

Sid is Frank's Dog

We're sitting in his kitchen and he's skinning up. He likes to talk when he's building, telling me stuff I've heard a hundred times before. I've just paid for a half Q, but I'm happy to hang out for a free smoke, so I let him talk.

“Not a drop of hash, you'd be pleased to note.” This is how he starts. “Honestly, I'm done. And none of that pish they put in fags these days either. That stuff is so dodgy man. You know the corporations put these, like, drugs in with the tobacco to make you want to smoke more. That's the stuff that kills you man, not the tobacco. I mean, think about it. How can Cubans smoke huge fuck off cigars all day long and still live to, like 95? Because tobacco is organic. It's quite good for you really. But cigarettes? They're just a one way ticket to fuckin'...you know...”

He runs his tongue along the edge of the skins and wraps it closed. The joint wobbles in the corner of his mouth as he says, “So, that's me. I'm off it.”

He lights the end, takes a deep toke, holds it, then fills the kitchen with that familiar sweet fragrance which always reminds me of rosemary. He passes it over, smiling. “From now on,” he says, “it's nothing but pure clean bud for me.”

He has a point. This is good stuff.

“My mate Dibsey grows it,” he says. “You know Dibsey, right?”

I rub my forehead. This conversation feels far too familiar. I don't know Dibsey and I tell him, “I don't know Dibsey.”

“Dibsey,” he says, “you know Dibsey, he plays the bongos.”

“Dibsey, right.” I still have no idea.

“He grows all this really good shit in his attic. He’s got lights and fuckin’ plant food and everything. It’s like a fairy tale. Dibsey keeps me sweet, which is good, ‘cause I’m never fuckin’ smoking hash or cigarettes again, man.”

Really, all I want is to quietly chill and watch rain drops dribble down the window, but he’s so intent about never smoking hash again I hear myself asking, “Why?”

“Because man, they cut it with glue or chemicals or whatever they can find.”

He explains it to me like I’m six years old and he’s the substitute teacher. “You see, the first dealer gets the hash from... from I don’t know where, but they come in these big hard clumps. Each clump is, like, a pound. He then cuts that hash with whatever he can find, and then he’s got two pounds of ‘hash’ that he sells.”

With two thin fingers he slices quotation marks into the air between us, and I find myself wondering why people don’t ever shape brackets or semi-colons in the air. How would you even shape a semi-colon with your fingers?

“The next dealer does the same thing, and the next. Then they sell it to you and me. They cut it with bitumen. You know what that is? It’s fuckin’ tar, man! By the time it gets to us you can see the double yellow lines down the side. I’m telling you, we’ve smoked a good portion of the M80. That’s why the government should legalise hash. Don’t you see? Get some proper fuckin’ regulations on how to make this shit.”

“So what,” I say, “this is old news. Why quit now?”

He takes a long toke and squints earnestly at me while holding his breath. He leans forward and quickly exhales a contrail of smoke from the side of his mouth. He says the real reason he quit is because of what happened last time he went to buy hash.

“I used to get the odd half Q off Frank”, he says, handing the spliff to me. “You know Frank, right?”

I have no idea, but for economy’s sake I just say, “Yeah, Frank.”

“Most times, Frank would come up to the flat with the gear and we’d play Playstation or muck about on the guitars or something. But, couple of weekends ago, it was Kenny’s bird’s twenty-first. I’m totally out of gear, so, before I head out for the night, I decide to swing by Frank’s house to see if I can get a wee stash.”

He impatiently takes the joint from my fingers and keeps talking between puffs.

“I get to Frank’s house and some wee kid answers the door. She looks up and asks me who I am. ‘Who am I?’ I say, ‘Who the fuck are you? Where’s Frank?’ The kid shouts into the house, ‘Da, it’s for you.’ Can you believe that? I was like, what? Turns out, not only is Frank married, he’s got three kids. Three fuckin’ kids!”

He finds this bit hilarious. Sits giggling, shaking his head. And I must admit that, in that moment, I, too, found the absurdity of matrimony and procreation quite giggle-worthy. With tears in his eyes, he tries to carry on.

“Three wee troopers! Can you believe it? He’s a fuckin’ dark horse that one. Anyway, calm as you like, he invites me in. No explanation, nothing.”

“Now, Frank’s a mate and I couldn’t say anything against him, but his place is a mess. No, really. It’s a total shite hole. You go in and everything’s brown. Even though you can see other colours, the whole place looks brown. Brown chairs. Brown walls. Brown light bulb. The family blend in, with their brown clothes and brown teeth. The whole place smells of pish. He’s got two car seats in his living room. And the carpet, Jesus, the carpet was rank! Piles of dog shit under the telly, I swear to God. At least I hope it was dog shit,” he giggles again. Then, quite seriously, he adds, “But he’s got a good vinyl collection though, I’ll give him that.”

“The kids sit on the couch next to this weird bloke who looks like he’s totally spaced out on jellies and between them there’s a naked baby, just lying there. I sit down on one of the car seats. Frank’s wife offers me a beer and then she buggers off to the kitchen and I never see her again. Of course, I say nothing. I think Frank knows why I’m there so I sit for a bit, and watch X Factor with his kids.”

He pauses the story to think, then suddenly raises his hands, as if trying to stop a bus.

“I nearly forgot,” he says, “this is the best bit. Next to his telly, Frank’s got this huge space age running machine, like in the gym. Brand new, with the Star Trek dials and everything. The whole flat is filthy, but this thing is shiny new and it’s got flashy lights and buttons. Hanging off the control panel is a bit of rope.”

He stops the story and hands me the last stub while brushing some ash from his lap. He goes over rakes through the cupboard till he finds a packet of

Chocolate Digestives. He shoves two biscuits into his mouth at once and mutters, "Want tea?"

I say, "Yeah."

He boils the kettle and puts on a Stone Roses CD.

"What was I saying?" he says.

I tell him he was saying that Frank lives with his family in a shit hole with a Star Trek gym.

"Aye," he says, sitting down. "Did I tell you about Sid yet?" he asks.

"No," I sigh.

"Sid is Frank's dog. So, I'm sitting watching telly, when this dog comes up and starts licking my hands. It's a short wiry little fucker. Picture a typical Ned, well, Sid is the dog version of a wee Ned. I hate dogs licking me so I push it away and tell it to bugger off. That's when I feel its skin. Most of its back is just scabs. It's only got clumps of fur here and there. It's the scabbiest fucking mutt you've ever seen, man. You shouldn't do that to animals. This poor thing looked really sick. So I was, like, rubbing my hands off on my jeans in case I caught anything."

"Then Frank says, 'Come on Sid, time for your walk,' and the dog hunkers down under my seat. Frank gets the dog and takes it over to the running machine, ties the rope to Sid's collar and puts the dog on to the conveyer belt. Then Frank switches it to *Fast*. At first, Sid trips a bit but soon he's off, running full pelt with his tongue hanging out."

"Frank sits down. Then he looks over at me and explains, 'He usually lasts about twenty minutes, then he just gives up and gets dragged. That's how we know he's done.' What's so funny? "

“Nothing,” I say, “it’s just a weird story.” It’s his impression of Frank that’s hilarious. He hunches his shoulders and puts on a deeper voice. He makes Frank sound like William Shatner.

“Aye, it’s a weird story but it’s bloody true. I sat there for ten minutes trying to watch ‘You’ve Been Framed’ over the noise of that machine and Sid’s heavy breathing. I was, like, no way! That’s just not on. I mean, think about how much money Frank paid for that running machine, just to exercise his bloody dog! But, of course, I didn’t say a fuckin’ word.”

He glares at me, uncertain, as I keep giggling.

“I just wanted to get my hash and leave, in and out, but you’ve got to be polite. Next thing there’s someone at the door. Three really loud knocks like this.”

He slaps the table three times for effect. I watch the biscuits and ashtray bounce with each thud.

“Everyone looks at each other, totally silent. There’s three more loud knocks. Frank looks at his oldest boy and says, ‘Get Sid.’ All the kids spring into action like an army of midgets. They’re all running about, flinging out ashtrays, untying the dog. I hear the toilet flush. The baby starts crying. Everyone’s running about like fuck except for the weird bloke on the sofa, he doesn’t even budge. He was glued to that fuckin’ telly. And I’m just sitting there, like that...”

He pulls back his chin into his neck and opens his eyes wide. I’m guessing he’s doing a look of shock. I’ve seen that impression a lot and never understood it.

“The door gets bashed again and Frank yells, ‘Hud on, I’m just cummin.’ By this time he’s got hold of Sid and he’s pinning him to the floor. So then...”

“No, wait. Shit!” He places a fist on his fontanel and says, “I forgot to tell you a bit. See, when I first went into Frank’s living room and sat down, I never told you about the hash.”

He leans in and says, “On his coffee table, Frank must have had twenty mobile phones. Now and again one would vibrate and the whole pile would shake. There were also some beer cans and an old cup of tea. But in the centre of the table, right there, in front of everyone, he’s got these two enormous lumps of hash. Like two huge Snickers Bars, well maybe more like Fudge Bars, but they were big. Big enough to be done for dealing. I remember thinking, there’s no way I would have that much hash kicking about the living room in full view of the kids and a stoner. That’s, like, asking for trouble. But then, Frank’s just Frank, there’s no telling him.”

“Anyway, so Frank’s got the dog in a head-lock, and this poor wee bastard is struggling like it knows what’s coming, it’s got ‘INEVITABLE’ written across its forehead. One of the kids brings Frank a jar of raspberry jam. Frank sticks his finger in the jam and rubs it on the dog’s arsehole. Then he takes a Snickers Bar of hash, dunks the whole thing in the jam and then shoves it up Sid’s arse. Both bits go right up that dog’s arse!”

“Bullshit,” I say.

“I fuckin’ swear it on my Ma’s eyes! The dog yelped a bit and then pished itself. Frank, covered in piss, gets up and answers the door. But it’s not the police, just some stupid university student that Frank used to sell weed to.

Of course, Frank goes absolutely ballistic. Calls the guy a fuckin' wanker and threatens to do him in. But the guy apologises and before long it's all happy families like. Everyone's sitting about having a bevy and a wee smoke. We must have sat there for about an hour because I remember watching the Lottery and then a program about Pumas in Africa or something."

"Africa doesn't have Pumas," I tell him.

"Well, whatever, I don't know. The point is, that whole time I'm sitting there thinking, 'C'mon! Hurry up! Let's go!' I do not want to spend another minute in this shite hole with these fuckin people. But I can't leave till I get something to smoke. So I sit, arms folded, and watch Sid lick his arse."

"Eventually, Frank gets up and asks me into the kitchen. I'm like, thank fuck, let's get this done. We get into the kitchen and he closes the door."

"Can you believe that guy?' Frank says, 'I near shat ma pants.'"

"Aye, me an' awe', I said."

"Least if it was the polis, I've got a perfect hiding place' Frank says, and he starts putting on a pair of pink marigolds. He gives me an old mop and shows me the floor. Sid is sitting quivering in the corner 'cause he's shat on the linoleum. They never let the dog out, see, in case he runs away with an arse full of hash. There's skitters everywhere and it smells god-awful, but Frank is acting like a proud father, giving it the 'what a good boy' and pure hugging the dog and everything."

"Then he leans over and sifts through the shite on the floor. He pulls out three chunks of hash, 'cause one bit had broken in half, but it was all still there. Calm as you like, he stands up and starts washing them under the tap. He's careful not to lose any or let it crumble away. I start mopping."

“Frank then opens a cupboard and pulls out a hairdryer, and he starts blow-drying the hash. Finally, he gives Sid a bit of steak from the fridge.

‘That’s for playing your part in the revolution’, he says to Sid.”

“We sit down at the table with the three lumps in front of us. ‘See, good as new’ Frank says. But they still stank of shite to me. He cuts about an eighth and wraps it in tinfoil for the prick in his living room. Then he asks me how much I want.”

“You didn’t,” I say.

“Frank’s a mate. I couldn’t sit there in his kitchen and tell him to fuck off. He’s got me weed whenever I wanted it.”

“You’re telling me, you bought hash that had been up a mangy dog’s arse?”

“I didn’t smoke it, obviously. I sold it.”

“To who?” I ask.

He stands up, avoiding eye contact. “Do you want that cup of tea, now?” he asks.