

Shark

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One

I lay out the first line of the evening on the toilet lid. Good that it's black, so I can see the white powder better. I roll a banknote into a tube. I shove it into my nose and suck the stuff in. For a moment I lean against the cubicle wall. My eyes burst open and my head implodes. Hastily I lay out a second line, because I don't feel like bribing the toilet attendant again anytime soon. Once I've consumed the coke, I lick the last grains from my banknote and run the tip of my tongue over my gums, because that's what they do in films. All it actually does is leave my mouth annoyingly numb. It feels like I've just been to the dentist. But I'm not bothered by that. I'm not bothered by anything. I flush the toilet and open the door. Time to conquer the nightlife. There are sure to be loads of attractive girls who'll find me interesting and funny and cool, with my wit and repartee. They'll also see that I can hold my drink, so many shots in such a short time.

'Fantastic!' I yell at one of the girls. 'Couldn't be better. Life looks rose-tinted. Everything will be fine. All society's problems will solve themselves. Everyone's going to live together in harmony on a flourishing planet. I believe in the power of human beings. Of change. In the future. In myself. Everything will be fine. Always.' As if I'm a drunk politician blasting out a motivational speech. The girl's only half listening. She does let me buy her a drink. When I hand it to her a few minutes later, I yell at one of my snuff buddies on the other side of the club: 'GOOOOOOO!' The girl thinks I'm talking to her and hurries away. Never mind: enough candidates to whom I can demonstrate that I'm highly entertaining. I down my glass of whisky and cola. Then I bark like a seal: the sliver of lemon sticks in my throat.

Flashback to an hour ago. I'm standing quietly filling up on beer and think: not this evening, no coke for me. Yesterday was a big night. Or should I say the day before yesterday? The evening lasted two days. Or three. But I have good intentions for this evening. Someone walks into me and spills gin and tonic over me. I give him a dirty look, but he's bigger than me – and I'm a metre ninety myself. He also looks like he's straight out the gym. He's wearing a tight, sleeveless T-shirt. I grin and shake his hand. He goes on his way. As I'm watching him, I spot a girl. She looks away and whispers into her friend's ear. The friend looks at me. Then she rolls her eyes. Probably thinking: that's the guy who's stoned every night. And I think: that's right. So I call my dealer and ask him if he'd mind doing a home delivery. The 'delivery' being drugs and 'home' being the club I'm in. Sometimes – when I'm

trying to sound interesting – I talk about Big C, yayo, snow, blow, sugar, Charlie, candy, chisel or a little rescue line. And I'd like to sound interesting most of the time, so I yell into my phone: 'Bring me a truck full of yayo, dude!'

Then I go looking for snuff buddies in the packed club. They inhabit the dancefloor, making involuntary arm movements. I tell them I'm off to stuff my nose full. I'm going to hit the slopes. I'm going hoovering. I feel like throwing snowballs. I also ask if they have cash to buy a bigger stash at a better price.

When my dealer finally arrives, I've rounded up enough for eight grams. He takes the hard little plastic pellets out of the side of his sock and I slip money into his hand. I share out the sugar with my snuff buddies. Of course I stuff the profit into my pocket, as I've taken five euros extra off everyone, so I can snort for free myself. I head to the toilet, bribe the attendant with two euros and lay out my first line of the evening on the toilet lid, a black lid.

As the coke has meanwhile kicked in, I leap to the end of the night. When I'm tripping, I don't necessarily experience what happens chronologically. The time dimensions intertwine, flowing over one another. Since I'm almost always tripping, or about to be tripping, or quitting tripping, or going from one trip to the next, or ripping people off in order to get tripping, events in my life are always jumbled. I can't remember what happened yesterday and what happened today. I also have flashbacks as if I'm experiencing them now.

I'm the kid from a couple of years back who tried XTC for the first time. 'Makes you happy,' said the girl who gave it to me.

I wake up in the street, in the gutter, literally. With my right arm stuck up to the elbow in a drain. The fire service have to come and liberate me. They ask my name and I can't tell them. I no longer know my own name. A fireman looks at the identity card he's pulled out of my pocket. 'Lee Trappeniers?' Yes, that sounds familiar. 'Seventeen?' Seems plausible.

Did that happen yesterday? It might have been a month ago. Past and present tumble over one another. Sometimes I even see my future. I just know how things will work out for me.

I'm sitting on a chair. Or more lying slumped down. A snail trail of saliva dribbles from the corner of my mouth. Or is it puke? From my right nostril: a trickle of blood. The red line totters over my upper lip and drips into my open mouth. My chin rests on my chest, which isn't moving. My breath falters. These are the final seconds of my life. I've already had my final thought. I wish it demonstrated enormous intelligence, summed up the core of life in a single sentence, but it wasn't like that; I just thought: stupid needle. I couldn't fumble it into my arm, my hands trembling and eyes shooting in all directions.

In the same room is someone I don't know. Well, I've known him a couple of hours. I don't know his name. I'm in his studio flat, I assume. It's a place I haven't been before. The room looks like any other junkie's den: sparse furniture and a mountain of rubbish. Clothes, needles, teaspoons, leftovers, knocked over beer cans, a couple of them filled with cigarette butts. The curtains closed, dim light, shitty music, by which I mean actual music about shit: gangster rap and that kind of crap. Add to that broken glass, a mattress on the floor, puke stains on the pillow, a filthy toilet, an empty fridge and generally too many people in a small space. Using is a team sport. Generally. Fortunately today it's just the two of us. I don't want an audience while I'm dying. So the boy without a name is the only one. And even he's not really here. He's lying, eyes closed, beside his mattress. Not that I'm noticing that at this point, as I've breathed my last breath. It'll be six hours before he realises I'm

dead. Meanwhile I'm lying here decomposing. Then he wakes up, grasps at his head, thinks: what happened? and then: have I got any stuff left? Only then does he detect the odour of discharged bodily fluids, notice me and wonder: who's that guy? Until it occurs to him that this stranger looks remarkably pale. 'Yo.' He shakes my leg. No sign of life. 'What are you doing here, mate?' He takes my hand and then ... 'What the fuck! Is that guy ...?' Not long after, he calls an ambulance. Although he's aware that I'm thoroughly dead. But what else is he supposed to do? How does he get this fucking corpse out of his studio?