

Jimmy

After half an hours wait my name is called. I get up from the seat and follow a short, fat man into the back of the building. We sit opposite each other at a semicircular table in a makeshift office.

'Sorry about the wait,' he says to me. 'I've just been in with Jimmy - and well - he pongs a bit, you know. You don't like to say it but he does.'

I nod though I don't know who Jimmy is.

'I mean you've been near him, you'll know what I mean. Bad enough you get the smell of him out there but sat in this tiny room with him, the door shut... Well you don't know if it's you, you know, you feel like...' He sniffs his clothes and jabs up at his nose with both sets of fingers. '*The pong*, you know? On your clothes, up your nose and that; you wonder if it's you.'

'Yeah,' I say.

The fat man looks at me in earnest. 'They keep asking me to stop him from coming in, because it can be a bit unpleasant for the others, the smell and that, but I mean he's not hurting anyone and...' He pauses and takes a deep breath. 'He wets himself see, but he doesn't wear anything, so there's nothing to soak it up. He doesn't wear pads or special pants, so the dribbles just come through onto his trousers. There's nothing to mop up the dribbles.'

'Aw, right.' I lean my elbow on the armrest and push my backside clear of the vinyl covering. The fat man continues talking.

'We get complaints but - and you keep sniffing yourself to see if it's you - but I feel bad for him, you know? I'm not going to get up in arms over it.'

'Naw.' I mutter.

The fat man's sad eyes move to my elevated rump. I mumble something about a missing bus ticket and reluctantly lower myself back onto the seat. He turns away as though I have let Jimmy down.

We sit in awkward silence for a few seconds then he claps his hands together. 'Well anyway,' he sighs, 'best crack straight on and get you on your way eh.'

He straightens himself in his seat. I mimic to show my approval.

'Let's see,' he guides his eyes along a sheet of paper with the tip of his biro. 'Leonard Pepper, mandatory, yes?'

'Aye.'

'Right - good - we've got the right sheet. If you just bear with me a minute I'll get this filled in for you...' He begins to scribble some notes down then stops abruptly. 'Three and a half years unemployed eh?'

'Yeah.' I feign a sigh.

'Still, you apply for jobs what else can you do?'

'That's it like.'

The fat man's shoulders deflate; his body slides down the chair. He turns away, shaking his head. 'He makes life hard for himself though.'

My brow creases. 'Sorry?'

'Jimmy.' He throws his palms up in disbelief at me.

'Aw right... I thought you were talking about... Jimmy aye.' I slouch back.

'Not wearing the pads and that.'

'Mm.'

'But I mean this place doesn't help. When you get enough bodies out there the temperature...'

'Hot. I noticed.'

'And the smell. Jesus!' He wafts a hand under his nose. 'Cos it's not just Jimmy, you know?'

'I suppose.'

'So anyway, this form,' he says, raising a corner from the desk with the tip of his pen. 'Do you want to come back or not?'

'No.'

'No?'

'Is that...?'

'No. That's fine. Suit yourself.' He shrugs. 'And you're sure about that cos once you've said you don't it's over, you'll not be allowed back?'

'I'm sure.'