

MUGDOON'S AMAZING LECTURE ON ALCOHOL

By Latif Gardez [copyright 2012]

Time is like a cigar burning down to the butt.

When you take a pull on it and the end glows red, those are the good times. The rest of the time it just smoulders away until finally it goes out. And that's the end.

It was about eight in the morning. He opened his eyes and shook the leaves off. Slowly he managed to bend upright; it almost rained.

He could hear this breathing, like a bear with a peg on its nose. Blinked to get rid of a copy of the Times he'd been sleeping under. That sound, that was Mugdoon.

"Wake up ya sod!" He whispered as close as he dared.

Mugdoon grunted out a noise like when you stick your fist down a lion's throat. "Bugger off! I'm late-sleeping!" He flicked Mugdoon's ear making him shake his head and a cigarette fell out of his hair; the Doon's secret snout stash. Mugdoon had a strange and unreadable background. Some said he was a Zulu, who had an Irish mother. Others said he'd been left to drift off the coast of Tangier when he was five years old and that he'd bounced off ten sharks to get to an island, where he learned to speak Arabic and managed to hook a ship to Morocco, where he became a ten year old Fakir, keeping his own snakes.

Spud edged away slightly, pulled out a book of matches and got his butt going.

"That's three ya owe me now!" Growled Mugdoon without turning round. The Doon never missed a trick. It was as if his hair, like a coral reef, picked up on everything going on around him when he was sleeping, pulling in bits of information. Mugdoon had a pronounced Irish accent and a face the colour of a coal bunker at midnight with the door shut.

"I'll pay ya back..." Spud said as he puffed away in the cold morning air of Hyde Park. The Doon just kept snoring, shaking the birds from the trees. Spud looked around, taking in the day. It all seemed dull grey and now the rain had started for real, he backed further under the cover of the big oak. The cigarette tasted good, but odd. He had never managed to learn where the Doon got his smokes from but he always had them. There was never a packet, they were just stuck into his tightly curling mane of hair, which was full of droplet sized silver charms, along with two pencils and a dried-out glow worm. Despite the fact it was pissing nails, Spud felt hot under his Merchant Navy coat – but there was no taking it off. "What the fuck are you up to, sod fer brains?" Grunted the Doon. Spud still jumped at that sound.

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Mugdoon had found him one night in King's Cross as he was being roughed up and searched by two coppers, who were looking for drugs. The Doon picked up one cop and threw him across the street and the other one ran off, with the Doon shouting after him, not to harass drinking-folk. Then he turned to Spud and said. "Don't worry shit-head I won't rape ya!"

Mugdoon picked him up, put him over his shoulder and walked off. Spud couldn't remember much, being doped-up and drunk at the time but the journey seemed to go on forever. After he came round, he asked Mugdoon to put him down so he could walk. They wandered along in silence together for a while, Spud thinking what a great minder this guy would be. He could run a real high-class deal with someone like that in tow. As he turned this over in his mind, he was going through his pockets, trying to find the cash and drugs he had stashed earlier, the cops hadn't done a full search before it all kicked off.

Suddenly he stopped. There was no cash, no drugs, nothing!

"Hey man, what the fuck have you done with my stash? And where's my money?" He shouted in his broken adolescent voice, trying to sound threatening, like he did with the other dealers in the Cross.

"I threw'm away" The Doon said, matter of factly. Spud's mind exploded into panic. "What...you did what?" His hands scrambled all over his body like crazed spiders, but the only thing he came up with was his flick-knife, tucked down his boot. Angrily he pulled it out, switching it open. "You crazy fuck! Come on, gimmie! Or I'll fuck you up man!" Mugdoon's face didn't change at all, he just walked forward, grabbed the knife, broke it in two, and threw it over a wall.

Spud blinked. Now on the back foot he didn't know what to do, so he pleaded. "Oh please man, at least gimmie the drugs back, I'm gonna be sick!" He whined, almost tearfully. Mugdoon's expression didn't change.

"I told ya, I threw them away, that shits no good for ya, and dat's dat!" His voice vibrated through Spud's whole body. "I'm gonna be sick man! Don't you get it?" Spud pleaded. Mugdoon just started walking. "I'll look after you" He said causally.

Spud trailed behind already feeling tired and ill, not knowing where he was or where they were going. "Where the fuck are we? I mean why did you bother helping me...?" He groaned. The Doon looked at him. "I don't like coppers picking on little kids like you...we're going back to my place"

Spud pulled up his collar and backed further under the tree. That's how it had been. He still didn't know why the Doon had helped him that night, but he'd kept to his word, he hadn't tried to mess about with him and in his own way he had cared for him. Spud had gone through three days of total hell coming off gear, but all the time the Doon had been

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there, keeping him warm, looking after him, feeding him, clearing up the sick and the shit – just like a real father. He had wondered sometimes if Mugdoon had had a son of his own, and maybe lost him and that was why he looked after Spud. The rain got heavier and the sky darker. Time, that was something else that had changed whilst he'd been with the Doon. He couldn't remember all the places they'd been, all the countries – Times, hid away in some truck and then awakening in the South of France, and the Doon saying. "The places I'm looking for is about two miles down the road..."

Spud thought they'd been travelling together for over one year but less than three, although he couldn't say for sure. Time just didn't mean...anything, not to the Doon. There were moments when he felt like a little kid, waiting for his dad to come home. Mugdoon would tell him to lie under a hedge, in the middle of the French countryside and wait for him. So he would lie there and wait, like it was his real father he was waiting on; someone he'd never known. Hours later the Doon would suddenly appear, always surprising him, and he'd have wine and cheese, and meats and country cider, and they'd move off somewhere quiet and make a fire; then the feast would begin.

Now they were back in England and it was cold and wet and he hated creeping into parks, late at night, waiting for the Doon to show up with some food and booze. Spud was still too young to go into pubs in this country. In Spain or France they didn't give a damn. He flicked the butt of his cigarette into the undergrowth and shivered.

"Doon what are we gonna do about breakfast?" He asked.

Mugdoon pulled himself out from under the bush he'd been sleeping in all night and shook out his mighty head of hair, which reached his shoulders. In one snake-bite of movement he was under the tree, next to Spud. Without saying a word he handed Spud a cigarette which he pulled out of his hair, along with one for himself.

"What's going to happen Doon?" Spud asked as he lit up. Spud watched him side on. The Doon just sat there with smoke curling up past his thick, black, eyebrows.

"I'll be going to Spain" He said flatly. Spud cheered up and smiled at the thought of the warm weather, the dark wine, and the warm girls.

"So when do we leave?" He asked. Mugdoon's left eye twitched, just a little. "We don't leave...I'm going on me own and dats dat!" He said, his eye still twitching.

Spud was stunned. "What, you're going to leave me here...why?" He said, his eyes filling with tears "...it's something I've done, my attitude...I'll change...!" Mugdoon reached over putting his arm around the boys shoulder. "It's not that boy, yer old enough now...six'n ten years and ya don't want to be hanging around the like of me...it's time you made your own

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way...it's Time..." And for the first time ever he saw the Doon hesitate. "ya don't need an ould sod like me ta knock about with and dat's the end of it!" He said emphatically.

Mugdoon reached into one of his pockets and pulled out a wad of notes.

"Here take this to start you off, there's about three hundred there – you'll be needing this stuff in London" He said folding it gently into Spud's hand, feeling the boy's tears, hot on his palm.

For a while they just sat there not talking, then slowly Spud got up and walked off into the rain. He stopped and looked back but there was no one there; The Doon had gone.

THE END

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