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JAMES KELMAN

How late it was,
how late

Minerva

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Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, Agnes Owens
and Jeff Torrington
are still around,
thank christ

feel it thumping. So ye need them man all yer wee survival plans ye fucking need them; yer breathing, whatever, so ye calm down. Ye need to be flat, that's how ye need to be, so it goes in one ear and out the other. Get yer head right, cause if ye dont they'll fuck ye. Nay danger.

He needed to sleep. He needed it just now. Nay circles. He tried to get it solid in his head; circles; so that when he woke up he would get some idea of how long it had been afore he dropped off, circles. Ye try these tricks, anything, anything at all. They dont work. Ye dont even know if they work cause ye've always forgot about them by the time ye wake up in the morning. And off he went again thinking, about all kinds of shit; thoughts of his ex-wife, his brother and sister, jobs he had worked at and guys he knew. When the sodgers came for him he felt like he hadnay closed his eyes but it was all night he had slept, right through. They didnay want to give him time to get ready, they were wanting to pull him out of fucking bed, fucking nude, fucking dress him. It's alright mate I can do it myself. They were in a hurry: fuck you and yer breakfast, they were doing their chauffeur. Ye're a hotshot, muttered one of them, so they tell us anyway. Then he says: Here give us yer hands.

Get to fuck, said Sammy it was the bastard bracelets: Ye're fucking kidding mate.

Shut up.

I thought I was getting out.

Shut up. Ye are getting out but ye're coming back in again.

Jesus christ.

Aye, ye've slept in pal we dont want ye missing yer appointment.

Slept in?

No know what time it is?

By this time he was out the cell and getting walked along the corridor and down wherever it was they were taking

him; they had stopped talking now, a sodger on either side holding him by the upper and forearms; he was still stumbling, trying to slow it down; but on round the corner and out through two doors then the steps up – he knew they were coming somewhere and here they were. One at a time, he said, christ slow it down. Then they reached the top and they were off again. It was fucking ridiculous. Then he was into the van. A sodger pushed him down onto a seat. As soon as the rest were inside the engine started and the door slammed shut. Naybody spoke. He raised up his arms and his right elbow bumped into one of them but nay comment, the guy didnay crack a light. Sammy had twisted to scratch himself under the neck, he fingered the bristles. He wanted to say something, but he wasnay gony.

When the van stopped the one next to him got the bracelets and unlocked them, took them off. The sodger on his left side said: Now listen to what I'm saying: ye're going in there and ye're going in alone. Alright? Ye hear me?

I hear ye.

Dont try fuck all cause we'll be waiting, right? Eh?

I hear ye.

Ye hear me. Good. Now beat it.

Sammy sniffed. Where's the close?

Ower there.

...

Step down, straight forward and to yer left.

Sammy nodded.

Mind what I'm saying.

Sammy was down and walking, his hands outstretched to find the wall; then he turned to his left and along till he found the close. There was footsteps ahead of him and then halfway down the close there was footsteps from behind; these bastards tailing him probably. Dirty fucking bastards. Bampots. Okay. He could have done with a fag. He should have tapped one of them. Naw he shouldnay.

The same woman at the reception desk; Missis La di da; he gave her the information. Just take a seat please, she said.

What time's it?

It's quarter past ten.

Jesus christ, he muttered.

He went to find a chair. Let them work it out, it was their fucking problem man bringing him a half hour early. Nay point him worrying about it. Maybe they would get sick of waiting and fuck off. Ye could only hope. He wasnay going naywhere. He folded his arms. Aw dear. He sighed.

Eventually the sound of somebody's chest from no too far away; some poor bastard trying to breathe: Ahit ahit, ahit; ahit, ahit ahit... Then that clogging noise in his throat, ahit, the big gob down there, all jellified and white-grey.

I got that dust pneumony, pneumony's in ma lungs
the dust pneumony, pneumony's in ma lungs
and if i dont get better
I aint got long, got long

Ye felt like giving him a drink of water except ye knew it wouldnay help, but still and all mate get it down ye: Ta pal dont mind if I do.

People are so polite; they get knocked down by a motor car and they get up and fucking apologise; Pardon me; that's what they say: Pardon me; then they give the bonnet of the motor a pat and a wee dight with their fucking jacket sleeve to take off the blood: Sorry mate I messed up yer paintwork. Ye could understand it but, trying to get by in the world; that was all ye were doing, trying no to upset cunts, no letting them upset you. Fuck the sodjers, nay point worrying about them, they had their own agenda. The one thing that was a stonewall cast-iron certainty was that they knew what they were doing. And Sammy didnay. So okay, it wasnay a problem. When the time comes ye move. Simple as that. Nay point hoping for the best. Ye could spend yer life doing

that; hoping. If ye were gony sit about hoping then okay, go ahead, but that's all ye'll do, know what I mean, it's like waiting, ye're aye waitng. Waiting rooms. Ye go into this room where ye wait. Hoping's the same. One of these days the cunts'll build entire fucking buildings just for that. Official hoping rooms, where ye just go in and hope for whatever the fuck ye feel like hoping for. One on every corner. Course they had them already: boozers. Ye go in to hope and they sell ye a drink to help ye pass the time. Ye see these cunts sitting there. What're they there for? They're hoping. They're hoping for something. The telly's rotten. So they go out hoping for something better. I'm just away out for a pint hen, be back in an hour. Ye hoping the football'll come on soon? Aye. I hope ye'll no be too long. I'll no be; no unless I meet some cunt - I hope I dont!

Sammy chuckled and put his hand to his mouth to hide it. That was what the bokel was like, the local boozier round from where he stayed - the one he failed to arrive at on Saturday afternoon - he called it the bokel because it made ye boke. Some joke that. Naw but no kidding ye man ye could walk in there on a Thursday night and ye'd see one guy playing the puggy machine and maybe half the pub would be spectating man that's how fucking bad it was for entertainment. Or else it was the exact opposite: battles. Ye're standing have a quiet pint and some cunt wants to get past ye and he says, Excuse me a minute john, then he takes out the stanley and rips the face of the guy standing next to ye. Bullshit. Naw but what do they think about? Ye see them standing there: no even reading the paper; no watching the telly, no talking to nay cunt, just fucking standing there. Drinking! that's what they're fucking doing man drinking. Sammy felt like joining them. Maybe if he asked the sodjers nice they would take him for a pint and a pub lunch; fish and chips or something he was feeling a bit peckish. One thing he was finding, ye dont like tempting the fates, but he was

finding he could do without a drink no too bad; it was the tobacco giving him the problems. These days it was usually the other way round. So all in all he had entered a new epoch on life's weary trail. That must be how his fucking feet were nipping. He reached to loosen the laces on the trainers; he would have taken them off except he would have to put them back on again. A creak on the chair next to him, somebody sitting down. After a wee minute a guy whispered, Is your name Samuels? Eh?

...
I'm Ally, pleased to meet ye. Pleased to meet ye. I take it ye're looking for a rep?

Sammy listened hard for other sounds, for other voices; there was the ones from the reception area and the ones from the other patients...

Eh? Need a rep?

Naw.

Ye sure? The guy sounded surprised.

I'm sure mate aye.

Naw I thought ye were up the PMBO on Friday. Are ye no?

Sorry.

What doctor ye seeing the now? Is it Logan?

...
I hear he's awkward.

He's alright.

No in my experience.

Sammy sniffed.

From what I know he's an awkward buggar.

I saw him a few months ago.

Did ye? Mm. Naw I thought ye would be needing a rep.

Ye're blind int ye?

Who telt ye that?

A wee bird.

A wee fucking dickie bird?

Naw but it's no gony be that straightforward, your medical case, from what I know about it.

What do ye know about it?

The guy chuckled.

Naw; I dont need a rep, thanks very much; fuck off.

I understand yer reaction, it's alright. Look, simple cases or hard cases, it's all one to me, I'll rep yours if ye like.

Ye deaf?

Naw I'm no deaf, naw, thanks for asking. Correct me if I'm wrong, ye were gony go for compen against the police department then ye changed yer mind? Eh?

Sammy got to his feet, he turned in the direction of the reception and groped his way to the counter.

The woman said: Yes?

Mister Samuels, I'm waiting for my appointment.

Yes with Doctor Logan, I am aware of that but he has a client in with him at the moment. Your name will be called.

Eh fine, okay, I'll just stand here and wait.

I'm afraid you cant just stand there and wait, people have to go backward and forward.

Sammy moved a couple of steps away then to his left, and he found the wall. He leaned against it. I'll stand here, he said, if that's alright with you.

I beg your pardon?

It's no that ye see I've got the police waiting outside the close.

I'm afraid it wont make the doctor end his consultancy any the quicker. Yes?

...
I'm waiting for Mister Samuels... It was the bampot talking; he had arrived beside Sammy.

Are you a police officer?

No.

You're blocking the passageway. Could you please stand to the side.

She's talking to you, whispered the guy.
You're blocking the passageway Mister Samuels.
Here, said the guy and his hand landed on Sammy's wrist:
Three steps more'll do it.
Sammy lifted the hand off.
No want me to come into the doctor with ye?
Naw.
It'd be in yer favour.
Ye said ye werenay deaf mate know what I'm talking about?

I take what ye're saying.
He went on to say something more but Sammy interrupted: Look mate gony stand somewhere else.
If ye insist.
I do insist.
Have ye got another rep like?
I dont need a rep, I telt ye already.
Mm. Well

Look, give us a break eh; cheerio. Sammy shook his head and turned away. He thought he heard the guy walk off but he couldnay be sure; he folded his arms, leaned his shoulder against the wall. Eventually La Di Da called: Doctor Logan is free to see ye now Mister Samuels. Please come this way.

And the guy's hand was on Sammy's wrist again and when he shrugged it off the guy muttered: Logan's a tricky bastard, he'll try and grind ye down; you're blind but and dont let him tell ye different; this is an entirely new condition which was caused through no fault of yer own but on a balance of probabilities by a person or persons in the employ of the police department. Stick to yer guns.

Sammy kept walking. Then La Di Da's hand was on his wrist. Thanks missis, he said but she didnay answer. Some of these middle-class bastards dont. They talk to ye and ye're allowed to reply but ye cannay speak unless spoken to. He stopped when she did, she chapped a door. He listened to

see if the guy was following. The door opened and he was pushed inside. The door shut. He stood where he was.

Just over there...

The voice came from nowhere. A mumble. Now came a rustle of papers. A cough. Just over there eh...

Sammy stayed. The cunt would probably have said it even if he had been wearing the shades and carrying the white stick. More rustling. Ye could picture him studying Sammy ower the top of his reading specs, an irritated frown on his coupon, thinking to himself: Who the fuck's this evil-looking bastard?

Sammy smiled. But for some reason he felt nervous. It was that bampot outside, the so-called rep. He had met reps afore. He didnay want one. He didnay need one; that was the last thing.

Would you sit down over there please.

Sorry doctor I'm blind, I'm no sure where ye're talking about.

Two steps forward five to your right. The doctor carried on talking before Sammy had found the seat. You're Mister Samuels, you were taken onto this register for a probationary period some six months ago; you're here this morning to complain of sightloss in both eyes: is that correct?

Yeh... Sammy found the seat and he sat down. He kicked his foot forwards and knocked against a desk or table.

And how do you say you chanced to lose your sight was it over a period of time, was it just suddenly gone; what?

Eh...

The doctor sighed. The report I have in front of me is ambiguous.

I woke up and that was that, it was gone. I telt the woman at the Central Medical.

Mmm. And when was this?

I'm no sure.

You're not sure?

Naw.

According to this the onset date is already determined, the Saturday before last.

Eh

Now you're saying something else?

I'm no sure.

You're not sure?

I'm a bit out with my time the now doctor.

...

It's just getting used to it, I'm no thinking too clear.

I see. Had you experienced deterioration prior to onset?

Naw.

Are you positive about that?

Aye; one minute I could see the next I couldnay.

So you're saying you've never been tested for glasses?

No.

Are you a reader?

Eh aye.

Mmm. And can you make out the fine print to any degree?

Nope.

In regard to television, do you experience difficulty there?

Nope.

Is there any record of blindness in your family? Parents or brothers and sisters. Grandparents.

My mother and father both wore glasses.

Constantly?

Eh...

All the time?

I'm no sure - eh naw I think they did. Aye, they did. My sister wears glasses for reading. I'm no sure about my brother, I've no seen him for a while.

Silence for a few minutes. More paper rustling and a drawer getting opened and closed. And Sammy heard movement from the doctor's direction. Then a sudden whooshing noise and he had to jerk his head. Then another. Again he

jerked his head; he clutched onto the sides of the chair. The next whoosh was much closer. Another whoosh now, it was from beside his left ear. Then the cold hand on his forehead.

Sammy listened to the doctor breathing, totally measured, no even a hiccup.

Try to relax Mister eh... No, please keep your eyes open for the time being.

More movement now. Something touched the side of his face, a rough sort of material. Then came a tap on the side of his left temple and he gave a slight yelp. He sniffed. The hand was off his forehead now. The doctor was walking away.

You're a smoker. Did you advise us of this when you applied to join our register?

Yeh.

How many a day do you smoke? on average.

Eh it depends.

A rough estimate?

Half an ounce. Unless I'm skint I mean, if I've got nay money... Sammy shrugged.

You are aware that treatment for certain diseases and illnesses will not be forthcoming if you persist? I strongly advise you to give it up. Tobacco's a killer; not only of yourself but of other individuals. It can also contribute materially to other ailments and conditions. Have you ever tried to give it up?

Yeh, a few times.

But you didnt succeed?

Naw.

Mmhh. Well Mister eh Samuels...in respect of the visual stimuli presented it would appear you were unable to respond.

...

Do you sleep at nights?

Yeh.

How many pillows?

Eh one.

And do you feel the need to have a window open?

Eh, sometimes.

For the fresh air?

Aye.

Do you experience palpitations?

No.

Pains in the ankle or shoulder?

Nope.

The chest?

Eh...naw, no really.

You seem unsure?

Well eh I mean I sometimes get indigestion.

In your chest?

Aye.

What makes you think it's indigestion?

Eh...it feels like heartburn.

Mm. Headaches?

Eh naw.

Never?

Naw.

You never experience headaches?

Never, naw.

Remarkable. Other pains?

...

Other pains?

Sammy folded his arms. Aye, he said, my back and my ribs.

But you dont experience chest problems. Mmhh.

Sammy stood. He took off his jacket: I thought you would maybe want a look doctor. He tugged the vest out the trousers, peeled it and his jersey up. He turned roundabout.

The doctor came to him: Just stand still. He touched

Sammy on the ribs and lower back. Then he said, Tuck your clothes in.

Sammy did it, he sat down, he heard the doctor writing. Eh I was just wondering...

Yes?

D'ye think this is temporary?

What?

My eyes.

Your eyes?

I'm talking about this being blind, if ye think it's gony be temporary or what?

I'm afraid I cant answer that. But I would advise you to exercise patience. Are you prone to psychological or nervous disorders?

Naw.

Anxiety?

Naw, not at all

Panic-attacks?

Eh naw.

You do understand what I mean by a panic-attack?

Sammy sniffed. I understand what ye mean but I dont understand how come ye're asking me about it.

Do you know a Doctor Crozier?

...

In fact he wrote a medical report on you some nine years ago. He describes you as prone to anxiety, that you seem inclined toward attacks of panic.

...

I have a copy of his report in front of me. Are you disagreeing with his clinical assessment?

Yeh.

You are?

Yeh. Well I mean it's no so much I disagree it was just cause of the circumstances, I telt him that at the time - a guy I knew got found dead.

Are you therefore disputing Doctor Crozier's assessment?
I'm no disputing it, I'm just saying it was an unusual thing.

Mister Samuels I should advise you that it's in your own best interest to adjust to the physical reality. You mustnt allow things to prey on your mind. Obsessive behaviour should be guarded against. If it is found that you suffer sensory dysfunction then your body will endeavour to follow its own compensatory process; this should be abetted rather than thwarted. No one is unique. In my experience persons who entertain sightloss come to feel bodily materials with such perfect exactness that one is tempted to suggest they see with their hands, or that their stick is an organ of the sixth sense; they can be observed distinguishing between trees and stones and water. You arent a religious man I see but there are those who are; they adhere to particular forms of belief; they would argue – I think convincingly – that it is to the soul that that very special sense of sight belongs. It is by no means uncommon to find that when the soul is distracted, whether by ecstasy or deep contemplation, the entire body remains devoid of sensation, in spite of being in contact with various objects in the material world. Now the point here is that sensation doesnt occur in view of the soul's presence in the parts that serve as external sense-organs but in view of its actual presence in the brain, where it employs a governing sensory faculty: a kind of central coordinator would be one way of describing it, except that in doing so we may leave the route clear for a denial of its ineluctable essence. I do recommend you regard your present condition as semi-permanent and move on from there, perhaps exercising more emotional restraint. I assume you're in receipt of Community Gratuity?

...
And which services do you provide?
Nayn the now.

When did you last provide any?

Eh October.

October?

It was for the City Building Project.

Mmhh. And when will you be starting back do you think?

Eh...

Is there another project in the offing?

Aye but I mean unless things change... Sammy shrugged.

Yes?

Well I'm gony have to re-register. Ye've got to be able to see to serve on a building site.

...

A lot of the things ye do are up high doctor eh...there isnay any floors; nay walls, nay ceilings. Ye're in the middle of building them so...they're no there yet. Sammy shrugged. If ye cannay see ye're liable to fall off.

Mmm.

That's how I'm here.

Yes well until comprehensive reports are carried out Mister Samuels...

Sammy sniffed. The doctor was writing. He cleared his throat and said, Eh I was wondering about things like guide-dogs and white sticks... About getting them I mean?

...

Eh how do ye go about it?

Go about it?

Eh, if ye wanted a guide-dog, or a white stick; how d'ye go about getting them?

I'm afraid I dont follow.

Right eh just if've ye no got the money I mean to buy them, I mean, what do ye approach a charity?

Well I dare say that if a claim in respect of a found dysfunction is allowed then an application in respect of a customer's wants that may be consistent with the found

dysfunction becomes open to discharge by the appropriate charitable agency.

So I should approach a charity?

...

Eh?

I beg your pardon?

Have I to approach a charity? I mean...should I approach a charity?

That's entirely up to yourself.

Yeh but

You may approach a charity at any time Mister Samuels.

Yeh but I'm just saying

The doctor sighed. Sammy clasped and unclasped his hands. There was a rustling of papers. The doctor said, I've prescribed a similar course of medication as that recommended by Doctor Crozier; it should help relieve your stress; also an ointment which you may apply to areas of your upper trunk. Here you are.

Sammy held his hand out and was given the prescription.

Good morning.

Sammy got to his feet. Eh doctor, see about the sight-loss...what happens now?

In what sense?

Naw just eh, what do I do now?

I would've thought that was up to yourself Mister Samuels.

Naw I'm no saying that, I'm just talking about eh...

...

Know what I mean?

I'm not sure that I do. The medical officers at the PMBO will require to examine you. That's a formality. As far as the DSS Central Medical is concerned I dare say their adjudicating authorities will require to determine a judgment. If the alleged dysfunction is verified then your claim for re-registration in respect of sightloss capacity will be allowed.

So that means my registration claim is nay gony be allowed just now?

Well how can it be?

Naw I was just wondering like what you were gony be saying. The report I mean that's eh... Sammy sniffed.

The papers getting rustled. The doctor was writing now.

See I was just wondering there eh about eh the future and that, my eyes...

I've stated that it would be wise to proceed on the assumption that should the alleged dysfunction be found

Aye sorry for interrupting doctor but see when you say 'alleged'?

Yes?

Are ye saying that you dont really think I'm blind?

Pardon?

Ye saying ye dont think I'm blind?

Of course not.

Well what are ye saying?

I told you a minute ago.

Could ye repeat it please?

In respect of the visual stimuli presented you appeared unable to respond.

So ye're no saying I'm blind?

It isnt for me to say.

Aye but you're a doctor.

Yes.

So ye can give an opinion?

Anyone can give an opinion.

Aye but to do with medical things.

Mister Samuels, I have people waiting to see me.

Christ sake!

I find your language offensive.

Do ye. Ah well fuck ye then. Fuck ye! Sammy crumpled the prescription and flung it at him: Stick that up yer fucking arse!

Yes good morning.

Ya fucking eedjit! Sammy stood there. He started smiling, then stopped it. Fucking bastard!

Yes, thank you.

Fucking thank you ya bastard. Sammy grasped at the desk; there were papers there and he skited them; he turned and headed to where he thought the door was but banged into something that fell and he stumbled, tried to right himself but couldnay fucking manage it and ower he went, clattering into something sharp and solid and he cried out. The door opened and somebody came in and grabbed his arm. Sammy punched at whoever it was and rolled to escape, onto his knees and up. It was the rep saying, Take it easy it's me. I'm representing this man's claims Doctor Logan.

Are you...

Sammy was moving away from the voices.

I was supposed to attend with him this morning but I got detained elsewhere; I apologise for the inconvenience.

The doctor started to reply but Sammy had already found the door handle; he got out the room and was walking. There was a wall; he patacaked along to the reception counter then it was a straight route to the exit. By the time he got there and groped for the door the rep had caught up with him: Okay he said, that's us.

Sammy ignored him and got out into the close. The guy followed: Hang on a minute, he said.

Naw.

Can I have a word?

There's folk waiting for me.

It'll no take a minute.

I said there's folk waiting for me. Sammy kept walking.

Eh if ye're talking about the polis, if that's who ye mean; they're away.

...

Honest. They went ages ago.

Naw they didnay.

Aye they did.

How do you know?

Cause I saw them.

Aye well they'll be back. What time's it?

Twenty past eleven. Did they say they were gony wait like?

Sammy carried on to the front close. The rep kept up with him: How did it go anyway? he said.

How did what go?

The quack?

Fuck the quack.

I telt ye he was tricky. That's how I offered to go in with ye. Ye're better with a rep for medical interviews.

Sammy stepped out the close to his left.

Ye going for a bus?

Sammy paused and turned. Look mate thanks a lot and all that but I dont need yer advice; I dont need a rep either; ye've got the wrong information, I'm no in for compen.

Naw pardon me I'll just remind ye, with respect, ye're no in for compen the now but ye're trying to re-register so ye might change yer mind. Ye might be forced to. Anyway, apart from that, ye're as well trying to get a few quid when the chance arises. No agree? Eh? I mean ye've nothing to lose.

You're a fucking comic mate that's what you are.

The guy chuckled.

Look eh

Ally; the name's Ally.

Aye right, okay; see ye think ye know but ye dont; ye're talking something else here with me; that's all I'm saying.

Ye're letting yerself get intimidated.

Sammy shook his head.

Ye let Logan intimidate ye, that was how ye lost yer temper. He wanted ye to lose it and ye lost it

Cheerio.

I mean did ye get a diagnosis? I bet ye ye didnay even get a diagnosis.

Sammy was walking.

It's no a disaster anyway I mean ye'd have been a miracle worker if ye did! But how near did ye get? What did he say? his actual words; did ye note them down? Did he give ye an opinion? or was it just a description?

Sammy kept going, touching the wall with his left hand on alternate steps. Surely the polis hadnay fuckt off? Surely they would be somewhere else watching. Maybe across the street.

How ye gony get home? Eh? If ye cannay see and ye've no even got a stick!

Sammy stopped and shouted: Look mate how I get home's my fucking business. He resumed walking.

What about yer referral did ye get yer referral? Cause if ye didnay ye're gony have problems. I'm talking about for a charity.

Fuck the charity.

Naw it's important.

Give us peace.

The guy was walking beside him now. Listen, he said, ye're no claiming the polis and that's understandable, ye dont want to seem like ye're lodging a complaint and that's fair enough. And ye're worried about yer Dys Ben claim and that's understandable as well cause it casts the same aspersions. Well what I'm gony say is, it doesnay matter. They dont care, win lose or draw. They're no worrying about you. So you shouldnay worry about them. Even if ye do score a few quid it's nay skin off their nose. Plus the fact if ye dont put in for it then ye're gony lose dough, cause once ye win the diagnosis question and get yer sightloss registration ye'll drop a couple of quid on the full-function capacity.

Sammy paused.

Ye knew that already but eh?

Fuck ye!

Naw? I thought ye would have. No knowing that, I'm surprised. Hang on a minute and I'll explain how it operates. Heh fancy a cup of tea? there's a cafe round the corner. Eh? It's in yer favour.

Look eh

Ally.

Ally... Sammy had stopped walking. The polis are gony be back and I want to be here when they do.

They're coming to collect ye like?

I'm no discussing it with ye, right? I dont have the energy - know what I'm saying? another time, another time; no the now.

Well I'm no pressing ye. Here.

What?

He put two bits of paper into Sammy's hand. One's the prescription, he said, the other yin's the referral, I got him to sign it for ye after ye went.

Sammy held them and said nothing, then he stuffed them into his pocket.

See the way I read the situation

Look eh Ally, I appreciate it all what ye're saying and that, but no the now, I might have discussed it another time, no the now, that's all I'm saying, no the now. Thanks for getting us the stuff.

Nay bother. Listen just hear us out a minute

Sammy sighed.

Naw only till they come. See the way I read the situation...okay ye got a doing off the department which is or isnay fair enough; some might argue it was - in fact that's what the polis'll argue once we've got them to admit it happened. But will they admit it happened? My guess is aye, it might take a wee while but ultimately they will.

Is that a fact?

Ye knew that?

Aye.

Good. Cause a lot of folk get surprised. One question: see when ye got the doing and ye went blind, was it immediate?

Naw.

Do the authorities know that for sure I mean did they note it down? If they didnay then the only thing they do know is ye're blind. So that's in yer favour. See if ye didnay go blind till two days later it makes yer proof of causation that bit tougher in respect of onset. But if they dont know then it might no matter. What's the latency period for blindness by the way? see if we find it usually takes a couple of days then everything's fine but if we find it usually happens straight off as a direct consequence of the blow or blows then we could be in trouble. Dont worry about that but I'll check it out. I keep a couple of medical books in the house; plus I've got other sources.

Who?

That would be talking.

Sammy shook his head.

Ye dont trust me eh?

I dont trust nay cunt.

Ah well that can be a problem, let me tell ye.

Sammy had raised his hand; he smiled. Alright mate nay hard feelings. He kept his hand out as if to shake. When Ally took it Sammy gripped him and held him. The hand felt nearly as big as his own. He didnay apply too much pressure, he wasnay out to hurt the guy. Okay, he said, now listen to what I'm telling ye: ye dont know. Ye think ye do but ye dont. There's something else going on here. It's no your business and I'm no gony tell ye about it. All I'm saying is it's no what ye think. So just leave it. Okay?

...

Okay?

Naw it's no okay. No when ye've got me like this.

I just want ye to fucking listen to what I'm saying.

Right I'm listening.

Ye're a rep, okay, I accept that. I didnay earlier on but I do now. I thought ye were a spook. I'm sorry. I dont think that now. Okay. It's just there's stuff going on here ye dont know about; and it doesnay concern ye; know what I mean? it doesnay concern ye.

Try me.

Ye're still no listening. Sammy increased the pressure and Ally now tried to pull away his hand, he got his other hand onto Sammy's wrist and tugged. Sammy lifted the hand off, he had to strain to do it but he got it, and he held it tight.

I cannay believe this, said Ally, it's ridiculous.

No to me it isnay.

There's people watching but it's ridiculous to them.

What the fuck do I care, fucking people watching man ye kidding! Sammy grinned. Then he released him. He rubbed his hands the gether, stuck them in his trouser pockets and moved away slow, he reached the wall and he leaned against it. He listened. There wasnay much traffic about. After a wee while he said: Ye there?

Aye.

Look eh I'm sorry and all that, I apologise. It's just things are difficult the now.

Aye well.

Sammy shrugged. See I'm fuckt; being honest.

Ye dont have to explain to me.

I thought I did.

Ah well ye dont.

Sammy smiled. Heh ye've no got a smoke?

Naw, sorry.

Look ye come on strong, know what I mean?

...

Ye come on strong.