeling tonight.'

'Nae bother Uncle Ron,' says I.

Over at Darjeeling Uncle Ron is batting quite well tae but Uncle Alex is on a right bender, ordering drink after drink fae the Pakistani bar steward Archie fae Karachi.

'Imperialist bastards,' says he.

'Int that right Archie, look at them.'

Then he staggers oot onto the edge of the pitch and throws a beer bottle at the umpire. He's like this:

'Who's the bastard in the white? Who's the bastard in the white?'

You can tell everybody's embarrassed by his behaviour.

'Get it right up yez,' shouts Uncle Alex, who is stripped to the waist, sticking his fingers up

at everyone in the pavilion. Archie fae Karachi and two other stewards run on to the pitch but Uncle Alex is too quick for them, dodgin in and oot of the cricketers, hurlin abuse. I can tell Uncle Ron is pure embarrassed man. Me? I knew it was coming. Uncle Alex cannae handle it here. No his type of people. I end up in a taxi haim wae him - the way things are gon it'll soon be a plane hame. He's got his UAE driving test the next day tae but he disnae give a shit.

That night the talk is all politics. Uncle Ron has some Afghan tribesmen roon at the gaff and they spend hours poring over the Khaleej Times. Something big is happening, something very, I can tell. Word is, there's going to be another Gulf War and the phone disnae stop ringing. Uncle Ron is in some state, the buck teeth and the sweaty armpits tae.

That night all the ex-pat hard-liners turn-up. Guy the technician from Pretoria. Donny the engineer from Auckland, Neil the naval architect from Zimbabwe and Rod the teacher from Portsmouth. They gather round the television, in a wee triangle shape tae. I nick upstairs and get into my Lawrence of Arabia outfit and Neil is wearing his old navy uniform. Rod has a few medals his old man won in the Second World War but they're nothing great, mentioned in dispatches, that sort of thing. Shamal brings us some beer and crisps and we get stuck in as the tv news shows Iraqi missiles raining down on Tehran.

'There's another one,' says Rod. Crack, yes.'

'Kill the fucking lot of them, wog scum,' says Guy, the blond hair and the blue eyes tae.

'Look at the state of them, they don't stand a chance,' says Ron.

'Get it right up them,' says I.

'Where's your elite Iranian Red Guard brigade now you cowardly baeestard?' says Neil, whacking his tennis racket against Donny's big fat arse.

It's good fun but upstairs I can hear Uncle Ron and Alex arguing. Then Uncle Alex appears with this daft big rectangular brief case.

'Hey look at Alex. He looks like James Coburn from The Great Escape,' jokes Neil.

‘Which tunnel are you using, Tom, Dick or Harry?’ asks Donny.

That’s the thing about Uncle Alex, he disnae care. He’s like this, mimicking Winston Churchill,

‘I’ll fight them in the swing parks, at the bus queue, in the dole offices.’

‘Wehey!’ shouts Donny. ‘You tell them Eck, we’ll miss you man.’

‘And as for you wee man,’ says Uncle Alex, pointing to me.

‘I’ll see you when you get back.’

I knew he was right. His departure meant I’d soon have to return to Scotland as well. Mum said he had to be here to look after me otherwise the deal was off. As I watched him go even I understood this was the way it had to be. I could have been an ex-pat. I could have had servants like Uncle Ron, and a fishing boat, and a swimming pool. I could have had big cars like Uncle Ron and adventures in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I could have been a big white man in a white man’s city. Instead I was going back to being wee Billy Queen from Hamilton. Except I was different now. Different because I knew how it really was in the world and how it should be in Scotland.

At breakfast the next morning the atmosphere is tense. Very tense. Without a driving licence Uncle Alex won’t be able to do his job at the new college.

Uncle Ron and Shamal are trying to sober him up wae black coffee.

‘You’re too drunk to drive. You’ll have to postpone the test,’ says Uncle Ron.

‘Yer arse. I’ll no be postponing anything. I’ll pass this test easy you wait and see,’ says he.

I can tell something bad is going to happen. Like the way it always does with us Queens.

We didn’t hear anything for hours. Then it comes on the news that a UAE army helicopter has found an Indian driving instructor deep in the desert, tied to a cactus. Uncle Ron gets a call from army intelligence who says the guy was in such a bad way that the vultures were sitting on his head before he was winched to safety.

‘Looks like your Uncle Alex will be going back to Scotland,’ says Uncle Ron.

That night the villa was quiet.

‘Uncle Ron has gone,’ says Shamal, bringing me poached eggs on toast in bed. ‘Gone where?’ says I.

‘On business,’ Mr Billy.

After the eggs I goes into the study and plays with his telescope for a while. ‘Must be Pakistan,’ says I, because I’d noticed the word Karachi written on a blue tag on his suitcase the day before he left. I puts on his white Hong Kong police helmet, the one he’d never let me wear, and I prances around in front of the mirror, naked, except for the helmet, and the gun belt. There’s a fax from the British Embassy explaining to Uncle Ron that Uncle Alex had to be deported but that it would be better for all parties concerned if nothing more was said about it. I stay there for about thirty minutes then I gets dressed.

‘How long has he been gone?’ I asks Shamal.

‘Don’t know Mr Billy, a few hours maybe. He told me to tell you it was business and that he hopes you understand.’

I understood all right. You have to go to these places to keep them in their place, to keep the empire alive. I sits down in front of the tv news with Shamal standing behind me. The three westerners were seized by Mujahadeen terrorists in a mountain village north of the Afghan capital Kabul for alleged spying offences, says the news reader. A Mujahadeen spokesman said the sentence is death by beheading. That could be Uncle Ron, I thinks.

‘My name is Stanley Anderson. I’m a British citizen and I confess to spying on Afghan military military bases on behalf of British Intelligence,’ says the prisoner, flanked by two black bearded Afghans.

‘Look Shamal, that could be Uncle Ron’ says I, twisting the gun belt around my naked waist so the holster sat by my dick.

Shamal goes down to pick up some toast I’d dropped.

‘Aye get doon there,’ says I, pressing her head against me. ‘And stay doon ya Philippino

bitch.’

## Chapter 5

### Ivory Tower Blues

HAIRMYRES HOSPITAL in East Kilbride, Scotland, is invisible from the road. Its whitewashed buildings hide on a hill surrounded by large trees. It is known as 'The Factory' presumably because it manufactures something. Death perhaps. Or maybe it is because it churns out more discontented walking wounded than any other hospital in Scotland. Appalled by the level of impersonal care they receive from overworked nurses and under funded wards, escapees regularly name and shame it so. To the west is Eaglesham and the bleak Fenwick moors where secret Ministry of Defence bunkers try to pretend they are also invisible, dug deep into the swampy peat bogs. A strange little village called Moscow is then all that virtually separates the traveller from the Irish Sea, Paddy's Milestone, and Belfast. Weird. Fuckin weird man. Just to the north is Glasgow. And South is Hamilton from whence we originally came.

The very word Hairmyers has dramatic connotations for those familiar with its ring, especially for council schemes like us who generally inhabit the place. It is synonymous with other words I quickly became used to as a child in the street, words like heart attack, stroke, take him some Irn Bru and a Daily Record, Daldowie, and, poor Betty, what about the kids. The streets around our scheme quickly became known as Widows' Corner as faither efter faither bit the bullet in a lifestyle war we males never seem to win in the West of Scotland. Even the English writer George Orwell spent time in that old war hospital as he battled tuberculosis - they say it was where he began to pen his famous novel 1984. This is 1987. And

ever since I returned from Dubai my dad has been in and out of this place with a range of bizarre and seemingly inexplicable illnesses. This time, I'm told, cancer has taken hold and time is of the essence auld boy, especially when you're hunting Captain Henley and some details have yet to be sorted.

The rain fell in a sheet at 45 degrees angling its way into your consciousness from a black, leaden sky, occasionally turning to bright white snowflakes just to torment us, but the Alpine illusion soon disappears, as it always does in that part of Scotland, plunging us back into split second bright sunshine before the instant return of the darkness and the evil whistling wind, fast, furious, designed to further destabilise the unstable, warning them they could be next. It is the weather of a schizophrenic God. Made in Scotland. Guaranteed for life. Scores of ugly black ravens flutter arrogantly around the hospital grounds, their jet-black coats and cocky swagger challenging the ambulances to a fight. Watch its head. It twitches cutely to the left and right, mocking the caring, concerned expressions of those visitors brave enough to come willingly to the doorstep of The Factory.

WARD 1 is where they put them – it's a logical countdown to death. Ward 1 on the ground floor just down from the wee paper shop and the canteen, popular with the visitors and kids like - by the way they do a rare bacon sannie or even a roll and sausage if you fancy it, at a reasonable price too. Yes. Very reasonable indeed. If you hold your nostrils while you dip it into a big healthy mug of tea, you can't really smell the disinfectant, the stuff that's sprayed all over the shop to disguise the pong of infection and the bruised blood of the chemo patient. It's magic. Ye cannae whack it. Cancer is the devil of all diseases. It doesn't simply eat the body, it slowly envelopes the mind - like a giant python consuming a live zebra - the victim fully conscious of the fate that awaits it, the stiff upper lip quivering uncontrollably, and all of that human pretence again, it raises its ugly head again, time and time again. Except this time

it's different. Because what else can people do? What the fuck do you expect, Billy?

My dad's in one of the small rectangular wards, the one where they put the serious cases so their death cackles don't disturb people - a room with six patients in total. He gives me the sort of look the villains used to give in those old black and white Charlie Chaplin films, the eyes darting nervously from left to right. But even at this late stage he is cool. No mention of the past. Or the future. Only the present matters to him. Although he clearly knows he's dying there is no self-pity. As I sit on the side of his bed he leans over and grips my forearm then, with a wink of an eye and a fly wee flick of the heid he says:

'Don't look. But see. See that big yin. There. Behind me? Bone cancer. That yin's goat a one way ticket tae Daldowie. See the wan next to him? They came in during the night and took him away - they thought he was deid but they must have revived him.'

Then, twitching his head the other way and still holding my forearm, 'Look at that yin there - poor soul int he?'

He screws up his face and shakes his head slightly, pursing the lips, the way he always does whenever he expresses sympathy for his fellow man. The guy he was talking about is half hanging out of the bed, his long greasy hair dangling to the floor.

'He never gets a visitor that fella. Must have been a wino or a tramp before they brought him in here.'

That was the thing about my dad. Even against all the odds he still considered himself to be the favourite. At the golf with his best pal Big Gordon, a guy could hit a 400 hundred yard drive on the first T and he would make a comment about the geezer's check troosers - he must have got them in the Debenhams sales, or look at that guy's nose, it looks like a bag of strawberries. Then, in front of everyone, Big Gordon would say, pull that finger, and let rip an enormous fart. Both of them would then walk up to the first T and, in front of everyone, duff their drives into the rough. But it's their right to duff their drives into the rough and they know it's their right because that's the type of men they are. I mean for christsake it wasn't all

Henley. He came and went. But all I could do was sit and watch when he decided to enter our lives. Between times we'd try to play golf the gither or even go to the football if we felt like it. But Henley made us feel special in a way. A golf club wasn't just a golf club - it was a potential weapon. He used the four iron one night to fend off a burglar from our house. His oxygen mask isn't a standard issue Hairmyers oxygen mask. It's one used by an RAF pilot at The Battle of Britain. And that's how he uses it. How he makes it look. How he makes it feel. He gives me the thumbs up when he puts it on, inhaling the sheer drama of his predicament, because that's the way it has to be, ignoring the surroundings in that public arena where even your last breath is public property. Like Wallace at Falkirk letting the English forces see his cavalry riding around to outflank them. No point in hiding the obvious. Like Jim Baxter at Wembley, making them watch, but not see, as he lazily lifts the ball over Bobby Charlton's head, dropping it gently onto the right toe of Dennis Law. Slowing the pace now. Freeze-framing the intention - the master craftsmen at work. That's us. That's the way we are, the way we will always be.

My father was full of fancy flicks, winks, nudges, secret messages. It's just that I'd never recognised them until now. I'd always been sort of embarrassed by his uneducated presence. Those Hogmanay nights when he sang his heart out, the wee urine stain on the trousers there for all to see. But now. Now I know. Now I know who the gargoyles are. His hand is cold and clammy, the wee thin wrist tae wae the green band oan it. Now I knew I'd need to bury him alone.

'How are ye gettin on palsie?' he finally says, pulling the mask from his face.

'Fine dad, fine,' I says, stroking the side of his head with my fingers.

'They tell me you're up at that university now, studying The English?'

'Aye, that's right. I've just started.'

A woman at the far end of the ward begins to sob as she holds one of the cancer patient's hands - her father by the sounds of it. 'Mary and Gavin are asking for you,' she says, the

voice quivering, trembling with emotion, oh daddy please don't die, please don't. A couple of Creepin Jesuses.

I stare at the tatooes on my dad's arm. One says mother, written over a dove it is, the other has the insignia of The Royal Signals which he'd joined in the 1950's as part of his national service. He pulls his wrist away from me, pressing the oxygen mask tight against his face. Someone has sent him a get well soon card with a set of golf clubs and a fairway pictured on the front of it. I point to it as he gasps for breath. 'I canni see a four iron in there,' I say. 'It must be lodged somewhere else.' He immediately gets the gag, the thumbs up again, the stomach heaving with sardonic laughter he doesn't really have the energy to expend. The head nodding slightly too, that knowing, gentle smile, the fun-loving eyes. After the burglar incident our golf conversations had always taken on a secret resonance. Only we ever knew the real significance of a 4 iron. During our games with Big Gordon and Scott he used to say to me, Billy gimme that 4 iron oot the bag will ye - it always came during stages in the game when something or somebody was getting on his nerves, if golfers up ahead were slowing things up or if the game wasn't going well. When Colin Montgomerie missed the green at the 14th at Augusta he turned to me and said, he should have taken a 4 iron, ye always get better contact wae a 4 iron fae that kind of distance. Even the number 4 had a special meaning for us. The golfers cry "fore" became a particular source of amusement to us. There was even a sense of irony about the dove on his forearm. Pissed off with a family of doves which kept shitting on his patio, he once borrowed a friend's air rifle and shot at the father as it sat on the roof of the house. It sat there for about 15 seconds then, as it tried to fly away, it fell, in kamikaze fashion, thudding onto the patio below. Dead. The duality of man - he could never understand what I meant by that - when I explained the contradiction, the penny didn't always seem to drop. One night as we watched Full Metal Jacket featuring the US marine with the CND badge on his helmet and Born to Kill written along the top of it, he suddenly nodded and said, 'Is that what you meant about me shooting that dove? I see what ye mean noo,' he said,

looking at the symbol of peace on his forearm.

He's tired now. I watch him fading away. He struggles to answer my questions. Questions he'd only ever partly answered when I was a kid.

'What did Henley do after he told you to open fire on the Arabs dad?'

'Nothing,' says he. 'Except he reported me and then handed me over to the Egyptians. I'd killed some innocent people, that's what they told me, that's what I did.'

'And what about Henley, where is he?'

'I don't know son, I'm tired now.'

He drifts in and out of consciousness and me, sitting there, holding his hand, waiting for a clue, a vital sign that will allow me to continue the hunt.

A bouquet of flowers and the ubiquitous bottle of Irn Bru sit on top of his locker - the flowers are from some well wishers from the British Israeli Movement, Royal Signals section.

Following my stare, he pulls the mask off again. At one stage I had four Irn Brus he says, I always think it gives ye a better kick when you take the four. I appreciate his attempts at humour and the use of the pun, even at this late stage in the proceedings. 'AAA hooo hooo hooo,' weeps the woman at the far end of the ward, hooting loudly into her hanky. Her behaviour reminds me of the old Swedish preacher in the film Zulu as the tribes approach Rourke's Drift. 'You're all going to die! Die! You're all going to die!' he proclaims, swigging from the whisky bottle.

That was how I left him. Amidst the chaos of impending death.

THE UNIVERSITY of Glasgow is a strange place to someone like me. Gothic gargoyles growl from above the cornices, twisted little cancer nodes, waiting to pounce, to send you spiralling down University Avenue. At The Western Infirmary big doctors with bandy legs stand waiting to experiment on you. They smell of wintergreen - as if they've just stepped off the rugby pitch.

I arrived there like a spaceman from another planet, after a few lucky higher results. I am older now - and wiser. I'd moved out of the house and rented a cheap flat in the West End, near Maryhill. It was dark and damp, but at least I was well away from Uncle Alex. My mum and him became an item. They didn't want me to go to university, so I went. Uncle Ron wrote to me from Dubai saying he was very proud of my achievements and that I could go over there and teach English after I'd graduated. I didn't fancy the arms trade though, I just wanted to escape. But you never really escape, not when Henley haunts you in bed at night.

There was something else. Uncle John the policeman had suddenly taken an interest in me. It was as if my dad had asked him to watch over me. He gave me money which I took to help pay the rent on the flat. But it was as if he was trying to guide me back into something else, away from the search for Henley. He keeps asking me what I want to do and has even given me a form to join the police.

I'm fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to have Esther by my side. He gained startling results in his Chemistry exams and won a special scholarship. We team up with another guy from deepest Lanarkshire known as Fish, so called because he drinks like one. Fish has a really high forehead with tightly cropped curly hair and bulging eyes. He wears a green Parka and a Motherwell scarf, and he walks with a slow ponderous step like a camel I'd seen in Dubai. He studied accountancy but his face didn't fit so, being a strange Lanarkshire boy, he ends up hanging out with us. One day at the Queen Margaret Union we see this blind guy sitting alone with his white stick, female laughter all around him. We call him Stevie after Stevie Wonder and gets him drunk. Stevie studies social sciences. He is angry and obnoxious with a keen sense of smell and he thinks he can get away with things because he is blind. One day I says to Esther: 'Let's ignore the cunt and see what he does.'

'Why the fuck did you ignore me outside the Boy George Building yesterday?' says he, tapping the stick on Esther's knee. 'I can smell you cunts a mile away. I thought you were supposed to be my buddies? What the fuck is up wae you guys anyway?'

One Friday afternoon when the normally silent Fish had run out of booze in his hip flask, he has a real go at Stevie.

‘Don’t fuck wae me Stevie,’ says he, ‘or I’ll stick that white stick so far up your arse you’ll be using it as a periscope to cross the fuckin road.’

Despite the rows, we sort of stick together the four of us. I often go back to Hamilton with them on a Friday night, just to touch base, to re-energise the thought processes.

‘We fought for this land,’ says I to myself on the train back to Lanarkshire, surrounded by sexy commuters with short skirts and leather boots, the choo choo train with Chanel No 5 for fuel, black holes, tunnels, timetables, personal punctuality, chugging out of Dalmarnock right up the Argyle Street and right into the lingerie paradise at the St Enoch’s centre, a world designed by them for them. Stevie tapping away inside this brave new republic with its emotionalism, materialism, office flirts and Christmas cards for sad tarts dictated to by the soaps. Esther with his head in a chemistry magazine, Fish, arms folded, staring silently at the post-industrial sprawl north of Cambuslang. ‘Where are you now Lord Kitchener?’ says I to myself, as we push onward through this no-man’s land. Ours is a lonely, distant, abstract war, one with pernicious pressure groups, politically correct paratroopers, and battalions of divorce lawyers. The women’s army, over there, rearing its ugly head, attacking under cover of dark. Outflanked now we lie, our faces in the mud, crippled by the uncertainty of an age devoid of direction, romance and ambition.

Picture a map of Scotland. The West Coast

With

Its jagged, bloody broken up inside

inconsistency

That's like the inside

of

our heids. are like a broken ginger bottle. Shattered.

And splintered. And the polarisation process

And it aw

sharp and Z-shaped like a scar on one's cheek Like a scar on one's cheek old boy. Back up there in gargoyle city some of them tell us Burns is second division stuff.

Remember when ah was a wee boy used to twist my empty crisp packet so that when one throws it into the bin it refuses to unravel.

That's how one feels inside. Not all right. All tight and twisted up. Look at the shape.

Turn it on its head and look at the shape man. Imagine it vertically. How would it look then eh?

No doubt it

would

appear  
rather fucking jaggy.

'HEY YOU, Billy cummon, we're getting off here,' says Esther, pinching my neck between his forefinger and thumb. And so we go, off the train, back into the terrain from whence we first came, ready to experience again that no man's land in which people like us often find ourselves, the educated working class, not bourgeoisie, yet no longer part of the breed which originally spawned us. If we were outcasts at university then the same can be said for our

existence in deepest Lanarkshire.

‘Where are we going?’ asks Stevie, tapping the stick on Esther’s shoe.

‘To the pub, where the fuck else?’ says Esther.

‘Which one?’ asks Fish.

‘One with dirty women preferably.’

And soon we’re in the taxi, ‘Town centre please,’ says I, sitting in the front seat and the driver is talking about the auld firm match. Esther pipes up from the back seat, ‘Driver, shut up please and take us to our destination, we aren’t paying you for your opinions.’ The awkward silence that follows is only broken by the rhythmic tapping of Stevie’s stick on the driver’s back seat. I just called. To say. I love you.

FOUR PINTS of frothing lager are placed onto the table by the wee waitress in The Glen Bar. A live band is warming up by the stage, cover version city. Stevie sups his pint, sensing the benefit of the doubt he always gets from pub punters in Lanarkshire and the local guys, well, you can tell from their body language they’re uptight about somethin. They’re always uptight the way they huddle together around the wee wooden tables. Fish sits in silence. He’s taken his Parka off but the Motherwell scarf still hangs around his scrawny neck. I see a guy in the corner by the fruit machine, an old pal of Uncle Alex’s. He clocks me tae but we both ignore one another, as you do. One of the women at the next table looks like Paterson’s dicktease of a maw, widnae mind givin her wan the night.

‘Excuse me,’ says I, as I push my way through mair women to get to the toilet.

‘It’s no manners they want,’ says one guy, ‘it’s yer cock.’

The band booms out Stuck in The Middle With You. Fish goes for more drinks, Stevie has slid across tae chat to one of the women about Weber’s Theory of Social Stratification and how his blindness does not render him in chains and that he is, in fact, a free man.

‘Aye,’ says she, ‘look at that Stevie Wonder wan hisnae stopped him, has it son?’

‘Alice, Alice, who the fuck is Alice!’ they sing, downing their voddies, wiggling their tits.

Then it's Deacon Blue's Dignity, a song about that guy that's a wurkin fur the council, savin his money like a tight Ayrshire cunt, then sailing his fuckin boat at the weekend, boring wee shite. The crucifixes hanging from the womens' necks prompt me to think about the moral lassitude of the Irish. I think of Uncle Ron for a second.

Esther hasn't wasted any time, he's already snogging one of them, sinking those teeth right in. Our cultural demise is inextricably linked with the manner in which we are forced to interact with infantile sub-cultures and their anti-intellectual perspectives.

'Are you Eastenders or Emmerdale?' says I, reaching across Esther and partner to speak to this particularly old one with nice big tits.

'I like them baith,' says she, dirtily eyeing me then Esther and his lumber.

'So you like the urban intrigue of the former followed by the robust bestiality of the latter?' says I.

'Suppose so,' says she, not really understanding, but who cares eh? She may be old enough to be my grandmother but I still want her so I push in past Esther. To my pleasant surprise she is even tartier than I first thought, fishnets on a woman her age, in this environment, with those tits, can only mean one thing. I push my way to the busy bar to buy her a vodka but I'm alone, starin at the gantry. There's an old guy sitting on a barstool at the edge of the chaos.

'Ye alright?' he says.

'Aye no bad. I was up seein ma old man at Hairmyers coz he was dyin oh cancer.' He seems interested so I continue with the story.

'There's five guys in the room, an old Glescae cunt, chatty as fuck; an eccentric lookin dude wae a long beard and wild eyes, ma old man, and, right in the corner, this baldy shite who keeps fallin asleep durin visitin time.'

The old guy is listening so I'm framing his heid in the vertex, shaping it up as I tell him about cancer ward.

‘His heads half hingin oot the bed an his specs are just aboot tae faw aff. Well ma maw and me ur showin concern tae the extent that she's nearly ower there liftin the guy's heid back ontae the bed, coz there isnae a fuckin nurse in sight. So ahm turnin roon an suddenly the guy's fuckin starin at me. He looks ok tae. Ah mean if ye hid tae bet oan who wiz next tae pop their clogs he certainly widnae be the favourite, ye ken. Ma old man, on the other hand, or the Grizzly Adams dude, his fuckin death hovering above their fuckin nappers. Anyway ah get the feelin the bald wan thinks ahm snoopin oan him in a ghoulish kinda way. But ahm no, coz asasay, if ah wantae see a walkin skeleton ah jist need tae look at ma old man. Anyhow. Tae get back tae the story, the baldy cunt disnae say a word an we leave him sittin on the edge oh his bed, gaspin furra fuckin breath. But ahm telt that as soon as we leave the baldy guy pipes up in a broad English accent, he says tae ma old man that the next time he has visitors would he mind takin them to the day room. Day room, fuck all, says ma old man. They'll stay here wae me when they comehere coz ahm too fuckin weak tae walk tae the cuntin day room, dae ye hear me? The baldy English cunt went quiet after that, an ma old man telt me the poor bastard passed away that night.’

The old guy just nods.

‘Is yer old man still alive?’ he asks.

‘No. That’s the point. He’s deid,’ says I. ‘They experimented on him you know. He told me so. Why should I doubt him? The student doctors were there, you know the types - the ones with the long bandy legs and the rounded R's - they were there in their white coats while the Grand Professor of Cancer Studies prodded around a bit. Them. The same guys. The fuckin sideburns. The wans that held pistols to our heids in the trenches and told us we were cowards for no gon over the top to kill our German brothers. They bastards. That's them thair, ower thair. Look.’

The old guy turns his head. He’s pretending he’s doing as he’s told, looking over his shoulder.

I like his style, kidding on like that. I buy him a drink and continue:

‘He was under sedation of course. That much is obvious to me. But he can still see what they're up to behind their masks because old soldiers always can see them. Before. I. Give. The. Order. To. Switch. Off. The. Life. Support. Machine, let me tell you something. I looked straight into his eyes for the very last time. They were full of hope. He held a few auld photos of Big Gordon and him, and Scott and I, at the gouf, as he called it. In one of the photographs Big Gordon was pretending to hit him over the head with a club. I couldn't make out if it was a four iron or not but it was ironic right enough. Then. Slowly. It comes. And with it comes the silence. And the ticking stops. But you know you can't listen to it for too long because there's too much to be done, too many corners to turn, and the long, dry, dusty road hangs there in your imagination like a childhood dream.’

The old guy's a good listener, a fine drunk, a man schooled in the art of putting up with the pointless chit chat of fellow piss artists. I'm buying him a drink tae, whisky, and me, whisky, whisky, whisky. He's taking it all in, my story about the hospital. I continue:

“Excuse me preacher man, I said to this weirdo who suddenly appeared with a bible and a dog collar, fuck off and leave me alone with the remnants of my father. Where were ye when we really needed help, ya cunt. One day there will be no priests, their day is done. They will be replaced by a new breed of man. And each man shall be his own priest, thank god for Walt Whitman when yer knees are tremblin and you've hid another go at authority. The ravens tae, they turn their back on you as you walk away from the place. They think ye canni se them but ye can see them aw right. Havin a fly cackle. Kiddin on they're swallying the worms. Havin a contemplative snigger - the big beady black eyes twitching from side to side, wary enough to quietly avert their gaze but never intimidated enough to fly away. Maybe it wiz their wey of gettin revenge for the death of their fellow doves, canni see it though coz wans black and wans white, get ma point bruv. I'm going to go on an urban raven safari one day. Call their bluff big time. Wipe them from the face of this planet. He would have liked that. Plenty of bang bang. Cleansing society.’

The old guy goes like this: 'Cheers pal.'

I've got the drinks on a tray now so I just push my way back to Esther and Fish and start chatting to that auld tart again.

BACK AT her gaff she plays Rod Stewart and lies back on the bed, wallmirrors all around her, legs wide open. When I go down on her, her big white belly seems huge but she tastes the same as any woman. The shag is uneventful so I arch my hips up towards her face, straddling her shoulders. I have to get the vertex angle in place, otherwise it doesn't feel right. She's not into giving blow jobs, old school, straight shag and plain loaf sandwiches for yer piece mister. 'Time to join the twentieth century,' says I, pushing it into her mouth, my forehead pressed against the mirror, flashbacks the movie of Orwell's 1984, Winston standing naked by the window, an auld wifie singin a prole song. It's. Life. In. The Fuckin. Raw. She gobbles it uncomfortably into her mouth. And for some reason I'm hearing that Lulu number, Relight My Fire, your love is my only desire. This guy's face keeps creeping into my mind not in a sexual way but he was in the pub wearing silver-rimmed glasses and a jersey and a big face like one of those amateur golfers. He tried to get friendly when I was up at the bar buying gran a double voddie, holding out his hand for a major shake, common decency, that sort of thing. And. It's. Pretty. Obvious. I'm. Not. Going. To. Come. Like. This. So I withdraw and finish it off as deep inside her whale-like stomach as I can.

OF COURSE nothing ever stays good for very long. Not when you're hunting Captain Henley. That very night, as I lie there with her, my old man's funeral arrangements are being made. It strikes me that I can't even orgasm without getting into the vertex shape. After the funeral I hang about the West End of Glasgow on my own. I even stay clear of Esther and Fish. And the vertex is attached to my forehead like a miner's head lamp. And Henley is everywhere.

He even guides me to the type of books I read. One of the first ones I ever picked up, alone, in the dark recesses of the university library, told me about a Colonel John Neil, born in Ayr and educated at Glasgow University. He forced Hindus to lick up the blood and gore from the dead bodies of British women and children mutilated during the Indian Mutiny at Cawnpore. He then hanged them. I immediately thought of Uncle Ron and all he'd taught me. For a moment I kind of liked the place because it re-inforced what I already knew. Then some of them try to change the way you think and that's where the experimentation begins and you end up in hospital or worse.

But I'm reading for myself now, so they can't touch me. *Catcher in The Rye*. 1984. Keep *The Aspidistra Flying* old boy eh, just like Henley probably does or Henley's son if he has one. More than that though I'm into Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet On The Western Front*, a German perspective. *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* by Alasdair Gray, the biography of David Livingstone, right up ma street, born, here, died of syphilis.

There's one on medical research that gives me the strength to keep going. Evidence suggests there is a link between the type of epilepsy drugs my dad was on and the chronic lymphatic leukaemia he developed in later life. He wouldn't have been on the drugs in the first place had he not received beatings from the Egyptian authorities. And he wouldn't have been imprisoned in the first place if it wasn't for Henley handing him over. So onward we go, with clenched fists and a business-like stride, out of the darkness of the library, into the bright light of day, down, down, along university avenue, down past the draft dodging guitarist on Ashton Lane, down into Civvy Street, down Byres Road, alone at the bar of the Three Judges, awaiting the verdict.

## Chapter Six

### Skating in George Square

SO MR Henley, tis you and I now, alone at this juncture, save for the two women in The Three Judges. One of them is mad, mentally deranged auld boy. It would appear t'other is of the social working ilk - late thirties perhaps, blond, kind, attractive. You see this type of pairing oot and aboot in Glasgow quite frequently. Hing is tae, The Three Judges is silent until baith women walk over to the music box and slip in some coins. You can imagine their conversation, Henley, this is how you do it Judith, you puts the coin in then you turns the knob. Back at her chair the mad wan dances whilst remaining full seated, the airms up in the air, the heid twitching. Blondie no saying a word, perhaps waiting for Billy's response eh, to gauge how the great Glasgow public are responding to this day oot for the infirm - will she be treated strangely, looked at acutely and what does this tell us about the relationship between ra public at large and those unfortunate enough to be sidelined from the mainstream? Billy says nowt Captain, nor does he respond. Another scenario where the strong is expected to change his behaviour to accommodate the weak, don't stare, look away, look away, look away - well not this sojer, not today. Blondie she senses the stillness of me and Henley. Uncontent with our conservative statuesqueness she moves her chair so her back is to us. She takes off her big rainbow scarf and lets the deranged one touch and smell it. Maddie waves it in the air like a football fan, the big wobbly mammaries shoogling from end to end, the tongue pressed tightly into her right cheek. Bloody good show, says I, standing up now, pointing a chair right at Blondie, refusing to give her even a sniff of what's what.

Outside up Byres Road you go, past the barbers row and up to the big cross where

pedestrians pause - like a giant stage set - having to stop and momentarily contemplate the meaninglessness of what they are setting about doing, staring across the stillness at wan another the motors zim, zim, zimming past from north south east and west, the four stations of the cross.

You step into Tennents.

When it's wet on the ootside, like pishin rain, get wet on the inside, that's aw ye hifty dae. The world according to Esther is a simple wan, like ah says, one man's ceiling is another man's floor. We're sitting together at the bar and it truly is pishing down outside. We're on the lager, big frothy wans, pint for pint, we compete, slugging it oot the gither. I tells Esther about Henley, every shagnasty detail, and the rain it plumps onto the big glass windae tae our left. 'He wiz there,' says I, thumping the big frothy wan onto the beer stained Herald on the bar - 'right wae me just as you're wae me the noo. He was there, I know he was there,' says I.

'Zis Henley? Sure it isnae yer drink fuelled imagination,' says Esther, forever the realist. 'But I can smell him,' says I, 'he was there, this afternoon in The Three Judges. Tellin ye Esther, I wiz right on his trail. Not gonni find him here though, not yet, not in Scotland, need to see where he's been first, what he's done, then I'll find him. That's why I'm going to India. My dad told me he once served there. Not the case in India, Private Queen, he used to say. I say India, Queen, do you know what that means Jock? The Jewel in the Crown, that's what it stands for. Lose India and the Empire will collapse, do you understand that you lazy, drunken, mutinous Jock?'

I leaves Esther sittin there and steps out onto Byres Road, so called because that's where the highland herdsmen stopped to refresh themselves and their animals before the final stage of their long trek to the sell the beasts at the market in Glasgow. 'Not a lot of people know that,' says I, in my best Michael Caine accent. There's something about leaving Tennents and the old dukers who bide there to step onto the new information superhighway outside,

moving into the new world from the auld, leaving the auld in its smoke filled, beer stained glory, glory what a hell of a way to die, to die an English bastard.

Up at Ashton Lane the times they are a changin, the wind it is a blowin according to the busker who standeth outside the wee Indian restaurant. Everyone in Glasgow knows who he is.

The usual posers are there tae, but I don't care about them - I care about the draft dodgers, the mongrels on the dole, the chancers, the beggars, the slime of society. Want to know what makes them tick - only then will I get to grips with their antithesis, honourable workers, the great Captain Henley. Giant stride across the cobblestones, ignoring the stares of the mediocrites, clutching their pints like cliches they stand, in circles for safety, Custer ya knob. Up the stair towards the great library and inside sanctuary where Henley leads me to Malinowski's Argonauts of the Western Pacific. It is good, he said, for the ethnographer to put aside camera, notebook and pencil, and join in himself in what is going on, a good excuse to get pished on cheap wine in my case. Be an ethnographer auld boy, see it from the inside out - then make your stance. Go to Edinburgh plenty there, festival time int it says the Ashton Lane specialist.

I put the kettle on back at the flat. Gives one time to think. Up on the shelf in my bedroom the list of books is growing. Orwell's Down and Out In Paris and London, now there's a thing. I could do that. Except there's one major difference - it's be too much like the real thing - no comfortable middle class safety harness for me if it goes wrong. I'd be climbing without a rope. The tea is nice and warm, flooding into the stomach cavern like that, giving me the strength to continue. I phone one of the Glasgow news editors to inform him of my intentions. It's no bad outside, a wee bit windy but what to wear, what to wear. I rummle around and find an auld pair of tracksuit bottoms and an auld scabby jaiket ma faither used to wear. Then it's back out onto the underground at Hillhead, aff at Queen Street then off to the capital on an away day. Now I really am an ethnographer. This is part of what I wrote:

## The Begging Ritual of Down and Outs in Edinburgh

By Billy Queen

It was a wet and chilly morning when I arrived in Edinburgh to beg for the day, my objective being to gather enough money to join the tramps and homeless people who congregate nightly in Princes Street Park to drink cheap wine and vodka. I hoped to put Malinowski's quote to the test by joining the drunks and down and outs for one day and night. Unlike them, however, I was experimenting. The truth of their situation, however, is that they nightly tightrope walk without a net in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle - their existence fixed on the highs and freezing lows of ritualistic Buckfast abuse.

I sat with my head down in the entrance to Marks and Spencers and when I did look up I was eye level with the average adult's thigh. My world was a faceless one, full of legs, shopping bags and dog dirt. My clothes were already wet, and my spirits low. I could sense people's indignation. I saw their cold expressions and heard the tut-tuts of the Morningside matrons. Then this old beggar guy comes up to me. He's like this: "People think we're skivers son, but we're not. Life is all about struggle. Some struggle in the office. Some struggle in the factory. It just so happens I struggle on the street. It doesn't mean my life is any easier. I mean look at me, I'm struggling tae buy some vodka the day."

I thought about a quote I'd read in *Works and Lives* by Clifford Geertz in relation to this "total immersion approach to ethnography". He wrote:

*"There is the isolation. There is the memory of home and what one has left. There is the sense of vocation and where one is going. And, most shakingly, there is the capriciousness of one's*

*passions, the weakness of one's constitutions, and the vagrancies of one's thoughts: that nigrescent thing, the self. It is not a question of going native. It is a question of living a multiplex life: sailing at once in several seas." (Geertz,1988:77)*

I arrived at Edinburgh train station without money for a train ticket back to Glasgow. It was too early to beg so I huddled in a doorway near the platform. It took me another six hours to raise the cash to make it back to Glasgow. At Queen Street station I went for a pee then walked outside. In my absence it seemed that winter had suddenly arrived. I stood in the freezing cold watching some skaters on the ice rink adjacent to the city chambers.

She appeared fae naewhere - like an ice goddess coolly emerging from the Christmas ice rink in George Square. The teeth chattering and the heid slightly trembling because that's whit happens when you sell your jaicket in winter. Standing there. Trying to drink the normality. Knowing it doesn't come bottled and that you have to work at it, for a lifetime perhaps. I watched, transfixed, for over an hour maybe, as a man learned how to skate. He fell, of course. Quite often. In front of everyone like that tae, much to the delight of his two daughters who repeatedly went to his rescue. All that effort. For this. The start of the Christmas holidays. And his multicoloured scarf tae, covered in wee glistening snow and ice particles where he'd previously fallen. Hard. He was hard. Because that's what Glasgow hardman really is. Coping with the reasonableness of it all. Holding back the madness. Doing the 9 to 5, Mon to Fri, and still making it to this level on the last Sunday before Christmas. Lordie Lord. You see it in other places. It's accompanied by a kind of naivete, ye ken, the jeans and the trainers and the friendly chatter tae. This innocent family fun thing. There are other guys like me. You learn to spot each other - semi vagrants, built like whippets, we follow normality around. We can't touch it of course because it doesn't belong to us. You'll find us in shopping malls. In car park lifts. We're watching you. We're not going to harm you. We open the doors for you, tipping our caps to the thing we honour and long for. We are curious voyeurs walking quickly

alongside life's horizontal escalator, trying hard to keep up, afraid we'll lose sight of you yet unable to stand in line ourselves because someone, somewhere, has decreed that it simply cannot be. So we hang around the perimeter, scratching a living, sniffing around restlessly, a pound coin here, twenty pence there. Ok, so I wasn't homeless, not really. But the loneliness makes you feel you might as well be that way.

I swear I saw her face on the ice before she appeared to me. Their skates sketched her image and the more I stared, the clearer it became. Her face is what you find at the end of this journey. Shug Morris, King of the Glasgow tramps, told me as we sat in Kelvingrove Park the gither that whit's for ye will no go by ye. Thanks Shug. I'll never forget you. You know what it's like to hear those Christmas songs, but when you're barred from joining in the chorus, it does something to a man. Nobody physically stops you - that's not the point. You stop yourself. And it grinds on your nerves. Eats away at your soul. Imprisons your very humanity. I knew she was there before she appeared. She buttoned my top collar to protect me from the cold, the way someone else I knew once gave me their black woollen gloves as we climbed to the top of a snowy peak in Glencoe. No need to avert my gaze to look into her blue eyes. They were already there. On the ice in front of me. 'You're cold Billy. So cold,' she said to me. 'Cummon we'll buy some hot soup.' She took my hand and led me away from that scene, guiding me back into the warmth. It was over now. This thing. This journey. It affected ye tae. Have no doubt about that. I loved her. She buttoned my collar like that to protect me from the cold and nobody had ever done that for me even as a wee boy. 'Don't ever leave me here on my own again,' I said to her. Promise me. Never. Ever. Again.

Of course she isn't real. At least if she is she never appears to me again. It is the first and last time I'd probably ever fall in love and it lasts only a few minutes before she disappears. But it isn't real love. It's just the beginning of my ten mile stare, the one which conjures up illusions to keep me entertained and informed, the one which leads me into the heart of Captain Henley who is certainly watching me.

Back at the flat sat a letter from Professor David Macdonald, my philosophy tutor at the undeniably bureaucratic University of Glasgow. The chap had kindly invited me along to one of his lectures as a way of gradually ingratiating me into the possibility of one day achieving something, a degree perhaps. But my stay in Glasgow would be very short-lived, as Henley, he called to me from various places and at the most inconvenient of times.

WHERE DO you go, what do you do?

THERE COMES a time when you need to dig in. Eyes to the front. That sort of thing. The flat is cold and you've nae money. Jason through the wall is high on something, The Stones thumping their way through. Hey. You. Get offa ma cloud. And there's another problem. Jason says we have a new neighbour, says he knows me, ex-Army, bit of a loner, the name of Paterson. Uncle John the polis has left a message on the answering machine. Strange why he keeps in touch, as if he's pulling you back into something, the loop the fuckin loop. He was always in the background him, just there in nae mair. Now there's nae Uncle Alex, his day is done. A new breed of guardian looms large, the big Uncle John. Then you do a strange thing. Instead of switching the fire on, you get the great army coat out and you put the kettle on, that'll keep you warm, you say, blowing into the hands, turning up the rough collar. Can't write without this blasted coat, the smell of the desert mixed with damp and camel cigarette smoke.

You move through to the hall now and crouch down to look through the spy-hole, wonder who this guy Paterson is, hope it's no John Paterson, back for revenge after all those years, trackin you doon for the bounty. Maybe it's time to do a quick recci, check oot the lie of the land and so on, maybe establish some communication. You open the door and walk across, says Samuel Paterson on the door, was that no his long lost big half brother or something, bet he's watching you watching him, the big eye peering through the magnified spy-hole and me all distorted wae the army coat as if you're in the magic mirrors, ex-army himself eh, must be

an ok lad, unless he's of the Henley variety, the likes of which you do not sense behind this thick reinforced tenement door.

It's easy to spy on him. Every so often you just walk into the hall and look through the thingy, the spy hole. It's an appropriately named device that's for sure.

Your friends, they try to help you. Like Esther. He phones you to come to The Escapologist.

You walk back through to the living room. It's become a kind of study, with newspapers strewn across the carpet and old tea cups on the mantelpiece. You prefer to let things build up then really get the sleeves up and get into it. No point in getting upset about it on a daily basis. You fuckin whatdoyoucallit, lie on the couch with your feet up. What time is it?

11.55am. 11.55am on a Sunday morning in Scotland in October. Not just Scotland. Glasgow, Scotland. Glasgow, once the second city of the empire, home to the tobacco lords, now populated by glitzy shopping centres, women's rights groups, and men who look like whippets, racing from one hostelry to the next.

Restless cunt that ye are, ye get back up again and look down into the street from yer first floor tenement. Two men are curled up inside opposite the close door, the growing army of homeless males, cast aside in this new age of look after number one politics. But enough of the theorising. If you don't get a move on then the same fate will await you. Surely not.

On with the great army coat.

A cold blast of air hits you on the face when you open the door. Someone has obviously forgotten to close the main outside door the night before. A copy of the Herald is on that guy Paterson's mat, a reader eh, ex-army tae. You turn the key, convinced the guy only had the paper as an excuse to come out and have a quick look at your door. Surveillance. Intelligence. It's aw about eyes and ears, eyes and fucking ears.

Jason next door, he once said to you, you freelance eh, is it a story you want, I'll give you a story. See that wee blond I was with, turns out she was under sixteen, shopped me to the authorities when I wouldn't give her money for more smack, now I've got all these women

with short hair cuts on my case, threatening to put me on the sex offenders register. Put that in your paper. It's not my paper, you say to him, it's the paper of the publishing authorities of the United Kingdom and he just looks at you and closes the door, retreating back into his chemical smelling trench.

It's cold outside, although not as cold as it used to be in late October. Wetter and warmer, global warming is here, of that there is no doubt, you think, turning the coat collar up nonetheless.

'Aw right mate?' shouts one of the dossers in the doorway across the road.

'Can you spare any change big man?' asks the other. You fumble in yer pocket and find what feels like some twenty pence pieces and a few tens. You cross the road. Then stand some six feet above the dossers. Peering down at their destitution you're like this, 'What happened to you two cadgers?' and the first guy, knees pressed to his chin and the white baseball cap, is like this: 'Its no just us pal, walk doon there and you'll find there's quite a few of us.' The baseball cap turns to his pal and says he was in the doss house but they cleared it oot, they're sayin it was a bastion of drug abuse and uncleanness or somethin so we've nae choice except to sleep rough.

You rummage about in the pocket. He'd heard this line before. The government had threatened to throw so called troublemakers out of the overcrowded men's homeless hostels. A question had been raised in parliament about how social services actually defined 'troublemakers' these days. The minister raising the question had asked if it depended on the colour of a man's baseball cap or the angle at which he chose to wear it. If he wears it back to front does that make the man of disreputable character, a sexual predator perhaps, or if he wears it to the side, a drug dealer with intent to smash into every hole in the wall north of Carlisle? This guy in the doorway wore it straight, tipping it when he sees you dipping into the army pocket for change.

'Cheers big man, you're a gentleman,' he says, displaying his protestantism.

You walk on down Belmont Street. Might make a decent freelance conference suggestion. Suggest we send a team of reporters out to interview the new breed of homeless people. Then again, it would never work because no paper had the clout or motivation these days to actually write what it saw.

Down at the junction of Great Western Road another dossier reaches out for cash.

‘Gave my last to that guy up there,’ you say.

‘That’s what they all say pal,’ says this one, reclining back into the doorway from which he first lurched.

Yer like this, listen you ya lazy pig, I’ve been where you’ve been so don’t gie me yer pish, get up off yer fat arse and work like the rest of us. The cunt’s like this, the hand oot, as if he’s about to hod back a kicking, aw right, aw right, nae bother, keep your stripes oan sergeant.

You up the pace, quick march, quick, eyes to the front, march in good order. Why? Because you’re keen to escape the falsity of it all, the feeling that the people who pull the strings these days have no real insights into the complexities of human existence. Even your own paper, the last bastion of so called respected journalism, is bowing to the diktat of the big advertisers, the money women and men who buy and sell ideas, who play with our perceptions, and who have gradually eaten into the fabric of decent, challenging news reportage. What the fuck are you talking about? You don’t even have a paper. All you’ve ever done is a few student pieces for the university Guardian and even they were subbed to hell by the subbing authorities, the red pen brigade, the fuckin whatdoyoucallthem, print controllers.

Esther sits at the bar of The Escapologist, one of the few underground bars left in Glasgow where manliness is still prohibited. It’s dark and dingy but at least it’s still relatively free. They’d had some great nights in there recently. It’s a place where political incorrectness, although illegal, is still more or less permitted. There are sexist comedians, sectarian jokes,

cheap beer, and duty free cigars and cigarettes by the truckload. They even had an old fashioned stripper in there last Friday night. And you know as you say this to yourself who it is that told you to say it. Orwell. Keep ThefuckinAspidistraFlyingman. The downtrodden writer who frequents ye olde prole pubs. He disnae frequent. He goes intae them noo and again tae spend his hard earned wonga. Betcha that's whit Henley carried in his army sack, a copy of Aspidistra and a biog of Eric Blair, fantasies of a would-be colonial policeman. He widnae even see the irony in it, the idea that Orwell was critical of the very system which produced such entities. Or would he? Because you can never to be too sure, especially in this age of fudge and pretence, fudge, pretence, fudge, pretend things are spinning right round baby when they are actually very still indeed, when the auld status quo has, in fact, remained intact during all of this kerfuffle.

Good old Esther eh? The chemical genius from mytown has a big fizzy wan waiting fur me on the bar, a German wheat tae, none of yer Carling shite. He's sorry tae hear about ma dad, nae bother pal, that's life Esther. 'Hope it wisnae ma potions that killed him,' he retorts. Then he just sits and stares ahead at the gantry, no doubt contemplating alcoholic concoctions, new mixtures to tickle the parts other beverage ententes had yet to touch. Wonder which part he would have played during the First World War? They used to recruit guys like us as officers, university guys, big brains. Esther would have been in the chemical core, designing defensive lung contraptions or attack minded gases.

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs.

The other punteros, they look at the great army coat but not Esther - my officer potential

comrade knows the lie of the land. This is war. If not hand-to-hand then a cultural tit-for-tat, a stramash in the land of the free. It's ongoing. Silent. But happening. An offensive here, a retreat there, a war of psychological attrition where the strong will stand and the weak will fuckin whatdoyoucall it, stumble.

The dry pong of the desert and the old unrolled camels still in the coat pocket tae. My dad was a wee guy whereas you are a lanky chap, makes the greatarmycoat feel more like a three quarter length jaicket, hingin just above knee yet designed to reach the top of the shin. But let us not worry about the tailoring details because it's the way one holds one's shooder that's important, angled slightly inwards at the left side to protect the purple heart, that's the real sartorial secret.

A puntero at the end of the bar is attempting to chat up young Lauren the barmaid, the pourer of fizziness, and part-time moral political philosophy research hingy. You know they're paying young researchers just like her to come into pubs just like this, to investigate the levels of political incorrectness among guys just like us but you don't say anything incase people think you're crazy. She knows the score though, she can tell Esther and you are special services just by looking at us, all this academic research is being spied upon in the search for alternative upstarts. You know it. And she kens. But does the puntero over there know anything aboot what's gaun on? Fuckin bet he disnae.

You look at Esther and you think - how does that cunt dae it? How does he get by? What does he think about? He's supping his pint, the froth sticking to his upper lip - why is that, why is it his pint always has a head on it? You contemplate the reason why and you conclude it has to be his middle-class upbringing, the chemistry set for Christmas, the faither the lecturer, the maw the teacher, it aw adds up tae the big snug security blanket, the family outings to bonfires and the proper Mac Reds for Halloween.

There's not a lot you can do so you order another wheat beer and a Jack Daniels and Coke for chemical man. Then you sit there until the pub heats up and the chatter trundles on

around you while Esther rolls another fag and the wind and the rain batter against the big shutters at the Woodlands Road End. There's a guy at the other side of the bar who looks like George Orwell, the hair swivelled round like the way Henley probably wears his, but he's no really there the night, not coming out to play and you miss him so you dae, you miss him, because without him there widnae really be any point.

## Chapter Seven

### Tracking Lance

THERE ARE always two sides to a story, just as there are always two sides to one's demented fucking identity. The duality of man is, indeed, a mystery to you. But it is the conflicting fundamental values of the Scottishman which intrigues you most, that enigmatic variable as changeable as the cunting array of pressure systems which rape the moonscape north of Crainlarich. It is often induced by a regular injection of alcohol poisoning but this is a mere supplement to the chemical intrigue and experimentation already raging around the interior of your temporal lobe rhythm. It very often begins with a semi-comatose condition sparked by drink. The stare then progresses through the ranks of sobriety until it becomes a condition, a way of seeing things, a third eye reflecting who you really are. The host must deal with the chaos of the party, restore order, before his ability to stay human dissipates forever. It is this ability which secures the victory.

6.45 am. Another day beginneth.

You stare at the ceiling and recount the conversations of the night before. But it isn't what Esther said, or anybody else, it is what you said to yourself that really matters. You pointed out that Lauren of The Escapologist was probably a member of the student security operatives. Destined to root out the student terror threat on campus, she pours pint after pint, eavesdropping on revolutionary style chit-chat at the bar. Then she reports back to her paymeisters. You don't have to be a student of course. You can be anybody, anybody.

The clock is ticking.

You roll over onto your side, bringing the knees up to form the embryonic position. Esther said there were some strange gringos in the chemistry department - of the foreign settler

variety. There's that and there's this and that. Uncle John, he'd be the chap to connect with, ex-Special Branch, always supping his Guinness looking for the celtic spirit that will lead him on the trail of past investigative glorifications. IRA, UDA, the fuckin thingwy, Bolsheviks. Maybe he could help him find Henley. Maybe he was a mate of Henley, you never can tell.

Hey. You. Get Off of My Cloud. Hey. You. Get Off of My Cloud - is thumping through the wall from Jason. You're gonni kill him. Not Jagger, Jason.

You wonder what it is that makes you think these thoughts in the bloody first place. Jason. Uncle John. Esther's chemical weapon theory. Fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, Lauren's suspicious flickering of the eyes as the beer plops into a glass and the head twitches to the left, the hand on the hip, listening to the craic, revelling in the idea that those rude men in the corner believe her to be a wee lassie barmaid when in effect she is an up-and-coming starlet of the security operative scene. Well it already was common practice in the old US of A, the employing of students for that very purpose. But where did you read that? You get up to check, not even bothering to dress, the greatarmycoat will suffice - you can be sure it will do its best to beat the damp that advances up the close and into the base.

You sit there so ye dae, just you, nobody else. And you read and search and you know what's happening here, you just know that When Students Turn to Terror, a report by Professor Simon Montague of London University, well it's about that very thing, and the professor has detailed all the campuses where the espionage and counter espionage is taking place and of course, Glasgow, the second city of the empire, is clearly highlighted as a hotspot.

You note the page.

Then you sit with the feet up. This is it. It's starting to happen. Esther's chemical weapon theory, the professor's report, Lauren's eyes.

Then an interesting thing happens. Or is made to happen. At the bottom of Montague's report there's a tiny name in black Helvetica print. It says, additional research by Lance

Henley.

You get back up and walk through to the hall. A quick spy on Paterson. He's here too. His cousin or his uncle or whatever, but he's back, purchasing that flat across the hall, waiting his chance to pay back the punishment dished oot tae his wee relative a few years ago. Ah, the halcyon days of nazi-style interrogation, tied him tae a tree, blindfolded him, threw stanes at his head, got a dug tae pish on him.

Yer sick of it so you just walk across the hall and chap his door. You stand there for a few seconds knowing he's watching you. And when he does appear he opens it quickly and shouts in yer face, hallo, the big unshaven look, the ginger hair standing on end, the breath, every breath, smelling of Carling or maybe even Tennents, but definitely cans because there are a few lying in the hall behind him and you can smell the metal. At first you think he's gonni lay wan on ye there and then and that would be it, but he disnae, this cunt's too fly. Then he spots the greatarmycoat or pretends he spots it. He's like this, you army? And you say sort of and he's like I'm 4th Paras, served in the Falklands, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. It's at that point his mood changes or appears to change, comin over all comradely like, him and me, sojers thegither. Ah contemplate inviting him in furra drink. Gon, that's what tae dae. Ask him in. Decipher what he's aboot. Get tae the bottom of this cunt wance and for all. A few days later you meet him in the close and he's like this aw right Billy, as if he knows you really well and maybe he does, maybe he's done his research, who knows, who really knows?

The next Saturday you meet him in the boozier across the street and after a few shandies he's like a wee boy, getting all excited about something he wants tae show ye. He's nervous tae. As if he wants tae show ye whatever it is but cannae. Something is holding him back. Ye chat the chat wae him. Gradually get to know him. Let him think he's geting to know you. You even tell him about yer dad. Egypt. The Royal Signals. The Vertex. The violence, the strange Egyptian voices and the fear, as if he wiz possessed by the devil himself, or Auld Nick as

your granny used to call him. This Paterson wan is warming to the cause. When you tell him you're from Hamilton he gets even more excited because Hamilton was home to The Cameronians, one of the hardest regiments in the British Army. He invites you back to his gaff for more beers. But its no the beers that turn this yin oan. It's The Cameronians. He shows me this book. It's called The Road Past Mandalay by John Masters. He's a right wee war historian, telling me about the retreat from Burma in 1942 and how the Hamilton men of The Cameronians fought like fuck time and time again even when retreating. Them and their Indian units, together, against the Japs. Battered, exhausted, hungry, they fought back. They were beat but no that beat. Like Gemmill against Holland or Souness against Russia in Spain they hit back. Glorious defeat - a Scottish speciality. You can tell Paterson is right into it. Then it appears. And when it appears you recognise it. The look in his eye. The highly-strung giggle as he produces his piece de resistance - a video of the disbanding ceremony of The Cameronians. 'This is a grievous day for Scotland,' says the Scottish holy man. 'Your roots have been so closely intertwined with the history of church and state in this land. But it has not been the tradition of The Cameronians to whimper. And we shall not whimper now! For you are men into whose inner fibre the bible as the word of god has woven its own strong and powerful influence and pattern.'

He looks at me. His eyes as black as early hell's waistcoat. And the silent stare. Of a stalker who hath come to remind me of something I know not what, not yet. Except to say he does not speak, only stares, and the snigger, when it doth finally reveal itself, is the twisted grimace of my poor tormented father, vertexed in my own mind's all-seeing eye for eternity. You retreat to your own resting place in search of peace. But you know the spirit has been unleashed as you await the inevitable ding dong of the doorbell. It is naked now, except for tracksuit bottoms and tatooes, standing there holding a photo album, his ultimate revelation. It is the way he now assumes ownership of you. In his big loud voice he booms, 'Aw right buddy!'

You know he's going to be a right handful but you invite him in because you need to find out once and for all if he's the stalker you think he might be. There's this guy in one of the photos, his head is off, it's stuck on the end of one of our rifles, the boys are smiling - as if they've caught a big trout or something. He's like this, pointing to the photograph, the hand shaking, 'That was us in 3rd Para, after the battle for Freetown, Sierra Leone, they sent us in first, the Scots, they always get sent in first, you know. They always send us in first, the Ladies From Hell the Germans used to call you in the First War.'

And the photograph is captioned 'Keep The Head - a Rebel Loses His In The Battle For Freetown.' Yer like this, drinking with him, a bottle of Bud, ice cold, but yer watchin him watchin you watchin him watchin you. He's not your bud, you're not his. He just happens to be here. That's how it goes. Especially wae the drink. Things just seem to happen. He's nervous. He's fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, excited but uptight, about showing you these photographs. You go through to the kitchen for another two beers but when you come back Paterson has gone, departed from the scene, a retreat, fleeing in the face of something, and the gentle closing of the door behind you tae. He sort of says see you, but it's quiet, not like his big loud introductory voice at all. In his haste tae depart he's left one of the albums. You pick it up and turn it round then you leave it on the wee coffee-table thing.

But something's distracted you something terrible. Aye that's it, that name you saw at the bottom of the big Professor Montague's report, Henley, you're coming to get him. Hing is. It might no be him. Don't just blame him cause his name is Henley right, snow his fot. Get a grip you. Ya tit. Let's have a look at his face though, just incase it might be. Click on the name, the name game, the name of the game is persistence to pull this mission off. Additional research by Lance Henley. Means he's probably someresearchfellowcunt, you know the type, the fuckinwhatdoyoucallits, the second raters, league division two! The very types the new state desire to promote into the inner sanctums of Big Ben, the sort of guys that pick up the phone at The Scotsman or The Herald, tiny precise English accents, mmmmmmm Bisto,

the Famous Five readers as a boy club. What do we hiv? The BB's. The Boys Brigade, quick march, quick, quick, quick, caps aff lads, eyes to the front, dae as yer telt, but don't think for yersel whatever you do.

Naw but the division twoers - wonder what role they would have played during the 2nd World War? Probably RAF some of them - maybe the odd pilot among them, more likely to be restricted to office duties, however, because of the childhood asthma - that sort of thing. But damndblast patriots nonetheless- and a half pint of heavy and a packet of nuts too please, no doubt. Shut it. It widnae be heavy, it'd be beer - a half pint of warm beer and a game of skittles! Ye wonder about that - skittles, where do they play it, out in the beer garden? Or is it inside the premises - next to the dart board, with the sound of gerry overhead and the black lab twitching at your ankle, slurping up a bowl of beer freshly procured from the busy barmaid who often dishes it oot tae man and dug alike, especially after a prolonged mission across foreign territories.

You twitch the curtains and survey the terrain doon below.

There's a bit of movement from the huddle in the doorway opposite. Probably just turning to scratch his arse, the way you do in bed. Either that or he is part of the surveillance team, the way it is in these New York detective programmes beamed in from Yankeeland, bagels, fresh cream, steamin sewers, then back on the job underthecover for another big stakeout - the security surveillance sojers must always hiv personal problems, like in their love lives, find it difficult to connect with womankind, that sort of thing.

Enough digressions though because you must keep on the trail. Blind boy Stevie's the man you need. The thing about him is he has interests. He's dead thorough in everything he does. It's as if, because he's blind, he has to make up for it in other ways. His research portfolio is pure pristine. And he has all these computerised study aids which he uses to the full. Like there's this thing, it's a computerised directory of everybody in Britain, like a special phone book for blind cunts. You give him a phone and he answers right away, because his machine is

voice activated. And he's dead straight to the point tae. You know it's like, right, what do you want, just get oan wae it - Stevie man, he doesn't suffer fools gladly, nor, for that matter, does he like it if you waste his time. You phone him and he's like this:

'What is it?'

'Could you do me a favour?'

'What is it?'

'Could you run a search for me?'

'What kind of search?'

'It's Henley. His son. Well at least, it might be his son.'

'What about him?'

'He might be a researcher at London University.'

'And?'

'Just tap in his name. Lance. Lance Henley. He works for a Professor Simon Montague.'

'What is it about you and this Henley cunt anyway?'

'Gonni just shut up and dae it.'

You hear the tap, tap, tap of his stick and the click, click, click of his blind friendly keyboard and he's like this, 'Give me a few minutes, I'll e-mail it across, bye.'

That's what you like about him. His efficiency. He knows you're up to something but he disnae ask questions, sort of expects you to have a wicked curiosity does Stevie but he's not interested in the detail because he's so wrapped up in his own gig. You see, Stevie is right into student politics, knows every social, cultural, political researcher in the land, keeps dossiers on the lot of them, the up-and-coming brigade, today's idealists, tomorrow's leaders. Tell you what though Billy, if he ever did make it to power - with Esther, you, and Fish in the cabinet, you'd have a different country on your hands aw the gither, a benevolent dictatorship no doubt free from political correctness with Stevie calling the shots and women understanding what it's really like in the world, just like Dubai - Uncle Ron and the guys from the Country

Club - now they were real men. We'd link up with them via satellite and start the revolution right here and the first thing we'd do is ensure women behave properly in the respect of looking after the weans and so on. You're not saying they can't be free, not at all, but that they might have to, eh, review their priorities to make them happier within themselves - for the benefit of everyone around them and the greater society at large. Of course that's whit would separate the New Republic of Scotland from other parts of the UK - we'd be following a rational male agenda but wid it, because, Henley and that, their women dae tend tae stay at hame already - difference is, we'd make it widespread, across the social spectrum, so it's not just the middle class wans who benefit from our progressive policies. You have to think that would in turn effect foreign policy tae because you're not going to accept any external animosity from international pressure groups driven by women who actually believe Africa is innocent and so on and so forth, many such feminine activists may be getting shafted by their own inabilities to see no evil hear no evil beyond the shores of yer great Scottish empire, what they don't understand is that there are big monkeys oot there, baboons, no just baboons, corrupt baboons carrying AK 47's and high on drugs the black fuckers.

Even yer Playstation 2 disnae offer any respite from it. It just doesn't. But that was of your own making. You chose to call your virtual hero Henley. You love it when he gots shot again, and again, and again in Medal of Honour Frontline. You should see his caption tae, the Ace Ventura hair sweeping across and around the forehead, that slightly refined, almost choirboy but no quite, persona doing his bit for Queen and Country. In the computer scene he's fighting on behalf of the Russians at Stalingrad, bang, bang, bang, what can you do, you, switch it on and play away and you can't help but hate those Russians, all Sergeant Kaplinski is interested in is protecting his precious tank, he shouts at me, Henley, protect ze tank, protect ze fuckin fucking tank. Reds eh? Mair interested in the material gains of war than actual human life, yer actual breathing, eating, sleeping, comrade. You try to shoot him, but the computer authorities don't allow that. It's disallowed. Aff side. Trying to shoot a

brotherly connection like that, right in the back of the head as he leads me through the trenches, trying to shoot him aw the time.

You shave your head.

You have to. Get rid of the waves. And the grey areas will dissipate accordingly. Serious minimalism old boy.

Just occasionally something might happen which instils in you a kind of, whatsitcalled, epiphany. It's so unbelievable yer no sure if it's virtual or no virtual, like as if yer mind has tricked you into believing it's true. Like that Johnny Cash number on the CD. He sees the face of Jesus in his soup after he's shot a man in Reno just to watch him die. It's the way it has to be, a solitary man taking vengeance even although his mama told him the pistol is the devil's right hand, the devil's right hand, mama said the pistol was the devil's right hand. Point is, this epiphany thing, it's like watching David Narey scoring against Brazil at The World Cup you can't quite believe what is unfolding before your eyes as Stevie e-mails me back with these sordid little details about my friend-to-be Lance Henley - the minor biog, his interest in foreign aid, his military background and his father Captain George Henley of The Royal Signals.

You put the kettle on.

Billy put the kettle on, Billy put the kettle on, Billy put the kettle oan we'll hiv a cup of tea. Victorian bullshit. It disnae sound right. Feels awkward. The whole thing. It jars.

It's raining outside.

When the kettle boils you ignore the teapot. No point in pretending there's strawberry jam and freshly baked scones in the pantry. That's no how it is. Just out of interest you check. Two Pot Noodles and a Mars Bar, no too bad. A quick spy on Paterson across the way proves that his hall light is still oan.

Here we all are, emblems of the New Scotland, the traumatised Paterson, Junkie Jason through the wall, and Billy Queen - on the trail of Captain Henley, a nice bunch of neighbours

living peaceably side-by-side in Glasgow's tenement land, made famous by lean tails of scrubbers in the lobby, communal harmony, and the hard but fair outlook of wifies and weans alike, waiting on da returning from the shipyards with a fish supper for all and a chirpy, if slightly drink fuelled, demeanour.

You sip the hot tea. It comforts you auld style.

Then you do a strange thing. You print out a photograph of Lance at the Henley boat regatta down south. You blow it right up then you pin it on the living room wall above the fireplace. Then you just sit back on the couch and analyse it. He's got greasy looking hair with silver rimmed spectacles, the shirt looks like Blue Harbour, Marks and Spencers, and he's got the light brown chinos on and the fuckin desert boots. Probably got that idea from his old man. He's leaning against a railing with the boats in the background - as if he owns the fuckin place. You just button the greatarmycoatcollar up as tight as it will go. Bet he goes to the regatta just because of the name - the mere implication of him somehow being genetically linked to the event's founding fathers would be enough to make him buy a train ticket and book into a B and B somewhere near the location. Then he'd go for a walk and buy a cone, probably a ninety-nine, scanning the yachts, son of the captain - that sort of thing. Copying his faither eh, like you - wae the greatarmycoat oan and the shaved heid, same thing in it? How is it? Coz it fuckin is, right.

You hear Jason nightmaring it, cold turkey mair like. So you jump up and batter through the wall. Then you blast him wae some Johnny Cash - track fifteen - I'm a walkin talkin miracle from Vietnam! Big Johnny hates those damned Yankees and who can blame him eh? Those damned Yankees think they own the goddam place. Just like The Henleys of the world. Der Englanders! You know which side you would have been on in the American Civil War - certainly not on the side of those nigger loving northerners that's for sure, then you pontificate on the wondrous state of affairs that currently exists in the world, us southerners rule the goddam roost - yee ha! Lance there - he belongs in Yankee land, wankee land mair like

it, but us, the likes of us, the northern British Islers, we belongs in the south boy, the deep, deep south, is where our forefather's settled and is where you talk your talk without fear of condemnation except from the ruling literary establishment up north who tries to tell us we're strange boy - well hell we may be strange to you folks but it's our man in The White House and it's our boys in EEIraq. And as for you YankeeEnglanders, well yous are just playing second fiddle to the righteous sons of Ahab and know what Lance, weeza comin to get you tae.

He's a bit of a dick. When you look closely at the print oot, you can see for yourself. He's got a New Zealand rugby jersey on for some reason. You can see his tits underneath it and he's wearing it outside of his trousers probably to hide his belly. So zis is ze offspring of my faither's oppressor?

You sharpen a pencil.

Then you walk over tae the photigraph and you place the point of the pencil under his very nose. You wriggle it right up his left nostril thinking about the sharp pain this would incur were it not virtual.

You check your watch.

Time to go to your first ever Glasgow University Guardian meeting. You just walk oot with the greatarmycoat on - striding on down Belmont Street, along Great Western Road, down Byres Road then left through the carpark and into uniland.

Inside the John McIntyre building there's the usual gathering of CND loving lefty creeps. You just button the armycoatcollar stiff and high and stand at the back of the room - comforted by the progress you've made back at the flat. This Asian woman called Chitra is running the show - Uncle Ron would turn in his grave, you can feel his presence, the hairs on your airms standing right up on end. When it gets to the point where you are supposed to offer ideas up for next week's paper a few people put their hands up like wee schoolboys and girls. That's no your style so you just shouts out but you can tell from the way you say it

nobody really takes you seriously because you just go I've got an idea. The Chitra wan it's as if she taking the piss. She smirks at my accent. Yes, I've got an idea, you repeat. I've got a report which shows that the secret services are watching you at the uni.

'You mean with spy cameras?'

'Naw, people, other students, are being paid to watch you.'

You lean against the desk at the back, sideways, with the right elbow at ninety degrees.

You watch her every move this Asian wan. She's obviously from one of the more liberal families, with the make-up and the short skirt, fishnets, and short black boots - a rebel Asian woman wae a scottie dug outlook. She disnae buy it immediately because she can't understand the concept. That's the thing about other students, especially lefties, they don't quite grasp the idea that democracy comes at a price and that one of the prices is that the security services are all around you. Intelligence gathering in Britain is easy. You remember Uncle John telling you that the activists are all so big headed and vocal - they think they are safe in the UK, the spy capital of the world!

She crosses her legs, the tight skirt riding up her thigh in preparation for the dog-eat-dog world of western feminist journalism, land of the long red nail and predictable moral outrage at male dominated governments, building empires within which the aforementioned types choose to ply their trade, midnight shopping at Debenhams, comfortable salaries and more moral outrage at the plight of the homeless and the starving in Africa.

You make me sick you feel like saying to her but naw, no this soldier, not here, not now. Later, in the pub, she blows attitude right in yer face. You say to her let me take you and show you the baboons in the jungle, there are men who behave just like baboons you say, and, intrigued by this strange analogy, she crosses her fishnets and says, 'You mean black men behaving like baboons?'

Yes, black men, you say, corrupt big black men with guns and a penchant for raping innocents and sniffing cocaine while they do the dirty deed. Her line of questioning is structured to root

oot racist males and she seems strangely interested in the ease with which she managed to procure this particular quote. You angle your head at about 45 degrees, conscious of the other lefties clambering for position next to the dominant Asian democrat.

‘Why did you make a fool of my accent in the meeting?’ you ask her.

‘Well it’s hardly appropriate language for an editorial conference,’ she replies. ‘I mean your ideas are, eh, interesting, but try to be more professional with your pitch.’

You take a drink, a big fizzy lager. You know only too well where this is going - men are to blame for war, men are to blame for famine, men, men, men. For a second you think maybe it is hard to defend, then you remember we’re aw in this thegither and always have been but yer no about to enter this culture of blame tit-for-tat thingy, whatdoyoucallit, oneupmanship.

She looks straight at you with those big almond eyes. She’s probably trained to psychoanalyse the body language of the predatory white male so you just look the other way for a second. Let her see you in your moment of doubt. You cross your legs, like a poof, because that’s what you have to do.

She wants the report, that’s all that matters, she wants the story right up her tight Asian ass, and Billy, you’re just the man to give it to her.

Hang on, who said that there - Billy, you’re just the man to give it to her. No am no. Not at the moment auld boy. Yer just trying tae be free and normal, you don’t have to give anything to anybody right. Just the man to give it to her. Listen tae that prick. Who are you?

As is always the case in Glasgow during the winter it takes a lot of energy to leave the warmth of the pub oot intae the cauld blast that whips its wey up from the Atlantic Ocean via The Clyde. You could just walk down to the new Glasgow Harbour development right now, maybe procure a rowing boat, see if you can make it down to the Erskine Bridge then, with a prevailing wind, who knows, you might even make it oot into the Atlantic for real then anything can happen. Maybe get picked up by a cargo vessel if yer lucky - oan its way west to Nova Scotia.

It would be nice to walk the promenade, see the world, people watch. But it's no like that here coz the second city of the empire is a no loitering, no watching city. Yer in a transient maze, streamlined, pigeonholed, to stay on the tread mill to ill health. It's heart seizure city. Even the red light district - what's it like? It clings to a steep hill. Blow jobs are administered at acute angles behind giant wheely bins down dark, wet lanes, winding their way to Strathclyde Police Headquarters Pitt Street. Heart diseasers, breathless, desperate punters climb the hill after a diet of six pints and a sausage supper to blaw their muck on the side of a concrete mountain, watched over by cold, voiceless voyeuristic office blocks with twitching cameras for eyes, ears and noses. It is perfectly designed to say no, don't come here, but intrepid mountaineers brave the risks to place their flagpoles in the piss stained slopes.

Ye turn right out of Ashton Lane.

If you go left you'll find yersel at the behest of The Three Judges so you go right. It's the best way. Stay on the right side of the law for now. Play it onside. It's the only way for a white protestant boy like you, especially a white protestant scottie dug like yersel - yer only friend is hard work, rationalism, and a firm belief in predestination. You have your first ever story to write for Chitra, you're writing with her in mind. She's the boss, the editorial guru - the fuckin whatdoyoucallit, censor.

It's been no a bad day. You've made inroads. Progress. You pop into the Western Bar for one last drink before the evening endeth. It's full of the usual losers, the type of guys you knew when you were homeless. In a transient city, this is where the waiting, the watching takes place. In here. In The Western Bar, they wait to be transferred to The Western Infirmary just around the corner. That's the great thing about Glasgow, everything's just around the corner.



## Chapter Eight

### Firewall Banter

SOMETIMES WHEN you wake up in the morning you can't be bothered doing anything. But there are other times, like this morning, when your thinking is clear and clean. You were going to say as clear as ice but then ice isn't clear at all, not when you think about it. It is a solid mass of complications, trapped bubbles and so on. The clarity you are concerned with is of the purest variety - black clarity, infinite solitude.

You have options. We all do. Choice is what living in a western democracy is all about.

Except, instead of creating clarity it encourages chaos, confusion, catastrophe if you want it.

You look at the sky outside. A seagull squawking about, hovering, swooping, playing games wae its mate.

Like you wae Lance, eh?

Naw, but when it's as clear as today you witness your own terribly treacherous foibles auld boy. Number one, you have no evidence to suggest Paterson is related to the John Paterson you tortured at school or that he deliberately moved into the flat opposite to spy on you before exacting revenge for the treatment of his kinfolk. This is a Glencoe Massacre conspiracy theory - the idea he will wine and dine you before chopping your head off and stabbing it onto his bayonet as a trophy - a load of Tower of London pish. Number two, it's good that you found Lance Henley at The University of London, doing the big research fellow bit for Queen and cunting country. Now that you know where to get him you feel comforted, the way you used to be at night when the headboard stopped slapping and you heard Uncle Alex finally leaving your mother's bed to go to work, but not before he rustled about in a

plastic bag putting something back - probably his big rubber johnnie, he did that every time. It was just you and her then. Well, now it was just you and Lance. Of course he didn't know it yet, but so much was happening in the relationship, so bloody much progress sir it was unbelievable it really was.

You twitch your head. A dug barks. Amazing that - you heard it before it even yelped. You see. That's the kind of morning it is. You can hear a pin drop in your own consciousness. Naw ye cannae, ya prick, what are you on about? How can you hear a pin drap in your ain consciousness - don't be ridiculous boy, eyes to the front, march in good order, dae as yer telt - ya fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, pretentious brainwashed cheeky chappie prone to the use of literary clichés passed doon tae you fae yer forefathers. Eyes to the front, wash yer hair in the basin ya draft dodgin mongrel. Fine. Ok. Consciousness in order. Now you must display the physical capacity to reinforce the psychological intentions. Get up you lazy bastard. There are terrorists out there. Hold your fire. Hone your intentions. Wait till they're in view then apply your mission statement.

You stretch one leg. The other is bent at the knee. Your head lies sideways on an outstretched arm - like a dead soldier. On the bedside table are your two bestest books - poems by Wilfred Owen and Beyond Good and Evil by Friedrich Nietzsche. The clock ticks. The wind gusts. And when the phone rings, you let it. Esther, pished, leaves a message - he's fed up with Scotland, going to Australia, you can come if you want, meet him today in The Escapologist 1pm. It's not going to happen. You must follow the line laid out for you, not Esther's, yours. The time has come to put Calvin's theory of predestination to the test. To forcibly alter the route would be tantamount tae. Tae what? Tantamount tae what? Tantamount fuck all. You could break the pattern. You could dismantle the nuclear weapons now. You and a few guys from the leftist student perspective, down to Faslane wae the pliers and barbed wire cutters. Disrupting Armageddon. Preventing it from actually happening. But you react again, don't you, with a twitch of the eye and a jerk of the leg. And this time

there's silence. Beautiful silence. You lie freeze-framed for a while, don't you, staring at the cylindrical shaft of light entering the bunk, spotlighting your consciousness. You follow the light so ye dae, but all you see are particles of dust cascading around chaotically. Without the beam of light they, the dust particles, do not exist in your heid because they fail to present themselves outwith their dominant geometrical boundaries. This ruthless truth in which we exist is a far cry from the wondrous and fallible idealism of such as Socrates who smoked fifty a day and still managed to score a series of great goals for Brazil. Naw but, what form does the natural goodness of man take when it is surrounded by such deceit and weakness? The chaos is neatly packaged in the heid now like noisy, sloppy children neatly fenced off in your mind's own Kindergarten. The older you get the more a man is capable of fencing items off. An old guy in Tennents told you that over a few big fizzy beers. If you have a fight wae the wife, that's separate from standing on dog-shit a few minutes later - both events aren't destined to happen, they are clearly not linked. It is this ability to rationalise events that separates the civilised world from the uncivilised world, like the monkeys in Africa who are into Voodoo - black magic, like religion, is just one big conspiracy theory - it imprisons the mind, deters action, prevents progress.

But what the hell has this to do with Henley or your overall intent? Clearly, to track him down certain direct steps must be taken. It's not going to happen naturally. You need to get up. Get to Glasgow Central. Get a train to London. Get a B and B somewhere near The University of London. Then watch. Hover. Gather information. Stalk the bastard. First Lance, then Henley himself.

You wonder what to wear but not for too long because the answer is obvious. The greatarmycoat will suffice, combined with the dark blue woollen crew neck from the Officer's Club sale in the East Kilbride shopping centre and, with the dark blue Thinsulate hat, you look commandoish - perfect for the mission ahead. This, with the stout pair of winter boots, grey woollen socks and black jeans, means you are fit and ready to go. You rip the remaining

clothes from the wardrobe, civvy street stuff, and immediately bin it - the minimalist approach to life makes you feel clean - free from the clutter that drags one into the complex capitalist quagmire in which we exist.

Shut it prick.

You sling the wee Wrangler rucksack over the shooder then quietly close the door behind you but as you do so, sling the rucksack on, you know it feels so right. This moving on, leaving the mess behind, the brave wanderer, the foot soldier off to explore new terraines, new territories out there in the vast global expanse.

Quiet boy.

Nae point in alerting Paterson to your sortie. Wouldn't be beneath him to follow you eh, the fly bastardo. You take the stairs three at a time, shut the close door, then you're out, a free agent stepping oot onto the pavement of dog-shit and broken gless, shrapnel from last night's assault.

Coz it is about war. Ok, maybe not machine guns and hand grenades on a daily basis but a kind of cultural battle, between the sexes if you fancy it or more likely some sectarian shit in Glasgow, the Tims and the Prods or whatever. It's just that we are in a state of denial. We exist to do nothing - the squash playing businessmen, for example, they no want change. But sometimes it's not easy doing nothing, that's where the trick comes in, that's how to play the system, do nada, ne rien, stay stume and gradually your wealth will naturally accumulate because you are on the right side of the wire, there's nothing dynamic about capitalism and the wage slaves who occupy her heartland, the difficulty is in just toddling about pretending everything is fine. Some of us are better at it than others. A useful trick is to surround yourself with distractions, Playstations, televisions, friends, golf, football, holiday brochures at midnight over an Espresso in the conservatory.

So you get on a train. And during the journey into England's green and pleasant land, you

maistly sleep, apart from one instance when, trying to avoid eye contact with the said type  
businessman above, whose lips look like cherries, you whisper to yourself:

Red lips are not so red  
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead  
Kindness of wooed and wooer  
Seems shame to their love pure  
O, love, your eyes lose lure  
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Occasionally you need luck in this tracking game, this bounty hunting it's a tiresome  
business - it takes you to the edge of logic, to the who,why,where and when of your very  
existence. You walk along a row of parked cars, glancing inside each of them for the scantiest  
of leads. Where is he? Who is he? What does he drive? Does he drive? The Jaguar can't be his,  
too flash. What about the The Cherokee Jeep? No way. Lance is never a family man. The  
bashed-in Mini? Could be. It's British. Practical. Historic. Perfect for an -up-and-coming  
academic like Lance. But no, it can't be, not with the sanitary towels in the front passenger  
seat. Further down the line, right outside the Department of International Relations, a blue  
Rover car sits almost illegally parked. On the passenger seat are some documents, university  
bureaucracy by the looks of it, addressed to none other than Lance Henley himself, flat 7(a)  
145 Huntington Drive.

You rest your weary limbs on a summer seat opposite. The car is no surprise, British,  
poorly built, probably purchased under the bulldog illusion, the popular misconception that  
British is still best. Christ, it's even got a wee Union Jack at the right hand corner of the  
registration plate.

You twiddle your camera. Then take a few snaps.

It needs a bloody wash! You walk back across the street and draw your finger down the dirty passenger door. You can't help yourself drawing a wee swastika. Then you peer inside again. This time you spot some golf tees on the passenger seat, long, wooden, green and white, he must be a winter player, playing off the winter mats no doubt, organised, eh, long tees and a wrinkled white golf glove. On the back seat there are some brochures of the Taj Mahal and a few scattered photographs that you can't exactly make out. There's a golf card with a military style crest on the front of it - Royal Hanson or something like that. On the dash-board there's a sticker that says God Is Love, oh no Lance, please, just as you were beginning to like the guy, the Britisher golfer keeping an eye on devious wogs plaguing our university campuses, the Rover driver with the silver rimmed specs and the New Zealand fuckin whitdoyoucallit - rugby shirt- then he has to go and throw in the godly connection - christ Lance cummon, get a grip son, fuck me, god is love, oh no, you don't want to go to church on Sunday but if you hiftae ye hiftae. Maybe he plays the organ - the wee angelic smile, singing Jerusalem, that sort of shit.

Shut it lad.

Maybe that's what you need. A good dose of positive spirituality. Why mock it boy? Let bygones be bygones, there but for the grace of God go I, Jesus loves me this I know, coz the bible tells me so.

Onward Christian soldiers  
Marching as to war  
With the cross of Jesus  
Going on before

You sit back down on the summer seat. It's damp. But who cares? He must be a jolly good sport, wearing a New Zealand shirt, the All Blacks eh, maybe there's a Scottish connection somewhere doon the line, he's obviously got something to say to the English union of rugby

if he's prancing around the campus wearing that shirt.

You look at the nice girlies passing by, clutching their folders to their bosoms. Must make my lecture then off to work in Pizza Hut at night or maybe even Marks and Spencers where it's warm and dry and well waged, a nice little part-timer position until the average degree is gained then, who knows, maybe a spell travelling the globe with some backpacking mates before meeting a cool guy with a teaching degree and a skateboard - settling down in a cheap but-up-and-coming part of London, run down but friendly with plenty of wee bars and Subway sandwich outlets, coffee shops, bookshops and a right good racial mix of people jumping in and out of one another's knickers. He would support Arsenal and write about the importance of football while struggling to relate to her feminine friends but she would admire his male obsession, although finding it difficult to understand until one day she goes along to the big match against West Ham and, over a pie and Bovril, realises the psychological release this game offers to men like hers and vows never to nag him again as they hold hands in the atmospheric little Italian that night at the crossroads between Petticoat Street and Brammel Avenue.

It doesn't work.

The good racial mix of people part. Living like this. Falsifying harmony. Pretend marriages. Kid-on Love. Right, kid on we're happy tonight, just for the children. The weans. Tomorrow's young generation. War sucks. Let's not talk about it. Eyes to the front. Stay stume. Everybody happy? Good, then let's continue, let's help to maintain that special conspiracy of silence that's really saying get it right up you.

Naw but this racial mix thing. It didn't work in Dubai and it won't wash here either. Uncle Ron was right. Dubai is a white man's city. So is London. And Glasgow. And whatdoyoucall it, Bradford City. The reason Dubai works is because people don't pretend there is a right royal racial mix - they just stay apart. Them and us. You and Uncle Ron at the Country Club - the injuns serving you drinks. It works because the boundaries are clear, not like in this

fucked up England of theirs.

You arch your neck up and stare up at the trees.

Fuck. Why you? The empire is retreating on itself and you're the only fucker who's seen what's happening. Except Enoch Powell. And he's deid.

You look down at the wee splash of mud on your boots. Spit on the finger. Rub, rub, rub, clean, clean, clean. The heid is well shaved tae but the minute it starts to grow it gets on your nerves, keep it cropped, just the way my dad used to keep cutting the grass, keep nature under control, make it all bare, pristine, orderly. March, march, march in good order. Alarm off at 6am. Fuckin wage slave jaiket oan by 7. Five days of hard graft, wan day to the devil and wan day to God. Ya robot. Shut it. Get on with it. The plan. The intended outcome. The damn and blasted mission of which you are about, here and now in the Auld Smoke. Widnae mind a smoke actually. A nice cigar, lit and inhaled in a masterly masonic fashion, bringing depth and atmosphere to the dreariest of pub crawls.

Naw but Lance. He needs to be here. You twiddle with a wee pair of infra red binoculars in the greatarmycoat pocket. You need to be able to use these soon because otherwise they are a waste of space. If they don't carry their weight in the world bin them - it's the only way to progress.

You walk back across to his car. Kick the tyres. Quite highly pressured. You drag your finger right across the dirty passenger seat door. It burns a bit. And your forefinger is black wae dirt. His car is a mess. Not what you would expect from someone so close to the spiritual cleanliness of the white man's god. You just lean on the bonnet and pull out the binoculars, zooming right into the classroom windae up at the department of Complex International Relationships. With any luck you might spot the New Zealand rugby top and the clip binder folder, the readily sharpened pencils furiously scribbling notes dictated by the big Professor Montague guy.

But you don't. You just don't. You march in good order with your eyes to the front. Right

across the road and up to the student's union furra pint. Maybe he's up there, the Lance fulla, supping his pint of Real Ale by the fireside.

The place is empty, except for the usual group of hippie style hingoots planning The Demo. Within minutes of your arrival one guy in a suit enters and sits at the bar alone, two seats away and, to his right, on the back wall, there's a giant mirror reflecting everything and everybody.

You order a fizzy one.

He's like this, 'You Scottish?'

'How did you know?'

'Yer accent.'

He shuffles across and orders a pint.

'Are you all right the noo?'

'Aye I've got this,' you say, lifting yer pint.

Then yer like this:

'What are you doing in here?'

The guy disnae answer. He gives you that stare again. Like Paterson efter The Cameronians video. You get a bit unnerved by it, then you say:

'It's just, the suit and that, you look more like a businessman.'

'You look like an army corporal,' he replies.

'Aye I'm looking for the big man, Captain Henley.'

'Who?'

His directness grates on you. Nosy fuck. But he makes you feel you have to answer him.

'Lance Henley,' you reply.

'That name rings a bell,' he says.

Then he stares at you again. He knows how to use the silence this cunt.

'So are you in the School of Business or something?' you ask, anything to break the tension.

‘International Relations,’ he replies.

‘That’s where Henley is,’ you say.

‘Is he one of Professor Montague’s bum chums?’ he asks. Asasay, a right nosy bastard.

‘That’s right aye,’ you reply.

‘I’ve heard of him by the way, heard the name. Wears a fuckin New Zealand tap, silver rimmed glasses?’ he says.

There’s somethin funny about the way this cunt swears. It just disnae feel right.

‘That’s right aye,’ you reply again.

‘He’s wan of they research fellow cunts?’ he continues.

‘Aye, that’s right,’ you reply.

You fuckin whatdoyoucallit, watch him drinking his pint. The red snout in the beer. The middle aged gut. Like a big Orwell pig. Why is he here? Has he been sent to spy on you?

He glugs it down. The throat compartment bulging and retracting, bulging and retracting.

‘I’ve met his boss Montague in a few dodgy places. He does research for the department.

Wan of these academic types. I’m actually up here to meet one of his colleagues who has some information for me about a new firewall technique he’s developed for one of the IT systems we use in Afghanistan.’

You’re like this, who is this monster? Who gave birth to it? Why is it here, now, in a student union?

‘Afghanistan?’ you say.

‘Aye I work there,’ he replies. ‘They send me to aw the dodgy places.’

‘As what?’ you ask.

‘International Development Fund. IT,’ he replies.

He puts his hand out.

‘Alan Burns by the way. Pleased to meet you. Where you from?’

‘Hamilton,’ you say, shaking his mildly Masonic hand.

‘Aw, right. The Cameronians? I’m Airdrie,’ he says.

‘How did you get involved in the IDF? you ask. You’re not sure if the abbreviation is appropriate but you say it anyway because it feels right. You take a drink, waiting on the response. He’s not shy. He’s lonely. Stressed. As if he wants to get it all off his chest.

‘I was a steelworker. Then things got worse, deteriorated rapidly I think is the term.’

‘Redundancies?’

‘Aye. Don’t get me wrong, thanks to the network of social support networks in deepest Lanarkshire the local authority saw to it that I fell onto a safety net. Through the business alliance social inclusion partnership group I got one year’s salary and a free higher education package.’

You fuckin whatdoyoucallit, check yer watch. 4.30pm. Then you look at his stiff collar and tie. There’s some blood on his neck, a rough shave the night before. He looks at you tae.

‘I thought you were army for a minute,’ he says, ‘wae the big coat and that.’ He sniggers.

‘Just a sartorial experiment,’ you reply.

‘So why do you want Henley?’

‘It’s for a story I’m working on.’

‘Journalist?’

‘Aye, that’s right.’

‘Which paper?’

‘Just freelance. Student paper.’

The barman appears. He nods at Alan. You watch their heads reflected in the mirror behind the bar.

‘A Jackie D’s and Coke, fill it up with ice please. Want wan Billy?’ he asks.

Where do you go, what do you do? You’ve felt his handshake before. Uncle Ron, Uncle Alex. Yer dad. He taps his fingers on the bar, the wedding ring, the gold bracelet, the black hairs on his thick set wrist.

‘Aye,’ you go.

His aftershave, overpowering, sweet, purchased on expenses during wan of these long haul duty free sessions. He dips his right hand into his pocket and puts an address book on the bar. Then he does the same with his left pocket. He then reaches inside his jacket and lifts out a third notebook. He twirls his cufflink. He twirls his tie. Then he’s like this.

‘In The Heart of Darkness bar in Kigali two twiddles of the right cufflink means you want a drink. A twiddle with the tie means you want a drink now or your leaving. Student barmen eh, hivnae a clue.’

‘What’s wae the different notebooks,’ you ask?

‘This one’s Bolivia,’ he says. ‘This ones Kabul. And this wans fuckin, whatdoyoucall it, Adisababa.’

He opens the first one.

‘Please excuse me,’ he says, stepping off the barstool, walking towards the door, ‘I have a phone call to make.’

A few minutes later he’s back.

‘A diplomatic bag has been opened at the airport.’

He scratches his cheek.

‘It’s the first fuckin rule we try to teach them. Never touch a diplomatic bag. Fuck sake! I don’t believe that. Barman, two more Jack Daniels and Cokes please.’

‘No I’ll get this.’

‘No ye’ll no.’

‘Aye I will.’

‘Put yer haun back in yer pocket.’

‘No. It’s aw right.’

The barman reluctantly serves us another Jack Daniels. It’s obvious this English bawbag disnae like us. Probably thinks we’re being irresponsible wae the loose diplomatic

references. The Jack Daniels tastes good, burning all the way down, making you feel welcome, warm. You look at the three mobiles he has on the bar. He follows your gaze, watching your every move. You just sit there, twiddling some sand in the greatarmycoat pocket.

‘What’s up wae you mate,’ he asks?

You don’t answer.

He takes another drink. We baith dae.

‘See when I was in Pakistan I went up to the foothills where the earthquake had been and I just sat and wept. I couldnae explain it. It just happened.’

He’s getting all, whatdoyoucallit, sentimental. It makes you want tae greet tae but ye cannae because you must keep your eye on the ball. What are we like man? Me and him. Sitting here. In the midst of this predicament in which we find ourselves. Him down to meet Montague’s contact. Me down to meet Henley’s son. We’re both down, down down south because duty fuckin calls. Him wae the suit. Me wae the greatarmycoat. Him wae the respectable sense of governmental duty. Me wae the. The what Billy? Me on the hunt. For the cunt. Who brought us here in the first place?

‘It used to be the churches that did it, a bible in one hand, bread in the other - now we’re in there, spreading Maggie’s word,’ he says.

He plays with the three phones on the bar, arranging them in a triangle - fuck me, the vertex.

‘I’m on the 7am shuttle tomorrow then onto Rwanda via Brussels. This could easily be my last day in the UK for some time,’ he says, the heid down. ‘I’m getting tired of it. I’ve actually hatched a wee plan in my heid for years.’

‘Harboured a desire,’ you add, encouraging him to say more.

‘Exactly. Nuttin special. Just that I’m sick seeing our own government money getting syphoned off by big nasty cocaine sniffing baboons who rule parts of the jungle south of Kingali.’

He waits for a reaction.

‘Monkey bastards,’ you reply.

He laughs the laugh, a high pitched excitable machine-gun sounding cackle. You’re in the club. You all are. You just don’t know it, and you won’t be aware of it until you see the vertex in the course of your everyday lives.

You drink the Jack Daniels all the way down, take it all up like a good boy. It warms yer whatdoyoucallit, yer intentions, yer best laid schemes be christ, they seem easier to achieve now. You wonder how he knew your name, why he’s in here in the first place, why you’re here? Why are you here ya prick? You’re Hunting Captain Henley. He didnae know yer name. He did. He said Billy. Check it yersel. Or maybe it was don’t be silly. Maybe you misheard him ya twadger. Get a grip of yourself old boy. Eyes to the front. March in good order and you will receive your reward in heaven.

He’s still talking when you put the glass back down. Then he says he has to go.

Something makes you stand up to help him oan wae the jaicket, the way Uncle Alex and dad used to do whenever visitors left the hoose. You stand behind him and unfurl the gaberdine collar, smoothing it right out with the palm of your hand. Then you pat the right shoulder.

On his departure you feel the animosity from the other students crawling over your skin. Those lefties hate the gaberdine. And now they hate me. You can’t be seen to retreat. Not yet. Not now. So you order another drink, a half fizzy lager and another Jack D’s as a chaser, just to confound them further. There’s no way Lance drinks in here. Not among the demo organisers and crop-haired lesbo freaks. Time to move on from this bar of monstrous magic mirrors. You knock both drinks back, letting the barman see you do it. Then you turn up the greatarmycoatcollar and move out.

Outside, the car has gone. It’s getting dark. You walk under a street lamp and pull out the black book. Lance’s address is written boldly - it couldn’t be clearer. It’s been a day and a half. There’s a puddle on the road. A motor drives past it, veering right to avoid splashing

you. Time to find a bed for the night. Tomorrow is another day as my mother used to say before she let the big Uncle Alex fuck her.

## Chapter 9

### A Snippet of Fact

AND IT certainly is, another day, of that there is no doubt. The methodical thump squeak thump squeak of the headboard against the wall has stopped now. You wonder why they chose to let you hear them fucking in such a manner. And the giggling beforehand, pretending to be my mum and Uncle Alex. The left-wing authorities probably sent them to keep an eye on you - maybe it wiz the wee Wrangler rucksack on the shooder that roused their attention, and the one-way train ticket to London too. That woman in the ticket office at Glasgow Central looked too intelligent to be there. Too much rouge to be real. Now you have the two youthful shaggers to contend with - as if Henley wasn't enough. Think boy think. Spit boy spit. Employ the rationalism of the founding forefathers of your great Scottish nation.

Oh Caledonia, we are your sons  
And will, again, be free!

Shut it ya prick. Keep the chaos neatly packaged in the heid now like noisy, sloppy children fenced off in your mind's own kindergarten. But it's just the manner in which they make it perfectly obvious they're there. The intelligence authorities can be a deceptively transparent bunch. Uncle Ron once said he always knew when they had been at his desk because they always leave a sign, a signal, a Royal Signal be christ. It can be anything auld boy - the baseline of a protractor angled at 45 degrees, or the legs of a compass pushed slightly apart to

form the perfect triangle, the vertex, Billy, the vertex. They know you hate that banging noise. They know. Aw right? Nae bother mate. Fine bud. We'll get there eventually eh? You stick in.

Shut the fuck up. Get up. Turn up. Turning up is half the battle, as Mark Twain once said. Easy enough for him to turn up. In the auld US of A. With the smell of mama's home made apple pie cooking in the deep oven and the auld fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, fifth amendment pish. But here in the old smoke it just wisnae the same as the new territories, especially in light of the hard reality that Lance didn't even know you, nor did the big Professor Montague for that matter. Yet it was incumbent on you to make their acquaintance, to somehow beaver into their consciousness for the sake of extracting a detail or two about the former's genetic father.

You just get up and get out. Away from the breakfast scenario aw the gither. Away from them two shaggers. Out into the early morning smog you tramp, as usual just you, one lone Scottishman battling on against the odds. Old Jack The Ripper be christ, walking the streets in Bed and Breakfast land, down Whitechapel way then out onto the Old Kent Road. How do you know he was old boy? You don't? What do you mean you don't? Well shut the fuck up then. Get on with it. Move on there. Keep yersel transient right, it's the only chance your kind have.

Where do you go, what do you do? You just keep on walking in a southerly direction like that Laurie Lee cunt in *As I Walked Out One Mid-Summer's Morning*, except it would be Mid-Sommer's morning in your case, not having any of that rural poverty stricken English superiority complex here, me and my violin writing poetry in prose among the sun savaged Spaniards. Henley ya fuck. You're getting it. What gives you the right of way on this path? Naw but, keep going, all the way to Portsmouth, down to Cadiz and further still to Malaga if you feel like it. Anywhere but here. Maybe fuckin buy some oranges, liaise with some of the auld brown shirts and work your way back up north, a new tribe, bringing order and respect

where chaos reigns.

No but you know you have to go back to that auld summer seat opposite to where Lance parks his car. To use the present tense is to apply a certain optimism to this situation in which you find yersel, the implication being that he parks there on a regular basis when, in fact, it could have been a wan-aff, a mere once in a lifetime glimpse of your target. Spit boy spit. Big Kelvin Walker would have gone back, just like Uncle Ron, a creature of habit with a work ethic the size of Big Ben, repetition, repetition, repetition, start again, do it again, and again and again and again, back and forwards, round and round, like the Gay Gordons or maybe even a Dashing White Sergeant. A quick glance over the shoulder to make sure the intelligence shaggers aren't in pursuit, up a gear, round two corners, doon a close, across some cobbles, up through an alleyway, up and over a wall by stepping on some big black bins, a quick jog through a park, into the trees, up over a burn and back on to the main drag - that should shake them off but, just to be sure, you hop on a red bus and go anywhere, anytime, eventually arriving at the London University via a circuitous route during which you contemplate the nature of pitch and spin, motivation, and how best to interact with the likes of Lance once you have gained conversational status with his lordship. It may be necessary not to challenge too much his superior intellect. Stop. That's it. Let him take the lead. He's the daddy. You're the cheeky Jock with a sense of loyalty knowing no bounds. As the Queen mum once said on a visit to the Indian reservations, they're so upright, so Scottish. Wee Shug in The Great Escape. He looks up to Steve McQueen but cannae take the same level of punishment in Der Cooler. Lance can be McQueen. You can be Shug. That's the way it is, the way the Union works.

Up in the Department of Complex International Relations Lance Henley has a pigeon-hole. It's made of wood and it smells, ever so slightly, of wintergreen auld boy. You stick your hand in up to the wrist then you wiggle your fingers the way you used to do it as a lad when you were guddling for froglets up the fifty feet. That split second of sentimentality makes

you think it isn't his fault, all this, this whatdoyoucallit, greatarmycoatwearing, you here, him there, the da's violent historical connections, ma da deid, his da where? Probably luxuriating in deepest Surrey fuckin whatsitcalled, weeding the garden, polishing the Travelsphere brochure, contemplating victories won, pastures new, territories gained, comrades lost, maimed, oh dear, mammy, daddy, get me out of here. Right you. Aye you. Ya prick. Why are you here? It's not as if he's going to inform on his faither, lead you to his lair so why are you doing it eh? You do it because ye hiftae. Anyroads, my target objectives are twofold. Firstly, to gain access to this report about the activities of students, full of sedition, usurping the state, dictating the new agendas in their underground pubs, caverns, and dimly lit bedrooms, plotting the downfall of what? Of what old boy? There are a few pristine white envelopes tucked neatly inside and a message to his students on the notice board above, informing them that this morning's tutorial, *The Balfour Declaration and The Modern State of Israel*, takes place at 10 am in Room C408.

So you stand there in the strangely three quarter-length greatarmycoat, its rough collar rubbing against the neck, and the wee Wrangler rucksack tae, slung over the shoulder like a broken down Jarhead. You roll a quick Camel, the way yer faither used tae dae before he set about laying those crucial communication lines south of Ismaelia. You enter the lift and press 4 but instead of going up, you really feel as if you should be going down, right, right down to the basement, or even further down, to examine the foundations of this grey concrete block built for sixties hippies but up you go, up slightly, not all the way up, an agonising semi, just halfway up, neither here nor there, to the level of purgatory, stuck in the middle with you and you don't know what it is you should do, except wait on the aluminium shutters opening and a watery slice of light, a newish corridor with the odd poster hanging partly off the wall and the usual half-assed rallying calls from semi-sloshed students to quite a sort of disaffected public.

The corridor is made of steel and glass splattered with pigeon shit. There are wire windows

too, this academic aviary is where they house the research fellows like Lance, colourful, lightweight doctors-to-be, proudly puffed up, fluttering their feathers, but unable to fly far, tweeting their embryonic theories to part-time student chicks smelling of the Burger King shift. Poor auld Lance. He no doubt tells his friends he's an academic when his real job isn't to teach students but to spy on them, riffling through the dissertations in search of the ultimate al Qaeda reference point. That's the thing tae, bet he isn't even aware what is happening to him - despite his academic semi-status, his position a few metres up the ivory tower, he probably isn't even tuned in to the consequences of his overall actions. Shut it prick. He's just doing a job right. Naw but he's a product of the new invisible empire. At least his faither and mine had to wear a fuckin uniform, ken? At least they weren't invisible manifestations of the whatdoyoucallit, that place where people go, that state of semiconsciousness where action and sense of duty to somebody, to something, is unaccompanied by any real raison d'etre, a place not exactly bereft of moral fibre but not connected properly to the values which once made the empire great. Shut it. Never mind him. He and the him. What about you? Did you have a nice time? Was the weather good? You just stand there outside Room C408, the frosted glass rectangle on the steel door tae, would have made it a vertex if they had known you were coming. Naw but you. Just stand there. Wait outside boy. Wait and wonder what you're going to say to him on his imminent arrival and, more importantly, how you're going to actually say it to him. You can't, for example, tell him you came all the way from Glasgow as that would alert him to something untoward. All that energy. Commitment. For what? He'd get suspicious of you. Maybe even begin an investigation into you, the hunter becomes the hunted, Billy Queen on the fuckin run from the English insurgents. Tell him you're working for The London University Telegraph or whatever it's called, that you want to access Professor Montague's report in order for to compile a newspaper article, but that the good chap is too busy to see you at the moment and since you're the research fellow you thought it would be appropriate to ask you about your participation in the writing of it.

You look out of the pigeon shit window. The intelligence shaggers are coming up the path. They probably realised half an hour ago you slipped through their security net. They'd be up here on the purgatory level soon if they weren't already there. You wait and see. Them guardians of the state will no doubt be posing as students, with their trainers and jeans and their Bruce Springsteen albums, their cynical psychological egoism and their, whatdoyoucallit, inability to see the worth of, of what, of what boy, of utilitarianism, of actions in relation to the common good of all men, and women tae if you felt like it. You wonder how they pigs dae it. How do they shag? Do they out cynicise each other? You ya bitch ye ken ye want it you original sinner. He's like this, bitch, she's like that, you bastard. Bitch, bastard, bitch, bastard. Oh dearie dearie. The state of the state right enough.

You just sit down in the corridor and wait. Then you notice the classroom door is open so in you pop. There's a big chunky green and blue scarf hanging on the academic chair, Henley's. You pick it up and wrap it roon yer neck thrice. A definite hint of wintergreen. What is it about that stuff, the perfume of Flashman and his ilk? Ye smelt it aff those big bandy legged doctors at The Western, bounding through The Beatson, experimenting on the punters in the fashion they do, for the sake of modern medicine and their upcoming thesis on the behavioural patterns of the dying man in aforementioned cancer ward. Big Solzhenitsyn eh, wonder what he'd make of the modern wards with all their high tech gadgetry and radio therapeutic goings ons. The scarf tucks nicely into the greatarmycoat, giving it that kind of cosy but robust feel. You could almost be in the officer's mess dressed like this auld boy. The odd visitation to the Jock's barracks, an exercise in humiliation here, a fuckin, whatdoyoucall it, a quick boot in the groin there. Perfect.

There's not much to do meantime. So you imagine yourself writing a letter to him.

Dear Lance,

You are you and me is me. Of that there is no doubt. So let's talk sensibly about the future. While it is true I would like to ride your maw and murder yer da, I don't mean anything personal right. What I mean is, I have nothing against you because you just happened to be in the right womb at the right time. You and I have in more in common than people may think. You dislike the trendy left-wing student brigade for a start. In fact you are actively involved in hunting them down. Well, see, I'm hunting you. I'm actually hunting yer dad but I'm hunting you first, then I'm going to get him, wherever he is, whatever he's doing, I'll be standing in his shadow. You know what I find interesting about you is that while governments, left, right, and centre, come and go, you are always there. Take your current position. The fact that a Tory government is in power hasn't diminished your funding, in fact, according to my research, it has increased. So here we have a situation where a so called cost-cutting administration is funding researchers to track down others with leftist leanings. Which brings me to ask who is really behind this ethos, who transcends governments across the globe?

You know, before I left for London, my Uncle John, an ex-policeman, contacted me to say I had to get in touch with a guy called Bob Nicolson, Editor of The Sunday Tribune in Scotland. Says there could be a job in journalism for me. What puzzles me is how Uncle John even knew I was interested as I hivnae seen or spoke to the fucker in years. But there ye go. You never ken what these intelligence shaggers are up to.

I don't want you to think I'm being spiteful towards you. I'm not. In fact I quite like you. I like your scarf. And your car. And your golf tees. What I can't understand is your god squad leanings but maybe we can talk about that another day. Anyway, there are other more realistic comparisons to be going on with. We're both the offspring of British soldiers for a

start. Ok, so you happen to be English and your dad was a fucking captain, my dad was a private, but they were still there together, in Ismaelia, protecting the empire's interests, sure they were? Just so happened yer da had a funny attitude towards the Scots, but we'll sort that later as well. The point is Lance, I think you should cooperate with me because, as I see it, we're in this together, in it for the long haul, keeping the auld aspidistra flying, you more than me, of course, but I'm just behind you, nurturing a baby aspidistra or maybe even a fuckin rubber plant fae Asda if you feel like it.

Anyway, I really hope you enjoy working alongside Professor Montague, researching terrorist activity on the campuses and your other complex international relations projects. And I hope your relations with the intelligence shaggers continue to flourish. And Lance, for god's sake, be man enough not to deny your involvement.

Best wishes,

Billy Queen.

The door creaks. A student laughs. There's a cough. A giggle. And in walks today's prey. Green cords, Jesus sandals, white socks. You sniff the scarf again, dried in Chanel, sweat, wintergreen, cigar smoke. Lights dimmed. Powerpoint operational. Prejudices in place. Ready? Then you'll begin.

*The Balfour Declaration and The Modern State of Israel*

Good morning. My name is Lance Henley, for those of you unfamiliar with the, the, the, the, state of play. I want you to think of *The Balfour Declaration* as a kind of gentleman's agreement because that's actually what it was. In 1917, that's how things were done. Over a

cigar and a, a, a, a, glass of port, well, discussions took place. A aaa bout the future. It is unclear what British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour truly intended by his declaration but his letter to the Jewish Lord Rothschild stated that nothing should be done, and I, I, I quote, “which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

You wait and you wonder. Uncle Ron once taught you the devil is in the detail. The devil is in the detail, Billy, he once said, and the detail isn’t always visible to the naked eye. That’s what makes The English such a treacherous language, you see, but you often miss the message.

‘Wwwell,’ Lance says, ‘you can’t make omelettes without bbbbbreaking eggs, as mmm y old granny used to say.’

You put your hand up because you have to.

‘The ch, ch, chap at the back,’ he says.

‘What do you mean,’ you say?

‘What do you mean what do I mean?’ he retorts.

‘Not being able to make eggs? You mean omelettes?’ you say.

‘Sorry old boy I thought it was self explanatory. Www ell of course civil rights were going to be abused, cracked, infact, into the boiling pot of world politics, if you excuse the metaphor.’

You just drop the hand and put it back on the soft scarf. When you touch, it reminds you of the morning you ended up in the Buchanan Galleries shopping mall back in Glasgow. It was Sunday at 10am, too early for the shops to open. So you just sat inside the mall, inside Costa’s coffee shop. The people who came inside beside you, they were cautious early birds, organised and average. This girl, she looked safe and happy.

He clicks the Powerpoint remote. The screen, it has a deep blue background, and the title is in brilliant white.

## *The Suez Canal and The British Interest*

‘Of course this wasn’t just about Zionist aspirations. Aaaa at the end of the 19th century the British sought to secure the Suez Canal to guard the route to India. If a deal could be brokered to settle the Jews in Palestine, this ggg entleman’s agreement would help to consolidate the British interest in the region. Even as far back as August 1840 *The Times* stated that the British government was considering Jjj ewish restoration. In 1848 Sir George Gawler, a hero of Waterloo, argued vehemently for the restoration of Jews.

You twirl the scarf, just like mama’s hair. Outside the room you see two shadows through the frosted glass windae, the intelligence shaggers, no doubt waiting on the lecture to end. They’re playing around, dry shaggin wan another, rubbing it in, reminding wan of wan’s past memoirs.

There are no questions to be asked. None at all. His reference points are as worn as his green cords. His hair, greasy and unkempt. His car, tired, ramshackle. You just sit there with the feet up, stroking the scarf. Let the mountain come to Mohammed. Over he trots. Clip clop, clip clop, clip clop, the mouse ran up the clock, the clock struck one, the mouse ran down.

‘How can I help you old boy?’ he asks.

You just sit there thinking to yourself, Old boy? Auld boy you mean, like an auld boy who walks doon the street on his way to the bookies? He looks at his watch, shifts his lecture notes from one arm to the other.

‘Who are you?’ he asks.

You stroke the scarf, letting him see something ain’t quite right here. If it is his scarf he’s doing a damn and blast good job of hiding the emotion, not recognising it as part of his usual attire. British cool under fire. You look away for a few seconds and the emotion is building up

in you tae, you can feel the tears stinging between the eyes and the nose the way it used to feel when the baw hit you in the face up the swing park. But you're cool tae, forget Cool Britannia, Cool Queen rules. Yer like this:

'Bill Queen is the name, from the London University Telegraph.'

'Oh, pleased to meet you,' he says, putting his hand out.

The handshake is mildly Masonic. Uncle Alex once taught you how to recognise the real thing because there are a lot of fakes around. The boys had to make a few adjustments to outflank common infiltrators pretending to be the business. Henley's is genuine enough, not mocking, but not completely real, an unofficial, semiconscious recognition, not a brotherly one, just a very loosely affiliated association. What can we do for you? You tell him we're writing a story about what campuses are doing to combat the new terrorist threat and that you heard he was working in conjunction with Professor Simon Montague in the compiling of a report into the seriousness of the situation. And how is yer bastarn da you want to say, but refrain.

More importantly, where is he? He's like this, feigning modesty, 'Well actually my part is a small one, I just assisted with the extended bibliography, referencing, that sort of thing.'

Fucking middle-class modesty, don't you just hate it? You pause and stroke the scarf, smelling his uncertainty, a touch of unease auld boy. Then you point out that you only want a copy of the report.

'I happen to have one in my room upstairs, you're welcome to come and fetch it. Tonight. I'll be there at 7.30.'

Still you sit there. Yer thinkin tae yersel fetch? You mean like a dug wae a bone? But you don't say that. You just turn the charm factor up.

'That would be splendid,' you say. 'I do hope I'm not putting you out too much by asking like this?'

'Yes, quite,' he replies.

Quite what, you think. Quite good? Quite bad? Quite fuckin tasty? He drops the heid.

‘Look, eh, is that all you require from me?’ he asks.

You require his mediocrity. You require his fuckin aspidistra but you canne hiv it, it’s too dear.

‘Yes, that’s all I require. At the minute,’ you reply.

Hey. Kimere. Your corner calls. Up. Out. It’s no fur you. Move oot. Leave the boy. Get the man.

‘By the way I enjoyed your lecture,’ you add. ‘It was very enlightening.’

‘Thankyou. We do our best. We do our best old boy,’ he replies.

OUTSIDE there’s partial cloud cover. The wind is blowing from an easterly direction. You tug on the greatarmycoatcollar. Its three-quarter length on you but who cares? There’s still sand in the pockets, that’s what matters. It gets right under your nails when you put your hands in the pockets for any period of time. Ismaelia sand. You just sit there and wait. At 7.30 you chap on his door but there’s no reply. In the common room across the corridor there’s music, voices, laughter. You twist some sand in the coat pocket then enter. The scarf, it’s hanging on a chair, only this time it’s tied in a big Windsor knot. You recognise the knot because your dad then your Uncle Alex taught you to tie your school tie like that. On a table in the corner there’s wine and punch, crisps and fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, fuckin niblet things. You get right into the wine and Lance, he sees you. You see him talking to an Arab chap and he sees you, time and time again. You walk into that awkward space, halfway between the table and the discussion, touching the void, laying the all important communication lines in the most inhospitable part of the terrain. He waits until you fill the space good and proper then he waves,

Mr Queen, do come and join us,’ he says.

‘This is Bbb ash. William, Bash. Bash is from The University of Dubai, he’s joining us here

on sabbatical for a year.’

He turns to the Arab.

‘William is a journalist,’ says lance.

You’re like this, trying to change the subject:

‘I used to live in Dubai.’

‘Oh the Country Club, The Irish Village, know them well old boy,’ says Lance. ‘My father once worked there.’

‘As what?’ the Arab asks.

‘Oh, nothing special,’ says Lance.

He looks at the Arab, then at me, the Arab, then me.

‘A charitable trust, delivering christianity to the darkest corners of the Arabian Gulf, that sort of thing,’ he says.

The Arab sniggers.

‘Bash is an expert on Iran says Lance. There’s a bit of a debate going on as to who owns a few islands off the Iranian coast. Tricky situation. Very tricky, especially with the current state of pppplay in Tehran. Excuse me a moment gentlemen.’

‘Why were *you* in Dubai?’ asks the Arab.

You’re like this, ‘It was years ago, as a kid.’

You look straight across his shoulder. Lance has shifted quickly across no-man’s land and has carefully adjusted the scarf behind him, straightening it up like a cricket stump. You see him.

And he sees you. Two intelligence shaggers crack a joke and laugh out loud, the way mum and Uncle Alex used to do after a session through the wall.

‘They call it the spy capital of the Middle East,’ says The Arab.

‘So I believe,’ you say.

Excuse me. It’s not the Arab you’re after, it’s the Englishman. You walk across to Lance but he’s turned his back and is walking in the opposite direction. You follow him because that’s

the way it has to be, the direction that has to be taken. He goes out and across the corridor towards his room.

‘Come in,’ he says, without really knowing if you’re behind him.

‘Ttt take a seat,’ he says.

He looks at the coat.

‘Rrr royal Signals? Wise travellers,’ he says, ‘ppp pause to sss eee the ways your fathers knew, that they may aid your climb, ttt towards tomorrow’s view. It’s a mmmotto. Mmm y father, was in The Royal Signals.’

You nod. He hands you Professor Montague’s report.

‘Is your auld boy still in the army?’ you ask.

‘No, but sometimes he thinks he is. He’s in India, pretending to be the old colonialist I suppose, you know how it is.’

‘What’s he doing there?’

‘Oh, some volunteer church project at The Mohandas Kumani colony near Nagpur.’

‘Will that be all Mr Queen?’

‘Yes. It will,’ you reply.

‘Well I look forward to reading the piece,’ he says.

‘Yes. I look forward to writing it,’ you reply.

OUTSIDE, on a wee seat, you just sit there. And you feel empty when you see him leaving the building, like the way you do when Scotland lose a big match at Hampden. You’re hooked on the chase, that’s all. So you stroke the greatarmycoatcollar to remind yourself it’s not over yet, that it’s only half-time. All that energy eh, look auld boy, must dash. You wonder what motivates him, what drove his father to parade up and down in foreign territories, the sweat under the armpits, screaming on the arid desert parade ground. And my dad, fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, him and his best army mate Scoby, up at the belly dancing club wance a

month and the Scoby wan sticking his burning hot fag onto the dancer's bum. Be christ, the place erupted so it did. And next day, during a particulary violent wog uprising, dad walloped this Arab wummin in the face with the butt of his gun because she was screaming right in his face. He just snapped. Henley saw him. Never said a word. Just pointed his pistol in the air. Both of them. Freeze-framed in history. Wise travellers, pause to see the ways your fathers knew, that they may aid your climb, towards tomorrow's view. The role of the British in Suez was to. What Billy, what was the role, tae mainatain the accessibility of the canal so our ships could gain access from the Mediterranean to Arabia and beyond, why, coz, just because. Shut it. Fuckin, whatdoyoucallit, pontificating, hypothesising. About what? Eyes to the front ya cunt. March in good order. Dae as yer telt or else. Or else what? Or else you'll report your actions to the intelligence shaggers. Right. Hey. Common. Hey. Kimere. Up. Cummon. Move it. Splash watter on yer face and move oot, cummoan, keep gon. Right, left, right, left. Out the door, away out of the purgatory level, take the stairs, down, down, down, three at a time, oot the door for a wee blaw eh? What's it like man? Being in the position where you are given the education to think about change, but are not empowered to do so by the aforementioned mental enslavement committee. It's a bit like showing a dog a bone then caging it a few metres from where it's supposed to be, with its teeth stuck right in there. You become demented. You are unwilling to accept that today's world is about doing nothing. The new system is geared towards a reinvented form of slavery, more subtle than the previous baw and chains, it takes the form of foreign imports, Polish joiners and Lithuanian nannies, fingertip digital control and a new form of conservatism that encouages you to channel your energies into nothing, making sure nothing changes. Shut it bawbag.

You roll a Camel. Just like papa used to make. Something's happening, you can feel it. The day, it stretches ahead like a country road leading to a remote beach somewhere. A bawbag analogy, yes, but real enough to you eh? Ya prick. Naw but that's how it feels. Like the front cover of *As I Walked Out One Midsummer's Morning*. You have the rest of the day in

London, just you and the cosmopolitan rabble, Billy Queen and the multiculturalist dreamboat, more like a skull and crossbones nightmare if you ask me or the likes of Uncle Alex and Uncle Ron or even Alan Burns if you fancy it. One of the clipboard carrying female students stares right at the greatarmycoat. 'I'm hunting Captain Henley, ' you shout after her, and the day, it stretches out in front of me. She just ignores you. But you have to keep going so you walk behind her, the big, deliberate step, great expectations as to what lies ahead. She may think you're following her, especially after the shout, stalking her even, but you have no intention of doing so, so why slow your step to make her feel at ease? You take what you get. We're all equal but not the same eh? That great American statement you hear them say. We're not equal, Burns. We're very unequal indeed. And why should the fast mover slow his step to be in time with clipboard-carrying travel-and-tourism type student who you're level with now and who feels uneasy because you can see her looking over her shoulder even although she has missed the point because you are now level with her and, ultimately, one, two, three steps ahead, doon through the campus gate, across a wee patch of greenery and out into a street with pavement cafes, bars, Polish joiners, black servants, white servants, Italian pizza stall holders, Croatian vegetarians, Indians, Iraqis, Kurds, Cantonese noodles and Spanish Tobacco. Your way is hard and arduous. But there's a crack in the clouds and you're going to walk all the way up to it, stretch it apart, then climb inside, and, cuddle in. See you in the morning, Billy.



## Chapter 10

### Down to The Auld Nick

November 2007.

HE OFTEN dreaded re-entering the rarefied atmosphere of the office. Tuesday afternoons are notoriously routine. Most of the reporters are static, still waiting on conference suggestions winging their way back from the editor's office. He's leaning against the sodden ballet poster, lighting a small cigar. He's on a dip, both physically and psychologically. The adrenaline buzz exiting his bloodstream at a rate of knots, leaving him devoid of energy and motivation. It's at times like these he'd be better off going straight back home to the flat. Fuck Auld Nicolson and his motley crew. A cup of tea maybe. Get the feet up. Read a book. Maybe snooze in the armchair for a while. He hated these vacant spells - that space between deadline stress when suddenly the mobile stops ringing and the fingers stop typing. His creative brain beginning to cramp up. No point in even thinking about chasing stories.

He's moving away from the wall, trying to avoid the splashes from the road as the cars flash past, their headlights cutting through the Glaswegian gloom. He's walking now. One foot in front of the other - the wind and rain battering against him, nearly lifting him off his bloody feet in fact! And he's walking past the inner-city all-weather bowling-green next to the block of flats and he can somehow imagine a rip in the surface, blowing in the wind. And the bowling residents - standing at the window hoping for a wee change in the weather so they can get the auld trainers on and get the jack rolling. Past the kebab shop and up onto the main

walkway, through the swing doors and taking the coat off and into the lift, up to the sixth. He's back inside. The first person he notices is Auld Nick with the arms folded and before he gets back to his seat the mobile is ringing then someone is shouting that The Scottish Government is on line 1 and Nicolson wants to see him and there's a message on his desk from The Rev Jack, please call back urgently, and he's dragging himself back up the gears now and it's Deep Throat on the mobile and the address is in Tynecastle, Edinburgh, and the guy's name is George McGinley and a fax from the press office of Scottish Ballet is being handed to him. And Auld Nick, man what's he like? The pock-scarred face and a nose like a strawberry. The pin-stripe trousers - like a broken doon banker! The fingers bright yellow with nicotine and three decades of hard political exclusives under his belt and 30 years of liquid lunches in the belly yet he still looked like a whippet. You know the type. The lean, mean, slightly bow-legged Glaswegian, wiry and grey, like a terminal cancer victim still stalking the streets, as wide as The Clyde and a chronic smoker and drinker man how does he survive that wido man you just couldn't trust him, would sell his old granny for a story, married to nothing but the job, willing to shop anyone in print and ready to drink to their demise in any watering hole in town. Nicolson was one of the old typewriter school who hadn't allowed the new technology to phase him. No way. He knew that Glasgow print journalism was about people. Not computers. He used his for one purpose and for one purpose only - as a word processor. The rest of the time he spent beavering away on the phone or in restaurants with MSP's and their underlings. He refused to carry a mobile phone, ironically claiming it was because of the cancer risk, yet he smoked 60 a day. The paper was Auld Nick's life. And his copy was as crisp and clear as a Highland spring in January. And this Monday Club crowd. They first became established around the time The Stone of Destiny was stolen. And Auld Nick, he's telling him this and Queenie's looking at the pock marks and thinking what a rough adolescence he must have had with the acne and the yellow fingers rubbing the red nose and the nervous sniff all the time. Private Queen knows the old timer is the master of

misinformation. Uncle John knew him when he was in Special Branch. So did Uncle Alex. Nicolson was a passer-on of information. You caught it from him, like a virus. Yet he was immune. 'Something to do with the British Israeli movement I believe,' says he, the fingers trembling slightly on the fag. Which British Israeli Movement is that Nick? Queenie feels like asking? Is it the one Lance Henley spoke of when Billy was down in London, being monitored by the shagging authorities? Is that the one? Are we speaking the same language here? Billy isn't messing about, he's like this, 'I need the names and numbers.' Auld Nick is saying 'leave it with me and I'll see what I can do.' That's what Uncle John said when Billy needed a job in journalism - 'I'll see what I can do.' It's what he said when Billy needed a flat - 'I'll see what I can do.' It's what they all say. Even Auld Nick - see what you can do, all things being equal, do what you can.

When he shuffles out of earshot Billy's onto the gay librarian known as The Handlebar because of his moustache. He's checking The Monday Club and Billy he's tapping The Monday Club into clips but nothing is coming up. He's looking up from the screen now and he sees The Auld Nick talking to another reporter. They seem to be gesticulating towards him and the wave of extreme paranoia is flooding through him. Suddenly he's under attack from all sides because the office flirt, Rich Tits, has joined the confab and he's sure they're all talking about him. Even The Young Docherty suddenly looks intimidating - maybe someone has tipped him off about The Paki Bash story and the incoming e-mail man, and there's one from Auld Nick how did he manage to send it so quickly? It's saying search for Scotland and Rudolph Hess and The Scottish Nationalists who helped the Germans during the 2nd World War. And he has to do something, quickly, to combat this wave of paranoia. He can smell the Chanel and its Rich Tits standing right behind him. She looks particularly attractive today. Her blond, page boy hairdo with the square fringe is a real turn on and, of course, The Tits are looking extremely gigantic today - the big double D low cut white bra and those nipples poking straight through the white Marks and Spencers blouse like gooseberries wrapped in

cellophane. This Rich Tits. This Dorothy White. He wonders what she must have been like as a wee girl, the wealthy parents from Morningside, horseriding at weekend, onto Edinburgh University at 17 where she studied for a lightweight arts degree, what was it, moral philosophy and sociology or something. Married at 22, into journalism at 23, writing glossy lifestyle features in quite an average sort of way and trying so hard to be someone. The big house in Milngavie. Being seen to be successful. Yes. The twisted, slightly upturned lower lip qualified her in no uncertain terms as a cynical journo - but in Dorothy's quieter moments, during her periods of reflection, who was this big-titted brash bitch? She's certainly the chummy type, comfortable in the company of men, the youngest child with three older brothers, slightly tom-boyish almost - always up for a laugh is Rich Tits, never taking anything personally. She's rich, intelligent, successful, stunningly good looking and Private Queen, at least for the moment, is finding it difficult to find that something, the eyes flicking back and forth now, his eyeline level with her curvaceous arse as she stands there in her usual gregarious way, entertaining the executive troops.

This flashback to the pub. When he drank his pint of fizzy stuff. And the froth sticking to his upper lip man, like a Hitler moustache it was. And The Holocaust. And all The Jews shuffling their way into the gas chambers man in their pyjamas tae it was bloody horrific so it wiz, enough tae give ye nightmares. Cummon now Billy. Get a bloody grip will ye. He's up out of his seat and walking right across to the sports desk in order to obtain some light relief. He's standing there, slightly hunched over the desk, reading a copy of The Rutherglen Reformer, flicking through the pages, keeping one eye on the page and one eye on Nicolson and Rich Tits. His mind is blank now.

What's his next move going to be? All this information. What does it all mean? Since he got up with the hangover this morning, was that last night? And his dead neighbour man, the blood and the ginger hair. Paterson was deid, the red hair and the knife in the neck and the wee dug shivering at the door as the big polis stepped over it and pushed his way through to the

lounge where Paterson was lying dead in his own blood. Jesus Christ, how did it happen? The Cameronians disbanding ceremony still playing on the video and that holy man, talking about God and power and death. All that happened last night - the brain beginning to focus now. And the post alcohol paranoia. And he feels like greeting now. What did I do last night? And the night before? When was Paterson found again? Mammy, daddy - somebody take pity on Private Queen's soul. Latch onto something. Quick. A different thought process. Run away from this feeling. This paranoia. This fuckin thingy. Christ Billy. Get a grip. He'd helped the police. Answered a few questions. Nothing major. He was too far gone to remember. They were coming back to get him though, he knew that. More questions would be forthcoming. He's staring at page 18 of The Reformer and there's a single column informing him that the born again American evangelist Bobby Clinton is to visit one of the local churches next week and he's frantic, give me something, anything, a pair of scissors. Cut out the article. He's striding back to his desk and tapping Bobby Clinton into cuts but nothing is coming up, and they are laughing out loud the three of them. The heartbeat accelerating and the dry mouth tastes and he's on The Net now tapping in Bobby Clinton and the guy's evangelical web page is coming up and JESUS he can't believe what he's seeing. Is this some kind of joke? In born again Bobby Clinton's web page biography he confesses he used to be a senior white knight in the Oklahoma branch of the Ku Klux Klan and that he only murdered his own father because he was beating up on his mother. But now he's coming home, he's done his time, and he's no longer in the KKK but he's found God instead. And the link to his page is STORMFRONT - a rogues' gathering of international racists united by God. And Billy is clicking on links: British Israelism, aims, objectives, mission, projects, Sumana Hali leper colony in India where we are presently re-establishing our influence, networking in Bangalore. We do what we can to alleviate the suffering of these people. Dan Hardy is the supremo, the supreme project director of the overall portfolio. The big healthy grin. Our men in the field include George Henley, ex-Captain in the Royal Signals. George is doing an excellent job liaising with our

business compadres in the developmental economic sector transferring the skills and knowledge capability to our hearty young volunteers in the frontline battle against leprosy, a blight of biblical times but ever present in the sidestreets of glitzy Bangalore. All things being equal we will strive to do what we can. Fucking Henley. He won't leave him alone so he clicks on e-mail and types:

Dear Dan,

I understand you are coming to Scotland at the end of the week to preach at a local church in Rutherglen and I'd like to interview you for The Sunday Tribune. I read in your biography that you used to be a keen golfer, but prison put a stop to all that and that you are currently trying to take it up again. Why not let me show you around some of Scotland's finest courses? I'm sure the editor would be delighted to fix us up with some complimentary tickets for the internationally renowned Loch Lomond course.

And Billy is smiling because there are times when he can't believe how much of a chancer he really is. Suddenly the intensity of it all has dissipated. This negative energy thing.

He's striding up to the three of them and winking at Rich Tits and talking about drug dealers in Drumchapel knowing she knows what Drumchapel means tonight. He's back at his desk.

The mood swing complete.

Staring into space. Back in that semi-trance. The colour draining from his face again. It's

3.05pm and the effects of those lunchtime beers are beginning to wear off. He's staring across at Auld Nick who has the phone stuck to his right ear, the head angled almost at 45 degrees, the eyes alert, and the fingers plucking at part of the remains of a cold fish supper. For one disarming moment Billy and him are staring straight at one another, Nick's gaze not even mildly deviating as he stuffs some chips into his mouth.

Billy is searching again for that glint of humanity. It's not easy to locate in an old journalistic hard-case like Nicolson, his watery bright blue eyes witness to so many brutal stories spanning the decades. Nick stares the shocking degradation and hypocrisy of human existence straight in the eye, he carries reality around in his pocket the way a priest carries his rosary beads. And the full head of shocking grey hair tae, bryl -creamed back in the old teddy-boy style, and the heart of granite tae, unmeltable as an Arctic glacier.

But if Billy stares long and hard enough surely he must find something in the face of Auld Nicolson who looks not unlike an elderly version of Count Dracula, with the wide mouth and the slightly prominent front teeth, dripping with the blood of careless politicians. It's just that split second glance. That thingimajig. That knowledge. That momentary exploration of one another's deep consciousness. And, yes, Billy's found what he was looking for. A tiny speck of white haddock has managed to cling on to the side of Nick's pock ridden cheek which looks like the north face of the bloody Matterhorn what with all the crags and gullies - a Glasgow face which looks permanently scarred. You see, the point is, Nick doesn't have a wife or a mother or a real friend to advise him nicely to wipe it off and two of the young consumer reporters are having a bit of a giggle at the Old Boy's expense. Bastards. With their trendy ties and their lightweight investigations, those shites honestly wouldn't know a decent story if it came up and shafted them in the eyeball. Now here's a dilemma. To tell Nick about that bit of fish clinging to the side of his cheek or not to tell Pud about that bit of fish clinging to his cheek? Billy is getting up from his chair now and walking around and leaning over Nicolson's desk now and saying, Nick, you have a bit of haddock stuck to your cheek and the

ould cunt's like this, oh sorry de ye want a bit, and he's wiping it off tae and handing it to Billy and the conversation is finished because there is no point in continuing in this vein.

And Billy is back in front of his own computer feeling a bit silly and soft, but fuck it, he's tapping in JOURNALISTS into the search engine and he's staring at a quote from ex US President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1963 to 1968) and it's saying:

The fact that a man is a newspaper reporter  
is evidence of some flaw of character.

Where exactly is this Mohandas Kumani? In India somewhere. Why was Henley there? Pretending to be the great colonial lord no doubt, striving to breathe life back into the empire old boy. The adrenaline pumping again. He tried to forget this after his trip to London. He put it on the shelf. Under the glass jar. Now it was back. Pulling the strings in his professional life. He's typing Mohandis Kumani And he's printing it out and standing next to the printer, trying to disguise outward signs of his positive lead, eager for it to feed out the information before anyone clocks it and he's highlighting the name and he can smell the Chanel and it's Rich Tits standing right behind him, she has this wonderful ability to sniff out a reporter who is on a winning streak man, ask her to sniff out her own story and she can't, so to make up for her inadequacies on that front she has developed the ability to latch onto whoever is winning.

What Billy really wants to know is just how far she is willing to go to secure a taste of that glory. Her affinities were 100% transient, displaying not an ounce of conscience or loyalty and she's like this, what are you doing Billy? Not even attempting to disguise the aggressive jealousy in her voice and Private Queen he's like this to himself so he is, as he folds the print out neatly into his breast pocket, I know what I'd like to be doing between your stockings ya

dirty big ride that ye ur and Billy man he can't help but be slightly sarcastic in his reply and he's like this, pulling paper from the printer, then, quickly trying to take full advantage of her split second lapse in confidence, 'I'm going to that nice wee Italian on Great Western Road at 6pm before shooting out to Drumchapel. Do you fancy it?' And she's like this, swallowing deeply, and the heart fluttering now right next to her big tit because she's excited by the prospect but her hard bitten professional pride isn't allowing her to admit she's dying to come so she retreats to the-I'll-have-to-check-my-diary routine and Billy is like, 'rRght ok, let me know when you want to go, I'll get a taxi from the front door.'

And the bloody phone ringing again.

Christ will this ever stop? This human nature thing. This whatdoyoucallit. This grassing and back-stabbing and the resulting conflict, death and horrendous destruction of the soul and the dignity and the humanity of our species. Fuck, Billy. Answer the phone ya daft philosophical eejit. And to keep himself entertained and because he's slightly tickled at the prospect of having dinner with Big Rich Tits, Billy is full of pathos when he answers it. He's like this, pretending his voice is a siren, NEWS DESK, placing the heavy emphasis on NEWS and lowering his voice considerably for the DESK part. And the feet up on the desk, the chest expanding.

'Good afternoon, news desk, this is Detective Inspector George Gibson from Maryhill police station in Glasgow. Could I speak to William Queen please?'

And Billy's like this, in a highly strung and energetic voice, 'SPEAKING.' And the wee serious polis voice at the other end man what are they like?

'Mr Queen I'm phoning in connection with the death of your neighbour Samuel Paterson. Strathclyde Police are now treating this as a murder investigation. I understand you assisted some of our officers to enter the flat the night his body was found?'

And Billy, what's he like, he's kind of putting on his John Wayne voice, but not too American to give the game away completely.

‘You bet I did.’ he says. ‘We just moved on in there and found him lying with a kitchen knife in his neck.’

The silence on the other side of the phone is deafening, and there's a split second when Billy freezes, because he knows he's fired the opening shots and he has no ammo left and he can only sit tight and await the counter attack from Detective Inspector George Gibson. The Georgie Boy. Three O Grades and a fuckin head for heights no doubt! Up Glencoe with the police trainers, that sort of thing. Eating an apple from his rucksack and commenting how tasty it always is outside. Naw but listen. What's he like. Comin onto Billy's phone demanding to speak to him like that. Does he think he is The King of Sweden or summit? He has riled the Detective Inspector, of that there is no doubt, and Private Queen, he's smiling to himself now at that phrase, of that there is no doubt, for it is one used by one of Scotland's leading football pundits, this result confirms that Rangers are the best team in Scotland - of that there is no doubt. The Detective is like this tae, trying no doubt to disguise the anger in his voice,

‘I have two very quick questions for you Mr Queen, can you tell me where you were on the evening of Wednesday 14th November? And can you explain why three of your business cards were found in the wallet of the deceased?’

And Billy doesn't like it, you know. This being questioned - because it's normally him asking the questions and he's like this, to himself, because he doesn't want superdetective to hear it again:

‘Well hell I was probably in the nearest watering hole,’ he says.

‘Mr Queen, I think you are underestimating the seriousness of this investigation. So why don't you get into a taxi and come down to Maryhill police station right away?’

And Billy is listening, and he's thinking to himself how refreshing it is to hear one of Glasgow's finest doing his job like this. Uptight and honourable!

But just as expected. It was merely a ploy to get to the serious point. The point at issue. The

bloody murder investigation and all that.

‘It's just that we received a search warrant to search your flat this morning and we found some envelopes which forensic say the deceased passed to you some months ago.’

And Billy, he's like this,

‘Well hells bells what gives you the right to riffle through my belongings like that? You are in serious breach of my civil liberties and a sheriff should understand that.’

And The Detective Inspector, he's losing his patience now and resorting to the use of more conventional police language. He's like this,

‘Mr Queen I have to repeat that I don't think you understand the seriousness of this situation. My advice to you is to come down to the station immediately as it will be in your best interests and that of the deceased.’

And Billy is stopping the John Wayne voice and is saying how can it be in the best interests of the deceased, he's deid for gods sake, ok I'm free for the next hour or so so I'll be right down. Billy is standing up and pulling on the Cancer Shop crombie. He's down the stairs again, taking four at a time, out past the security guard and hailing a taxi.

And the bastarn taxi driver is instantly gettin on his tits tae. He's one of these conversationalists who believes he has his finger on the pulse of humanity. Private Queen is sitting in the back listening to his hypothesis and the guy really is a living, eating, shiteing, contradiction in terms. He has fascist potential written right across his big black hairy neck. Who knows maybe this bastarn taxi driver is The Grand Wizard! Talk about bringing the mountain to Mohammed. The KKK are like this, taxi fur Billy, well send wan roon right away ye ken and ye can interview the boss while he drives to the polis station. No but really. The guy is talking about the Albanian asylum seekers up at Sighthill and how he would send them all back on the next available plane and then he's moving on to another subject area which he quickly rips the pish out of, and then another and another. This is how this guy is going on. Opinion after bloody opinion, none of it even mildly substantiated.

Billy is sitting there taking it all in, giving this shyster every opportunity to exercise his democratic right. But it's grinding on his nerves all this, all this what, all this thingymajig, confusion and chaos. If truth be told he's in trouble. He's going to the nick here man, anything could happen. He hasn't a scooby where he was the night of his neighbour's death. Probably out of his brain on booze somewhere - if he had any sense. Or better still, with his nostrils stuck up the nether regions of some wee tart from Partick, who knows, who cares? You do Billy coz you could end up in the deepest of pig shit here man. The fast black is squeaking and jerking and bumping its way along Great Western Road the way only Glasgow taxis seem to do, unless you've been on a rickshaw in India but that's a different cultural matter altogether. Anyway they don't have the same squeaking sensation do they? Its kind of churning Private Queen's insides up a bit. He still hasn't said a word to the driver yet who is currently, right at this very minute, rattling on about The Press photographer and Princess Diana and how the guy should be beheaded on the Eiffel Tower for what he done. Billy knows for sure the guy is taking the pish. He knows Queenie is a journalist. He's picked him up from the front door of The Sunday Tribune on many occasions in the past. This driver's rudeness is the equivalent of Billy saying that all taxi drivers are wankers but he's not saying a thing, keeping the old powder dry for the moment. Now he's on about fuel prices and how Blair was lucky to get elected again in 2001. He's wrongly assuming that Billy is proceeding in a westerly direction to go to Maryhill police station on official press business, some kind of interesting news investigation, and the driver's like this, I'll gie ye a story if ye like. Then he's fantasising about how he beat up two intruders who broke into his next door neighbour's house, such a nice wee old dear tae and the rain coming down in torrents so it is and his wee fast black windae wipers gon at ninety tae the dozen tae, you know the type, the wee fast Nazi salute style, demanding krystalnacht with every clean sweep washing away Scotland's rain drops. And Walter Smith tae, he should never have left Scotland for Rangers and David Taylor wisnae even man enough to bury the hatchet. Billy feels like burying the hatchet right

into this bastard's napper: the splashing of blood puddles and the squeaking of his brakes and the air freshener in the back seat and his wee tartan rug. He's past Maryhill shopping centre and that'll be £5.50 please and Billy is reaching into his pocket for six, 'keep the change you ignorant bastard' he's sayin right in the guy's ear, and slammin the door shut.

The Detective Inspector Gibson is awaiting his arrival at the hallway and he's like this, 'Oh its you did ye tie yer horse up ootside?' And Billy is momentarily taken aback by this fine example of Glasgow's finest expressing a sense of humour in this candid fashion, in the face of adversity tae.

And Billy imagines firing back, in his big John Wayne voice tae:

You bet your life I did pilgrim  
She's filling up just as we speak  
Ran into some injuns on Maryhill Road  
but I guess they're dead injuns now.

And the Detective Inspector Gibson is looking at Queenie as if he is daft but you can tell he likes him, that glint in the eye, and just at that point Billy feels like hugging him, a big bear hug between brothers, right there and then, a bit of male bonding with the police authorities right there in Maryhill police station - just the ticket for an emotionally deprived man like Queenie. Just the tonic that wiz - a bit of love and understanding man between him and the authority figures of today's highly taut society.

He felt like spilling the whole can of beans right there - everything that was heavy on his chest, right oot wae it, in the middle of the nick, just burst into tears, maybe get them to rustle

him up a wee roll and sausage with plenty of broon sauce and a piping hot mug of tea, maybe get the feet up for a while, maybe a game of dominoes with the desk sergeant or 7 card switch even, followed by a wee nostalgic chat about the Ibrox disaster or Heysel even if the guy was up to date on his disasters. Anyway. Disnae matter. Just that. You know what one means - the bloody tears welling up inside him, in his eyes now thinking about the vertex and all it involved.

The Detective Inspector George Gibson what was he like man, the slightly bow-legged, young fresh faced born-again christian type with the piercing blue eyes and the smooth white skin. Probably an ex-amateur footballer. And a Scottish Nationalist with a wife called Morag. You know the type - managed one game for Clyde Reserves or summit and still has a copy of the programme on his bedroom wall. He had to cut his promising career short after a crunching tackle from the opposition's centre half. You know the type - a sort of broken door sporting has-been.

Billy's immediate impression of him being a bit of a fresh-faced do-gooder with a cynical twist to his personality is further substantiated by the guy's next line, because he says take a seat son. It's unfunny and patronising because Billy knows the Detective Inspector is now merely using this false familiarity to create empathy with his victim, who is Billy Queen, the man he is about to try and convict. Either that or he knows Uncle John. He used to be a cop. Still is. Once a cop always a. Suddenly this dolly bird of a policewoman with short blond hair appears and Billy's like this, 'Any chance of a roll and sausage with lots of brown sauce?' and she catches the eye of the DI who is leaning back in his chair with the forefinger standing erect on his lip. And Billy, he's trying hard here to interpret the signal the DI is giving the blond Private Pauline because if truth be told he doesn't really want a roll and sausage he's just playing games with himself to keep himself bloody amused in light of all this nonsense he's being forced to endure. Cummon, is he getting his roll and sausage or not? And Billy, he's asking for a piping hot mug of tea with milk and two sugars as well, no buts it's got to be

butter, and Private Pauline of the police authority is disappearing ,no doubt gone to prepare the bloody food!

‘What do you know about Sierra Leone?’ the DI is asking in a serious voice, and Private Queen is launching into a monologue about the fact there used to be British soldiers there, sent to repel the rebellious West Side Boys who were threatening to overthrow the country in a bitter battle over diamond plantations, guns and pure heroin. Billy is conscious of Paterson's anti-intellectual nature so he proceeds to talk about the ex-British colony in more detail, pointing out that Britain's violent imperialist history was always eventually going to backfire and pointing out that the empire was recoiling at a rate of knots, folding in on itself, hence the rapid growth of asylum seekers and racist taxi drivers and policemen. There's a kind of dumb silence. Gibson is playing with his elastic band, twanging it back and forward, and he opens his mouth as if he is about to say something, to attempt to join the debate perhaps, but nothing comes out, he's effectively dumb-struck and Billy sees now that he's confused, ok he pretended to quite like the John Wayne impersonation but Billy reckons Gibson doesn't like this brief analysis of international politics because he wasn't very good at History and Modern Studies at school - in fact, Gibson wasn't very good at anything at school which is probably why he's in Her Majesty's police force, right here, right now.

But Billy can sense this fresh faced bastardo has an ace up his cuff - he has something on Private Queen - of that there is no doubt - he can feel it coming, this thingy, this threat to his own personal security. That's why he's here after all, to be threatened, they will threaten him with his freedom, they will threaten to put him in prison. And George Gibson he's reaching into his drawer and throwing a large brown envelope across the desk and there's a dramatic pause of about 8 seconds which the church-going policeman manages to hold exceptionally well and Billy phew, he can't believe that silence man, deafening it is, and still not a sausage in sight. Now The Detective Inspector is explaining to him how forensic found this envelope in his flat and how it is covered in Samuel Paterson's fingerprints. And Billy is like this:

‘Well what the hell pilgrim!’ But it's no longer a laughing matter is it, Detective Inspector Gibson up Morag's fanny on a Saturday, off to church on Sunday? And inside are photographs of soldiers from the 3rd Parachute Regiment holding the beheaded heads of black women and children. And one guy he's holding it up like The Scottish Cup, with a big smile on his face and then the photographs show them systematically putting the heads onto their bayonets and posing for the camera. One of the captions reads ‘Keep The Heid The Paras Are In Town,’ scrawled in badly spelled virtually unreadable handwriting. And the roll and sausage has appeared and Billy is thinking how he remembers Paterson showing him the photographs. Billy thought they were the scoop of the century to be honest but Auld Nick said no, ‘Let it be,’ that’s what he said, ‘Let it be.’ And the DI he's asking Billy why these photographs were in his flat and Billy just shakes his head and says ‘Mr Paterson must have given me them.’ He thought he’d given them back. Infact, he was sure he’d returned them. Nobody could get into his flat except him and Uncle John. He helped him find the place, so Billy gave him the spare key. And it's the staring game now. George Gibson staring right through Private Queen’s very soul, searching it for signs of guilt. And he's likely to find something there because Billy is a pretty shifty character, all things considered. He's weaselled his way into some very strange little situations indeed in his life and done some things he's not particularly proud of to be honest. Billy is feeling uneasy now. Where was he that night and how did he get that envelope? Gibson is now strongly advising him to quickly obtain an alibi for the night Samuel Paterson was killed.

And the church-going Mr Gibson, the Eric Liddell type, has turned into a twisted mother fucker no doubt reaping revenge for all that pent-up frustration at being a cop and his hatred of professional types like Billy boiling over, except Billy still truly believes there is a corner of Gibson's heart that quite likes him, probably because of the John Wayne impersonations - probably the best laugh this wee dullard has had in a while. He can just imagine him at The Police Federation ball or whatever these fuckers attend, the bloody Lodge probably, telling his

mates about the mad murder suspect who impersonates John Wayne. But he's telling Billy in no uncertain terms that they will be asking him back in for recorded questioning and that they will be watching his movements very closely indeed and, in the midst of all this treacherous negativity Billy is cutely wondering to himself exactly when this roll and sausage will arrive. It never does. At least if it does, Billy certainly never ever sees it, let alone tastes the brown sauce.

He's back on Maryhill Road again, turning up the collar of the Cancer Shop crombie and the rain, plummeting and plip-plopping onto Private Queen's slightly balding napper in big heavy Glaswegian droplets, making the hair gel shine now and the spiky look tae, looking even mair ridiculous when wet. Nae wonder his hair bloody stands on end but - the shite he's in. And he's glancing at his watch and the mobile is ringing again and it's Rich Tits and he can't be arsed at the moment because he's thinking of ways he can get hold of those Sierra Leone photographs - award winning material. Of that there is no doubt.

But Rich Tits is adamant. She's asking where he is and it's 4.45pm and Billy's voice is full of anger because he suddenly can't be bothered with her, she's getting on his bloody nerves if you want to know the truth because her voice seems so philistine and here he is up to his bloody eyeballs in this, this thingymajig, all this stuff man. And there's no way he's going back to the office and his voice now, it's different, depressed now, in the rain and that, no John Wayne swagger, a wee wean's tiptoes maybe, but no swagger. And Rich Tits, being a woman, senses immediately that it is different and of course his sadness and current solitude intrigues her because she's a nosey bitch who enjoys feeding off the misfortune of others. She wants to meet up for a drink before they go to that wee Italian on Great Western Road. He'll meet her upstairs in The Cul De Sac on Ashton Lane in about 15 mins. There isn't a taxi in sight and he's getting soaked and his mobile is ringing again and it's Auld Nick and he's like this:

Queen, it's Bob Nicolson here.

Where the hell are you?

And Billy can hear the click of the putter hitting the golf ball as Nicolson speaks and he can imagine the twisted expression on that old phoney's face as he is thoroughly preoccupied with taking the next putt yet in the same breath pretending he is anxious to speak to his ace reporter. Auld Nick wants to control Billy. He knows Uncle John. So he probably feels responsible for the boy's journalistic progress. And Billy is telling him he's up at Glasgow University.

'Never mind that,' he says. 'Forget your academic friends. I've had a Rev Jack on the ringer biting my ear about your bloody St Petersburg assignment. Now don't piss me off here, did you tell him your assignment was some sort of PR trip or something? I mean does he realise you are going there to dig up some hard news for us? Listen to me. Get on the blower to him immediately and let him know in no uncertain terms that you are from The Sunday bloody Tribune not Travel Weekly, do you understand? I will not compromise our objectivity. And get back into the office pronto. I want 1500 words with background on your Young Tories story.'

Billy is like this, 'Of course, good-bye.'

OVER AT The Cul de Sac Rich Tits is waiting at the bar.

As one drink follows another and, as the alcohol begins to bite, she starts to rabbit on about Auld Nicolson and the rest of the backbenchers. Constantly looking around inside the office for gossip and news instead of applying her curiosity elsewhere. The lips tae, moving up and down and rabbit this and rabbit that but Billy can't hear what she's saying because it's all slowing down again and the hubbub in the pub like a record being played at the wrong speed and the pub filling up now and from the corner of his eye Billy can see Leah Macpherson, the

manageress of Hardy's pub. She's the one who doubles up as Fran Healey's unofficial PR person whenever he returns to Glasgow because before he became famous he used to rehearse upstairs in her pub. Old Sheonagh eh? Managed to fix Private Queen up with an exclusive interview with Fran The Man last year and Billy's eyes are darting back and forward, ready to time his move, everything suddenly back into focus again and the pub packed and Billy excusing himself. He's pushing his way through the crowd to the toilet but it's only a diversion and splashing water on the face now and looking at himself in the cracked mirror, how symbolic is that, and the mad hair style tae and the slightest of cracks beginning to appear around his eyes and the three day growth. Christ, where was he the night before last? Where was he the night Samuel Paterson was murdered? Fuck Billy. Cummon. Concentrate man. Christ, he'd soon have a goatee if he didnae get a shave.

Mind that lassie Fiona he used to go out with in his first year at uni. The languages student fae Shawlands tae. She's like this, why don't you grow a goatee? And she kept saying this and it was beginning to get on Billy's nerves in fact and then he turned up to meet her one day outside the modern languages building and she was wearing Jesus sandals and, christ, Billy did a really weird thing, the combination of the Jesus sandals and the great goatee request was too much to contemplate and he made his excuses and left her standing there. Just like that. No fuckin explanation or look I really like you but, just nothing, no warning and no more communication. No more kissy cuddly in the back row. Nothing. Avoided her for the rest of his time at university. Instinctive revulsion. Ended.

And Billy cupping his hands and drinking the water, might as well start the rehydration process to combat the inevitable hangover. He's lifting up the collar of the Cancer Shop crombie, making the right collar stand on end, Elvis style, before he opens the door again and pushes his way through the crowd, accidentally on purpose banging into Leah..

Within minutes of course the conversation turns to Fran Healey and Leah and Fran were both delighted with Billy's profile piece and it's framed on the wall of the pub.

And he's due back next month is Fran and, christ Billy was that really almost one year ago, and Fran is that sort of guy, dead down to earth he is, knows his roots, always conscious of his Scottishness, and Billy is slipping her his new business card and already planning a repeat performance next month in Leah's pub. A very profitable chat for Private Queen! All the time watching Rich Tits out of the corner of his eye, keep yer eye on that bitch you never know what she's up to. But she's still sitting at the bar, knocking back the Chardonnays and there's just the beginnings of the slightest hint that that wan is losing the plot. And should he stay or should he go now? Should he stay or should he go now? If he goes there will be trouble, and if he stays it will be double. And he's saying ta ta to Leah, winking at her as he pushes his way way to the exit, and Rich Tits sees him leaving and he's standing on his tiptoes and pointing to the watch, signalling to her that he's urgently heading off somewhere. See you later. And to be honest he reckons she's too sozzled to care about the wee Italian anyway. And a bitch like big Rich Tits, she knows the score anyway, or does she? Does she know the score Billy? Is that right? Is that what wan thinks?

Anyway, Billy is back out onto Ashton Lane again, only this time he's moving away from the door quickly just in case Rich Tits decides to follow. He really can't be bothered with her mind-fuck games, so he's moving up a gear, striding across the wet cobblestones, turning right, up the stairs past the Boy George building, the darkness and the rain tae, pelting down from all angles, the QM's posters sodden and falling off the walls, the tall Ivory Tower ding, ding, donging its 7pm. The splashing and the wet feet and puddles, too deep to imagine, up tae yer ankles in places and the big frown on the face, just bought them shoes from Burtons. What do you expect him to be? Smiling? Up past the Modern Languages building where he emotionally executed Jesus sandals, that's History, Archaeology, Careers Guidance and the big round reading room, and the wee goths inside and out, right opposite John Smith's. That's where he fell in love, christ the tears in his eyes again or was it just the rain, don't know, don't care Billy Queen eh, fuck sake Billy get a grip, the heart racing now and down the hill at last

swinging left and into the relative warmth and light of the Glasgow University Union. Ahhh Bisto. That unique aroma of pie chips and beans, wintergreen, rugby scrums and big fizzy ones. And the big portraits tae of all those cheesy big politicians on horseback wearing the wigs, plausible big bastards.

What was he doing here? He wanted away from them, that's what he was doing here. Time to think. Weigh up the odds. So Henley is in Sumana Hali? He knew that anyway. Lance told him ages ago. Why was he back to haunt him? Why was Auld Nick giving him these leads? Cummon Queenie, think. Spit lad, spit. Uncle John and Auld Nick had been friends, contacts, drinking buddies. They all knew the score. That's how come Queenie got a start on The Tribune - through a friend of Uncle John's. Even Auld Nick, the way he treated Queenie. It was if he owned him! As if Queenie owed him something. Where was he on the night of 14th November? Out drinking that's where he was. Up the Cul de Sac. Christ it was only last week. The deceased had only ever been in his flat once. But the photos? Had he kept them or not. Did Paterson take them back? He couldn't bloody remember, if truth be told! He stopped for a second; just standing there in the dark Glaswegian night where faceless motors splash rainwater on your legs and only drunk men speak.



## Chapter 11

### Ayr in Winter

THE ALARM is going off and it's 7am on a cold November morning and it's making Billy jump, the heart thumping and the heid tae, the mooth like an Arab's armpit or perhaps even the bottom of a budgie cage if you feel like it. No jimjams for this soldier last night. Straight to his scratcher with the suit still on, the tie slightly askew and the curry stain from Ashoka still visible at the bottom edge of his immaculately starched white collar. Why? Why would it be starched old boy? Probably because he constantly bought new ones instead of washing and starching the way mama used to do in The Golden Age. Better to pay £5 for a new one, the price of two frothy beers, than to spend precious time sweating over the starch machine in the utility lobby. No more halcyon days for you boy. Eyes to the front. March in good order. Where were you again? The mind racing now. The eyes twitching furtively from left to right, throbbing, like a penis on ecstasy. Curling up into the foetus shape. Memories of mum. Men with drinking habits needing to be loved, needing to be pulled to the bosom and comforted, the knees trembling slightly and the teeth and the chin chattering. The bile rising in the throat and wanting a head holder, there lad, get it up, get it all up, that's the boy, you'll feel better wance you extricate it from your gullet ma lad. But why us Sarge? Because we're here lad. Nobody else. Just us.

Christ. Where was he? There was a deep droning sound, like a double decker bus passing right

by his windae! What a cheek at this time of the night. Has the Glasgow Cooperation got nae respect left for ordinary town dwellers struggling to come to terms with the pressures of this computerised age in which we exist from day to day? Those ancient craftsmen of the organic age didn't have to deal with this shite. They were at one with their motivational psychology and with nature. I mean it simply isn't cricket anymore old boy.

When did he leave? Prioritise. Henley. Auld Nick. Follow the lead. He'd given him something before he left the office. Yes he had. No he hadn't. Didso. Didnae. A crumpled up piece of paper. A contact. In relation to what. In relation to somebody he should go and see if he wanted to discover more about the British Israeli Movement.

Billy is staring at the plain white bedroom wall now. It's as white as a pan loaf.

Looking closely now at the whiteness. Feeling its aesthetic smoothness from here.

Its simplicity is awesome.

Triangular.

Vertex.

He sat on the edge of the bed, his feet touching a half eaten pizza, flotsam from last night.

Spewed on the bedroom floor at one stage. Blasted Jack Daniels and Coke. Jesus Billy, what are you doing with your life, stumbling across it now, slip sliding away on the pizza pie, the mushrooms black around the edges like a Hiroshima sunset. Get into the shower boy! Letting the weight of the hot water thump onto his aching head and neck unable to muster a wank because of the brewer's droop and he's thinking about conference time again and Auld Nicolson man, the way he creeps about. And the fact that. The fact that what? What fact? He switches the shower off and braces himself for the cold blast of air which hits him when he steps outside the bathroom. Fuck sake. Freezin isnae the word. Baltic is too warm. Antarctica? Na. It lacks that Je ne sais quoi. Disnae quite have the same ring to it. Naw but listen. Whitjecall it? Do you think they get it as baltic on the English Riveria? Down Brighton and Hove Albion way? Old grandmothers and fathers on the front, rustling the sweetie packets in their poackets, a quick smoke at the pipe while one gazes across The Channel old boy, the white cliffs and the black labrador, country manors, huns from the sun and all that puerility - the tartan blanket and the quivering knees: little England drooling as the asylum seekers enter via the tunnel - memories of The Great Escape and The Empire now folding in on itself. And he's rubbing himself down now and spraying the Magnificent Harley Davidson, original of course, under the old armpit and pulling the boxers on and another new white shirt and a big blue shiny tie with the Windsor Knot.

he wall. If he had the time

He could

Pop into B&Q tonight. Get the paints to start this handywork, a bit of painting and

decorating was needed. He was going to paint the wall. Except he doesn't actually want to do it. He merely wants to *think* about doing it. The actual act itself would be an anti-climax. There was something else. This thought would be his, and his alone. It widnae belong tae naebedy right. Not the state nor the authorities. Nobody at all. No point in rushing in. Do it all properly Billy. First of all get the poster with all the different colours, neon pink, mid-morning blue, yellow dreamspout.

Sit down with a big mug of tea and choose maybe your top five colours.

1. Rose White
2. Natural Saffron
3. Dreamy Peach
4. Apricot Crush
5. Tuscan Terracotta

Then

Maybe the following night or at the weekend even, go back to the big DIY store and purchase sample tubes with a small brush to begin with. That was it. Henley and The British Israeli Movement. Pud trying to help him after speaking with Nicolson in the glass office, the goldfish bowl of Glasgow journalism. Where was that old crumpled up piece of paper, that ancient symbol of the auld school contact system? It was there. Where? There it wiz, there. On top of the bedside cabinet! Beside his loose change. Nicolson, what he is all about man? He's written The Royal Burgh Hospital, down by Ayr somewhere, a fulla by the name of Davie Scobie. He's not hanging around now. Straight out the door now. Fuck sake, there's a

big Glasgow polis standing guard at Paterson's door. Scares him shitless. Morning sir, he says. Mornin says the big polis.

And the icy Glaswegian wind a-blawin in his face man. It's all coming into focus again. Christ it really is getting clearer. All that happened last night - the brain beginning to focus. And the post alcohol paranoia. He feels like greetin now. What did I do last night? And the night before? When was that mercenary guy, my neighbour found again? Mammy, daddy - somebody take pity on Private Queen's soul. Needing a warm milky bosom on which to rest the napper. This horror he's having to face up to. And the stench of human waste wafting up from the warm winds of the underground and he's thinking now that when the warm winds meet the icy cold Siberian winds, there may be a thunder clap, inspired by 500 tonnes of Glaswegian shite slushing about, underneath the tube. Aye, a thunder burst, the clouds crashing together and the shite and pish of a million Glasgow hangovers and curries pouring down on one's heid. It's all around ye man. It permeates your skin. Your way of life. Your very existence old boy!

And one single please and the wee steel mesh cage and the green uniform and sliding down deep into the bowels of the clockwork orange tube now and others, many others, in the same boat, all the arses wiggling about and the women, their arses, and all trying to look formal and professional now. All the papers being read. The Glasgow silence. The wind blasts through the tunnel and the tube screeches to a halt. We're all clambering on and Billy prefers to stand, avoid the stares. The quality press, old boy. If only they knew what they were reading and the reasons behind the journalists writing it they'd probably throw those tools of capitalism away right now and start the damn and blast revolution right here, right now. In the tube. Naw but its all right kiddin. You still need money to buy mince and for Billy that meant stories. That intelligent looking guy reading The Herald - looks like an accountant or a lawyer or summit - Private Queen is thinking about pulling the paper away and asking him, excuse me, I was wondering if you might have any stories floating about. My name is Billy Queen of

The Sunday Tribune, Scotland's own paper - is there anything you wish to say this cold November morn? The chugging back and forth man, he's holding onto the rail now, the contents of his gut sloshing around inside and the mouth still like the bottom of a tropical fish tank man and christ not a story to his name, not this week, not last week, nor the week before. Fuck the public transport sytem. Billy's getting a taxi doon to Ayr right away. Right as soon as he gets aff this stinking underground. Amidst all the confusion and chaos it is becoming increasingly clear to Private Queen that he has missed something. Billy hails a fast black. But the taxi driver and him just sit there. So Billy and the taxi driver sit there in silence. And The Driver, of course, is asking all the questions, what do you want me to do now Mr Queen, what is our next move, we cannot sit here forever old boy. The nose is twitching. Instinctively his brain is sub-editing all the nonsense, distilling only the purest facts. Clearing the brain cells. It's sparkling. He knows where to find the diamond but his hunch isn't yet based on empirical facts. It is only an instinct. And he's leaning forward and telling the driver to take him to The Royal Burgh Hospital on the outskirts of Prestwick. You know there's a boundary charge? Yes pilgrim I know there's a boundary charge. And as the taxi jostles and squeaks and jolts out of Glasgow and onto the main Ayr Road, up past the Fenwick Moors, it's still dark and the wind is howling across the moor, buffeting the taxi. And the rain, battering against the windscreen, big blobs of the stuff, and all the normal people heading to work in their cars, or maybe heading home if they couldnae be fucked. Not for Billy that. This returning home business was not on the agenda. Not if they were still watching his bloody flat. Aye. Across to Prestwick. And the hospital in the forest. For the mentally deranged. And Billy is pulling his notebook from deep inside the Cancer Shop crombie and the name Davie Scobie of The Black Watch stares out at him. I'm here to see Davie Scobie of The Black Watch, says he. Who are you? she says. I'm an old friend, he phoned me yesterday. And in Scobie's room there is military memorabilia; photographs of various military campaigns. Scobie is sitting on his bed with the trackies and a

bottle green sweatshirt on. He's twiddling with something: earphones perhaps, or rolling a ciggie. The point is his head is down; fully concentrated he is, or sad, maybe about to break down and greet. He's like the way Billy's dad was after a confab with the vertex: intense, reflective, anxious as to who he hit, what he damaged after the uncontrollable outburst; shattered, crying quietly to himself. Billy's been here before all right. He'd need to gie him space, talk to him from afar, bring him round gently: lovingly in the case of his dad.

'Davie. It's me. Billy. Billy Queen from The Sunday Tribune. You phoned me yesterday mate. You informed me that the nursing staff in here are being paid extra by the MOD to silence you?'

Davie's voice: it's all slurred and full of drugs. Too fuckin right they ur, he's sayin. And look at the state of me noo, pumped foo of their drugs so they bastards can control me. And Billy is staring right through the guy's very soul now. The trembling hands: the eyes still in a state of fright, the eyeballs rooster red, bulging from his shaven head; the tremble in the voice. He disnae want to talk. No yet. He could be one of them: kidding on he's a reporter. How can he know for sure?

How can anyone?

Know.

For sure.

'It was the vertex with my dad. Up there,' says Billy, pointing to the corner of the ceiling with his eyes. Where the lines of the corner connect: like a pyramid; you can see the triangle if you look long enough.

Davie shuts his eyes. Then rests his chin on his chest.

Tell me how they treat you in here Davie. Do they torture you?

‘No so much that. Just. Well.’

Davie sniffs: almost a greet but no quite. ‘Every day there's some reference made to The Gulf. A joke, a reference tae it; a big laugh; Iraqi warships steamin across the Irish Sea, that sort of thing. The nurses think we're not real men: as if we've broken doon while the real men keep gon. There's nae respect left. Know what I'm sayin? He's twiddling his thumbs on his lap, concealing his crotch.’

It makes Billy feel like gon hame. Right there and then. Chuck it all in. Get the paints oot. Fuck Henley and his sordid life.

But just as it's about to end, Davie comes roon.

‘They bastards don't know what it's like to have their bodies pumped fu of chemicals, he says. The nurses in here are aw fuckin MOD. This isnae a hospital. It's a fuckin prison for Scottish sojers who served in The Middle East, and who want to tell the truth about what happened.’

Davie, listen to me Davie. I'm gonnae ask you a question and I want you to clear your mind and think very carefully about the answer. A neighbour of mine used tae be in The Paras. He's a mercenary noo but he used to be in your regiment. His name is Sam Paterson. Do you know him? And the Davie Scobie isnae even trying tae remember. He's grabbin Billy's airm and he's like this:

‘Listen pal. You're a reporter right. Well report this back to the great British public. The Iraq War. It's over. Finished.’

‘What exactly do you mean by all this?’ asks Billy.

‘The Brits have sold out. We're on the retreat. Leaving those poor bastards to fight it out. There's going to be mass slaughter. We know that. We want to stop it. But they just won't allow it.’

‘Who won't allow it?’

‘Them. The governors. The intelligence spooks. Whatever you want to call them.

See yer pal, Paterson.’

‘Aye what about him?’

‘If he isnae already deid or half mad, he’ll have a similar story to tell you. Ex-army troublemakers.’

‘What about them?’

‘We’re on a hitlist. They want us deid because we’ve seen too much, know too much.

We’re disposable.’

‘Disposable what?’

‘Disposable fuckin items. See the boys who fought in The Gulf War? Disposable.

The Falklands: deid.’

Davie’s heid is trembling now. With all the pressure. He’s under pressure. From above and beyond. Billy feels he has to do something. Maybe offer Scobie a polo mint. Or an opal fruit if he had one: something to stop the shaking, to prevent the post trauma setting in. Anything. Please stop it.

‘Are you all right Davie?’ he asks. Your mouth is getting a bit frothy.

‘Why did you come here?’ asks Davie.

‘ You phoned me. I just happened to pick up the phone. It was transferred across to me in the office, that’s all. You phoned me. That’s the way it is: all things being equal; I came to see you Davie.’

‘I know you did son, I know you did. Must have been a helluva journey, all the way from the cross to the square like so.’

‘What cross?’

‘I don’t know. Any cross,’ says Davie. ‘Glasgow Cross: Kings Cross for all I know. I’m much obliged to you anyway, that’s ma point: all things being equal, you coming here in the manner in which you did.’

Davie grabs Private Queen's arm.

'Look at me. They've got me by the balls in here. I'm hooked on their drugs. And the nurses puttin oan the Arab accents every day. Making me feel even mair paranoid. Look at Gulf War syndrome, there's guys in here wae that, neurological problems, schizophrenia, psychosis, epilepsy, creeping fuckin madness, you name it, they look for any excuse to straitjacket you because you want to tell the truth.'

'Calm down Davie, please.'

'Don't tell me to calm down nothing. You could be wan of them for all I know. A special team, the boys.'

'What do you mean?'

'Just the way you walk and talk. Coming in here with your all things being equal.

Your BI patter.'

'What's BI patter?'

'The British Israeli Movement - the BI's we call them. Forget Gordon Brown. They call the shots. The BI's rule it. I'm tellin ye pal, there's a special team of them, you're probably wan for all I know, they're paid to keep an eye on guys like us after we're discharged. The BI's we call them - the British Israeli Movement. The idea is they have their own internal Middle East agenda, they just use Britain as the vehicle to maintain their own presence in The Middle East, and in other ex-colonies. There's this wan, Hindlay he's called, came in here wae the Special Branch tae see me, askin me questions about the pubs I went to in London. Ye know whit, they werni intersted in the terrorists, it's the mad sojers they want, the splinter groups they created in the first place to fight their dirty war from Whitehall. Now they want to drag us back in, take us aff the throat of the very enemy they trained us to kill.'

'Did you say Henley?' says Billy.

'Hindlay, Captain Hindlay I think it was, an old guy, ex Royal Signals, tall, grey, rectangular moustache.'

‘When was he here?’ says Billy.

‘Could have been weeks, months, no sure, you lose track of time in here. Don’t get me wrong, he was decent enough, spent more time talking about this project in India, I think because he knew because my grandfather once served there he wanted to talk about it, how he’s involved wae some foreign office aid project based in India. Him, him him.’

‘Did he tell you anything else? Naw that was about it. He was with this big Scots plain clothes guy who just stood there, occasionally joining in the conversation with an aye and an uhu, that was about it.’

And Billy is staring straight at this guy now. Searching for the thin line between truth and madness. And he's saying the truth is I can't remember your neighbour but you can be guaranteed there are more like him. Being watched and hunted by the authorities. Driven to drugs and suicide by their horrific experiences. And Billy feels the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. One of the male nurses has appeared behind him, standing there with the arms folded and the legs apart. And when Billy turns round to meet his gaze, it's as if the guy feels he has to say something to explain his presence.

‘It's time for your medication Davie. You'll have to ask your visitor to leave now.’

Billy turns away to look out of the hospital window and he can hear the wind whistling now and the trees rustling and the pitch darkness outside with the rain splattering against the window. Davie’s like this, grabbin him by the airm tae, ‘I hope you find out what happened to your neebor.’ And Private Queen is like this, take it easy Davie, I'll be back tae see ye soon, and as he walks away Davie is sitting up in the bed shouting manically, ‘No if ah see you first!’

The journey back to Glasgow is a long and treacherous one. With the wind battering the taxi, sweeping across The Fenwick Moor, and Billy with a serious feeling of emptiness. Like the way you feel on a Sunday at 6pm when that Songs of Praise shite comes on except much worse, much more haunting. He's frantic now. Where will he go? He can't go back to the flat.

The office even. Sit in a pub? Into the Maconnels for a quick beer maybe. And the taxi driver's like this, 'what was that aw aboot?' Although Billy has kind of befriended this wan, he doesn't even answer him. He just stares out of the window looking blankly at the bleak scene outside. The car headlights to the rear are right up close. It's a big black Saab convertible and it overtakes then cuts in in front of them, the guy in the front passenger seat getting a right good look in as it passes. Billy has another clear objective in mind now and that is what? What is Billy's objective? Why did Auld Nick give him that lead? Who are these people? And the black Saab tae, out in front now, but slowing down to let Billy's taxi pass it again. The sort of behaviour you would expect from a couple of boy racers on a summer's night.

But here.

In November.

Alongside The Fenwick Moor.

And who has Billy to go home to? Who can he discuss his fears with? He's staring at the driver now and, you know something, he envies that bastard's ignorance. The brain working overtime again and the eyes darting about in the heid. Cummon Billy.

get a grip man.

It'll all be over soon.

This thingy.

This thingymajig.

This existence.

And if that fuckin taxi driver even utters a word he swears he'll smash his fucking skull through that glass partition. Bloody Glasgow taxi drivers. He hated them with a vengeance. And the guy is talking tae. Talking away about some nonsense Billy isn't even listening to. Something about China or some pish like that. And how the Yanks should move in now and give them a doing. It's a battle for world domination and that. And the guys like this, constantly looking in the mirror, searching for some kind of acknowledgement from Private Queen. Acknowledgement about what? Billy is a split second away from heidering the guy right through the glass partition. He could pretend he's reaching into his pocket for something, tapping the guy on the shoulder and that, hey pal pull over a minute I've got something tae give ye. Fuck ye! Stitch that ya yabbering taxi driver Mr Shagnasty that ye ur. And christ the Japs are next to get it. They should have dropped ten nuclear bombs on them and finished them off for good. Women and weans the lot. Kapow. And just for a split second Billy is wondering if this is the same heidbanger he got the other day, because the patter is almost the bloody same. These Japs, they think they are aw Samurai warriors, a bunch of arrogant wee cunts if ye ask me.

Queenie almost hears himself saying but naebady is asking you, but he manages to keep the powder dry for a while longer. Completely out of context tae, Billy is like this hey pal gonni pull over at that wee shoap? Nae bother pal says the driver, are you gon in for a packet of Maltesers or something? And Billy is ignoring him and saying I'll be back in a minute and he's ordering some small cigars in the shop. He takes his change but he canni stand the thought of going out just yet so he walks through the back door of the shop and out into a wee back yard. And Queenie is lighting up a wee cigar now and blowing the smoke out into the damp Glaswegian air. And Billy, what is he like, he's climbing this wee wooden fence at the back

and lowering himself on to some waste ground, the jacket sticking on a nail toe but stuff it, it was only a Burton's job anyway. And he's saying good luck to himself in a German accent, the way the Gestapo chap said it to Richard Attenborough in the Great Escape, as he's about to board the bus. He's walking away from the whole mess. A warm glow again, in the chest this time. Thinking about that taxi driver sitting there patiently awaiting his arrival and hypothesising about how he would react when he walked into the wee shop in search of his disappearing customer. He'd be like this, where is that shiter? And Billy would be like this, the hands in the pocket, the shoulders slightly hunched, walking away from the whole scene, kicking a stone as he goes, leaving all the repression and bloody ignorance right behind him. Over another wee fence and a wee dog barking at him. Queenie swinging his right leg, making out as if he is about to kick it when he really isn't and it's going down on its front paws and wagging the tail, a friendly growl, full of fun this wee thing and he's into the next pub he sees for a swalli by the way, a big golden wan wae the bubbles frothing up nicely thank you very much. And the usual afternoon drinkers. Auld guys wae dugs and invisible war medals on their chests sitting there reminiscing about Eichmann and aw that war pish. And Billy, a lonely figure at the bar, the Cancer Shop crombie buttoned up to the neck, the bloody dicatphone whirring in the top right hand pocket just for fun and the mobile switched on to answering machine just for a change. Let it settle for a while. Then head back to the office. On foot even if he felt like it. Just for a wee change. Or he could even get wan of those bicycles, like the kind James Coburn got when he cycled through the countryside during The Great Escape. Aye that would look quite good, wae the cancer shop crombie oan and the bicycle clips and that, right up to the office door and in past the security guard, the big legs arched like a giant bow, right into the lift. Who knows he might even meet Rich Tits in the lift and be able to ask her if she fancies a ride. Then right up onto editorial. Right into Auld Nic's office wae it, reporter Billy Queen reporting for duty sir. I'm your new eco friendly cyclereporter, here to confer on you my desire to deliver an increasing number of EXCLUSIVES by way of

the common bicycle. And the strangest thing is happening to Billy because as he's standing at the bar with the big golden one he suddenly has the desire to jump it. Right over the top then out the back door again. He'd probably end up in a wifie's back garden or something if he kept this up. And he can't keep his eye off the wee opening at the back. He just wants to loup it to freedom again. All these old guys sitting there in silence waiting to die on a cold November Glasgow aifternin tae, it wid seriously burst yer heid this. So Billy's up anyway and up ye go over the feckin bar.

The adrenaline rush is incredible. If he gets caught he can aye say he's William Queen MA, ace reporter with The Sunday Tribune and that he's investigating some heinous drugs crime in the local neighbourhood. Naw. Second thoughts the manager might be a bit of a pusher himself, could end up in serious trouble, being held against his will while the manager and his bouncer or summit frisks Queenie against the door. Nae fear. So he's over the bar like a thoroughbred at The National and through the door into the kitchen and the eyes darting about in the heid looking for a quick exit. Anything just to get a breath of fresh air. And would you believe it the door is slightly ajar so he's making it even more ajar and pushing his way through the backyard. His head is gettin caught up in aw these white sheets hangin oot he canni break free from them. The bloody chief barmaid has been busy wae the old washing machine, of that there is no doubt. And he's walking through the sheets and one is sticking to his face, like the bloody Ku Klux Klan he is, the Grand Wizard or something! Just as well there are no anti-racists about or they'd hiv him lifted immediately. He's laughing to himself now as he wrestles with the sheet. One of the barmen is oot wae a cricket bat in his haun and he's shouting hey what the hell do you think yer dayin? Billy is like this turning round and catching a glimpse of the guy. He must have rickets or something because he's got the Glasgow bow legs. For a split second he thinks the guy looks like a cowboy about to draw his hipster. And Billy is shouting, in his big John Wayne voice, I'd advise you to watch who the hell you're talking to pilgrim. I'm just mindin my own business roundin up a few sheets. And

the guy is like this, in a kind of poofy effeminite voice tae, are you aff yer fuckin heid? But before he says another word Billy is running towards the back fence and jumping it in a wanner and there's a grassy verge on the other side wae empty Tennents Lager cans tae and Billy's foot catches one and it sends him rolling down the verge. But he's laughing all the way, and caring very little if he injures himself in the process and there are two dugs shaggin right in front of him, thought they only did that in spring time, the tongues hanging oot and so on. And he 's away from that pub and all that macho stuff and the guy with the cricket bat and standing waiting on a bus.

Might go to Loch Lomond for the day. Just tae clear the heid a wee bit. Maybe paddle in the loch. Or even dae a wee bit of hillwalking just tae get rid of the bloody cobwebs. Either that or take a bus tae Fife. Or Arbroath even. Somewhere he can get a smokey or something. Maybe watch the tide coming in or going oot, depending on what it felt like. Aye some sea air that's got to be the answer. Billy can just imagine Auld Nick's voice, he'd be like this where the bloody hell are you, get back tae the office this minute, you've got a big assignment comin up. Naw but the bus stop is deserted. And he's grateful for the Cancer Shop crombie because it's gettin cauld, ye ken yon damp, dank Glaswegian cold. Goes right through ye so it does. Wouldnae mind just goin hame. Maybe get the feet up in front of the fire. Watch the racin. A nice hot cup of tea. Naw but he canni get that out of his mind. That Sammy. Deid like that. The ginger hair and the dug shiverin at the door. Concentrate Billy. There's no way he can go back there. Bad scene that. Very bad scene. Too depressing to even contemplate. The cops would probably be watchin the flat anyway. Bloody spying on it or something. Knowing his luck, they'd probably have the sniffer dugs out there right now, sniffing around the confines of his inhabitanace. Sniffin his smelly socks and that. Hey cummon now. You'll no find anything in there. Private Queen. Having to stand there and take this pish. He's like this, look boss I'm going to have to go, the phone is cracking up, and he's slevvering into the mouthpiece to make it sound fuzzy and just as he is about to hang up he can hear Auld Nick

talking about a nine iron shot he played from the bunker when he was under pressure during an outing. When he hangs up Queenie is staring at some BNP graffiti on the battleship grey bus shelter. He's thinking about the all seeing, all hearing, all knowing third eye. That inexplicable one. The one that allows you to predict how people will behave in life before they actually go and do it. Most disturbing old boy. A gift. A talent.

And a nuisance. A nuisance because when you are listening to someone saying something you are actually hearing, deep down in your soul, what they are actually saying, what their real feelings are. It's a bit like mind reading. Except its based on a linguistic interpretation and on their body language. From a philosophical point of view, it could be argued that human beings in fact lie all the time for assorted reasons related to embarrassment, modesty, conceit, or whatever else you care to mention. Billy doesn't want to get into another taxi. He'd rather get a bus. Even if meant putting the wrong change in. Billy is getting on the first bus that comes. Sitting near the rear. Keep an eye on developments. Somebody may be watching you. But they won't get the chance, because you'll be watching them. And buttoning the Cancer Shop crombie right to the top. And Davie Scobie's coming into full view. The big yellow teeth and the rancid breath. Fact is stranger than fiction. It's enough to give you the willies when you think about it. Billy is pushing his knees against the seat in front, the eyes darting about in the heid and the dry mooth.

Searching for idealism. Somewhere. A sign of light on this dark day. The kids on the street wae the shell suits and the bow legs like a modern day Lowrie painting. Men tae looking over their shoulders, the arched neck as they walk, the fast paces and the haunted look on the face. As if the broo spies are watching them or something. The schemes of Glasgow are full of dodgy cunts like that. The eyes. And the wee quick, urgent walk. Christ they'd make great Nazis when you think about it. Fuck all else tae lose. Let's walk in a jerky fashion and follow the mad dictator. The whole agenda wiz just so fuckin scary. No but these young guys looked like whippets or greyhounds or summit. Gaunt and bony, but fit as fiddles tae. That is The

Glasgow Look. The mad trainers and that and the sporting trackies. Transitory types, even in their ain hames. And the other thing that bothered Billy about them was their stout moral fibre and sense of fairplay and desire to support the underdog and say the most ludicrous things at the most ludicrous of times during a social gathering for example. Shut it. Cummon Billy. There Billy.

Shhht.

Settle down now.

It'll all be over soon.

Back at the office everyone had obviously gone home for the night. The editorial floor retained that kind of low hum which only editorial floors possess, even at night it's obvious something is always happening. The old place may be bereft of human life but it's a false image because it could erupt at any minute. Billy switches one of the lights on and settles down at his desk to eat a fish supper he managed to bring in with him. He switches on his computer and sits with his feet up on the desk, the big Tracker Desert Boots free now from the stench of yesterday's dog dirt. There's a large brown envelope on his desk simply addressed to Billy Queen MA. He knows it must be from Auld Nick because that old bastard is always being sarcastic about Billy's education. Deep down, however, Billy doesn't mind the ribbing because he senses Auld Nick probably respects him for it, indeed Nicolson himself, given the opportunity, may have made a grade 1 academic himself because he had a mind like a bloody bear trap. As Billy lifts the envelope to investigate he hears a clatter coming from the back of the office, the section still in darkness. And the heart racing now, the dry mouth, and the head turning around quickly, momentarily catching a glimpse of some shadows, in Auld Nic's

office, some bloody activity of some sort.

Cummon Billy.

Get a grip man. Eyes to the front. March in good order. All things being equal we'll soon be out of here.

There's nobody there.

The office is empty Billy cummoan keep the heid here for christ sake. And the trembling hands. Into Auld Nic's office. Inside his desk there's a letter from his doctor advising him to stop drinking otherwise his liver is unlikely to hold out. Mmmm. Interesting. So the old boy hisnae long to go. Then the other unopened letter, with the British Israelism stamp, fuck who goes there? says Private Queen dropping the letter. There's somebody out there in editorial. But Billy what's he like man, he smells something and he's up, out of Auld Nick's seat, the Cancer Shop crombie still to the fore tae, and he's standing there in the darkness, deep inside Blue Beard's cavern, the hair standing erect on the back of his neck. Back in editorial he's checking under the desks and everything and there doesn't appear to be any signs of life. Back at his desk the brown envelope remains untouched. Some things have been neatly rearranged in his drawer, the way they do, to let you know they know. Who know? You know, they know. Fuck sake Billy. What? And Billy is ripping it open, a slight shake still in his left hand. Inside are some MI5 documents with the Top Secret, embargoed until November 2007, written on top. There are some old black and white photographs of Rudolph Hess and some photocopies of old newspaper clippings dating back to 1944. There's a compliment slip from Auld Nick saying, Thought this might help, Careful where you tread, Good luck, Pud. Underneath the slip, there's an Observer article featuring an interview with the ex-leader of

The British National Party Steven Tynedale, and highlighted are some quotes about The British Israeli Movement.

He hears a clicking. Jesus Queenie, there's somebody in here. Over at the gents a light, a cloud of smoke. He stands there in the dark, sweeping his hair back, the fag lit. Who is that? Nicolson. What are you doing in here at this time of night? You'd think you were investigating me the way you're carrying on. Listen Billy son, see at the moment, you *are* under investigation. Go home, get the feet up, leave it for a while. But there's a story? Aw, there's always a story, you know that. It's just that some stories are better left untouched. Why do they think I killed my neighbour? They don't know if you killed your neighbour son. But if you don't leave off it, you'll no even know yourself if you killed your neighbour. Take a break. Go and sun yourself somewhere. All things being equal that's about all you can do. What about my dad? What about your dad? What happened to him in Egypt - with Henley - you know don't you? Look, you asked me about British Israelism, it's not all that bad. They have to watch over ex-servicemen; make sure their needs are being catered for, that they're settling back into Civvie Street, that sort of thing. You know about my dad don't you? Well we don't take you on here without knowing some things, that's obvious. You have to be given the chance. The chance? The chance to what? To see things for yourself Billy, that's the whole point. You have to be free to see it; for yourself. Like your neighbour, he got the chance, but he couldn't settle. According to my sources he kept mouthing off in the pub about The Falklands campaign. Like Davie Scobie tae. All things being equal he should have zipped it when he got the chance. Auld Nicolson man what's he like? The master of misinformation. Fuelling the fire whenever he gets the chance to do so: pouring petrol on the flames of paranoia. He's like this, wolfing into the fish now. Leave Henley, he says. He was good at that: picking on one emotive word and leaving it out to dry. He always did that when he was fishing for a political exclusive - pretended he was in the know. He really could be an old drama queen whenever he got the chance. Billy's like this: Nick? What? Get aff my desk.

Strangely, Auld Nicolson does as he's told. Slowly. Very slowly. He retreats back into the darkness of the office. Standing at the far corner of the editorial floor Billy sees another shadowy figure. And he feels now like curling up into the foetal position and forgetting all of this. This situation he finds himself in. This time it's the security guard, shining his torch, staring at Billy, suspiciously. Even although the guy knows who he is, he is still suspicious of him. And that is a depressing scenario. That Glaswegian twist of the neck, the chin resting on the right shoulder, the haunted, gaunt face, with the torch shining right on it, spotlighting all the insecurities man, it really was so alarming, so desperately alarming.

Somebody help me.

Put an end to this. This feeling. This damned existence. Oh its you Mr Queen, aye its me Mr Queen and you're right I have no home to go to because what you don't seem to understand is that they are watching it, my home. My flat is being monitored by the authorities because they are suspicious, just like you. They think I stuck a knife into my neighbour's neck. I stuck a knife into the back of my neighbour's neck and now he's deid. Why? Because he was playing his bloody music too loud, why do you think? I chapped his door and asked him politely at first, that I wouldn't mind so much if it was half decent music. But he wouldnae listen.

Aye.

The security guard tae. Still standing there, making it clear from his body language that he would prefer if Billy left the premises, even although he has no jurisdiction to say he should.

Only one place to go.

The pub.

But not MacConnells.

Somewhere Billy didn't know anyone.

He's standing up, slipping Auld Nick's envelope into the Cancer Shop crombie and into the lift, walking past the other prick of a security guard at the desk. He's outside in the cold, dark night. And he sees a figure across the other side of the road and it looks very like Auld Nick, the same body language, that swinging golfer's gait of his. He's turning right to head into the town centre, back down past The Odeon and into Bar 6. He's ordering a cold golden one, and a couple of guys follow him in. He can see them from the his third eye, the wan he developed in Dubai. Billy can smell them. And it's making him profoundly depressed just to think about it. This feeling of being watched. The barmaid, a young studenty type, doesn't have a clue. She's pouring the pint and he envies her as well, what in her second year at Uni or something, not knowing a fucking thing about the real world. The world of Auld Nick. And the mad sojer. And the guys at the golf club. Soon Billy was going to get out: away somewhere different. Thank christ he was getting out of Glasgow. And he's sipping his pint. Feel like saying hello to them, these guys at his back all the time with the jeans and trainers and leather jackets. Hey you fuckers. Away and read a book. That's what he feels like saying to them. Go and read a bloody book!

These authorities.

Servants of the state old boy.

The wee barmaid is smiling at him and he feels like giving her a big hug, not in a sexual way, but in a humane way. Is this the closest Billy will ever come to a religious experience? This non-religious West of Scotland, hard drinking, hard talking man. And as he takes a big gulp from the golden one he ponders this point in more depth. Just a sudden wave of philanthropic desire. He wants to give her something in return for that smile. Let's face it, she doesn't have to do it. It is as if she was saying don't worry be happy Billy. As part of his overall experiment, he's smiling back at her now.

But it is obviously just an illusion.

Because she isn't smiling back at him smiling back. Don't be silly. This is Glasgow. If you get a smile from a barmaid, it's a wan aff, leave it that, don't expect to build a relationship on it or anything.

And don't think about building a conversation around it. Christ Billy do you want jam on it or something?

This communication problem

It had to stop.

Yet Billy remembered something about German women when he was on that assignment in Hamburg. Put simply, Billy doesn't seem to have a communication problem with German women for some reason. He finds them very direct and easy to understand. Not like The Britishers. With their complex mood swings and sexual bloody hang-ups. The female German's thought processes are far more straightforward and logical. Ok now, we hav had zee meal let's

go to bed and fuck, that sort of thing. And after we hav fucked we will fuck some more and zen I will run you to the airport and say aufwiedersehn.

I vill not contact you.

And you vill not contact me.

Understand?

Ze next time you are in Hamburg, phone me and we vill fuck again. Do you understand!

And that's making Billy smile. The smile back on the face now. And the big Cancer Shop crombie with ze collar turned up tae. Naw but another thing about the German birds, they don't hold it against you in evidence for being alone in a pub. But was he alone in the pub? Was he fuckin whatdoyoucallit, alone, in the office, when Auld Nick approached him? Why was he warning him away from Henley? That's how it felt. That's how it actually wiz. No get real Billy.

Cummon.

Concentrate lad.

That's not true. In Scotland, as in Ireland, people are very understanding about that lone Celtic thing, you'll never walk alone an that. Lonely Irish and Scots migrating to strange lands with their big suitcases. Going to find a new life in new lands.

On their own.

Nothing strange about that.

Everybody getting to fuck out of Scotland because its so bloody depressing to be here in the first place. Shut it prick. Just think about Auld Nick. Wiz he there or no, up in the office? Fuck Billy concentrate. And what about Paterson? Does one remember entering his abode that night? The fuckin different voices in the heid and the. And the what. What William? Billy. Private fuckin Queen. Get back up there now boy. Find out for sure, wance and for all, if Nicolson is actually there. Then again, no. Never look back. Up and out. Forward march. Only Henley has the real answer to the question, ah lie about my father.

He still can't quite understand that wee barmaid, however. If it was him he would try to follow the smile up, possibly with another smile and then a wee bit of conversation. Maybe she had been trained at the barmaid's college to give one smile to the customer and one smile only. Maybe you only got the smile when you purchased a golden one. If that was the case Billy would be getting pished tonight. Get her smiling all over the place.

She has a really cute face.

Which automatically makes a man think about a woman's arse.

Look at the pretty face. I'd like to kiss that face then logically progress.

The Germans understand that.

They see human sexuality as being inextricably linked to animal sex. Dogs sniff one another's arses, so should we.

You and me baby, ain't nothing but mammals so let's do it like they do it on The Discovery Channel. Hello boys, are you reading this, can you see me, I can see you. Nice tae be nice.

Nice tae be watched. Nice tae watch you watchin me ya cunts.



## Chapter 12

### Away Past Barlinnie

HE KNEW he had to siphon it through. Siphon? Siphon what? The dirt boy, the dirt. Spit then blow your bugle. Rally the troops for one last hurrah!

He didn't want to be here. Where? Under them bridges that's fuckin where. The Hielemann's Umbrella at Glasgow Central, that's where. Couldn't go home last night, not with the big polis standing guard at his flat and them with their binoculars in the tenement opposite, staking it all out no doubt. Better to cast off all that excess baggage and travel light. He looked in his wallet: £50, not bad. Plus he had been paid a few days ago, too busy to understand that fact. What fact? The fact that he'd been paid and could soon be standing with the rest of them waiting on the Debenham's Blue Cross half price sale to open up The St Enoch's Centre, that's if he had any common sense. But no. Not this soldier. Bangalore was his clear cut objective. Then onwards to Henley. Leave all them fuckers to it. He could take a plane. No. Wait a minute. Too obvious. A train then, ya prick. No way man. He would be too easily followable in a train, the quality press all held up high like that and the twitching eyebrows, the crossed legs, the bustle and everything of that sort. Better to hop on a bus at Buchanan Street. They'd never expect that: the professional man on a bus routine. But it would be better for him. Better for his overall health and well being. Just get up to Buchanan Street and take it from there he said to himself. Maybe go to Kings Cross if he felt like it; get

himself into a travel outlet and buy a one way ticket to India. Goa first. Just to break him into the pace and routine of a new continent. Then travel overland by bus to Bangalore - that would shake em off, confuse them all, one and all, all for one, it would confuse them. This chat about India. It reminded him of a quote from his philosophy lecturer which stuck in his memory from university.

‘Gandhi defeated ‘The English’ by holding a mirror up to their uncivilised nature,’ he said. ‘It is this intelligent, peaceful response which unnerves the armies of all great colonial powers – it stirs their consciousness, eats at their soul, and, in that split second of human hesitation, the battle is won and India is free.’

He wanted to find that reflection. That’s what this hunt-the-cunt escapade was all about.

This road trip. It was Henley calling him again. His dad once told him Henley had been stationed in India, in a remote town called Nagpur. Henley’s son Lance had even unwittingly coinformed it. Now it was his duty, his calling, to get on his trail - to discover why he is like he is, why he does what he does.

It was getting cauld. He’d hiv tae make the move soon. Sooner than later. He knew it had to happen. This journey. This departure from familiarity into the unknown. It affected him tae. But it was his destiny - his escape route from the insular existence to which he had become dangerously accustomed. He wondered why it had chosen him but not for too long because there is too much to be done, too many corners to turn and the long, dry, dusty road ahead hung there in his imagination like a childhood dream. Buchanan Street Bus Station is next to the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow. An appropriate place for all these fraught farewells and the comings and goings of it all. All the emotion of it. Nobody was there for him that cold miserable morn. Nor should there be.

He quickly forgot the weird emotionalism of the invisible farewell. Then the loneliness gripped him. That desperate isolation which creates an extreme instinct for survival. He looked deeper into his soul. His goals are but of the noblest - high and mighty objectives no

doubt doomed to tragic failure but pure in intent. One time, as he made his way towards another road trip, as a lad, this guy across the road said: Where are ye gon Billy? Away, he replied. Where ur you gon, says Billy? I'm gon in for ma tea, says he, giggling at his ain patter. See ye later Billy Boy. Billy had watched him as he'd vaulted the fence back into his garden and, for a second, he envied him because he was able to forget. He doesn't know why, he just is. And this journey tae. It just is. Why us Sergeant Major, why us? asks the young Welsh Guard at Rourke's Drift. Because we're here lad, he replies. Nobody else. Just us. There's a guy at Buchanan Street Bus station with his right palm in the air, a decent farewell gesture, the tartan bunnet on the heid angled slightly to the right. Reminded him of his dad at New Year singing Ma Big Kilmarnock Bunnet. He'd always stand wae the hon oot like that. He'd be like this: 'Says I ma jock, dae ye think am a mug, just then he slapped me on the lug, says aye man, I met ma match in Glescae.' Hey, says I, get your angles right, twist it roon tae form the vertex and he looks at Billy in yon middle class style, who do you think you are sonny?

On the bus south the windae is wet with droplets of rain, each one winding its way from top to bottom, criss-crossing, but strangely fixed on reaching. Its. Own. Individual destination. It's a short. Staggered. Route. Furious and panic-stricken at times, each drop's progress halted only by the unnecessary and split second complexities of merger. Outside. The walking wounded limp around. Injured in body. Limping, twisting, hunched, gargoyles peering from the gutters: one gesticulates at him, filthy rain water splashing onto its white track suit. Wounded in spirit, the ingrained frown mark splitting its forehead, the mouth contorted slightly to the left, a walking stroke victim drenched in the squalor of the city's filthy sewers. Poleaxed by conscience, they peer into cheap shoap windaes, pointless gifts for poor offspring their preferential objective, reflecting the grief of their dull and desperate demeanours. God is dead. You merely pretend otherwise because you are too weak to face

reality. Death awaits. That is not the issue. It is what you strive to achieve as you die, that is all that matters. I'm puzzled by the manner in which you claim to see reality in me yet you consistently avoid its pursuit in your own self-analysis.

The sharin a bus thing tae. The assumption we are all in it together for better or worse. It grinds on the nerves. With enough cash he'd purchase his own infallible moon mobile with a satellite guidance system and a radiation proof shield. Ignore society. What's it ever done for mankind? The Scottish economist Adam Smith believed the greater good could only be served by individual achievement. It is indeed Billy's mission not to become degraded by the group at the expense of his highest ideals. His fellow passengers, it seems, do not have the self-discipline necessary to resist eating and drinking before the bus has made it past Celtic Park. It is therefore his contention that, in virtually any other context, such creatures are doomed - for they cannot exist in competition with human beings who do, in fact, possess such a characteristic.

To his left is the bus window. To his right is a woman. The woman is lost inside a woman's magazine. Hiya. My name is Billy Queen says he. Pleased to make your acquaintance. Where are you travelling to this fine morn? he proffers - an opening gambit to this strange context into which we have been uncaringly thrust. Billy. And her. Sitting here. Like this. The fuckin legs croassed tae. He's like this. And she's like that, wae the hand oot, giving to him a limp wristed shake. South Africa, she replies, rather curtly, for one so obviously weakened by a noticeable lack of direction. I didn't know this bus went to South Africa, says he. I'm flying from London to Joburg, says she, the hands clasped on the lap tae. She is in her mid to late-thirties, a strawberry blond with a square fringe, the wedding ring and misconceptions clearly displayed. You were probably quite freckly as a child, says Billy to himself. Where are you gon, she asks straight-faced, straight-laced? To London, then to India, says Billy. Why are you going to South Africa? he asks her. He instinctively knows what direction it's taking. He can tell, not merely by the demeanour or by the religious symbols with which it chooses to

adorn itself but by this other quality, an invisible inexplicable wan which hings there in your consciousness. There may well be a case for immediately re-instating auld Nelson Mandela or electing Eugene Terre Blanche partly due to the sinister corruption now eating the heart of the ANC but cheap political point scoring is pointless in this present climate of puerile ignorance, a form of bigotry fuelled by extreme feminine conscience and brutal materialism fed by the doctrine of manic individualism. It tells him the shopping is ace in Joburg. Sun City is class. The beaches in Durban are dangerous because of the sharks. And the only reason it goes is to see its cousin because it has caught the cancer of the breast. And all that before it reaches Lesmahagow.

Outside the living dead have disappeared from view. The journey south has begun in earnest. The man in front has stopped reading *Catcher In The Rye* and two elderly women behind him are comparing the merits and weaknesses of *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*. The Italian philosopher Nico Machiavelli once said that many people often see what you appear to be but few experience what you really are. It was an appropriate thought to have because that's what he saw of the people on the bus that day. Superficiality. Brutal and naked it wiz. The initial excitement of the departure having diminished, the queue at the toilet grew conversely. He looked at her again. Well he hidtae because it's the only way to progress, the only means by which ye can survive this onslaught, this unrefined infringement of your *raison d'être*. It's very brave and unselfish of you to travel all this way to see your sick sister, he says, leaving your husband and kids behind, very brave indeed, says he. Cancer is a terrible thing, says she.

Barlinnie looks great from this angle. As the bus speeds past he ponders its magnificent design – a big misery factory. And not one escape in its entire history. He could imagine those villains banged up in there, smoking their hash and playing table tennis, cursing the screws, planning their next crime: the card schools and the auld special unit shut down now. Jimmy Boyle's *Sense of Freedom* and all that stuff. Fantastic. When you really think about it.

He'd arrived at this juncture because he was hunting Captain Henley. He had to find him. He is his mission. A mission which must be achieved before ill health, apathy, and old age overtake him. Nothing is to stand in the road of the plan which takes predominance over human life itself. His motives are as clear as the rainbow arches over the Hamilton mausoleum and the bus speeds on, straight and true in its attempts to transport us south as efficiently as possible.

His fellow passengers thrive on distraction. Many wear headsets. One or two play with mobile phones. Some read tabloid newspapers and comics, predictably scanning the sports pages first, then the TV guide, then the problem page. He stares at the man and woman in front, the latter sporting a small paintbrush as a hair clip. The thing beside him still reads its magazine - a rather striking silver crucifix now visible around her neck. Friedrich Nietzsche once said that Christianity has cheated us out of the harvest of ancient culture; later it cheated us, again, out of the harvest of the culture of Islam. War to the knife against Rome! he thought. Peace and friendship with Islam! Are you very close to your cousin? he asks her. She smiles and says you never know the minute do you, this could be my last chance to see her. She is excited about the journey. He can tell by the tone of her voice. Well, it's perfect for her. She had the conscience clearing excuse all prepared. It was one she had clearly made earlier. Our conversation also reveals she's never been to South Africa before, and that she knows nothing about the politics of the region. She is making this pilgrimage to the sun for the sake of her dying cousin, whose father is in the diamond industry. He owns two bungalows, five servants, and a "divine" holiday home in beautiful Cape Town. An extended trip to Sun City is also high on her list of priorities. She scans the magazine again, flicking through its glossy pages at high speed. Her wedding ring is of the metal, not the diamond, variety. Her jeans Primark, her white blouse BHS. He arches his neck away from her, staring straight ahead, anywhere but here.

God is dead, he thought. And until people like her realise that, there is no point in us

progressing along the same route. She will only detract me from my ultimate goal. She only pretends God is alive because she is too weak to face the reality of her situation. Death awaits her in a few years as it awaits us all. That is not the issue. It is what you strive to achieve as you die, that is all that matters.

Wozu "der Mensch" da ist, soll uns gar nicht kummern: aber wozu Du da bist, das frage dich: und wenn Du es nicht erfahren kannst, nun so stecke Dir selber Ziele, hohe und edle Ziele und gehe an ihnen zu Grunde! Ich weiss keinen besseren Lebenszweck als am Grossen und unmöglichen zu grunde zu gehen.

Listen. I'm a Queen, from a West of Scotland council scheme: hardy, familiar with grass torture, Buckfast, and the smell of rottweiler shit on the soles of one's shoes. I know a few hard men, although I can safely say I'm not one myself. I got involved in a bit of football hooliganism in the late 90's but, hey, who didn't? Nothing serious. Just the odd punch and kick into a group of Hibernian casuals, smart arse Edinburgh cunts wae a big hit for themselves. Not like that though. Not the way you think. Not only for the adrenaline buzz. But for this. This thing. In this surreal fashion. You stand there so ye dae and you might sit down and read a book in the midst of it all or set up your easel if you fancy it. You can even tap one of the hooligans on the shoulder and ask him for a light or what he thinks about the invasion of Iraq. And as for the Hibs cashie on the ground with the archetypal look of horror on his face you ask him if he fancies a pint later on. I stuck a compass up the arse of the hardest man in the school as I sat behind him in the music class. That's the sort of thing I do. My philosophy lecturer told me my working class upbringing combined with my adventurous intellect would one day prove to be a wicked concoction which would lead me into strange, surreal situations in life. I'd started going with prostitutes from an early age. Well if you know what I'm talking about you get hooked on it, don't you? It all started with the mother of a friend who offered me a blow job for a fiver during the lunch hour from school (provided I wore my school blazer). But to me they weren't straight blow jobs. Not like that

anyway. Like this. I noticed things while she was doing it. The big Easter egg in her kitchen, the lottery ticket on the table.

I found this feminine psychology thing a bit hard to handle. I didn't really know how to chat birds up so I usually ended up playing silly wee intellectual games with myself to pass the time whenever I was in their company. That's what becoming educated does for one. You flit between the classes and the sexes. Talk not a bad intellectual game, then switch to the ideology from which you first arrived. Confusing isn't it? I couldn't BE like anyone else but I could spend time with them - playing their silly games, but only to a point. Chekov once wrote: Do, please, write a story of how a young man, the son of a serf, who has been a shop boy, a chorister, pupil of a secondary school, and a university graduate, who has been brought up to respect rank and to kiss the priest's hand, to bow to other people's ideas, to be thankful for each morsel of bread, who has been thrashed many a time, who has had to walk about tutoring without goloshes, who has fought, tormented animals, has been fond of dining at the house of well-to-do relations, and played the hypocrite both to God and man without any need but merely out of consciousness of his own insignificance - describe how that young man squeezes the slave out of himself, drop by drop, and how, awakening one fine morning, he feels running in his veins no longer the blood of a slave but genuine human blood.

Now here's me, Billy Queen, a slave no longer. But then again Henley. He calls the shots.

Spit boy, spit. Why me? Because you're here lad, nobody else. Just you.

He straightens his back to look over the paintbrush towards the driver's window - the windae wipers working overtime now to deal with the torrent of rain battering against the enormous windscreen. The way ahead is only momentarily clear, the time between the wipes drowning in a violent sea of despair and confusion. But there is hope in the idea the driver is content in the knowledge he is serving his passengers well, transporting them efficiently to their chosen destinations. He is, no doubt, himself driven by that feeling he is performing a vital task, taking them from Glasgow to Manchester and carrying the weight of those communal

responsibilities on his weary shoulders.

She has, predictably, given up on the magazine and is now pretending to sleep, her head angled at 45 degrees against the headrest, the legs crossed, the right hand under her left knee. This gives him the opportunity to further inspect her feminine attributes. Her long hair hangs down onto the tip of her tits, tantalisingly tickling them. The bra is white. He can see it through a gap in the buttons of her blouse which has arched up slightly, starched and strong, like the sleeve of a judo suit on Viagra. She has a wee smirk on her face, contented, almost angelic - like Creeping Jesus himself! He shakes his head and turns the other way, disgusted at her futile attempts to avoid confronting the issues that really matter in the world. She depends on other people to set the rules of the game then she responds, critically, and in a nagging and negative way, which makes him hate her. She is older than him, reasonably intelligent, materialistic, and poorly educated - you know the type of woman, you see them everywhere in Glasgow. Are you missing the kids yet? says he. She smiles nervously because she wants a real conversation, she's attracted to the idea of it, but she feels self-conscious about her own intellectual limitations and this has a detrimental effect on the structure of the dialogue, the way she says and does things. It restricts her thinking and, in so doing, restricts the society we all unfortunately have to share with her. I have a list of presents a mile long to get for them so I'll be straight into the shopping malls when I get there, says she, laughing, for some unfathomable reason. Her laugh, it momentarily frees her - she sounds like a wee girl, him and her, a wee boy and a wee girl once from the same street yet now miles apart - what happened to us? You know what kids are like. Do you mean kids generally, says he, or your own kids in particular? She looks down at the magazine again: uncertain of herself, unclear of her reason, unable to evaluate the christ figure attached to her neck or the vast African continent stretching out before her, that shopping mall in Joburg, the one she couldn't afford anyway, uppermost in her embryonic imagination. She didn't, couldn't, answer. That was his lasting impression of it.

When the bus finally stopped at London he stood patiently behind her as they waited to disembark. This time spent waiting in queues, especially after a long journey, is a particularly interesting moment to observe the body language of your fellow passengers. Where exactly are they going and why? Billy Connolly talks about dogs in Glasgow who are always in a rush. They go scurrying past you on the pavement, trotting quickly and urgently to their destination. What motivates them? Some humans are the same. They scurry around everywhere, a sense of futile urgency etched on their pursed lips. What was so important as we stood waiting to get off that damned bus? Where was SHE really going and why? She is alien to me. What other conclusion are you supposed to draw from such solid, unrelenting silence?



## Chapter 13

### And Up To The Raj

THE FLIGHT to India went well. Naw it didnae prick. It was horrendous. Him being stuck in at the window seat while two young lovers snogged next to him. He got boozed up for most of it, a nice hip flask with black rum helping to blank it all out. When he sobered up he thought about Henley not being there. What then? Without Henley life wouldn't be the same, not when you really think about it. There was a white cow on the runway, that's why the pilot couldn't land - that beast, it just stood there demanding its right to be holy, to be worshipped by its skinny human servants. On touchdown he felt The Englishman: no longer in the past but in the present, in the bloody here and now. This is where he was. In the searing heat the beast stood swinging its tail under the wing while its semi-naked butlers dragged a block of ice under its nose. In the terminal too: the passenger with the Panama hat and the putt-putt-putt of the spinning ceiling fan, the man he rubbeth his face with a distinctly white handkerchief, no scent of mama's spit on this particular piece of quality cloth, the light white linen jacket tae, ideal.

Billy had procured from Lance Henley more or less the exact route his father took to the Mohandas Kumani project. He even had the address of the same modest accommodation in the town of Calungute: the perfect place to acclimatise before venturing further into the interior. It had a modest swimming pool, the ubiquitous ceiling fan, and a mosquito net carefully draped around the single bed, a nice place to lie and stroke his baws while contemplating the thought processes of his prey. He even asked the landlady about The

Englishman. In severely broken up English punctuated only by the clatter of the ceiling blades she said she recalled him but he couldn't be sure of her and neither her of him, and so the conversation ended.

Billy just reccied the place by day, then rested up by night. In Goa the villages were tiny catholic enclaves, enshrined by Virgin Mary effigies and Portugese street names. Stooping palm trees camouflage her altars – remnants of a colonial past. He thought he saw the gentleman with the Panama hat again, but it was only a fleeting glance in a busy market square.

In Calangute a fruit seller swaggered along the beach, a square basket balanced delicately on her oval head. She dropped to her knees and began her bitter-sweet sales pitch: 'Hello Babu. Pineapple? Mango? Hashish? You happy man today? You hippy? You happy hippy? You Yuppie? You work too much, wurk, wurk,wurk, wurk, wurk. Pineapple babu? Eat it up. Then tomorrow I eat you eh? 200 rupees ok?'

Being eaten by an Indian woman sounded fine to Billy but at this point he had other priorities. He tried to shake the idea off but the thought entranced him. Had Henley been approached by the same attractive beach prostitute how would he have responded? And what was the nature of the Englishman's sexuality? At his age maybe he would have taken on a few lady companions in return for hard currency, or even boys. The enchantment of the old colonial master servant arrangement may have been too much to resist. Billy gently dragged the back of his forefinger down her cheek. You know Henley? he whispered. The woman looked startled by his sensuous touch. The Englishman, has he been around? She smiled. The shape of her chin, so perfectly prim, and the almond eyes tae, how had he touched her, how had she folded his shirt in the shade of early evening?

Sunset over Anjuna - a burned out hippy paradise barely recovering from cold turkey. His shadow extended onto the beach, beyond the junkie shacks, where jungle meets surf. On a cliff above the surf two westerners about Billy's age stood in their shorts and ripped T-shirts,

smoking hash. Contemplating jumping are you, lads? asks Billy, as he approached them along the path. There were two of them, one white and gaunt, the other one all tanned with the ponytail and six pack to match.

One of them mumbled something in reply. Something like might as well. Something which told Billy they were not happy campers. Something had upset the lads, something unspeakable.

There are heavyweights here, warns the gaunt one – scary Scandinavians who worship the moon. His shaven head trembled as it inhaled the joint, wary of the black vegetation behind it. There's marijuana, here, 10 grams for £3, and hash for the price of a mango. Last week there was acid, ecstasy and LSD, but the party's over – replaced by 'bad gear', paranoia and corrupt police. We have PMT, he tells Billy – Post Marijuana Tension. Some guys were arrested tae, taken back there, never came back. Yer best tae get oot of here if ye kin, it's no aw whit it's cracked up tae be, it says, staring out across the dark Arabian Sea. Wait till the mornin pal, then get oot, that's ma advice tae ye, there's nae Glaswegians here anyway, ken, we dinnae want ye getting lonely eh? What are ye daein here anyway? I'm lookin for Henley, says Billy. You Edinburgh? Too fuckin right I um, replies the skull. Listen, pal, I hivnae seen Henley right, I dinnae even ken who yer talkin about. It's probably best if you just leave it, ken. It was strange meeting a fellow Scot in such an outpost and his assumption that Billy wanted drugs was quite demeaning. They say the grandest narcotic in life is the experience of war and killing one's fellow man, just like Billy's dad did. He thought briefly about this and concluded that his own game of hunt-the-cunt had already elevated him beyond the reaches of the Edinburgh junkie's degraded consciousness.

Nightfall. A small neon light flickered like the lighthouse at the edge of the world. The jungle party thumped to the beat of tribal Europeans lost in their own heart of darkness. Free love now forbidden, the techno hippies gyrate – caught in a self contained, psychedelic trance. A topless woman with long blond hair danced with a tree, wiggling her hips against the trunk. A

scantily-dressed mother suckled her baby, placed it on the sand, then returned to the rave. Ageing hippies caught in a time-warp stared aimlessly at the makeshift wooden dancefloor. Their image overtaken by present events, they retire to the stinking jungle farmyard – a lost generation smoking pot with wild pigs.

Next morning the twelve hour bus journey east began at Paniji bus station. I'm going to Bangalore tonight, my seat is booked, Billy explained to a large clipboard with a little Indian man behind it. The man had a squint in his left eye. He nodded and shook his head at the same time then pointed to the sky. Two beggars point their crutches and laugh full of ridicule and rotten teeth. Welcome to India. The little official smiled then, bowing to the beggars' request for more street theatre, he says: I think the good gentleman does not understand that although he reserved his seat in Calangute that doesn't matter so much because the booking system is so very different here in Paniji. I fear the good Englishman must cross many palms with many rupees. The idea of being thought of as an Englishman had never occurred to Billy and when presented to him he dealt with it rather easily. After all, there were surely other more urgent considerations to be concerned with.

A small shady man with a limp tugged at his bag. The bus leaves from far away. Come with me. I will be your cooly. Give me your bags, he says.

But what about this bus here? Billy asks. No, no, no no sir. This bus is bound for Bombay and you are not wanting to go to Bombay. Bombay is very big, very bad. You are Englishman. You go to Bangalore. Come. I take you. Please. Sit here. On my scooter. Having crossed the last pothole ridden intersection to hell, his slyness lifted Billy's small backpack from the bike then saluted him. I hope you are having a very nice trip indeed. God be with you sir, he says, the tiny chest heaving, his pride intact and primed. Billy had never had a coolly before. The relationship worked well. It was clear cut. Both parties knew where they stood.

The bus queue was every respectable white man's nightmare. Standing in front were four

Indian postulants with 'I love Goa Hats', posing for holiday snaps. They simulated sex with one another, a seedy side show for their small, semi-naked audience on board the Madras sleeper bus opposite. Two blond boys, aged 7 or 8, pressed their tanned chests against the glass, pulling their privates in a series of sexual signals to their Indian admirers. A woman with blond dreadlocks, their mother possibly, slapped them on the head. Punch and Judy style, they disappeared, then reappeared, this time tamed and horizontal on the beds next to the window.

On board Billy's Bangalore bus bad news awaited him. Two members of the sex driven good time gang were in front, one of their seats rudely reclined onto his lap. As the engine shook into life they cheered: Hip, hip, hooray. Hip, hip, hooray. Hip, hip, hooray! The last ray of sunlight burned like a laser onto his left cheek and to the right a grey bearded curry walla tucked into some spicy mush. More cheers for the on board movie, hooray, a subtitled martial-arts masterpiece starring singer and fighter Rajeed Singh. Crash, bump, ahh, the potholes of Karnataka, rattle and roll, a fantasy filled future made poetic by the pain of the present tense, where dreams are dreamt wide awake and lost loved ones immortalised in the mind. The old man's snores spluttered infected saliva onto his silvery sideburns, and his tongue, it slipped into Billy's mouth - the moronic machinations of a sleepless Karnataka nightmare.

Meantime, Mother India clattered past, squalid snippets of her steaming slums fading in the darkness. Where are you Henley? Have you seen what Billy has seen on this painful journey? How does one retain one's dignity during such a bizarre road trip where the potholes of hell rattle your righteousness?

Learn to speak Kannada, or leave Karnataka now, warned the green graffiti on Mahatma Gandhi Road, a sweeping boulevard bustling with businessmen and unashamed capitalist intent. It isnae intent ya prick. It's just the way it happens to be, right. Nothing more, nothing less. The tourist guide described Bangalore, the state capital, as India's new high-tech

haven where the pace of life, like the intellectual and political climate, is brisk. Stop it. Please. He didn't ask for this sound. This is Henley's cadence, not Billy's. Refrain. Fuck refrain. Quit it right. Amidst the gold and leather shops a cinema hoarding advertised Arnold Schwarzenegar's True Lies. Middle-class Indians with serious faces queued outside the picture hall. They held bottles of Coke, waiting in silence for a belated glimpse of the Governor of California. Billy knew True Lies was dated. But that was the whole point, the fuckin past catching up with the present. It affected the way he spoke, the way he thought for christsake. Outside the run-down Grand Imperial Hotel, a uniformed Sikh salutes two guests, McDonald's litter clinging to his stout, black, knee length jackboots. He saluted as Billy left the city on a rinky, dinky rickshaw, then a waiter wearing a tuxedo slapped a young beggar girl on the nose and the beads of sweat, they dripped down the runner's spine, his elbows pumping like piston rods. Take me to the real town, says Billy, mush, and his big watery brown eyes they are as bewildered as that of a bull about to be slain by its masterful matador – civility no longer a disguise, brutality a strange surprise, the endgame it is nigh, and death, by the sword of slavery, awaits. Ya prick. It disnae have to be like that, it ain't necessarily so. Things that you're liable to hear in the Bible it ain't necessarily so. Naw but could Henley have really taken such a hard, circuitous route? Billy had almost received the full itinerary from Lance. Problem is he was knackered. All this travelling it was pining his spine. Being ex-army Henley, of course, would have suffered no such problems. Yet India is a great leveller my son, it probes for weaknesses of mind and body, testing, stretching each to the very limit.

Indian Railways: the proud relic of a lost empire. Leave my shoes alone Billy says to the naked boy who crouched at his feet on the piping hot platform. He ignored his request, pouring a foul smelling polish onto the suede, his spit staining the fabric, the right palm upturned, awaiting the soothing touch of a rupee note. Look. You've ruined my shoes, one says. They used to be suede, desert boots no less, now they are plastered in brown polish

and resemble a pair of run-down Doc Martens. He clung to Billy's right foot while his friend wrapped himself around the left knee and, together, they struggled along the platform. As the train arrived he shook shoeshiner two from his shin but number one was more resolute – he held on tight and, as we clambered across the line and onto the steps, Billy wriggled his lower leg like an Irish dancer, thrusting him back into the track. When the train pulled away they reappeared, running alongside it, waving and cheering, their radiant smiles shining into a first class carriage of incandescent humiliation. Incandescent humiliation? Yes, incandescent humiliation - that's exactly it old boy. Incandescent. Humiliation.

At Jolarpetti junction a young Tamil woman struggled to tie string around a bright orange sari hanging hopelessly from her semi-naked body. Her spastic right arm jerked uncontrollably in the searing midday sun. Alongside, a proud railwayman waved a green flag. In the hut behind him there was a man wearing an army cap and khakis. That could be Henley. This could be Henley. This is where Henley is at. Billy knew it. He can't see him. Or hear him. Or touch him. He just felt him. Next stop Bangarapet where weird stone formations gave way to picturesque Tamil villages, lost in a medieval time-warp. Shut it prick. Eyes to the front cunt. Fuckin shift.

Madras Central: a sauna in the sun. This was Billy's stop. Time to change trains. He stepped onto the melted tarmac platform, a chewy landing point populated by black soldier ants and an army of shoeshine boys who hop back and forth on their haunches like giant frogs. One thumped onto his right foot, its meaty weight that of about three pounds of mince. Leave my shoes alone, he told it it. Look. They used to be suede. They should not be polished. It clung to Billy's leg, its shiny black hair pressing against his knee. Another one massaged his left ankle. Billy walked on with one tiny Indian still attached to each of his legs. He closed his eyes and tried to move on but the weight, on either foot, it dragged him down until, in that split-second of lost consciousness, he lost his rupees, he lost direction, and, with the impetus gone, he lost reason. But it wasn't his mind that was insane, it was his soul. If this was the

route Henley took, could he really blame him for the madness that is imperialism? And his dad too, blindly following the Englishman's egotistical, irrational orders - who wouldn't, in the heat of battle, resort to such blind subserviance to protect one's own life? He could have kicked the tiny boys onto the track. In this barren land who would question the actions of a lone Englishman protecting his right to walk unimpeded by tiny Tamils, drilled in the ancient art of subtle incidental assault? Further along he met a solitary French backpacker who sat with captured cockroaches and burned them alive with his lighter, using their hard shells as earrings. This is called adapting to your environment, uh? he says, swinging back his black waxed dreadlocks before scuttling along the platform on his hands and knees, the Marseillaise playing on a small radio by his abandoned rucksack. He sat huddled in a dark corner then shouted, hey Englishman, relax, India is 80% waiting, 20% doing. Billy almost disputed his nationality with the human roach but such cultural nuances become blurred in the boiling pot that is Madras, a city where the stench of curried mush is indistinguishable from its resultant human waste. He thought again of Henley. Why the journey from quaint south coast tea rooms to the centre of this putrid degradation? Why, in later years, would any man choose to leave his green and pleasant land to return to the scene of this heinous imperialist crime, lost, yet strangely not forgotten? He was, according to his son Lance, a financially secure man, keen on sailing and the odd spot of golf, a man with some mountain craft, fond of wandering, alone, through the wildest valleys of his beloved Lake District. Yet here he was, on behalf of The Foundation, retracing the steps of those early East India traders, a route now hi-jacked by obnoxious Australian backpackers and errant European students unsure of history and their place amidst the chaos.

Finally, the Varanasi Express departed, rattling through Andhra Pradesh, destined for cooler Himalayan climes. In the compartment voices were raised: Westerners wear shorts, says one man. They think they are from a superior culture. I hate them. I will do something. I hate them. This is how I feel, he insists. As night falls Billy stares silently at his train ticket,

conscious of his fixed glare, the glint from his dagger, and the mildly reassuring message from Mahatma Gandhi on the ticket: Let all of us Hindus, Mussalamans, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians live amicably as Indians. He held it in his fist, conscious of all religions – and his exposed knees.

Sevagram, near Wardha Station: the village where Gandhi built his ashram and, officially, the hottest place in India. In the nearby city of Nagpur open sewers flow into the curry and chapatti shacks, uniting, in a common culinary concoction, the scent of food and hot spicy faeces. Suffering cheerfully endured ceases to be suffering, the Mahatma once said. It is transmuted into an ineffable joy. Mamamama cried the tiny one-legged baby by the sewerside. A skeletal dog casually walked over and licked her head, pausing to pant and briefly guard the abandoned infant. But the beast has no reason and wandered north along the Pandit Malviya Road, a road that stretches deep into the darkness past makeshift shantys, pitted and putrid it meandered like some sullied stillbirth of a mother monsoon, its pungent trail leading who knows where - to the very heart of Henley himself perhaps. Yet the blackness of the fast approaching Wardha night held no fears for Billy. In its place, more than anything, was the desire to confront him. As night descended he felt his ever nearing presence pulling him towards him. And as it did so, the crowing of the cocks and the cries of the naked babies diminished. He picked his way through them, his footprint larger than their feeble brown bodies. The Englishman was here.

In Jagson's Hotel the one-eyed receptionist was particularly irritable this evening. It is very troublesome news, he shouts from the reception desk. Just now many people perspire in Nagpur. It is far too hot here. Your room is not quite ready sir. Something very bad has happened on the air conditioning. A man has hung himself. We will clear him away for you first sir. There are many angry voices and many murders. Billy takes a seat and picks up a newspaper. He holds it straight and high to cover his face, to shield himself from the ensuing chaos around him. The Hitavda is almost orange in the early evening light, its daytime

pinkness fading in a translucent reflection. Yet even between the pages of this so called neutral zone he can sense his influence: the natives, they tried to write like The Englishman, their juvenile grasp of his language reducing them to comic strip writers reporting nothing - the chronological structure echoing that of an over excited nine-year-old telling his mum about an incident at school or what he saw happening up the swingpark. He read the front page, but even here Henley was speaking to him, his adventurous boy's own values reaching out to torment Billy:

Twenty-two students were injured when a mob of Bihari youths armed with knives and bicycle chains stormed the Laxminarayan Institute of Technology hostel late this morning. It was a sequence straight out of a crime thriller as about ten Bihari students brandishing knives and cycle chains roared into the campus on motorcycles and scooters to avenge an assault. As exams are underway, most of the students in the hostel were busy with their books. Initially, confusion prevailed as the Biharis went searching for their "prey." The hostel inmates, in a quick move, grouped themselves and retaliated with hockey sticks to save one of their chums from the intruders.

Henley has been here. He could hear his voice now. On the wall next to the reception desk a torn poster described the 'goodwill of the Mohandas Kurnani project.' It showed smiling whites alongside barefoot Indian children standing in front of a four by four landrover. There was something else. A man had hung himself on the air conditioning fan and the hotel staff were clearing the mess up before letting Billy into the room. It was like yon time Paterson was found in the flat across the landing, history bloody well repeating itself. Death followed Billy like the vertex he carried with him in his consciousness. He framed it in his mind's eye and kept it like a souvenir. It had various pockets attached to it: the killing of the white dove; the massacre of those Egyptians, and now, on the ceiling fan itself.

Up in his room Billy opened the shutters and stared across the shanty rooftops of Nagpur. The room was shabby but reasonably clean. He waited until dusk, until the battle hath ended

between mosque and hindu temple. In his backpack was a quote from Kipling's poem *Young British Soldier*. He reads it for courage does Billy.

When you're lying out wounded on Afghanistan's plains,  
and the women come out to cut up what remains, you roll  
to your rifle and blow out your brains, and go to your God  
like a soldier.

He only had a place name and a few rupees but it was enough to take him by rickshaw to Shadripuram. It lay on the eastern outskirts of Nagpur. But even the rickshaw driver would not enter. He shook his tiny brown head and his frightened eyes questioned the lunacy of his English passenger. The way ahead was dark except for the odd gas lantern glinting in the distance. There was no town here. Just waste high shanties up ahead and the putrid stench of rotting flesh. The fuckin shanties were up to his waist so he had to bend right down like Joe the Coalman to get in, to gain entry to this otherworld he has journeyed far and near to be in. The first rat was big, black and bold. It stared at Billy, questioning his accreditation in The Pit.

It thumped onto his right desertboot but not for long coz fuck ye, he kicked it into touch, its heavy body thudding into the corrugated fence. The rest of the team smelled danger and scurried down the open sewer that appeared to be the main street. To his right, Billy felt something prodding at his right hip. Could this really be Mohandas Kumani? He lowered himself down to be closer to the thing, its rancid breath made him wrench and its touch was pleading, desperate, like that of an old man about to issue his final death rattle. Its head seemed swollen, the skin stretched and bubbling like lava. Is this where the Englishman was? Where it finally comes to rest?

Down here in the gutters of Shadnipurum the leper head found something amusing. And there

were other stirrings. Behind the cloth door of his house, others made their move, reaching out, touching Billy all over with their stumps. One of them spoke some English. He offered his stump as a handshake. My name is Krisinappa, he says. He tied a spoon to his right stump to scoop sour milk rice into his mouth. He offered Billy some but he'll stick to the wine wee man thanks anyroads. His stumps were smooth but crinkled at the points like raw links sausages. He sometimes chewed them when he was bored, or when asleep. He picked roses with his teeth and tried to sell them outside the colony but the thorns pricked his wounds. By night he thought he was a boxer, playfully thumping his stumps into Billy's stomach and doing the Ali shuffle. Billy slapped him on the side of the head, tweaking his only ear between his forefinger and thumb but only part of it falls off, small remnants of skin smelling like old grey cannabis ash. Where is the Englishman? asked Billy. Henley. Captain George Henley. Where is he? Where is the Englishman? mimicked Krisinappa, mocking Billy's question, offering no answer, no clue.

His friend Damal was once a proud hunter until leprosy stalked and captured him. Now, he believed, he was cursed by god, condemned to live in Beggar's Colony for eternity. He wore a crucifix upside down, pushing it into Billy's face for a laugh. There was a smirk on the cheap metal. Three furra pound, three furra pound old boy, Billy says, here, sticking the point of it up his rotten nostril, dragging it sharply down across his reeking cheek, and pressing it into the jawbone, you're deid if ye dae that again. He crawled to his corner with a tormented snigger and sat twiddling it, glinting it off an empty bottle by the open fire.

Who are you? asked a soft, civilised voice. I say, who are you? it asked again. It was the voice of Jane Austen, strangely perfected in this harsh territory one found oneself in. Do sit down. I'm Billy Queen, a journalist from The Sunday Tribune in Scotland. Scotland? The home of Dr Livingstone I presume? Out of the darkness stepped a lady by the name of Shoba. I hope you will tell the people of Scotland what is happening here in Beggar's Colony. The men here are angry, says Shoba, mistress of understatement, and a mother-of-three who has learned to

knit without fingers. Damal interbreeds then uses his baby to beg uptown – incest is his only source of income, apart, that is, from a mysterious priest who brings occasional funds from the church. The priest he comes here, but only certain families receive help, some even go to live in Mohandas Kumani where they get medicine. The rest of us are left to rot, quite literally, Mr Queen. When we complain the priest shakes his head and tells us we have lost faith in our fellow human beings. One day we will rise up against the church, she says, thrusting her knitting needle in the air, the lioness of the new rebel leper brigade. And The Englishman, Henley, is he here? asks Billy The lioness turned into a hyena, laughing and smirking, it mocked Billy, leaving no clue, except a wicked silence and the sound of more tormented giggles from the children. Little Nongoose he pouted like Kylie then blew in Billy's face, the kiss of death kids here called it. Ignore him, says Shoba, the chameleon. He is what you would call a cheeky person. I'll fuckin cheeky you ya bitch if ye smirk at me like that I'll take ma hon aff yer jaw ya rotten lump of dried shite. Then he stood. And when he stood he felt like Gulliver in the land of the little people because his chest and neck were above their tiny corrugated rooftops. He marched on, squelching through their debris, standing on whatever comes his way. In the village square he met Balveer Bhatt, the swarthy village leader from Tamil Nadu. 'Namaste,' says Bhatt, stumps raised to his mouth, his silver-rimmed glasses shimmering in the light of the open fire. I have come many miles, across land and sea, to look for The Englishman, I'm told he is here. Bhatt smirks with rotten teeth, except for one which is gold and shines in Billy's face like a luminous satellite high above the black Indian sky. Tell me. Tell to me where he is, says Billy gripping the stump. Bhatt used his shoulder to press a mobile phone to his ear. He laughed at his own private leper joke, yattering, yattering. Why you want him? he asked. Billy knew he was close now, closer than ever before to procuring the rights to face The Englishman in the midst of this stench-pot of a town. My name is Billy Queen. I'm a journalist. I'm staying at Jagsons hotel. I'm here to write about the good work he is doing on behalf of the Foundation. I need to speak to him.

Now. Bhatt talked into the phone again, watching Billy's response as he yattered. What is it about the Englishman that inspires this sardonic salacious grin on the face of every leper? Could someone please let Billy in on the joke? Is it that Henley bullied his father into killing innocent bedouin? The lepers, they knew Billy, they have been warned of his arrival. Swami was the guardian of knowledge, the man in the know in other words. He's the fuckin whatdoyoucallit, granddaddy of the colony. If he had proper wrists he'd be wearing a gold bracelet, that's the type he was; a money man on the make in leperstown, an East End barrow boy, simmering with cynicism.

Billy couldn't be arsed. The travelling had taken its toll. He wanted to sit down, he really did. Right beside that big black rat chewing at Swami's rotten left toe, right there. Honest, he didn't give a fuck anymore, that's how he felt about it all, the entire package deal, him hunting Henley. He was fucked, knackered. Let's face it it had been a long haul and he wasn't going to find him. He felt like just walking away, maybe giving Swami a few rupees to help with the overall cause then just getting out of this mingin maze. Maybe sit in a side street and watch a snake charmer for a while, just chill. See a few sights then get straight back hame, paint the wall, sign the peace pledge with Auld Nick and get on with things: join the club, the brotherhood. It was obvious Auld Nick and Uncle John were somehow affiliated to the British Israeli mob, he knew something was afoot, always was, and Uncle Ron tae, what was all that about? All the Afghanistan stuff and the weapons in the hoose and how he got that job at The Tribune, it was all too easy. His mates in Hamilton had asked him about that and he could never answer them, how did you get that job at The Tribune Billy? It just happened boys. He didnae know what happened to Paterson, honest, he just didn't. It was playing on his mind but. He felt tired. Bloody exhausted infact. The police shaggers were probably on his trail right now. Interpol or whatever you call them. Maybe that's who Bhatt was phoning, Hallo its the chief leper from Mohandas Kumani, Beggar's Colony, here I have one Billy Queen in my midst searching high and low for The Englishman, please come and collect

the cunt in order that he can be returned to his proper abode. He just turned and walked. He was good at that. Right in the middle of something. He could just walk away. It happened in editorial all the time, even in the middle of a conversation, he'd just walk away fae it. All the horror. Bhatt and his local politics. You wait on me I might or I might not. Fuck you leper face, Billy was offski. He twisted and turned, deeper into the quagmire of it all, this thingy, this place to which he had been drawn by some fatalistic magnet. How can ye get a fatalistic magnet ya prick? The wordsmiths wouldn't be too pleased with him, that's for sure, the whatdoyoucallthem, bloody backbenchers watching what you write and how you write it all the time, they'd be up-in-arms at Billy's florid and often cliched use of plain English, they'd be ready to walk oot in protest if he kept this up. Henley was getting his balls booted, plain and simple. Or was he? Billy wisnae really sure how he would react. He might even just want tae hug the prick, right there and then, a big brotherly hug, get it all out his system, aff his chist, that sort of thing, forgive and forget, never look back in anger, all of that.

He walked down the narrowest, darkest alleys he could find. He wanted to see it all, the full uncut version of the depths of depravity in leperville. But as he did so, he was sure he'd met Henley before anyway. Psychic repetition was at work. Uncle Eck and Uncle Ron and Auld Nick and the Detective Inspector tae. Hallo boys. Are you listenin in tae this evening's broadcast coz ye know who ye ur ya cunts. In fact you have probably alerted Henley to my visitation upon this strange toon. I tied ma horse up at the leper refuelling station, ye can riffle through its saddlepack if ye want but you'll no find a thing because Billy Boy travels light that's why he's twisting and turning down the narrowest, darkest alleys where you see it all, the horror, right before ye, right in your face. He needed to rest. So there he sat. If he had a mooth organ he would have played it, that's how bad he felt. So near and yet so far. Up wae the bonnets of Bonnie Dundee, My Big Kilmarnock Bunnet, whatdoyoufuckincallit, a Troop of Irish Dragoons.

This wee leper lassie offered him a drink so he took it. It was wine. They seemed to have a

ready supply of the stuff, cheap and sweet, not exactly The Buckfast but hell it wid hif tae dae. She had the hon oot, trying to procure some money from Billy, here take the lot he said pouring the rupees into her pocket. She looked right at him. I don't suppose you've seen Henley? Billy asked. She gave him that same smile as the rest of them whenever he mentioned The Englishman. As if they were all living out of his pocket, paid to keep quiet - a genuine conspiracy of silence, just the way it used tae be in Billy's hoose. Then she reached out and took his hand. Honest tae god, that's what she done. Her skin it was smooth, not leper-like. You see the kids were beautiful, the leper offspring they weren't infected. Because their maws and das were disnae mean they wur tae. She took Billy all the way into this wee battery of corrugated shacks. He had tae bend right down too because he was a giant and her hand it was so small. Some of them had gas lamps on and one even had a black and white portable. They were eating curried mush and one or two of them were shagging one another on an auld sheet on the flair. They dinnae seem to care if the kids were there or no these leper cunts. Where are you taking me? Where. Are. You. Taking. Me? English? she says. Aye. Yes. I take you English, she said. English, I take you English. But she didn't. She just didn't, right. She just laughed - as if Billy's was a common and foolish request, that's why she was laughing mate, every cunt wanted Henley and she probably found it amusing that Billy thought he had instant access rights. And the more she laughed the worse it became. This dreadful hopelessness, it imposed itself upon Billy. He had no chance. He just.

Had to get out. Back tae the hotel. Even there she wouldn't leave him be. In the steaming heat of the unforgiving Nagpur night he imagined he saw the girl in his room. There was something else. When it got dark he imagined seeing that hanged man dangling from the air conditioning fan. He imagined it was Henley, he really did. The girl stands in the corner, laughing. English, English, English, she chants. Why didn't you take me to Henley? he asks. I did, she says, pointing to the ceiling. Above Billy's bed he noiselessly swings. In the fading light of the

ensuing Maharashtra night his iridescent glow shimmers then dies. The receptionist was waiting for the call. Room service – two gin and tonics, says Billy, and make them ice cold. There is no rush to cut the Englishman down. His dead face frowns at you. His arcane stare no longer dares to witness the sins. Man has reason, Gandhi once said, discrimination and free will. The brute has no such thing. It knows no distinction between virtue and vice, evil and good will. And so they are, him and Billy, harmoniously, sarcastically tied, until the morning, perhaps, when the sun casts new light on the black Indian sky and he fastens her sari and kisses her goodbye.

## Chapter 14

### Back To The Future

WHAT HAD he done? What. Had. He. Done? He hidnae done nothin cunt. He looked to the left. Nothing. Right? Two empty gin and tonic glasses. So he'd sank them, so what? This happened to Billy a lot. Wakening up, all the big tension away. Like as if it had all been a dream, or a nightmare. His heid wisnae even sair. Good start. Very good start when he thought about it. No hangover. And oot the windae the call to Allah. Things were fucking so clear that when the phone rang its rings took ages. Like between each solitary dring it took about thirty-five seconds. After the fourth one he reached over to the bedside table and picked up the receiver. Morning, Billy Queen speaking, he said. Good morning Mr Queen this is reception, I have a call from Mr Balveer Bhatt if you wish to take him? Why would Bhatt be phoning him like this? He never expected the leper to do so. That wasn't the way it was here. There was no reliablity. Yet here it was. A phone call. About what? About what Billy? He looked at the clock. 8am. Where had he been? Fuck knows. He held the receiver to his chest. Let them bastards hear his heart beat, he didnae care. The deep asthmatic breathing of Bhatt, he heard it. That fuckin receptionist had put him on without Billy's permission. He imagined the leper clutching the phone with his claw, that local councillor style intelligence, the big leering grin, the occasional sycophant worming his way through life in the colony. All of a sudden he'd be smiling, that big false smile, the gold teeth and the bracelet because strings had been pulled. Something had changed since their last meeting. Billy sensed it. Money had no doubt crossed some rotting palms. Now it was clear. This was an abusive phone call,

that's what it really was if you examined it properly. Shut it Billy. Take the call. He shut his eyes.

'Billy Queen speaking,' he said.

'Ah good morning Mr Queen. It is Balveer Bhatt from Beggar's Colony speaking.'

Billy looked at his watch. He listened momentarily to Bhatt's deep diseased breathing. He was out of breath, sweating no doubt in the early morning sunlight.

'Are you there Mr Queen?'

'Yes, I'm here,' said Billy.

'Ah good morning Mr Queen. Em. I have Captain Henley on the other line for you.'

Billy lowered the phone to his chest again. He looked up at the ceiling fan. It had stopped now - the whirring dead, the putt-putt-putting ended. He stared across at the vertex and whispered the words his father had so often screamed as he battled with his tortuous Egyptian demons: they were as clear to Billy now as they'd been as a boy in Hamilton; El-Omari, set maat, Maadi, El Omari, set maat, Maadi. Now Henley was finally within his grasp. Billy lifted the receiver to his ear and lodged it between his right shoulder and his ear, angling his head perfectly at 45 degrees.

'Hello,' he said.

'Ah, Mr Queen. This is George Henley speaking. From the Foundation? I believe you requested some kind of meeting with me?'

Billy paused. Here he was, with Henley in his sights, yet it was Billy, not him, expected to answer the questions. And his voice, predictably polite, energetic and upbeat, even now, in the unbearable heat of deepest darkest India. He wanted to greet. Right there and then. But there was no way this soldier was going to let the moment get to him. Emotionless reason may have been Henley's speciality but Billy was determined to beat the Englishman at his own sordid psychological game. His mother had once corrected his English when he was a wee boy. She told him to speak proper English when he was in the company of English

people. So that's what Billy did with Henley. He spoke the best English he could muster.

'Yes, that's correct Mr Henley,' said Billy.

'Oh please do call me George. We tend to dispense with the formalities in these parts.'

Billy paused. First name terms eh? A wide boy. A public relations man. A fuckin whatdoyoucallit, people person. He looked up at the vertex again. Set matt, set maat, he whispered.

Perhaps Henley didn't hear the whispering or maybe he chose to ignore it. Either way, it was him who spoke first.

'I understood you were looking for me last night?' he said.

Billy blinked. Averting his gaze from the vertex he swung into the impressive journalistic linguistics he'd honed over the years on The Sunday Tribune news desk. It was a mix of polite reflection and intellectual intrigue, a tone which indicated to his prey that they were at the centre of something extremely interesting, that their life was central to the heartbeat of the country. He never believed it then. And he certainly didn't believe it now. Not here. Not in this peculiar situation in which he now found himself.

'Yes, that's right,' he said politely. 'My name is Billy Queen from The Sunday Tribune in Glasgow. I'm writing a series of features on the Brits in India and wondered if it would be possible to speak to you about your work with the foundation?' Billy waited for his response. He often used what was known in the trade as the straight bat technique. As you connect with the contact you tell them directly what you want. It gives the impression of brevity, deadlines, a sharp requirement to get to the fucking point old boy. Get in and out. Hit and fuckin run.

Henley played the false modesty card. A common trick for one once so highly esteemed within Her Majesty's forces.

'Well what is it you'd like to know Mr Queen? Our work here is very routine, not exactly the stuff of award-winning journalism I'm afraid.'

‘Just what it involves,’ said Billy. ‘A description of your daily routine, the ups and downs of working in such an environment, that sort of thing. We wouldn’t be focussing on you in particular, Mr Henley. As I say you would be part of a larger series of features spotlighting the good work of British people throughout India.’

Henley paused.

‘Oh, so you’re travelling beyond Sumana Hali, to other parts?’

‘Yes, that’s right,’ said Billy

‘How charming indeed. Well, look Mr Queen, we can arrange to meet for dinner tonight if you like. Shall we say 7.30, at the Regent Hotel?’

‘Sounds good. Where is it?’

‘It’s on the Pandit Malviya Road. Where are you, in Jagson’s I believe?’

‘That’s right.’

‘It’s only a seven minute rickshaw ride from there, the driver will take you directly for two rupees. They do a beautiful masala and the beer is cold and European.’

‘Yeah, that sounds very good.’

‘Ok, good show, well look, must dash, see you tonight, oh and eh, dress is rather formal, no shorts. All right Mr Queen? Nice speaking to you. Goodbye.’

‘Goodbye.’

And so it came to pass that Billy had finally spoken with Captain Henley, albeit on the phone. He’d contemplated the moment many times. But it was the lightness of his tone which struck him most, the simplicity and directness of the conversation, the precision of the arrangement and, most of all, the ease with which he expressed his supreme confidence in the rickshaw driver. To Billy, the streets of Nagpur represented convoluted chaos. Yet to Henley, appointments could be made with unerring accuracy.

There was another thing. As he passed the time until 7.30pm he was convinced Henley was watching him. Maybe not Henley right but someone working on his behalf, the intelligence

shaggers in other words. Like mad dogs and Englishmen he ventured out in the midday sun and there were people there all right. One guy in particular, he kept on seeing him, loitering in the chappatti stalls. Billy tried to lose him by backtracking, dodging down alleys, nipping across busy roads. But still he was there. Even in the relative coolness of a slightly air-conditioned cafe, he saw him, peeping out from behind The Khaleej Times, a Dubai quality written in English, not a Nagpur paper at all. Uncle Ron used to read it all the time. He remembered it. He remembered it well.

The rickshaw ride to The Regent was a steamy affair. Indeed it struck Billy his particular rickshaw runner was deliberately dragging him over every bump and pit hole on that dark and stinking dirt track called the Pandit Malviya Road. India reeked. And that skinny runt of a rickshaw runner was, in the heat of the night, a skeletal extension of the surrounding decrepitude. In Glasgow, he found it difficult to relate to the crass conversations of black hackney cab drivers. He consoled himself with the fact that here the rickshaw runners were at least too breathless to converse.

The Regent was, indeed, a thoroughly colonial affair. Immaculate turban wearing doormen dressed in elegant red sherwanis saluted him as he stepped into the blissfully air conditioned reception. There was no sign of Henley. So Billy made himself comfortable at the bar, the sanctuary for most Scotsmen unfamiliar with such formal surroundings. His Jack Daniels tasted good, better than it had ever done. So good that it instantly made him contemplative, a dangerous condition for one already taut with the heightened sensitivity of his present circumstances. He drank it all up like a good boy. Then ordered another. As was usually the case, halfway through his second one, he saw the vertex pattern emerging in the strangest of places. On the gantry, on the napkin, in the way the barman triangularly arranged the array of nibbles on the bar. He looked down at the immaculate white marble floor. And there too he became fixed on the tiny triangular black specs. Only he, it seemed, was able to see the sign. He followed the trail to the shiny black shoes, splayed perfectly at 45 degrees, and shining.

Then he worked up his way up the immaculately tailored straight lines of the black dining suit trousers, and up past the tuxedo. It was a long journey, at least that's how it seemed to Billy. And at the end of the junction, just above the chest, he finally arrived at the narrow black dickie bow that was to become his destination. There was no need to look further. It was Henley.

He looked rather disappointed to see Billy. Maybe he had expected more from a journalist. A more formal attire perhaps. Billy stared at the sheer finesse of the dickie, then held Henley's gaze for as long it took for the old boy to speak.

'Are you Mr Queen?' he asked.

Still, Billy held his fire. Then, without awaiting confirmation of the true identity of his dinner guest, Henley introduced himself.

'I'm George Henley,' he said.

There was no attempt at a handshake. No pretence, no fake commitment. Billy was happy with that arrangement. It suited his own situation, the one he found himself in. Here and now, at last, with the real Henley. Not the one he'd imagined in Glasgow pubs, nor the chap he'd encountered in his fractured imagination and in his array of prolonged nightmares when the gales blew from the east on a cold dark winter's night in Scotland, but the one here, now, immaculate, controlled, and always thinking he was in charge. Billy liked that. As they made their way through to the dining room he understood now what was to follow. He'd never been in a proper Indian restaurant in India. Sure, he'd trawled the various curry houses in Glasgow. But this was different. Billy wanted to sit at a corner table but Henley opted for a central position, in full glare of the world. Billy was in no rush to speak. He let Henley take the lead. But Henley himself was interested in this strange creature from Glasgow. So both waited and watched until the Captain, intrigued and slightly perplexed by his guest's self-imposed silence, said:

'So what do you think of India Mr Queen?'

What. Do. I Think. Of. India. Mr Queen?

Not now Billy. One should answer the man's question in a manner which disguises one's real intent.

'Fine,' said Billy.

'Very fine indeed.'

'A fine country. Wide. Expansive. Colourful. Cramped. And smelly.'

Henley dropped his gaze. Maybe it was the word smelly he wasn't used to. Not the way Billy said it.

'I understand you are writing a series of articles? For The Sunday Tribune I believe.'

Billy lifted his Jack Daniels glass and drank the dregs from the bottom of it. He sucked the ice before slipping it fully into his mouth.

'Do you know it?'

'I know of it,' said Henley.

'What do you know of it?'

'Not much,' Henley smiled.

He folded his napkin. Then folded it again. He laid it back on the table, the perfect triangle, pointing directly at Billy.

Billy shifted uneasily in his seat.

'Can I get you a drink Mr Queen?'

Billy turned to the waiter who was standing behind him.

'Jack Daniels with coke. Fill it up with ice please.'

'And a gin and tonic for me please, no ice,' said Henley.'

It wasn't merely the awkwardness of that first meeting between the two men that struck Billy. Nor was it even the almost irreverent manner in which each permitted the others mild eccentricities to flourish. There was something else. It began with the meal. They didn't choose masala, they chose fish. It was full of bones but Henley showed Billy how to extract them

most effectively and, when he couldn't do it properly, Henley smiled and gave him his. As the finest wines flowed Billy's self-conscious ignorance of the etiquette of Indian dining diminished and in its place there appeared an almost magical bond, one which both men came to cherish. Henley guided him through the remainder of the meal and Billy accepted. It just happened to be the way things were: Henley, absurdly overdressed even in these formal surroundings, and Billy, learning to use his right hand to scoop up the beef and pork dishes that followed. They were an Englishman and a Scotsman abroad, obliquely united by the harshness of the fetid Nagpur night.

As the evening progressed, Billy suddenly became acutely aware of time. Not the time on his wristwatch but the time he'd spent occupied by thoughts of The Englishman and his dad, the late Private Queen. For the first time ever the present consumed the past. Henley had been brutal and now here he was eating cherries in The Regent with his father's persecutor. It was like preparing hard for an exam and now sitting in front of the paper, staring at the questions he'd sought answers to for a long, long, time. He watched Henley closely, analysing the cool arrogance with which he called and despatched the array of Indian waiters serving their every need. Billy's problem was, of course, somehow transferring the present back into the past. He pushed and probed, then probed and pushed again. At first The Englishman wouldn't be drawn. Like an outgoing tide he dragged Billy out into the present, wave after wave of self effacing storytelling about the leper people of Mohandas Kumani, a languid logorrea of line after line pulling Billy further and further adrift. Henley was cute. Very cute. Knowing Billy had already spoken with Balveer Bhatt he cleverly pre-empted the point about money being taken to house only certain families in Mohandas Kumani, the others left, literally, to rot in Beggar's Colony without treatment. It perfectly fitted Henley's idea of the corrupt colony and he dismissed it with a flick of the wrist. It's the way things are here, Mr Queen, that's the way India operates, that sort of style. Gradually, as time slipped past and the fine wines fermented both their tired brains, Henley began to slip back into the past tense where Billy's

consciousness lay in wait like a mighty lion re-awakened in the jungle. As with most men his age Henley found it hard to resist the past. He spoke of the Scots he had commanded with fond affection. And as he spoke of their stoutness and their taut obedient uprightness, his eyes shone like diamonds, in a virtual congenial recognition of the relationship, past and present.

They reminded me of Red Indians in a way, he said. More interested in the how than the why. Their levels of obedience were, well, rather extreme shall we say. We used to have regular boxing bouts against other regiments. I remember one chap, from Lesmahagow I believe - is that how you pronounce it, Lesmahagow? He couldn't box for farthings he really couldn't. But rather than let the side down he took a thumping on our behalf time and time again. He had one trick up his sleeve. Straight from the off he would strut across to his opponent and smack him on the chin.

A pre-emptive strike like?

Yes, quite.

Like Benny Lynch.

Something like that, yes. I mean after that it was one way traffic. But this chap, no matter how many times he was knocked to the floor, he would always get back up. I remember him well. I mean they adored him, absolutely adored him. He virtually became the regiment's mascot, the object of their affection and admiration. Couldn't quite understand that. Always though the objective was to win myself, not to glory in some form of masochistic, heroic defeat.

Quite.

Quite what old boy?

Quite a thing that. Quite good when you think about it. Doin that for yer mates.

Quite. And their language. F this and F that. Everthing was an F and a C. Quite remarkable how they managed to fit so many F and C's into their daily dialogue. Some of them were

strange creatures. Couldn't bloody understand a word at times.

Yes, of course. Anyway, I don't want to use such a predictable cliché but they really were like sheep, difficult to separate out. I mean loyalty is one thing but if you're a commanding officer you need to be able to talk to each of your men individually at some stage. Very difficult sometimes with the Jocks. They stuck together so much it became impossible to treat them as individuals.

So how did you treat them?

As soldiers old boy. We gave the order. They carried it out. That was the arrangement.

The arrangement?

Yes, that's right. The arrangement.

You mean like the way one might arrange to go to the football with someone, that sort of thing?

I saw it more as a musical arrangement, a thing composed of various ordered parts.

Like a flower arrangement.

Yes, sort of. Where different species come together in harmony.

Species?

Yes, exactly. Not of the same taxonomic rank. You must have noticed it yourself, Mr Queen.

As a journalist, I mean.

Noticed what?

The variety, shall we say. The hunters and the hunted. The haves and the have nots, so to speak. I mean, why do you do it old boy?

Do what?

Hunt. That's what you're really doing isn't it? You're hunting. Cummon. Run it past me, is that what you chaps say?

We used to play a game.

A game?

Up our street.

Your what?

Our street. It was called Hunt The Hare. We picked on one boy. He was given one hundred seconds to scarp. Then we tracked him down. When we found him he had wet himself with fear. Just the idea of it. People coming after you. When it was my turn I hid away outside the boundary. But you know what? In the end I just stepped back inside to give them the chance to find me. 'That cunt went outside the boundary. String him up!' screamed the guy who earlier wet himself. The next night we renamed the game. Know what we called it? Hunt The Cunt.

Henley poured them both some more wine. Then he snapped his finger at the waiter and pointed at the bottle. He paused.

That's all very well but.

But what Captain? Do you not approve of the name? Does it irritate your refined English sensibilities? Did it never occur to you that as you once strutted in and out of the barracks with your officer's stick tucked tightly under your right arm that you were the hunter and the humiliator of another species, as you like to call it?

Henley looked over his shoulder then leaned back into the conversation.

Look old boy it's not like that. It's an arrangement, nothing more. We're in it together, you and I. Just like your father before you. I issue the order, you lot obey it. That's the way it has to be. We're surrounded by barbarism old boy, can't you see it? You were in the colony yesterday and again today. They are no better than animals. That's the way it is. The way it has always been. The arrangement lifts us above that degradation. It permits us to maintain a sense of order in a disorderly world.

Do you know what order is, Captain? Order is about having a normal father. Order is life without the vertex.

The what? Henley sniggered.

Without the Egyptian demons in the living room. Order is knowing who your father really is, not waiting for the monster to arrive when the wind whistles from the east on cold, dark, Scottish winter nights.

Henley shifted uneasily in his chair. He knew something wasn't right. That Billy's ulterior motive for the meeting was beginning to reveal itself. Yet it was too late to change things, to reverse the new emerging status quo, the wine had seen to that.

Billy sensed his opportunity. He leaned forward and thrust his forefinger towards Henley's ageing chest.

You know nothing about order. You're very being creates its antithesis. Ismaelia, June 1959. The police rebellion. Where was the arrangement then?

Henley dropped his head. His chest sank into the tuxedo and, as it did so, his neck shrivelled and drooped. Suddenly he looked old to Billy. Older even than Billy's father when the cancer finally took control.

You arranged for him to be handed over to the Egyptian authorities didn't you Captain?

You arranged the press censorship. And before that, you arranged the shootings didn't you?

Henley stared straight ahead, not at Billy, but at something miles away in the distance. He ruffled his napkin with his right hand, the triangle squashed now in the palm of his hand: the vertex gone.

Billy witnessed the disappointment in his face. Disappointment that his dinner guest had become a volatile messenger from the past. Billy controlled himself. He leaned across the table and whispered.

That night was the biggest British military humiliation since Bloody Sunday wasn't it, yet you arranged it so nobody would find out. That was the deal, the arrangement, wasn't it Captain?

Henley shook his head, his eyes glistening with tears. He gently rubbed the napkin across the glass table as if to wipe away the memory Billy was forcing him to confront.

You kept the Egyptians sweet by handing over my dad. In return they agreed not to let it leak out that a bloody massacre had taken place on their patch. Do you know what they did to him? Are you aware what the arrangement was in the police cell that night? They rearranged his toe nails, then they rearranged his mind. Then, when I was born, my childhood was rearranged around his traumatised mental state. Just as the doors had to be rearranged in our house to stop him escaping and the social arrangements too, they had to be changed to fit his violent mood swings. Then there was our own wee family arrangement. We had to keep it all a big secret in case the men in white coats arranged electric shock therapy to his head. That was a nice arrangement too. Perfect.

Henley said nothing. He reached across for his teacup and tried to lift it from the saucer. But even that seemed too heavy and he clattered it back down. The old man had looked forward to an affable evening with another Brit and hadn't at all, it seemed, expected this type of onslaught. Billy watched him. He'd wanted to confront him like this for years yet now, in the very wake of that confrontation, he felt cheap and unmanly. Henley had helped him through the meal. He'd looked after Billy's manners, not in a patronising way, but in a caring and understanding fashion. Now they were both lost in a battle between past and present, a purgatory where conflicting versions of history impinge on the future. Where now do they go from here?

Henley took a brilliant white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed the sweat from his forehead.

The culture of blame, he said.

What?

The culture of blame old boy. That's what you reflect - a new generation of buckpassers. It blinds you to the truth, to the reality of the human experience. Yet you lot up there claim to be the hard-bitten realists. Well if that's the case then I'm afraid the hard-working rational Scot has lost his mind. Immersed in what Maggie Thatcher called Moaning Minnie land, he

constantly searches for scapegoats. Open your eyes Billy. See what your father saw so the way ahead becomes clearer. All men dream, but not equally. Your father wasn't a victim Billy. He was a soldier. He didn't shoot the wogs with his eyes closed. He did so taking aim, following orders.

Aye, your orders.

He wanted to be there Billy. They all did. The Scots I commanded were the best soldiers any commanding officer could wish to have. They were already tribal, even before we gave them the uniform. Your dad was a brave chap. Sensitive, I remember, but direct and protective of his fellows. Quite a show if I remember correctly.

A show?

Yes. A show. A bloody good show.

Just like the night of the riots in Ismaelia. Was that a good show too? When you ordered him to open fire on innocent civilians, what kind of show was that?

You don't order the Scots to do anything. Don't have to old boy. Their brutality is instinctive, in-bred I'd say, genetic - that's why they're the best soldiers in the world. Walk into any old public house in Scotland and look at the men. They're already pent up, on edge, short tempered - lawless believers in law, and rebel believers in authority. As for you Billy, what they have done to you is tragic. Those ivory tower liberal idealists have put you in a state of denial, about who you really are, what you really should be.

Civilised?

Henley folded another napkin - the vertex was back.

Oh don't talk such rot boy. There is no civilisation without war. Open your eyes, Queen.

Can't you see the horror around you? Have you been re-programmed to ignore the reality of your place in the world? You are white and British for god's sake. The empire isn't dead old boy, it has merely changed shape. We still control them you know. Look around you. Can't you see the degradation? We are alive. You are alive Billy. You possess an inbred moral law

Billy, one which will bind together the generations into a tradition and a mission - that's what you're really hunting for. It's what you've found. It's what you are. That's why you're here. You're driven by your father's death, aren't you, son? You carry forth his serious, austere spirit and in so doing you sacrifice the comfortable life of your peers back in Scotland. That's why we're really here, Billy, can't you see? Private Queen isn't dead. His spirit is here with us in Nagpur. You carried it here, to the home of empire.

Billy looked straight at the buttons on Henley's tuxedo. He seemed like the last living Englishman in India. All around them in the restaurant, young wealthy Indians were appearing, laughing, it seemed, at the artefact Henley had become. Billy dropped his gaze. He hated you.

Henley gently swirled the wine in his glass.

Let me tell you something, boy. Your father didn't hate me, he tolerated me. He tolerated me because he understood the importance of the arrangement, the crucial nature of class cooperation in the maintenance of law and order and white British rule. Yes, I handed him over to the Egyptians and yes, he was badly beaten. But our actions were joint actions. He knew, as I did, that it was the only way to keep a lid on the massacre otherwise our influence would have been seriously diminished in the Suez zone. The last thing we needed was the world's press bleating on about a few wogs left dead in the desert. He sacrificed his own personal interests, that's what soldiers do. And from that follows the great value of tradition: in memories, in language, in customs - that's why you sing his songs Billy, why you walk his walk and talk his talk. Do you understand me, boy?

Yes sir.

Good. Then we have an agreement.

An agreement to what?

To finish our wine and to cooperate in spite of it all.

In spite of what?

Our candid differences, old boy.

He looked at Henley's flat and civilised forehead. Seemingly untouched by conscience, it was smooth and strangely unwrinkled for a man of his years. His hands too, long and elegant fingers, ghostly white amidst the black of the Shadnipurum night. As with most white men in strange lands they were excited by one another's presence. To Billy The Englishman was a calming influence, a rational individual who knew the rules of the game and how far to stretch them. As part of the deal Henley received savage vibes. They shared an unsigned agreement, a silent entente carved out of the overwhelming cultural chaos that surrounded them. Maybe that's what The Union had been, what The Union was, what Billy's dad felt when Henley had given the order to open fire that fateful night that led to this, his father's late night obsession with The Vertex and the branding of his dad, not Henley, as a murderer.

Maybe Henley did recognise Queen. Perhaps he saw in Billy the same wee look his father had, as, together, they raided villages in and around Ismaelia all those years ago. It was so damned pointless. It really wiz. Them both sitting here. In the midst of it all. India: she strips you naked, examines you like a doctor then, when she's finished with your body, she pricks your mind. Henley knew this, or at least that's how it felt to Billy. You look tired, old boy, he said. No, not at all, lied Billy, fighting the secret fight that most Scotsmen fight in the presence of Der Englander. He'd been brought up in a land of nods and winks and invisible objectives: head up, keep your eyes open and your mouth shut boy, march, march, forward in order. Now, here it was again. We are us. They are them. Together we conquer. Divided we die. The night Billy broke his dad's arm he was writhing around the bed spitting expletives about an English officer called Captain Henley, and the plethora of Egyptian words and place names: Port Said, Ismaelia, El-Omari, Maadi. Even now the words stuck in Billy's head: demy (town), niwt (village), set maat (place of truth). He'd regularly struggled with his dad's almost supernatural strength as he battled with his tortuous Egyptian demons visible only to him. Even when the bone snapped that night he flailed it around wildly: normal pain a mere

pawn in his mission to rid the room of the evil he thought existed. Yet in hospital when the doctor asked who Henley was? Name, rank and serial number was the only reply. Then silence. It wasn't the first or last time he was to encounter Henley. Or the silence. Now here he was, here they were, together again amen.

Henley paid for the bill with a nudge and a wink and another agreement to meet the following day. He was to show Billy the leper colony and the work of the foundation. There was a handshake, a polite goodnight, then Billy was left to make his way back to Jagsons. It was, of course, a lonely, inebriated walk.

## Chapter 15

### Nagpur Sunrise

HE SAT in his room at Jagsons counting the giant cockroaches as they rattled back and forth across the stone floor. The lights flickered until midnight then, as the monsoon clouds swept in from the south, they flickered again and died.

He thought he saw something up on the ceiling fan. He shook his head. Fuck sake Billy get a grip. Eyes to the front. Get up. Splash water on your face boy. Be a man. For wance in yer life just dae it. He turned his back on it and slid out of bed the other way. It was so dark he had to put his airms oot like Frankenstein tae walk tae the bog! He had his bare feet tae. But that's one thing about the cockroaches, they scuttle away from ye - its no as if they're trying to climb up your leg or anything, thank christ. Power cuts were a regular occurrence at Jagsons so management kindly left a wee box of matches and a candle next to the cracked bathroom mirror. Billy lit it and stared at himself. He was knackered, the face all puffy wae the hangover and all the rest of the goings on. He could feel it at his back. The Visitation had become quite a regular thing now. It changed shape and form. The previous night it was Henley he'd imagined hanging from the ceiling fan. Tonight it was a leper gargoyle who kind of looked a bit like Henley. Billy held the candle up to the mirror and it was there again, behind him. Except this time it was Henley and his dad. They were in their army khakis except Henley was naked up top. They were holding hands as if they'd just been sleeping together through in Billy's room. What made it feel bad was the way Billy's dad moved his hand up onto Henley's chest and caressed it. They were just two young men, together, taking part in Britain's great colonial dream.

When Billy blew the candle out, they kindly disappeared. It was over. And so was the black Maharashtra night. In its place a blazing Nagpur sunrise the likes of which Billy had never seen before or was ever likely to see again. He had to clarify things. There was no clarity, that was the problem. What did he actually have? He had a line, that's what he had, a hook, a peg, an angle. That woman Shoba, the posh rebel with the mock Jane Austen accent, what had she actually told him? He sat on the edge of the bed, but he couldn't remember it, he just couldn't. Aye, that's what it wiz, thingwy. The Englishman was taking money from the better off lepers to arrange access to yer actual leper colony, a hospital in other words, where they could be guaranteed better treatment. That's what it wiz, a bloody glorified BUPA scheme for lepers, courtesy of Captain Henley. Billy held his head in his hands. Jesus, fact really could be stranger than fiction. Enough of the cliches boy, the fuckin, whatdoyoucallthem, them literati shaggers will be listening in to punish you for your laziness again - you need to work harder to find truly original ways of expressing oneself, ya prick. No but shut up. Listen. It wiz true. If Shoba was telling the truth then this was a finding, investgative journalism. But did she actually say it? And how had the time between her actually saying it and the development of Billy's thinking within that time zone adjusted the way in which she actually said it? And what if that was the case? If that particular hypothesis held firm, where did that leave Billy's fragments of intent in relation to the overall picture about what his dad did? And what about the way wee Billy had interpreted his words and violent actions all those many years ago as he sat cross-legged listening to his dad's fearsome war stories by the fireside? How had life manipulated the truth in other words? Shut it knob. Knobby Styles, ya prick. She had said it.

If it were the case then surely The Englishman would be using the money to furnish his lavish colonial lifestyle to which he had become accustomed. Not a bad little earner when one actually thought about it. Billy tried to stamp on a cockroach, but it was too quick, scuttling across the floor and back under the drawing table. Why did he call it a drawing table, he never

drew there? Shut it. Concentrate on the task in hand, the fuckin mission statement. If that was the angle then fine, Billy would have his story. He could write about corruption at the heart of the Foundation. Auld Nick would be happy. Henley would be exposed. Billy would get his exclusive. Problem is, would Auld Nick run it? And so what if Henley was ripping the lepers off, wasn't that what Billy had been taught to do by his own father? Not rip off a leper exactly but look efter number wan, put the boot into the weak because that's what Protestantism was all about, The Elect and The Doomed, the natural fatalistic order of the universe as we know it captain! Where did that leave him and his journalistic ethics with his angles, his intros, perspectives, and increasingly pointless spins? He needed something else, something better, something new, deeper - more bloody meaningful, infact. It was to do with his dad, carrying on the spiritual tradition, fuck the political correctness. It wasn't religion he was seeking either. It was to do with honour, sacrifice in the name of what? In the name of strident loyalty to one's ain being. The auld yins knew all about it. Auld guys in pubs, they were it. They knew what Billy meant, or did they actually? Billy scratched the heid again. Spit boy spit. Sound the retreat. What was he going to do about Henley? What would anyone do?

## Chapter 16

### An Agreement Between Men

There was the usual politics. There always is. Over the next few days and weeks it became clear that all was not well in Beggar's Colony. The Englishman was only tolerated by those lepers lucky enough to be plucked from a slow and agonising death there. The Superiors, as they were known, received treatment and were, in relative terms, looked after in the Mohandas Kumani Leper Colony. But it was those in Beggar's Colony who came to Billy. They wanted to overthrow Henley and the iron grip he had on the selection process. Over lunch at The American Colony Hotel Billy told Henley about the plot against him. The old man swirled his gin and tonic in that slow, languid fashion Billy had become accustomed to. It is the Indian way, he told Billy.

'Yes Captain, I understand that. But unless you act swiftly Bhatt will see to it you are overthrown, the work of The Foundation will be left in ruins.'

Henley smiled.

'And what would you have me do? Have him horsewhipped at dawn?'

Billy folded his napkin, once, twice, thrice: the triangle.

'Perhaps a more subtle approach is called for Captain: a negotiated settlement with the threat of some physical force behind it.'

Billy thought back to his days at The Country Club in Dubai. If only he could install some of the ex-pat friends of Uncle Ron - they were the type of men required for this particular

objective. Henley sipped his gin and tonic. The Englishman had suspected Bhatt for some time. Now it was time to deal with him.

‘I have a proposal for you Billy,’ said Henley.

Billy nodded his head. He liked the old man’s deliberate style. It reminded him of a bygone relationship he had with other men in the past. It was the promise of a gift with certain stipulations attached. He liked that. The idea of being rewarded if his forthcoming actions merited it.

Henley swallowed the last of his drink and placed his crystal glass on the table.

‘All things being equal, I want you to be overseer to the colony.’

Billy looked down at his carefully folded napkin on the table.

‘Did you know I was coming here?’ he asked.

Henley looked down and gently rubbed his forefinger across the edge of the table.

‘Did you?’ asked Billy again.

‘I’d rather not say old boy.’

‘You know Paterson don’t you?’

Henley looked to the side. Here. There. Anywhere, except straight at Billy.

‘You killed him didn’t you?’

‘Oh don’t be ridiculous old boy. Paterson killed himself. He knew the rules.’

‘Who else do you know?’

Henley clenched his fist.

‘You know Davie Scobie don’t you? You went to visit him in hospital in Ayr didn’t you?’

And Nicolson. Is he one of your contacts too?’

‘Look Billy, there are journalists in The Foundation too. You chaps aren’t immune you know.’

‘And what would you have done with my dad if he had squealed about the Ismaelia massacre?’

‘Your father was different. He was a beautiful man and a brave soldier. It wasn’t like that with him Billy. You must learn to understand that no man is born equal. Your father wasn’t a Scobie or a Paterson.’

‘You visited my dad in hospital too didn’t you? When I was just a wee boy. I remember you looking at my mum.’

Henley chapped his forefinger knuckle twice on the table then snapped his finger at the waiter.

‘More drinks please. Billy, another drink?’

Billy nodded. He’d seen that chap before. In the students union at London University: Alan Burns.

‘Will you accept my proposal or not Billy?’

‘And if I refuse?’

‘I assume you will return to Scotland. Back to your flat. Back to Mr Nicolson and your Uncle John.’

Henley paused.

‘And back to that murder investigation where I believe, since your disappearance, you are now a prime suspect.’

Billy looked around at Henley’s villa. It had been paid for by The Foundation and was staffed by three Indian servants. Unlike Uncle Ron’s brash, new abode in Dubai, it retained a sedate sense of grandeur. They sat there throughout the long, hot evening, playing chess and gently mocking the servants.

‘I once pushed an Indian waiter into the swimming pool at the Country Club in Dubai,’ he told Henley. ‘He couldn’t even swim.’

Henley smiled, anticipating a funny story from his newfound Scots compadre.

‘No it wasn’t funny,’ said Billy.

‘There was more to it than that. After I done it, I knew I must have done the right thing

because the other ex-pats applauded. When I walked back among them they picked me up and passed me round like a rugby ball. I was just a boy. But it was the most exquisite feeling.'

Henley nodded. And later that night, as the sun set across the vast expanse of the parched Nagpur slums below, and his companion drifted to sleep under the shamiana, Billy gently propped his head on a satin pillow and slipped his old army revolver from its holster which always hung in the corner.

After a short rickshaw ride downhill to Beggar's Colony, Billy was soon pressing the barrel against that fat bastard Bhatt's cheek. It wasn't loaded, but that stinking leper cunt didn't know any better.

'You fuck with Henley, you fuck with me,' said Billy, squeezing it right into his putrid flesh.

'I'll blow yer fuckin brains oot.'

It all happened so quickly, as Uncle Alex used to say, a pre-emptive strike. That local councillor cunt Bhatt visibly shat himself and, next day, he was gone.

Billy didn't tell Henley. Henley already knew why Bhatt had left. Henley knew about his dad too, they knew each other's minds now, the three of them, locked together in union. It fascinated Billy. Night after night he'd sit in the cave with only a small paraffin lamp, and the stench of slow, rotten death, for company. In the corner, just above Billy's forehead, was the vertex. The coming together of three angles, the arrangement, the union. He contemplated its significance. Was it his dad and himself who constituted the base of the pyramid, allowing Henley to be the point, or was it Billy himself now at the sharp edge, with the old boys of the regiment making up the base? He understood Henley and himself, brought together by context, two educated men, closer to the same class than his father could ever have been. Yet it was this polarisation between his dad and the Captain which made the thought of their relationship even sweeter now. It was an arrangement which undermined class and national boundaries. His dad, the common Scots private, a joiner to trade, and Henley, the Captain, that English grammar school boy, what was it that bound such divergent spirits together in

harmonious correlation? Even when gripped by those terrifying seizures it was not, never, to be Henley's fault, that's not how the vertex works because its considerations are broader, its sphere of spiritual influence silent and all embracing.

A few leper families came to see Billy, the new overseer. They offered him gifts, they offered him their daughters, to get them out of Beggar's Colony. They thought he knew The Englishman, that he had influence. As the days passed Billy's consciousness drifted. He left Jagson's to move into a small villa with a swimming pool, paid for by The Foundation. It wasn't as magnificent as Henley's but he had a pretty Indian maid. He called her Shamal. By night Henley and him drifted from one plush hotel to the next, mixing with an array of diplomats, UN officials and international aid workers. The Englishman initially introduced him as a journalist but, as time passed, the title was dropped and he spent more time writing The Foundation's press releases and updating their website. It was an undefineable organisation. Part charity, part business, it drew funds from other such arterial set-ups, such as the British Israeli Movement, The Freedom Foundation and from an array of anonymous global business connections some tied to development charters from Bangalore to Bombay. Billy should have been on the blower to Auld Nick. He did so on one occasion. But it was obvious their relationship was over. He never phoned back, opting instead to tender his resignation in a brief and wonderfully obnoxious e-mail. He had nothing left to chase. Now Billy virtually had control of who got into Mohandas Kumani and who didn't. He soon turned it into a home from home, even managing to buy a satellite dish in downtown Nagpur which allowed him to watch the Old Firm matches back home in Scotland. In one of the flea markets he came across something that looked like an old St Andrew's Cross flag and he hoisted it up on a clothes pole on top of the cave roof. Because the shanty roofs were so low you could see it high above everything else, fluttering proudly during the monsoons or still and limp, weary, in the long and sultry late afternoons.

The lepers treated him like their new local councillor. He had to listen to their complaints and

their concerns. They weren't daft. They knew Billy held the key to a better life for them up at the hospital where medicines were readily available and student nurses from Great Britain and France bandaged their wounds and dispensed drugs for pain. Sometimes the lepers became angry but generally remained in awe of Billy's British accent. Most of them tried to bribe him. What money they had, they gave him. In return he would bring the odd bottle of medicine from the hospital, or, most popular of all, strong painkillers and morphine from the surgical unit. He knew the anaesthetist, a white French girl from Dijon. She loved his Scottishness and he loved her morphine even more. He often went for weeks without seeing Henley. Yet their relationship, their arrangement, remained firmly intact. It was about a moral law which invisibly bound them together into a tradition and a mission, here, in the colony, here, in the new empire not visible to the naked eye but understood deep in the heart and arteries. The morphine. It worked well. Sending him to a place where his soul was free and his intellect even more so, free to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, and to dream of a new existence in which his true value as a man lay. He was happy in his role as The Englishman's assistant although there was an implication of mindless subserviance in the relationship. It was just an agreement they had, that's all. An agreement between men. One night, the Englishman invited Billy to a business meeting at The American Colony Hotel. As Billy entered the function suite he stopped and looked across to where Henley stood by the drinks table with a British diplomat. Henley said, Unpredictable as ever! and everyone laughed, then he put his glass down and came towards Billy with both hands outstretched. He felt just like a boy again in Dubai, and it reminded him of the time his dad ran to meet him after he got lost on the beach at Whitley Bay.

## Appendix A

An article published in The Big Issue Scotland on August 8, 2007, page 14

THE NIGHT I broke his arm he was writhing around the bed spitting expletives about an English officer called Captain Henley. It wasn't the first or the last time I was to encounter Henley. But this had been a particularly violent flashback featuring a plethora of Egyptian words and place names: Port Said, Ismailia, El-Omari, Maadi. To this day the words stick in my head: demy (town) niwt (village) set maat (place of truth). My mum and I regularly struggled with his almost supernatural strength as he battled with his torturous Egyptian demons visible only to him. Even when the bone snapped that night he flailed it around wildly: normal pain a mere pawn in his mission to rid the room of the evil he thought existed. As I pieced the story together using late night conversations about his experiences in The Royal Signals in 1951, I came to hate Henley. But I was told not to say a word incase people thought my dad was mental. The enforced silence drove me into my 'boys own' game of revenge against the posh Englishman who'd tormented my dad so much. I exacted revenge on him as I played with my toy British Commando soldiers on the mantelpiece, subjecting him to an array of agonising injuries and death. He was the one with the pistol and the binoculars. I pressed his head against the white hot bar of the electric fire watching him melt onto my mother's best carpet.

To me at least Henley was an English coward. Fresh from Sandhurst he subjected the other Scots soldiers in my dad's regiment to systematic humiliation. The Jocks were fair game in his view. Whenever there was a nasty or dangerous mission, he always sent my dad and his pals. I'd sit cross-legged on the living room carpet listening to his late night stories about Henley, relieved it was a talk night, not a fight night. His reminiscences took me into another world: a place where cruelty was common. There was the story about Henley refusing to give the men

water rations as they dug a latrine in the blazing desert sun. Then there was the time during a billet inspection he ordered my dad's mate Scobie to empty his locker with letters from his mother. In front of the men he poked a hole in one of the letters, dangling it on the edge of his cane. 'I didn't think Jocks *could* write, he said sarcastically, adding, 'at least not in the Queen's English anyway.' As the story went, Scobie hit him before serving detention and a series of beatings.

Then it was my dad's turn. During a period of heightened tensions in the Suez zone he was ordered to guard a cable depot in a town south of Ismaelia. Captain Henley ordered the men to shoot on sight if they suspected any terrorist activity or thieving. Following orders, my dad opened fire, 'dropping' one Egyptian dead and 'scattering' the rest. He was mentioned in despatches for 'saving the day'. But what the military records don't explain is why the great British Army later handed him over to the Egyptian authorities in whose custody he was savagely and repeatedly beaten. As a boy he protected me from that part of the story, retreating instead inside his own head, he'd stare up at the corner of the living room ceiling, the silent precursor to one of his terrifying flashbacks. The attacks always came at night. By day he was the finest, most hardworking and sensitive man I'd ever met. But as darkness fell, and especially when the wind blew from the east on a winter's night, he invited the ghost of his leering and twisted Egyptian jailer into our living room.

My dad is dead now. But Henley lives on in my mind. I've turned him into a Ph(D) at Glasgow University. The book, *Hunting Captain Henley*, is a semi-fictional account of a young man's search, not just for Henley, but for an explanation of Scotland's role in the colonial project that was Suez. More than that though it is an exploration of the effects that post traumatic stress can have on the families of victims. It is a lonely world in which to live not least because it taints your world view. It effects the way you look at the Arab world and at Scotland and the UK. More than that it is a study of the schizophrenic nature at the very heart of Scottish identity and the linguistic tensions that exist between Standard English and Scottish dialect.

As part of my research for the project I contacted Hollybush House in Ayr, one of the treatment centres run by the charity Combat Stress, also known as the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Association. The centre provides welfare support and treatment for all Ex-Servicemen and women who suffer from symptoms of mental health problems related to their time in Service. They have a catchment area covering all of Scotland, Ireland and the North East of England. The clients who attend Hollybush for treatment range in age from 19 to 90 with the current average age around 40 years old. There is a world of psychological injuries often fuelled by drugs and booze. It is a place of recurring nightmares, persistent anxiety, violent outbursts, nightmares and flashbacks. Britain, unlike most of the Western World, does not provide a dedicated service for their veterans who have suffered psychological injury. I'd gone to Hollybush House to somehow confirm to myself that my own experiences didn't matter: that they were merely isolated childhood machinations that should be left in the distant past. What I discovered was an horrific catalogue of present tense psychological trauma suffered by the sons, daughters, and wives of war veterans. This is Scotland's Secret War, a world where relatives live in silence, shouldering the stress of loved ones newly returned from Iraq, Afghanistan, The Falklands and Northern Ireland. While post traumatic stress and the struggle of 'our boys in the field' has received plenty of media attention, another battle closer to home is cruelly and silently stabbing at the hearts and minds of loved ones. One fifteen-year-old girl was prevented by her Gulf War veteran dad from speaking about her experiences. Another spoke of the 'unbearable tension' in the house, of having to firstly find out what kind of mood her father was in before deciding to go into the living room or straight upstairs to her room to blot out the feeling of simmering potential violence and tension. "It's like living in a secret society," said one of the wives. "Nobody will talk about it. As an army or ex-army wife it's as if we are supposed to obey a silent code of honour." For others it is not merely silence but violence that is the enemy. "My dad gets angry, very angry," said one 15-year-old. He lashes out and it scares the hell out of me. What worries me is the way the sins of the father sort of pass onto the children. I'm on alert mode whenever

my dad goes off on one. I'm just dead angry all the time and I don't understand why." The stories follow a similar pattern. They tell of dads "rocking back and forward", "being loud and aggressive" then "slumping into tears." They tell of worldly war stories on winter nights by the fire exploding in violence. They tell of fear, anxiety, horror in the house. Some of them have written simple prose or poetry to get it off their chests. One teenage girl wrote this about her father:

### Veteran

A laughing pleasant man  
takes me to the train station  
one week later  
a surly remote man  
collects me in silence  
bombs are falling in  
the Middle East  
and the war in his head  
has resumed

What disturbed me most as I listened was that they also told part of my own childhood story. While I've learned to cope with the anger I still hanker after Henley. My search has become an intellectual journey as much as anything else. It is one which searches for Scotland's true role in the creation and maintenance of The British Empire and it is one obsessed with the relationship between Henley and my dad, between England and Scotland:

an Act of Union which still takes us to war today, back to the killing fields of what I see in my subconscious as The Invisible Empire, one which operates under the guise of various international organisations, treaties, and old friendships.

Garry Walker, an ex-army nurse and Head of Clinical Services at Hollybush House said: “People in the UK just don’t understand the far reaching consequences of war veterans trauma. It isn’t just the soldiers - it’s the families who suffer. We now work with carers and have introduced weekend family workshops, where they are encouraged to develop healthy coping strategies for dealing with the ongoing effects that their loved ones condition has on them.” Garry’s wife Carolyn is also a Nurse Therapist at the treatment centre. She has recently returned from Australia on a Churchill Travelling Fellowship where the wives and families of Vietnam Veterans have set up support groups. With proper financial support Carolyn hopes to set up a similar system here. She said: “The Australian system made me more aware of the lack of resources available to the partners of British ex-servicemen. The Australians have access to a free confidential counselling service, The Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, and are at the forefront of research into the effects on families.” One study in Australia claims that the sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans may be at increased risk of problematic alcohol or drug use. The Morbidity of Vietnam Veterans Study (1998) found that 36% of veterans who participated, self-reported problematic alcohol and drug use. As a result many sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans may have been brought up in an environment affected by alcohol and other drug use. One of them confesses: “Thinking about the bad times of my childhood is like picking a scab: I always end up bleeding. A lot of my childhood was normal, regular, every day, despite dad’s alcoholism and annual Anzac Day freak out, and mum’s ‘funny turns’ (panic attacks) and ‘nerve pills’ (tranquillisers). The rest of my childhood was bad enough that I suffered a minor nervous breakdown when I was eleven.” Some Australians have even been encouraged to write poetry as a way of getting things off their chests. One writes about his father:

Billy will be on hole watch  
A thousand-metre stare  
Waiting for the dawn to break  
When Charlie won't be there

Billy will be on hole watch  
And as each bottle dries  
Very few will understand  
Why he sits and cries.

Although no equivalent study yet exists in Scotland or the UK the early signs are that the extreme distress placed on Scottish families is following a similar pattern. The stories are numerous and shocking: from Iraq to Afghanistan and Bosnia the sons and daughters of Scotland's soldiers cope in silence, some too terrified or embarrassed to reveal the true horror of what has become a psychological war on the home front. But surely, as the silence of this secret war is broken, the true extent of the sins of the fathers and its effects on families and loved ones will finally be told.

## Appendix B

An article published in The Big Issue Scotland on January 24, 2008, page 18

THE PARK is a no-go area. Everybody knows that. A woman was raped there last month. The beast struck on a Saturday morning, dragging his female victim off the street into bushes. Police described the attack as “horrendous” and it sent ‘shockwaves’ through the community. In the high rise flats above Dalmuir Park in Clydebank the local MSP Des McNulty says there’s ‘an influx’ of ‘people with addiction’ and ‘mental health problems.’ At residents’ meetings it has been said that ordinary families are moving out through fear, willingly displacing themselves to make way for the new breed of ‘neighbours from hell.’ For one mother the final straw came when a microwave passed by her window six storeys up. The crazed alcoholic above then threw the television out behind it. The reaction is acute, the language, vehement. McNulty claims the town has become a ‘soft touch’ for drug addicts ‘booted out’ of Glasgow due to the city’s ‘no-nonsense’ eviction policy. He said: “The tenants in the Clydebank East flats and maisonettes in particular feel their area has a very high concentration of problem tenants, some transferred from other parts of West Dunbartonshire and some from Glasgow. There have been individual cases which I have asked the Council to investigate. One case I had reported to me recently involved a man who attempted to set fire to the local shop, the latest in a long series of offences.” But McNulty says his hands are tied because of confidentiality rules. “The employees of West Dunbartonshire Council won’t speak to you,” he said. “So most of the information I receive is anecdotal. I simply don’t have statistical evidence.”

You can feel McNulty’s frustration as he watches a once proud and united shipbuilding community torn apart by the petty politicking and desultory dictats of faceless council bureaucrats. It isn’t even the councillors to blame. Some point the finger instead at office

workers who administer the system. People who describe themselves as ‘normal’, ‘law-abiding’ and ‘working class’ say a smokescreen has been created to protect problem families. They say their concerns are blatantly ignored in favour of ‘a new underclass’ protected by political correctness and ruling their relocated roost with avengence, cocky and confident the law will put their human rights before the needs of the peaceful and largely law-abiding majority. A new class war is emerging in which a once strong sense of civic duty, the muscular spirit of the shipyards, is being outflanked by a cowardly quangocracy armed with office Christmas trees and political spin.

One case in particular has caused outrage. Locals say a woman who was slapped with the first criminal ASBO in Glasgow moved in to the high flats. Samantha Cleary took up residence last month after carrying out a reign of terror in her own Blairdardie neighbourhood. In court she gave her address as Ellinger Court, Dalmuir. Yet West Dunbartonshire Council insist it has no record of her living there. Local residents claim they have evidence of other ASBO cases being moved into the area, yet council leader Iain Robertson denies this.

Dannie Lennie is Chairman of the Dalmuir Multi-Tenants and Residents Association. He knows the flats in the area well and says he has witnessed a degrading decline in living conditions while ‘faceless council managers’ turn a blind eye. Danny says people have had enough. He describes what he calls “a buddy system culture” within the council where quiet agreements are made to house problem tenants from other areas. He says it is impossible to get straight answers and that when you ask for explanations administrators constantly shift responsibility from one authority to the other.

Chris Starrs is the PR Manager for Glasgow City Council. When asked about anti-social tenants in Glasgow being re-housed in Clydebank, he said: “Have you spoken to Glasgow Housing Association? I think this is their area of responsibility.” Lynne McEwan is the press officer for Glasgow Housing Association. She said: “I’m afraid that this is not, in fact, Glasgow Housing Association’s responsibility. Whenever someone is evicted from a Glasgow Housing Association property for antisocial behaviour they are automatically declared

homeless. In Glasgow it is the council who have responsibility for homeless people - not Glasgow Housing Association.” When asked again to pass the inquiry on to someone in Glasgow City Council Chriss Starrs replied: “I will if there is someone in the council who can answer your query.” Another Glasgow City Council Media officer, Catriona Watt, then said: “Glasgow does not place homeless households in any form of temporary accommodation outwith Glasgow. Sometimes we refer households back to the authority that they have a local connection with - and this is a national procedure - and there is an established framework for this. We do not house anti-social homeless cases in Clydebank. Where the Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation we do this within Glasgow.”

Dannie Lennie remains unimpressed. He said: “That sounds as clear as mud to me. And it typifies what we are up against. These people are playing the semantics game to protect anti-social tenants. What do they mean by a ‘local connection?’ - that’s what ordinary tenants want to know. Does that mean if they’ve visited the local boozer or walked in Dalmeir Park they have a ‘local connection’ - that’s what I mean about this underhand buddie scheme - it allows them to house whoever they want here.” Lennie claims vulnerable people are left increasingly isolated because office ‘pen pushers’ as he calls them are bowing to the needs of anti-social tenants. He may be right. In Methill, Fife, last week gangs of teenage thugs left a blind and disabled man a prisoner in his own home after forcing his carers out of the neighbourhood. Care chiefs axed the service after staff were ambushed by a gang of up to sixty yobs who have overrun his street. The thugs throw stones at cars, smash street lights, and prevent visitors getting out.

Back in ‘The Ghetto’ as it is now known by many locals, Christmas is fast approaching. But while council office parties get into full swing pensioner Mary McGuigan (77), from Dalmeir Court, is too afraid to visit the local Co-op to buy two selection boxes for her grandchildren. Mary remembers the time when neighbours around the maisonettes and Clydebank East high flats would visit one another and hand in Christmas cards. Now there is graffiti and an intimidating silence. Mary says she has seen boys with swords and that drug addicts urinate

in the lifts. "They kick down people's doors," she says. "And they burgle and steal from neighbours. I just refuse to go out now at all. There was a time when you could depend on your neighbours. Now they've taken over and there's nothing we can do about it." Others feel more militant about the situation. Terry Hamilton (70), from Yoker Mill Road is a retired engineer from John Brown shipyards. He said:

"The council is full of fancy patter. But I'll tell it as it really is. This place is a dumping ground, a waste disposal pit for Glasgow City Council to drop its anti-social tenants. As long as it's away from their patch they don't care. That's what's really happening." Terry recalls a time when people would sit on benches during the summer and chat. "We'd talk about everything, about Clydebank, about the world. There was a positive, humane community spirit. Now you can't sit outside without hearing abuse and seeing alchies and junkies. And it's all the same sort that are doing it. They are out of control. People are sick and tired of nothing being done about it and now believe the only way to get things done is to do it for ourselves." Terry may be right. Only recently one man did just that when he beat up a junkie who he claimed was constantly harrasing ordinary people. 'Junkie Bashing' as it has become known is now a reality not just in Clydebank but in neighbourhoods throughout Scotland. According to Scotland's foremost drugs expert Professor Neil McKeganey, director of the centre for drugs misuse research at Glasgow University, 'ugly splits' are now developing with residents forming vigilante-style gangs to 'impose their own social order.' He said "Many people in these communities have lost a sense of safety. Some are going out and junkie bashing because they feel the junkies in their area are largely to blame for the problems." In other parts of Scotland vigilante style groups have already taken steps to solve their own local problems. Earlier this year residents in Menstrie, Clackmannanshire threatened to carry out "punishment beatings" to restore peace to their crime-ridden town after anti-social residents moved in. In a letter to police they described problem teenagers as "Menstrie's Untouchable Generation." The letter said: "We are taking our own action. We know who they are, where they live and who their parents are. We are going to enforce a village standard."

Jim Campbell (46) is a welder from Kilbowie. He believes that continued council inaction and political correctness is fuelling the problem and that it isn't surprising people are taking action. He said: "They say they can't tell us the names of the anti-social tenants being moved in for reasons of confidentiality and to protect their human rights but what about our human rights? Isn't it a human right to be able to walk to the shops for a paper without being afraid of being spat on or to plant daffodils around a school without having them ripped up? We have to reverse the fear factor. It's them who should be dropping their gaze when they walk past us, not the opposite way round. This whole situation is a powderkeg waiting to explode. People have had enough of political correctness that is designed to protect only one section of the community. It's not just political correctness within the council, it's within the legal system as well." One case in particular has infuriated ordinary Bankies. A local mother whose son was stabbed to death has been told his killer could be back in the town just 11 months after being jailed. Hilda Canning knows she may soon come face to face with her son's killer, maybe at the shops, maybe in a lift. Almost exactly one year to the day (last November) McGinley was caged for six years for killing Gerard. But the PC brigade now consider him 'low risk' despite stabbing Hilda's son to death with a kitchen knife. Hilda is still unable to look at photographs of her late son. News of the beast's impending release has made her 'a prisoner in her own home' - a term which has become a cliché used by ordinary tax-paying citizens caged in their own community. While she is stuck behind psychological bars, Thomas McGinley may soon no doubt be out stalking the streets again, eyeballing passersby who simply want to buy a loaf of bread and live life in peace in their own land.

It isn't just the adults who are angry. Children too are talking about the 'cruel' yobs who 'sap their spirit'. The latest victims are 342 primary kids whose hard work was destroyed by a nasty wrecking spree during the October break last week. Pupils at Kilbowie Primary planted around 1000 daffodil bulbs to improve their school environment. But when they returned from the break the bulbs had been ripped up by thugs. Head Teacher Aileen Rice described the 'serious blow to morale' as the school is repeatedly targeted. She said: "We have been

carrying out improvement works by adding bulbs to the school grounds as part of our efforts for the Eco Schools Green Flag. The bulbs were planted all down the sides to make the school look nice. But the vandals have dug and thrown bulbs all over the place. The kids are really quite angry.” Locals say drugs play a major part in this. Kids as young as eight have been reported as operating as watchers for older drug dealers around the flats. Some are the sons and daughters of junkie parents, carrying on what has become ‘family traditions.’

It is the run up to Christmas and Dalmeir Park is a bleak place. It sits in the shadow of a citadel of freedom - the famous Clydebank crane. The Titan was one of the key targets for destruction by the Nazis in World War Two but managed to survive the blitz. But way beneath its steel structure, a new class war is being waged. It is a war where silent ententes have been agreed. One in which nothing is said, merely understood. The park is a no-go area after dark. There are no statistics about anti-social tenants. You can't use the swings unless you drink Buckfast. And don't visit your local GP - he has just been allegedly “savagely” beaten up in his surgery. All is not what it seems in the real River City.

## Appendix C

An article published in The Guardian newspaper in July 2008, on-line edition.

Akwero Florence is 54 now. She has never seen a dollar bill in her life. When she tried to explain this to the teenage soldiers, they shot her husband. Her children started screaming. So they shot them too. Then they raped her - all ten of them. As she lay bleeding the boys of the Mai Mai thrust the barrels of their guns into her vagina. That afternoon, more young men came to Kindu and raped her again. Today, Akwero is bent double over a stick after surgery to save her womb. She says the second group of armed men are *interahamwe*, the extremist Hutu militia that fled into the Congo 12 years ago after leading the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. The interahamwe use rape as a tool of genocide, telling women they would bear Hutu children and that would be the end of the Tutsis. Thousands still hide in the forests of eastern Congo. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped over the past decade by young soldiers. The Doctors On Call Service hospital in Goma alone has seen close to 4,000 women for rape over the past four years. One in four required major surgery. More than a third are under 18. "They really come with very bad wounds," said Doctor Justin Paluka. "Some have their vaginas pulled out. Most of them have been raped by four, five or even ten men."

Beni Richard is 16 now. He is a *child killer*- not because he is an adult who kills children but because he was a child who killed adults. During his five years as a child soldier he also raped women like Akwero. Beni says he was often forced at gun point into committing brutality. He took many women because he was told it would make him powerful, bullet proof. The more he raped, the stronger he became. He even saw five year-old girls being gang raped. "I was happy as a small boy," says Beni. "Even when my mother couldn't feed me I still played and laughed. But all that came to an end during the war. When I was eleven the soldiers came to my home and made me join the army. They promised to feed and educate me. And they promised my mother they would pay me in dollars to help support my family while I was

gone. I was taken to the front-line and given a gun. I was trained and told I had a job for life.”

Today, Beni is *Kotelengana*. The Lingala term literally means 'the trash of the army.' It is used to describe an ex-child soldier turned vagrant. They are often malnourished, in poor health, out of school and have no adult support. They often have their own dependants - girlfriends and babies.

According to research by the aid organisation War Child 70% of all child soldiers are struggling to reintegrate. They remain a marginalised, threatened and increasingly neurotic subculture. Yet as the politicians speak of peace in the region, and on the eve of the first International Criminal Court trial of the alleged child soldier recruiter Thomas Lubanga in The Hague on June 23rd, a new secret war has already started. It is a battle between what some see as an army of foreign aid spin doctors and local tribes who say they can't stomach the tsunami of propaganda aimed at reintegrating Lubanga's lost children. In this emerging *Newspeak* Beni is not a rapist, he is a lover. According to War Child, his girlfriend Marie Agathe, herself abducted at the age of twelve, says he saved her from the other soldiers. They fell in love and now they have a handsome baby boy called Moise. “Very touching”, says Mutumbo Nganga, a tribal councillor in the village of Kindu. “You know we are sick of the white man's lies. The *Kotelengana*, they hide behind your words. Just as Thomas Lubanga will hide behind your so called justice system in June. I heard a woman from Christian Aid talking about forgiveness. Has she been gang raped? Have her children been executed in front of her own eyes? One hundred years ago we had Belgian colonialists. Today, we have totally unrealistic aid agencies who refuse to accept the worthiness of our local laws.” Nganga may be right. Some Africa experts believe many of the continent's most brutal wars have been ended by deals that have incorporated warring factions into the democratic process through amnesties and the conciliatory processes of traditional justice. Meantime, it is the under fire aid agencies who shoulder the unenviable task of convincing battle scarred victims of rape that their perpetrators are capable of reform, that the duality of man can be overcome. Only when that argument is won can Akwero and Beni truly begin to live in harmony in the same village.

“There is some negativity but community reaction to reintegration is positive overall,” said UNICEF worker Chulho Hyun. He may be right. UNICEF'S basis livelihood scheme has allowed returning child soldier Patrick Okodo,17, to sell fish with assistance from a community based organisation. Many others, including teenagers like Beni, are set to follow Patrick's example. One day, Beni hopes Akwero will come to his stall. “Maybe we can talk. I want to help, that's all, says Beni. “That is my hope, my big plan for 2008.”

Geoffrey Keele is UNICEF'S spokesman in New York. He said: “As we try to move towards peace in the region there will be many, many more former child soldiers trying to reclaim their lives. What we must concern ourselves with is the return home, looking at tomorrow with dignity and resilience, beyond the trauma of yesterday.”

So Keele and others look ahead to a time when yesterday's rapists are accepted as today's lovers, yesterday's child killers - tomorrow's child rearers. It is time, in other words, for the boys of the *Kotelengana* to become the men of the DR Congo.

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