

Confessional

by Marc Nash

He plucked the sheet from the birdcage. The mynah bird still had its head tucked under its wing. "That time I said I had to drive to Leeds for a meeting, I was actually down the clap clinic getting a prescription". A mixture of drowsiness and not having been exposed to those particular words before, meant that for once the bird didn't come back with a snappily inappropriate retort.

He bounded up the stairs into the bedroom. His wife caught sight of him looming up in the dressing table mirror and turned to put up her arms to warn him away from her facepack. Undeterred, he gently cupped the back of her skull and drew her forward so that their foreheads met. "When I was thirteen, I caught a frog and pulled it to pieces out of some sort of perverse desire to see how it was made". He pulled away and she handed him one of her wet cotton wipes to remove the cream transferred to his brow. She put it down to the significance of this red letter day and offered a silent prayer it wasn't going to be like this for the next three weeks.

Ensconced within the plush leather in the back of the limo, he levered himself forward as he depressed the partition glass. The back of the driver hove into view. "Anytime the family au pair was out the house, I would go to the laundry basket and take out a pair of her stockings and wrap them around my face and inhale. Just once I tried it around my neck and squeezed, but I'll admit, I got scared." Apart from a slight cocking of his head measured by the tilt of the peak of his cap, the chauffeur managed dutifully to keep his eyes on the road.

He pulled on the sash cord and the curtains parted from the plaque. The applause from the old people's home residents was somewhat subdued by their arthritic venerability. But he wrought an even greater bewilderment when he informed them that not only

had he smoked cannabis regularly in his younger days, he had most definitely inhaled. He had only desisted from the happy habit when his dinner party circuit supplier had been caught and imprisoned. As he left the building, a wheelchair bound lady winked at him. But it could conceivably have been a twitch.

Perched on a soapbox to address a precision engineering factory's shopfloor, he opened his arms out wide in a gesture of embrace. Then he scissored them back into his chest as he regaled them with details of stealing reams of paper and typewriter ribbons from his first office job. How he had even managed to smuggle out one of the company's two VCR machines. The workforce then broke out into a riot of mockingly trying to lift their hundred weight machine tools and miming trying to stretch their pockets over them. He turned rather helplessly to his host who glared daggers at him.

At the Police Federation he blurted that he'd launched surreptitious spitball after spitball from the observation deck of the Empire State Building and tried to imagine them landing on pedestrians below. At the children's hospice with the camera whirring, he leaned in close to a little girl hooked up to drips and told her he'd started drinking in pubs at sixteen and his first X-rated movie was when he was seventeen. Her medication meant she fell back into slumber while he was talking. The boom mic did however pick up all his words.

On the podium at Pride, he owned that he'd loved taking his children to playgroup as he got to ogle all the breast-feeding mothers. At the Inter-faiths conference he came clean about his Gap year antics. All those interminable train journeys around Europe were spent playing gin rummy for money with his card novice travelling partner whom he had just taught the game and therefore gradually cleaned out of money. An Imam replied that gambling was a sin. A Rabbi stroked his beard and told him he should go make recompense to the man even thirty years later as it was now. A

priest took him by the elbow and quietly inquired if he thought of converting to Catholicism. After all it wasn't unheard of within his line of work.

After the polls closed on election day, the country had revealed itself split right down the middle. Half the nation had welcomed his uncommon honesty as evidence of a man who could be trusted to tell it like it is. But the landslide of support his strategists had anticipated was undoubtedly compromised by their man's unfathomable compulsion to confess anything, anywhere, at any time. This had prompted a backlash coalition, ranging from those Dutch uncles aghast at his moral reprehensibility; through those amateur psychologists gauging that he had just too many character flaws to be depended upon for the pressures of high office; down to the pragmatists who merely doubted his abilities at summits and treaties, given the lack of tact and diplomacy witnessed during the campaign. His now estranged wife fell into the first cohort of the naysayers.

His intention to step down from the Party rather than contest the re-run election, was announced on his behalf. Since his aides couldn't be sure he wouldn't be overcome with the compelling urge to confess that retirement hadn't actually been his decision.

