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Opening extract from **Concentr8**

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is supposed to affect up to 10 per cent of young children (mainly boys). The 'disorder' is characterised by poor school performance and an inability to concentrate in class or to be controlled by parents, and is supposed to be a consequence of disorderly brain function...The prescribed treatment is an amphetamine-like drug called Ritalin. There is an increasing world-wide epidemic of Ritalin use. Untreated children are said to be likely to be more at risk of becoming criminals.

Steven Rose, *The 21st Century Brain*

TROY

You want to know how I got famous? This is how.

Weren't proper famous. Didn't last more than a few days. Weren't popular famous neither. I mean most famous is we-love-you famous or you-done-something-good famous – this was the opposite. For a few days me and Blaze and the others was the official scumbags of the universe. But what I'm saying is – we ain't. We ain't and we weren't.

Taking a guy off the street and tying him to a radiator and keeping him sounds psycho but if you knew me – if you knew my whole life what happened up to that day – you'd get it. I mean you probably still wouldn't like me – so what that don't mean nothing anyway – but you'd know I ain't a nutter or evil or any of that other stuff what they said about me.

Don't nobody want to see it that way though. Not now. Listen it started when London was totally flipped – I mean the whole city had just gone mental – lost it – and I'm not saying I knew what was going to happen but when things

did kick off I weren't surprised. It was the way the madness got so big so fast – the way everyone took it up – the way the police seemed to give in and leave us to it that's what was so wild. It's like suddenly anything was allowed literally anything – stuff you can't even imagine till it's right there in front of you. Stealing burning smashing places up and that's just the start – cause when you actually see looting with your own eyes it's hard to believe – it's insane sort of like all the shops are open and everything's free and people are just losing their minds – running in taking whatever they can carry and running out again with a look on their face that says *this can't be happening but it is!*

When they took away Concentr8 they must have known it was like shaking up a Coke can and flipping the ring pull – they knew it but they didn't care and blaming us for what we did is like blaming the Coke for squirting you in the face. They made it happen so there ain't no excuse for them acting all surprised.

In those last few normal days we all knew something was different like when the air goes thick before a storm. You could feel it everywhere. On the estate – in the streets – just looking in the eyes of other kids there was a crackle like everyone knew all it would take was one spark to set the whole place on fire.

I missed the beginning but people are saying now it's the kids what started it – going mad for Concentr8 – but then on the second night all them other people angry about all them other things joined in and it just rolled on – got bigger and bigger till it felt like it was everyone out there on the streets howling it out like wild dogs – letting rip – everything bursting out just a river of anger flooding from everywhere so nothing could stop it. Funny thing is when

anger comes out – when it's been boxed up and boxed up then it explodes – it feels like a happy thing like a celebration like a party – don't know why it just does. It's like anger and the opposite of anger mixed together out there on the streets tearing it up – half party half war.

If you opened all the doors on all the cages at London Zoo you'd get the exact same thing – playtime for the animals and everyone else shitting bricks. It'd be the zookeepers that'd get eaten first – ain't that the truth.

There was one moment – and this is later after what I'm trying to tell you about – one moment when me and Blaze was walking along and it was early evening. Things was just getting going and we had our ballys round our necks – not up yet but ready for when things started – and there was this guy sitting in a restaurant eating a meal. He saw us walking past and he looked at us the way people like that always do – with a sneer kind of disgust on his face like just our clothes and the way we walk makes us scum. I don't go out of my yard much – ain't safe – but if we do we get that look all the time and we're used to it so I didn't even notice anything unusual. Blaze is different though. He saw that look just like I did – but he knew the feds was busy – knew everything was going crazy and there was no rules no more – all that shit was on pause – and he lifted a foot and kicked the window in. Just like that. Karate style with his heel. The glass shattered and fell everywhere on the floor on to the guy's table on to his plate and over his lap and you should have seen the look on his face. Like he couldn't believe what just happened – like he thought he was about to die – like one minute he's watching a war movie on TV then suddenly the TV explodes and guys burst out firing real guns at him.

It was beautiful. He felt so safe behind that glass then suddenly quick as it takes to flick off a light he realised that anything could happen to him – that he weren't in a different world looking down on us from miles up – we was right there in front of him in the same place and if we wanted to we could jump through the broken window and do anything. I swear one minute he's the big man in a suit eating his fancy meal then the next second he's like a naked baby quivering totally helpless not a clue in his head what's going to happen to him – more scared than you ever seen anyone.

For a second we looked at each other through the jaggedy hole – all three stuck in position by the madness of what just happened. I stood there feeling the buzz – a waft of chilled restaurant air brushing my hot cheeks – then we just laughed and walked off leaving that guy in front of his glass-covered meal probably sitting in a puddle of his own piss. The look on his face – funniest thing I ever seen.

It was Blaze that told me it was starting – Blaze that messaged me to get off my arse and come taste the magic. I go round his place and I thought he'd be pumped like me but he's well calm – chilling in his room. It's even hotter in there than outside – the air sweet and thick with smoke and heavy like every mouthful has been breathed over and over. He fills me in – tells me he was out the night before when things flipped and how gangs of kids squared off to the feds chucking stuff on and on half the night and how he thought that was it – but now it's all going off again but bigger much bigger and I got to see it. It's wild and beautiful he says. Them's the words he uses. Wild and beautiful.

He reminds me to be careful to keep my bally up to stay away from cameras to avoid anywhere I might be cornered. No dead-end streets no shops without a back door. He asks

me what I want. Trainers? Phones? He says it with a smirk like he's taking the piss and I feel like any answer will sound stupid so I just bounce the question back at him. That's when he tells me he got a plan – says he's going to do something big and asks me if I want to join him.

When Blaze asks you a question like that it ain't really a question. You can't say no – nobody says no to Blaze. Not cause we're scared of him – at least I ain't – but because you just want to go where he goes and do what he does. The alternative is to be in the wrong place away from the action. Ain't no option but to go along for the ride. I don't even say nothing but he knows I'm in.

When we set off from Blaze's flat it ain't even dark yet but there's already people streaming back into the estate carrying armfuls of stuff. There's one guy has a stack of Foot Locker shoeboxes up to his chin and he's trying to run but he can't. He drops one but don't even stop for it. We call after him but he just says we can have them.

We have a look but they're the wrong size and a shit brand so we head on. There's people with heaps of clothes still on hangers. There's a lady with three huge boxes of washing powder. There's others hauling wheelie bins filled with god knows what but so heavy it takes two to pull – all surging in on a hot wind funnelling through the towers almost like off a hand dryer. A bloke goes past with three plastic bags in each hand stuffed with fags – all wild eyes and a massive grin like he can't believe his luck.

I want to run before everything goes. I can't believe we're only a bit late and already it feels like all the good stuff might have gone – but Blaze don't even quicken his step so I stay with him cause it's Blaze – and fact is me and him is always side by side. Now more than any other day I don't want to

lose him. Ain't saying I need him – just saying we're a team stronger together cause some places whoever you is you ain't safe on your own.

Blaze must have been messaging the others cause there's six of us all together by the time we walk out into the unbelievable mayhem on the high street – into the drifting smoke – into the non-stop wail of more sirens than you can count – alarms ringing everywhere – breaking glass – surges of shouting and cheering as something catches fire or smashes or as a new shutter gets lifted. Just the minute you smell it and hear it you know you ain't never felt proper chaos till now. Gives you a tingle as you walk into it – like some incredible movie coming alive all around you in 3D and you're actually in it – able to pick stuff up and touch and throw and run. It's like all your life you know what's fantasy and what's solid then suddenly you find yourself in a place where the two are mashed up together and you don't know what's what – cause however much you stare and blink this kind of shit just don't seem real.

I seen end-of-the-world stuff on DVD hundreds of times. Every other movie you see ends with something like this. But now I know they got it wrong every single time cause I ain't never heard no sound like this – ain't never heard nothing so wild what kicks you in the stomach with some weird kind of terror that you got to run towards not away from. It's huge it swallows you up this sound of every single person out on the street knowing there ain't no police no fear no consequences and you can do anything.

Never even realised half the things you ain't allowed to do till I saw what it looks like when suddenly everyone can do whatever they want. It's something you got to see to

believe and I swear if you die without ever living it that's almost as bad as dying a virgin.

So the six of us walk along – feeling it swimming in it with our eyes bulging out at the craziness everywhere. No cars just people on the streets with ballys up covering their faces and even though it's insane everyone seems to know where they're going. People are running. People are carrying piles of stuff from the shops – pushing whole TVs around in supermarket trolleys – just staggering with bags and bags of shit from everywhere with spaced-out drugged-up eyes as if looting is the biggest high they ever had.

It looks like Foot Locker's the first place everyone's gone for. The shutter's twisted up bent to one side and inside it's been picked bare – you can see the last people coming out all disappointed cause there ain't nothing left.

Next door five blokes are trying to take out a cash machine. A few doors down from that there's a swarm of people heaving at a metal grille over the door of Currys. They're going at it with crowbars and hammers and bricks and even a plank of wood. One guy's shouting at everyone trying to get them organised to work together but half the people are ignoring him just trying to batter it in. Three guys together are dropping a paving stone again and again on to the padlock. There's a cheer as it snaps. The shutter goes up and the doors give way a few seconds later. Like water down the plughole people flood in pushing against each other – elbows and fists everywhere. It gets a bit nasty when people start running out with boxes of TVs and laptops and printers while more people are trying to fight their way in. A woman gets knocked over and a few people coming out just tread on her – maybe cause they can't see over what they're carrying or maybe because they don't give a shit. Someone

pulls the woman off the ground and punches a guy that trod on her and a fight starts but most people just ignore the fight and go round it – in and out of the shop.

Blaze ain't moved. He stares just calm like normal – no excitement no panic nothing – cold hard eyes watching everything but his whole body totally still – not even a flicker – and cause he ain't going in none of us do it either.

Eventually Karen says *what are we waiting for?*

So quiet you can hardly even hear it over all the noise Blaze just says *go if you want.*

Nobody moves.

Look at this shit says Femi. *There's everything!*

Go ahead says Blaze.

Femi looks at Karen and she looks back at him but they don't leave.

If we stay here everything'll be gone. Are we going to just watch everyone else get it all? says Jay.

I ain't a thief says Blaze. I don't know why he says that cause he is – I mean not often but we all done it sometimes. Ain't easy to contradict Blaze though so I know nobody's going to say *yes you is.*

They steal from us! says Jay.

Who does?

It's a weird conversation because we're all standing in a line not looking at each other just staring straight ahead watching a huge shop being emptied out by swarms of people. The look of disbelief on their faces as they come out carrying armfuls of stuff is almost hilarious but also not. It's like there's the beginnings of a quicksand sucking underfoot and I feel myself wondering for the first time how far this can be pushed because beyond a certain point chaos might not be so cool. If it becomes OK for anyone to

rob anything pretty soon no one's safe. After the shops are empty what's going to be next? Houses? Council flats? Kids on the street?

All of them! says Jay. *They're all at it. The feds the politicians the bankers they're all crooks and they just get away with it so why shouldn't we?*

Suit yourself says Blaze.

Sort of reluctant but too proud to back off Jay walks towards Currys. He has to stop for two guys who are carrying a washing machine. *You coming or what?* he says.

I can feel that Karen and Femi want to go with him. They both look at Blaze but Blaze just walks off down the road. I follow him. Been still so long I got to unquench my trainers from the hot tarmac. After a moment Karen and Femi and Lee are with us. I turn and watch Jay disappear into the swirl of people funnelling through the shop door.

Last moment I see him pops out at me like a flash photo cause I get the feeling it's a fork in the road and now his life's going one way mine another. Don't know why I just feel it. And turns out I'm right but not in the way I thought cause it ain't him that's walking off the edge of a cliff it's me.

There's fires up ahead and everything's getting louder busier angrier. We're walking right towards the middle of it all – towards the boom boom boom from a corner that's filled with feds wearing helmets and banging their shields – looking like the last stand of some army that knows it's finished.

A building's almost disappeared inside flames which are roaring and snapping out the windows and up the roof – lighting everyone's faces orange. I can feel the heat halfway down the street. The noise of it is a growl you can feel in your chest and there's also what sounds like a shootout from

inside as things crack and shatter and fall. There's fire engines lined up behind the police but they can't get to it. Feels like it ain't going to be long before the whole thing comes down.

I look at Blaze and he ain't smiling or frowning or nothing. The fire's awesome - a hundred times bigger than any fire I seen before. Huge orange swirls are billowing out and the smoke looks like some kind of dark flood shoving upwards into the sky. I always thought smoke wafted and drifted but this stuff's different it's thick and heavy and you can see that one lungful would kill you. There's no way anyone left in there is coming out alive.

Everyone knows the whole city burnt down once hundreds of years ago but that always felt like almost a fairy story till now. Now I can imagine it. This whole building's just gone and it's hard to see what could stop it taking the next one along and the next one after that.

People are chucking bricks and traffic cones and bits of glass and anything they can find towards the feds. There's a skip by the side of the road. Two guys are inside it passing stuff out and it's all getting chucked over the empty strip of road in front of the fire towards the feds. Nobody seems angry. It feels more like a laugh like the wildest party there's ever been.

Part of me is twitching to run up and throw stuff. We all been stopped and searched so many times - treated like scum by feds who's just looking for any opportunity to screw us over - and the idea of chucking a brick that might get one of them is beautiful. They get off on reminding us we're nothing. It's obvious in the way they look at us and talk to us and mess us around even when they know we ain't doing nothing bad. So why wouldn't we get off on letting them know they're wrong - letting them know

we're here and we ain't nothing and we can fight back? If someone's bullying you and there's nothing you can do to stop them you dream of hurting them back and of doing all the things you can't in reality. You just do. And now the dream is alive and there's rows of them cowering and there's hundreds of us and we're winning – man it's one of the sweetest things I ever seen. Concentr8 was just the start. The dam's broke and now everyone's angry about everything – I mean the anger ain't new it's letting it out that's new. Don't got words to describe it cause it's vicious and brutal but also innocent like a kid what lets out every feeling without even meaning to.

The whole thing is like heaven and hell rolled into one and I just stand on the spot turning round and round taking it all in – no clue what to think or say or do. All of us got that same look on our face except Blaze. Blaze got a plan.

I soak it up a while longer until Blaze says *follow me* and we all do because you just do when it's Blaze.

We turn down a side street and five minutes further on everything's normal again. You can hear it – you'd have to be deaf not to know total mayhem was everywhere – and you can smell the plasticky smoke what pinches the back of your nose – but where we are now is all quiet and empty and ordinary. The only weird thing is that it's too empty – there's no cars or even people. Here it's almost as if the city's gone to sleep even though the sun's still up. It's kind of eerie – me and Blaze and Karen and Femi and Lee walking down the middle of the street as if we got the whole city to ourselves.

Lee's got a metal rod in his hand – something out of that skip. He goes up to a parked car – a Merc – and smashes the side windows. He tries not to smile but you can see he enjoys

it. Nobody says anything and we just carry on walking. I want a go but I'm too embarrassed to ask.

We don't stop walking till we get to the river which is just the usual sludgy brown road of cold tea rolling on like normal like it don't make no difference everything around it has gone mad. All that water tons and tons of it always moving it's amazing when you look close. Even though it's the shittiest water you ever seen it's still beautiful just the power of it.

Don't hardly ever come up this far – ain't safe. I'm wondering why Blaze has brought us here until I notice that unlike the rest of us he ain't looking out at the water. He's facing the other way looking up at that big glass bollock where they run the city from – don't even know the name of it but it's where the mayor works.

Streets ain't so empty round here. There's a few people like us who are out to see what's going on – some others who look like they're going home from work – and even a few people wandering up and down like it's any normal evening and they're off to the cinema or a restaurant or whatever it is people like that do. It's a weird mix with only the muffled wail of a hundred sirens down near our yard giving away what's really going on.

Blaze stares up at that building. He got a look in his eye like an animal that's found its prey.

What's going on? says Femi eventually.

Are you with me or not? says Blaze.

Yeab says Femi shrugging like he don't know if Blaze is taking the piss or what.

All the way?

All the way. Ain't convincing the way he says it but Blaze don't seem to mind.

He turns to me. Fixes me with them icicle eyes. *All the way Troy?*

I don't know what Blaze is talking about but it's not like my thoughts even flicker to any other answer. *All the way man.*

All the way? he says again. This time to Karen.

She don't hesitate but she don't say nothing either she just steps forward and kisses him on the mouth deep and long and so hot I actually go a bit hard just watching. Karen's his girlfriend and she's the finest girl on the estate or any other estate in fact. She got blue eyes and dark skin and a single diamond stud the size of a pinhead in her nose and a mouth that's somehow angry and sexy and aloof and cool all at once. She never smiles but in a weird way it also looks like she's never not smiling. There's a little curl at the edges like she knows something you don't. Nobody has any idea how she paid for the diamond or even if it really is a diamond but I don't care. If I could kiss that mouth just one time I'd be ready to die.

She don't like me not as in don't *like* me but as in actually hates me but that's another story. It's Blaze that breaks it off and pulls away from her. I don't know how he does but he does and he turns to Lee.

All the way?

All the way blud says Lee.

He don't ask us to follow but when he turns and walks away we all do. He strolls towards the entrance of the glass bollock then when a man comes out – a slouchy half-bald bloke with a suit that don't fit right and a grey briefcase – Blaze swerves and changes course. We go with him and now it seems like we're all following this guy.

When we're round the corner – in a narrow street that leads to the main road – Blaze calls out to him. *WHERE YOU GOING?*

The guy stops and turns. You can see the whole calculation on his face. Run away or talk my way out of it? Play it cool or spring before it gets any worse? He knows we're bad news and he's right. It takes him less than half a second to realise that whatever it is we got in mind for him can't be run away from. Not a lardy old guy like him up against us – he wouldn't get more than a few steps.

Home he says almost casual but with a crack in his voice that shows he's bricking it.

You work for the mayor? says Blaze.

Another telltale pause. More cogs whirring in the guy's head. *No.*

We saw you coming out. You're wearing an ID badge.

Like an idiot the guy pulls the ID badge off and hides it in his pocket. *I'm in the housing department. I've got nothing to do with the mayor. I've never even met him.*

I didn't say you had says Blaze.

Lee slaps his metal bar into the palm of his hand.

What do you want? he says. *You want my phone? Take it. Have it.*

He hands his phone to Blaze. Blaze takes it glances at it drops it on the floor and stands on it. There's a little scrape and a crack as it crushes under his twisting heel. *I don't want your shit phone.*

Karen and Lee crack up. The guy's eyes are flicking everywhere – he knows he's trapped.

What do you want?

Blaze stares at him not speaking. He sucks his teeth making a sinister wet squeak like a mouse being strangled. *That's what I'm trying to decide* says Blaze but you can tell he's only messing with the guy drawing out his terror.

Well I wish I could stay and help out but I really have to get home.

The guy turns and tries to walk away but he don't get more than one step before Blaze grabs him from behind with an arm around the neck. The muscles on Blaze's arms stand out like the twists in a rope. He ain't much older than me but he got the body of a man already with a thick fuzz on his top lip and he's taller than the guy by a head at least.

I think what I want is for you to listen. You and everyone else. Blaze's voice is quiet and deep and slow like always. He never shouts but now there's steel in it.

The guy's face is ketchup red. It don't look like he can breathe. If this was a cartoon there'd be smoke coming out his ears. After a while Blaze slackens his hold and he coughs air back into his lungs.

I'm listening! says the guy eventually. *I'm listening!*

That ain't what I got in mind says Blaze, and at the same moment the briefcase falls on to the tarmac. It don't even look like he dropped it on purpose. Something in him has given up and his muscles have gone limp.

Can you feel this? says Blaze.

Yes! says the man almost shrieking it. His eyes are rolling in their sockets with red jags popping up like he's stoned but it ain't that it's something else completely. I don't know what the two of them's talking about.

Can you feel THIS?

The guy yelps and his torso jolts – twisting lurching but not getting out of Blaze's grip. Now he's moved I see that Blaze has a shank pressed into his back.

I glance up. Lee's licking his lips nervous afraid looking same as me like he had no idea this was going to happen. Karen's eyes are wide too and she's half smiling but I have no idea what that means. Femi's got a face like he just pissed himself. I don't reckon anyone was in on this.

Careful I say. *There's cameras.*

Blaze looks up scanning for CCTV and there's a moment when it's like we're dreaming or floating cause time just does this hover – I swear it feels as if the whole city's gone quiet waiting for Blaze to decide what to do next.

It's Karen what ends it snapping *Get him! Just get him!* She got the weirdest look in her eye like she forgot everything just gone off the edge wild and animal. It's like everything's been stripped away and just for a flash this is the real her – the pure naked Karen and I swear it's vicious.

But all this everything what's happened up to now it ain't nothing – ain't even half a step away from normal life compared to what happens next. Takes us all a minute to even understand what he means when Blaze finally speaks up cause what he's saying takes everything to a new level. He don't say it loud – don't say it like it's even anything special – but everyone hears and it's so crazy nobody speaks up or tries to stop him. We all just go along with it.

You're coming with us he says.

Hyperactivity...was first recognised in the mid-nineteenth century by German physician Heinrich Hoffman, who in 1844 wrote a popular collection of nursery rhymes entitled *Der Struwwelpeter*...One of his creations was Fidgety Philip, who causes chaos at the dinner table.

Matthew Smith, *Hyperactive: The Controversial History of ADHD*

FEMI

One minute it's a laugh just scaring the guy, nothing bad nothing actually mental, then next thing you know he's pulled a shank and we're dragging the guy off and I'm thinking *NO ONE ASKED ME!?* I'm thinking *I'M NOT INTO THIS WHAT YOU DOING THIS IS CRAZY BAD*, but I mean it was too late by then weren't it?

That's Blaze, though. I swear it's lethal being around him cause you don't know what you're going to be dragged into, and Mum always says *stay away, stay away from that Blaze* and I know she's right, but it ain't that easy is it? It's like a magnetic force, you get pulled in, don't know how you just do.

I could've walked off. Right then. But nobody said this is your last chance. Nobody said this is your last second to choose to be normal – to go to school and do stuff and be an ordinary person.

He should have told us. Asked us. I mean this weren't no small thing, this was big time, but Blaze don't do that. He don't give you no choice. I mean he asked me if I was in and maybe I did say yes, but it's not like he said what I was in *for* cause if I'd known, it would have been *NO WAY!* It would

have been *NO WAY YOU'RE CRACKED MAN!* And that would have been it. I would have been out of there.

So next thing we're walking with the guy to the bus stop, I mean the BUS STOP!? You can't kidnap someone on a bus, that's just stupid, but I mean the shank's right there and he knows it so he can't do nothing. You can see from his face like he thinks he's two seconds away from death, just one false step and Blaze'll stab him, and I don't reckon he would, I mean Blaze is bad but not that bad. He's too clever. Wouldn't stab nobody out in the open, I mean that's basically suicide ain't it? But the guy, he don't know that.

Shank's in Blaze's pocket and we're all around the guy all the way to the bus stop. Can't get over it man, I mean if that was the plan it's insane, but the guy's like all limp and he knows he can't run away so what can he do?

You can see him pleading with his eyes, staring at people walking past just begging them to help him but nobody's looking, and even if they were they wouldn't care or wouldn't step in, cause nobody wants to mess with our sort. Ain't worth it. Everyone knows that, even if you only been in the city five minutes.

Bus comes and we get on. All of us. I swear it's the maddest thing.

I could've run off then. Easy. Could've just not got on the bus, walked away, whatever. I mean that's what I should've done, I ain't stupid. But it's hard to describe that feeling, it's like you're on rails or something, cause it was all of us, it weren't like I was thinking for just me. We was a unit and I mean I weren't in control, I was only a passenger. Blaze had it all laid out in advance or he seemed to anyway, and when he's decided what's going to happen, that's what happens. Ain't nothing you can do to stop it. I didn't have the power

to change anything. I swear he can make you do stuff you couldn't even think of, wouldn't do in a million years if it was just you on your own.

Sometimes I feel almost like the buzz for him ain't that he even wants to do it – whatever it is – it's that he wants to see how far he can push us. Wants to feel what he can make other people do. And the more we're doing what we don't like, the more he's feeling his power, swimming in it, just basking in how he's got us where he wants us.

Mum was right with that *stay away from Blaze*, she was more right than she ever could've known.

Blaze and Troy they got something dead in them, something cold won't never be warmed up by nothing. Can't even imagine them ever living in a normal flat, having a normal job just being normal. I'm different, I ain't like that. Shouldn't have got mixed up with them, cause I ain't got the stomach for that life, ain't got the balls. And I ain't got the smarts to bail out when I ought to, neither.

Didn't even know where that bus was taking us. Should've asked. Should've just got out and walked home. Wouldn't have even had to say anything, not a word. Could've just walked. Been over it hundreds of times in my head and that's the craziest thing – all them minutes ticking by slow as you like, and me just sitting there on that bus letting Blaze take me off into his madness – take me out of the life I had up to that day, into some other place that weren't never meant for a kid like me.

I don't even got the excuse that it happened too fast – that I didn't have time to think about what I was doing – cause I did. I had all that time on the bus and I didn't do nothing with it, so I suppose you could say I deserve everything what happened to me.

So eventually we get out of the bus and we gone miles. It's Hackney or something, I don't know. The bus empties everyone out before the high street because apparently things are kicking off round here too. Blaze acts like he knows where we are, and leads on without looking worried or confused or nothing. He don't let the guy further away than the length of his arm. Just stays ready to grab him at any moment. Or stab him. Whatever.

The guy stumbles around like some zombie, his skin weird and tight around his eyes and his neck so rigid it's like his spine has turned to metal. His face goes white then red when Blaze drags him over to a cash machine. Don't know when it happened, but looks like Blaze's already got his wallet. Asks the guy for his PIN and he just starts begging *please don't do this please*, then stupid shit like *I'll give it to you if you let me go. Will you let me go when I tell you?* But Blaze don't even respond and eventually he gives the number.

Types it in. Nothing.

You can see the guy's eyes spiralling everywhere, trying to think of a way out, trying to think of how he can run for it, but he can't, there's no way. We got him. There's people around and he could just scream and lash out but he knows that would be a risk, a big risk with the shank so close and Blaze so cold. He's working on it though, trying to calculate his options, then you can see his head goes limp and drops when he decides it ain't worth it, and all slow like his mouth is filled with sand or something, the four numbers come out.

Types them in. Hundred quid. Just like that. The five neatest flattest notes you ever seen.

Pulls out the card and pushes it right back in. Types in them magic numbers. Hundred more! Man it's so crazy we ain't never done nothing like this, and worse than ever I just

want to get out, but there's a pull now cause I got to see what we do with all that money. I mean it's ours now, a whole fat stack of it to do whatever we want.

Blaze puts the numbers in again but this time no dice. It's maxed out at two hundred and none of us ever seen that much cash in one place. It's like wings I swear, lifts us up and carries us down the street.

Blaze gives twenty to Troy to go get some chips and stuff, then gives me twenty and don't say nothing just points to a sweet shop.

Walk in and start piling stuff up on the counter and the guy watches me every second, don't move his eyes off me for a moment, and there's chocolate and sweets and crisps and everything, and when I hand over that crisp perfect twenty you can see for a moment he don't even want to take it. He knows it ain't really mine. But ain't no difference between me and him, because he takes it right enough. Rings up the stuff and it's sixteen something so I keep piling on more until it's right up to £19.73.

He bags it and passes me the change real slow and reluctant like he's too good to do nothing for a little shit like me. Holds it out with his arm half bent so I got to reach out to take it. I let it hang there, don't take the money and tell him to put it in the charity so he knows I ain't cheap. I wait and watch till he puts it in, like I think he might nick it, so he knows what it feels like cause that's what he's been thinking of me all along.

By the time I'm back Troy's got two bags of food, Blaze has got bottles of White Ace and WKD, and I've got the snacks so we're well set up for a big night. Don't let the guy go though. I mean I would if it was up to me. What more do we want from him? But Blaze got other plans and he leads

us off away from the sound of sirens and fighting and down weird roads where there ain't even flats or nothing, just fences and garages and warehouses. Then we come to some train tracks and there's a gap in the wire and without even asking if we're up for it he leads us on and over the tracks. And that man is still with us like some puppet at the end of Blaze's arm.

Troy gives me a weird look as we go over the tracks. Like he knows something. Not afraid exactly but kind of resigned. I get a little acid jolt up the back of my throat when I turn back from the other side and see the gap in the fence and think to myself what if I never get back there? What if this is a one-way trip?

I already know I messed up worse than I ever messed up before, but I keep on going don't I? Just follow the others without even thinking for myself and I don't reckon I'll ever be able to explain why.

World's full of mysteries ain't it? Who made the Earth and the animals and what happens after we're dead and all that shit, but biggest mystery of all it's why we do what we do. It's the one thing we ought to know better than anything else, but sometimes you just don't.

Charles Bradley (1902–1979)...prescribed the amphetamine Benzedrine to his patients in an effort to stimulate the replacement of spinal fluid and relieve the children's headaches. The drug did little for the headaches, but teachers at Bradley Home observed that it seemed to improve the ability of patients to learn and behave at school. After testing the drug further, Bradley began using it regularly...By 1950 he had used it on 275 children and found that it was effective over 60 per cent of the time.

Matthew Smith, *Hyperactive: The Controversial History of ADHD*

KAREN

It's the weirdest place I ever been? Over the tracks and over this wall and then through a tiny gap in these massive concertina doors, and by the time we go in it's getting dark and you can't hardly see nothing inside. No proper lights or nothing but Troy and Femi they rig up some pissy little lamps like you get on a desk or something and that just makes it worse? Just shadows everywhere? This huge room like a factory or something but empty and dusty and wrecked just full of abandoned shit nobody even wants. Concrete floor and miles of empty metal racks and tyres and bits of cars and small high-up windows made of wrinkly glass that don't even let in no light. The lamps is too bright to look at – they just make this little pool we got to sit in – and behind us and above us there's these huge shadows dancing when we move, so spooky it makes your blood cold I swear.

Me and Blaze we go into a little room where you can't hardly see nothing. He tells me to watch the guy and he takes

out his shank, and my heart starts going crazy fast cause I don't want that, I mean that's just evil, but he puts it in his mouth and climbs up to a window where there's a big slatty blind? Takes the shank out his mouth and cuts the cord. There's a massive SSSHHHHHHHHHHHHHK as the blind slices down, makes my whole body shudder so hard I nearly lift off the ground cause it's like the sound of an axe or something. The guy's eyes are almost popping out his head now, he's just so losing it.

Blaze tests the cord and it looks thin but strong. He gets another one from the next window and shoves the guy down next to a radiator and ties him up. They don't say nothing. Neither of them. I just want to get out of there, cause I don't know what's going on now, I'm kind of freaking?

Back in the big room they're all sitting on the floor eating and me and Blaze get some and then we're drinking and it ain't long before we almost forget there's a guy tied up next door.

We done all-nighters in weird places before. Just around on night buses or in parks, I mean it's a laugh. Ain't scary or nothing cause it's us everyone's scared of. I swear, wherever we go if it's late enough people just run off, leave us to it? But this is different and maybe that's why we just stay up cause sleeping here, that's too weird.

Don't nobody know the way back except Blaze, so there ain't no option of bailing and anyway, once we all been drinking and Blaze has put on some music from his phone and we got some food inside us I don't reckon anyone wants to go anyway, cause the feeling that's making us scared flips over, and on the other side there's this kind of crazy laughing dancing shouting not caring about nothing vibe that sort of wipes out all the spookiness and makes it feel like a party,

like the most secret exclusive weirdest party you've ever been invited to, like this ain't never going to be repeated and it's almost magic that you got to be there. Like years later people's going to be saying *d'you hear about that amazing night when blab blab blab* and you's the one's going to be able to stand up and say *yeah – I was there*.

I mean the days can all just end up being the same can't they? Monday Tuesday Wednesday on and on always the same. Then there's something like this and it's like, BOOM! So why would you walk away? From that? Cause now minute to minute we don't know nothing about what's going to happen next, and walking away, I mean that's like saying you'd rather be dead than alive ain't it? Maybe you'd've done different, but maybe you wouldn't, cause you can't know till you're in it.

No idea what time it is, but eventually when there's nothing left to drink and it's proper late everyone just flattens some boxes to put over the concrete and flops out. Blaze whispers he's got a place for us and he leads me by the hand to this rusty metal staircase in the corner takes us up to like a balcony or something? Looks down over the whole place? And off the balcony there's like an office, and we go in, and it ain't half so wrecked as everywhere else, and there's even a sofa and Blaze lifts me – lifts me like I don't weigh nothing – and sits me on the desk and I'm about to say that I'm freaking that this is just too weird but then he's got his arms round me and I'm folded into him and he's kissing my neck and half the words don't even come out of my mouth right cause I don't know it's like I'm melting. My whole body just melting into him cause he's just raw and strong and when he wants you there ain't nothing you can do to stop yourself giving in to the power of it. Nothing.