

Disordered Minds

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Extract

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One

Colliton Park, Highdown, Bournemouth
Monday, 4 May 1970, 1.30 p.m.

IT WASN'T MUCH of a park, barely half an acre of wilted grass off Colliton Way where local people walked their dogs in the mornings and evenings. During the day it was hardly frequented at all, except by truants who hung around the trees that lined the fences. The police rarely visited it and, anyway, there was a hundred yards of open space between the only entrance and the offenders. In the time it took two overweight coppers to lumber across, the teens were long gone, vaulting the low fences into the gardens that formed the rear perimeter. As complaints came in thick and fast from homeowners whenever this happened, the police, preferring an easy life, tended to leave the youngsters alone.

The logic ran that while they were in the park they weren't thieving, and it was better to turn a blind eye and concentrate official efforts in the city centre. To

the cynical police mind, truancy came low on their list of criminal behaviour.

Situated at the poorer end of Highdown, Colliton Way had little going for it. Unemployment was high, school attendance poor, and the proposed new buildings on the acres of waste ground behind it, which had promised jobs and houses, had faltered to a halt. The only site under construction was the Brackham & Wright tool factory, which was a planned replacement for the present, antiquated building in Glazeborough Road. This was no consolation to its workers, many of whom lived in Colliton Way, because up-to-date technology and automation always brought redundancies.

The most persistent truants were three boys. They were charismatic and generous as long as their leadership wasn't challenged, dangerously violent when it was. It made them a magnet for unhappy children who misinterpreted generosity for affection and cruelty for regard, and none of the children understood how damaged the boys were. How could they, when the boys didn't know it themselves? Barely able to read or write, only interested in immediate gratification and with no rein over their aggressive impulses, they thought they were in control of their lives.

That May Monday followed the aimless pattern of the many before. So entrenched was the boys' truancy that their mothers no longer bothered to get them out of bed. Better to let sleeping dogs lie, was

the women's thinking, than face a beating because their overgrown sons were angry at being woken. The boys were incapable of getting up. None of them came home before the early hours – if they came home at all – and they were always so drunk their sleep was stupor. All three mothers had asked for them to be taken into care at one time or another, but their resolve had never lasted very long. Fear of reprisal, and misguided love for their absent first-borns, had always effected a change of mind. It might have been different if there had been men around, but there weren't, so the women did what their sons told them.

The boys had picked up a couple of thirteen-year-old girls in the centre of town and brought them to the park. The skinny one, who had her ten-year-old brother in tow, held no interest for them; the other, a well-developed girl with flirtatious eyes, did. The girls sat opposite each other on a bench seat with their knees drawn up to their chins and toes touching while the four boys sprawled on the grass at their feet, staring at their knickers. Wearing knee-high boots, miniskirts and crocheted see-through tops with black bras underneath, the girls understood exactly where their power lay and it amused them. They spoke to each other about sex, and pointedly ignored the boys.

The response was lacklustre. The boys passed round a bottle of stolen vodka but showed no interest

in the crude flirting and, without an endgame, all sport grows tedious, even cock-teasing. The skinny girl, annoyed by the boys' lack of interest in her, teased them for being virgins, but the taller girl, Cill, swung her legs to the ground and shuffled her skirt down her bum. 'This is silly,' she said. 'C'mon, Lou. We're going back down town.'

Her friend, a small undernourished clone with smudged black eyes and pale pink lips, performed her own skirt-wriggling act and stood up. They both aped the fashion sense of Cathy McGowan from their favourite pop show, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, with belts worn at hip level and hair ironed straight to fall in heavy fringes over their forehead. It suited Cill, whose face was strong enough to take it, but Lou, who was tiny, like Twiggy, wanted to cut her hair in an urchin style. Cill wouldn't allow it. It was part of their friendship pact that they looked alike, or as near alike as was possible for a well-developed teenager and one who had to stuff Kleenex down her bra.

'You coming, or what?' Cill demanded of Lou's ten-year-old brother, nudging him with her toe. 'Your dad'll string you up if the bizzies catch you, Billy. You see if he don't.'

'Leave me alone,' the child mumbled tipsily.

'*Jee-sus!*' The drink had made her quarrelsome and she cast a scornful eye over the prone bodies. 'Blokes are so fucking pathetic. Me and Lou's had the same as you, but we ain't passed out.'

'Don't push your luck,' said one of the boys. He wasn't the tallest, but he was dark-haired and dark-eyed, and to her immature mind he looked like Paul McCartney.

Another, a freckle-faced redhead, reached a hand up Lou's thigh. 'Slag,' he jeered, squeezing hard.

She squeaked and pulled away, smacking at him. 'Virgin, virgin, virgin!' she chanted. 'You ain't never gonna get it, you're too fucking ugly.' He made a grab for her foot and she wailed at Cill to get him off. 'He's gonna pull me over.'

The taller girl put a boot on his chest. 'Let her go!'

He relaxed his hold with a grin. 'What d'you expect? You're a coupla tarts, ain't you?'

She manoeuvred a stiletto heel over his nipple. 'You wanna say that again?'

He was visibly pubescent, with hair above his lip and acne crowding his neck, and he was too drunk to be intimidated. 'You're a fat tart,' he slurred lazily, 'n' you've been laid so often I could park a car up yer cunt. Want me to try?'

His two friends rolled onto their fronts and watched the tableau with a gleam in their eye. To a girl with more experience, it would have been a warning sign, but Cill was a novice. She brought her full weight down on her heel as she stepped over him, dancing away before he could catch her. 'N' don't never call me fat again or I'll put my heel on your cock next time.'

The redhead clutched at his chest. 'That bloody hurt!'

'It was supposed to, dickhead.' She jerked her chin at the other girl as she started to walk away.

But there was no such easy escape for Lou. She was trapped against the bench and lost her balance when the dark-haired boy made a lunge for her. He grabbed her arms as she fell and spreadeagled her on the grass, and her wails of fear brought Cill running back. Their mothers should have warned them about the dangers of whipping up testosterone, but the only advice either had been given was: if you dress like a tart, you'll get yourself raped, and it'll be your own fault when it happens.

Believing she was streetwise, it was Cill who was the more naive. With animal instinct, Lou became catatonic immediately and held no attraction for the aroused adolescents. Cill fought back determinedly and took the full brunt of the assault. She kept calling on Billy to run for help but, at ten and drunk, all he could do was bury his head in his arms.

It was when they pulled her by her hair into the lee of the trees that Cill gave up. The pain was indescribable and sent tears coursing down her made-up cheeks. It masked all the other pains she experienced. All three wanted her – she was the dominatrix – and they took it in turns to have her. The dark one raped her twice. She was too young to understand

psychological trauma, but the ripping of her clothes – so loved and so longed for – the sweat, heat and filth of a prolonged gang bang and their leering, triumphant faces as they repeatedly violated her destroyed her in a way that their overexcited, briefly sustained penetrations could not.

‘That’s the last time anyone calls me a virgin,’ said the redhead, standing over her and zipping himself with a flourish.

The dark boy kicked her. ‘Bitch! If you run to the cops, you’ll get more of the same. Understood?’

With a belated sense of self-preservation, Cill closed her eyes and shut him out. She could name each one, although she never would. Her dad would kill her if he knew she’d been raped, and the police wouldn’t believe her anyway. *It was broad daylight in a park in Bournemouth, and no one had done a thing to help her.* Part of her brain wondered if the road was too far away for passers-by to see what was happening, the other part reproached her for dressing sexy. Her mum was right – she *had* brought it on herself – but all Cill had ever wanted was for people to say she was pretty.

Lou crawled across the grass to lie beside her. ‘They’ve gone,’ she whispered, stealing her small hand into Cill’s. ‘You OK?’

No-oo-oo! It was a scream that would reverberate in her head for days. ‘Yeah. What about you?’

The child curled into a fetal ball with her head on Cill's chest. 'Your dad'll tan your hide when he finds out.'

'I ain't telling him.'

'What if you get pregnant?'

'I'll kill it.'

'Billy'll tell our mum.'

'Then I'll fucking kill him, too.' She pushed Lou off and sat up. 'Where is he?'

'Over there.' She jerked her head towards the bench. 'You shouldn't've stood on him, Cill. Ma says it's always the girl's fault when a man gets angry.'

Cill tugged her torn top over her exposed breasts and stared at the hymenal blood on her thighs. She didn't need a lecture on blame, she needed to get home without being seen. With a vicious grab she caught Lou's hair and twisted it round her fist. 'I wouldn't've 'ad to if you hadn't called him a virgin. Now, are you gonna help me, or you gonna drop me in it again?'

Tears sprouted in the other child's eyes. 'You're hurting me,' she pleaded.

'Yeah,' said Cill unemotionally.

'It weren't my fault it happened.'

'Bloody was. It was you called them virgins. You're a fucking stupid bitch, Lou, and you didn't do nothing to stop it.'

'I was scared.'

'So was I . . . but I came back.'

Lou gave an uneasy wiggle of her shoulders. 'There weren't no sense us both getting done.'

'No,' said Cill, taking another twist of hair and digging her knuckles into the smaller girl's scalp. 'But you fucking well will be if you or Billy ever tell on me.' She stared into Lou's eyes, her own full of tears. 'You got that? Because if my dad has a go at me again, I'm off . . . and I ain't never coming back.'

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The cooling between the two girls was noticed by their families and their teachers. Once or twice Louise Burton's father tried to find out what had caused it, but Lou, who kept pestering to have her hair cut in the urchin style she so craved, shrugged and said Cill had found another friend. Billy slipped out of the room each time, but it didn't occur to either of his parents that he knew anything. Nor were they interested enough to pursue it. Free of Cill's influence, Louise reverted to dressing appropriately for a thirteen-year-old, and the brief flurry of truanting that had brought her to the unwelcome attention of her headmistress ceased abruptly.

For Priscilla Trevelyan's parents, the break was equally welcome. Their daughter had become wayward in puberty, but Louise Burton's unquestioning subservience had exacerbated it. Mr Trevelyan, disappointed by Cill's unwillingness to apply herself and troubled by her early maturity, had exercised a tough,

physical discipline to control her, and the sudden loss of affection between the two girls was acknowledged with relief but never mentioned. He was worried that talking about it would rekindle the dependence and he forbade his wife to show sympathy. He put Cill's bad temper down to the broken friendship, but overlooked it because of her new-found commitment to attending school.

The girls' teachers were less sanguine after a fight broke out between them during a PE lesson on Friday, 29 May. There had been three weeks of hostile silence before Louise said something that prompted Priscilla to react. It was a cat-fight of teeth and claws with the smaller child taking the brunt of it before the pair were finally pulled apart by a furious games teacher and marched in front of the headmistress. Priscilla stood in stony-faced silence, refusing to speak, while Louise sobbed about having her hair pulled and Cill trying to persuade her to truant again. The headmistress, who didn't believe her, nevertheless made the decision, in the absence of apology or explanation, that Priscilla should be punished with a week's suspension while Louise was let off with a caution.

Predictably, Cill's father took out his disapproval in a thrashing and, as she had threatened, she ran away some time during the early hours of Saturday, 30 May. Mr Trevelyan described the punishment as

'a couple of smacks' when the police asked if there was a reason for his daughter absconding, but otherwise he could not account for the out-of-character behaviour. She had never done it before, she had a good home and was doing well academically. Yes, there had been a few truancy problems in the past, but that was the fault of the secondary-modern system. Priscilla was easily bored by lessons that were geared to the less intelligent.

Louise, under questioning by a sympathetic policewoman, began by saying that Cill would kill her if she told the truth, then confessed the rape. She couldn't name the boys, but her description led to them being rounded up and their homes searched for any sign of the missing girl. They denied any knowledge of rape, Priscilla Trevelyan or Louise Burton, and nothing was found to connect them with an assault on the girls. It didn't help that Louise hadn't known their names, could only give vague descriptions, couldn't remember how they were dressed, and that Cill's crocheted top, miniskirt and knickers had been thrown away. Nor, when Louise tearfully insisted that Cill had brought it on herself by getting drunk and talking sexy, did the police believe an assault had taken place. Heavy petting, perhaps, but not full-on gang rape.

However, as the major stumbling block was the alleged victim's absence, the boys were released after

token questioning at 13.23 on Monday, 1 June. Rape was taken less seriously in 1970.

*The following is a single-chapter excerpt
from Dr Jonathan Hughes's
Disordered Minds*