

Jesus of the glassworks

Between the auld factory and the railway line wis like a bad film set for a space B-movie.

Aquamarine boulders – lumps of scrap glass of varying size from when the auld building wis at its height – were scattered. Some jutted from the long grass. When the sun shone some o’ them looked like the tippy-tops of sunken polis car siren-lights peeking out.

Man-made dunes, the piles of sand from which glass wis once made are dotted across the barren expanse behind the building’s shell – funny enough, there’s no’ a window left in the place.

The set ends at the embankment of the Glasgow to Airdrie line where blue trains occasionally flashed either way. At night, they add a big here-then-gone spotlight that shoots across the set.

It’s been thirty years since the glassworks closed. Un-demolished. No gentrification. No’ like the shipyards or the old Forge.

Nobody wants to gentrify Earnside Street. A row of tenements leading to a railway bridge on one side.

The grass, the glass and sand on the other, that’s a place for junkies, teenage boys wi’ stashes of porn, secret drinkers, and daft wee lasses that don’t know any better giving in and giving out to daft wee boys that do. It is the sort of place the papers describe as a “wasteland” – if a deid body is found.

But everybody round here jist calls it The Muck. Obvious. A big stretch – maybe a couple of hundred yards by a hundred – of wasteland. Across the years, tenement boys who stole milk from posh Mount Vernon doorsteps in dawn raids born of boredom and double-dares, camped here. Many is the bunch of daft boys have been under canvas, drank stolen sherry and bragged the nights away until sunrise found work for the idle hands of wee boys who went on to steal bigger and better things.

Acting the big man. Kings o’ the wild frontier behind the auld *United Glass* building. I wis one of the daft boys back the day.

I like it here. I always have. I hide here. I always have.

I have been here a couple of hours now. Watching trains. Deciding ...

Well that disnae matter for now...

There's somebody coming through the dunes. I can see him. He cannae see me though.

When I wis a wean, mebbe ten or so, I liked that tae. Loved watching. Still dae.

I could see him now but he cannae see me. Like a commando in the war pictures. I don't know if I want tae talk tae this gadgie, so I pull the auld green torn tarp I wis sitting on right o'er me and roll into the longer grass. I know I am now invisible. Inside the tarp I can smell damp and dirt.

Ah'm a cocoon.

Through a cloth-tear I see the guy get nearer. He's about fifty feet away and coming into focus. I am good at judging folk and I decide to unroll myself slowly as he steps closer. He's a young guy. Mebbe in his twenties.

I stay in the long grass though and realise my fags and lighter are there on the flattened patch where I sat just minutes ago.

He is getting nearer. He looks alright. A bit of a hippy. Long hair, beard, beads, the works. He still has no' seen me. He doesn't look like a druggie or a bam, so I edge closer to the patch. I am lower than he is and he is soon stood over where I am now sat, back with my fags and lighter as if I have been here all along.

'Jeez, ye gie'd us a fright there, man.'

The hippy seemed a bit shocked but not scared.

'Sorry, pal.' I said. 'Jist sitting here watching the world and the trains go by like.'

'D'ye mind if I sit doon wi' ye?'

'Naw, help yerself. Fag?'

'Aye thanks man.'

I study the hippy a bit more as he flicks my *Zippo* into life and lights up a *No.6 King Size*. (ten left, so nae panic). He minds you of thon Robert Powell; you know the right good looking English guy fae *Jesus Of Nazareth*. He's sort of light tanned version o' that fella. He's a Glesga man but no' fae round here. He looks too kind and quiet to be fae here. I light up one tae and the two jist sit there, saying nothing. But that's OK. I feel OK wi' this guy. Calm like, y'know. There we are two guys in a sand dune wi' the whole o' Glesga buzzing about us, but it's quiet, dead quiet. Chapel quiet. I like

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these bits of quiet. Sometimes they last for an hour or so. Others it is shattered wi' the noise of the blue train as it batters past in whatever direction. No matter how many times it happens, it aye makes ye jump a wee bit. But that's trains, I suppose.

Robert Powell's right name is Jay.

'That's whit everybody calls me,' he said. 'It's easier than spelling out the full yin, I suppose.'

'A'right buddy, Jay it is. Ah'm Boaby.'

'Pleased tae meet ye, Boaby.'

'Likewise. Could ye go a wee hauf?'

'Ah don't... but fuck it, why no' – it's no' gonnae kill me.'

'True. Plus, ye cannae dae when yer deid, eh?'

We took a couple o' big swigs each.

'*WhiskyMac?*' said Jay

'Aye... the bam's dram, eh!'

Our talk wis the only noise for the next half an hour or so. Talking about fuck all really. The telly, fitba, music, lasses. Talking away wi' the authority of folk that know fuck all.

Still cannae get o'er how much this cunt looks like Robert Powell aff the telly though. His eyes are like hypnotic, like a guy fae a mind reader's poster.

'You really don't want tae dae wit ye came fur Boaby. Dae ye?'

I went quite cauld. Jay wis staring like he knew whit ah wis thinking.

'Whit? Ach away and don't talk shite, Jay. Too many bams' drams for you I think.'

We were pissed though. I fetched a couple of *Carlies* out the wee bag I carry wi' me. One each.

Pffft! Pffft! Ah love that sound.

The lager tasted good. Sharp. Took away the syrupy whisky taste. Who the fuck thought up *WhiskyMac?* Gets ye pissed though.

Jay wisnae giving up.

'So, what made ye change yer mind?'

‘Change ma mind fur whit?’

But I knew fur whit. And so did he. I had tanned a couple of spliffs before ah came oot. Took a haunful o’ Trammies tae. I wis right fucked up now. Jay must have been pissed tae, He looked like one thon guys that cannae take much o’ a drink. His eyes were right watery. But still piercing. Right intae me.

Ah hid been sitting here for hours before Jay arrived. Every time a train passed, my courage deserted me. Ah’m a shitebag. Feart. When ah came oot this morning I wis fuckin raging. Wanted tae kill some cunt. You when ye watch plays on the telly and some actor who plays a depressed guy tells everybody he ‘got nothing to live for. I may as well not be here...’ and blah blah blah fucking blah...

Well it’s no fuckin like that at a’... this is real. She’s fucked off and took the weans wi’ her. Fuckin rent arrears like a wee country’s national debt. Ah’ve selt and pawned everything I could. All that’s left wis in the wee bag. A haversack wi’ Trammies and lager and skunk and fags and a *Zippo* and a wee roll of tenners... £150 fae Cash Convertors fur ma *Gibson Les Paul*. Fuck’s sake. Whit’s the point? This isnae Play for fucking Today. This is Shettleston. This is oan yer Sweeney. This is insane and no’ worth a fuck. But ah cannae dae it. So ah’m gonnae leave here soon and pish ma £150 against the wall. Wi’ a bit a luck some cunt’ll mug and kill me oan the way hame. Knowing ma luck though, they’ll probably leave me in a bastarding coma.

THAT’S WHIT AH WANTED TO TELL JAY.

Ah didnae, though, cos ah’m a shitebag A coward. A drunken, lying, cheatin’ idle, wife-hitting, wean-frightening, worthless cunt. Ah couldnae even fall in front o’ a train properly.

But ah said fuck-all... ah jist looked at him and smiled.

He smiled back.

‘I know.’ he says, like a fucking Glesga mystic.

‘Gie it up, fur fuck’s sake. Yer no’ ma therapist ya daft cunt.’

‘Ok, Boaby. Ok.’

Jay smiled again. Usually when people get too near ah batter them. He seems different. Calm. Good. Fuck ah’m stoned!

‘Ah’m fucked up here, Jay, ye know...’

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‘Aye ah’m a wee bit oot of it masel.’

‘Is Jay short fur Jesus, there Jay. Is it?’ Ah couldnae stop laughing as I asked. ‘You know like *Jesus of Nazareth*. You’re a dead ringer fur him, man!’

‘What, Jesus?’

‘Naw ya daft bastard. That English cunt that played him oan the telly. Ye know, that right good looking fucker wi’ the eyes that follow ye like ma granny’s picture o’ the Sacred Heart.’

‘D’ye mean Robert Powell?’

‘That’s the fella!’

‘Well that wid be odd, me bein’ Jesus, Boaby.’ Jay said as he laughed. ‘Jay’s short for Jafar, Boaby. Ma name’s Jafar.’

‘Like the baddie in Aladdin?!’

‘Aye, something like that.’

‘So yer a Mozzie... fuck’s sake!’

‘So... dae ye no’ like Mozzies, then?’

‘Don’t gie a fuck pal. Ye can be whit ye like. Proddie, Jew, Buddhist... ah don’t care. Ah’m jist laughing cos ah thought ye looked like Jesus.’

‘S’pose that’s funny efter a’ then, eh.’

We laughed that laugh that the stoned and pissed do well. Ah wis tired and pissed and stoned. And a bit happier.

‘Jesus... fuck’s sake Jay. Kin ye imagine?’

‘Well ah wis your Saviour the day, Boaby, eh?’

‘Mebbes aye, mebbes naw. Bit yer a’right Jay. Yer a’right. Anyhow, Jay how did you get here, man. It’s no’ a place for a west end boy like you.

‘How d’you know I am a west end boy?’

‘Ye jist look it. Sound it tae. Anyway, don’t dodge the question. Whit brought tae The Muck?’

‘The Muck?’

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‘Ah forgot yer no’ fae roun’ here. The Muck is whit the local call this place. Ye know, cos it’s mucky, ah suppose.’

‘Be honest wi’ ye Boaby it’s a long story. But ah woke up o’er there.’ He pointed his thumb o’er his shoulder like a hitch hiker and indicated towards the edge of The Muck, near the bridge.

He went on, ‘I don’t know how really. As ah said it’s a long story. Ah rather widnae tell, ye know. Last thing ah mind wis goin oot last night. Then ah woke up. I wis disorientated and started wandering. Then I saw you. You didnae see me though. I watched you go for the train and then jump back and thought “*fuck, ah better dae something*” ... ah ducked down for a wee bit and watched and then decided tae come across... and here ah am...’

It must be about noon. The sun is high and it’s warm now. Well, warm for Earnside Street. Ah’m sleepy. Ah can see Jay’s tired. Ah normally would never sleep in front of a stranger. But it wis Jay. He wis OK. Ah felt comfortable wi’ him.

‘Ah’m gonnae kip a wee, Jay. Help yersel tae the *Carlies*...’

That wis the last thing ah ever said tae Jay.

‘*Help yersel tae the Carlies*’... what a parting gem, eh?

When I woke up it wis dusk. Ah wis still dazed when I realised Jay had fucked off.

‘Jeezo, the £150. Ah bet the cunt’s took it!’

But he hadn’t. It wis a’ there. There wis a wee note. It wis folded. It said “Thank you” in big letters on the outside. I knew he wis a good guy. Ah got the *Rizlas* oot and rolled a fattie.

Ah just sat there as the dark came. Ah felt better wi’ each breath oot. Ah took the *WhiskyMac* oot the haversack and drained it.

‘Here’s tae you, Jafar Jesus, whoever the fuck ye are.’

Ah wis quite stoned again and ah drifted but then ah sat bolt upright. Polis lights flickered back and forth. Then the train went flashing by and lit up the patch of tarp.

‘Hey you! You there!’

It wis a polis voice. Nae doubt. Ah wisnae gonnae hing about tae find oot whit they wanted either. Ah got up tae run but I wis too fucked. Two big polis had me oan the grun in nae time.

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‘Come on, hairy boy,’ said the one pushing ma arm up ma back. ‘We want a word you doon the station.’

I said fuck all. Nae point. Nae point protesting innocence. Ever. No’ wi’ these cunts there’s no’.

The Panda car wis next tae a scenes’ van and an ambulance. Floodlights lit up a big bit of The Muck. The bridge wis like it wis in daylight. I cannae believe whit ah saw in the back o’ the ambulance. A deid guy. Nae doubt. The two polis dragged me by. I looked again. Jist a glimpse. Fuck me, it wis Jay.

My brain wis burlin’... the bigger polis pushed my heid doon and and shoved me in the back. The second one got in the other door. The dig in the ribs took ma breath away.

‘Fucking schemie junkie cunt,’ the bigger polis said and dug me again.

It wis only the appearance of the plain clothes guy that stopped this cunt getting right intae me. Ah wis pleased tae see his heid pop round the door o’ the car. That didnae last long though.

There wis another detective in the front of the motor. The plain clothes guy’s heid wis in the car and he wis talking across the two woodentops that were either side o’ me.

‘Look at this, boss’

The front-seat turned to meet the other one’s gaze.

‘Wallet. Empty, except for the driving licence, Jafar Ayub it says here. Ah found it near the bridge, aboot ten feet from the poor bastard... and that’s no’ all boss...’

The bastard had ma bag.

‘A haversack, boss. Hunner and fifty quid in cash, Trammies, weed and this...’

He handed the tec a bit o’ paper.

The tec read it out, ‘*Thank you.*’ Then he unfolded it. ‘*Thanks for the drinks and stuff. But fair dos... I saved ye! See you on the other side of the tracks.*’

The front seat tec said, ‘You’ve got a lot tae explain son. Whit’s wrang, dae ye no’ like Mozzies, eh?’

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‘Ah don’t know whit yer talking about. He’s ma pal, Jay... like Jesus...he wrote me a note... ah...’

Ah stopped talking. It wis nae use. They think ah’m a gibbering junkie. The tec looked at the dig-in-the-ribs polis and said, ‘So, the guy who’s been deid for a day and a hauf wrote you a note, eh?’

Ah looked at the tec.

‘He wisnae deid when he wis wi’ me... he wis... aw whit’s the fucking point.’

The tec looked o’er at the dig-in-the-ribs cunt.

‘Mackintosh, read this shitebag his fucking rights, will ya?’

The Panda slowed at the lights at the *Polski Sklep* near ma hoose. There wis one o’ they wee newspaper billboards:

MURDER HUNT: MUSLIM MAN FOUND DEAD IN WASTELAND.