

THE JOKER

Darren Bennett, sat waiting in his dressing room for his curtain call he had waited a long time for this moment to arrive and was very nervous.

Darren is a stand up comedian and had been and had been a comedian it seems all his life, class clown, work fool anything for a joke. Darren had done all the normal rounds the working men's clubs and third rate bookings, even standing in at the interval in bingo halls, no one took any notice of his act all the patrons only wanted the bingo to start again not to listen to some fool telling jokes.

He had been booed off stage even had fruit thrown at him and things to bad to mention, but now here he was at the Palace Theatre home of the stars.

Many a great name had played these hallowed halls, names like Sheila Armstrong, Nathan Butler and of course Darren's hero of all time Parley Grainger

His real name was Henry Butterworth but no one was going to remember that name so he changed it to Parley Grainger, it sounded rather grand Henry had thought so himself.

Everyone who was anyone was Parleys friend he had played to the high society kings and queens the cream of the crop had come to see him perform he was a legend on the comedy circuit.

'Ten minutes Mr Bennett' the voice shouted.

Ten minutes Mr Bennett, how many years had he waited for someone to call him Mr Bennett as it was usually

'Hey Bennett you're on next'

No dressing room then just the men's toilet to change in before the punters filed in the club or where ever he was playing

Then he had to wait till all the drunks went home before he could change back again, times when the toilets were far less clean after the night's entertainment than before the show.

Now he had his own dressing room it was not very large but it was he's and he did not have to share it with anyone.

He had come a long way since his days at the local school, the area he lived in was rough to say the least it was survival of the fittest or the fastest, people got beat up just for looking sideways at someone Darren included till he learned one great lesson after being beat up a few times the one thing that kept him out of trouble and pain was (Laughter) the one thing that transcended hate and fear, make them laugh.

So that is what he did make the bullies laugh and the left him alone to be the clown on all went well and soon he was entertaining the school in plays, workshops and drama.

Like many families Darren's was poor the lived in a two-roomed apartment on a council housing estate.

There was five in the family, his father could never get the break, he so desperately tried to achieve, he tried so hard to climb the ladder but never got off the second rung.

His mother worked in a bakery and had to get up very early in the morning to walk the two miles to work, you could say she was an early riser. His sister and brother were younger than him, and attended the local primary school. Darren's classmates were low lives and lived in the housing estate where Darren and his family lived.

Darren so much wanted to learn, but they the low lives would make any excuse to disrupt the lesson so no one learned anything and in the end they all got punished.

They once got and exchange teacher form South Africa who took them for a lesson in history, but of course them the low lives took it upon themselves to ridicule him and made him loose his cool.

He called them cowards and bullies so they beat him up just for the hell of it; he flew back home the next day.

School scared Darren so much and being in the older end of the school was terrorized by the bullies, the kids used to have to give up their dinner monies to the bullies as a kind of protection for not being beaten up.

But for Darren who had no money was in itself very traumatic and he joined the gang to try and fit in he hated being poor and vowed one day he would climb out of the poverty he was in if he could.

The only weapon he had was to be funny then he never got beat up again by anyone, as he had his own protectors in the low lives, so he traded safety for humour and it worked.

When he left school at the age of 16 with not much in the way of academic qualifications, he had stayed on an extra year to study art as he had an ability to draw.

The teacher convinced him that was the way to go he said he could get a job in commercial art.

He was good but the jobs he applied for were not suited to him because he came from the wrong side of the tracks as it were but how do you get on in life when no one gives you a chance because you are poor.

Darren made a vow he would make it some day and get the hell out of this area and this life.

So here he sat staring into the dressing room mirror, he looked older than his twenty-six years, and he was billed as a new act but had been round a few years and wondered how the crowd would receive him tonight.

After all he had played in some real tasty places clubs and pubs where the audience were legless by eight-o'clock at night.

Meat pies had been thrown at him pints of beer, he once asked a man, who was heckling him,

‘Hey mate if you can do any better be my guest’ Darren shouted

This only got the man more aggressive and he jumped up onto the stage and then tried to strangle Darren only for the intervention of the security he may have succeeded.

But that is always the way he has found it the ones whom give it can never take it.

‘Two minutes Mr Bennett’ the voice said.

‘Two minutes’ Darren said out loud

‘Hope I remember all my jokes’ he used to write them down on anything, on his sleeve the back of his hand anywhere he could easily see them.

Darren stopped writing them on his shirt sleeve has his long suffering wife Mavis told him she would not wash his shirts any more if he did not stop the practice.

Darren had met Mavis one night while doing a gig in a working man’s club she was with a hen party who gave the acts that night hell not the least Darren.

They were all drunk and swore at him and said sexy things to make him forget his jokes, which worked to some degree but he in turn gave it them back, but the did not try to strangle him.

He had met Mavis later standing at the bar she had a warm smile and made some apologize for her friends taunting him her eyes twinkled in fun as she spoke to him.

The were married a year later but his career of late was not going anywhere, and the struggled to make ends meet it seems his past had not left him.

Darren had a job at a garage as a motor mechanic but so much wanted to be an entertainer as he hated being a mechanic all the oil and crap and cutting your hands every minute of the day and the bosses who were utter pricks. But Mavis said

‘One day you will make it you just have to believe in your self’ she was sweet and he loved her for it.

‘Curtain call Mr Bennett’ this is it son now you are on, he put on his coat and looked at himself one more time.

‘You look tired my boy this job and the other job if you could call it a job is telling on you maybe you need an holiday, oh yes that is it a holiday but how do I pay for it, oh well time to face the music’

He left the dressing room and walked along the hall to where he could hear the noise of the band, a lady came towards him she seemed to be upset.

‘Good luck you will need it’ she said to Darren,

‘Oh great that’s all I need a crap audience’