

THE FIRST DAY OF THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

(by Irvine Welsh, *extract from Trainspotting*)

Third time lucky. It wis like Sick Boy telt us: you've got tae know what it's like tae try tae come off it before ye can actually dae it. You can only learn through failure, and what ye learn is the importance ay preparation. He could be right. Anyway, this time ah've prepared. A month's rent in advance oan this big, bare room overlooking the Links. Too many bastards ken ma Montgomery Street address. Cash oan the nail! Partin wi that poppy wis the hardest bit. The easiest wis ma last shot, taken in ma left airm this morning. Ah needed something tae keep us gaun during this period ay intense preparation. Then ah wis off like a rocket roond the Kirkgate, whizzing through ma shopping list.

Ten tins ay Heinz tomato soup, eight tins ay mushroom soup (all to be consumed cold), one large tub ay vanilla ice-cream (which will melt and be drunk), two boatils ay Milk of Magnesia, one boatil ay paracetamol, one packet ay Rinstead mouth pastilles, one boatil ay multivits, five litres ay mineral water, twelve Lucozade isotonic drinks and some magazines: soft porn, Viz, Scottish Football Today, The Punter, etc. The most important item bus already been procured from a visit tae the parental home; ma Ma's bottle ay valium, removed from her bathroom cabinet. Ah don't feel bad about this. She never uses them now, and if she needs them her age and gender dictate that her radge GP will prescribe them like jelly tots. I lovingly tick off all the items oan ma list. It's going tae be a hard week.

Ma room is bare and uncarpeted. There's a mattress in the middle ay the flair with a sleeping-bag oan it, an electric-bar fire, and a black and white telly oan a small wooden chair. Ah've goat three brown plastic buckets, half-filled wi a mixture ay disinfectant and water for ma shite, puke and pish. Ah line up ma tins ay soup, juice and ma medicines within easy reach ay ma makeshift bed. Ay took ma last shot in order tae git us through the horrors ay the shopping trip. Ma final score will be used tae help us sleep, and case us oaf the skag. Ah'll try tae take it in small, measured doses. Ah need some quickly. The great decline is setting in. It starts as it generally does, with a slight nausea in the pit ay ma stomach and an irrational panic attack. As soon as ah become aware ay the sickness gripping me, it effortlessly moves from the uncomfortable tae the unbearable. A toothache

starts tae spread fae ma teeth intae ma jaws and ma eye sockets, and aw through ma bones in a miserable, implacable, debilitating throb. The auld sweats arrive oan cue, and lets no forget the shivers, covering ma back like a thin layer ay autumn frost oan a car roof. It's time for action. No way can ah crash oot and face the music yet. Ah need the old 'slowburn', a soft, come-down input. The only thing ah kin move for is smack. One wee dig tae unravel those twisted limbs and send us oaf tae sleep. Then ah say goodbye tae it. Swanney's vanished, Seeker's in the nick. That leaves Raymie. Ah go tae bell the cunt fae the payphone in the hall. Ah'm aware that as ah dial, someone has brushed past us. Ah wince fae the fleeting contact, but have no desire tae look and see whae it is. Hopefully ah'll no be here long enough tae need tae check out any ay ma new 'flatmates'. The flickers dinnae exist fir us. Nae cunt does. Only Raymie. The money goes doon. A lassie's voice. – Hello? she sniffs. Has she goat a summer cauld or is it the skag?

– Is Raymie thair? It's Mark here. Raymie has evidently mentioned us because although ah dinnae ken her, she sure as fuck kens me.

Her voice chills over. – Raymie's away, she says. London.

– London? Fuck . . . when's he due back?

– Dinnae ken.

– He didnae leave anything fir us, did he? Chance wid be a fine thing, the cunt.

–Eh, naw . . .

Ah shakily pit the phone doon. Two choices; one: tough it oot, back in the room, two: phone that cunt Forrester and go tae Muirhoose, get fucked aboot and ripped oaf wi some crap gear. Nae contest. In twenty minutes it wis: – Muirhoose pal? tae the driver oan the 32 bus and quiveringly stickin ma forty– five pence intae the box. Any port in a storm, and it's raging in here behind ma face. An auld boot gies us the evil eye as ah pass her oan the wey doon the bus. No doubt ah'm fuckin boggin n look a real mess. It doesnae bother us. Nothing exists in ma life except masel and Michael Forrester and the sickening distance between us: a distance being steadily reduced by this bus.

Ah sit oan the back seat, doonstairs. The bus is nearly empty. A lassie sits across fae us, listening tae her Sony Walkman. Is she good looking? Whae fuckin cares. Even though it's supposed tae be a 'personal' stereo, ah kin hear it quite clearly. It's playing a Bowie number . . . 'Golden Years'. "Don't let me hear you say life's takin' you nowhere Angel . . . Look at those skies, life's begun, nights are warm and the days are yu-hu-hung . . ." Ah've goat every album Bowie ever made. The fuckin lot. Tons ay fuckin bootlegs n aw. Ah dinnae gie a fuck aboot him or his music. Ah only care aboot Mike Forrester, an ugly talentless cunt whae has made no albums. Zero singles. But Mikey baby is the man of the moment. As Sick Boy once said, doubtlessly paraphrasing some other fucker: nothing exists outside the moment. (Ah think some radge oan a chocolate advert said it first.) But ah caiinae even endorse these sentiments as they are at best peripheral tae the moment. The moment is me, sick, and Mikey, healer. Some auld cunt, they're always oan the buses at this time, is fartin and shitein at the driver; firing a volley ay irrelevant questions about bus numbers, routes and times. Get the fuck oan or fuck off and die ya foostie auld cunt. Ah almost choked in silent rage at her selfish pettiness and the bus driver's pathetic indulgence of the cunt. People talk aboot youngsters and vandalism, what aboot the psychic vandalism caused by these auld bastards? When she finally gits oan the auld fucker still has the cheek tae have a gob oan her like a cat's erse. She sits directly in front ay us. Ma eyes burrow intae the back ay her heid. Ah'm willing her tae have a brain haemorrhage or a massive cardiac arrest . . . no. Ah stoap tae think. If that happened, it would only haud us back even mair. Hers must be a slow, suffering death, tae pey her back for ma fuckin suffering. If she dies quickly, it'll gie people the chance tae fuss. They'll always take that opportunity. Cancer cells will dae nicely.

Ah will a core ay bad cells tae develop and multiply in her body. Ah can feel it happening . . . but it's ma body it's happening to. Ah'm too tired tae continue. Ah've lost all hate fir the auld doll. Ah only feel total apathy. She's now ootside the moment. Ma heid's gaun doon. It jerks up so suddenly and violently, ah feel it's gaunnae fly oaf ma shoulders ontae the lap of the testy auld boot in front ay us. Ah haud it firmly in baith hands, elbays oan ma knees. Now ah'm gaunnae miss ma stoap. No. A surge ay energy and ah get oaf at Pennywell Road, opposite the shopping centre. Ah cross over the dual carriageway and walk through the centre. Ah pass the steel-shuttered units which have never been let and cross over the car park where cars have never parked. Never since it was built. Over twenty years ago. Forrester's maisonette flat is in a block bigger than

most in Muirhouse. Maist are two stories high, but his is five, and therefore has a lift, which doesnae work. Tae conserve energy ah slide along the wall oan ma journey up the stairs.

In addition tae cramps, aches, sweats and an almost complete disintegration ay ma central nervous system, ma guts are now starting tae go. Ah feel a queasy shifting taking place, an ominous thaw in ma long period of constipation. Ah try tae pull masel together at Forrester's door. But he'll know that ah'm suffering. An ex-skag merchant always knows when someone is sick. Ah just don't want the bastard knowing how desperate ah feel. While ah would put up wi any crap, any abuse fae Forrester tae get what ah need, ah don't see the sense in advertising it tae him any mair than ah can help.

Forrester can obviously see the reflection ay ma ginger hair through the wired and dimpled glass door. He takes an age to answer. The cunt has started fuckin us aboot before ah even set foot in his hoose. He disnaegreet us wi any warmth in his voice.

Awright Rents, he sais.

– No bad Mike.

He calls us 'Rents' instead ay 'Mark', ah call him 'Mike' instead ay 'Forry'. He's calling the shots awright. Is trying tae ingratiate masel tae this cunt the best policy? It's probably the only one at the moment.

– Moan in, he tersely shrugs and ah dutifully follow him. Ah sit oan the couch, beside but a bit away fae a gross bitch with a broken leg. Her plastered limb is propped up on the coffee table and there is a repulsive swell of white flesh between the dirty plaster and her peach coloured shorts. Her tits sit on top of an oversized Guinness pot, and her brown vesty top struggles tae constrain her white flab. Her greasy, peroxide locks have an inch of insipid grey-brown at their roots. She makes no attempt tae acknowledge ma presence but lets oot a horrendous and embarrassing donkey-like laugh at some inane remark Forrester makes, which I don't catch, probably concerning my appearance. Forrester sits opposite me in a worn-out armchair, beefy-faced but thin bodied, almost bald at twenty-five. His hair loss over the last two years has been phenomenal, and ah wonder if he's goat the virus. Doubt it somehow, They say only the good die young. Normally ah would make a bitchy comment, but at this moment in time ah

would rather slag ma granny aboot her colostomy bag. Mikey is, after all, my man.

In the other chair next tae Mikey is an evil-looking bastard, whose eyes are on the bloated sow, or rather the unprofessionally rolled joint she is smoking. She takes an extravagantly theatrical toke, before passing it onto the evil-looking gadge. Ah've goat fuck all against dudes with dead insect eyes set deep in keen rodent faces. They are not all bad. It's this boy's clathes that gie him away, marking him oot as wide-o extraordinaire. He's obviously been residing in one ay the Windsor group hotels; Saughton, Bar L, Perth, Peterhead, etc., and has apparently been there for some time. Dark blue flared troosers, black shoes, a mustard polo-neck wi blue bands at the collar and cuffs, and a green parka (in this fuckin weather!) draped ower the back ay the chair. No intros are made, but that's the prerogative of my bawfaced icon, Mike Forrester. He's the man in the chair, and he certainly knows it. The bastard launches intae this spiel, talking incessantly, like a bairn trying tae stay up as late as possible. Mr Fashion, Johnny Saughton ah'll call the cunt, sais nothing, but smiles enigmatically and occasionally rolls his eyes in mock ecstasy. If ye ever saw a predator's face it wis Saughton's. The Fat Sow, god she is grotesque, hee-haws and ah force oot the odd sycophantic chuckle at times ah gauge tae he'roughly appropriate. After listening tae this shite for a while, ma pain and nausea force me tae intervene.

MY non-verbal signals are contemptuously ignored, so ah steam in. Sorry tae interrupt ye thair mate, but ah need tae'-be pittin ma skates oan. Ye goat the gear thair?

The reaction is over the top, even by the standards ay the crappy game Forrester is playing.

– You shut yir fuckin mouth! Fuckin radge. Ah'll fuckin tell you whin tae speak. just shut yir fuckin erse. You dinnae like the company, you kin git tae fuck. End ay fuckin story.

– Na'e offence mate . . . It's aw tame capitulation oan ma part. After all, this man is a god tae me. Ah'd walk oan ma hand, and knees through broken gless fir a thousand miles tae use the cunt's shite as toothpaste and we baith know it. Ah am but a pawn in a game called 'The Marketing Of Michael Forrester As A Hard Man'. To all those who know him, it's a game based on ridiculously flawed concepts. Furthermore, it obviously aw being played fir Johnny Saughton's benefit, but what the fuck, it's Mike's gig, and ah asked tae be dealt a shite hand when ah dialled his number.

Ah take some more crass humiliation for what seems like an eternity. Ah get through it naebother though. Ah love nothing (except junk), ah hate nothing (except forces that prevent me getting any) and ah fear nothing (except not scoring). Ah also know that a shitein cunt like Forrester would never pit us through aw this bullshit if he intended holding out on me. It gies us some satisfaction remembering why he hates us. Mike was once infatuated wi a woman who despised him. A woman ah subsequently shagged. It hadn't meant a great deal tae either masel or the woman concerned, but it certainly bugged the fuck oot ay Mike. Now most people would put this doon tae experience, ye always want what ye cannae have and the things that ye dinnae really gie a toss aboot get handed tae ye oan a plate. That's life, so why should sex be different fae any other part ay it? Ah've hud, and brushed oaf, such reverses in the past. Every cunt has. The problem is that this shite's intent oan hoarding trivial grievances, like the fatchopped malignant squirrel that he is. But ah still love him. Ah huv tae. He's the boy holdin Mikey grows bored wi his humiliation game. For a sadist, it must huv aw the interest ay sticking pins intae a plastic doll. Ah'd loved tae have given him some better sport, but ah'm too fucked tae react tae his dull-witted jibes.

So he finally sais: – Goat the poppy?

Ah pull oot some crumpled notes fae ma poakits, and wi touching servility, flatten them oot oan the coffee table. Wi an air ay reverence and all due deference tae Mikey's status as The Man, ah hand them ower. Ah note for the first time that the Fat Sow has a huge arrow drawn oan her plaster in thick black marker pen, oan the inside ay her thigh, pointing tae her crotch. The letters alongside it spell out in bold capitals: INSERT COCK HERE. Ma guts dae another quick birl, and the urge tae take the gear fae Mikey wi maximum force and get tae fuck oot ay thair is almost overwhelming. Mikey snaffles the notes and tae ma surprise, produces two white capsules, fae his poakit. Ah'd never seen the likes ay them before. They were wee hard bomb-shaped things wi a waxy coat oan them. A powerful rage gripped us, seemingly coming fae nowhere. No, not fae nowhere. Strong emotions ay this type can only be generated by junk or the possibility of its absence.

– What the fuck's this shite?

– Opium. Opium suppositories, Mikey's tone has changed. It's cagey, almost apologetic. Ma outburst has shattered our sick symbiosis.

– What the fuck dae ah dae wi these? ah sais, withoot thinking, and then brek oot in a smile as it dawns oan us. It lets Mikey off the hook.

– Dae ye really want me tae tell ye? he sneers, reclaiming some ay the power he'd previously relinquished, as Saughton sniggers and Fat Sow brays. He sees that ah'm no amused, however, so he continues: – Yir no bothered about a hit, right? Ye want something slow, tae take away the pain, tae help ye git oaf the junk, right? Well these are perfect. Custom–fuckindesigned fir your needs. They melt through yir system, the charge builds up, then it slowly fades. That's the cunts they use in hoospitals, fir fuck sakes. – Ye reckon these then, man?

– Listen tae the voice ay experience, he smiles, but mair at Saughton than at me. Fat Sow throws her greasy head back, exposing large, yellowing teeth. So ah dae jist as recommended. Ah listen tae the voice ay experience. Ah excuse masel, retire tae the toilet and insert them, wi great diligence, up ma arse. It was the first time ah'd ever stuck ma finger up ma ain arsehole, and a vaguely nauseous feeling hits us. Ah look at masel in the bathroom mirror. Red hair, matted but sweaty, and a white face with loads ay disgusting spots. Two particular beauties; these ones really have tae be classified as boils. One oan the cheek, and one oan the chin. Fat Sow and I would make an excellent couple, and ah entertain a perverse vision ay us in a gondola oan the canals ay Venice. Ah return doonstairs, still sick but high fae scoring.

– It'll take time, Forrester gruffly observes, as ah swan back intae the living-room.

– You're tellin me. For aw the good they've done ah might as well huv stuck thum up ma erse. Ah get ma first smile fae Johnny Saughton for ma troubles. Ah can almost see the blood aroond his twisted mooth. Fat Sow looks at us as if ah had just ritually slaughtered her first born. That pained, incomprehensible expression ay hers makes us want tae pish ma keks wi laughter. Mike wears a very hurt I–crack–the–jokes–here look, but it's tinged wi resignation through the realisation that his power over me has gone. It ended wi the completion ay the transaction. He was now naemair tae me than a lump ay dug shite in the shopping centre. In fact, considerably less. End ay story.

– Anywey, catch yis later folks, ah nod ower tae Saughton and Fat Sow. A smiling Saughton gies us a matey wink which seems tae sweep in the whole room. Even Fat Sow tries tae force a smile. Ah take their gestures as further evidence that the

balance ay power between me and Mike has fundamentally shifted. As if tae confirm this, he follays us oot ay the flat. – Eh, ah’ll see ye aroond man. Eh . . . sorry aboot aw the shite ah wis hittin ye wi back thair. That cunt Donnelly . . . he makes us dead jumpy. A fuckin heidbanger ay the first order. Ah’ll tell ye the fill story later. Naehard feelins though, eh Mark?

– Ah’ll see ye later Forry, ah reply, ma voice hopefully cairryin enough promise ay threat tae cause the cunt a wee bit unease, if no real concern. Part ay me doesnaewant tae burn the fucker doon though. It’s a sobering thought, but ah might need him again. But that’s no the way tae think. If ah keep thinkin like that, the whole fuckin exercise is pointless. By the time ah hit the bottom ay the stair ah’ve forgotten aw aboot ma sickness, well almost. Ah can feel it, the ache through ma body, it’s just that it doesnaereally bother us any mair. Ah know it’s ridiculous tae con masel that the gear is making an impact already, but there’s definitely some placebo effect taking place. One thing that ah’m aware ay is a great fluidity in ma guts. It feels like ah’m melting inside. Ah huvnaeshat for about five or six days; now it seems tae be coming. Ah fart, and instantly follow through, feeling the wet sludge in ma pants with a quickening of ma pulse. Ah slam oan the brakes; tightening ma sphincter muscles as much as ah can. The damage has been done, however, and it’s gaunnaegit much worse if ah dinnae take immediate action. Ah consider going back tae Forrester’s, but ah want nothing mair tae dae wi that twat for the time being. Ah remember that the bookies in the shopping centre has a toilet at the back. Ah enter the smoke-filled shop and head straight tae the bog. What a fuckin scene; two guys stand in the doorway ay the toilet, just pishing intae the place, which has a good inch ay stagnant, spunky urine covering the flair. It’s oddly reminiscent ay the foot pool at the swimming baths ah used tae go tae. The two punters shake oot their cocks in the passage and stuff them intae their flies wi as much care as ye’d take putting a dirty hanky intae yir poakit. One ay them looks at us suspiciously and bars ma path tae the toilet.

– Bog’s fuckin blocked, mate. Ye’ll no be able tae shite in that. He gestures tae the seatless bowl fill ay broon water, toilet paper and lumps ay floating shite. Ah look sternly at him.

– Ah’ve goat tae fuckin go mate.

– Yir no fuckin shootin up in thair, ur ye?

just what ah fuckin needed. Muirhoose's Charles Bronson. Only this cunt makes Charles Bronson look like Michael J. Fox. He actually looks a bit like Elvis, like Elvis does now; a chunky, decomposing ex-Ted.

Away tae fuck. Ma indignation must have been convincing, because this radge actually apologises.

– Naeoffence meant, pal. Jist some ay they young cunts in the scheme huv been trying tae make this thir fucking shootin gallery. We're no intae that.

– Fuckin wide–o cunts, his mate added.

– Ah've been oan the peeve fir a couple ay days, mate. Ah'm gaun fuckin radge wi the runs here. Ah need tae shite. It looks fuckin awfay in thair, but it's either that or ma fuckin keks. Ah've nae shit oan us. Ah'm fuckin bad enough wi the bevvie, niver mind anything else. The cunt gies us an empathetic nod and unblocks ma way. Ah feel the pish soak intae ma trainers as ah step ower the door ridge. Ah reflect oan the ridiculousness ay saying that ah hud naeshit oan ays when ma keks are fill ay it. One piece ay good luck though, is that the lock oan the door is intact. Fuckin astounding, considering the atrocious state ay the bogs.

Ah whip oaf ma keks and sit oan the cold wet porcelain shunky. Ah empty ma guts, feeling as if everything; bowel, stomach, intestines, spleen, liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and fucking brains are aw falling through ma arsehole intae the bowl. As ah shit, flies batter oaf ma face, sending shivers through ma body. Ah grab at one, and tae ma surprise and elation, feel it buzzing in ma hand. Ah squeeze tightly enough tae immobilise it Ah open ma mitt tae see a huge, filthy bluebottle, a big, furry currant ay a bastard. Ah smear it against the wall opposite; tracing out an 'H' then an 'I' then a 'B' wi ma index finger, using its guts, tissue and blood as ink. Ah start oan the 'S' but ma supply grows thin. Naeproblem. Ah borrow fae the 'H', which has a thick surplus, and complete the 'S'. Ah sit as far back as ah can, withoot sliding intae the shit-pit below ays, and admire ma handiwork. The vile bluebottle, which caused me a great deal of distress, has been transformed intae a work of art which gives me much pleasure tae look at. Ah am speculatively thinking about this as a positive metaphor for other things in my life, when the realisation ay what ah've done sends a paralysing jolt ay raw fear through ma body.

Ah sit frozen for a moment. But only a moment. Ah fall off the pan, ma knees splashing oantae the pishy flair. My jeans crumple tae the deck and greedily absorb the urine, but ah hardly notice. Ah roll up ma shirt sleeve and hesitate only briefly, glancing at ma scabby and occasionally weeping track marks, before plunging ma hands and forearms intae the brown water. Ah rummage fastidiously and get one ay ma bombs back straight away. Ah rub off some shite that's attached tae it. A wee bit melted, but still largely intact. Ah stick it oan toap ay the cistern. Locating the other takes several long dredges through the mess and the panhandling of the shite ay many good Muirhoose and Pilton punters. Ah gag once, but get ma white nugget ay gold, surprisingly even better preserved than the first. The feel ay water disgusts us even mair than the shite. Ma brown-stained airm reminds us ay the classic t-shirt tan. The line goes right up past ma elbow as ah hud tae go right aroond the bend. Despite ma discomfort at the feel ay water oan ma skin, it seems appropriate tae run ma airm under the cauld tap at the sink. It's hardly the maist extensive or thorough wash ah've had, but it's aw ah can stand. Ah then wipe ma arse wi the clean part ay ma pants and chuck the shite-saturated keks intae the bowl beside the rest ay the waste. Ah hear a knocking at the door as ah pull oan ma soaking Levis. It's the sense ay wetness oan ma legs, again, rather than the stench, which makes us feel a bit giddy.

The knocking becomes a loud bang.

C'moan ya cunt, wir fuckin burstin oot here!
Haud yir fuckin hoarses.
Ah wis tempted tae swallay the suppositories, but ah rejected this notion almost as soon as it crossed ma mind. They were designed for anal intake, and there wis still enough ay that waxy stuff oan them tae suggest that ah'd no doubt huv a hard time keeping them doon. As ah'd shot everything oot ay ma bowels, ma boys were probably safer back thair. Home they went. Ah goat some funny looks as ah left the bookies, no sae much fae the pish-queue gang whae piled past us wi a few derisory 'aboot-fuckin-time-n-aws' but fae one or two punters whae clocked ma wasted appearance. One radge even made some vaguely threatening remarks, but maist were too engrossed in the form cairds, or the racing oan the screen. Ah noted Elvis/Bronson was gesticulating wildy at the telly as ah left. At the bus stop, ah realised what a sweltering hot day it had become. Ah remembered somebody sais that it wis the first day ay the Festival. Well, they certainly got the weather fir it. Ah sat oan the wall by the bus stop, letting the sun soak intae rna wet jeans. Ah saw a 32 coming, but didnae move, through

apathy. The next one that came, ah got it thegither tae board the fucker and headed back tae Sunny Leith. It really is time tae clean up, ah thought, as ah mounted the stairs ay ma new flat.