

Two

I arrived at the office more or less on time. My guts were still churning and I was sopping wet, so I headed straight to the gents, wherein to fix myself. I dried my hair using a handful of paper towels from the dispenser, then hung my dripping raincoat on a cloak peg. I took a deep breath as the sickness rose in me once again: it had swelled in the pit of my stomach variously en route to Corporation HQ, but this bite was hard. The perspiration broke on my brow and I dove into one of the cubicles, unsure as to which end I needed release first. I whipped down my kecks and placed my butt on the seat with split-second precision timing: my judgement had been correct. The rectal explosion was evidence of this. Bowels had clearly been the right choice. Okay, so it was 50/50 as to my being correct, but a serious gamble nonetheless. I wiped, flushed, got myself sorted ready to make the jittery journey to my desk, where I knew a megalithic stack of papers which required my attention would have accumulated. As I walked, I began to realise just how sore my sphincter was. That ale must have had a whopping surfeit of yeast to affect me like this, and no mistake. Maybe the Mexican seafood had been a rather ill advised choice, too, in retrospect.

I logged onto my computer, once I had shifted enough papers and general clutter to enable me to exhume my stained keyboard. The 7-key above the QWERTY bank is jammed, so I have to use the number pad, which is a bind, and problematic for me with my limited typing skills. But just because my typing's a little less than secretarial standard, they think they can exploit me. I'm actually quite well educated: I have a degree, and a reasonable one at that. And I have aspirations, too. Or at least I used to. I used to be a well-motivated individual, but my years at the Corporation have crushed my very soul and quelled my desire to work hard. I still want success,

but have, over time, completely lost sight of what it is to succeed, and what it was I wanted to be successful in. And then there is the whole fundamental idea of success.

What one party may consider success, another may see as nothing short of total abject failure. I've overheard people make remarks to the effect, 'he's done well for himself. He's got a job he's happy with, enjoys hanging with his work mates, likes his girl and has a good time. He's succeeded in doing what he wanted: respect due.' But is it? Of course, success is something which most people respect. Success is an achievement. The ability to achieve should, perhaps, be respected. However, respect must be earned. Success doesn't necessarily deserve respect. If an individual's success is the result of their hard work and talent, then, indeed, respect is due. If a slight degree of luck is involved...we all need a little luck to help us along. This success is worthy of acknowledgement and respect. If an individual has striven hard and overcome adverse circumstances and yet still achieved in a positive manner, then likewise. But to succeed at the expense of others is beneath contempt. If an individual can claim success by stamping on the existence of another, then that success is, at best, ill-deserved. 'The greatest good for the greatest number,' said Voltaire. Now that *is* enlightened. Okay, but the point stands. Achieving success and claiming glory while those whose heads have been trampled underfoot are left to wallow in the shit deposited by the upwardly mobile is despicable, and cannot justifiably be qualified as 'success'. 'Winners do things losers would not dare.' That's as maybe, but how often is it fair to suggest that 'winners' do things that 'losers' are morally averse to, or would not lower themselves to do? 'Winners succeed because they do the things that losers only dream of.' Again, maybe, but often the 'winners' are 'successful' because they do the things that 'losers' wouldn't dream of, or entertain doing, in a million years. Go figure. As for the individual who achieves his goals, however limited, and attains satisfaction...well, what of him? 'He only ever wanted a quiet, easy life, time to spend on his hobbies with enough money for a subsistence living and a few pints with his mates on a weekend.' Fine, but to equate satisfaction with success is an erroneous, misguided and spurious correlation. I'm glad that street cleaner's happy and contented. But he's not successful, whatever you say, however you look at it. So perhaps he has achieved his goals, and that's all well and good. His life's fine. I can respect that, at least inasmuch as I have no grounds on which to proffer my disrespect. I shan't pour scorn on the man because of his profession. The world needs street cleaners, and good ones at that: street cleaners who do their job thoroughly, and with

good grace. We can't all be possessed of godlike genius. We can't all be great artists, writers or visionary thinkers. We need those who are content to shovel the crap at the bottom of the pile, and that guy there who's content to clean the streets...well, yes, he's truly exemplary in his field, one of the best shovellers of shit the world has ever known. If the man's a twat, however, I cannot respect him, however well he does his job, whatever he brings to the street-sweeping profession. But irrespective of that, let's understand this: he ain't a successful man. And neither am I, for here I am, the same as he, shovelling someone else's shit for a dog's dropping of a wage.

Of course, then there is the issue of self-respect. This is something which is wholly removed from plain respect, and a world away from success. That said, success is, without doubt, easier to attain if the individual has a modicum of self-respect, because self-respect and confidence are often largely intertwined. But self-respect is something I'm in no mood to consider now, not least of all because my headache and pit-of-the-stomach sick feeling are far too distracting. Moreover, my own self-respect is a small shadow which I can see receding away from me, diminishing tangibly with each day I spend here at this fucking desk here at Corporation HQ. My self-respect is, at best, limited right now. This is why I abuse myself so. Okay, so I drink to forget. It doesn't work; it simply brings my morose side to the fore and clouds my judgement. Sometimes, on a good night, I manage to forget why I drink. Unfortunately, my aching kidneys remind me, I never manage to forget *to* drink. But it gives me something to look forward to: slow death.

My PC's ready for action. I am not, but must work through my sickness. In time it will fade, although the real sickness, deep within, will be with me forever. It could, however, be alleviated by escape from this penitentiary, a break into the light... I start sifting through the reams of dog-eared papers on my workstation. The accumulation is quite phenomenal. There are notes and post-its absolutely everywhere from work mates, colleagues and other Corporate workers who I've never met and am unlikely to. It matters little: I have no desire to meet them. I'm quite happy to let them remain the faceless, unnamed, blank, impersonal, non-personal Corporate dogs they doubtless are. I'll work through the tasks they've left for me to work through - in time. I'll prioritise the tasks as I see fit. Or as management sees fit. Or as the client sees fit. It all depends on who starts shouting the loudest, who takes the most effort to get off my back, who won't be placated or fobbed off with 'I'm working on it' lines, despite the fact that they're usually true. For some bizarre reason, you see, I take some

kind of pride in my work. You wouldn't know it to look at my desk, but the state of my desk is truly beyond my control. I'm a tidy, orderly person, but these papers get deposited while I'm away, either in meetings, at lunch, taking a dump...and then they breed, without restraint. Or consideration for the stress my workload places me under.

My head aches, my ring is raw, and I have eight hours of hard labour to endure before I can really get stuck into some serious ale, although a pint or three at lunch will at least accelerate the dreary spell between midday and five-thirty p.m. I guess the question is, whom do I ask to have the honour of accompanying me in the imbibing of these tasty beverages? I'm feeling low right now, and heading out for lunch in the company of some hot female would be good for my fragile ego. Christ, thinking like this I must appear to have an overflow of hormones seeping from my swollen twat gland. Ah, don't misunderstand me: I'm a good man, and, as a rule, an honest man. But my home situation's been getting me down. I'm sensitive to criticism, and have been subjected to an awful lot of late. To compensate, I feel the need, rather tragically, to locate myself in the company of people who are sympathetic, and make me feel good about myself. I'm beginning to feel considerable remorse over the incident with my mate's fiancée at the weekend, and the guilt-induced nausea in the pit of my stomach, combined with the concentrated levels of alcohol in my bile, causes me to break into a sweat as I hold back a retch.

As I'm sitting groggily in my swivel chair, trying to focus my mind, and, indeed, my eyes, on my keyboard, I'm suddenly aware of the presence of another being beside my desk. I look up, blinking, to see a female figure standing over my cowering, shuddering and feeble frame.

"Hi," she says, brightly. As she observes my ashen features and perspiration sheen, her face drops a little. "Are you alright?"

"Uh..." I find it hard to respond.

"Heavy night last night?"

"Rather," I replied.

"Look," she said, "I can't stop for long now. I've already been given a load of grief this morning over my skiving. 'Why were you absent from your desk?' I can only tell my team leader I'm in the loos because of women's things so often..."

Oh, Christ. I'm fairly hardy to these things, and am accustomed to this girl's graphic detailing of such matters, but this morning...

"Yeah, yeah, sure," I managed to wheeze.

“And they don’t like my skirt. I mean...well, do you like it?”

I cast an eye over the garment. The task didn’t take long.

“Uh...sure.” It was fortunate that she had decent legs.

“My team leader says it’s too short and I can’t wear it any more.”

“What, you have to go without?” my hangover was affecting my capacity for smart comments, and no mistake. I groaned inwardly at my own lameness.

“No, silly! But I bet you’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

I couldn’t reply. What could I say? She was a pleasant girl, and no mistake. Physically, she was fine, too. Facially...I guess you could say her appeal was...subjective. She wasn’t ugly, but...I guess quirky may be an apt choice. She was one of the Corporation’s biggest tarts. Not an easy lay, that I knew of, and believe me, I’d have known, but her attire was nothing if not eye-catching. Sometimes, it was simply almost nothing. I got on well enough with her, but found her, and her blatant flirting, a touch overbearing. She scared me. Yes, me, Dr. Hard. She scared me like Grace Jones scares me. In short, she terrified the crap outta me. I was always on edge in her presence, in case she decided she’s had enough flirting and devour me instead. With those teeth...ouch. I broke out into another wave of heavy sweating as this thought swept through my consciousness. She probably thought I was getting turned on.

“You wanna do lunch?” she asked.

“Okay...” Damn. I’m so weak.

“I’ll meet you at my desk at twelve.”

“Okay.”

“So, do you think my skirt’s too short?” she asked, wiggling her hips provocatively.

I looked at her face, then her hips, her thighs, and back to her face. “It hasn’t got a beard, has it?” I quipped, cringing once more.

“No,” she replied.

“Then it’s not too short.”

“Thanks. That’s what I thought. It’s a good job I trimmed this morning. See you at twelve!” She skipped off down the office. My bleary eyes followed her butt as it made its way to the end of the office and turned the corner out of sight. ‘Well, that was the morning’s first dilemma resolved, I suppose,’ I thought. ‘But a satisfactory resolution...?’

Exiled in Domestic Life

Ah, what the hell...