

## Nearly Killing Julien

Here's an adage I've always held to: everything will work itself out. Seriously, no hint of a lie. Everyone's in the same river, and you've just got to go with the flow.

I nearly killed Julien one time.

Or more specifically, the poison I'd left out on the counter nearly killed him. I was going to put it away somewhere safe – or at least label it, but Grimmy played an absolute bop on radio one at a critical moment. By the time I'd stopped dancing I'd forgotten all about it.

Luckily for Julien, his life was preserved by a succession of minor miracles.

First of all, he washed his hands moments after opening the bottle, because he was doing the dishes when he moved it out of the way. I assume he opened it to check whether it was empty, because he's big on recycling and he knows I often forget to do it.

Second, it was a hot day and he'd left the window open. That meant there was a gentle breeze, which ensured he didn't breathe in a lethal dose of fumes when he unstoppered the bottle. It also meant I didn't get a lungful when I found him.

Third, my gig for the evening had been cancelled short notice, so I was in the house to find him gurgling on the lino, surrounded by crockery and soapy water.

Fourth, the bottle didn't break when he dropped it. Bizarrely enough it was actually standing the right way up on the floor when I walked in, which tickled me. What are the odds of that?

The problem was I could hardly call an ambulance, could I? Half the ingredients in that bottle were so totally illegal that boring old men in court would've put me in the slammer for two decades plus. That's just not on. The fact that any substance can be illegal to own is just immoral in and of itself anyway – nobody should have the right to stifle human creativity! You know, if they just legalised everything they could tax it all, keep everyone happy, *and* have a nice chunk of change in the transfer kitty at the end of the year too.

As a matter of fact, if they were more relaxed about the whole thing then this wouldn't even

have happened in the first place. I'd have a nice sparkly lab with labelled containers instead of having to ply my trade in the kitchen. God forbid they make property affordable so I could get my own place. Why not put my tax money toward that, instead of chucking it at tracking down all these so-called illicit substances?

But hey, what do I know? I'm just a punter with a dying room-mate on the lino.

So Julien was twitching and frothing and wheezing and so on. I figured he wouldn't actually expire anytime in the next minute so I re-stoppered the bottle, hid it away, and dug out a mask to protect myself from any residual fumes. Minor miracle number five, I was right, and he hadn't died when I returned my attention to him.

This was probably going to get messy.

I put some tarp down in the living room and dragged him onto it. No sense in getting all his bodily fluids on the carpet, and lancing all the sores was going to leave stains too. I didn't have time to grab my tools from upstairs, but luckily Julien's into all that Warhammer shit so there was an exacto knife on the coffee table. I armed myself and got to work.

Pop, pop, pop. Even through the mask it smelled pretty bad.

Now I must confess that what happened next was not a miracle. Quite the opposite; it seemed that the laughing gods above thought I'd done such a good job so far that the situation was a bit too under control, and needed some extra drama.

So the doorbell rang.

Now I could've just left it, but there was a problem. The living room (which contained a very suspect looking Julien sprawled on a tarp covered in blood and pus, if you recall) was right next to a massive street-facing bay window. If our visitor wandered just a few feet to one side to have a peek in, they'd have a front row seat to our ongoing situation. And given all the noise Julien was making, I wouldn't have blamed them for getting curious.

So I opened the door and hey ho it's a pizza delivery guy. I guess Julien must have planned to order food while I was out.

“Hello, pizza for Julien?” He said.

“No Julien.” I replied, because I find it difficult to speak coherently when I'm stressed.

“Oh.” He looked confused, then I saw his eyes flick to the side, where you could see Julien's foot protrude onto the landing. We'd been made.

I couldn't see anyone else on the street, so I kicked Mr. Pizza down under and hauled him inside before he could recover, slamming the door behind us. Time was of the essence so I grabbed the skipping rope we had slung over a coat-peg, tied him up, and shoved a crumpled old t-shirt into his mouth.

I popped him down on a spare piece of carpet in the living room, and just about remembered to shut the curtains before returning to my impromptu surgery. The lancing was done, but I'd definitely need to empty his stomach. I tipped the water out of the washing up bowl, hauled Julien up and jammed two fingers down his throat as Mr Pizza watched on.

Two minutes later the job was done, and it was good news! Julien probably wasn't going to die for at least thirty minutes. I had a gander at Mr Pizza's wallet to celebrate: Dirk Youngstone, born in '96, organ donor, banked with Santander. No cash, because who even carries that these days?

People would surely start asking after this upstanding member of society sooner or later. I used Dirk's finger to unlock his phone, sent a message to his manager informing them that he was ill and going home for the day, then took a bit of time to relax. Take stock, you know?

I ate Julien's pizza. I figure I'd earned that much for saving his life. Then I started pondering on how I'd sort this all out.

Julien was tight. Assuming he pulled through, he wouldn't tell anyone. He already knew about all of my unsavoury hobbies anyway.

Dirk was a different matter entirely. Dirk needed to be silenced.

The problem was, everyone and their mum would be able to figure out that Dirk visited our house. Phone tracking, the pizzeria's records, witnesses that could've seen him cycle over here... it wouldn't be hard to join the dots. I needed some time to think.

Thankfully, I'm a clown.

So I texted my clowning agency, and checked if there were any other gigs I could pick up last minute. Might as well try and craft an alibi, even if it was shaky. I found a suitable birthday party that needed a last-minute replacement, and booked myself in.

I popped Dirk in the attic, put the still-incoherent Julien to bed with a bucket and about half a ton of ibuprofen, then went off to entertain kids for a few hours. I'd deal with Dirk when I got back.

I hadn't had time to shower, so my evening of mirth was marred by a succession of children complaining about the smell. Eventually one of the parents marched in and emptied a can of Febreze, which managed to smother the worst of it.

It was a bit difficult to concentrate, mostly because I got to thinking that an old skipping rope and a flimsy lock were all that stood between Dirk and freedom. If he wriggled out of his bonds, a solid kick would be all it'd take to batter his way through the loft hatch. Safe to say my balloon animals were of a significantly lower quality than usual.

Luckily, normies typically aren't smart enough to discriminate between high and low quality balloon animals. My peers would have laughed me out of the building, but these casuals were happy enough with my efforts.

It had gone seven when I got back home, and by that time I had a vague plan in mind.

That plan was immediately rendered irrelevant, because I arrived to find a cold and unlit house with the door kicked in. Not a great start. I picked my way through the shards of wood and had a look about.

It wasn't pretty. I noticed the first body at the bottom of the stairs. His face was hidden by a balaclava, but I still recognised him instantly. Seb Stafford-Bloor. He'd wanted me dead for a while

now – I'd poisoned someone close to him, I think. I don't really recall - it was a while ago, and clearly he'd not been able to let it go like I had.

In any event, there he was with a standing lamp stabbed through his abdomen and blood all over the shop. I looked up the stairs, picking out another prone form in the darkness.

Lighting up my phone, I ascended to find Dirk with about thirteen stab wounds. Dead, obviously. The hatch leading to the attic was open, with the skipping rope in a pile beneath it. Hm...

A glance into Julien's room confirmed that he was still in bed asleep, apparently unharmed. So Seb had figured out where I lived, came over with a knife to kill me, and ran into Dirk mid-escape. It'd probably been dark, so Dirk had panicked, and they'd both killed each other in a truly bizarre fracas. Miracle number... 6?

Certainly it was the miracle that could get me the fuck out of this situation.

I retrieved Dirk's phone, made sure to get Seb's prints all over it, and positioned it strategically on the stairs. I buried the skipping rope, tidied up, then called the rozzers - "Oh my god I've just gotten home and I think there's been a break in! Please send help, two people are badly hurt!"

I'm much more coherent when I've had a chance to practice first.

After that, I just told the story that fit best. Seb broke in, got interrupted by the untimely arrival of Dirk the pizza guy, panicked and started a fight. Tragically, thanks to a fall down the stairs and an unfortunately positioned lamp, neither of them survived.

I was out clowning and Julien was taking a nap – dead to the world thanks to his sleeping pills, you see. He was quite under the weather anyway. Yes officer, I just found all this carnage after getting home from work.

One thing about cops? They really, really don't want a dead body to equal a murder investigation. Especially if it's unlikely to get wound up quickly. Having two unsolved murders up on the board at the end of the month would mess with their clearance rate, add to their workload, make them look bad, the works.

Two dead bodies that could have killed each other, though? Perfect. Two cleared cases, in the black, thank you very much for the promotion, sir. You don't need to build a case against a dead man, after all. They can't fight back.

Best of all, I save them a lot of time which they can devote to doing proper police work. Not that there's such a thing as proper police work, given the state of modern rozzers. Everyone wins!

I'm sure the constable that interviewed me suspected something. I am a clown, after all, and after It and Gacy we have an undeserved reputation. Especially when you find dead bodies in our homes. But did that constable want that kind of hassle? Did he fuck.

Julien survived too, which was an added bonus. I'm still living with him now. Top lad, absolutely great room-mate. Still spends all his time painting little Warhammer figurines.

The point is these things always tend to work themselves out. Take it all in stride, bring a positive mental attitude, and try to have a bit of a laugh while you're at it. I know I did, when I found those two bodies.

And that was the story of how I nearly killed Julien.