

“I’ll tell you something honestly about drugs, honestly, and I know it’s not a very popular idea, you don’t hear it very often anymore, but it is the truth: I had a great time doing drugs. Sorry. Never murdered anyone, never robbed anyone, never raped anyone, never beat anyone, never lost a job, a car, a house, a wife or kids, laughed my ass off, and went about my day.” Bill Hicks

**Tuesday**

## Joe and Little Bob

“Frankly, Little Bob,” I said, “it sounds to me like a lot of shit”

“No, man Joe; think about it for a minute.” Little Bob waved his arms around, then stopped and changed his approach, looking at me like I was an exceptionally slow child.

“Now, look Joe,” he said, “maybe I’m not explaining it properly to you or something. It’s a good idea. No, correct that, it’s a great idea, a sure thing. Safer joint kits, yeah? Unbleached and additive free skins, roaches made from proper card and not bits ripped off Rizla packets cause they’ve got ink and all that shit on them and that stuff’s got to be really bad for you, so let’s say organic paper and cardboard...”

“Can you get organic paper and cardboard?” I asked.

Little Bob threw his hands in the air, “Shit, Joe! Details, details! I’m just running the basic fucking, what do you call it, concept past you. Shut the fuck up and let me finish, yeah?”

I shrugged and took a swig of tea from my mug. We’d just finished smoking a tasty little number rolled with some primo Northern Lights and my throat was dry; so dry, in fact, that you could have put a couple of palm trees in there and called it Sahara.

It was a beautiful sunny Tuesday afternoon in June, and here we were sitting in my living room getting stoned and bickering about nothing. The sunlight came pouring through the bay window, making the dope smoke hanging heavily in the air take on a greenish-grey colour. The window was open slightly and from out on the street the sound of children playing reached us. For nearly a full minute, neither of us spoke as we regarded the smoke in the sunlight.

“So where was I?” continued Little Bob suddenly, “Oh aye, organic skins and roaches and organic tobacco. *Voila!* A safer doobie kit!” he stopped, looking at me in triumph.

I thought about how to say what I was going to have to say. No real way of letting the man down gently, so...

“Well, Bob,” I said “this is all fine and good and I do see where you’re going with it, but the fact is that, one, they’re still...”

“Facts *are*” said Little Bob.

“What?”

“You said ‘the fact *is*’; then you said ‘one’ so there’s obviously going to be more than one of them so it should be ‘facts *are*’”

I sighed and resisted an urge to scream.

“Okay; the facts *are*, one; they’re still going to be smoking shitty dope bought from some dealer, right? So it doesn’t really matter a fuck how quality the peripherals are, man, ‘cause the dope they’re smoking is full of all sorts of shit. Sorry to piss on your parade and all but...”

“Well, they could smoke weed then,” said Little Bob, starting to flail a bit now, then suddenly, “No! *Organic* weed! Aye, that’s it! Ha!”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say Little Bob, but if I can finish what I was saying before, fact *two* is that whatever the peripherals are like, and whatever the fucking dope’s like, the fact remains that most people are smoking the fucking stuff, and I don’t care what you say about organic tobacco or weed or whatever, it’s still fucking smoke and it shouldn’t be in your lungs. End of fucking story.”

I could see in Little Bob’s face that his latest money making scheme was falling to bits, but he was determined to give it one last shot. Tenacious little sod, man.

“But...” he said.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, what is it? I’m stoned! Give my head some fucking peace!”

He wasn't to be deterred: "See Joe, Maybe we could recommend on the packaging that the user smokes straight grass in the, what's your word, pe-riph-e-rals?"

Before I could dig him up for taking the Mickey, Little Bob held up his hand.

"No, wait," he said, "let me finish; I was talking to someone about this and they said that smoke from weed isn't like smoke from tobacco"

"Okay," I said, reaching for my own (non-organic) skins, roach material and weed, "I'll bite. How so?"

"Well," Little Bob continued, "It's like this. The difference between smoking weed and smoking tobacco is like drinking water and drinking petrol."

"Oh, for goodness sake! Where *do* you get this shit?" I exclaimed.

"No, no, it's true man!" indignant now, "Some fluids are good for you and some aren't and that's how it is with smoke, man. Some are good and some aren't"

"Bollocks."

"It's not!"

"Bollocks."

"It's n..."

"It's bollocks and let's stop this or we're going to fall out about it. Here," I threw the unlit joint to Little Bob, "light this and shut up."

Little Bob stuck the joint in his mouth and lit it with a Zippo. He inhaled deeply and held onto the smoke. He snapped the lighter shut and dropped it into one of the breast pockets of his shirt. He was irritated at me, and was holding onto the smoke while he thought about what to say next. I was hoping he'd take the hint and just stop this line of conversation. For the

past hour, he'd been trying to get me interested in this stupid get-rich-quick-scheme of his. I'd known Little Bob for a long time, certainly long enough to know he was full of this kind of stuff.

To be honest, I was none-too-keen on lending anyone any amount of money over, say, fifty quid. Some weeks earlier, in a moment of E'd up largesse, I'd promised a young scallywag by the name of Barney Blair a loan of five hundred notes to pay off a fine he'd incurred due to some trouble with the boys in blue. The next day when Barney appeared in my local watering hole looking for me to make good on my promise there wasn't really much I could do other than put up the money, even though I barely knew the guy. It was either that or look like a total scumbag, reneging on a deal made in front of a number of witnesses. Anyhow, he left the bar full of gratitude and promises that he'd get it back to me as soon as he got himself sorted out. After he'd left, one of the wags at the bar said I'd get my reward in Heaven, and after a few weeks had passed I started to realise that this was probably going to be true. I was ticked off: as much at my own drugged-up gullibility as at Barney. But, hey-ho. I'd promised the man I'd help him out and so to then turn round and say I'd changed my mind really would've made me look like a scumbag (if only in my own eyes), and back in those days that kind of thing still mattered to me.

Finally, Little Bob exhaled, the smoke from the Northern Lights leaving his mouth in a long, continuous stream.

"Better?" I asked.

He looked at me through beefburger eyes, "Aye, much." he said at last. "That stuff sure hits the spot." Reaching for the ashtray, Little Bob flicked the white ash from the tip of the joint. "So I guess I should cancel the order for the Rolls Royce then?" he said, passing me the joint.

"I guess." I replied, thought for a minute and continued, "Let me tell you a story about a woman I know. It kind of elaborates on why all the organic stuff is a dead duck."

"No need, man" sighed Little Bob, "You've said your piece and I take the fucking point"

“Yeah” I continued, “but nonetheless...okay, one day a couple of years back and I’m knocking on the door of this flat where I’m supposed to be meeting Lonnie Davidson to do a bit of business.”

“Lonnie Davidson,” chips in Little Bob, “I remember that guy. Lanky streak of piss about eight foot tall with a lazy eye?”

“That’s the man” I say, “Anyway, there I am at Lonnie’s door this particular morning and...”

“Didn’t something weird happen to Lonnie?” interrupted Little Bob

“Yeah, he took a header out a fucking window, now can I tell this story or are you going to take a header out of *that* fucking window?” I nodded towards the open bay window at the other end of the room.

“Sorry, man; I’m all ears”

“So anyway” I continued, “Lonnie isn’t in but one of his flatmates, this woman called Shauna comes to the door looking like absolute shit, you know, all spotty and grey skinned and horrible, like an Italian zombie from one of those fucking videos. Now, I kind of know her and I know that she’s a real fucking pill and powder monster. She tells me Lonnie isn’t in and says to wait for him if I want, then she says she’s going back to her bed ‘cause she’s got a migraine or some such shit. So I sit around their cold living room long enough to smoke a couple of cigarettes then decide to go. I’m on my way out the front door when this voice from Shauna’s room starts going ‘Joooooooooe! Joooooooooe!’ like it’s at death’s door or something. So I knocks on the door and push it open and there’s Shauna lying on a bed in the semi darkness with a load of bits of fucking stone all over her face and body”

“No shit?” says Little Bob, getting more interested in the story now.

“Absolutely, so obviously I’m a bit taken aback, and I just can’t resist asking her what the fuck? Know what the crazy woman says to me?”

“Go on,” says Little Bob, “let’s hear it.”

“Well, I told you she reckoned she had a migraine?” I said, Little Bob nodded, “well her cure for it was crystals, yeah? So she’s got all these bits of stone all over her, like I say”

“Did they do her any good?”

“Funny you should say that Little Bob, because I told her that I always found that Aspirin helped with a headache, at which point she whipped the stones off her eyes and looked at me like I was something the cat left behind the settee. She says to me ‘I try to not pollute my body with unnecessary chemicals, now would you please get me a glass of water and just leave me alone?’”

“No shit!” said Little Bob again.

“Yep, and when I went into the kitchen for her drink, there was all this organic tea and fruit tea, herb tea and all that sort of bollocks lying around, right next to a bong, bits of resin and all the usual smoking and snorting paraphernalia. Man, oh man, ‘unnecessary chemicals’ my fucking hole.”

“Her body was a bit of a temple then?” said Little Bob.

“So she seemed to think, but she was just fucking deluded, man: a couple of nights later I see her in the back room at Sonny’s with two rolled up notes sticking out of her face and maybe a G of fucking beak racked up in front of her in two mega-lines. She’s all smiles and doesn’t seem to see any contradiction in what she’s doing right there and then and all the fucking spiel she gave me about ‘unnecessary chemicals’. Shit. And you know something else, Little Bob?”

“What’s that?”

“I’ve *completely* and *utterly* lost the point of this fucking story. What the fuck was it?  
Shauna...

“Cocaine...” Bob chipped in.

“No, man. The coke was kind of peripheral to it all. Or *pe-riph-e-ral* as you’d no doubt have it.”

“Oh, touché” giggled Little Bob.

“That’s touché and not *tow-chay*?” I was giggling too now.

Still giggling and having totally lost the thread of what I was saying, I got up out of my seat and wandered towards the living room door. Little Bob watched me through eyes that by this time looked as though they were sinking into the back of his head.

“Where you off to, Joe?” he asked.

“For some unnecessary chemicals,” I said, “in the form of beer. Want one?”

Little Bob looked at the time on the video recorder; 12.46. “That the right time?” he asked. I stopped and looked then nodded. “It’s the afternoon so in that case I’d love a beer, Joe. Then I can tell you about the other thing I wanted to ask you.”

I groaned a big theatrical groan. “Not another master plan, Little Bob, please. I’m losing the will to fucking live here, man.”

Little Bob laughed, “Naw, man Joe. No master plans after the last one. This is something else; something else completely.”

And *that* was pretty much how the whole thing started.

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At that time I was involved pretty heavily in horticulture; specifically the growing of cannabis; more specifically still, the growing of Northern Lights, and though I do say so myself, pretty top drawer weed it was too.

I'd a business arrangement with a couple of friends, Jake and Molly. They were hippies and the three of us had known each other since we were at high school. We had quite a bit of history together; in fact, it had been me who'd introduced Jake to dope way back when. Thing was, we all knew each other really well (they were and still are married; and to each other) and the arrangement worked really well with no bull and no rip-offs.

Jake and Molly lived out in the sticks where they'd bought a plot of land with a derelict house and a couple of old outbuildings. Jake had renovated the house and had paid particular attention to the basement, which is where we'd our grow room set up.

We had a load of Northern Lights plants down there doing their thing 24/7. The way we'd organised everything meant that the total amount of boo we got off these ladies kept us all in a pretty comfortable lifestyle.

Before we'd gone into this bit of black capitalism we'd made an agreement to only sell the weed wholesale. Obviously, this didn't make us anything like as much as we could have if we'd sold the stuff ourselves, but none of us were particularly into dealing with the kind of scumbags you tend to meet in this line of work, and making maybe half a dozen big drops a year to one or two trusted and totally discreet customers was loads less risky than peddling weed day-to-day. And besides, it wasn't like Jake and Molly needed the money that badly either; Jake was a builder, and this kept enough legit money coming into their house to keep the tax people happy and the police out of the picture. I had a legit job working for a little less than half a week in an independent bookshop. It was easy work and gave me a lot of free time to mess about and do my own thing, and most importantly the money I made was just enough to make me look like a bona fide earner and taxpayer; this in turn kept officialdom off my back and let me get on with my extra-curricular activities unhindered.

Molly kept house, looked after their baby and their expanding array of animals – hens, goats, dogs and cats – and tended the fruit and vegetables grown hydroponically in two big greenhouses Jake and I had put up near the main house on the site of one of the outhouses. And apart from keeping the family in fruit and vegetables, this set-up also provided a believable explanation for the purchase of gallons and gallons of plant nutrients made two or three times a year.

But the best thing was though, that *nobody* knew anything about my partners at all, not even the people who bought the weed from us year upon year. All of these dealings were arranged through yours truly and I was vague enough right at the beginning when the question of where the weed came from arose that they took the hint and never asked again.

And this was my life for a good number of years. Back then the computer networks that bedevil the cannabis entrepreneur these days were still in their infancy; no official department was linked to any other one, everything was on paper, paper had a habit of getting lost, and so on. My part time job meant that the tax people were happy because I was paying my dues; the unemployment benefit people were happy because I wasn't bothering them at all, and this in turn meant that I wasn't being pushed into some pissant training course or whatever. Being in the business I was in and claiming any sort of benefit was a recipe for disaster, it always seemed to me, so I put in the hours at the shop and didn't draw attention to myself. And of course, like I say, this was the big fucking A1 reason for being a wholesaler rather than a retailer, as nothing in that line of work was guaranteed to draw the attentions of the dibble quicker than a constant flow of dope-hungry consumers.

And on top of this, none of the three of us had anything in the way of a criminal record; not even any juvenile stuff. It's not that we weren't naughty boys and girls or anything; it's just that we were smart enough and lucky enough to know how to not get caught. As far as the police were concerned we didn't exist, and so we were able to run our little farming operation unimpeded, and for Jake and Molly this meant an idyllic rural life with plenty money and dope and no worries; for me it meant a pretty easy urban life with not too many worries and enough money to be able to do pretty much whatever I wanted, and at that time what I wanted to do most of the time was take drugs.

Back then I liked taking drugs, no correct that, I *loved* taking drugs and while most of my friends knew this, only a couple of my very close friends actually knew that I'd any sort of involvement in the cannabis market, and what they knew was pretty vague at best. This suited me just fine. The parties I did business with were both discreet and incredibly well-connected, and on the odd occasion I met any of them out and about they introduced me to a lot of other well-connected people on a personal (as opposed to commercial) level. All of which was good, 'cause this meant I'd a lot of really good druggie connections without any of them knowing me as anything other than a consumer. Throw a successful – in the

underground sense at least – DJ flatmate into the mix and, even though I do say it myself, my credentials on the dance/drug/boho/underground scene were pretty much impeccable.

In spite of (or maybe because of) the lucrative horticultural sideline, I rarely kept any more than the odd half ounce or so lying around the house, and that was strictly for the personal consumption and enjoyment of my flatmate Kelvin and me. And my love of other chemicals and psychoactive substances generally didn't extend to having lots of them to hand either, and when I did there were rarely more than would allow me to claim they were for my personal use on the off-chance the Old Bill came knocking.

And so it was, and on the whole life was pretty groovy.

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That summer I was living in one of those big tenement flats in one of the streets off Woodlands Road in the West End of the city. It was, and is, a pretty good place to live if you're of a certain age and don't mind a lot of noise. I'd stayed there a while by this point and had managed to avoid telling many people the address. Right now, I was beginning to wish I hadn't told Little Bob.

Like I say, I shared the place with Kelvin, a friend of some years standing who was building up a prodigious and fearsome reputation as a DJ on the club and party circuit. We'd rented the place from a mutual friend who had taken a sabbatical from her work some eight months earlier in order to "go travelling", which to me always seemed to translate as fannyng around in the Far East doing lots of illegal substances. Some weeks earlier, we'd had a telephone call from our errant and absent landlady; she informed us that she was currently somewhere in Australia with some guy she'd met and that she was planning on staying there and had absolutely no plans to come back to Glasgow for the foreseeable future. Kelvin and I were pretty good tenants, considering our respective jobs; we always paid our rent on time and tended to keep the noise and comings-and-goings to and from the flat to a minimum. This being the case, and if it continued to be the case, then she saw no reason why we couldn't stay on indefinitely as caretaker-tenants, and at a pretty reasonable rent.

All of which was good news for the two of us as we liked living in that part of town. As far as I was concerned it had everything going for it: restaurants, cafes and loads of bars to suit any and every particular mood or taste. The shops were everything you could want too, again catering for all moods and tastes.

But the best thing about living round that part of town was the fact that technically it was inner city without all the usual nonsense you might associate with the term, so relatively little crime (and absolutely no guns or anything like that) while at the same time being a drunken hop skip and jump back from all the action in the city centre. Plus, it was close to the university, and this meant lots of parties and a constantly changing population, which in turn kept the neighbourhood interesting.

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And so here I was, on this particular Tuesday afternoon, getting stoned and about to start drinking beer way too early with Little Bob Kerr. This was okay though, 'cause Little Bob and I had been amigos for a few years and we always had a rare old time when we got going. I'd been in Glasgow for a good while but before that I'd lived in Edinburgh for a number of years and that's where we'd first met and we'd kept in touch after I moved. Now though, Little Bob lived in Glasgow, having had to up sticks and leave Edinburgh in something of a hurry about a month or so earlier after some sort of trouble. He was kind of vague as to what kind of trouble it was and I'd decided that if he wanted to tell me he would and that it was nothing at all to do with me anyway. Apart from the two stoner students he shared a flat with I was pretty much the only person he knew around town and therefore we saw quite a lot of each other.

My better half, Lilith, had left town three days before to go on a family holiday that had come up at short notice. I'd taken some time off from the shop to basically get drunk and stoned for a few days while sitting around in my underpants watching dodgy pirate copies of gore videos (Lilith plain refused to watch these things with me). As far as the weed business went, a delivery had been made some three weeks earlier so there was plenty of money in the bank and nothing particularly urgent requiring my attention on that front either.

So I'd been moping about for three days in a half drunk and wholly stoned state, and now I was getting a bit bored with it. Little Bob had phoned on the Monday evening asking if I'd be in and could he call round. He had a couple of things to run past me, he'd said. Like I say, I knew Little Bob of old and knew that he was given to these not too clever get rich quick schemes, but I could never really tell how serious these things were and how far they were just dropped into the chat in order to try to provoke some conversation.

Having laid waste to this week's bright idea, I was waiting to hear what was coming next as I came back through to the living room with two of those big bottles of Budweiser Budvar lager.

"Here" I said to Little Bob, handing him one of the bottles, "I wasn't aiming to start this early today but what the hell; one of your ideas is bad enough but two is guaranteed to drive me to fucking drink."

Little Bob grinned as he took the beer from me, raised and tilted the bottle slightly in a toast to me and took a swig. I returned the gesture and settled back into my seat.

"Okay," he said, "are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. Actually, it's kind of funny that we should be drinking East European beer just now 'cause stuff from East Europe's what I want to ask you about, only I'm not talking about beer."

"Right," I said, taking another swig and wondering what was coming next, "So?"

"So I've known you for a long time, eh? And I know that you're a bit of a dope connoisseur (Little Bob pronounced it 'coney-soor') and that you like to partake of some pretty fucking beezzer grass," saying this reminded him about what was left of the joint sitting in the ashtray and he reached for it and sparked it up as he continued, "Aye, beezzer grass like this stuff. And I know that you know a lot of folk with the same kind of interest as yourself, so have you ever come across a sort of weed called Vilnius 23?"

"Called what?" I said, sitting up, and now suddenly interested in the turn the conversation had taken.

“Vilnius 23 is the name I got for the stuff.” said Little Bob, as he reached over and waved the now rather sorry looking remnants of the Northern Lights joint at me. I shook my head but had sat up, and I must’ve looked interested and attentive because Bob grinned and wagged one of his index fingers at me, “Ah, that’s got ye hasn’t it? I thought it might!”

“Well, come on then” I said impatiently, “cut the shit and let’s have the rest of the story. Vilnius 23, we’d got to. So-called because it’s from, where, Estonia?”

“Lithuania, actually” said Little Bob.

“Yeah, whatever. So Lithuanian weed then; why ‘23’?”

“Ah well,” said Little Bob, “that’s the fucking strength of the thing; twenty three per cent THC content.”

“You have got to be fucking kidding. Twenty three per cent? No, man, it can’t be. Does not compute.” I shook my head.

“I’m telling you, man Joe; twenty three per cent red eye straight up. Story goes that when the wall came down and Russia went tits up that there were all these fucking Soviet chemists and shit left high and dry with no employers and no income.”

This rang a couple of very quiet bells in the back of my head somewhere. I’d heard a story like this before at some after-party somewhere. Everyone was the worse for wear and so the details were obviously vague, but I certainly remembered something about Eastern Bloc pharmacists setting up all over the place and churning out shed-loads of pretty top drawer Ecstasy and amphetamine tablets in particular. Grass was something I hadn’t heard about, but when you thought about it, why not? It made a kind of sense, too; in the chaos of post-Soviet rule the authorities - such as they were - would’ve had more to do than bust weed growers and a few clandestine E labs. Still, twenty three per cent THC content was really high, and my immediate and obvious thought was that, assuming it was as Little Bob said, this stuff could be a serious player on the weed market in the long-term. And while I didn’t seriously expect to still be dealing weed when I was forty, you never could tell, and so it made good business sense apart from anything else to keep an eye on what the competition was up to.

*Twenty three per cent THC content!* That stuff would give our stuff a serious run for its money.

All of this ran through my stoned brain in a matter of seconds, and Little Bob could see it, and he could see that he had me hooked.

“So,” he said, a smile drifting across his face, “You’ve not heard of this one? I wasn’t sure if you would or not but I reckoned that if you didn’t, then you’d know a man who did. Whaddya reckon?”

I thought about that for a moment, “You actually tried some of this stuff?”

“Well, no; no exactly” he admitted, “I was at a party at the weekend in Edinburgh and a few folk were talking about it. Two of them had tried it and it came from someone from Glasgow. They said it was fucking quality dope, and that smoking it is like the first time ye smoked a joint and got proper stoned, know? It’s like the first time so giggles and munchies and all that stuff. It just sounded fucking great, and they said that the guy that had it apparently was going to get a lot more of the stuff. I just liked the idea of being stoned like the first time, know? And as you’re a man who knows something about this kind of thing and these kinds of folks I, you know, thought ye might have some sort of a Scooby who might have it and where I might get some.”

I was still thinking about this twenty three per cent strength thing while Little Bob was rattling on with his spiel. He was right, up to a point, about me knowing people who might know about Vilnius 23, but kit like that wasn’t something that was likely to be kept quiet for very long – the dope scene didn’t really work like that – and I’d not heard anything about a new kid on the block; not a word. Not that this in itself meant much in itself, it just meant that it might be floating around some other set of people out there.

Still, the fact that it was around meant that I needed to try to check it out, if only out of professional curiosity; something like Vilnius 23 was deffo something that we, meaning Jake, Molly and I, needed to know about. This, together with the fact that I was currently, albeit temporarily, *sans femme*, didn’t have any work of any sort to do for the next week or so, and

was drinking myself towards a killer of a hangover out of sheer boredom all kind of helped me make a decision.

“Okay, Little Bob” I said, putting the bottle of beer down and getting to my feet, “why don’t we go hunting for some of your weed? First things first though; I’m going to get a shit, a shower and a shave and at least try to make myself feel a bit more human. You amuse yourself and I’ll be back in twenty. Try to amuse yourself in a way that doesn’t involve any more weed though ‘cause we’re going to need to keep the heid for at least a part of the day...”

“You’re the man.” he said, grinning.

“...and this may take a day or two before we find anything out; you got anything that needs sorting out before we get this show on the fucking road?”

“Nah, nothing man. You know me; I’m a footloose free agent. Although...” he stopped and his brow furrowed.

“What?” I said.

“...I’m fucking starving. Where’s the fridge?”

## Doctor John

“Okay,” said Little Bob, “so what’s the plan?” he was walking quickly to keep up with me. “I mean, you *do* have a plan, right? Right Joe?”

We’d walked from my building along to the corner of Woodlands Drive and Woodlands Road. I realised that I hadn’t actually given much thought to where we’d start, so I stopped walking for a moment and looked at Little Bob. He was wearing a pair of those mirrored sunglasses and all I could see were my two bloodshot eyes looking back at me, which kind of distracted and alarmed me for a second. No sense in advertising our current state, so I fumbled in the pocket of my denim jacket for my own sunglasses.

“Well,” I said, as I slid the legs of my shades over my ears and pushed them up onto a comfortable spot on the bridge of my nose, “the plan, such as it is right now, is to go somewhere for a cup or two of coffee and think about what to do next.”

“Shit, man Joe. We could’ve done that back at your place” Little Bob was miffed, “I thought that the way you fucking took off there that you had some sort of concrete plan, man.”

If Little Bob was pissed off, I was getting annoyed; “It’s concrete enough to know that if we sit around my place trying to figure out who to speak to that we’ll just get totally fucking monged and do what we always do when we’re monged, which is to say fuck all. Now come on, let’s go to that new place up on Gibson Street.”

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It turned out that The Bean Cartel was one of those new types of café places that had ideas well above its station and gave itself the rather pretentious subtitle of ‘coffee house’. No doubt this was all done in an attempt to convince the punters they were getting the experience of New York in the middle of Glasgow, and in so doing justify the ridiculous prices they charged for a cup of coffee made with steamed milk.

The front of the café was made up of several very large folding and sliding doors, all of which could be opened and thus allow the inside to effectively run out onto the street where a

few tables and chairs were placed for the use of paying customers. The owner had a habit of opening the entire front of the place up so as to allow the customers to drink their coffee alfresco, but this meant that three times a day you couldn't hear yourself think for the noise of traffic, and this together with the attendant pollution kind of detracted from the overall Greenwich Village ambience that seemed to be the intention.

Because we were both still pretty stoned from the last joint of Northern Lights, Little Bob and I spent a minute or so faffing about trying to decide whether to sit outside or in. The sun was still beating down and there wouldn't be another wave of heavy traffic for another hour or so, but in the event the plainly drunk and/or mentally ill man who seemed to have decided that he had some sort of grievance with the lamp post situated right outside one of the Bean Cartel's many doors made the decision for us, and we hurried into the cool interior of the café just as behind us Mr Schizo-drunk started yelling profanities at nothing and nobody in particular. This kind of shit was generally referred to as 'colourful Glaswegian characters' and I found myself wondering very briefly if they had the same calibre of colour in and around Greenwich Village. Most probably, I decided.

The inside of the café wasn't only cool, but after the glare of the sun outside and also no doubt due in part to the fact that we were both still wearing our sunglasses, it also seemed very dimly lit and as a result of all of this Little Bob and I stumbled about like a couple of drunks while we tried to acclimatise ourselves to the drastic change in lighting. Both of us still had eyes like pissholes in the snow from the weed, or at least we thought we did, and so we didn't really want to take our shades off, but at the same time we were managing to make tits of ourselves, tripping over steps and low stools that had decided to suddenly become invisible to us. I could sense, rather than see, some of the patrons glancing at us with disapproval, and one or two of them clearly had the idea that we were in some way associated with the ranting nutter outside. The waiting staff appeared to be drawing straws to decide who would come and take our order.

Little Bob and I eventually got ourselves settled at a table. We got our sunglasses off and our eyes became used to the lighting. Of course the table we'd chosen was the only one in the entire place that hadn't been cleared after being vacated by the previous punters. This served to endear us with the staff further still, and I could see three of them in a huddle beside the till, each of them giving us the occasional glance, but none of them with any apparent

intention of coming to take our order. It was all getting quite uncomfortable. Happily, I'm not one given to dope paranoia, but unfortunately the same couldn't apparently be said of Little Bob.

"Jesus, man" he hissed, "what's the fucking deal with these guys?"

"Easy, pardner" I whispered, picking up the menu and considering the twenty-odd types of coffee the place sold in an attempt to look nonchalant and definitely *not* stoned. "Someone will be over in a minute; keep the head."

This didn't do much to allay Little Bob's increasing annoyance.

"Jesus Christ" he said, "I could've grown the fucking beans myself in the time it's taken them to get it together to come over here." Then in a louder voice – a much louder voice – "Any danger of getting some service over here, mate? Please?"

At that, a little guy detached himself from the gaggle of waiting staff and minced over to our table with an annoyed and impatient look on his face.

"Can I help you" a split second pause for effect, "*gentlemen?*" This last word said with a rictus and thoroughly insincere smile.

Little Bob peered and squinted at the guy through eyeballs still pink from THC, "Yeah man, two coffees. White for me and" he glanced at me, "black?" I nodded, "And black for my friend here. Thank you."

The little guy had taken out a note pad to write the order on, he didn't bother and pushed it back into his apron with a "Humph!" of exasperation, as though we'd interrupted him in the middle of something really important. He fussed and farted around clearing the plates and coffee mugs left by the previous occupants of the table before he turned on his heels and minced off again. "Last of the big spenders" he announced to his idle colleagues, "two coffees, one black one white." There was a snigger. Little bob bristled.

“For fucks’ sake, Bob,” I said, “will you just calm down? You’re like a dog with two arseholes, man.”

That did the trick, and Little Bob laughed out loud. “Fuck knows what that means, Joe” he said, still laughing, “But okay, you’re right; be calm. *Beee caaalm*”

“Exactly,” I said, “You’re in a Zen-like place, okay? Now, let me think about how and where we should kick this thing off. I can think of a number of usual suspects who may be able to help us out with this. The thing is, what with this being a Tuesday and what with it being pretty early afternoon, it might be kind of tricky finding anyone. No point phoning people ‘cause none of them ever answer the fucking phone before it gets dark, and...”

The waiter came back to our table with our drinks; “One black and one white coffee...*gentlemen*”, again through gritted teeth. This guy really didn’t like us for some reason. Maybe he was on his period. As he put Bob’s down, some coffee splashed out of the mug and onto the table. I thought for a minute the guy was going to either scream or cry. He looked at us like it was our fault.

“Look,” I said, “it’s fine, really, we’ll clean it up don’t worry about it.”

“Humph, it would take a lot more than that or either of you to worry me.”

Jesus, what *is* this guy’s problem? We’re still pretty wasted so the last thing I want is any sort of ugly scene with the hired help in a jumped up café, but this guy was really starting to tick me off. Luckily or unluckily, depending on your point of view, Little Bob finally took the hump big time.

“Listen, you,” he growled, “We’re paying customers, so let’s have less of the attitude. No doubt you’re some sort of media wannabe, and no doubt your friends all think you’re quite the fuckin’ humorist, but while you’re wearing that little apron...”

The waiter started to say something, a look of utter hatred in his eyes, but Little Bob wasn’t for being stopped now. He raised his hand:

“...but while you’re wearing that little apron,” he continued, “then as far as I’m concerned you’re paid to wait tables, so like I say, cut the attitude right now. Either that or get whoever’s in charge over here. Now, do we understand one another?”

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“Well how the fuck was I supposed to know he was the fucking manager?” asked Little Bob less than two minutes later as we walked along Gibson Street. “And let’s put a positive slant on it; at least we didn’t have to pay for the fucking coffees.”

“We didn’t get to drink them either though, Bob.” I said, “And my mouth really is as dry as a mother superior’s fanny now. Let’s find somewhere a bit less poncey.”

One thing the incident *had* done, and it took me a few minutes to realise this, was to straighten us both out. The effects of the Northern Lights, top drawer or not, had gone: zip.

And this wasn’t such a bad thing considering. A lot of people talk a lot of nonsense about dope, you know, “clarifying the mind” or “helping me focus” and this sort of rot; personally, I’ve never found it anything other than a hindrance when I’m trying to plan or think about anything beyond the most basic of stuff. And the stronger the weed the more this rule applies. I’ve tried it too, on a few occasions: “let’s get stoned and do X”. Yes, top idea, let’s do that! So you get stoned and do absolutely nothing, like everyone kind of knew was going to be the case from the start. Or maybe that’s just me. As it is, I’m more into keeping a clear head when there’s anything to be done of any importance as that way, if I do happen to mess it up, then I can’t blame anything or anyone other than myself.

So we made our way to a greasy spoon café on Great Western Road and sat ourselves down with those cups of coffee we’d been chasing for the past hour or so.

“I’ve had a few thoughts about who we can talk to” I said, lighting a cigarette and taking a draw. It tasted pretty horrible and I made a mental note that at some point I really must stop smoking, though the fact that I loved weed as much as I did meant that I probably wouldn’t.

*Fact was, I'd been half promising myself for years that I'd quit the nicotine but never actually did. Like I say, smoking dope was the big problem for me; I always smoked weed/tobacco mix joints. I could easily have switched to straight Northern Lights doobies as - unlike a lot of people - supply really wasn't an issue for me. I used to tell myself that smoking straight grass joints got me too monged to be able to function, which was true to a certain extent, but at the heart of the matter was the undeniable fact that I liked that little tobacco lift. If I didn't smoke weed, I always told myself, then I'd probably quit cigarettes.*

“So who are you thinking about then Joe?” Little Bob brought me back to the here and now.

“Well, to kick things off” I said, “I think we should call on a friend of mine who is pretty tuned in as far as indoor horticulture goes.”

“Does he grow the old Amsterdam Spinach himself, then?” asked Little Bob.

“Some, and man, some of it is shit hot, but he keeps it small and he says he does it out of scientific curiosity, as a kind of experiment.” I said, “But more to the point, he's probably forgotten more about different types and strains and all that sort of stuff than we'll ever know. We might strike it lucky straight off and then we can go and do something else.”

“Think he'll be up for letting us take part in an experiment?” said Little Bob, grinning, “Out of scientific curiosity like, obviously.”

“Jesus wept!” I exclaimed in mock exasperation, “We've no sooner got straight than you want to get stoned again.” Then I grinned back, “He just might, Little Bob. He just might at that. Now, let's find a phone box; I'll need to call the good Doctor and let him know we're coming. We just turn up at the door unannounced and he just won't answer.”

“A bit paranoid, aye?” said Little Bob.

“A combination of that and plain good sense; look, here's a phone along here. Have you got any change?”

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Dr John Bloom was a real, bona fide scientist type of guy. So real and bona fide, in fact, that he taught in the chemistry and pharmaceutical sciences department in one of the better Scottish universities, though he had himself been taught at Cambridge. I'd known him for a number of years, having met him through my business partner Jake, who'd gone to university for a year where he studied chemistry for nearly a year before dropping out to become a builder instead. Dr John had been Jake's tutor and it had been a matter of a few hours for them to discover they shared a love for strong, exotic dope and malt whisky. Their friendship continued after Jake decided that academia didn't rock his boat; if anything, once the student-teacher relationship had been removed, their friendship grew and strengthened.

Dr John had fallen in love with drugs as a seventeen year old, back at the tail end of the 1960's. Particularly beloved were those ones that used to be known as psychedelics, but anything with mind-altering properties came into his field of interest.

I hadn't seen Dr John in a while, so the telephone call was necessary as one thing he really wasn't keen on was uninvited or unexpected guests. So I made the call and once I'd given him my assurances that Little Bob was okay and that, yes, he'd respect the rules and all the rest of it, Dr John invited us over to his house. I didn't say anything about why we wanted to see him, as we'd long since made a rule that business of any sort involving anything of an illegal nature would never be referred to directly over the telephone. Dr John had this idea that the police had some sort of computer thing that rang bells somewhere every time certain words were used. Personally, I thought this was pretty unlikely, but it always seemed to me like a good habit to get into and so I'd made it one of my own rules for those rare occasions I was forced to call someone to score off them. After all, you never could tell.

"Okay," I said, as I left the telephone kiosk, "We're on, so let's see if we can get a taxi."

"Are we going far?" asked Little Bob.

"Not really," I said, "But it's a bit far to walk, especially in this heat. And to be honest, I can't be arsed, so a taxi it is."

"Cool as fuck," said Little Bob, "Here's one coming now."

We flagged the cab down and I gave the driver an address. It wasn't Dr John's address, but rather another house at the corner of his street. The driver nodded and we were off to Kelvinside.

As we drove along, I pointed out that Dr John had never met Little Bob and wouldn't have known him if he'd climbed out of one of his numerous bongs, and that therefore I'd had to vouch for him and promise I'd impress upon him the need to forget anything that took place from when we arrived at Dr John's house 'til when we left again. Little Bob messed about a bit, of course, saying he'd only tell his flatmates and all that kind of stuff, but he got the drift that – at least as far as Doctor John was concerned – maintaining his anonymity was as serious as cancer. This meant that I had to tell him something of Dr John's life in the straight world, but beyond this I didn't tell him much else.

The taxi dropped us outside a massive old house on Cleveden Drive. "Wow!" exclaimed Little Bob "Is this it?"

I shook my head, "No. it's not far though. This way, and this is one of those areas where the residents will call the police at the drop of a hat if they think you're up to anything even remotely dodgy, so no fanning about."

"You're the man" said Little Bob with false solemnity in his voice.

We walked down the street running off Cleveden Drive. There were houses here, as opposed to tenement flats; this was a pretty strictly "no riff-raff and no students" type of area. Fortunately, because neither of us had been up all night (yet) and while not exactly dressed in collar and tie, we both looked reasonably presentable, nobody gave us a second glance.

We crossed the road and I led Little Bob into a smaller and even quieter street. Halfway down this street I stopped.

"Here we are, Little Bob," I said, "Now remember what I said to you in the cab, yeah? No fucking about."

“No bother” Little Bob replied. He looked vaguely uncomfortable and subdued in this quiet and leafy environment of middle class affluence; expensive houses with beautifully tended gardens no litter lying around and no satellite dishes or dog mess to be seen.

I opened the gate and walked up the garden path to the front door of the house. The garden itself was in bloom with a riot of colours. I hadn’t a clue what any of these plants were, but the sight of them was a cheery one. I knew though, that it was the garden at the back of the house, and particularly the gardens *in* the house where we’d find flora of an altogether more exotic – and many of them illegal – nature.

“Okay,” I said, “Now…” and I stepped forward and rang the doorbell.

For a good few seconds, nothing happened, and then I could hear the sound of a door closing somewhere within the house and then footsteps coming towards the front door.

A muffled voice from the other side of the door said, “Who goes there, friend or foe? Speak, friend and enter.”

“Most definitely friends” I said, smiling, “It’s Joe Kane”

A bolt was drawn back, a key was turned in a lock and the door swung open. Dr John stood in the doorway smiling at us before moving to one side to allow us in to the house.

“You must be Bob Kerr” he said, holding out his right hand to Little Bob, “Delighted to make your acquaintance; any friend of Joe’s is welcome.”

Little Bob took the offered hand and shook it, “Likewise,” he said, looking up at Dr John. I hadn’t told Little Bob that Doctor John was getting on for seven feet tall.

“Let’s go through to the day room,” said Dr John in his cultured and plummy voice, “I’ve got the kettle on for tea.”

He led us along a bright hallway lined on both sides with bookcases all of which were full to the point of bursting. There were plants everywhere as well: on top of the bookcases, on the floor, on plant stands; everywhere you looked there was a chaos of books and plants.

We went through to an altogether calmer and more sedate room, what Dr John referred to as “The Day Room” in that quaint sort of Victorian turn of phrase he occasionally employed.

“Take a seat; I’ll be back in a minute.” He said, “Or maybe you’d prefer to come through to the kitchen? We can talk as I brew up.” And he disappeared through an adjoining door and into a short corridor that led to the kitchen. We followed behind.

I glanced at Little Bob, who was looking mildly puzzled. “What’s up?” I asked.

Bob shook his head, “It’s nothing. I’m just wondering why there’s absolutely no smell of weed in here at all. From what you said I was expecting the place to fairly stink of Skunk.”

“Are you *still* thinking about getting stoned? Don’t worry; all will be revealed I’m sure.”

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So there the three of us were, sitting in Dr John’s Day Room sipping China tea and talking about weed. We could’ve been two ladies and a middle-aged dowager talking about their geraniums; certainly Dr John lived in the right ‘hood for it, and most definitely had the right accent. Vilnius 23 had come up some half an hour earlier and the Doctor had become most animated at this point. Unfortunately he’d never heard of it himself, and hadn’t come across any marijuana that strong before. However, the story surrounding the weed (unemployed Eastern Bloc scientists at a loose end following the end of Communism) sounded very reasonable indeed, he said. Furthermore, there was a lot of cross-breeding and pollination going on and the strength of weed was creeping slowly up to levels never previously seen. Maybe someone had just found a way to do it before anyone else, he said. Whatever, Dr John was very interested indeed in the possibility of producing weed of that strength; albeit purely as an academic exercise, of course.

So, telephone calls – national and international - had been made to a number of specialists using his various code words. Messages had been left and there wasn't much else to do now other than accept Dr John's hospitality. It was only now starting to creep towards late afternoon, so I could easily do in a couple of joints, get straightened out and then maybe do a bit more Vilnius chasing later in the evening. Besides, it would be rude not to. Yep, shop talk over, now was just the time to get a bit stoned.

“Are either of you gentlemen fans of cannabis oil?” he said, getting up from his armchair. Little Bob and I looked at each other. Did I say “a bit stoned”? What I meant was “totally wasted”.

“Er, uh, yeah, sure thing, Doc.” Little Bob stuttered. He seemed a bit caught off guard; he'd been waiting for the invitation for the past hour or so and now it had been made he'd gone all sort of coy and Queen Victoria on it.

“Then please,” Dr John continued, “let us go downstairs.”

“Lead the way, maestro.” I said.

The rooms down in the basement were where Dr John did most of his extracurricular “research”. He took a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened the door to the basement for us. Immediately there was the unmistakable smell of weed; strong weed. Little Bob looked at me and I raised my eyebrows. In almost every room there were grow-lights and hydroponics tanks full of one sort of plant or another. The man's electricity bill must have been frightening. As if he'd guessed what I was thinking, Dr John told us that he'd gotten hold of some sort of gizmo that allowed him to put out the amount of light needed for his horticultural pursuits but using half the amount of electricity. While the smell of the grass would have been quite obvious to anyone who happened to come down into the basement, up in the main house there was absolutely no indication of what went on below. All of the basement rooms used for growing had fan units to pump air in so as to keep the plants cool under the remorseless glare of the lights, and next to these other units worked tirelessly removing the cat-piss aroma from the basement and putting it all up the chimney of the house and into the air of the outside world. As Dr John only seemed to have a couple of dozen cannabis plants at most, this meant that their smell could dissipate into the air pretty much

unnoticed by anyone, although Dr John told us that on particularly hot and still days it was possible to get the occasional whiff of skunk out on the street.

It was as well he didn't grow weed on the scale that Jake, Molly and I did as our operation would have turned leafy Kelvinside into a Skunky Chernobyl within hours; which was why we ran our operation out in the sticks in the middle of nowhere.

We continued our tour of the basement rooms. There were quite a few grass plants, but all sorts of other plants too: hundreds and hundreds of them and none I recognised.

"The cacti I keep in the greenhouses, of course" Dr John was saying, "Hydroponic methods are great in their own way, but there are so many plants it just won't do for at all. The cacti, for instance; they need to grow from scratch. The same applies, obviously, to all the acacia bushes, and trees and shrubs of that nature."

"Obviously." said Little Bob. Both Dr John and I looked at him with surprise. He gave a shrug and smiled, blushing slightly.

The last room we went into was full of laboratory equipment, and was obviously where the serious work went down.

"Wow," said Little Bob, "It's amazing."

"Couldn't have put it better myself." I said.

"Okay, my friends" said Dr John, "I just need to get some of the material from the refrigerator and we're in business." He opened the door of a very big fridge and peered inside. "Ah," he said to something we couldn't see, "There you are." He spoke as though he was addressing someone he was particularly fond of. He reached into the refrigerator and took something from it.

Dr John closed the fridge door and led us back upstairs. He locked the door to the basement and then indicated to us to follow him. We went through the kitchen and out into a big conservatory at the back of the house. It was very hot indeed and Dr John opened several

windows before sitting down and putting a small glass container on a coffee table. Little Bob and I sat on a big comfortable sofa on the other side of the table.

“A bucket-vaporizer, I think.” He said, reaching behind him and lifting this contraption that looked to me like a see-through home brew container, though this gizmo was made of glass and was maybe only a third of the size. There was a thing like the business end of a blowtorch attached to what looked like a little tank of gas that had been somehow fixed onto the inside of lid of the bucket. Next to the gas tank there was a long, thin piece of metal - also fixed - that extended perhaps three inches higher than the top of the blowtorch, at which point it had been bent at a 45 degree angle so the tip of the metal (which had been fashioned into a sort of dipper) was right above where the flame of the torch would be when it was lit. In the top of the container there was a length of clear plastic piping.

By now Little Bob and I were totally engrossed in proceedings while at the same time at a bit of a loss as to what was going to happen next. Dr John caught our expressions and smiled at us in amusement. Then he winked.

“Okay,” he said, “Let’s put some oil in the measure there and spark this little beauty up.” And with that he flipped the lid on the container he’d brought from the fridge in the basement and, using a small spatula, tried to spoon some stuff that looked like the sort of phlegm someone with bronchitis might produce into the dip at the end of the metal rod. The stuff was a very dark green and so thick you could have stood the spoon up in it. After a minute or two fannying about with the stuff, Dr John got it into the dip before screwing the container onto the lid, which had now become the base.

He pressed a button on the underside of the base and this in turn lit up the torch; the flame burned hotly but didn’t actually touch the metal spoon. After a couple of seconds, what looked like a thick white smoke started to pour from the oil, and within seconds the container was full of the stuff.

“I’ve not managed to quite get this working as well as I’d like” Dr John explained as all this was happening. “The heat’s supposed to vaporize the active elements of the oil, but as you can see, there’s still some smoke present. Not to worry though; it’s still a dynamite hit.” He

passed me the plastic tube, “Here, try it.” he said, “You just suck as much out of it as you want to. I’d advise some caution, however. This particular batch is rather potent.”

I’d only smoked oil a few times in my life and it was always a really messy way of doing. That said, I’d always had it in a joint and this meant lots of faffing around trying to mix the oil with tobacco. When I eventually got to smoke the stuff, it was always pretty damn strong. However, my memory of it was that it was brown whereas this stuff was green.

Gingerly, I took a lungful of the smoke, expecting at any second to be rolling around on the floor coughing and trying to catch my breath. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that no such thing happened. On the contrary, the heavy and thick looking smoke was very light, to the extent that I wasn’t sure if I’d actually had any at all. I took another blast of the thing, this time holding the smoke, vapour or whatever-the-hell-it-was in my lungs for as long as I could. Again, I didn’t seem to have made a dent on the white cloud inside the container.

While I was doing this, I was aware that Little Bob’s arse was making buttons beside me; he was bouncing up and down in the seat next to me and all but taking the plastic tubing off me. I handed it to him as I exhaled.

Within thirty seconds the dope hit me like a veritable sledgehammer. “Jesus Christ,” I said, “Now *that* is powerful shit.”

I felt like I was really drunk; so much so that I’d lost the power of speech or movement. I slumped back onto the comfortable cushions and decided to just go with the flow. It was too damn late now to do anything else. It would’ve been nice to have a cold drink though.

Just as I had that thought, Dr John said “Gentlemen, I must apologise. Would either of you care for a cold drink? I believe I have a bottle of wine chilling somewhere. It’s cheap and cheerful but ideal for situations like this.”

My mouth was suddenly so dry I could hardly speak, and I could feel my eyes turning to beefburger-y slits as the dope washed over me in waves. I tried to nod, but was utterly immobilised. I hadn’t been as stoned as this since I was a teenager.

Dr John smiled, "I'll take that as a yes then. Back in a minute." And he turned to leave the room. At the door of the conservatory he stopped and looked back at us, "You know, I take the state of the two of you as a real complement." And he laughed before disappearing from sight.

Suddenly I was aware of a low moaning noise; I eventually managed to turn my head enough to see that the source of the sound was Little Bob.

"Ooooh" he was moaning.

"Bob" I finally managed to say, "What's up, man?"

"Nothing, Joe, except that I am utterly fucked out of my head; I don't think I can move."

I managed a smile, "Me neither. I told you, didn't I?"

"You sure did, my man" croaked Little Bob, "You sure did. Fucking hell, what is this we're smoking? I can hardly move my eyes let alone anything else."

Dr Bob came back with a two litre bottle of Soave and three glasses. He looked at the contraption on the table; "There's still quite a lot left if either of you are interested" he said.

"No, I'm fine right now" Little Bob and I answered in unison.

"Man," said Little Bob, "I am soooo fucked right now. My complements to our host; you've achieved the impossible: I don't think I've ever been this stoned in my life."

Dr John smiled and bowed. "The pleasure is all mine, my friends," he said. "I hadn't actually tried any of this batch myself as yet because I suspected it would have that sort of effect and I've got rather a lot of work to do. Personally, I prefer the lighter end of the strength spectrum."

He filled each of the glasses with wine and sat back down again.

“Is this what the Vilnius would be like?” Little Bob croaked.

“I doubt it,” said Dr John, “what we have here is just the psychoactive compound, so it’s more-or-less pure. The oil one used to be able to buy was usually adulterated or wasn’t actually oil in the true sense. I’ve used the traditional alchemist method of steam extraction...”

“Alchemist is totally fucking right.” I interrupted, “Sorry.”

“...although what some people seem to do is extract the THC and so forth with alcohol and try to pass this off as oil, which it isn’t though it will *certainly* get one stoned. The alcohol extraction, strictly speaking, is a tincture rather than oil. I’ve found the alcohol technique works very nicely with opium poppies, but frankly, pure alcohol is too much bother to try to get hold of in the quantities necessary for cannabis without drawing attention to oneself, so I tend to use it sparingly, on opium as I say, but also for tryptamine and phenethylamine extractions. Oh yes, it’s very good for those.”

“Whoa, Doc,” said Little Bob, “I don’t know about my man here,” he lifted a hand with some trouble and pointed at me, “but I’m fucking lost now.”

“Of course, of course, not to worry,” said Dr John. “Oh! I think I hear the telephone; do please excuse me and do help yourselves to more to smoke or drink.” He nodded at the contraption on the table, “There’s still rather a lot of oil in there, I’d say.” And he was gone from the room.

I could vaguely hear him on the telephone a couple of rooms away before music started playing. *I Put a Spell on You*, by, I think, Arthur Brown. Yeah, definitely Arthur Brown. Dr John: child of the 60’s.

“Feeling brave enough to do some more, Little Bob?” I said. “I still feel mashed, but not quite as incapacitated as I was ten minutes ago; nothing like an explanation of extraction techniques to focus the brain, eh?”

Next to me, Little Bob giggled. “I am still so fucked. But at least my tongue doesn’t feel too big for my mouth any more. Jesus, I sounded like a retard before.”

“I can’t say that I noticed.”

“What, you’re saying I sound like a retard all the time?”

“No, I just meant you sounded fine. Oh, for fuck’s sake! Let’s not start this bollocks, eh?”

“Sorry, man.” Little Bob sat up and reached for the vaporizer tube.

“You’re going to go for it then?” I said, starting to laugh.

“Fuck, aye. If it doesnae kill me it’ll make me stronger, aye?”

“If you say so.” I said, still giggling.

“Gonnae join me?” said Little Bob as he farted around trying to get the burner gizmo going.

“Be rude not to,” I said, “but I want some of that wine first.” I picked up my glass and drained half of it in one swallow. “That’s better. How are you getting on with that thing? Got it going yet?”

“Yep; here we go. Man, look at that white smoke...” Little Bob sucked greedily on the pipe and I watched as all the white vapour disappeared.

“Watch and not overdo it, Little Bob.” I said, but even as I said the words, it became all too apparent that they’d come too late as Bob’s beatific, stoned smile evaporated as he turned several shades of green before settling for a rather alarming beige.

“You alright, Little Bob?” I said, as he slid from the sofa and almost on to the floor in one fluid movement; kind of like someone pouring water slowly out of a bucket. “Actually,” I continued, “Looking at you, I think I’ll pass on having any more of that; for the moment at least.”

“Oh, God. Oh, God, I think I’m having a stroke or something.” Moaned Little Bob from down at my feet. I’d have helped him up but experience had taught me that in these situations it was best to wait to be asked for help as sometimes where the individual taking the whitey ended up (in this case, Dr John’s conservatory floor, covered in slate tiles) was precisely where they wanted to be.

“Ooooh,” the moaning came again, “things are starting to spin a little bit and I can hear a noise like a helicopter landing. Am I taking a whitey? I’ve never had one before.”

“Sounds like,” I said, “anything I can do for you?”

“Not unless you know how to make this stop. Otherwise, just leave me here. I’ll be okay in a minute or two. It must be the lack of sleep that’s done this; I cannae think of anything else.”

“Yeah,” I said, “that must be it. Nothing to do with the fact that you just pigged out on...” I looked into the bowl of the vaporizer; it was empty apart from some black gunk at the bottom, “...every last fucking drop of the oil that was in there. You greedy dickhead. You and your appetites, man.”

“Guuuh, thanks for the sympathy. Now, if you’ve finished lecturing me,” Little Bob’s voice was muffled as by now he was lying more-or-less underneath the settee with his face pressed onto those cool tiles, “Is there anything I can do about this or...”

“Nope,” I said, “I’m afraid you’re just going to have to weather it. If I was you I’d have a sip of the wine though. Actually, orange juice would be a better idea; I’ll go and see if Dr John has any. I need a piss at any rate; back in five.”

“I’ll be right here, man.” Came Little Bob’s muffled voice again, “I’m not going anywhere until the room has stopped spinning round. Oh, Jesus...”

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After a quick trip to strain my greens in the toilet, I went to find Dr John. He was in the kitchen, deep in conversation on the telephone. I knocked softly on the open door to alert him to the fact I was there. He glanced at me and waved me in, before putting his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone. “Two minutes?” he said. I nodded and then went back through to the conservatory to retrieve my glass of wine. Little Bob hadn’t moved. I topped up my glass and took it back with me to the kitchen where Dr John was finishing his conversation. He put the telephone down.

“So…” he said, leaning against a worktop and looking at me.

“I don’t suppose you’ve got any orange juice, John?” I asked, “Little Bob’s taken an attack of the vapours.”

“Oh dear; was the oil a bit rich for his blood then?”

I smiled and sipped some of my wine, “Something like that. He’s blaming it on lack of sleep. I’m blaming it on him being a greedy cunt.”

I saw that Dr John kind of winced at my use of the C-word.

“Sorry.” I apologised, immediately embarrassed at myself, “I forgot I wasn’t at home. Er…” Suddenly very self-conscious, I put away the rest of the wine in two gulps.

“Not at all, not at all. Orange juice, yes in the fridge; there’s a glass in the cupboard over there.”

I fixed Little Bob a drink and went back next door with Dr John.

“Hmmm. He *does* look rather green around the gills, doesn’t he?” said Dr John with a note of concern in his voice. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Orange juice will do the trick,” I said, “but it just takes a little time for the vitamin C to work its magic. He’ll live.” I knelt on the floor next to the prostrated figure of Little Bob. “Here

you go, mate.” I said to him, “Freshly squeezed orange juice; get that down your neck and you’ll be right as rain.”

“Cheers, Joe” came a muffled reply. “Just put it where I cannae spill it and I’ll get it in a minute.”

We sat and looked at Little Bob in silence for a minute or so. Dr John was still frowning and shaking his head gently. I smiled.

“Don’t worry,” I said, “He’ll live and this might actually teach him not to be so damn greedy.”

Dr John nodded and turned his attention to me.

“Indeed.” he said. “That telephone call was a reply from one of my contacts down south; at the Forensic Science Service drug testing unit at Aldermaston, no less. They’ve never heard of Vilnius 23, but said that this doesn’t necessarily mean much as it may be floating around under another name for one thing, and for another, they only analyse samples seized by the police so they don’t necessarily know about everything that’s out there. The strength of it bothers them though...”

“They should get a load of your fucking oil” said a muffled voice from beneath the table.

“...and I’d have to agree that it does seem very strong for a strain of grass.” Dr John continued, “I’ll let you know if I find out anything at all, but I’d rather like it if you’d keep me informed of any developments, yes?”

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Dr John and I talked about drugs and drank wine, and after half an hour or so Little Bob managed to sit up and drink his orange juice, grimacing.

“Oh, boy,” he moaned, “I’m never going to do that again, I can tell you. That was fucking horrible. Ugh! Never, never again.”

“Yeah, right, until the next time.” I said.

The telephone rang again in another room and Dr John excused himself to go and answer it. While Little Bob had been lying on the floor, I'd managed to make a bit of a dent on the two litres of wine and was feeling as good as Bob was feeling ropey.

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*It's a funny thing, but for me at least, some alcohol always seems to offset the effects of too much, well, too much anything really. If I'd necked a particularly strong pill and things were getting to that sitting in a corner in a monged state chewing my own face stage, I always found that a beer or two sorted me out. The same applied to anything vaguely stimulant. A lot of my peers used to bleat on at me about how you shouldn't drink alcohol with Ecstasy because it dulled the effects, or you didn't get the maximum benefit/effect from it and all that kind of guff. Personally, though, I always found that a pill or two washed down with a beer or two gave it a good kick start and made for a smoother kind of experience or whatever.*

*The first couple of times I took E were probably two of the most enjoyable drug experiences of my entire life, and both of them involved rather a lot of alcohol spread out over the course of the evening. In fact, the second of these involved necking half a Jack and Jill with a guy I only knew vaguely at the time. We went to a bar and sat talking all night, with the intention of hitting a club but never quite managing it. The end result was that we had an absolutely great night and have been the best of friends ever since.*

*Of course, both of these occasions were back in the day when you really did get what you paid for and a few beers didn't just immediately kill the effect of the drug dead.*

*Besides which, I liked booze – which is why I almost always had a good range and amount of it lying about the house - and have always found it complements pretty much any drug you could think of (with the exceptions of Ketamine and one or two others) very nicely. Opiates and booze can be a touch and go way of doing though, and is best avoided, although Lilith and I had necked some opium on a couple of occasions and we both found that a bottle of*

*chilled white wine hit the spot very nicely, thank you very much. But don't get me started on opium...or not right now at least.*

*Anyhow, to get back to the peer group drinking embargo for a minute or two, yeah, it used to be really frowned upon by all those E purist types. When I moved to Glasgow, it was really not the done thing, to the extent that if I so much as suggested having a glass or two of something to get the show on the road, everyone would look at me like I'd farted. However – and I don't claim to have had any influence over this – within a couple of months, the whole scene (or my particular part of it) seemed to have gotten into the booze and drug mix in a big way. Looking back on it now, I think that the change probably had a lot to do with the fact that the quality of the pills was already starting to slide and people were becoming aware of the fact. Maybe this had something to do with the purists starting to do what would have been unthinkable a few months earlier: topping up with speed and/or some acid.*

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Little Bob was half sitting, half lying on the settee and slowly coming back to the land of the living when Dr John returned from his telephone call. I'd no idea how long he'd been out of the room, but it seemed like quite a while, although that might have been something to do with the oil.

“Gentlemen,” he said as he walked briskly into the room, “I hope you won't think me rude and I hope you won't take offence, but I'm afraid we're going to have to cut our sojourn – pleasant and illuminating as it has been – short.”

Immediately, Little Bob and I sat up, though Little Bob took rather longer than me about it.

“What's up, John?” I asked, “A problem? Is there anything...”

“No, no problem.” Said Dr John, looking vaguely embarrassed, “Or at least not in the sense you mean. It's more a diary mix-up and something timetabled for tomorrow is going to have to be brought forward to this evening due to unforeseen circumstances. I do hope you both understand...” his voice trailed off and he gave a perplexed glance in Little Bob's direction.

“It’s okay,” I said, taking his meaning, “Give it another twenty minutes and we should be fit to move. Okay Bob?”

Little Bob grunted and nodded his head vaguely.

“You’d better drink that orange juice and get it together, man,” I continued, “Cause it’s time to saddle up again.” I turned back to Dr John, who was looking even more embarrassed now. “Can we phone a taxi to come and pick us up, John?” I asked him.

“A taxi, certainly. No problem, I’ll do it now. I’ll ask them to give it, ah,” he glanced at his watch, “quarter of an hour or so, yes?”

“Absolutely fine” I said, “Thanks. We’re going to Woodlands.”

Dr John nodded and left the room once more. Little Bob sat up slowly and rubbed his face.

“Fuck, man Joe,” he muttered, “was it something we said? I’m feeling a bit para, you know?”

I shook my head, “Nah, don’t worry about it Little Bob. While you were away there was a prolonged phone call and that’s what this is about; nothing to do with us, so no sweat.”

Little Bob considered this for a second before nodding. He was about to say something else when Dr John rejoined us.

“The cab will be here in a while,” he said. “Look, I feel really terrible about this, I really do. So I thought...” he held up a small container between his thumb and index finger.

“Look,” I said, “it’s cool, really. It’s all good, so you really don’t have to...”

“That’s mighty fuckin’ white of you, John,” Little Bob interrupted me, “What is it? More of that oil?” Getting rather unsteadily to his feet, he reached out to take the container.

I was mildly put out and affronted at Little Bob’s insouciance, particularly after the show he’d recently made of himself when he took the whitey. I had visions of spending the rest of

the day getting blitzed out of my head on the stuff or worse, having to buddy Little Bob through a succession of bad reactions. The boy never learned. However, I needn't have worried;

Dr John smiled, "Er, no," he said, mildly, "this is something rather, um, different I thought you might like to try." He handed Little Bob the container; it was full of a thick green goeey stuff that, from where I was sitting, also looked like phlegm.

"How are the two of you with hallucinogens? I know they're not to everyone's taste." Dr John continued. Little Bob and I looked at the container then at each other.

"Depends..." I said.

"What are we talking about here?" asked Little Bob, peering once more at the contents of the container with a look of curiosity on his face. "It looks to me like someone sneezed in this. What..."

"It's called Salvia Divinorum," Dr John explained, "It's a Mexican plant and is actually rather rare. The indigenous Shamans use it when they can't find enough Peyote for their rituals..."

"Peyote?" interrupted Little Bob, "isn't that where..."

"Mescaline comes from." I put in.

Dr John coughed lightly, a little miffed at the interruption. "That's correct; however it's not really like Mescaline. I won't bore you with the finer detail; all the chemistry and pharmacology." he continued, "Just suffice to say this is an extract of the active ingredient. It's rather concentrated as well, so for goodness sakes, *be careful with it*. Go home, get comfortable, put on some music, dim the lights and smoke a little bit of it. We've found that the hot knife technique works rather well...try to avoid mixing it with tobacco at any rate."

"Er, how long does it last?" I asked.

“You’re probably talking about no more than an hour at the absolute outside, though there is a certain ‘hangover’ effect you might want to be aware of.” Dr John replied, “Actually, you could do me a real favour and time the experience, make some notes, perhaps?”

“Wow!” said Little Bob, “Cheers!”

There was a sudden buzzing noise from the front of the house. “That must be our taxi,” I said, getting up, “Let’s go, Bob.” I shook Dr John’s hand; “A pleasure as ever, thanks for the hospitality and everything.”

“Yeah,” Little Bob offered his hand, “Great to meet ye and all, and really sorry about the whitey...”

Dr John smiled and shook the proffered hand, “Likewise, I’m sure,” he said, “and don’t worry about earlier; that oil *is* rather fierce stuff.” He turned to me again, “On which note, *do* be careful and not overdo the Salvia. The effects can be rather unpredictable and it sometimes affects people in rather different ways.”

The buzzer went again and Little Bob and I headed through the house in the direction of the front door. Both of us were staggering a little, Little Bob from the lingering after-effects of his white-out and me from a combination of white wine and the oil.

“One final point about the Salvia” Dr John said, “is *not* to get any of it on your hands or clothing.”

“Fuck!” exclaimed Little Bob, “Why not? Does it eat through skin or something?” He looked at the container now with suspicion.

Dr John smiled again, “Not at all” he said, “but it’s highly concentrated and it *will* dye anything it comes in contact with bright green.”

We all stood grinning at each other for a moment before Dr John said, “Seriously, it will dye everything green, and it’s a bugger to get out.”

On that note, I opened the door and started out, bumping into a tall skinny guy in torn jeans and a hooded top as I did so. “Oops,” I said, “Sorry, I didn’t see you there.”

The tall skinny guy looked at me like I’d stepped off a spaceship or something. “That’s okay,” he said finally and like he didn’t really mean it, “It was my fault.” I didn’t think he meant that either.

I had the sudden feeling that I’d met this guy before but couldn’t place him. I vaguely recognised the face and the spiky peroxide hair but just couldn’t put my finger on where we’d met before. I hate it when that happens; it might have been the dope or it might have been the booze, but either way it would bother me all night unless I said something.

“Do I know you from somewhere?” I said, “My memory’s not what it should be.” I glanced at Dr John as I said this and skinny blonde guy caught the look and smiled.

“Maybe” he said, relaxing a bit, “I meet a lot of people.”

“I’m Joe, this is Little Bob” I said, holding out my hand. He looked at it like it was a gun or something.

“Kid Jinx,” he said, “How you doing?”

Little Bob was about to say something when Dr John interrupted. “Look,” he said, “I think that the taxi driver is starting to get impatient. I’d go before he leaves you here.”

Little Bob and I looked at each other and took the hint. We said our goodbyes and our thank yous once again and walked – wobbling slightly – to where the taxi was waiting.

We got in and gave the driver my address before turning to wave a final goodbye to Dr John, but he and Kid Jinx had already gone in and shut the door.

“What the fuck just happened in there?” Little Bob was asking me, “Did I miss something? I know I’m a bit wrecked but...”

“I’ve absolutely no idea, man.” I said, “But I don’t think it was anything we said or did. Or rather, anything *you* said or did. Seemed to all be to do with that Jinx guy. Fuck, I know him from somewhere, man. I just can’t place him though.”

I was still pondering this when Little Bob asked the cabbie to pull in at a booze shop. He jumped out and returned a minute later with a bottle of Tequila (“If we’re going to be doing Mexican drugs we need to get it authentic, man.”) and two cartons of orange juice, by which point I was discussing the hot weather with the cabbie and had forgotten all about Kid Jinx. It would come back to me at some point, or it wouldn’t and it was no big deal anyway.