

Arrogant, cocky, over-confident were a few of the labels that could, and were, levelled at Greg Curtis, a 38 year-old fork-lift truck driver at a Chinese wholesale food retailer. He had enough friends however, but secretly nobody really liked him. People like and in various ways are attracted to those who emit charisma, charm, and confidence. Some people however, have this in abundance and it can simply become too much, because no-one really likes arrogance, except for maybe a few, bizarre individuals, but they are the exceptions to the rule, as there is with everything.

He had his close-knit circle of friends, or followers, people who laughed at his jokes, who agreed with his political opinions, who never disagreed with him on anything, and this in turn, only fed his ego, reinforcing his own delusions of importance. He had never married, and had only had three girlfriends who couldn't take anymore of mannerisms and promptly left. He claimed he didn't want a partner, because according to him his freedoms would be stifled. Going for a pint and watching the match with the lads would probably be jeopardised, and he didn't want that. He would always claim that he could easily chat a woman up if he wanted. He could have a one-night stand with practically anyone he chose was his bold claim, believed by his friends as usual. It was just that, he never actually wanted to chat any women up, he would usually say, such was the paranoia he had of commitment, of losing his freedom.

Always sporting a shaven soccer hooligan look, with a stud in the top of each ear, and wearing casual attire wherever he went, he was one of those people most would try and avoid, and if you were to enter a conversation with him, you would hear his opinion, no matter what.

Of course, he used to be the school bully, had spent several months in jail for glassing a friend over an unpaid £1 bet, and even his work colleagues, indigenous Chinese pretended not to understand him, yet he was always, however, under the constant delusion that everybody liked him, that he was popular.

Usually at least twice a year, he and his so-called friends, Robbie, Davey and Jimbo would holiday in Ibiza, or Majorca, or any of the other home from homes, little pieces of England only with more nightclubs and takeaways. His friends would always try and enjoy themselves as best as they could, putting up with him, but sometimes he would simply be in a bad mood, and whatever was on his mind you would not hear the last of, over and over again, the same arguments, the same opinions, until he'd settled down and forgotten about it.

It was a sojourn to Malaga from where they were now returning. They had arrived in Bristol airport, caught an extortionately priced taxi that drove them to Avonmouth which put him in a sour mood for a few minutes. They had all decided that before they went their separate ways home, they would all go to a fast food outlet, and as they walked along a row of shops by a canal, one in particular caught his attention. 'Who you were' it was called, and upon closer inspection on a curtained window, several notices were up proclaiming what it was.

'Revert to your past life. Who were you? Were you a knight in shining armour, or were you the princess he rescued? Come in and find out for free'

"Free!" he said, and pointed at the notice, looking around at the others.

"It's free" he continued, "How's this place supposed to make money?" He didn't expect an answer.

"Dunno, are we going for scran, I'm starving." said Jimbo

"This'll be a laugh," Greg said, "It shouldn't take too long. I'm gonna say I used to be a king or something like that". They all followed him as he entered.

Inside, they found it to be no bigger than a normal sized living room in a semi-detached, with what was basically a dentist's chair in the middle that looked like it had been passed around a few times and was finally sent to the dump, only to be found and rescued.

Besides that there was a high stool, akin to those found in pubs, and nothing else. The others all stood near the laced curtained front windows just standing around as though waiting for a bus. The walls were bare, as was the floor. Across the entrance leading into the back room Greg saw there was a curtain, which was pulled back, and a man who must have been no more than a few years older than him with dark black glasses and a cheap black suit walked in. He smiled at Greg and his friends without any humour, without any meaning, as though he was the last customer of the day and wanted to shut the place and go home.

"Hi, my name is Seymour. Take a seat, lie back, and just relax" he said, gesturing to the chair.

Greg did so, and winked at his friends before resting his head back.

"Okay," said the man, "Clear your mind".

"That shouldn't be too hard for him," said Davey, and instantly regretted his sudden act of bravery because even though Greg smiled, he knew that behind it he was genuinely insulted. The man continued.

"Close your eyes, and tell me what comes into mind". Greg grinned at the man.

"I'm not sure I should tell you, it involves me and two women," They all burst into laughter, except Seymour who simply stared at the floor. Soon Greg was back with his eyes closed, and was thinking of himself sitting on a throne with a golden crown.

"I think... I think... I was some sort of king..." In a quick movement, he lifted his head, winked at his friends, and returned back to thinking of being on the throne.

"Tell me what else you see," said the man, "Tell me your surroundings".

"I see...I see...." As he saw himself as the king, he watched as the throne faded away, along with his attire, only to be replaced with a filthy sheet. Greg suddenly found he could not move at all, or even open his eyes. He could only watch his mind's eye as it showed him with greater and more clarity the person he used to be.

The image became like a dream, only with more distinction, based more in the real world, the real world for 1241, and his present day consciousness became that of his older self, in his new reality, his new world. The sky was clear blue, it was a nice day, and he found himself on the floor against the wall of a castle. He was a beggar. Some other people passed by, none of them looking in his direction. His skin was muddied and grimy, and he was sprawled on the ground holding out a small tin cup for any trinkets or money.

With his new mind, and his new knowledge of some distant future world, he knew that this is who he was now, and who he used to be. He also thought that he perhaps would not be returning to that small room back in Avonmouth by the canal so he flung his cup aside, one coin falling out, and dragged him self along the bridge and looked down into a moat, its waters dark and murky. He pushed himself over the edge and plummeted down in some effort to kill himself and return to the room, to wake up, but his reality was simply that. He hit the water, found he had no strength to swim, and sank away into the gloom.

His friends back in the room simply watched as their friend seemed simply to be asleep, and wondered if they were not seeing things as he slowly faded away.

The man turned and simply looked at them.

“What’s happened?” said Robbie, “What have you done with Greg?” The man looked at him like a defiant schoolboy not answering the headmaster’s questions. Rob knew he wouldn’t get an answer, and he also knew it was time to get out of there, they would have to find out another way. However the fact remained. Greg was gone.

“Come on lads,” he said, turning and walking to the door. The others hurried out

“Tell me one thing,” the man suddenly said. Robbie turned.

“If I could bring your friend back, would you really want me to? You see, I know that you don’t really like him do you? He stifles you, he influences you in ways you’re not comfortable with. Obviously you pretend to like him. You pretend and even convince yourselves that he’s a good mate, but you can never convince your conscience, can you? The voice that always tell you what you really think. So tell me, would you like me to bring him back?”. Robbie did not hesitate, and simply shook his head.

“No,” he said quietly, then turned and left. The man got off his stool, and walked back through the entrance at the back.

Outside, Rob rejoined the others who suddenly had a barrage of questions. He looked back at the place, and found that it was simply a derelict, boarded up newsagents. They all stared at it, then hurried away.

“Is Greg coming back?” asked Davey.

“No,” said Robbie, and all of them remained quiet for a few moments, not showing any emotion, but inside, they were smiling.

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