

HOWARD MARKS

Señor Nice

An Extract

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HARVILL SECKER BIOGRAPHY

I always needed these five minutes of peace before the show to collect my thoughts and destroy the butterflies in my stomach. I achieved this in various ways: shouting at myself in the mirror, snorting a line of cocaine, or falling into a quick but deep meditation.

My guests left, each one wishing me good luck. I sat down and smoked the rest of Polly's Super Silver Haze spliff. Christ it was strong. I started giggling. I thought of my dead father and dying mother and cried a bit. I paced up and down and gulped some whisky.

'Okay, Mon. Dem a wait pon yo.'

I walked out and followed Leroy to the stage.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome on stage Mr Howard Marks.'

Adrenalin pumped through my anxious brain and body. Shouts, hoots, and catcalls greeted me as I took my place behind the microphone. The noise subsided.

'Are there any plain clothes cops here?' I asked the audience. 'Because if so, now's your fucking chance. Just fucking try it, motherfuckers.'

Loud cackles of laughter cut through clouds of marijuana smoke. I picked up my script and began reading 'The Dope Dealer and the Terrorist,' a version of the passages in my book concerning my dope importing activities in Ireland with self-professed IRA gun-runner Jim McCann. September 11th had just happened, so the piece was appropriately topical and outrageous. My Belfast accent left a lot to be desired, but the show was working.

'I've cracked it, H'ard. Send me all the fucking dope you want. I got the man I needed. He fucking examines everything coming into Shannon Airport. And, if he values his fucking Guinness, he'll let through what I tell him to. His name's Eamonn. He's a true Republican'

'Jim, does he know we're going to bring in dope?'

'Of course he fucking doesn't, you Welsh asshole. He thinks he's bringing in guns for the IRA cause. He's dead against dope.'

Relieved to be speaking to a responsive audience, I relaxed and looked around the stage. Behind the camera, which was pointing at the ceiling, Martin Baker had gone white. Leroy was at the side of the stage looking at him with concern and worry wrinkling his magnificent face. Suddenly, Martin lost his legs and began falling into a giant spaghetti of electrical cables. Leroy dived, caught him, saved his life, and carried him off. Martin had done a whitey on Polly's skunk. Fuck! I hoped no one else had. It would be bad publicity. And what would happen to the DVD? Never mind, the show had to go on.

'Jim. The consignment's left and it's addressed to Juma Khan, Shannon, Ireland.'

'You stupid Welsh cunt. What did you put my fucking name on it for?'

I suddenly realised the similarity in pronunciation between the names Jim McCann and Juma Khan.

'Jim, Khan is like Mister in the Middle East. And it's Juma, not Jim. Juma means something like Friday in their language.'

'Jim McCann might fucking mean Man Friday in Kabul, but in Ireland, Jim McCann means it's fucking me for fuck's sake.'

I announced the end of the first half and followed Leroy back to the dressing room. The sight that greeted me was appalling. Martin Baker was trying to convince two St John's ambulance men that he had suffered a migraine attack.

Leroy kept repeating, 'Im woulda dead, Mon. Im woulda dead, Mon.'

Polly was lying semi-conscious on a sofa and whispering over and over again, "Never happened to me before, and I've been smoking dope for over 40 years, and I grew this myself."

Psychic Dave was reassuring three other comatose bodies with carefully worded predictions of their imminent recoveries

based on the Tarot cards, while Marty and Taff at his side were crying with laughter.

'Ten minutes to show time,' cried Ian.

The ambulance men shuffled out scratching their heads.

'Taff, can you skin up another joint?' I asked. 'Better use the hash this time. It's for me to smoke on the stage during the second half.'

Ian popped his head around the door.

'Five minutes. Clear the dressing room.'

This time I just snorted a huge line of cocaine.

Leroy came to get me, still repeating, 'Im woulda dead, Mon.'

'Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome back on stage, Mr Howard Marks.'

I decided not to read an extract about life in a United States Penitentiary as originally planned. I would read the Egyptian delegate's speech to the League Of Nations Second Opium Conference (1926) on the need to make hashish illegal. That always went down well and would be more in line with my legalisation agenda, which judging by the dressing room needed some support.

'Hashish is a deadly poison against which no effective antidote has ever been discovered. Users suffer from two serious medical conditions: (1) Acute hashishism and (2) Chronic hashishism....'

I pulled out the hashish spliff from my top pocket, lit it, and smoked it until nothing but ash remained. The crowd went wild. Leroy and the Pavilion's own security looked around anxiously. I put a red Fez on my head.

'The chronic hashish user eventually becomes hysterical, neurasthenic, and completely insane. Hashish is beyond any doubt the principal cause of insanity occurring in Egypt.'

To rapturous applause, I sat down for the question and answer session, which always started with the same questions:

'What's the strongest dope you have ever smoked?'

'Nepalese hash from a place called Mustang.'

'Do you have any regrets?'

'No.'

'Who was your best shag?'

'Your mother.'

'What is your favourite method of hiding cannabis?'

'In a container.'

'What are your favourite munchies?'

'Sugar Puffs.'

'Which is the easiest skunk to grow: White Widow, Purple Haze, or Jack Herrer?'

'I don't know; I'm not a gardener. I just deal with the finished product.'

Then some peculiarly local questions:

'What do you think of today's performance by the Welsh rugby team?'

'Complete shite. If they wanted to score, they should have given me a call.'

'If Wales was independent, would there be a better chance for us to legalise marijuana?'

'Absolutely. Tom Jones has already sung our new anthem: "Green, Green Grass of Home."'

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