

Kalashnikovs in Thurso

There he comes now, coming round the corner, sovereign and full of beans, muttering some God governed responsive content which sounds like “I’m just bad bad bad for you” away to go to Nando’s to ask for a fish supper. But suddenly either an Uber or a taxi coming round a corner which he didn’t cross with caution hits him like a tonne of bricks, and that marks the death of person number one.

-Love my joab. Proper scum at the bottom of the barrel joab.

Proper scum at the bottom of the barrel job indeed. Personified here by the perfectly qualified underachiever person number two. He’s cordoned off a manhole in the road using plastic cones and raised the cast-iron cover using the appropriate apparatus and is now away to descend in to the pungent depths with his tools strapped around his waist and his headlight for vision. He slowly makes his way down the wet dirty ladder one step at a time. He reaches the bottom of the pit and there in the belly of the beast he’s aware of a hum which incrementally increases with every millisecond passing until very soon it’s a dramatic booming sound and the tunnel is shaking. The thunderous sound of crashing waves echoes all through the sewage labyrinth and the moment he can interpret his doom is the same moment he is engulfed by a formidable sea of bile and shite.

Person three is a despondent degenerate searching for love in all the wrong places. He eats a banana in a languid fashion with his pasty dry mouth desperately musing the degrees of his existential dread. Soon enough he will make hopeless attempts to relinquish his sluggish vertigo with the medium of booze, his drug of choice. At his best, the romantic in him affords him a deluded sense of empowerment. He believes with a seemingly learned understanding that he owns his addiction unlike his contemporaries whose addiction owns them. Person three is marinating himself; seasoning himself for his legacy-lacking end that will surely come soon given his rate of self-destruction though he isn’t quite categorically past redemption.

Mary thinks of herself as a living-wage-earning builder of totemic bears but in reality she's a porter for the Build-A-Bear franchise. But Mary does more than catch teddy bear errands. Mary is passionate and creative, playing artistically with a multitude of mediums when she's not working and even when she is if she can find a window. Mary is good at mirroring the ebbing and flowing nature of life with her attitude and creative practice and on the whole lives in a harmonious way. Mary is person four and Mary will live a long and prosperous life due to lack of stress and an active and generally healthy lifestyle.

Person five says no with a smile to person six.

Person six is an angsty lassie transfixed to her phone sending lower case messages because it conveys a cool carelessness which feels representative of her. She's had a turbulent time dealing up with an inadequate parent but has ultimately come out on top. She is headstrong and knows the degrees of her identity. Currently though she is heartbroken and is away to hit the pubs with reckless abandon; away to have a boozy breakfast having not even brushed her teeth. Person six needs a helping hand, could person seven be the man for the job?

There's person seven now, holding up the show. Harpering on about his alleged dj set tonight at the Balmoral Hotel.

-You're the reason I can't provide immediate support for this poor devastated lassie. It's like fucking walking through porridge walking with you.

-I need fed and watered. That's your business. What's that over there?

-Just a couple toilets and a wee guy. Never mind that.

-Listen.

-What?

-You've acquired a house plant.

Neither person seven nor person eight (which is the narrator) are the appropriate men for the job.

I want to lay my heart out bare and vulnerable without an ounce of arrogance, naked and painful, cathartic and cleansing, for all to see. Perhaps through a disparate series of flash fictions of people dying and not dying. Perhaps through four people looking at a painting of a woman with arms spread, mimicking the crucifixion of Christ.

-Somehow I hadn't noticed she was crucified.

-Neither did I when I was painting it but then I stood back and realized that's what it was.

-It's funny – I see it now. Totally. But I didn't see it until you said that.

-The crucifix is a funny one, we see it all the time, it's so charged.

-Let me tell you about the details.

-Okay.

-This is a bra to avoid uni-boob; these are lipsticks; this is anti-aging cream. It's all about how women are crucified by the figures of beauty.

-So that's lipstick on her hand where she's nailed to the cross and not blood then?

-Yes.

-Christ.

I'm caught between humour and horror at the anguish of my mortality and I'm never able to reveal both simultaneously.

Here comes person thirteen to maintain vitality and momentum in this fictional work and it herd it from meandering in to trite territory. Person thirteen is a farmer born to

a farming family of many generations. Person thirteen sits himself in his tractor's seat which has long lost its novelty and sighs before cracking his gnarled leathery hands and turning on the ignition to begin a long day of crofting. After cracking his knuckles, he recalls when the tractor's novelty was still fresh and how he relished rallying it around his family farm blaring sentimental rave anthems out a tiny Bluetooth speaker half-pushed from the night before. He sighs again in sorrow for a light he feels has ceased and turns on the ignition and begins his day feeling jaded and lost to youth.

Can I live?

-If you give me a lift to the studio to pick up my jacket I'll buy you a McDonalds.

Sixteen gives fifteen a lift to the studio, fifteen collects jacket, sixteen drives to McDonald's and ends up being the mug that buys everyone in the car their tea at the drive-thru: dialogue continues now between sixteen and fourteen.

-The funny thing is, I don't even feel angry about it, I just find it funny and mildly inspiring.

-Yeah, man, don't. What to do to recover the money is next time you're with him in the pub and he's away being all animated and explosive or whatever and he's left his wallet on the table, just help yourself, mate.

Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen...

Seventeen's a real bastard and he's for sure going to die now. I'm gonnae relish the murder. Look at his big craning neck and gaunt jawline. Look at his hunched posture and lanking skeleton. Look at his hackit denim jeans. Look at his waist and his protruding pinch of scrotum at the top.

Actually, you can do it this time.

Shoot him. Do it.

Do it. Shoot him.

Whey.

It's not a real gun. I told you you're in here with a Real One. I'm not going to accommodate any hullabaloo trying to get you to shoot him when in fact I could just shoot you.

Boom boom.

Bye, Boo.

I just shot

you.

You were person eighteen and now your deid, so when you leave here, go on and live the rest of your life

free.

It's a forgone conclusion. Your death is a foregone conclusion.

-Welcome to Perth train station. Please don't clamber out the windows or fall out the doors.

-I've had too much to drink to take any shit.

Pokes head out window and gets decapitated.

Person nineteen. Deid.

Person twenty also deid. With no explanation.

Everything was sombre but then it was jovial again.

-I trust you and have faith in your ability. Cut my hair.

-You have no preferences?

-Make me look good.

Person twenty-one enjoys the experience of getting his hair cut. Having another person touching and navigating around his head. He enjoys watching his hair becoming more refined and his facial features seemingly becoming more enhanced. It's always quite a gratuitous finish to the ceremony: barber and sitter are both satisfied and happy – there's a lot of passing of compliments between the two people followed by a well-natured transaction and a £1 tip.

All the while, person twenty-two's slyly making his way around the rooms of twenty-three's house whilst twenty-three is at the Second Presbyterian Church with his wife and children.

Twenty-two took twenty-three's colt pocket navy out his leather belt and aimed it at a painting on the wall and polished its face before putting it back; he smelt the lavender inside twenty-three's daughter's pillow case; he played with twenty-three's son's train set. Then he ate bread and butter in twenty-three's kitchen and drank twenty-three's coffee while he considered how he would assassinate twenty-three in the next ten days.

Jessie James' corn liquor tastes different in this town, could it be it's the same as the last?

-I never thought I'd be so full of love and life again. Here's to you – Happy Birthday, Wendy.

-It's true, the old man's back again.

-Is he? You've had a haircut.

-I have thank you for noticing.

Person one in fact did not die from the injuries he sustained in the beginning of this tall tale and now he's back on the scene with a few plasters on his face and his arm in a stookie with fight music blaring in his head. He manoeuvres past twenty-one and twenty-two and cocks his own colt pocket navy and boom. He's blasted twenty-three, stealing twenty-one's moment and not only that, now he's away to claim the reward.

But person three has got word of the bounty too and he didn't come all this way for nothing. He too manoeuvres past twenty-one and twenty-two and produces his own colt pocket navy from behind his mangey jeans and in an unhinged jolt blasts it, murdering person one. The act hurts his soul and the mark he feels now is the mark of a man beyond salvation. He gauges this correctly and turns the gun on himself and blasts his own head off.

Now here comes Mary to make sure everything's okay.

-So much death! So much anguish!

She touches the forehead of each corpse, holding her dainty fingers for the longest on twenty-three.

-First there was a betrayal not yet followed through. Then there was a cripple claiming bounty ahead of the betrayal. Then there was another bounty hunter with little to live for which murdered the bounty hunter before him before turning the gun on himself. But first there was a betrayal – *and this man is the traitor!*

Mary casts her finger upon person twenty-two, charging him for all the death and indeed, he is the root of it all. The degrees of his betrayal go much further than a seemingly recent aspiration to assassinate his friend to claim bounty. In fact, the sum of the bounty is measured by the degrees of twenty-two's deceit: he has provided information to the authorities for the last few years which has led to the bounty at hand.

The accusation from such a noble clairvoyant as Mary stirs hostility in many of the birthday guests and they eye person twenty-two suspiciously.

Person twenty-one doesn't want to be tarnished by his proximity to person twenty-two so tactfully shuffles away from him and through the guests over to a canopy table where he tactfully fills a plate with unoffensive delicacies.

Person seven is the first to beat the drum. Never known to be so bold he springs from a chair on to a table and without breaking glasses or stepping on sandwiches leaps in the air and descend with his fist towards person twenty-two in an anime-like attack. He cracks person twenty-two's puss, pummelling him in to the ground.

Then twenty-four comes forward holding a bread knife. Seven steps to the side and to halt exploring the brutal potential of our numbered friends any more here is where we draw the line.

And I still have no prejudice

-Quiet while I'm watching tv or I'll smack the jaw out yer puss.

-You shouldn't watch that violent stuff, it makes you act cruel and out of character.

-I'm sorry, baby. I was only kidding on.

-What's even happening anyway? It's so hard to follow.

Person twenty-six points at the tv as the scene plays out.

-Well, he was away to assassinate him after betraying him already for years as there's a bounty on his head now. But he got in before him and murdered him first. But then he got murdered by him who then went on to kill himself. Then Mary came in and touched all their foreheads and was able to find out with her special powers that at the root of it all was him since he'd been betraying him for years which probably led to the bounty. Then he jumped off a table and smacked him in the puss knocking him to the ground and the guys wife went ham with the bread knife and then he had to scoop her up and carry her away because it was getting so heavy.

-Christ. That's horrible. What kind of sick-minded freak would come up with this.

-Quentin Tarantino.

-He's schizophrenic or something honestly. So, is this his ninth film then?

-No, his tenth.

-What's it called again?

-Kalashnikovs in Thurso.

-I heard he's not making any more films after this one, is it true?

-We'll just have to wait and see eh.