

Too right I'm bricking it. You would be too, if you were in my shoes. He's not a man to be messed with. Too late for that mind you. Too late for regrets or second thoughts; I acted on the first thought and, as far as he's concerned, that forfeits my right to a follow-up. There will be no redemption through apology either. All I can look forward to is an enormous helping of pain - if he ever catches up with me.

So, it's simple, right: don't get caught.

Aye.

Simple.

No, of course it's not simple but, then again, tell me something in life that is?

Oh, aye, me. I'm simple. Must be. Stands to reason; I'm short of brain cells. That's the cause of my current predicament. Oh, and her.

Aye, she's to blame as well. If she hadn't been so gorgeous, so persuasive, so unhinged, I might not be here.

Might not. Always hard to say with such things. I'm a bona fide screw-up in my own right. I've got form. Blaming her suits me. Deflects from the defects. Detracts from the artefacts.

I realise you have no idea who he is or who she is but, patience my friend, there are more pressing matters for me to attend to.

The smoke is still twisting upwards. Languid. Serpentine. The smell reminds me of the caps I fired from a toy gun as a kid. A roll of red paper, punctuated with evenly spaced dots of gunpowder; the same acrid, sweet smell as now, when each tiny charge exploded with a snap under the hammer of the gun; each blackened remnant creeping out of the top of the barrel. When you had no gun, you'd hit them with a stone just for the joy of hearing them crack. Some guys would try and set off a big bunch all at once, hoping to create a small fire in the process. Only, this isn't kids' stuff. This is all too real. There's no disputing whether or not I've shot this guy. There's not going to be any stomping off in the huff because he refused to die as directed and, even if he did lay down and expire, no Lazarus impersonation when his mammy calls him home for his tea.

No. This guy's tea's oot as they say in Glasgow. He's brown bread if your preference is for Cockney rhyming slang. Or, he's fucked, if you're being completely blunt in any of our wonderfully diverse English speaking enclaves.

I just shot Ralph Bonner in the face and it's not a pretty sight. Actually, he wasn't a pretty sight before – a kind of bulldog/human cross. It's fair to say I've not improved his looks any, though. I've never seen a dead person so close up before. I've never actually seen a dead person before, in real life, not on the television or in the cinema. It's bizarre. Hard to take seriously. I'm looking into this guy's head. Not in the metaphorical sense of how a shrink might look into it but literally, right inside it. The bullet has wreaked havoc. Blood is spreading out behind him, creating a glistening slick halo. I think I should be moving, getting the hell out of there but I can't. I'm staring, entranced, frozen to the spot. I can't really take in the enormity of what's just happened. This is a big moment, a Rubicon crossed, another of normality's bridges going up in flames.

I snap out of my trance. There's noise, a commotion somewhere. Far enough off to give me some time, I hope.

I'm feeling scared again. The adrenalin that fuelled the despatching of Ralph is receding. This plan, if that's what you can really call it, doesn't seem such a good idea any more. I can feel the tingling heat of The Stickman's ire. I'm bricking it. But, as I said, you would be too. I guarantee it.

I have to go but I can't leave this bloody mess behind. I have enough to worry about without adding the police into the mix.

I turn Ralph over. No exit wound. The diffusing blood all seems to be coming from the gaping hole in the front of his head. The bullet is lodged inside somewhere. Thick skull – I'm saying nothing.

I'm mindful of evidence trails, ballistics matching bullets and guns to each other. I shove the gun into my waistband and I delve. It's not pleasant. He's still warm; crunches, squelches. Retching,

trying not to look, I finally locate the hard lump of shrapnel I planted there a few moments ago and pull it out. I wrap the bullet in a bit of paper tissue, put it in my pocket. I'll find a place to dispose of it later.

I have a sudden bout of guilt in regard to Ralph's mother; I'm making her job of identifying the body literal because, thanks to me, the face only she could love has been replaced with a lump of gelatinous bloody gloop. But it's not my fault Mrs B, he was trying to kill me. I was just defending myself, he gave me no choice.

I look around. There's a motorbike parked between a couple of cars. I drag Ralph over toward it by the ankles. He weighs a frigging ton, thick round the middle as well as between the ears. A bloody snail trail smears across the ground behind him.

I tip the bike on its side and use the rather impressive knife he pulled on me to dislodge the fuel cap. Petrol spills out across Ralph's upper body and legs. I stand the bike back up again, feeling bad about damaging it as it's a great looking machine. I would so love to just ride off into the sunset on it. Two issues there: no keys and no clue how to ride a bike, even if someone handed them to me right then.

The knife goes back into the holster inside his jacket. The gloves come off, pulled inside out, stuffed into one of Ralph's pockets. I take out my lighter. Click, whoosh, he's up, up and away.

The smell is awful; cheap clothing melting, encouraging the flames. I'm looking about again. Sooner or later, someone will come back for the bike or one of the cars. I can't wait around. I need to go. I should have been better prepared to deal with eventualities; haven't done a very good job of keeping the scene of Ralph's facial obliteration clean. I've no real faith in this fire as a foolproof deterrent to detection but it seemed worth a try.

Thing is, a fire wasn't exactly the best way to remain undetected - it's a bit of an attention grabber. It would seem that I don't react well under pressure. Improvisation's not my strong suit.

I've been stepping back. Instinct and subconscious self-preservation must have been pulling on an invisible rope to draw me away, pull me clear.

I'm about ten metres from the burning body of a man I just shot in the face.

Now, I run.