

Tales of the Great Unwashed

Make it a double then. It's for the pain. The ankle's swole up awful bad so it is, that's three days now, I'm telling you, it's getting worse before it's better, all that liquid in there. It's a muscular thing, you know. Just as well I knew what was happening right enough, how to fall right and all that, cos it could've been a lot worse. No, that's not a rash, it's, well, it's a bit hard to explain how it, well, thing is, see, right you are, cheers. Aye, well, it was this way right.

Before I tell you, you know the high road over to Southill? Know that bit where you come off the carriageway and it goes into the country road for like two, maybe three mile along by the golf course? Know the bit I mean? No streetlights, no nothing. You could be right in the middle of the country there. Might as well be. There's that bit right in the middle of that stretch where the road's like a roller-coaster so it is, all those bumps, blinds hills and suchlike. That's where it was.

Well, way it was right, I was in the town for the reunion. Well, we call it a reunion, but it's not the likes of your formal set-up and that, it's just me and a few of the old squad meet for a pint, and it's not even a regular thing, might be once a year, might be twice in one year then nothing for three, you know the score. And it's usually me that does the phoning and the chasing up and that. Anyway, it was in the Halterneck, just down by the river there, aye, well, you know what it's like Jack, I mean, I would, you know, if I could, I would take the boys in here you know, cos there's a right few quid get spent when the boys are out right enough, but it's just with the way they get when they've had a few you know, cos sometimes they get the old squad songs going and that you know, six-para, we're a bit boisterous when we get together, even now you know, and it's not every crowd you can be doing that in without someone taking offence you know, I mean it's all plenty water under the proverbial now and all that, but it's just a wee trip you know, nostalgia and that, doesn't mean to say we haven't grown up or that.

Still, it was in there for a few, and that was alright, but I had to leave just a bit sharp to make sure of that last bus cos you know what it's like if you miss it, I mean, that's fifteen quid easy in a cab if you're after midnight you know, so I got myself out and grabbed a sausage supper and off down to the bus stop, and right busy it was too, loads of folk with the same idea as me, make sure they get the last one, and wasn't the bastard late as ever, twenty minutes by this time he was, I was shivering like that so I was, and the wind was getting up too, so even when you're below the bit, you know, that canopy over the Woolies there, the rain's coming right in so it was, and I was getting wet as well. Pure drookit, so I was.

So the bus eventually turns up, but there's only about ten or something get on it, and that was good cos I always like getting a seat at the back if I can you know, I think it's maybe a left-over from when I was in the forces you know, just that idea that you always want to cover your back like and with being on the bus you can sit at the back there, and it's a bit more secure. Even when I'm out on the street or in the shops or that I'm always aware of what's happening behind me, who's there you know, cos it never really leaves you, not once you've been out there you know. So I got that seat at the back on the left hand side, cos that way you can see who's coming on as well, see who's on the street. And they're nice as well those new buses,

you know, the ones with the one deck but they've got the stair that goes down so folk can get on easy, maybe if they're in the wheelchairs or that, and they're right broad inside so they are, plenty of room to get up and down and that, very nice, and the cloth seats too, none of that plastic, remember it was always that plastic stuff that made your arse sweat?

So anyway, we gets to the end of Alby Road, and it always stops there by the depot, so the Hector comes on, but he doesn't even bother checking the tickets and that, he just has a word with the driver, maybe about him running so late or whatever, I don't know, but there's about fifteen get on there, and it's mostly women you know, cos a lot of them must've been at the bingo down the road, and by the time they get a couple after, they're waiting on the last one as well, so they all pile on, but I've still got the back seat to myself you know, and that's fine, cos sometimes these women come up and start gabbing you know, and it's like when you get a few of them together and they've a wee bead in them, you know they get a wee bit carried away, and with me being a single man and all that, they can sometimes start giving you the eye and all that, you know, I suppose they've got out for the night and they see a guy on his own, so it's usually just patter and that but I don't really like all that type of thing you know, much rather just sit on my tod you know, with my own wee thoughts you know. But that's the bus about half full anyway, so eventually the Hector gets off and we're away again, and by this time the rain's really on for the night you know, really pelting down, and it's that way you can feel the bus shifting a wee bit with the wind cos it's strong now, but off we go, down by the park, and then you're at the toll there, and it's the last stop before the Southill Road.

I don't know what it was made me sort of sit up a wee bit when we stopped at the Toll, but I knew right away there was something up. It's just that way. I've never been able to explain it, it's maybe likes of the veterans and them who go on about getting a sixth sense from being in the field and that, I don't know, but there was just something not right, and even before the bus stopped I was up like that, you know, watching, and there's no-one in the bus shelter, but just up from it there's these three guys standing up on a wee grass bank sort of thing behind the shelter, and they're shouting the odds to this someone that's on the pavement but you can't see who it is with the angle of the bus, and with the rain being that heavy you can hardly make out what's going on, but this one on the pavement must be shouting back, and you can see the guys are giving it the viccy and all that, so the bus does stop right enough, and on gets this woman.

Now, I'm not one to be talking folk down and that without knowing anything about them, I mean, you know, going by the old first impressions and all that, cos it's just not right, but as soon as she got on you could tell right away she was bother you know, she just had that kind of cut about her. She was a right big lass too, not that tall mind, but broad and heavy, and one of those big big anoraks on her like the weans wear, like it's a quilt you've picked up and wrapped right round you, and the legs coming out the bottom with the sannies on you know, the big sannies with the thick soles on them. And this big jacket's like pure bright red, like not fluorescent or that, but dead

dead bright red, like blood, and all this white writing all over it, but funny words, like maybe a german football team or something. I don't know where she got it. She takes the hood down when she gets on right enough, and the hair's short and blonde, all that spiky way cos she must've got wet before she put the hood thing up, but a right red face on her too, maybe she must have been running or that, but very puffed and flustered she looked anyway. I don't know what sort of age she was, she had one of those faces you can't really say age-wise, and with me not having the old specs on I really couldn't say if she was fifty or thirty or whatever, but on she comes anyway and then she's trying to get her face in the wee window bit to talk to the driver, and you can hear him shouting eighty-five! eighty-five! and she's giving it all this raking about cos she must have her change in her bag or her pocket or whatever it is that's under the big jacket, so she's starting hauling up the big jacket to try and get inside it, I don't know why she didn't just unzip the thing and get into it like that, but she starts hauling it up anyway, and you can see her legs and all that, and by this time the boys outside have come down to the bus and they're still shouting the odds, and honest to God, I couldn't even tell you the things these lads are coming out with, I never heard the likes of that, even when I was in the paras, you know, I mean, I know us lads get a bit of a reputation about the language and the behaviour and all that, but as far as I ever saw there was nothing like that when there was ladies in the company you know, or if there was, then it wasn't what you would call normal female company if you get what I'm saying, even then, it's not called for, it's not right. But all credit to the driver, I mean, it's a dodgy situation for him right, cos he can either pap this woman off and leave her to these lads, and by the sounds of what they've already been saying you wouldn't leave man nor beast to them you know, so he shouts at her to make her mind up, and she starts raking again, so the driver gets the doors shut, and that's like a signal for these lads to start belting into the side of the bus, and they're like jumping up and banging on the windows and that as the driver pulls away, and he's only going slow at first right, cos this woman's still raking about and she's not got a grip on anything, so if he just shoots straight off she'll be on her arse, so he takes it easy, but they're up battering at the door and you can see these other punters down the front are getting a bit scared and kind of bowing down and away from the windows in case they start trying to pan one of them in, cos that's happening all the time you know, but when we get to the roundabout the lads have run out of pavement, so that's us, we're away.

So you know where I am right, we're just after the toll, and as soon as you're by past the roundabout you're onto that dark road, the long one over to Southill, and that's when it all started. I don't know what sparked it all off, it was maybe cos she didn't pay the man, I don't know, but she starts making her way down to get a seat, and you can hear the driver giving it ho ! missus ! and all that, but she's not caring, you know, she's just that way she's probably not even hearing the guy you know, and I was like that, oh ho I says, could be in for a spot of bother here you know, cos this wee old yin down the front, just a wee fella, maybe in his seventies or that, he sort of turns and says something to her, and she turns towards him, and I

Ian Brotherhood

couldn't hear his voice but you could see him sort of pointing up towards the driver, he must've been trying to say to her that she was still to pay and that, but whatever it was, it sets her off right, and she starts shouting about how they're all bastards and all that and she'll sort them, she'll no stand for it and all that, and you can see the other biddies are starting to talk to each other and shake their heads and all that, but this one isn't bothering you know, and she moves further up, and it's like you can see everyone pure shrinking away, you know, just praying she doesn't dump herself down beside them, and you can hear the driver by this time kind of shouting, he must be on his radio thing, and that's all we need you know, if the cops are getting called and all that, but I'm not caring anyway just so long as she doesn't sit by me, but she keeps coming right enough, heading for the back, and by this time we're starting over the hilly part of the road, and the driver's getting faster cos he must be thinking he just wants her off altogether, and it's another two mile to the next stop, so he's speeding up, and she's getting closer, by this time she's about halfway down the aisle. You're all a shower! that's what she's shouting, youse are nothing but a shower of this and that and all the names of the day, but it's not like she's picking on anyone, it's just like she's shouting at the world you know, then she starts hiking up the big thick jacket again, and right away, I was like, oh ho, here we go, and the folk right beside her is kind of pressing against each other, but there's nowhere for them to go cos she's stopping them getting out their seats, and then she grabs a grip of the seats either side of her and squats, and this is right when we're going over one of those hills there, and your guts give a wee jump when you go over them anyway, but she's got a grip there on either side, and the big jacket's up round her hips like a big red safety belt sort of thing, and, oh jeez, I can't even say it you know, but she does one there right in the middle of the aisle, dead fast as well it was, and right away, there's this wee wifie who's trapped right by the lassie, and she's up screaming, standing up, and she starts climbing over the seat in front of her trying to get away, and a fella on the other side further down, he looks back and sees this wee jobby lying in the aisle so he's up like a shot and makes for the front of the bus, and that starts everyone else, and they're all shouting and trying to push by each other to get to the front, and even the ones that was trapped with her standing there, they're all over and away, and they're all shouting at the driver, she's done it! she's done a mess on the floor driver ! and all that, and I swear the bus started moving about, like it was ready to go off the road, but it was maybe just with him speeding up more and the bodies all rushing to the front like that, I don't know, but this one's back upright again and she's coming forward again. So I was like that, looking about, and I says, oh here, this isn't right this. How will I get by her, cos she's looking right at me you know, and she's sort of smiling. It's all a bit hazy then, well, not so much hazy, I mean, I can remember it all, but it all happened so fast you know, it's like it's slow in my head cos I keep replaying it, I just can't get it out my head you know, but she comes nearer, and I swear she's looking right at me like she knows me or something, but I never clapped eyes on her in my life right, and she's singing something, can't even guess what it was, but she's trying to sing snatches of it, shutting her eyes for a wee second,

then opening them again and staring right at me, and you can hear the driver down the front and he's shouting into the radio about a code whatever it was, he's like I've got a code twenty-four! or whatever it was, whatever the code is for there's someone done a jobby on my bus, and the wifies are like crying and all that with the panic setting in, and the old fella's shouting at the driver to open a window, and this other one's shouting that he wants off right now and all that, and now she's only about ten feet away, and she's still got her eyes locked on me, and I see the steel handle beside me, and the emergency instructions, not that I need the instructions mind, but I remember it dead clear, and that's like my only way out unless I tackle her straight on, but I don't fancy it at all, she just looks too mad, like she might do anything, and then she's by the wee step that goes up to the back seats, only feet away from me, so I slam down the handle and the wee emergency door flies open like that, and the bus is fair tanking along by now so it is, and I swear it was just like being back on a drop, the air blasting past the gap, the darkness outside, the fear and the smell, it was just the same. Then she grabs the handles again and starts making to do another squat, and the old yin down the front is shouting, and you can hear the fear in his voice, he shouts, watch it son, she's gonny do another one ! and he's maybe right enough, so I grab my bag close, shuffle sideways, then I chuck myself out and try to make myself into a wee ball.

Well, I don't know what speed he must've been going cos it felt like ages before I slowed down, tumbling and bouncing for, I don't know, fifty, a hundred yards maybe, but a good landing it was, quite soft what with all the bushes and that, and

when I got up the bus was away over by the last hill before the interchange, this wee set of lights way in the darkness, and you could still make out a wee red blob where she was standing at the back of the bus, and the driver had all the hazards on so he did.

It took me about an hour to walk home, what with the ankle and that, but that wasn't too sore at the time cos of the adrenalin you know, but it was a right long walk anyway with the rain and the wind. Right state I was when I got in.

Aye, and the rash? It's not a rash as such, it was from these wee like thorn things I had stuck all over me, in my hair and my ears and all that, don't know what they were, but the nurse says I must've been allergic to whatever it was, they came off the bushes you know. They pulled out as many as they could you know, but they says I've still got loads embedded in my scalp, so I've to keep putting that cream on. Aye, it was some night right enough, I'll no forget it in a hurry.

Aye, another double there. Cheers.