

Jehovah's Slitness

It was a hobby we had, me and Dan, my best friend from school now colleague in the music biz: we enjoyed toying with nutters' beliefs. A fundamentalist in a silly hat screeching away on a street corner held only childlike charm for us. As their spittle-frothed mouths preached armageddon and death to non-adherents, we'd buy them tea. We'd chat, cautiously moving into questioning about their particular Gods. Dan was good at the scientific thrusts, sudden assertions of fact about Darwin, the female orgasm, or the nutritiousness of pork. I provided the charisma, the glaze of amiability which drew them into our atheist web.

Why? The goal of our theological parlour game was to see 'the quiver' - that moment when a spasm of doubt contorted the face of a 'godder'. Naturally our pious victims would never admit what they'd felt; never dare verbalise sudden doubts - but that jerk, that quick and pale false smile - oh we knew, and we high-fived. It was as close as two straight geeks could get to fucking Richard Dawkins -and I'm not ashamed to admit, we got off on it.

Daniel Pearman and I made our fortunes pushing the the drum and bass music of L Hammond Dredd. On the back of that 90s windfall, we set up a mediocre label, and now had a half-dozen semi-underground music artists who sometimes filled dance-floors up and down the land. None of them was a superstar, but with our matching detached 5 bedroom houses, minutes apart in Chipping Ongar, we did not give a proverbial fuck. We were two lucky bastards in our late 30s, dressed like teenagers, playing like toddlers. Our leisure time was spent hosting gluttonous dinners with our Reiki-loving wives Kate and Lucy. We relished winding them up about their wanky beliefs, vacuous psychics, and dull ideas that "there must be something out there... at least something - this can't be it!" But it was.

Dan and I had always been like it: there is nothing more, this is it: so let's go to Ibiza, get mashed, make our music, and live our lives. Fuck the nursing home. Fuck the church. Even reality can suck a dick. This philosophy had led, one bored boozy afternoon, to us drunkenly grilling a Buddhist pamphleteer in pub. The game proved enjoyable, so much so we started playing it sober. We filmed some encounters, Vined them, cried laughing - freeze-framing the 'quivers' and making a gallery for our studio. We puffed on spliffs, blowing smoke into the crisis faces, laughing, dropping beats. There was no God, and it was harmless fun showing the deluded this was the case. We were helping them.

Then came my day of Terry Harley.

The only difference that morning was my being alone. Kate was out, Dan was down at the studio editing some dross to be fired into Spotify and forgotten. I had a day off. I'd already hit Porn Hub three times, smoked my way through an L-skin, and I was bored and stoned; secretly wanting to be at work - but pretending honourable pursuits still awaited the remainder of my day. I closed down the lid of my laptop silencing the groaning black porn star who'd just reached the front of a queue to gang-bang a broken looking Czech girl. Pulling up my jogging bottoms I flicked on the kettle, deluding myself that Green Tea could somehow atone for my morning of going at myself like a tribal chief beating at a drum. As the boiling water hit my misguiding emerald leaves, the doorbell kicked in. It was custom chime which dropped Baby D's Let me Be Your Fantasy every time we had a visitor or parcel. I opened my solid oak front door and there, standing slightly back, was a grey-fleshed thin man in his fifties. Terry.

"Hello," I said, struck with an urgent post-wank paranoia but not risking a look down for throb or patch.

"Hello, I'm Terry. Terry Harley. I'm from the Nephews of God." he manoeuvred wisps of colourless hair across his peeling scalp.

"Right."

"Can I speak with you please?"

"About..?"

He gestured up towards the firmament: "Him." he said, jabbing a dirty-nailed finger skyward.

"My tiler?" I said, a moron's joke - but still...

"No," he said tonelessly, "God."

"I know. I was joking, Tony."

"Terry."

"Sorry." I could still feel the steady work of White Widow weed's THC upon my brain.

Here was a golden opportunity to steal a point from Dan; bag a Quiver without him being there. And in my home too.

"Are you a....a Jehovah Witness?" I asked trying to mask anticipation.

"In a sense, yes. Yes I am."

The urge to punch the air was strong. A Jehovah: the Unholy Grail of de-godding.

“And... Do you like Green Tea?” I said.

“Yes.”

“Ton... Terry. I just boiled the kettle. Come on in.”

Five minutes later, we sat in my conservatory eyeing each other, the vapour from our green teas dissipating in the breeze from the open fanlights. Terry was dressed in blue jeans and a yellow flannel shirt. His face managed somehow to be friendly yet dead at the same time, a banal blankness - the lobotomised look of those who replace dealing with stuff, with dealing with God.

“So...” I began.

“So...” he mirrored, leaning in. I couldn’t put my finger on the menace, but the bastard unnerved me a bit.

I checked my tilted iPhone was recording, but he easily followed my unsubtle, stoned gaze.

“Switch that off,” he said, “Please.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. Orders? In my own home. But I switched off the camera. Prick.

“Why would you want to record our conversation,” he said.

“Oh... just for interest,” I sputtered. Christ, this was difficult without Dan. I needed a fact here. A jokey bit of pop science. Without my partner in faith-spearing, this all felt a bit cruel, victimising.

“ I love God,” said Terry suddenly. The flesh on his cheeks had a forgotten quality, like meat at the back of the fridge.

“ I know. You love God.”

“And you are an atheist, aren’t you?” he said retaining the demeanour of village vicar, but seeming also... volatile

“I am.” I said.

“And this is a game.”

Fuck , I thought. “No. Not at all!” I said.

A pause.

“Hmm. Then may I ask why you’ve invited me in?”

“Well.. you *were* the one that knocked.”

“But... why did you invite me in if you are a non-believer.”

“Belieber” I said and sniggered.

“I’m sorry?”

A pause.

“Just to talk. I asked you in for a chinwag.”

“For tea and talk.”

“Precisely.” I said.

“And cake,” he added. I thought he meant this as a joke and I laughed, but when he didn’t join in, I took the hint.

“Oh... err... sure.”

I crossed into the kitchen for my stoner’s stash of Victoria sponge. I returned with cake, Kate’s Jamie Oliver knife, and two clean white side-plates, but not before taking the opportunity to quickly text Dan. He messaged back instantly: “slay the fuck-bag!”

I handed a moist slice of a cake to my visitor.

“Thank you,” he said, “ I haven’t eaten for a long time.”

“Really... how long?”

But he only smiled. I realised at that point he had no leaflets, no bag. Nothing.

He ate, chewing slowly, sucking the calories from the food. Bubbles of saliva gathered at the corners of his dry thin lips.

“God,” he announced through a mouthful of a beige paste, “is the ultimate happiness!”

“Riiiiight. I don’t doubt that,” I said, steeling myself by conjuring an image of Dan smoking and laughing: “but... one problem... He’s a fairytale invented to prop up the weak.”

Ouch. A longer pause.

Terry stopped chewing and swallowed. He sipped at his tea, slowly, then smiled, “God is the greatest part of my life. And yours. The only part that is truly good”

“Well... that’s a pretty dark thing to say, Terry. If you think about it”

“Dark?... it’s light. Purest light.”

“Wow.” I said. And I was astounded. I could hardly believe he’d ‘sacrificed his Queen’ so early. Perhaps the poor bastard had some sort of learning difficulty; maybe a mental patient. I must be merciful. I would be quick. Like a smiting God, I thought, and grinned.

“More cake?” I said.

“Please,” he said, helping himself this time. His filthy nails gouged the sponge as he lifted a slice away. I would bin the thing after he left.

"Let's get this done shall we," I said. I took a breath, and then: "Now pick one."

"Pick one?" repeated Terry inanely.

"Yes. All Good or All Great? Choose."

"But God is both, my friend"

"No he isn't, my friend. He is either one or the other."

"Well I choose both," said Terry with a punchable serenity.

I couldn't quite believe he was falling for this sub-A Level-Philosophy opener.

"Does God," I said, pausing, choosing my example carefully, "Does God enjoy Aids and VD of the dick?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Does God love syphilis, Chlymidia. VD. AIDS. Dick disease."

"No. Of course not."

"Then, fair Terry, eater of cake, why did he create it?"

I enjoyed the pause, watching my first blow register deep in his consciousness. All he had in return volley was: "You speak of Satan's work."

I laughed. "Sorry... but it's so exactly as I thought it would be, it's fucking funny."

"What?" he said, smile rictus, beads pricking out on his flaky head.

"Well if God didn't create dick disease then can't you see: he is not *all* powerful. Not *all* great. Do you see? He may be good. But cannot be great too. Unless of course he *did* create VD of the dick. Then, well... he is not good, but one messed up pervy, beardy individual."

There was a long pause.

"Tea?" I said, and executed a perfect pirouette.

"I..." the final vestiges of colour left his dull flesh.

"You see that, *my friend!*" I stood up, "is a grade A 'Quiver'. Boom! Selfie!"

I took a snap, me in the foreground, the vanquished behind, then tossed my phone down in front of him.

"You may leave now, Terry."

But he did not move. More than that, he seemed to freeze.

"I'm sorry Terence but we're done, my son."

Nothing. He sat there. Like he'd been switched off at a remote server.

The first adrenaline shots of heavy doubt went through me.

"Terry?"

And then the thing I could never have imagined... happened.

Without hesitation, without even a microscopic change in his demeanour, he picked up the Jamie Oliver kitchen knife, and in one clean swipe, drew it across his throat.

I didn't scream.

I'm not sure I even moved.

It was an order of shock like I'd never felt.

Blood came across the conservatory in a diamond-shaped sheet. It halved the room, halved time. Spatters, cheap horror effects, across the table, me, the floor - the cake instantly red. Everything red. I turned to sprint from the room and slipped spraining my wrist. I looked back. His eyes were still the same. No reaction, nothing, just pulses of blood like a machine cleaning itself out during a service. He slumped forward onto the table. My phone? My fucking phone. It was soaked and trapped beneath a dead nutter. Shit.

I crawled through to the hall, making animal noises of fear and panic as I went. I slammed the door behind me with my foot and dug out the landline from under a pile of Lonely Planets.

The nine of the keypad glistened with coagulating blood as the call connected.

"P....p.....leeese. Please. Police. Per...lice. Ambu..."

"Speak slowly sir..

"And an ambul...lance."

"Sir?"

"He cut his own fucking throat! Fuck!"

I lay in the hallway, sobbing, foetal position, almost...yes almost praying for sirens.

After 5 stretched out minutes the doorbell hit its drum and bass, and I wrenched open the front door. A small ginger bastard dressed as paramedic. I kneeled by his feet.

"Where's the injured person. Sir! Where is he?"

"Through there, he's fucking through there." I was crying. "Fuck!" I screamed.

The paramedic opened the door to the conservatory, then stepped backwards into the hall.

"What's the hell *is* this?" said the paramedic. He was furious, "This some sort of joke?"

"Wha..." I said through snot.

"If this is a bloody wind-up, mate, you're gonna be in a lot of trouble."

I was perplexed, but then, through the doorway and into the hall, monstrosly backlit...an unscathed Terry.

“What’s going on?” He asked the paramedic flatly.

“I think your friend here is playing silly bastards.”

Terry and the paramedic exchanged a few words which in my confusion I couldn’t make out. I heard police sirens turning in my road. The paramedic went to greet them, “Wait there.” he said as he left.

“What the.... what the hell, Terry I thought...”

But Terry didn’t let me finish, “Ssshhh.”

He crouched down next to me, a twisted grin on his face. He slowly moved his mouth closer to me, until his lips were millimetres from my ear.

“You know what Jesus said to the meek?” he whispered.

“What?” I asked, my body shaking.

“Laugh and the world laughs with you..... Cry, and you’re cunt.”

He stood up and walked towards the front door.

“Thanks for the cake, my friend” he said, and without looking around, he left.