

## LINK 1: MORE REAL JOSH

I was trying to work out why I was dressed as a voodoo priest when I saw the giant Lego Man wash up on the shore. Lying on his back, one arm reaching out to the skies, he was carried along by the lap of the waves and deposited gently on the pebbles. I made no move to pull him out or help him, instead I drew my tail coat around me and dragged my top hat down over my eyes, hoping that I could get back to sleep. A little later I forced my lids open and peered from under the brim as a gaggle of kids arrived and set about dragging him up the beach. They stood him on his feet and posed him, arms at his side, rigidly to attention, smiling blankly ahead. When they had gone I pulled myself up and walked over to have a closer look. He was constructed from bright red, green and yellow plastic Lego bricks that had been made on a massive scale; fully assembled he was over 10 feet high. Across his chest were written the words “More Real than You”.

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I couldn't make sense of what I was seeing or what was happening to me. Last night I had gone out with Lucinda to Josh's Halloween party; I thought that there might have been a problem there, perhaps an argument or even a fight. Now it was the next morning. I'd woken up on Brighton beach, dressed in a skull encrusted top-hat and a long tail coat, in the pocket of which was stuffed a leering black and white face mask. I didn't understand any of this. I needed to see Lucinda. I needed a proper bed and some sleep. I also needed a slash. The promenade was beginning to fill with Saturday morning foot traffic, so I grabbed my moment and trotted up the beach towards a pair of municipal bins. I popped my hat on the ground, unzipped and huddled in close into their cover.

It was at this point that the photograph was taken.

It is a simple shot of Brighton beach, with the shingle sweeping away from the camera, the blue sea slicing the facing the frame at a diagonal and the skeletal form of the West Pier in the background. In the middle distance, thirty feet away, stands the Lego Man with his yellow head and hands, red legs and green chest, just as I have described. It is not immediately apparent that there is anyone else on the beach, but if I look carefully, to the right of the photo, beside a cream coloured bin, I can see myself. A black silhouette wearing a coat that trails almost to the ground.

I looked over and saw someone with a camera, he was a white male, in his early 30s with greasy blonde hair flopping over his eyes and the camera. I didn't make any

move to confront him and he simply pocketed his camera and walk away. Later that day he would load the picture up onto the Internet, and a few days after that I would find it, a few days in which my life would have been torn to pieces.

### **Link 2: Andy on the Beach**

I zipped myself up and stalked off, moving away from the bins, looking for somewhere more private. I was feeling sick and my head was swimming. After a few steps I leant back against a seawall. The knuckles of my right hand were bruised and aching, I made a fist and a rivulet of blood slid down my forefinger. I folded my arms over my stomach, creasing my body forward against the pain. When I turned my eyes up I was looking out towards the sea and the insectoid remains of the pier.

It was then that I saw the second photo being taken.

A powerful looking woman with short grey hair was squatted on the pebbles in front of me. She was leaning and adjusting her body, testing angles, searching for the perfect shot of the burnt-out metal hulk that is all that remains of the West Pier. I casted my eyes along the line of her lens, down towards the water's edge, where a man was silhouetted against the silver gleam of the sea. He was bending and gathering stones into his hands, and then standing to throw them out into the water. His arm draws back, the camera clicks and the woman has captured her photo. She packs up and leaves and the man carries on hurling rocks into the sea.

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I'm looking at the photo of him now, it captures the very moment when he releases the pebble. If I blow it up, taking it to the highest resolution before it breaks into pixels, I can see the stone high above his head. It looks as if he's thrown it straight into the air, and then is waiting for it to tumble down on top of him.

He turned to face me, as if sensing my eyes on his back. He was wearing a black bikers' jacket, unzipped to his chest, and something hung around his neck. It looked like a figurine that was dangling down to his stomach.

It was topped with a flash of violent pink hair and this sparked something in my memory. I started to make connections and as I did so, so did he.

He pointed at me and shouted. I turned and ran, up the steps and onto the boardwalk, spinning and dodging through the crowds. He was behind me, yelling and swearing. I looked over my shoulder and saw him crashing through the throng, elbowing people aside, scattering children's buggies and holidaymakers as the pink haired doll swung and bobbed wildly about his neck.

I crossed the road, the traffic crunching to a halt about me, drivers too stunned to do anything other than stare as I passed. They found their horns as the man crossed, marking his passage between bumper and bonnet. I vaulted a metal railing and headed down a slope that led into the damp gloom of a car park. A woman in a blue Fiat swung out of the entrance and bumped into my hip, but I was gone, the only impression she left on me was

that of the astonished ‘O’ of her mouth.

I was underground, my footsteps echoing back hard off the walls, my breath catching in my throat. He was yelling at me: “Stop! Stop now! You’ve got to stop!”

I sprinted down a line of cars, looking for an exit, praying for a way out.

“Come here! Come to me!” he yelled but I ran faster. I kept my head

ducked below the level of the car roofs. I swung down and rolled under a coupe, pushing my body beneath its wheels and tucking in against its fender. The stench of petrol flooded my nostrils. The ground was wet and cold against my face, the under-chassis pressed sharp metal fingers into my back.

He was walking closer. Kicking cars and screaming abuse: “You stupid fuck!” THUNK “Don’t hide!” THUNK “They won’t let you get away with this!” THUNK “Fucking” THUNK “Selfish!” THUNK “Prick!”

He was getting nearer with each blow. I hunkered down and held my breath. Then there was a huge slam as his foot connected on the metal above my head, his heavy boots buckling chrome. He was giving heavy and laboured pants. I thought that he must be able to hear me, because he was right beside me. His heels were grinding into the concrete beside my head.

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“Don’t hide!” he screamed. “You can’t escape that way!”

He was above me. I could have reached out a hand and touched him, grabbed the hem of his jeans and tugged him towards me. There was a foolish, crazy temptation to do this, but I held myself. He began to slam his fists into the bonnet over my head, letting out a curse with each blow. He sounded uncontrolled, drunk. Suddenly his knees veed out and he was squatting down, looking under the cars. I twisted and tried to align my body with the wheels to either side of me. It gave me pathetic, barely sufficient cover.

His head dipped right down, so that it was almost touching the floor, and he called out: “You’ve got to get out! Before it’s too late!” That gave me pause, and for the briefest moment I thought about responding, just for a heartbeat I wanted to know what he meant, but then I caught sight of his face. I recognised him from the night before, from the party, but something had happened to him. His skin was ripped and torn, with jagged cuts across his cheeks. The dried blood from these wounds was mixed with smears of white and black make-up. His left eye was puffed and swollen, reduced to a sharp slit. He was wearing a dishevelled grey wig that had slipped back on his head. The doll hung at his neck, beautifully dressed and preened with pale pink hair clipped into a neat bob. It twisted and turned on its silken cord as he scanned under the cars. Her eyes were blue and oversized, fixed on me in my woeful hiding place. She had seen me. She knew I was there; but he did not.

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His face, battered and damaged, was there just for a moment and then it was gone. Then from the distance, at the very edge of my hearing I heard a cry. A call of: “Coooooooooyip!”. There was a pause and then a reply, a series short staccato cries of: “Hoit Hoit Hoit” dart back on the air and are lost between the concrete walls.

He growled out his response: “It’s too late. They’ve started.” There was a crash as he struck another car. “It’s your own fucking fault.” Then there are footsteps and he was gone.

I lay under the car. Breathing. Living. I looked at my swollen fingers, cracked and bleeding and considered the swelling around the man’s eye, how neatly and precisely my fist would have fitted into that blue-black socket.

I didn’t want to move. Not immediately. So, I lay in the oil and in the dirt, with my cheek lying against the cold concrete and closed my eyes.

