

**Extract from “Scroungers”
by Alexander Hayden James Smith**

Scene 12

Lights up. Syd is sat on the sofa reading the paper. The headline is 'World still to End: House Prices reach Record Low!'.

Matt enters in his dressing gown, bearing a cup of coffee.

Matt

Crikey, you're up early.

Syd

Mmm.

Matt sits down and flicks on the telly.

He sits watching a while.

Matt

What day is it today?

Syd

Tuesday.

Matt

Jesus.

He continues to watch the television.

Matt

You looking for jobs?

Syd smirks.

Matt

Yeah, well, you never know.

Syd

Really, Matthew. What jobs am I going to get out the back of a paper? Besides, apparently, the offer of a handjob?

Matt

Well, when was the last time you had a handjob?

Pause as Syd thinks.

Syd

About the last time I had a real job.

Matt turns to him.

Matt
Fucking hell.

Syd
What?

Matt
Fucking hell.

Syd
What!?

Matt
Fucking hell!

Syd
For Christ's sake, Matthew, what is it? So I haven't known the touch of woman in a while.
Big deal. I can still touch myself. In fact, I'm probably better off that way.

Matt
No, it's not that.

Syd
Oh. Then what, then?

Matt
I can't believe you once had a real job.

Syd flexes his shoulders.

Syd
Oh. Well, yeah. I had a job. Once.

Matt
My word. What was it? No wait, let me guess. Concentration camp guard?

Syd
My dad's grandmother's side of the family was Jewish. I resent that.

Matt
No wait, hold on...Chief Inquisitor for the Vatican?

Syd
I despise religion, Matthew.

Matt
How about...pimp?

Syd
You think I was a pimp?

Matt

Yeah, but not a cool pimp. Like a seedy pimp who never washes. And pushes underage girls.

Syd

You think I was a seedy pimp of underage girls...? Matthew, let me tell you, this has been a most illuminating conversation.

Matt

I'm only joking!

Syd

Christ alive, I feel dirty just talking to you. You know, this says more about your imagination than mine, Matthew. Wait until I tell your girlfriend about your obsession with underage snatch.

Matt

My obsession!?

Syd

Yes. Well, how underage are we talking, here?

Matt

I dunno, fifteen?

Syd

Oh. Oh, well that's almost alright then.

Matt

Really?

Syd

Yeah, well, I thought you meant children. I mean, that shit's fucking taboo.

Matt

No shit.

Syd

I mean, I know you're all about breaking boundaries, Matthew, and pushing the envelope of what's acceptable, but I thought that was bold, even for you.

Matt

Well, false alarm!

Syd

Thank God for that. I'd hate to think I'd been sharing a flat with a nonce all this time.

Matt

What were we even talking about?

Syd

Underage girls.

Matt

I meant *before* that.

Syd

Oh, fuck knows.

Matt

You! It was you and your once-job. Go on, what was it?

Syd

Oh Jesus, that? Why are you even interested?

Matt

Because you brought it up!

Syd

Oh, for fuck's sake. Alright. Yes, once upon a time I had a job. I did. I worked...

Pause.

Matt

Go on...

Pause.

Syd

...In a shop.

Matt looks most disappointed.

Matt

That's it? A shop?

Syd

Yeah.

Matt

You worked in a shop?

Syd

Yeah, what were you expecting?

Matt

I dunno. I thought it'd be something exciting. Like, you were the CEO of a company but it all went belly up and you sank into a deep depression. Or you were the heir to the fortune of some company, but they were involved in killing kids in Africa or something, so you quit in disgust. Or the slave trade, or something.

Syd

So far today, Matthew, you've expressed the opinion that I resemble a Nazi, a paedophile and a slave trader. What next? Harold Shipman? Ian Huntley? Joe Mangle?

Matt

What sort of shop was it?

Syd

It was a music shop.

Matt

A music shop?

Syd

Yeah, like a shop. Where the kids go, you know? To buy music.

Matt

We don't have those anymore.

Syd

I know, it was a long time ago.

Matt

Fucking hell, must have been. What was it like?

Syd

Oh, Matthew, it was great. We played any music we wanted. We all got stoned out the back. No one gave a toss if you were late 'cause there were no fucking customers anyway.

Oh, Matthew, they were glory days.

Matt

So what happened?

Syd

We got taken over, didn't we?. Some new outfit. Thought they knew better. Out went the good music. Out went the fun. All we got was shite. In the end I had to leave.

Matt

Had to?

Syd

Well, it was that or get fired.

Matt

Oh, fair enough. What did you do?

Syd

I put on a John Lennon CD.

Matt

What? That's it?

Syd

Well, it was two in the afternoon. The shop was full of kids.

Matt

Yeah, but John Lennon? It's hardly a sackable offence, and I say that as a fan of Paul.

Syd

Jesus, you would be. I mean, yeah, you'd think it'd be okay, but then *that* song came on.

Matt

What song?

Syd

That song.

Matt

Imagine?

Syd

No, Matthew. 'Woman is the Nigger of the World'.

Matt

Oh. But that's a very powerful song. It makes some very good points about about both sexism *and* racism.

Syd

Yeah, you try explaining that to twenty irate parents.

Matt

Fair enough. You should probably have thought that one through a bit more.

Syd

It was on accident, I promise! I tell you, I've never seen such a commotion. They were going mental. My manager nearly got lynched.

Matt

How hideously ironic. So what, you've never had a job since then?

Syd

Oh, I've done bits and pieces. Bollocks, really. It's all fucking bollocks.

Matt

But you're not stupid, Syd. You can do things, surely?

Syd

Who cares? Everyone can *do* things, Matthew. It's hardly a unique talent. Do we really need nine billion people in the world working in fucking call centres? Jesus. There's enough sad souls out there who are happy pissing their lives away making someone else rich. Let them. I'm sure the world won't collapse.

Matt

It would if everyone did what you do.

Syd

Yeah, but they won't, will they? Like I said, there's more than enough gullible wankers out there who are happy being treated like children by some over-inflated prick. Despite what you might think by looking at me, I'm a very small minority, my friend. Most people are quite content to play the game.

Matt

It's not a game, Syd, it's real life!

Syd

Real life? Oh, spare me. It's a game, Matthew. Who's got the highest score? Who's got the most points? It's just numbers on a screen. What does it actually mean, though? What's the actual purpose?

Matt

How the fuck should I know, Syd? It's just the way things are.

Syd

It's fucking bullshit.

Matt

Well what would you propose, then?

Syd

How the fuck should I know? I'm just stating my reaction. I never said I had any solution. If I did, maybe I wouldn't be such a sorry piece of shit.

Syd reaches behind the sofa and retrieves a brand new bottle of wine, and a glass. He pours himself a large one and prepares to retire.

Matt

It's not that bad, surely?

Syd

Ah, who gives a fuck. Good night, Matthew.

*Syd leaves, holding the bottle and his glass.
Matt looks at his watch.*

Matt

It's two in the afternoon...

Matt sits alone. Suddenly Syd's phone, left on the sofa, rings. Matt leaves it until it rings out. The caller leaves a message. Matt takes the phone in his hand, looks at the screen, then takes it into Syd's room.

Lights down.