

BIG BUDDHA CHEESE

Written by

Adam Manuel

Ramnavägen 43 Lgh 1101
504 39 Borås

Email: adammanuelwritinggmail.com

Phone: +46 (0)704449510

Website: adammanuel.com

FADE UP ON:

The tranquility of a British country village on a warm summer's day: people cycle, dog walkers mingle, men mow their gardens, kids play with water pistols.

On a quiet residential street we see a frail old woman walking with a granny trolley. BETTY HARRISON (late 70's).

GARY (45) steps out of a nearby house to collect the milk bottle on his doorstep.

GARY
Morning Betty, beautiful day.

BETTY
Just wonderful.

GARY
You take care now.

Gary steps back inside.

Betty continues walking through the *almost too perfect* cul-de-sac, until she reaches the end of the road. She stops outside a large manor house with exquisite gardens filled with fresh spring blossoms.

A sign at the entrance reads: "PENHALE RETIREMENT HOME."

EXT. PENHALE GARDENS - MOMENTS LATER

A congregation of cheery pensioners are enjoying the sunshine. RUTH, DOROTHY and JOICE (all late 70's).

Betty strolls around the corner.

BETTY
Good morning ladies.

JOICE
Oh Betty, we were just wondering where you were. You're missing this glorious sunshine!

BETTY
No need to worry my dears, just nipped to the shops to get some compost for the herbs.

Dorothy notices Betty struggle as she takes her seat and stands up to help her.

DOROTHY
You stay put old maid, just leave it to me.

Dorothy walks out of sight.

JOICE

So, as I was saying, little Megan,
well, she's not so little anymore.

RUTH

They'll always be youngins in our
eyes, no matter how old they get!

The "girls" nod in agreement.

JOICE

She's just finished school and is
planning on...

EXT. PENHALE GARDENS

A more secluded area of the gardens. The DRONE of the OLD LADIES CHATTERING can be heard nearby, but their speech is indistinguishable.

Dorothy takes her time as she unlocks the door to a traditional glass greenhouse. She enters.

INT. GREENHOUSE

Dorothy immediately closes the door, then loosens the top button of her blouse to combat the intense heat:-

But this is no ordinary greenhouse. Unlike the gardens, there are no springtime blooms, bees buzzing, or glimmering colours... just green. Stacks of seven armed leaves with serrated, razor sharp edges.

Dorothy leans towards one of the plants and breathes in the euphoric air. She closes her eyes as the intoxicating aromas stimulate all of her senses.

EXT. PENHALE GARDENS - MOMENTS LATER

Dorothy walks back to the group and sits down. She has a little bag of green resting on her skirt. The ladies continue their business like normal.

JOICE

... but Megan's younger brother,
he's a different kettle of fish. I
don't mean to be cruel, but a
rotten apple really does spoil the
barrel.

Betty takes out a pouch of tobacco and king size papers from her granny trolley and passes them to Dorothy.

DOROTHY
Thank you dear.

Dorothy opens the bag and begins grinding the green leaves between her fingers, making them crumble onto her skirt.

JOICE
You see the problem with James is discipline....

JOICE'S VOICE continues to DRONE ON in the background.

Dorothy takes out a king size paper -- tears off a roach -- and mixes the tobacco/weed concoction together. She swiftly rolls a joint with precision dexterity. Then holds it out for Betty.

Finally, Joice abruptly stops her rambling. The "girls" stare at Betty as they wait.

DOROTHY
Betty?

BETTY
Oh, how lovely.

Betty takes the joint and rests it on her lips. She sparks the lighter a few times before it stays alight.

Betty sucks, toking hard on the marijuana, and then slumps back into her seat before passing it on to the next lady in line.

INT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE - BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

A typical teenage lair: posters of rock bands cover the walls, a desk in the corner houses schoolbooks -- untidy is an understatement.

On the bed we see JIMMY DUNBAR (15). The alternative surfer type. It's his room.

Sitting on the floor is his best friend, MIKE (15). Mike's reading a pornographic magazine.

MIKE
Check out the tits on this one.
She'd get it.
(turns the page)
And her.

Jimmy glances over, barely acknowledging his comments.

JIMMY
Just put it away.

MIKE

What, are you gay or summin?

JIMMY

Yeah, good one.

Jimmy stares out of his window at the house across the street. There's a girl strapping a surfboard onto a car, she is LISA (15). Mike notes a sense of longing in Jimmy's face.

MIKE

Stop waxing your vagina and just go for it dude!

JIMMY

What?

MIKE

Come on, if you want to give her a shot of PENIScilin, you've gotta get out there and show her who's boss.

JIMMY

Yeah, cause you know what you're talkin' about.

MIKE

At least I've dipped my wick.

JIMMY

You always say that.

MIKE

I have... on holiday.

JIMMY

On holiday, why is it that everyone seems to jump the v-boat when they're on holiday? It's a little too convenient.

MIKE

Look, just listen to me and you and what's-her-face will be bumping uglies before the week's out.

A guy (late teens) exits Lisa's house. They embrace. Must be her boyfriend. They both get in the car and drive off down the street.

JIMMY

(sarcastically)

Sure thing Casanova.

A RUSTLING outside the door.

Jimmy and Mike turn to see CRISSY (11), Jimmy's younger sister, peering through a crack in the door.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Get out of my room!

CRISSY
How can I? I'm not in your room.

Jimmy lurches towards the door and slams it shut with a brutal shove.

EXT. SECOND HAND BOOKSTORE - CAR PARK - DAY

A woman leans against the bonnet of her people carrier, waiting. She is SUSAN DUNBAR (40's).

EXT. SECOND HAND BOOKSTORE - CAR PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Susan stands next to ARTHUR (60's), the bookstore owner.

ARTHUR
You couldn't bring them inside?

SUSAN
There's a lot.

ARTHUR
I'm not sure how much I can help you. We're small. Seems like we already buy more books than we can sell.

She opens the boot. Inside we see piles of moving boxes filled with old books. They spill out onto the seats as if completely worthless.

Arthur picks one up at random -- puts on his glasses -- and examines the spine. He's taken aback.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
No...

Arthur starts nervously rummaging through the boxes.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I can't afford these.
(beat)
Lord of the Flies, the Wind in the Willows.
(beat)
Oh my, the Man with Two Left Feet. One of my favorites. All first editions. I can't, I'm sorry, I wish... but I can't.

SUSAN
I'll take fifty for them.

ARTHUR
I'm sorry, but I don't have that
kind of money.

SUSAN
No, I mean fifty.
(beat)
Pounds.

ARTHUR
Miss, you don't understand. These
books, this collection, it's worth
thousands. Tens of thousands. Maybe
more.

SUSAN
I know.

ARTHUR
But... why?

Susan shrugs. Arthur stares in awe at the collection.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Let me give you a thousand for
them. I can write a cheque.

SUSAN
One hundred.

ARTHUR
No miss, please.

SUSAN
Give me two hundred in cash and
we'll call it quits.

Arthur contemplates the offer.

EXT. SECOND HAND BOOKSTORE - CAR PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Susan closes the boot after Arthur takes out the last box of
books. He gives her the money.

INT. CAR

Susan throws the cash onto the passenger seat, then turns on
the stereo.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER (V.O.)

Divorce doesn't come cheap. You'll need money to maintain yourself, support your children and pay for legal fees. You need a new account, a guard account, somewhere untouchable, somewhere to protect your finances, yes, now it's time, you are in the midst of a battle... you need a war chest!

Susan opens the glove box -- takes out a pen and pad -- and writes a note that reads: "WAR MONEY." She tears it off and folds it over the two hundred pounds.

INT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Susan is putting the finishing touches on the table centerpiece.

SUSAN

Kids, dinner!

Susan glances at a fork that's not quite symmetrical with the corresponding cutlery. She quickly lines it up before Jimmy and Crissy enter.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Ta-da.

JIMMY

(unimpressed)

What's this?

SUSAN

(defensive)

This, young man, is the meal I've slaved over for the past three hours.

CHRISSY

It looks great mum.

SUSAN

Thanks honey. If only your brother had a little more of your positive attitude.

Susan kisses Chrissy on the forehead as they sit. Jimmy slumps in his seat. His MOBILE PHONE RINGS. He answers.

JIMMY

(into phone)

Hey, what's up?

Susan puts down her cutlery and stares in disapproval.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

What?
 (into phone)
 I'll call you back.

SUSAN

No phone calls at the table honey.

The family dig in.

JIMMY

You know dad asked if I wanted to meet him after school tomorrow.

SUSAN

Uh huh. Did you tell him about your assignment?

JIMMY

Well, I thought I could do it at --

Jimmy glances at Crissy. She's not listening.

SUSAN

I don't think that's such a good idea.

The atmosphere turns morbid. Jimmy picks at his food.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to eat?

JIMMY

I'm not that hungry, can't I just heat it up later?

SUSAN

No Jimmy, we're having dinner together, as a family.

JIMMY

Then where's dad?!

Susan buries her face in her hands.

SUSAN

(strained)
 Please Jimmy, I can't do this now.

JIMMY

Fine.

An awkward silence.

CRISSY

(innocent)
 When is dad coming back?

The tension grows.

SUSAN

We'll talk about it later honey.

(beat)

Come on, eat your carrots.

Susan takes a sip of wine and forces a smile, but the subtle welling in her eyes suggest she's far from happy.

INT. MEETING ROOM - EVENING

A congregation of people sitting in a circle at an alcoholics anonymous meeting: young drunkards, middle-aged businessmen, old farmer types, you name it.

JOSEPH DUNBAR (40's) is slouched in his chair surfing the Internet on his smart phone. BILL (50's); an attendant, is somberly telling his story. LAUREN (30's); a blonde bombshell sitting nearby, can't take her eyes off Joseph.

BILL

Recovery of the whole family has been the greatest gift of my life. But the night I celebrated the sixth anniversary of sobriety, I let it all go to waste.

(beat)

My boys, I hear they're doing okay, little Jamie's just about to go to college. He's a good kid. I wish I could see him. Tell him how sorry I am. Tell them all how sorry I am.

(beat)

I've run out of second chances. This disease just feels too cunning, baffling and powerful to ever let me take a rest.

(beat)

I'm starting all over again today. I'm so disappointed in myself because I drank yesterday.

(beat)

I just keep thinking, if I get the chance to speak to my boys again, what will I say? Should I lie to them?

(beat)

I'm done lying. I've done too much lying. More than anyone should in a lifetime.

The coordinator claps. Everyone joins in.

COORDINATOR

Thank you for sharing with us Bill.

(beat)

(MORE)

COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

Now believe me, I've heard every excuse under the sun during my time here: my father beat me, my ex-husband walked out on me, I was diagnosed with whatever. I see a lot of people blame everything and everyone else, never for a second pointing the finger at the real culprit. It's refreshing to hear somebody willing to take responsibility for their own actions. That's a brave thing you did Bill.

The coordinator looks towards Joseph.

COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

Joseph.

Joseph sits up straight. Lauren giggles.

COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

You've been coming here for a few weeks now. Anything you'd like to share with the group?

JOSEPH

No thanks.

COORDINATOR

Why don't you just tell us why you're here?

JOSEPH

(shrugging)

Wife's orders, she thinks I have an attitude problem.

COORDINATOR

You know if someone feels like they have to tell you there's a problem. It's probably something you should think about.

Joseph huffs.

COORDINATOR (CONT'D)

Okay, so let's talk about taking action. What are you waiting for? Your mother to cradle you back to sleep? A spiritual enlightenment?

EXT. MEETING ROOM - LATER

Joseph is standing on the pavement. The other attendees can be seen socializing through the window.

LAUREN (O.S.)
You left early.

Joseph clocks Lauren standing nearby.

JOSEPH
Yeah, not really my thing.

LAUREN
You mean you don't enjoy listening to other people's problems?

JOSEPH
Can't say I do.

LAUREN
I know what you mean. Godddamn sob stories. It doesn't help with Pavlov in there telling us all it's somewhere to "let go." Like hell it is. It's just a place people can go to feel sorry for themselves without feeling guilty about it. Did you hear that guy in there? Apparently we all have a "Disease."
(beat)
I'm Lauren. You're Joseph right?

He nods.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
It's nice to meet you.

Silence.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Well?

JOSEPH
Excuse me?

LAUREN
Usually when someone says "it's nice to meet you," the other person says the same back. I believe they call it manners.

JOSEPH
I'm sorry.

Joseph extends his hand. She smiles.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
It's nice to meet you.

LAUREN
So your wife sent you here?

JOSEPH

Sort of.

LAUREN

Brink of divorce?

JOSEPH

We've sort of passed the brink to be honest.

LAUREN

So you have kids?

Joseph's lips twitch.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

I swear half the people in here have the same story.

JOSEPH

Well you've hit the nail on the head. I have a boy and a girl.

LAUREN

That's nice. I have a daughter. No boys though. Always wanted a boy.

(beat)

Would you like to join me for a coffee? I know a nice little place down the street. I promise there'll be no more talk of AA. Cross my heart.

JOSEPH

Thanks, but I really should be going.

LAUREN

Really? Well for future reference, from now on you'll be forever known as the man who stood me up.

(beat)

Are you sure you want that title?

Joseph contemplates to offer.

JOSEPH

Sorry. I just can't.

LAUREN

Okay. I give up. Maybe I'll see you on Thursday?

JOSEPH

Maybe.

Joseph steps into his car. His head clearly enlarged after Lauren's oh-so-obvious flirt.

EXT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE - STREET

Jimmy is standing on his driveway. There's a commotion coming from Lisa's house. He watches her silhouette storm back and forth in the downstairs window. He lights a cigarette and calls his dad. Conversation intercut.

Joseph's PHONE RINGS.

JOSEPH
Son! How are you?

JIMMY
Hey dad.

JOSEPH
You excited about the game tomorrow?

JIMMY
Actually that's why I'm calling. I don't think I can come.

JOSEPH
(clearing his throat)
Your mother?

JIMMY
She's being a bitch. Today, she even made us sit down at the dinner table. You know, *as a family*.

JOSEPH
As a family huh.
(beat)
Maybe I could talk to her.

JIMMY
No dad!

Jimmy inhales a little too much smoke and starts coughing.

JOSEPH
You okay son?

JIMMY
Yeah dad, I'm fine. Just a bit of a chest cough.

JOSEPH
You're not smoking are you?

JIMMY
Dad! God, why do you... no, I'm not smoking okay.

JOSEPH
 Alright, just asking. I worry about
 you that's all.
 (beat)
 You do want to come to the game
 tomorrow right?

JIMMY
 Of course I do. It's just. If you
 start trying to negotiate with mum
 it'll only make things worse.

JOSEPH
 You sure?

JIMMY
 Please, just drop it. I'm fine. I
 just wish...

-- Lisa steps outside.

LISA
 (into house)
 I'm just getting some air. Is that
 okay or do I need your permission!?

She slams the front door and paces down her driveway.

JOSEPH
 You just wish?

JIMMY
 Nothing. I've gotta go.

JOSEPH
 Okay son. Oh, and watch your
 language. You shouldn't call your
 mother a...

DIAL TONE...

Lauren is still standing on the pavement nearby. Joseph
 eyeballs her slender body.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
 Fuck it.

Joseph drives off before he does something he'll regret.

EXT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE - STREET

Lisa and Jimmy stand on opposite sides of the street. Jimmy
 tokes on his cigarette, bashfully aware of Lisa's presence.

Banal, awkward pause. Lisa jumps in to fill the void.

LISA
Got one for me?

Jimmy hesitates, and then takes out his pack of cigarettes.
Lisa joins him for a smoke.

LISA (CONT'D)
Fucking parents.

JIMMY
Yeah.

LISA
It's just, they think they know
what's best for you, but...

JIMMY
Yeah.

LISA
Screw them.

JIMMY
Yeah.

LISA
Do you say anything else?

JIMMY
Err, yeah. I mean, of course...

LISA
So it talks! You should try that
more Jimmy. Maybe people wouldn't
think you're so weird.

JIMMY
You know my name?

LISA
Well duh, I've only lived across
the street from you for the past
five years. And I am?

JIMMY
Lisa.

LISA
Good. I would've been pretty
insulted if you didn't know.
(beat)
I never put you down for a smoker
though. You don't strike me as the
type. I mean, I can tell you don't
do it very often but...

JIMMY
What do you mean?

LISA

Jimmy, please, who holds a cigarette with their thumb and pointer? Plus, you've gotta actually take it back. Like this.

Jimmy lustfully gazes at Lisa's lips as she inhales.

LISA (CONT'D)

See?

She blows the smoke in his face and giggles.

LISA (CONT'D)

Sorry. I just couldn't help myself.

Jimmy takes back more than he can handle. He coughs and he tries to conceal his embarrassment.

LISA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. That happens to everyone the first time they take it back.

Lisa's mum glances out the window. Lisa stubs out her cigarette.

LISA (CONT'D)

Fuck, I better get back inside.
Thanks for the smoke.

JIMMY

No challenge.

LISA

What?

JIMMY

Sorry, I mean, no problem.
(murmuring to himself)
You fucking idiot.

LISA

Okay weirdo.

Lisa smiles and walks back up her driveway. The commotion continues the second she steps back inside. Jimmy walks up his driveway smiling.

INT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE - SUSAN'S BEDROOM

Susan is sitting in bed on her laptop. She's placing the finishing touches on an epic forum post on a website named: "YOU'RE STRONGER THAN HIM!"

She raises the volume on her speakers.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER (V.O.)

So you think you have a problem?
Let me tell you something about
YOUR life. YOU create your own
problems. Think about it, how many
times during the day do YOU say the
words, "no problem:" when somebody
says thanks; when your boss asks
you to file those "important"
reports. The stronger woman sees
these so called "problems" for what
they really are... a challenge.

(beat)

So the next time you open the door
for a stranger; buy a colleague a
coffee; or offer a friend some
advice, what will you say when they
respond with a "thank you?"

SUSAN

(sotto voice)

No challenge.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER (V.O.)

That's right. No challenge.

Something catches Susan's eye.

CLOSE: LAPTOP SCREEN. SUSAN CLICKS ON A FORUM LISTING
LABELLED: "LOCAL MEETUPS."

She clicks.

CLOSE: "THE NO MAN MINGLE"

She clicks again.

INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM

Jimmy on the phone pacing up and down his room.

EXT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE

Susan steps out of the car.

SUSAN

You could've waited inside.

JOSEPH

I didn't know if I should.

SUSAN

I'd rather than make a scene
in the street.

JOSEPH
I'm not here to make a scene. I
just want to talk.

Susan struggles with the groceries, picking up more than she
can carry.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Let me help you with those.

SUSAN
No! I'm fine on my own.

Susan, too proud to ask for help, struggles for her key as
she reaches the front door. Joseph uses his key to let her
through. He lingers in the doorway.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Are you just going to stand there?

Joseph steps inside.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM

Mike lying on the bed. His phone starts buzzing. Conversation
intercut.

JIMMY
We just had a smoke together.

MIKE
And?

JIMMY
And what?

MIKE
What else?

JIMMY
Nothing else. We just talked and
had a smoke.

MIKE
Seriously Jimmy, tomorrow I'm gonna
punch you in that fleshy patch
where your cock used to be.

Mike hangs up.

Jimmy, still buzzing, slumps on his bed smiling like a champ.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - DAY

Susan driving down her street. The backseats are filled up
with shopping bags.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER (V.O.)

When experiencing a great injustice, you have two choices. You can either step back and say "I am a victim" or you can fight. You may have been dealt a random hand, but you choose how to play the cards. This is your moment of defiance.

She clocks Joseph standing on the pavement.

SUSAN

(sotto voice)

For fucks sake.

She pulls up on the driveway.

INT. KITCHEN

Susan packs away the groceries.

JOSEPH

So I'm in AA.

SUSAN

Good for you.

JOSEPH

Good for us.

SUSAN

How so?

JOSEPH

Susan, I'm trying here. I came to make things right. Chissy's asking questions; Jimmy's started smoking again.

(beat)

What's that shit you always say, "No challenge."

SUSAN

Don't.

JOSEPH

Well, what is this if it isn't a challenge?

SUSAN

Are you done?

JOSEPH

You know I was supposed to see Jimmy tonight.

SUSAN

Don't make me out to be the unreasonable one. You know he's got a lot on at school.

JOSEPH

And what about your little family dinner last night. I mean, what are you trying to prove? He needs his father!

Susan looks Joseph dead in the eye. There's something dark and spiteful lurking beneath the surface.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You haven't... please tell me you haven't.

SUSAN

I've thought about it.

JOSEPH

There you are teaching family values and good virtues. How dare you. We agreed that we'd wait until he was eighteen.

(beat)

That man is nothing but a good-for-nothing junkie.

SUSAN

That man is his father.

JOSEPH

I'm his father!

SUSAN

I think you should leave.

Joseph picks up the first thing he can find -- a glass of water -- and throws it against the wall. It shatters into a thousand pieces. Susan freezes.

JOSEPH

I'm sorry.

Almost immediately, Joseph cleans up the mess.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Please. Not now. Not like this.

Time for goodbye. Neither of them know the protocol here. Joseph bobs his head and leaves. Susan is visibly shaken.

EXT. DUNBAR RESIDENCE

Joseph walks down the driveway, shielding his tears from the world.