

# Sleep Now In the Fire

By Paul Blake

---

The train sped across metal tracks flanked by barren fields, crops withered and dead, farming equipment left to rust and die as the oil and petrol had run out. The rattle of the carriage and the wheels a welcome counterpoint to the screaming and crying from the passengers around me. I had fought for my place beside the window, the slight gap allowing in the wintry air, providing sweet, cool relief from the sweltering bodies around me. Air conditioning had long gone, too expensive to run, unnecessary for these passengers. In the cramped confines, it had become survival of the fittest, the strongest, and the ones most willing to take what they wanted. That's what it has always been about. Will. Ours, Yours, Theirs. The Will of the People. Our will to survive, Your will to obey and Their will to lead.

I could see the clouds in the sky ahead, a dark grey, and a forbidding portent of what was to come. They obscured the weak December sun behind us, casting a shadow far and wide. Beside me, Steven collapsed to his knees, I lifted him back up. He had helped me gain this position, any weakness and we would be back in the heap, on top of the already dead, already rotting from within as the heat of the carriage sped up the decomposing. We were in the camp together. In his other life, Steven was a journalist. We spoke occasionally, but like most in the camps, we tended to keep ourselves to ourselves. In the carriage of death, we decided early on to team up and get the best spot.

“Steven, stand up for God's sake!” I spat into his face.

“Mark, I can’t... I can’t.” Steven said, his eyes glazed and half closed, his voice weak and wheezy.

“You fucking well will or I’ll finish you off myself.”

Steven didn’t respond, his face slackened, his muscles drooped, his badly shaved head rasped against my cheek as his head dropped. I found I was supporting all his weight, I looked around me, at the faces of some of my fellow passengers, no one was looking, their eyes downcast, lost in their agony and fear. I stood up straighter, expanded my chest and pushed Steven up with all my might, as he came back down my fist connected with his face, I heard the crunch of the nasal cartilage break, the sickening pop as his optical socket broke, his right eye bulged as the air from the sinus cavity tried to escape. I pushed him towards the centre of the carriage, where his corpse tripped over another’s outstretched leg and tumbled over, the skull made a nauseating shattering sound on the hard wooden floor of the carriage, the blood mingled with those already passed. No one said anything, no one dared, they were just looking to survive, to end this journey, to get off this meat train in one piece.

How had it come to this? I was a college professor; I had a doctorate in Medicine; I wrote books; appeared on television shows; I played Rugby Union for England; I voted Remain. Yes, that was it. I voted fucking Remain. It had been ten years and six months since that fateful rainy day in June when seventeen million people voted to leave the European Union because of ... I don’t know. There were a thousand ‘reasons’, none of which stood up to the slightest scrutiny, a thousand lies, untruths, rumours, hearsay and bullshit. This was compounded by the government deciding in all its insanity to crash out of the EU with no deal and no plan. Crashing out to cheers across the tabloids and social media with Mr Farage’s reptilian grin plastered across every television channel and paper. He soon buggered

off though, didn't he? His work done: his pockets full of EU money. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, was ousted by her Senior Ministers before the ink was even dry on the Exit document. A vicious leadership battle took place between Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, which only ended when footage appeared via WikiLeaks. Of course, it would be that Russian propaganda machine. Footage of BoJo at a party mocking the people of the UK, calling them gullible spastics for believing in his lies. His crazy hair and zany antics were soon missed as Gove, free of restraint and full of power in the top job used the Henry VIII powers to suspend General Elections, in the National Interest, of course. We mustn't have anything disrupt the Leaving process. Labour and the other political parties, were forcibly disbanded, with 'Oh! Jeremy Corbyn' locked in Belmarsh Prison, along with other traitorous members of Gove's own party, Clarke, Soubry, Morgan and others. The House of Lords was abolished, they had tried in vain to prevent the No Deal approach and it destroyed them. The People were sick of these unelected free lunch bastards trying to take away their sovereignty, or so they were told.

Every trade deal the UK attempted after Brexit was rebuffed, The US, India, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, China, even Micro-fucking-Nesia. The Commonwealth countries that were supposedly aching to join the UK turned their backs on their former masters, in some cases publically, laughing as they stuck their fingers up. A result of the Boris School of Charm no doubt. No one wanted to be associated with the 'Nation that cut off its own nose and then stuck it up its own arse.' These were all told to the People as successes, the UK standing up for the People, carrying out their wishes. Oh the People, what happened to them? Well, we became poorer, much much poorer, the new Government abolished the minimum wage and the working time directive, which in turn removed holiday pay, maternity leave, the maximum working limit, night work limits, rest breaks. Brexit turned the UK into a little sweatshop of horrors, all long-term contracts were dissolved and everyone put on zero-hour contracts, so they could 'choose when to work', their employers just took the logical step and

chose people that were willing to work any and every hour, if you didn't then you were not chosen. The disabled and on benefits were made to work, if they didn't they wouldn't get any money, if they couldn't, well it was simply a matter of Will really, they weren't willing to work and the People weren't willing to continue to pay for scroungers. Homelessness, food banks, prostitution, betting shops, pawnbrokers all increased, as did bankruptcies, repossession, suicide, crime. Inflation rose as did interest rates, borrowing became more expensive, the grocery shopping far more expensive, luxury shopping was reserved for the Upper Class, in shops barred to lower classes. To combat the rise in crime and disorder the army was deployed on the streets of England and Scotland.

Ireland was left to fend for itself. The British government was unwilling to pay to maintain any border between Northern Ireland and the Republic and left them to battle amongst themselves and then swept in when violence spread to the mainland. Good Friday Agreement? It was more like Pancake Day for the Irish, on both sides of the border. Ireland is now a Celtic ghost land, and eventually people will be able to safely go back there. Our Government told the world it was an accident, a plane carrying nuclear warheads, or maybe more than one, a computer error, or maybe it was a submarine, I can't remember. Winter started early over there, the sky over Ireland a mass of dirt, soil, ash and Deoxyribonucleic acid.

GDP growth slowed to zero and then crashed under. The Pound collapsed to pennies against the Euro. The People were reassured that it was okay as it meant we could export more, however, no one wanted UK goods. The EU and the US found you could transport cheaper, better quality, and less controversial goods from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Somalia, North Korea. The Service industry collapsed, the majority moved abroad, bankers to Germany, insurers to Belgium, creative industries such as fashion, film, advertising who were sick of the intolerance, the racism, homophobia, transphobia they saw across the unfettered

Right-wing papers moved to sunnier climes. Farmers couldn't get enough workers to pick their crops or buy their goods. The fishing industry died as seas were polluted in the name of Sovereignty. The government changed the way the media was controlled The Guardian newspaper was closed for printing anti-Brexit propaganda, along with The New European, Metro, Evening Standard, and Daily Mirror. Headlines shouted out and denounced them one by one, screaming Traitors, Mutineers, Enemies of the people, Saboteurs, Defectors, Judas', and more. I admit they were very creative in their synonym usage. The BBC was closed down and heavy regulations were imposed on broadcasters, what they could or couldn't show, most just decided to show repeat after repeat of old comedies as they were cheap and easy to procure. 'Till Death Us Do Part' and 'Love Thy Neighbour' were the nation's most-watched shows. The internet was filtered and then filtered further; the range of sites allowed narrowed and narrowed until there was no point in it. VPNs and encryption were banned, which led to a breakdown in the remaining banking industry as anyone could easily hack into their systems, and did.

Within two years of leaving EU Citizens fled the country in droves as after a campaign from the Brexit-supporting press the Government decreed that all EU Citizens had to register online and wear the yellow stars of the EU on their chest so U-Kingdomers would know not to hire them, and know to avoid them. In their absence public services ground to a halt due to a lack of doctors, nurses, officers, and specialists, it was the final nail in the NHS and it died, replaced with an insurance scheme copied from the Yanks. Replacements were brought in from the Middle East, as they were only ones willing to come: Syrians, Iraqis, Afghanis, and Yemenis. They came because of promises of a land of plenty and plenty for everyone, these promises were soon found to be as empty as the shelves in shops; as dirty as the rubbish-strewn streets; they were left as abandoned as the cars on highways thirsting for petrol their owners could not afford. They left as fast as they arrived, gangs of indigenous

white men, aided their decision, viciously and fatally in some cases. The Sun called them the 'Red, White and Blue Shirts' and said 'we're proud of their Bulldog spirit.'

Upon the ten year anniversary of the referendum, with the country starving, unemployment rife and murmurings of dissent amongst the rulers it was decided that The People needed someone to blame, there was an obvious choice. 48 percent of the country would free a lot of hungry mouths from the meagre resources left, and who better than those that talked the country down, that spread Project Fear and fake news, the snowflake Remoaners, going against the Will of the People, dissenters, conspirators, renegades, and rebels. Social Media and television archives were scoured for any Remain-centric content, that's how they got me: I was a vocal supporter of Remain and highly critical of the Government before and after leaving. My apparent 'celebrity' status made the crimes even worse.

And that is how I ended up here on a train from Newcastle to Godknowswhere, from holding camps in Gateshead, and the North and South Shields for the past four months among my fellow betrayers, men and women, vermin and cockroaches. I looked out of the window at England's shit-brown and unpleasant land, grey-clouded hills, and satanic sweat-mills. A tear streaked down my cheek, followed by another, and another, my shoulders shuddered and shook and I started coughing, a rough, and hacking cough. When it had subsided I saw flakes coming through the window. The train began to slow. Through the window I saw Battersea Power Station in the distance, its four chimneys spewing great dark clouds, the orange glow of the fires beneath lighting the clouds in the gloom. I saw the buildings and streets around the station covered in a blanket of dirty snow, as we passed them. The streets deserted by people.

The train pulled into the station and the carriage doors were unlocked. I saw signs saying 'Victoria Station' and 'Detainees This Way' arrows pointing in the same direction. We were pulled from there by men with no necks and tattoos of the Saint George's Cross, their emblem. We were marched in pairs past black cab pickets of screaming fanatics, shuffled past cries of "traitors", "scum", ironically "splitters" was a popular chant, which made me smile without humour, and from one particularly venomous patriot "Merry Christmas you cunts!" We crossed the Thames over Chelsea Bridge. The Thames, never the clearest and cleanest, had slick rainbows of oil shimmering on the surface, churned by the waves; the smell was nauseous, of rotten meat and spoiled fish, with a lingering aroma of charcoal.

I could see we were being herded towards the power station, hazy in the wintery air, obscured by swirling wind-blown flakes of... well, of course, the old ideas never disappear, do they? They circle and bide their time, waiting for the right moment to come swooping in. The analytical part of my mind informed me dryly that there's no denying it isn't an effective method, proven to work. The emotional part screamed at me to run and to run fast. I listened intently and I pushed the women next to me hard into her escort making them both stumble, and set off at a tangent to our line of quislings. I ignored the shouts telling me to stop and pushed my legs harder. The long train journey and malnutrition in the camps were making this more difficult than it should be. It felt as though I was running through thigh-high waves on Britain's now polluted and toxic beaches. Hands reached for me and I swatted them away as I ran. I pictured myself at Twickenham heading for the try line, ball in the crook of my arm. I surged forward. Ahead, I saw the wooden fence ahead of me. The panels looked weak. I saw a barren urban wasteland through the gaps. An upturned shopping trolley, a beer crate, a broken wooden pallet, black bags, white bags, the thick dark green bags, all piled on top of each other. Bags torn by rats, birds, scavengers, their contents spilt. I hit the fence with my

shoulder and it cracked, I pushed further, deeper, harder, using the power of my legs and broke through. I tumbled to the ground; someone tumbled over me, cracked my head with a knee or elbow in the melee. I pushed myself up as more hands grabbed me, clawed me and dragged me back down to the ground. The world went bright and then black as I was struck once, twice, more. I lost count and stopped caring, I saw through one bleeding eye the chimneys above me and the thick clouds of swirling twisting eddies, and I suppose, Kevins, Michaels, Thomas', Annas, Jennifers, and all, too.

---

Paul Blake, 2017 [@paulblakeauthor](#)

© Copyright Paul Blake, 2017, All rights reserved.

[paulblakeauthor@gmail.com](mailto:paulblakeauthor@gmail.com)

Twitter [@paulblakeauthor](#)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

---