

Get To Da Choppa!

He's really done well for himself has Arnold. This place is massive. An attic apartment, I think it's called. Open-plan, varnished hard-wood floor, vaulted ceiling held up with immense steel rafters painted International Orange, its vast. Empty you could easily have a game of five-a-side in here. Couple of seating areas furnished with expensive furniture, enormous flat screen telly, pool table, a bar in the middle with stools. Three walls of exposed red brick and a wall of tall glass windows, white curtains obscuring the view from outside.

One wall is fitted with shelves which contain what could be ten thousand records. On a raised stage in front of the vinyl, sits a DJ setup of four decks on a platform made of a bank of black speakers. How the fuck do you find a record in that vast array. I wonder what system he uses. Must be alphabetical. I must remember to ask him. I remember being slagged by a couple of mates for having my mere thirteen hundred records in alphabetical order by artist. They thought it was weird. One of them was a vinyl junky with more records than me, so I asked him how he had his organised. He had them in alphabetical order by letter so, if he wanted to listen to *The Royal Scam* by Steely Dan, he had to look through all the esses till he found it, whereas I only had to look through my group of Steely Dan records. I argued I could find a particular record quicker my way. They both thought I was a bit anal. Tossers. Anal indeed, looking through all the esses – couldn't be arsed with that. There's a joke in there somewhere.

This place is awesome. Echoes a bit though. Needs more soft furnishings. Everything is so high-end and contemporary. Oh, get me! Mister Loyd Grossman! 'Isn't this space gorgeous? Now, who would live in a house like this?' I laugh. What else? Some arty-farty paintings, one looks like a Pollock rip-off – signed by the artist. Can't make out who. How does he afford this place? How did he afford all this shit? Do DJs make that kind of money? I'm in the wrong game if they do. I'll ask him.

There's a big thick framed display too. In it there's a photograph of Arnold grinning and Arnold Schwarzenegger with his arm round him grinning too. Mounted within the display with the photograph is a VIP guest lanyard and pass, and a ticket for the event. And an autograph in gold Sharpie: 'From one Arnie to another, Get To Da Choppa!!!! Best always, Arnold Schwarzenegger.'

That's about all you need to know for now. Oh, apart from the length of rope tied to the foot rail of the bar and running up over a rafter, and Arnold noose round his neck, gagged, hands and feet bound, standing precariously on a bar stool in the middle of the room. Need a pee.

In the bathroom, I wash and dry my hands and contemplate myself in the mirror. What has become of me? Thing is, I can't see anything different. It's like nothing has changed since this morning when I shaved but isn't it strange that you can shave your face and never really look at it, sure you take care at the sideburns and try to get them even, but you don't really – see. I must have been about forty-five when I noticed that I have a big ear and a small ear, and they don't seem to be at the same level on my head either or is that just because of the difference in their size? Anyway, back to the task in hand.

In the studio, Arnold's breathing is short and fast. He's beginning to sway a little. He's whimpering. I'll need to take the gag out.

'I was just contemplating ears, Arnold. I have a big ear and a small ear, and I'd never noticed till recently. Funny, eh? Ears are funny, aren't they? And you never

really notice them, do you? Never give them a second glance, unless there's something really wrong, sticky-out or pointy or something. Like Doctor Spock. No, that's not right, is it? It's Mister Spock.' More whimpering and moaning. Get a stool and get that gag out before he faints. I take one of the other stools, jump up on it and grab the gag from his mouth.

'That better?' I ask jumping down.

Arnold gasps and draws great gulps of air into his lungs. 'What – the – fuck – are – you – doing?' he gasps in between breaths.

'Careful now, don't fall,' I say, 'try to stay still.'

'You've got the wrong guy.'

'Really, how do you know that? I haven't told you anything yet.'

'I've done nothing wrong.'

'That's a sweeping statement.' I place the stool back where it came from and slip behind the bar. I peruse his selection of drinks. He's got everything here, brandy, vodka, jeez Campari, who was in that advert? Where he spills his drink on that posh bird? The guy in *Rising Damp*, always trying to get in Miss Jones' pants. Leonard Rossiter, that's it. Fuck, look at the selection of whiskies, all malts by the looks. Lovely glasses too. I pick one up – nice weight to it, crystal I expect. 'Some selection of malts, Arnie my man. What do you recommend?'

'Have any fucking one you want.'

'Just asking. No need to get shirty. I asked for a recommendation. So, let's try that again, shall we? What do you recommend?'

'Lagavulin.'

'Nah, too peaty, tastes like a lump of turf that's been soaked in petrol.' I select a malt at random and pour four fingers of it into the glass. 'Hey, before I forget, how do you organise your vinyl?'

'What?' he says, his voice hoarse.

'Your vinyl, how do you organise it? So you can find a particular record quickly?'

'You're mad,' he says and starts to shout for help at the top of his lungs. Up here no one will hear him. The industrial units below are shut for the weekend, and the attics next door are empty. We are quite alone but the cries echoing round the room are fucking pissing me off so, I walk up to him and place a foot on the top edge of the stool.

'No. Don't. Please don't. I'm begging you.'

'Stop. Shouting.' He nods and I take my foot away. 'So, how do you do it?' I ask.

'Do what?' he says his voice hoarser now from the shouting.

'Organise your fucking vinyl.' Fuck he's pissing me off.

'Alphabetically.'

'Just alphabetically? Or alphabetically by artist.' I take a sip of the whisky. Fucking peaty. Must be from Islay. Never mind. I feel it burn on the way down, its warmth spreading, its peaty, liquorice and toffee bouquet on my tongue and its vapour in my nose. It's quite good actually.

'Yes. Alphabetically by artist. That's it.'

'Of course, me too. Only a madman would do it any other way.'

'Please let me go. I haven't done anything.'

Okay cut to the chase. Can't be arsed with this. 'So, you didn't know Daryl?'

'Who's Daryl?'

‘Come now, you don’t expect me to believe you didn’t know her. Let alone deny what you did to her.’

‘I don’t know any Daryls.’

‘You’re a DJ for God’s sake. You’ve probably had hundreds of women. Ah, that’s it, you don’t ask their names. You just didn’t know her name.’

‘Please, let me go. I haven’t done anything.’

‘Okay.’

‘I’m telling you I haven’t, now let me go you fucking mad bastard!’ he shouts almost losing his balance. He’s sweating. It’s beading on his forehead, running into his eyes and making them water. Must be uncomfortable.

‘Ooh, someone’s tired. Mad bastard. That’s a bit rich, only a mad bastard could do what you did to her. And dangerous too, considering your present predicament, don’t you think?’

‘How much do you want?’

‘How much do I want?’

‘Yeah, how much?’

‘A million. No. Two. No. Fuck it, I want everything.’

‘Everything?’

‘Ev-ry-thing,’ I say holding my arms out and spinning on the spot like a ballet dancer, ‘the lot.’

‘You can’t...have everything.’

‘Now. Are you quite sure about that, Arnold?’ I say, taking another draught of his, I must say, excellent malt.

‘I can’t...’

‘Thought not. Why would you want to buy me off? If you haven’t done anything? Looks kind of incriminating. Don’t you think?’

‘But I haven’t done anything, I don’t know any Daryls, you have to believe me.’

‘I have to believe you? Really? Oh, come on. Arnold. I don’t have to do anything. Okay then, you want to play cat-and-mouse?’ I drain the glass and pour another. ‘I guess I can do that.’ I laugh. ‘Actually, it’s more like a game of hangman, don’t you think, Arnold. Okay, where were you on 2nd February?’

‘I don’t know, that’s months ago. I can’t remember. Let me go and I’ll look up my diary.’

‘Yes, good idea. Here, let me untie you and help you down,’ I say and laugh.

‘It’s in the desk drawer. Over there,’ he nods his head in the direction of a massive oak desk, ‘top right hand.’

I walk over. ‘Here?’

‘Yes, black Moleskine.’

‘Moleskine? Expensive. Just like everything else in here.’ I open the drawer.

‘Nope. Not here. Nice try.’

‘It must be. Look again.’

‘Look again? Yes, Sir! You ordering me about? Who do you... Okay, I’ll look again. Let’s remember ... one thing... and it may not be apparent to you... I’m not the bad guy here. Oh no.’ I rummage about. ‘Nope. Not here.’

‘Maybe I put it in another drawer, please look, please.’

‘Nah, can’t be arsed. Everything here’s so ex-pen-sive. You must earn a fortune. DJ. You know, lots of people hate DJs, think they’re gobshites. Of course, I couldn’t possibly comment.’

‘That’s part of it... being a gobshite. No dead air. Dead air kills DJs.’

I laugh. 'Well, that's one way to put it. Course, I'm a photographer, we are victim to the debate: is photography an art? Some people seem to think it's not; I of course think it is. Why wouldn't I?'

'Sure it is. Possibly the only valid new art medium of the twentieth century.'

Oh, he's good. 'Hey, Arnold, that's good. You just make that up? On the spot?'

'I think I heard someone say that or read it.'

'Fucking tossers. Photography's not an art.' Makes me fucking mad. I down half the glass in a oner.

'Tossers?'

'Yeah, tossers that think it's not an art form, for fuck's sake Arnie, keep up.'

'Like who?'

'Keith Richards, Mick Jagger, Melvyn Bragg, Jeremy Clarkson...' Say it.

'Schwarzenegger.'

'Schwarzenegger?'

'Yeah,' I say, then give him my best impersonation: 'get to da choppa!'

'That's it!' he shouts. 'Second of February. I was at an evening with Arnold Schwarzenegger.'

'Really?'

'At the Grosvenor. VIP package. I'm in the clear. You can let me go.'

'Prove it?'

'Over there. The picture. On the wall.'

'There?' I point at the glass display frame.

'Yes. Yes.'

'What is it?'

'A display from the evening. Photograph. Ticket. The date on the ticket is second of February.'

Drop the bomb. 'I. Know.' Mushroom cloud. I look into Arnold's eyes and he into mine, I wait a split second to enjoy his epiphany, then I sweep the stool from under him with a kick.

In the bathroom I contemplate myself in the mirror, looking for the slightest difference in my face. How can something monstrous like that happen and there's no clue to it in my countenance? I look exactly the same as before. Perhaps it takes longer to show up? There's no sign of the Hyde within. How extraordinary. Who was that posh bird in the Campari advert? Long dark hair, skinny, broad cockney accent. Lorraine Chase.

Back in the room Arnold's dead. His head at a funny angle, his head dark purply-blue like a big bruise. I think he might have shat himself. I can see he's pissed himself. Did he cum? There's that mandrake root thing. That a hanged man ejaculates as he dies and where his seed lands a mandrake plant will grow. He looks and smells funny. Two cannibals eating a clown, one turns to the other and asks: 'Does this taste funny?'

Oh, well. Poor Arnold. Just like poor Philip. Poor fucking Arthur too. And Scott. And the two Richards, is it two or three Johns? And the rest. Anyway, poor Arnold, fuck him, he must've done something. Like the rest of them. No. It was Joan Collins. It was Joan Collins that got the drink spilled on her in the advert. Lorraine Chase was some bloke asking her: 'Were you wafted here from paradise?' and she says: 'Nah, Luton Airport!' Glad I got that sorted out.

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