

Voice of the Voiceless - Paul Blake



He stood there looking, but not looking like he was looking, at the Palace of Westminster. He wore black joggers and a grey hoody. His trainer-clad foot raised on the foot-high wall beside the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, as he pretended to stretch his muscles. Rage Against the Machine played in his ears. Getting his blood pumping and anger surging. It was part of his routine as he waited for the opportunity to come knocking.

It was an ordinary cold February evening as Mark and Jenny sat together on the sofa watching a film. Jenny had her legs up across Mark's lap as she swiped away colourful candies on her phone, occasionally glancing up when the music from the TV got loud enough to break through her concentration. Mark was engrossed in the action on the screen.

"Who's that?" Jenny asked. "Why are they chasing him?"

Mark paused the film. "That's Igor. He's chasing Matt Damon because he stole a computer chip that Igor needs to hack into the stock exchange and—" Mark was interrupted as his phone beeped a notification. Mark looked across the room to his desk and saw his phone's screen light up and then fade. "—steal a ton of money from Wall Street. Matt Damon doesn't

know that Igor isn't actually a bad guy. He's like Robin Hood and is planning to give the money he steals to charity and GoFundMe medical donations."

"Aren't you going to see who texted you?"

"Nah, it'll just be one of the boys sharing a meme about that virus in China. They've been doing it all day."

"Go get your phone," Jenny lifted her legs off him. "I want to see."

"But the film?"

"It's boring. No one is watching it."

Mark calculated whether it was worth making the obvious comment and the argument that would inevitably come from it versus actually getting to watch the end of the movie. He stood up.

"It's like you don't want me to see your phone. It's not your other girlfriend texting you, is it?" her eyes narrowed.

"Other girlfriend? Don't be silly. I can barely handle you, let alone another one too." He shuddered for comedic effect and laughed. He retrieved his phone from the desk and passed it to her. She typed in his passcode and opened the app.

Mark sat down and picked up the remote. "See, if I had anything to hide you wouldn't know the passcode, would you?" He got comfortable and started the film.

"I don't get it? It's not funny."

Pause. "What don't you get? Let's see."

Jenny passed him the phone. On the screen was a picture of two company logos side by side. They were both umbrellas shown from above with eight segments. One had red and white segments and 'The Umbrella Corporation' written below. The other had turquoise and white segments and Chinese writing with an English translation below 'Shanghai Ruilan Bao Hu San Biotech Limited'.

Mark smiled. "This one," he pointed, "is the logo of the company in Resident Evil and the other is a biotech company in China. They have the same logo, just different colours."

"What's Resident Evil?"

"We've seen three or four of the movies and you've been here when I've played the games."

"We have? Are you sure?"

Mark nodded, "We even went to the cinema to see the first one."

"What's it about?"

"Zombies."

Jenny paused, “That’s not funny.”

“I didn’t say it was. They rarely are. That’s why I wasn’t bothered to get my phone.”

Jenny got off the sofa and walked to the doorway. “Where you going? The film?”

“You finish it. I’m just going to tidy the kitchen before bed.”

Mark watched her leave and shook his head, “For fuck’s sake.” He settled into the space she’d left and resumed the film.

As the infection and death count rose and lockdowns came in. From herd immunity to quarantined cruise ships to Boris Johnson’s “Many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time” to 5G activating the virus in vaccines and birds being government-issued drones spying on the population. Mark went from memes to Facebook virologist, refuting those that said it was just flu. He was on furlough and in lockdown. *What else was he going to do? Bake banana bread and work out to Joe Wicks?* Jenny was a nurse in the local hospital and Mark could see the toil the pandemic was taking on her. She’d tell him of seeing people on ventilators, dying alone as their family were not allowed in the hospital, lending them her phone so they could Facetime one final time. Her tears mixed with theirs as she told him of their despair and pain.

The months went on and the Government regularly demonstrated their incompetence and malice. That goblin Dominic Cummings breaking lockdown for an ‘eye test’, Eat Out to Help Out serving up Covid infections on a plate, the sickeningly flawed ‘world-beating’ Trace and Trace programme that cost twelve billion fucking pounds done on a flawed fucking Excel spreadsheet, not closing the schools, or even the goddamn borders until it was far too late. What’s the point of being an island nation if there is a global pandemic and you let tens of thousands of your citizens die? The daily briefings where ministers stood in front of the population and gaslit the nation. Doing everything they could to stop the pandemic? *Fuck them*, Mark thought.

Mark spent all his time on Twitter and Facebook arguing with fuckheads about the merits of lockdown and masks and vaccines. Pointing out the government failures and how anyone could have done a better job. Yes, even that idiot Corbyn. He found himself getting angrier and angrier. At the government and his thick-as-shit friends. He knew they were thick-as-shit; he’d grown up with them, went to school with them. He watched as they attended anti-

Lockdown protests in London, Mark began to call those that opposed measures to safeguard the population pro-virus and later, as the numbers grew, killers.

And so, the much predicted and often dismissed second wave hit with a vengeance.

Mark's mum and dad joined those who died before their time. Just after the Christmas that the Prime Minister said would be 'inhuman' to cancel. Mark recalled the phone calls where she begged him to spend the holiday period with them. Mark wouldn't relent. It wasn't safe for them. His mum and dad were in their seventies with plenty of underlying conditions and with Jenny working on the frontline it wasn't right to risk it. He'd promised they'd go see them after lockdown, they'd have a belated Christmas with the dinner and the exchanging of presents then. He'd put the decorations back up for the one day. It'd give them something to look forward to. His mum was hospitalised first. Mark's dad called to tell him. She must have caught the virus when their friends came round for pre-Christmas drinks. As his Dad told him, Mark's anger levels rose. Then his dad coughed.

Jenny was at work, and Mark was sitting on the sofa. A framed photo of his mum and dad in his lap. Their faces smiling as they celebrated his mum's seventieth birthday. They were in each other's arms, dancing. Mark remembered the occasion well. His dad had rented the local village hall as a surprise, and Mark and Jenny went up there the day before and got the hall ready. Banners, balloons, table cloths. His mum cried when she saw the hall and then cried some more when she saw all her friends there. She'd spent the whole evening dancing and talking and smiling.

Mark held the photo of her and his dad and vowed to do whatever he could to end this.

Mark spent the next month scouting the Houses of Parliament while pretending to exercise, watching the comings and goings of ministers. Making full use of his furloughed free time. Looking for the best place to strike, and the best person to strike against. He had a list of targets

from the Prime Minister downwards. He didn't want to waste his chance on a nobody. That wouldn't achieve anything. The government wouldn't change their approach.

It was a sunny March day when everything came together. Coincidentally the anniversary of the first and wasted lockdown. Mark was in Victoria Tower Gardens South, surrounded by trees in spring leafy greenness carrying out his pre-exercise stretches. The Houses of Parliament overlooking the park. Mark saw the grinning sex-pest-looking Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock, walking towards him. Mark recalled the video of the Minister laughing when interviewed about the Track and Trace system, and the countless times he wanted to punch the laptop screen when Hancock appeared on the Covid briefings. That smug face, always so close to an outright grin, even when delivering the harshest news. *Yes, this will be an appropriate victim. Maybe someone with a hint of a soul will take over from him.* Mark thought.

Mark reached into his pocket and took hold of the handle of the folding knife in there. He placed his thumb on the opening lever. He stood up from the hamstring stretch he was doing and did a shuffled running on-the-spot motion to continue the illusion he was there for valid reasons. Hancock drew closer. A beige folder in his arms. He was wearing an expensive grey suit. *He's probably here to perve over the young women tanning on the grass.* Mark waited until Hancock had passed him before following. Waiting for the right moment. He withdrew the knife and pushed on the lever. The blade unfolded and Mark adjusted it in his grip. He increased his pace and was within two feet of the minister.

"You murdering piece of shit!" Mark shouted as he pushed the knife towards Hancock's back.

At the sound of the shout Hancock turned while still walking, and the blade struck the folder he was carrying. Mark withdrew the blade and struck again. This time cutting through the sleeve of the suit jacket. Hancock's face turned from his usual paedophile in the playground smile to panic, and he stopped walking. Mark collided with him and both fell to the ground. The knife fell out of Mark's hand without him noticing, and he carried on stabbing with his empty, closed fist. He struck Hancock's face, chest, belly while screaming "You killed them!" repeatedly.

He didn't feel the Taser bolts catch on his hoody, but he felt the electricity flow between them as his muscles stopped obeying his will. He collapsed beside the crying Health Minister as they cuffed his hands behind his back.

THE END

Author's note.

I hope you enjoyed this story, thank you for taking the time to read it.

Twenty-seven of my other short stories can be found in my short story collection A Few Hours After This on Amazon - mybook.to/FewHoursEbook.

