

Saturday 77

Michael Botur

SATURDAY ONE

The probation lady, the one with no makeup and no empathy, she said they'd pick you up at 7.30, God bless her, and they're right on time. White van; unreflective eyes of idiots inside, wiping snot on the windows. You dry your eyes on your shirt cuff. You were hoping the van would crash on the way, killing everyone, so you could go back to bed, maybe teach your boy the origins of the Avengers, or just *listen* to your side of the whole ugly domestic... well, *incident*. Spend some quality time. He's ten, too young to appreciate the trouble you're in: 300 hours of slavery, punishment for breaking the laws of the land. You broke a window; Rochelle felt afraid and phoned the police. One conviction for the damage, one for the intent to assault. Best you stay away from your family one day per week and work the wrong off. You're a villain and a bad influence on the boy. Today, penance begins. You're lucky your wife hasn't changed the locks.

The van stops at the end of your driveway, wheels up on the kerb a little bit. Now all the thugs know where you live. Wonderful. You have a backpack with a nice lunch and a thermos in it. The driver, a little dark elf of a man, says, 'Get the fuck out with that shit.' It takes a moment to translate: he's saying you're not allowed to bring your own lunch. The whole vanload of boys slides the door open and they sit on your lawn with their feet dangling into the gutter. You look back at your bay window and sure enough, your wife is closing the curtains, even though the sun's only just risen. Cigarettes appear from behind the criminals' ears, from inside drink bottles. They pass around a single can of Monster energy drink, slurping loudly. The van driver wears a hi-visibility vest. He doesn't make any eye contact. He lights two cigarettes and gives one to some cousin or relative, judging by the way they slap palms. The driver is of their world and on their level. He's not the reasonable bureaucrat you were hoping for.

'Tryna bring that shit up in here,' the driver mumbles, chewing his cigarette.

'I did indeed—listen, where can I list my allergies? I'm gluten intolerant and sometimes—'

'Leave it the fuck behind, bro. Thas contraband.'

You swing the lunchbox behind your leg. It has Snoopy the beagle on it. 'My wife made it for me...'

‘Want me to notify the Department you’re in breach? Naw? Didn’t think so. Leave it in the letterbox. Bring nothin but your smokes and your shoes. Leave the attitude.’

The smell wafting out of that van is the inside of the washing machine that time you tried to repair it, salty rotting funky fruit, and something almost fecal, like diapers, all of it mixed in an ashtray. One of the criminals pushes a smoke into your side and you say ‘Not me, ta,’ and he says, ‘The fuck ju say to me?’

You take the smoke and hold it like a dying baby bird from a hot sidewalk. What does one do with such an object?

When the smokes are smoked and they’ve urinated on your rose bushes, everyone piles back into the van and you drive out to where the hedges run for a hundred metres and rocky driveways are half a mile long.

In front of a country mansion, the driver pulls over in a puddle of gravel. ‘Last smokes, boys.’ The driver pushes a glowing pink vest with even-pinker trimming into your hands. Pink? Is the man daft? All the boys thud out of the van, trample some gravel, spit a lot, hunch their shoulders for warmth, do some more smoking. You sit in the van, breathing through your mouth, fumbling with the cigarette you’ve been issued. Then the boys climb back into the van. Someone wipes a wet finger on the top of your neck. You attempt to slump in your seat. Then a wet finger is in your ear and your head hits the ceiling. God have mercy!

The van stops for good at a church out in the country. Without being ordered to, all of the boys evacuate and fetch items from the van’s rear—pot, burner, gas bottles, paint brushes, rollers, rakes, shovels, a box of wrapped sandwiches. Six guys in different vests, all yellow, lob the gas bottle at each other, crumpling and gasping and cursing as they catch it. You follow a couple of guys with yellow trimming before the driver taps the back of your neck.

‘Don’t fink you wanna go with them. Wrong colour.’

To your left are Pinks. To the right, the Yellows are all gathering behind a shed and lighting very small, floppy cigarettes, which they shield from the breeze with great care. Their cigarettes smell like burning vegetables.

‘Do I need to sign anything... I haven’t listed my next of kin...’

‘Wouldn’t wanna be ya,’ says a man elbowing you as he scurries over to the Yellow gang. His back is the same shape as the back of the man you saw sentenced before you. He appears to have chosen yellow. You stared at that back as you tried to determine the mood of the judge and what sort of facial expression would appease her. A Chinese woman with a sagging throat, she was. She spoke to Yellowman as if she were programming a computer. You heard Yellowman quietly say ‘Praise

Jesus' before he was led into the court cells for processing. You shared a cell with him for 44 minutes. There were no colours, then. The only entertainment, the only literature you had to read was your watch. You didn't farewell one another when you were released into a cage on the edge of the motorway. Your son was crying in the car. His mother had some documents she made you sign before she unlocked the passenger door.

'You'da got fucked up.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Cheese roll? Hell no!' A pink guy with blue eyes lasering out from a brown face is standing beside you, shaking his head. 'You'da got fucked up if you tried a roll with the Cheese.'

'By Cheese, you mean—'

'Not chore colour. Think pink.'

Your Pink gang is setting the lunch up. This is the real work, apparently. The Yellows are occupied digging a latrine and mixing foaming soap tablets with buckets of water, and placing planks over the hole, for one chosen Yellow man to squat on. He squirts into the chemical broth. Another Yellow is tearing A4 papers into strips and handing them to the defecator.

The vertically-challenged driver leaves the keys in the van's ignition and blasts radio harness-racing as loudly as he can. You think of people in the race stands smiling in hats and you sniff and wipe your eyes. You could be in the office today, watching through the blinds as daddies with toddlers on their shoulders follow mothers pushing prams, making those few extra phone calls to get ahead, coming home announcing a bonus for an unexpected sale, coming home a hero—but you won't. You failed your family. You're just a crim in a pink vest.

The first job is to weed a section of garden as long as a couple of trucks. It runs where the church's lawn meets the road. There are pie wrappers and cigarette boxes in the soil. The Pinks *squirt* strings of saliva into the soil. Will that soften the dirt? You'd like to consult a Pink about why spitting seems so pleasurable, but you're unsure how to broach the question.

The midget hands out lunch bags with pale, faded apples, soft, slightly wrinkled. The largest Pink man, whose eyelids are fat and won't stop squinting, sits on his rump smoking while everyone places their apples between his knees.

A guy with the names of girls inked all over his neck tells you to give your muesli bar to 400.

'400?'

'Big Boss.'

'And he's known as 400, is he?'

The tattooed-neck man reaches into your lunch bag and takes your muesli bar and peels it open and gives it to the so-called Big Boss. The boss tosses the whole muesli bar into his mouth like it's a cracker. The tops of his hands bulge with meat. His arms look small compared with his vast core.

'Quit starin. Hun'll whomp ya.'

'Hun?'

'4Hun.'

'4Hun?'

'Mr 4Hundred, dumbarse.'

For two hours, all the weeding is done by you. 50 Saturdays, you decide, that's what the Pink boss represents: 4Hun's 400 hours equate to 50 Saturdays. A year of weekends.

'SMOKE,' bellows a foghorn. It's Mr 4Hun. The foghorn is aimed at you. The pink gang are stretching and laying their legs and elbows on the grass. They're having a cigarette break because they're tired from smoking, apparently.

'SMOKE.'

'Fraid I don't smoke,' you say, and tug on a knotted root.

Mr 4Hun rolls over. A Pink helps pull him to his feet. The buttons on his pink-trimmed vest pop open. Now his vest is flapping on his sides. His belly is a Swiss ball crammed inside a stretched black singlet. 'New Pink owes us, y'all lisnin? You: don't forget.'

'I shall, er, not.'

Mr 4Hun whistles on his thick kebab fingers. 'PISSTOWEL!'

Everyone plays PissTowel for a while. Someone pisses on a towel and whips the other pinks with it. When you get whipped, you're It. You're obliged to urinate on the towel and chase others. You're 'It' for long enough that your hands become white and wrinkly. The Pinks giggle and scamper about. They rest their hands on their thighs, panting, then cough up mucous and spit at you. Mr 400 lies on his stomach, playing with daisies, nibbling grass stems.

A Pink brings a pot of water to a nice, steady boil. He pours cups of tea and provides a cup of water to clean sugar off the teaspoons. A chocolatey, sticky waft says the Yellows are sipping coffee.

You pour hot water on your hands and wipe them on the grass. You put your cuppa down your throat and stroll up the hill until you're standing amongst the Yellows. You tap the cellmate on the shoulder. His wings were clipped in court, just like yours. That 44 minutes together meant something. You both hunched your shoulders and tried not to piss your pants in front of the judge. You could be brothers. 'Hi, Tim.' His jaw falls open. 'Listen, I was wondering if after lunch you're interested in swapping vests or—'

A hand is on your shoulder. 'The van, get in the van, it's the only place they can't getcha!' the midget driver barks. You're trying to look backward and keep eye contact with your Yellow brother but you're being tugged by the elbow into the van and shut inside.

'Lose my fuckin job if you get stuck!' the driver is bleating.

'I wasn't stuck.'

'Stabbed, ya fool!'

SATURDAY TWO

Will his name change to Mr 392 now that he's done another eight hours? When precisely did he commence leadership of Pink Inc? What nature of a day job could the man possibly work? Is he on full-time community service? There's so much you'd ask your fellow Pinks if only they were a tad more approachable. The mysterious Mr 400 is a foreman, you imagine, a scary foreman who'll pull you off a forklift if you're driving across the concrete with your forks raised. You're picturing him getting his Wheels Track & Rollers endorsmen—

'Pockets,' Mr 400 is saying from the rear of the van, and the guys crowding each side of you roll their knees onto your hands and begin frisking your pockets. They smell like wet dogs.

'Better have them fuckin ciggies.' 'ALRIGHTALRIGHTOKAYOKAY!'

All you can do is point your chin and twist your hips to make the bulge of two cigarette packets appear.

They release the pressure on your hands and you lick the back of your sore wrist. You're not really here. You're in a bathtub of bubbles. Your son is singing with you. There's opera on the radio and a chicken in the oven. If you will it, you will fulfil it. Will it to fulfil it.

WILLITANDCHANGETHESSEGODFORSAKENSATU—

'Better,' says 4Hun, biting open the smokes. Even with his shades on, you hold eye contact with him for just a moment, in the rear-view mirror, before lowering your head. For one nanosecond, he needed you.

Bathtub. Bathtub with little Robert.

They expertly strip the cellophane from the cigarette pack and a guy called Bubblegum tucks it down your Pink vest and pats your chest.

'Smoko,' says the midget and pulls over onto a layby on a cliff overlooking a rocky river. Each male, Yellow and Pink, lights up before leaving the van. The air turns white. You gag.

'Get out and have one, Pink,' booms 4Hun. 'There. Go stand there.'

The Pinkies give you their names as they take your smokes, two each. A dollar a cigarette, up in smoke. There's a guy with burnt flesh that may as well be brown, Foreskin is his name. There's Strawb with his sunken cheekbones, Barbie with unpredictable blond curls. There's Lips,

with knuckles covered in scabs; Sticker, with swastikas jabbing his neck, making him look like he's constantly wired with agony. Floppy: huge nose and lips, soccer ball shoulders. Neck like a second torso growing out of his collar bone. Starfish: bald head, burnt by the sun. Then there's you, gutful of ulcers, fingertips nibbled till they're red.

And Mr 400. The centre of gravity.

The burner and billy are set up on the gravel beside the van, right there on the margin of the highway amongst the flattened coke cans. It's ten past eight in the morning. Fog blocks out the sun. The water steams until it screams, everyone watching. Pinks and Yellows sip their cups and wince and rip open little packets of sugar. After they've sipped and smoked three cigarettes, each Pink steps over the safety barrier, finds a nice clean slate of gravel, puts his hands between their legs and writes his name in urine.

A trickle of Yellow piss comes near, like a probing snake. Strawb kicks gravel on it.

Two Yellows come out of the bushes. They've snapped some branches back to make it easy to go in and out of the bushes. 4Hun scrunches Bubblegum's shirt and pulls him towards the hole in the bushes. 'Oi,' Hun barks at the midget driver. 'There's a sucky-sucky for you if you want.'

'Ta,' goes the midget. He folds up his newspaper, needs help getting over the barrier and into the bushes.

Three men later, it's your turn.

SATURDAY SIX

Saturdays begin in horror, end in relief. For five Saturdays, your stomach remains unstabbed. Saturday Six, the day's job is painting the pipes of a new drinking fountain at the primary school. Robert wanted to come. He tried to hide in the car boot but his shoelaces were sticking out. He tried to give you the cigarettes you'd dropped in the hall. Cigarettes, hmph—catching Robert with a cigarette, that's how the whole domestic with your wife began in the first place. Robert didn't understand you were getting picked up by a van of thugs. Work, he called it, as if what you do on Saturdays actually matters. 'Why can't I come to work with you?' he whinged.

You see a woman you know walking her Labrador along the horizon. She's a mortgage broker you frequently see at training workshops, stroking her phone and nibbling croissants. She's going to notice you and ask what you're doing with these beasts. Are you visiting as part of a prison advocacy service, perhaps? Are you evaluating a piece of land before you organise its auction?

Everyone splashes at least a few drops of paint except for Hun, who spends most of his day eating smuggled tidbits his staff bring him—jerky, a mandarin, a can of Red Bull hidden in the exhaust pipe of the van. Floppy thought it made sense to stash the forbidden can in the exhaust. It fizzes away into nothing when Hun opens it, and Hun orders the Pinks to drag Floppy over to Yellow Country, where he is kicked around as if he's a coiled rug the Yellows are trying to unroll with their feet. For 80 minutes, he doesn't move. You want to phone someone. You want to text your son, *SEND AN AMBULANCE*.

Hun scoffs morsels from the lunch bags as he enjoys the beating. Since these men do not have a soccer ball for entertainment, you suppose it makes sense they're kicking Floppy's head instead. Nostrils thick with brown tobaccoey snot, Hun breathes through his mouth and bits of food fly out like wood chips. You can hear the breaking skin of each mandarin segment. You can see the droplets of sweet juice spurting between Hun's teeth. Then he's onto the jerky, making it ooze beefy drool with each chew. He guzzles the last drops of boiled Red Bull and belches. It took a lot to smuggle these gifts for the king. Random inspections of the van have been happening before it leaves the Corrections depot, the Pinks say.

The Pinks are standing at attention, watching Floppy have his ribs kicked until they're cornflakes. You turn away and hand 4Hun your muesli bar. There's an egg sandwich left in your lunch bag. You gobble it, hoping 4Hun appreciates the favour you're doing everyone. The gang hates egg sandwiches. You suppose your role here can be the human garbage disposal unit, eating waste. That's useful. In the van, you were intimidated into sucking on a crumbly, wonky joint shaped like a used birthday candle. It's the only thing that's given you any appetite. Your body resists gravity. Your mood is flat.

'Did you chuck your apple in the pile?'

'Yes sir. Mr 400, sir? I was wondering if you've got many hours left to go... I have about 260 to go, you see, so, like I said, I was wondering—'

'Go wonder somewhere else.'

An ambulance comes and takes Floppy's body away. The Yellows boil fresh coffee water. The Pinks break for a game of Rockball. They take off a t-shirt, fill it with one big rock or a lot of small rocks, and launch it at someone's head. Knock a person out and you've won, and they're It. After Rockball, it's back to lying on the grass. You suck your grazed knuckles. Strawb talks of rewiring the circuits of his landlord's electronic garage door to crush the cunt, grinning as he talks. One person, Lips, talks about his enemies; everyone else chips in 'Fuckin cunt' and 'Shoulda wasted him,' spitting constantly. If you don't curse,

you might be viewed as somebody soft and therefore a candidate for a beating.

Lunch on the grass. You smell the Bermuda, good golf grass, and pretend you're in a spicy foamy bath and the insects nipping you are just the hot water tingling, it's summer evening, 2004, you're in a bath with your son, him and his little diddle and squeaky voice, that's all, roast chicken, opera, bliss, bathtub. Your son is playing with your nipples. His thighs are chubby. His eyes are huge and bright. His hair is thin. He eats mush. How did clouds get into the bathroom? Your head falls through the warm water of space.

'PINK! PINKY PINKAAAAYYYY! WAKEY WAKEY! Where's them smokes at?'

Burnt red eyes. A dizzy drowning sensation. 'Oh. Beg your pardon, I must've drifted off. Er... I thought two packs'd be plenty.'

'Cunt, you better get some dropped off before we go home,' a Pink is going. You can hardly see him while you rub your eyes, getting used to the sun.

'Else you ain't goin home,' Hun adds, and disappears a muesli bar.

You haul yourself off the grass and let the bubbles pop inside your head. You can't ask the Yellows, you can't ask the Pink gang. The only quiet place to make a phone call is the van.

Your boy answers his phone, thank Christ.

'It's me.' Your lip is quivering. 'ME. DAD.'

'Sup, dad. We won at half-court. I got a three-poin—'

'You have to help me.'

FRIDAY NIGHT

The sun is going down the sinkhole. You drive aggressively to get to Highbury Drive before Quicksilver Fasteners closes. Turns out the man in question moves hinges and bolts for a living. It took a lot of Facebooking before you found him. Although on Saturdays they'd die for him, he's not actually Facebook friends with any of the Pinks, not on LinkedIn, Old Friends, nothing. Floor Manager of Quicksilver Fasteners on Highbury Drive: that's Mr 400. You pull into the most remote parking spot. You don't dare switch your engine off, in case they catch you. You watch Mr Manukia nodding and smiling at a couple of Indians as they take some screws or hooks or something out of a courier box and discuss them.

Maika Manukia: not horridly obese and intimidating. Nah, in work mode, on civilian street, Maika is jolly and round and reliably strong-looking, as if his bulk is only used for good. Not sunburned, not stinking, not tossing back sandwiches as if they were pieces of chewing

gum. Some little girl, all dressed in crimson, with Dora the Explorer gumboots, runs up and grabs his thigh and he hoists her into the air. Granddaddy Maika has brought his little lady to work today and he's showing her off for the boys.

Everyone's heading off for the long weekend. You eat chips in the car and have a nap. You awake when the sky's dark blue. You drive to the shops, fill a trolley with supplies from the Nite Stocker. You begin filling a second trolley. Cans of Red Bull are on special. Jerky is pricier. Chippies come in mini-packs of 12. Muesli bars are pretty affordable when you buy low-enough quality. As you shunt your pile of food through the aisles, watching pregnant women bent over babies in trolleys, you think about 400's hours. Surely he's down to 200. 150, after that, 75, then what? He'll simply not be there one day?

You drive through silent, black streets towards the 100-zone, the goodies rattling in the boot. You chew a chocolate bar and your teeth stick together. Mailboxes stare at you. Every number with a hole in it is an eye—6, 9, 0, 8. Your body doesn't want to sleep even though your head keeps telling you you were working hard on sorting out those Land Information Memoranda just ...how many hours ago? The math is hard. Who needs math? Bollocks to math. You'll bisect a section next month, put readymade houses on it, arrange what plumbing you can, go to meetings, read your performance reviews, make 1000 phone calls.

At 2am, you bite open the earth with a shovel and bury smokes and jerky and cans of beer at the church, car lights off, bonnet hissing, working in moonlight.

At 2.58, you tuck chips and lollies and energy drinks in the soil of the drainage ditch on the edge of the high school rugby field. By dawn, you've stashed tubs of jelly and boxes of juice and Pepsi and cigarillos and magazines in every community service spot across the farm belt surrounding your city. Community halls, cemeteries, sports fields, playgrounds and a water filtration plant.

You ease back into your house, where the air smells like warm bedsheets that need to be changed, clip your muddy fingernails, sit on the toilet. Tomorrow is Saturday. Tomorrow is Saturday.

'Daddy?'

'You should be in bed.'

'Whatcha up to, daddy?'

'I'll tell you tomorrow.'

'It's already tomorrow. Sun's up.'

'I'll tell you after work.'

'Roman's dad doesn't work on Saturday.'

You turn the shower up as hot as it'll go, burn off your outer layer of skin, towel, then slide into bed beside your wife. She'll awake, expecting

to find the old you in bed beside her—but the old you’s been left out there.

SATURDAY 10

‘THINK PINK!’

‘PinkAYYYYYYY!’

You slap and knuckle and rub as many hands as you can reach. There is extra oxygen in the air today. It makes your feet float above the grass, makes you stare long, makes your words agreeable. You bite open a sugar packet and knock it back, *AHHHHHHH*. Sweetness in the desert. Cups of tea take half an hour’s preparation and 20 minutes to sip. A Pink serves cigarettes like hors d’oeuvres on the lid of the billy. You rip the plastic off your muesli bar and chuck it to 4Hun, a perfect throw, a good catch. He chomps it in one, raises his chin and eyebrows in thanks. The first bubbles appear in the billy of water and you rub your fingers together. Cupsa tea taste incredible on Saturdays. 4Hun’s stoked when you push a sneaky can of beer into his pocket. ‘Pink Up,’ you go. You know he’s wondering where you got it from. He moves his sausagey lips and chuckles. You tap a little dirt into the hole between your feet where you dug the beer up. You’ve buried a shopping bag’s worth of forbidden goodies at each work site. You can buy all the influence you want. You’re the richest man in this universe.

You couldn’t wait for breakfast to end. Your son sensed your excitement. You put your cigarette out in your cornflakes and as your wife called you Dumbass, Redneck, Lowlife and stormed off to the gym, your son asked you for a smoke. You slid the pack and the lighter across the table and went out onto the lawn to wait for your pickup. You had a couple spare packs of smokes, anyway. No dramas. Get the bash if you don’t share your smokes. Set an example for the boy.

There’s fresh Pink meat. Looks like there’s fresh Cheese, too, ’cross the river on THEIR bank with THEIR billy and THEIR pile of apples. You order New Pink to light your smoke. He’s a ginger with long ears and fingers and arms and scars on his shaved head. He wears a t-shirt telling everyone that he fought in the regional MMA round robin, 15 fights over one long weekend. He’d better know how to fight, then.

4Hun bellows ‘Apple Shower.’ Just an induction game, an icebreaker. See, everyone pushes a broken bit of stick into an apple and everyone biffs the apples at the new cunt. Just a shower; sometimes he gets juicy, sometimes the broken bits of stick cut him open. His eyes get all full of juice and there’s seeds on his brow afterwards. It’s just like any induction, except his nose won’t stop bleeding and you fling the dregs of

the tea on his hands and the cunt shudders like he's got Parkinson's disease.

'Still waitin on them smokes,' you go, and for the first time your spit goes right where you wanted it to, right into New Pink's eye.

Good day at work, after all that—bliss, actually. You locate two sticks stuck in the ground, a piece of chewing gum paper under a rock, a chocolate bar wrapper sparkling in a bush, little clues, little stashes, little bits of power and influence. You dig in the right place, pull up a Playboy, a PSP, a tin of chopped chicken. You do it when no one's looking, no Pinks, certainly no Yellows. You're just lucky, you just happen to find stuff, you tell the boys with a shrug. You trade smokes for drinks for smokes for chips for gum for comics for burner cellphones for smokes.

Your spine jolts. You flinch and gasp. 4Hun is patting your back.

TUESDAY 46

At work, there's like a whole hour of photocopying each day, that's for the shitty flyers you drop off in community centres and Rotary Club and shit. Flyers sell, like, one in 40 houses. Un-fuckin-believable. Who knows, there's a trend of retirement homes filling up all their rooms, forcing old rich folks into bungalows, that trend might send a few clients your way. Tuesday, there's cold-calling to do, 10am till 11 when retired people are home. Then warm calls, far fewer of those, they're a 20-minute job each, most days. Ten warm calls can be 200 minutes. That's four hours, with breaks factored in. You smoke before, during and after. When your fingers aren't rolling smokes, they're bending paper clips into spears, sickles, shanks. You walk out each day looking like you've got childbearing hips, your pockets packed with instant coffee sachets and those little UHT milks. You'll bury it all under the moon when you're out being yourself, far from your family.

Your Approvals Coordinator is this young Christian fuck. He's blond. Blond is Cheese, you decide. Cheese ain't a good colour to be. Mr Approvals Coordinator needs to watch where he walks.

You want to stab a lot of people during the day. This one lunch time, you find a broken, jagged square of plastic in the recycling bin. You take it out into the car park, find a quiet spot, scrape it on the concrete until it's a long, sharp sliver. You stash it under your Rancho cardigan. Let Mr Approval build up some more debt first, then you'll take what's owed.

'Everything okay?' ApprovalCheese says, and you're like, 'Who the fuck wants to know?'

'Just checking you're okay,' he says. 'Please don't talk to me like that in future, okay? I don't like it. Is that new? That tattoo, on your neck,

youchy, it looks painful. I never noticed that before. Everything copasetic? Yeah?’

He snatches an apple out of your hand at the lunch table. Says he doesn’t like you sticking pins and skewers in the fruit.

He doesn’t talk to you when there’s others around. He sends you an email asking you to make an appointment for a ‘catch up,’ that’s how the email puts it. *Catch-up*, you snort, you got to use that on Saturday: ‘Oi, Yellow, let’s go have us a *catch-up*.’ Catch up with a rock in a sock, more like.

The crew at Rancho Realty is yawning by 3 o’clock Fridays, all except you. You’re amped. Tomorrow is Saturday, and when Saturday comes, you’ve got more energy than you know what to do with.

See, last Sat, the scraper normally used by the midget driver to get the mud off his windscreen, well, one of the Yellows got that and snuck up on one of your boys as he was taking a shit and made a mouth in the Pink’s neck, a big *slice, like gills on a fish, how you can see the redness of the fish inside, and the cunt’s mouth’s opening each time he gasps, and 4Hun rolls onto his feet, doesn’t do anything for the wounded Pink, who’s got bubbles of blood coming out of his nostrils, just tells you all to grab an apple, see, and there’s only about ten apples, but when you stick a few nails in an apple, goddamn they get deadly, so it’s a good thing you buried a packet of six inch nails somewhere round here and it’s a good thing you all turned out to be good enough throwers to corner the Cheese responsible and land a few nails in his ear and watch the bloody apple juice turn his neck pink.*

You’re telling this story as you and Approvals and about five accountants are waiting for the elevator. Approvals is giving you this look like you’re not even speakin English.

SATURDAY EVENING

You rummage in the toolbox and come up with a hammer. You double-check the garage door’s locked. When you smash your front teeth, your whole face splits apart, it feels like. You’re sure you’ve cracked your skull open and a hairline fracture has run from your jaw to above your eyes. Your face separates into jigsaw pieces and falls everywhere.

You were too fresh-lookin, too pretty. It was holdin you back. Warriors can’t be pretty.

Bop-bop. Bop-bop. That’s your boy at the bathroom door, asking you if he can help. Yeah, you can help, boy.

‘Don’t use a light one—find a dark one. Blood’ll ruin a white towel. NO! Not a yellow. Biff it in the bin. I’m serious. Get me a red towel.’

You’re filling in gaps in his knowledge. You offer your boy a toke of weed. He doesn’t seem to know which end of the joint to suck on. He

coughs till he's scratching the floor. You rip open a can of beer for the boy and it takes his cough away. You spend a good 90 minutes in the bathroom talkin bitches and bullies, pay and payback.

Your son's been having a girl make fun of him, the same girl every third period, she always has cooking class and tries to trip him when he's headed to woodwork. Boys've witnessed it. He's losing his mana.

You tell your son to keep his voice down. You find brake fluid, pour it on the garage floor. 'See how fuckin slippery that shit is? Slip the bitch up. Pour it in the corridor when she's comin outta class.' You put the kettle on, demonstrate what boiling water does, killing bugs instantly, turning flowers limp with death. Your boy's got deodorant in his bag, aerosol spray. That'll blind the bitch. A lighter added to the aerosol? That's a flamethrower, son. You tuck five twenty dollar notes into his hand and curl his fingers around the money. Slip this to your teacher. No detention, no worries.

Your wife's banging on the door, saying something about the InSinkErator. You haul it open and breathe fire into her face.

'DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?'

SATURDAY 77

You show the new Pinks how to boil hand sanitiser in a lidded pot and then separate the alcohol. Everyone gets to sip from the billy of hot, clear hooch. First sip goes to you. That's the way it is, now.

One of the new guys is a bright, useful little fuck, full of good ideas. When he turns up with only half a pack of cigarettes, you almost don't let him live, but he goes and discovers a first aid kit zipped inside the rear seat of the van. It was there all along. Fancy that. There's all sorts of useful shit in that first aid kit. Razor blades, for one. He has this technique—you slot razor blades in an apple, put the apple in a slingshot and launch it at the Cheese. Sliced cheese, bro!

Some of the good ole Pinks are still around. Strawb's got more hours, Foreskin too. 4Hun? Pfft, get out. See, you found out where he works, backed him up against the wall with your bumper as he was trying to close up, to pull the last roller door down. Had that little granddaughter on his shoulders, he did. He started crying when you squirted petrol on his pants and started lighting a rollie. Helluva nice guy, Maika Manukia is, it turns out. Prays to Lord Jesus Christ when there's flames getting near. Through the snot and sneezing, he said he'd get a transfer to another work gang. You said, 'Cheers for that. Guess I'll take your position, if it's empty.'

You'll be doin a few extra Saturdays, but not 'cause the Former 4Hun snitched on you.

Boy oh boy did you get in shit when the feds found out what you did to your boy's mum. Your boy's too young to do actual community service, even though he helped with the whole, you-know, *thing*. The *unspeakable* thing. When your boy gets out of protective care in a few years, he'll be good to have around on Saturdays. Makes a mean cuppa tea.