

The Killing of Crazy JaDa

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Half an hour ago I watched my best pal from school get incinerated long before his time. Ironically, the priest that did the service would not have crossed the road to piss on the poor cunt if ... well you know the rest. I'm looking at the auld sky pilot now. He's got thone drinky-face and the giveaway alabaster hands. Never misses a free drink and steak-pie purvey.

The living room and kitchenette are mobbed, fag smoke everywhere – all the wee top windows are opened but the stinky blue cloud is taking some clearing.

From outside it must look like Easterhouse has picked a new Pope.

Jada's sister Senga is pissed. Everyone is. She's walking towards the priest, who lifts his hand not too convincingly to hover over his glass as if to say, '*not for me, thanks.*' – but Senga carries on regardless.

'Thone wis a lovely wee eulogy thing ye did there, father so it wis. Ah'm sure oor Jackie's lookin' doon right noo smiling. Especially the bit where you talked about the auld days back in St Mark's, father. You hud him fur R.E. back then, so you did...'

'Yes, Agnes. I remember Jackie very well indeed. A fine young man taken so soon. Tragic indeed.'

Did he fuck remember him, if he did, he'd know that nobody has called him Jackie since he wis twelve. Jackie Davidson has been JaDa – his gang name since 1968. Back then, everybody in *The Fleet* had nicknames. It was like a competition for the best one.

Some of the boys used to put a lot of thought into it. JaDa used the first two letters of his first and last name. I wasn't as inventive. Nala – is just Alan spelled backwards. Some of the boys; like Big Doc, Black Smiddy and Mad Mo didn't put too much work either.

The guy I felt sorry for in the nickname stakes was Jimmy Six Baws – *Jimmy Forbes... For-bes... four-baws*. One of the boys added a further “two baws” for better comic effect. There’s no shortage of funny cunts in Easterhouse – and the lesson here is ALWAYS make your own nickname before somebody does it for you.

That poor bastard is still Jimmy Six-Baws. I even heard him answer to it outside the crem as I walked to my car. He didn’t recognise me. I recognised him. He was still fucking huge.

Not fat, just fucking huge. Always was. Even boys as mad as JaDa steered clear of him. Hands like shovels. Big red beard now and as bald as a snooker baw. Looks like he could club seals for a living.

He’s a brickie, or rather a builder. I reckon he won’t need a hod. He could just stick the bricks in his pockets. I would not be surprised if he actually had six baws.

Nicknames were as *de rigueur* then – just like the Crombie, or the Harrington, the boots, the Fred Perry, the blade and the Rod Stewart haircut – before he went a’ fucking glittery.

We were daft fucking weans really, trying to be Glesga Bowery Boys.

But there was no Pat O’Brien to save us like in the auld pictures. No Spencer Tracy Father Flanagan’s *Boys’ Town*. (Unless you counted Frankie Vaughan and his campaign to get the boys to hand in their knives. He meant well. He came from a place like Easterhouse, only it was in Liverpool. He was a big star giving something back and not just playing golf wi’ Tarby and Brucie. For months in the late sixties it became flavour of the month for English and foreign documentary crews to be all over the scheme.)

It was one of those times that big Jimmy Six Baws had his nickname confirmed.

He truly proved himself to have some baws. He was fearless.

One night him and JaDa screwed one of the outside broadcast vans. It belonged to a French telly firm. JaDa took a couple of tape recorders and two wallets while Big Jimmy fucked off with a big TV camera.

JaDa sold the tape recorders in the *El Paso* pub about half an hour after knocking them off. With the money from the wallets JaDa was well flush. Poor Big Jimmy Six Baws was landed with the big camera. He was laughed out of the pub and dragged his hot French 35mm cine camera behind him all the way home.

Next morning, he was stood in front of a French TV director trying to sell him his own camera back. The French guy wasn't daft. He knew if Jimmy could have sold the gear he would have.

'I weel giff you fuckin' nuffing,' the director said in the face-off. Then he took a step back as Jimmy took a claw hammer out of his Crombie coat.

'A'right then. Ah'll smash it tae fuck right here!'

Thirty seconds later, Jimmy was fifty quid better off.

JaDa turned to me. We were watching from two stairs up at his JaDa's house.

'He really has got some baws, has oor Jimmy, eh Nala?'

Jimmy Six Baws was the talk of the scheme for months after that.

Anyway, I'm still watching the auld priest neck his giant hauf. I'm about ten feet away. He does not recognise me either. I recognise him. The baw-faced auld cunt. Too handy wi' a tawse by half so he was back in the day. I'm tempted to go over and tell him what a cunt he was to us when we were weans and how dare he guise as a man of God. He did fuck all for the scheme, except live in the biggest house in it. But I did nothing. Just watched.

I have not been back on the scheme for years. Not since my auld ma died ten years back – and with the parents gone, and given the amount of travel I did at work, I never got the time.

That's a lie of course. Like anyone that got a chance to get off Easterhouse, I took it. I could not get away fast enough.

I only wish JaDa had done the same.

Dead at 42.

Fuck all to show for it.

It was three days ago when I heard JaDa was dead. Senga – his sister – phoned. She had kept my number from my mother's funeral. She had nursed the auld wife.

Sister Agnes Davidson – an Easterhouse angel. I recognised her voice immediately and knew just as quickly that it was bad news.

I picked up my desk phone on the first ring – as I always do,

'Alan Corrigan...'

'Hello, Alan. It's Senga Davidson. Ah'm awfy sorry but I jist don't know how to say it, so ah'll jist say it. It's oor Jackie, He's deid.'

'Jesus... Senga. I don't know what to say. What happened?'

'He wis kilt outside the *El Paso*, some ned knifed him for his deal money. You know the young wans roon here, they think cos he deals a bit of weed, that he's fucking loaded.

'It wis a fucking boy that done him. Sixteen. Aff his heid on the gear. JaDa didnae even see him coming. Thing is, he didnae even hiv ony money oan him – and the boy wis caught and battered before the polis even turned up.

'Hauf the pub wis efter him when somebody shouted intae the lounge what had happened.'

Senga told how the boy was captured and beaten almost to death by an angry mob as the ambulance crews fought to get him and his victim's corpse off the icy pavement. She went on to tell when the funeral was going to be. But I was dazed, only half listening. At that

moment, I could not help but think that it would have been the other way around. I thought one day I would get a call saying JaDa had killed somebody.

Not that he was not bad or evil. Far from it. He was funny and generous. We were pals from primary school. But there was always an anger that flashed from him, a violence that blinded him.

It only ever lasted seconds but always ended with him attacking. And he could fight like fuck. At the youth club, he was far and away the best boxer there, until he met his match, and lost his temper when the boy jabbed him around the ring. He hit the boy with the corner man's stool. No more youth club – no more boxing either for JaDa.

'I know yer dead busy Alan working for the papers an' that. But my mammy and others wid love tae see ye there.'

'Of course, Senga.'

I replaced the receiver and did not bother to tell Senga I worked for a magazine not 'the papers.' Those days had long gone. I picked up the phone again and arranged for my driver to take me to the airport. I reckoned I would be in Easterhouse in a few hours. My secretary called.

'Mr Corrigan would you like me to book a hotel?'

'No, Sally. I'll be staying with friends.'

Poor Senga.

Poor Mrs Davidson.

Nobody should see their own wean buried.

Apart from the weddings, funerals and occasional drunken Hogmanay guilt trips, I think I might've seen JaDa a handful of times over the years, especially in adulthood. I was only four hundred miles away. But I might as well have been on the Moon. On the plane to Glasgow I thought back to the last time JaDa and I were together. It was not long after him and Jimmy

Six Baws had robbed the telly guys. It was coming up to Christmas and we were skint. JaDa was emboldened by the robbery and was keen to get another quick cash job. We happened to be walking past the youth club when JaDa saw his chance.

‘Look at that cunt there. Wi’ the suit oan. Ah bet he’s from that telly mob.’

There was a TV van nearby and the guy at wheel shouted to the guy at the club doorway. It was misty and raining and the guy was silhouetted – could not quite make him out. But I could see he was quite a big guy. His reply to the bloke at the wheel let us know he was English.

JaDa rasped his confirmation.

‘Nala, he’s English. He’ll be fucking minted. Let’s do the cunt.’

I did not even have chance to argue. JaDa was right on the guy in seconds. But JaDa was in for a shock. This fella was no slouch. He had obviously fought before.

The English guy took a few steps back. Next thing his jacket was wrapped around his left arm shielding from JaDa’s blade. I still had an *IrnBru* bottle in my hand. I took from the inside of my Crombie coat. But I froze. The big guy was jabbing with the jacket-covered arm. Then he stepped forward with a straight right that put JaDa on his arse. He was out cold. I smashed the *IrnBru* bottle against the wall and tried to glass the guy with it. The whole fucking bottle shattered. A glass stump with a cork was all that was left. If I hadn’t been so fucking terrified I would’ve laughed.

JaDa was laid out still. I lunged.

‘Don’t be fucking stupid son,’ the English guy said.

Sirens drew nearer.

‘Back off, kid. Think. The old Bill are coming.’

But I didn’t think. I threw myself towards the guy. My breath left me as I did.

His solar plexus punch made me throw up. I crumpled. The right cross knocked me out for a few seconds. I was semi awake on the slippery black shiny pavement. The big puddle next

to me lit up with the blue lights from the panda cars. I groggily looked up and two woodentops grabbed the semi-conscious JaDa. Another grabbed me and bundled me into the car – but not before another dig in the ribs. I think I saw the English guy was talking to the cops. It was still pishing wi' rain. On the back seat, semi-conscious JaDa's groans competed with the loud swooshes from the windscreen blades as the threw wee waves across the glass.

At Chester Street Police Station, me and JaDa were in separate cells. I could hear him smashing the place up and shouting and bawling like a fucking mental case. I sat feeling sick. I lifted my *Fred Perry* and looked at my stomach and wondered who had put the bruise there, the polis or the guy we had tried to mug.

The door opened. I looked up. It was a 'tec. An aulder guy, about my Da's age.

'Whit d'you want?'

'Never mind, what I want ye wee shite.'

'What hiv ye done wi' JaDa?'

'Yer pal's charged with ABH, robbery and possessing a blade. But you're a lucky boy, eh?'

'Whit?'

'Follow me, son. For some reason your victim thinks you shouldnae be charged and wants to gie ye a chance. He said the same about yer pal but ah telt him that's right oot the question. That wee fucker wis bang to rights. But we hivnae got much on you, so we'll humour him. Public relations and that, eh?! Anyway, the soppo bastard wants tae talk tae ye. Mebbes he thinks yer worth saving a wee fucking nyaff.'

We walked the green-tiled corridor in silence. We stopped at door.

It had a name-plate that read **DCI JOHN MACKINTOSH**. The auld 'tec pushed it open. The English guy was there.

‘Can you leave us alone for a minute, inspector. I want to talk to the kid alone.’

The ‘tec mumbled ‘Who’s fucking office is it, anyway? ... and it’s chief inspector by the fucking way.’

He turned on his heel and added more audibly, ‘I’ll be right outside, sir.’

The door clicked shut.

I looked the guy in the eye.

He smiled broadly and held out his hand.

That was the night I met my friend Frankie Vaughan.