

## Face Value

I come here for my tea most days. Odd place to choose you might think, the cafe at the Garden Centre. I'm not a gardener, but I do sometimes pick up a plant that's going for next to nothing; something spindly and out of shape, usually. I take it back to my room. Give it some care.

It's busy here today; they're in to pick up their annuals – splash of colour for the summer. Make quite an outing of it, some of them do.

I'll get up and fetch another cup of tea in a minute. After that I'll be off; I don't want to walk home in the dark. It's not that I'm scared - no, it's the others who get frightened and then I land in trouble. Suspicion of intending to rob, or molest. Suspicion - I was born to it.

I'll never know how I got this face. From my parents I suppose, though I never knew them. Or maybe it got twisted when I struggled into the world. A face no one trusts. If something goes wrong and I'm in the vicinity, they pull me in - on suspicion. They can tell a villain when they see one, so they reckon.

That's Doreen over there behind the counter. She's a good sort. One day they took me in for a mugging that happened while I was here for my tea. An old man, it was, outside the Betting Shop. Doreen spoke up for me and they believed her. Anyone would believe Doreen - a face you'd trust. We're not friends or anything - no chance of that - but she serves me the same way she serves everyone else and I don't hope for more.

I'm at work till four, then I come over here. I've got to account for where I am and I know Doreen would back me up. I walk everywhere – buses could be trouble. On my way here today I wanted to stop for a rest in the park, but I wouldn't dare do that. Mothers have to watch out for suspicious characters and I don't blame them. So I keep on the move. I couldn't hurt a child.

There's a bloke over there's making me bloody angry. Big man in a green waterproof. Two kids with him. He was going to take the table next to me but he gave me a look and went up the other end. Reminded me of a boy at school, Derek he was called. Derek Gibbs, the ringleader. For a couple of years he had his fun, but then I got smart – put the word about I was carrying a knife, which I wasn't of course. He kept clear of me after that. Probably reckoned I looked just the kind of kid to use one.

I hate the mornings; most days I wish I'd never woken up. I'm in a rage by the time I'm out the door. Then I take it out on the cars. That's my job - cleaning the cars at the second-hand dealer's. They think I'm keen the way I make them shine.

I'm on my way home now and I can't get Derek out of my mind. I'm stamping my feet as I go along...Derek Gibbs...Derek Gibbs...Derek effing Gibbs...

When I get there I make sure some of the other lodgers know I'm in – establish my alibi for the evening. Then it's into my room and close the door, take off the jacket and roll up the shirtsleeves. I have a look at the plants but I don't give them their water. Can't seem to settle. Now I'm over at the drawer, where the knives are. I'm putting them in order - biggest down to the smallest. This is the last one. Small, but very sharp.