

The Hound and the Hood

by

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1 -

Steven

“Fuck you,” says my face. “Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you.”

My face isn't speaking, but if it did it would be saying “fuck you”.

It helps to practice in the night time. My face is getting easier to control.

In the shop reflection it's obvious that it's perfect.

Mini frown. Deep Eyes. Mouth zipped. Teeth locked.

Teeth locked are still important even if you can't see them behind your mouth. It makes a big difference.

And my hair, long and black. And my clothes, black.

Then again the disgusting Hoods looking at me.

My face looks back. “Fuck you.”

The Centre is all shiny and blinding and trashy like searchlights in a Cave or Vegas or something else on Telly.

In the Centre everything is fighting battling warring for your eyes. The people in the shops have the big white smiles with the fake white teeth cause then you don't see the hands in your pockets cause you're looking at the teeth and trying to see the black in there. The sad mothers put animals around their bodies to keep warm and laugh the tears into their coffee. Dead ones. The girls who try for sexy (ugh) try with the curves and everything cause they have no Daddy love. The boys are lost like there's a secret

trap door in their heads and they think am I real? so to make sure they are loud and big and standing and bumping and pushing and fighting, just to see Am I really alive? Good question.

Nobody wins my eyes. They know better than to try with me. That's because my face is saying "fuck you". They look at me and even though they're stupid they know not to talk to me.

And noise everywhere.

Some of them are screeching little rodent smiles popping out of holes in the dirt but there's no hammer. Others are doing fake laughing and the more the mouth opens the more the heart is falling out. Some of them are doing the shouting like men do on Telly when they lift heavy things like cars and pianos or like animals do on Telly for "mating season".

Like a stampede they're always shouting and they think it's fun. Run like a hunter attacking at each other, run and squeal like an ant being squashed in your fingers if you could hear him up close. They throw themselves at each other for fun. Yeah right.

Some old people even bring their kids here. Have you seen this place? Talk about bad parenting. My feet are walking past some family that just realised and is trying to escape under the flying fireworks.

Like that running family knows there are a lot of different types of Scum around here. Let me tell you.

The Centre is a feeding grounds.

It's the watering hole in the African wilds, but it's the tackiest, neonist watering hole ever. Everyone's hungry and there's not enough food. Some eat, some get eaten.

There are the lions and the giraffes and the laughing hyenas and the cheaters and the tigers and the wildybeast and more and they all want to eat at the watering hole but someone has to be hungry at the end. It doesn't matter what animal they call me cause they'll be hungry at the end, not me. And the one that has to be eaten, the littler ones, there's no way it's going to me, the biggest eater of them all.

You know what they say. It's a doggy dog world.

So my eyes are dead in front of me and not seeing anything on the sides not even the plastic people wearing the sexy clothes and my jaw is pressuring like a crazy man and it's working cause no one is talking to me but maybe looking a little but that's O.K. cause feel my jaw like a total iron gate closed with a crunch. Crunching on the eyes looking.

It's nothing that you want to see but there it is on the left and like the car that crashes and the little girl that comes tumbling out with a split head when you're seven you can't stop your eyes from the blood.

It's the first shop and it is so bad but it's just normal bad so if this is funny or something then get prepared cause the Centre is one of those funny places like you heard already. Not the normal laugh-laugh funny, the oh my god let's get out of here funny.

It's the Players. They say they're players no like player-players and they do this silly sweeping shoulders thing and pull up their shirt frills and what does that have to do with playing sports cause that's what player means. Play sports. Then they say player-player but that's not two players instead it's that they're a super good player.

But they don't even play sports they just stand beside the sports shop where they throw money at the special new clothes with the stripes and with hands grabbing inside their cacks. How lovely.

One time they had a ball and surprise surprise it rocketships into the water fountain and splash on all the kiddies. But the kiddies were crying and the noise is a drill in my brains so no good. It's obvious they can't even play and look at them there pretending with their hair all short and up spiky like they want to stab the ball with their heads and play with it all stabbed. Stupid stabbed football.

Not cool, they work so hard trying to know who is good, who wins, shouting at the telly and throwing coins down a well, hoping the right player-player kicks them up better money.

Besides have you even seen these guys? Like the baby toys you push but they never fall just rolling back to you no matter how you want to push them over. Stupid fat toys wearing the super large jerseys with someone else's name on the back and not even all that jersey can cover the guts that peeks out at the bottom like a monster under the sink. Can't even pretend to play getting up off the sofa shouting and already sitting down choking. No wonder they wear other names, names that must be way way better at running and kicking and standing up shouting at the Telly.

Standing there with hands in their baggies like they're itching scratching down there and showing off the lovely itchy rash to everyone and do some silly grins now and laugh a little with their head back like they're making millions of money all the time. They don't even play.

The name of the shop is stupid it's called Jersey Shore like with the jersey jumper they wear in sports teams but like that thing they like too with the muscles on Telly. Inside they've done some decorations like a beach with shells and sand and even mermaids and crabs and why, especially cause crabs won't help you kick things they'll bite you and the ball too. That's a double-stabbed ball one from the hair and one from the crabs. But with the sports stuff there on the beach the Players can't keep their hands from swimming arms into the stripes and the little logos and they put their frills up high like it's good for making them faster or something. Stupid Players.

So I think about the crabs being alive and not make-believe and them crabbing and shovelling all over the Players legs and jerseys and spiky hair and down their arms into their cacks. Lovely friendly crabs.

Sometimes they say don't hate the player hate the game, so O.K. hate the game but maybe people have more hate than you think idiots. They really don't understand hate.

They look over too when my feet are clodging past and they're bouncing a ball up and down and pulling up their long socks and wearing one colour like they're a power ranger without the masks or new crayons or something.

The next one is on the other side and wow if you thought that one was something to remember then you need to have a super big memory for the Centre.

The Slags. It's not a nice word but it fits on them like a one-size glove fits them all. Maybe you know already by just hearing Slags but if you don't let me tell you.

It's easy. Slags are pirates.

Pirates years before they were pirates were just people and the people had lots of money. But then they change and they start to be afraid about the money. They think oh no what about the money is this enough money? and will I get any more? They get povernoid and they find some big sand and dig deep inside the secretest place they can find and that's where they put the treasure.

That's like Slags but for the treasure the Slags have love. And they put the love in themselves inside all the layers as deep as it can go. For safekeeping.

But what happens when you need your treasure again? The pirates have lots of digging tools like shovels and nets and stuff but the pirates have lots and lots of sand to look under. It's different for the Slags. They only have one little body to look in and only a few holes to check. But there's only one kind of tool. They want that love so so much.

These pirates want their treasure so much they'll dig dig dig any hole and try any shovel they can find.

The Slags are in a shop called Sexcessorise. No, it's not a joke.

Sure, who could call a shop Sexcessorise? but these Slags just say yes like it's their parents telling them it's O.K. to believe in the tooth fairy or something else stupid. They start selling the sexcessories to the girls who don't know what sex is but it's O.K. cause it's cool. But once the sexcessories start the sex comes soon after.

They don't even know how it's a silvery slope. First it's a little silvery necklace then they're putting little silvery into their tongues like always licking money and then it's tramp stamps and blowies and Ahoy Mateys! a whole new ship of pirates looking for treasure. Silvery slope.

What the Slags don't get cause they have a bird in their head flapping around and pecking out their ears is that they don't want perfume or clothes or shoes or flowers or chocolates or anything like that and all they can do is keep pushing against their silly hearts like a wall with spikes but they'll never win. They should run away from the spike wall but like you heard they have panicky birds for brains.

The girlscreeching is making my ears jump off cliffs like the whistle that Lauren has in her purse and maybe they're screeching about something important to me but then my feet are slurping on the ground past them and maybe past some girls too maybe but who notices girls anyway so whatever.

There are more groups too like at the TeenScene with the Scenesters. You get it, like they're in the cool scene or something. The shop is a skateboard shop called TeenScene and it doesn't make sense but they don't care cause they're scenesters and scenesters don't care ever. Caring is not cool. That's the point of it – there is no point.

The Scenesters have stars cut into their heads and little tattoos of lighthouses and ketchup and anchors and the one in a weird language with the funny words, just like from their mouth with random and dude or something. They all think there is a camera on them and they're going to be on Telly but not on one of those stupid shows, one of the "radical" ones with straw hair coming out of sideways baseball hats or something. They like to stand around the skateboard shop and no one can skate and they just want the fat runners like they have feet like my Aunt Aggie when she couldn't walk any more and instead needed a cane but she didn't even get one with an eagle or a skull.

It doesn't make any sense.

Anyway, Scenesters only get bad when you get bad with Scenesters like saying they're not cool cause Scenesters will do anything to protect cool. They'll do some uncool stuff to protect the cool.

They just do their cool stuff there and now it's the book shop Wordsmiths and it's obvious who's at Wordsmiths. Worms.

Wordsmiths is for the Worms, talking about numbers and words like important things. They don't all have glasses (that's what people say and it's not fair) but most of them do and if you see someone with glasses they're probably a Worm.

Like the sign says Wordsmiths is for Wordworms but as someone else said more like woodworms heh like the hairy leg ones that you see in Granda's house under the back step in a panic when the slab comes comes up and bright burns in and you're not ready and it's not even what it looks like, let me explain. Stupid Worms. The stone slabs

down with a real wet glunch.

They like books too so that's why Wordsmiths in case you're wondering cause they have no friends in real life and instead they look for friends in their books

Some people call them Swats or Brainiacs cause they have the big brains but that's strange funny really if you think because these are the clever guys so the people say but the clever guys can't even find friends in real life cause they don't have any real words instead they say actually and indeed like no one ever says yeah or no anymore. Instead they have to go to books for pretend friends. Who is so sad that they need to force a pretend not alive person to be a friend. It was easy to find Robin so maybe they're no so smart like they think.

Walking past them is easy cause the Worms are afraid to say boo to a ghost with their lisps and glasses cause they'll just be too scared cause all they know is silly numbers.

So no more silly Worms or anything else. You know there's more too like the Grungers and the Jersey Pullers and the Spice Boys and the Loners and some idiots call me a Loner but they don't know anything and what about Robin then, idiots?

But none of that is important cause this is a Hood area now. The Hoods have the most valuable place here. The Food Court.

Why is the Food Court most important?

Everyone has to eat. Duh, like with the watering hole earlier.

Hoods always eat.

The Hoods take over like a rash on a person's body and suddenly, before you even know it the rash is everywhere including places you can't see or reach and the rash is more in control than the body. Stupid rash Hoods.

My feet are grounding through the Food Court and there are the Hoods now, disgusting and she's there somewhere definitely.

This is when most of the other eyes move this way and the clump of the boot gets extra loud, not cause they're walking louder but cause all the eyes are on them and the whispering starts instead of the shouting and cursing and spitting and smoking and all that disgusting stuff. But sometimes all that stuff keeps going even extremer. Like exploding frogs at Halloween or stealing purses just for fun and not doing anything with the money just doing it for fun cause you like doing a wrecking ball on people's lives just to watch them snake around cause they're broken.

The Hoods are disgusting and make my neck dry-die sometimes and only coughing hard makes it stop. Sometimes the Hoods are things that have no words, but maybe you don't know so let me see.

You know when you're not thinking and you're eating your dry pork chop dinner and pretending it's tasty and then your mouth does something weird like bite the inside of your cheek and your body is under something else's magic. Something evil. That's a Hood.

You know when you walk around at night, just minding your own business in the dark with the sky and you can't see cause it's dark and you step in something nasty. That's a Hood.

You know when you bad dream about someone breaking into your Cave and with all light everywhere they smash up the records and the windows and it's a heaven party with Suns everywhere and now you can't think or know or even think and it's like your head has holes and out spills everything like a juice box that has lots of pencil stabs in it from senior infants. That's a Hood.

Oh, maybe you want the other things. O.K.

How you recognise a boy Hood -

Little white cuts in their eye hair, white fluffy socks up over the sports pants and lick-clean white running shoes (for running away), a walk like a drunk man with arms swinging like swings far and far and nearly falling over the top like little Tim Murphy from down the street. Broke his teeth, like some of the boy Hoods. The baseball cap, pointing up at the sky, the skyer the better, little rat moustaches like they never grew one before, wait until they see mine. Always talking through their throat like every word is a spit and sometimes it is a real big yellow cigarette spit right in the Centre or sometimes at you if you get too close. The hair is short except for a little bit coming down to the eyes straight and with goo like a bad curtain for the face. Sometimes the big fake gold chains and it's funny like they're a dog and the gold chain is for gold walkies, but no one would take these puppies just a big sack and nyerrr into the river. Plop.

How you recognise a girl Hood -

All of a girl Hood is fake. Fake gold on every girl finger like young priest girls and the skin is a fake berry orange like living in Africa, and the lips are a fake pink like gooey strawberry stuff and they're always doing a big fake kiss to nothing in the air when they're walking like they're ready to kiss anything just in case. All fake fake fake.

They have these big earrings of fire like a little rat is jumping through and who knows. The girl Hoods turn into "women" younger and younger trying to get tattoos on their bums and diamonds in their bellies or something before they're even born. And the dark make-up eyes like they're hiding at night in a war and maybe they are actually if you work your brain. Yeah, a war at night.

Sometimes Hoods are pirate Slags too as you know already. Did you know about the naked skin too? Always with the little or no clothes like they want you to watch them and then when they steal your eyes they look at you like a monster and how dare you and you perv and then they wiggle away and no way my eyes were even looking anyway.

Hoods (the boys and sometimes the girls) sometimes like to put their Hoods up so you can't see their disease-faces. That's why Hoods maybe.

Hoods like smoking and drinking and spitting and they're disgusting with their drugs and bump into old ladies and are horrible litterbugs and enjoy getting under people's skin and running around in there and making their nose come out their ear and give them cancers in there or something.

Maybe she's there with them. She's there somewhere.

There. Lauren.

Disgusting Hood.

My eyes don't even sly over there but she's got her hair in pigtails and that cute little cheerleader thing but with the little tassels that are new maybe and look at the little runts with her and my eyes are everywhere else and my mind's exploding with it.

There's no stopping, and my face is still saying "fuck you" to everybody and my eyes don't move but mainly my face is talking to Lauren.

Maybe people are saying weirdo or something in the background but my head is growling and smiling at the same time because who cares but my face doesn't move one bit, not one bit. There's no little ball of paper or whatever it is shuttling past me close to my head or laughing anything at all cause it's just focus focus focus. They're not going to even bother me or anything.

None of them know. Today is the day. They don't have a clue. It's here.

They can't get their claws into my nerves today because there's a new Cerberus record and it's going to be all dark and grimy puddles like the other ones and it's going to feel great shouting at the top of my neck to it and playing it for Robin and he will love it of course. It's the new Cerberus record and they have it in stock and one is held behind the counter with my name on it and that one's for me.

"O.K.," says my head. "We're here."

The Record Sleeve is like another sort of Cave. No Hoods in here ever. No Players, no

Slags. Sometimes some Worms but they're always over at the weird section trying to find their stupid numbers even in the music. Idiot Worms. There's no numbers in music.

But in my shelves it's all good. My old friends are there to say hello. Like the Skeleton Man on the front of that one. He always has a flag or something, but sometimes he's burning it and sometimes he's waving it around so it's never easy to know where he's from or if he's going to war or something. Then there's the upside down cross like there's a problem with God and Jesus and all the rest of them on a Sunday so the best thing to do is to turn them upside down. Hallelujah!

There's more too, like the bat head one and the long hair on a motorbike and the girl with the sword and the shield and she's naked but you can't see with the shield but you still know and there are a lot of different ones but mainly black and snakes and skulls and all the cool stuff.

But there's the one. The main new one for me. The dogs, all three of them. Well, three dog heads but with only one body and all of the heads are angry and wow sucky for the body having three dog heads fighting over it, how does it do it? My favourite is always the middle dog and they have different names because they're different and have different personalities too. The one on the one side is called Spot and he's got a big black spot over one eye and the one in the middle (my one) is called Rover and always has his big mouth open and he's doing a snarling laugh all the time that's nice and the last one here is Lassie and he is always sniffing but an angry sniff.

The names are fun cause they're nice dog names but they're not nice dogs and

sometimes that makes me laugh. Rover is my favourite not just because of the angry laughing bark like mine but cause he's in the middle too and that's not easy for anyone.

No need to pick up the record from the shelf because there's one behind the counter definitely and with a little sticker saying "Steven Daly" on it and it's for me for sure. So one last look at all the different things there, the cross and the skeleton and the coffin one too like it's death time for everyone (cool) and straight to the counter.

Weird. There's a girl there behind the counter and wait she doesn't look like the others in the Centre. No fake tanning skin or the glittery cheeks or anything or the stripes or the gum and jumping through basketball hoop earrings. Instead there's a little diamond in her nose on the side. That's weird.

In my head it's like trying to do a puzzle looking at this girl and she doesn't know where to go in my head and she's kind of buzzing around my head a little bit and the buzzing is making my heart knocks a little and try to escape but in a nice way kind of.

So there at the counter and not saying anything yet, it's in my mind that who knows maybe she'll talk to Robin and talk to me and maybe it's not the same for everyone. Maybe this stuff is O.K. and normal.

Me.

"Hi."

Her.

"Hi."

So far so good.

Me again.

“Is there a Cerberus record there? The new one?”

She looks at me in my eyes and maybe all the ideas were just future happening but then she does something different instead and does the roly thing with her eyes that means whatever or not interested or talk to the hand or something. She puts the record on the counter and takes the money. She sighs upwards at the hair on her head and moves it like a wave goodbye or a scam and that's it.

Walking away my head is thinking about the roly eyes thing and whatever what an attention Whore Goth anyway.

Lauren

I'm sitting here and I'm not getting enough attention.

I'm looking hot as fuck, as per usual, and I have my Hoods surrounding me, but it's a meagre display, insufficient to requirements. I need more attention than this. But that's okay, I have time. Just you wait.

I remember when he took me to one side, Smiley. I was foxy and knew what I was

doing so it was inevitable that the conversation would come. He strained his neck trying not to look down my top as he said, with an attempt at reverence; “Everything the light touches is our kingdom. A king’s time as ruler rises and falls like the sun. One day, Simba, the sun will set on my time here and will rise with you as the new king.”

Sincerely. The spazz had learned the whole fucking thing verbatim.

I always had what you could generously call a soft spot for Smiley. Yes, that soft spot. For a boy of his position, he never took himself too seriously and always had time to stop and chat to any passing runt, but on the plus side he never had hang ups about his place in the food chain.

Small fish, big pond. Smily small fry.

Chum, you could call him. Friendly shark-bait.

Oh well. It was his turn to get thrown under the bus. Metaphorically speaking, of course. I would never get an innocent bus driver involved.

On that note, people need to know there’s a new sheriff in town. I get to work.

I have my girls on my side. In their usual spot by the sexed-up mannequins, *quelle surprise*, are the boys. They glance over, skittish, whisper, try to figure out which one of us they like, and what they’d like to do to us. Just a normal day in the Centre.

The girls are pretending not to be doing precisely the same thing. They pretend they’re looking at their nails and their phones and gossiping about whoever, whatever,

but really they want what the boys want.

I know none of the boys are brave enough to approach us; it's like it's enemy fucking territory or something. So I get the wheels in motion.

There's a new pledge, so I call her over. I think her name's Gemma or something. She's "dressed up" in this 'Lady and the Tramp in one' thing, but I can totally make it work. She's getting split ends and her nails reveal a calcium deficiency but the boys are fucking retards and I know they'd totally do anything for her.

I summon her and ask which of the Hood boys has her nipples hard. She's all shy like we're in a fucking crèche or something, but finally she spits it out. Some boy named Baz or something.

I spot him - the same as them all. Shiny white runners under striped tracksuit bottoms with a yellow polo shirt, collar peaked. Up top, a buzzed-short haircut and a stud in one ear.

I don't know how anyone can differentiate between the runts.

I ask what she wants to do with him, and she blushes like we're eight fucking years old or something.

"Do you want to suck his dick or what?"

I send her fucking reeling with that one. She's floundering; not a clue how to respond.

She looks around her to all the girls, who look back with the dead eyes of fucking sheep. Some shrug their shoulders, some look away. One or two – the fast learners – give brusque nods.

She looks back to me like she's a virgin and says I guess so or something that tells me that it's on. I flick my hair back all sexy and tell her she'd better not let me down then, if I'm making this shit happen for her. I say one good turn deserves another. I say scratch my back I'll scratch yours. I say I'm going out of my way for you. I say do right by me.

She swallows (practice?) and nods her little girl head.

Okay.

I stand up and get my shit together. I know everything's where it should be, but the boys like to see you fix yourself up, it's weird.

I pull my see-through tights up taut on my pins. I pull my skirt down tight over my ass. I fix my bra, plumping up my sweet tits. I take the gum from my mouth and stick it under the chair.

I take a cigarette from my pack and pop it in my mouth, all provocative, and I shimmy over. I send them scurrying like panicked prey; my heels click-clacking like a rattlesnake.

The unlit cigarette dangles from my mouth, like a phallic symbol, and they can't get that out of their heads. They're whispering and trying to sit still as I approach but they

can't keep their arms and legs still. Jittery little boys. They don't even realise I'm their saviour.

I arrive and they're all looking at me.

I don't say anything, just wait. They're flies in a web.

I sigh. "Eh, light?"

One or two of them still don't get it, but a couple of them scramble to their pockets, trying to find a lighter. Some of them are beyond help and don't even smoke.

Finally, one of them stretches out, tries to play it all cool, but it's not even a Zippo and still he can't get it lit the first time. I kill one guy's snicker with a frosty look. I'll be administering the put-downs today, thank you very much.

I suck. It lights. "Thanks."

I turn to leave, then do a dramatic turn-back.

"Oh, is one of you boys Baz?"

I was right. The yellow-collared one goes yeah.

I beckon him over to me with a finger. You can see the nerves boiling through him already, but he does what he's told.

He stands in front of me, shifting feet. I lean in, whispering.

“You see that cute little bitch over there? Red top, blonde hair, hoop earrings?”

He nods his little boy head.

“You like her?”

He looks at me now, as if I'd asked him a trick fucking question.

“I can set you up. Unless that is, you're not interested...”

Then I do the whole turn and walk away until you call me back thing. Child's play.

“Wait, eh, yeah.”

I waltz back over and lay down the ground rules.

“Okay, Baz. She's one of my girls though, so you'd better treat her nice, Capisce?”

He nods his head like he knows what I'm talking about.

“Treat her nice, a movie, some ice-cream, whatever she wants.”

“Okay.”

“Also, my girls like to smoke a nice blunt before they do any dick-sucking. Alright?”

He hears 'dick-sucking' so of course he says yes. He'd say yes to asphyxiating his

Gran if I wanted him to.

“Sure, of course.”

I nod. Of course.

Him, shakily: “But I'm not sure where I'd find a... blunt..?”

“Oh, you don't? Don't worry, I'll set you up. Hundred a bag. Thursday after school, have it with you.”

He stumbles. “I have football practice on Thursdays.”

I shoot him a don't-be-a-fucking-idiot look. His mind races back to the 'dick-sucking'. He nods yes.

“One hundred. Thursday. Take her bowling or something. Yeah?”

“Eh, yeah.”

I stop whispering now and take a step back.

All the boys are still looking at me.

I take my finished cigarette from my mouth and hold it out. They scramble for a makeshift ashtray and can find nothing. A particularly troubled one takes it from my hand, stubs it into the ground with his shoe and kicks it under the chairs.

He grins like a fucking Olympian. I roll my eyes. Idiot.

I talk to them all.

“If any of you guys are interested in something similar, you know who to talk to.”

I give Baz a little wink; “Seeya hun.”

I walk back, moving my ass like a fucking music video. They’re all watching it.

The girls are whispering as I return.

The little-girl jitters make me want to vomit. They all speak at once, eyes darting to me, back to the boys; trying to whip the little mongoloid hamster in its wheel to figure out what sorcery I had conjured.

How did I do it? Am I crazy? What did they say? What did I say? Am I okay?

Gemma is silent, her eyes wide like I hold the key to happiness in my hands and control her entire destiny. And, in a way...

She bites her calcium-gagging nails. Young love is fucking hilarious.

I tell her Little Boy Baz wants to take her bowling on Thursday. She's over the fucking moon with excitement and little wet girl-pussy nerves. I tell her that I've made sure he'll treat her nice and all.

She thanks me and oh her God if she can help me in any way or anything, she'd be so happy to.

I say, oh I do need you to give him something on Thursday, and collect some money, but if you *really* want to make it up to me we can talk after the big day.

Sure, she says, whatever you want me to do.

I'm sure I can think of something.