

## DON'T D.I.Y.

Bloody phone! I'm just in the door!

"Mr McCreadie?"

"Yeah; who're you?"

"An urgent call from Harry Dempster, the Herald editor. You're through."

"You're a hard man to locate, McCreadie."

"Why the urgency, Dempster? I'm just back from holiday. I'm tired; going..."

"You know why I'm phoning?"

"No idea."

"Don't you watch tv when you're away? Read newspapers? Internet? Phone home?"

"Nope! Make a point of it."

"Listen, Steve. You're in today's Herald again - Guthrie's column. Give me your email and I'll send you copy of his first article from a week ago, and the reaction it's evoked nationwide; plus today's article. Can you get to my office, pronto? Take a taxi."

"A taxi from Gourock? Who's paying?"

"We are. Look, I want you under contract. If other papers offer you more we'll negotiate higher. This is going viral. You're on £5,000 minimum."

"Five grand? That's... Stunning. But for what?"

“Plus expenses. Trust me, Steve. Unless they try to stick a ‘D’ notice on us.”

“That likely?”

“Possibly. This is political dynamite. Look, just get moving. You’ll get my emails en route. Others are searching for you. Go now!”

“Bloody hell! This is mad. I’d things planned. I...”

The urgency in Dempster’s voice, curiosity, the money - plus the thought of being besieged at home, motivates me. I bale out in five, decide against a taxi, and drive to the station. Half-way down the street, checking my mirror. I see a black 4X4 is pulling up at my driveway. Ye gods!

The train to Glasgow will give me time to read what Harry’s sending. I ring The Herald. Speak to Dempster’s secretary. “Tell your boss I’m on route. ETA 10.38, Glasgow Central.”

I find unoccupied seats with a table and locate Guthrie’s first article. “Fuck’s sake!” I’m stunned. Heads turn. It’s impossible - but there it is - my name; reference to my novel’s contents. How did Guthrie access it? I only sent it to Allinson to crit. He must have shown Guthrie. A couple sit down opposite me, and I catch the headlines on his Daily Record. The Herald’s headlines on my iphone are very similar. Nationwide chaos, spreading into Europe. Labour, SNP and all trade unions want the changes. Liberals sit on fence. Surely they can’t blame me? I had only imagined this situation for my story. This is a fucking nightmare. I read on:

*Unemployed on the march in Glasgow, Manchester and London. Stock market in free-fall. Emergency meeting of COBRA today. Corbyn says government’s lost control.*

I can't concentrate. I want off the train. Need to walk. What the hell am I hurtling towards? Then I remember Dempster's dangled £5000. I could do with that right now. I'm needing... It dawns on me that I'm hearing what the woman opposite is saying to her husband.

"You can't kid me, Bob. Banning all DIY would be right up your street. You and a lot of other idle-onians will be chuffed."

"Aye, Margaret, but it makes sense that millions will now be employed. Learn new skills. Get off their arses - and the dole - and start paying taxes."

"Yes. But we're going to have to pay painters, plumbers, gardeners, joiners..."

"OK, so there's a downside, but his other plan - one-man-one-job. That's the best notion in the book. Stop all those greedy bastards with their multiple directorships and consultancy fees; plus making sure every person or company working in this country pays taxes here. I'm for ending unemployment. These are revolutionary plans this guy McCreadie came up with - a win-win situation."

I lean forward. "Hope you don't mind me asking. How about the DIY-ers who build their own planes, houses, boats? Do their gardens, plumbing, painting etc. Are they...?"

"Have **you** not read the news, son?" says Margaret. "Just like the characters Steve McCreadie created, they still want to continue DIY or have multiple jobs and evade taxes."

"A miserable bunch," Bob smiles. "Some of us are willing to sacrifice for the good of the nation. Eh, Margaret?"

“Don’t start me. This’ll cost us all plenty.”

I sit back. We’re coming into Paisley. Listening to the two of them was exactly like the reactions I had expected such characters to take. But in my story, everything eventually works out and the instigator is a hero - eventually. In reality, I think I’ll be marked as a villain.

When the train draws into Central Station, and I step onto the platform, a woman approaches me. “Mr McCreadie?

I look at her suspiciously. “Who’s asking?”

“I’m Stacy, Harry’s secretary. He said *“Look for a tanned man”*, and in February you’re it.”

I follow her through the barrier. Unexpectedly, we board a taxi in Gordon Street.

“Not going to the office, Steve. Harry’s in a meeting. We’ll go for coffee. He’ll join us for lunch when he can.

“If he’s not in jail,” I joke

“I rather think you’re the more likely candidate,” laughs Stacy.

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Stacy’s an attractive girl - very. Luckily, a window table upstairs is vacant in the Willow Tea Rooms. “Harry will walk past two or three times before coming in. We’ve to watch, and I’ll phone his mobile if we see anyone following him. All very cloak and dagger!”

We chat about holidays till Stacy fingers Harry. “There he goes. Heading down Sauchiehall... He’s stopped now. He’s coming back up. I can’t spot anyone watching him. You, Steve?”

“Nope. Might have slipped a bug in his pocket.”

“Hopefully not. I’ll ring him twice.”

Dempster shakes my hand when he comes in. He studies me closely. “We’re going elsewhere for lunch, Steve. Settle the bill, Stace.” Back in Sauchiehall, we walk along to the Koh-I-Noor. “They’ve got booths. Privacy.”

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“Right, Steve. We’ve ordered, so let’s talk. You’ve read Guthrie’s articles and the various reactions?” Dempster was wasting no time.

“Quite astounding.”

“Power of the written word, Steve. Your story has some life-changing ideas.”

“Yeah, but I’m not responsible for...”

“Mike rescued your story from lying in a drawer. Saw its potential. gave it life. Which for many, including you, Steve, will never be the same again.”

I’m puzzled. “What is it you want, Harry? I don’t know what I’m getting into.”

“You’re news. I sell newspapers. Having got you, we’re ahead of the game. I love your original story. I want to know what motivated it. I can understand why

Mike based his article on it. You sowed the seeds, Mike gave them sunlight and water.”

“He didn’t ask permission to...”

“Mike’s a journalist. Seizes opportunities. You’re an evangelist, I think? Do you stand by what you wrote? Do you want what you wrote to happen?”

“Definitely, Harry. But I’m an ideas man. I wouldn’t know how to turn a blueprint into a working model.”

“Steve, trust me. Experts are doing that right now. The Tory government’s worried. All the fat cats with fingers in many pies are shit-scared. It’s like a virus. The millions unemployed are demanding this. Everyone wants to read your story. But, make no mistake - an awful lot of people will disagree with you.”

“The guy I sent my story to didn’t rate it highly!”

“He’d be checking your spelling and your grammar, not seeing the big picture.

Right, before you accept or reject my offer, let me tell you the outcome of my meeting earlier today with the Chief Constable, MI5 and the Scottish Secretary. Basically, they are looking for you to retract your ideas. To say they are impractical - a fantasy. And that the government know what they are doing.”

“That’s stupid. I’d never say that.”

“Smashing! I told them the genie is out of the bottle. The sooner your ideas are implemented, the better our country will be.”

“Is that going in tomorrow’s edition?” Stacy’s eyes were wide.

“It is, Stace. Unless they slap a restriction on. They’ll have your house watched, Steve, and your phone tapped.”

“I often stay at my partner’s. She was with me in Madeira.”

“Here, use this phone, and tell her you’re out of circulation. Don’t use your own mobile. In fact, tell her it would be wise to be with you at present.”

“Can they trace **your** mobile, Harry?”

“My normal one, yes. But we keep a few cheap phones, to use once then dump. Give Steve a couple, Stace. Get yourself more if you need them, Steve.”

The food is delicious but I’m hardly eating. I have to pinch myself. Is all this real? When we finish, Harry says, “I’m making it £5000 + £200 a day expenses. There’s no coercion. You don’t have to sign unless you want to.”

Stacy is holding a pen, she looks serious. I am nervous. I take her pen and scribble my name. Harry shakes my hand, then pays the bill, while Stacy hugs me. Later she escorts bemused ‘Gavin Pemberton’ to a rural hotel.