

# WAR

Paul Ekert

It was a war of attrition and I was winning. The enemy suffered his losses without comment, his power fading with every passing second. Soon he would perish.

And yet, even on the verge of overwhelming victory, I felt no thrill. No glory. I didn't enjoy war. It was a tool. A necessary evil, if indeed that paradox can exist. A solution used towards my enemies' destruction. Nothing more.

Nevertheless, there could only be one winner and on the verge of victory and I, all conquering hero, could not help a smile as I looked set to survive yet another encounter with this vile opponent.

Just a little longer...

"Hey!"

The enemies' unexpected reinforcements approached and inwardly I groan. All I had needed was a few precious seconds to finish the job, to obliterate the pest.

"What are you doing in that sink?"

The reinforcements are walking up behind me and pulling out the plug.

Efficient female fingers prise the much reduced and now thoroughly deformed piece of soap from my hand.

"Not another bar," the nurse looks from me to the soap, and then her eyes dance away towards the ever present security guards.

"I've only just put this one in here." She says. She wants to be angry, but she doesn't have the courage. Not around me.

She looks at my hands and compares them with prunes. It wasn't true. Inside there was blood, not purple juice. I know I've checked. I'd watched it squirt away from my flesh as frantic hands tried to stop me. Self-discovery held the only truths worth knowing.

With one hand on my back and the other on my wrinkled fists, she leads me back to the dormitory. I study her face on the way. It's all angles and protruding bones, and I wonder for a moment if she would look prettier without the smooth white skin that covers those rosy red cheeks.

"I think that you are at war with reality," my psychiatrist says one cold afternoon. I'd heard her use that exact phrase in the staff canteen. In between flirting and complaining about the food. It got a big laugh from the other Doctors, even the ones she wasn't flirting with.

I know. I was listening. I was watching.

Nevertheless, I like the idea of being constantly at war with something and consider it as an alternative to making my hands look like prunes. Or perhaps it's the other way round, perhaps reality is at war with itself and I'm the only one who's noticed. Perhaps I'm the only sane man left.

Perhaps television is reality, everything preordained, everyone being told what to say, what to wear, what to do. Just like life.

Or is it that the other way round?

In a car, looking through dirty windows at dimly lit streets, I try to tell the difference between this and TV, and reality.

Reality.

Reality is walking through a cold dark night with the wind blowing rain in my face while I stare up at the stars and know for a short moment, that I'm alive. But by the morning, the knowing has gone away.

"Does soap ever remind you of your mother?" my psychiatrist asks, taking notes and showing me splodges of ink on white paper. "Are you at war with your mother?"

"No. I'm at war with reality." I say and that makes her think. And then I remember that I've not spoken to anyone for years... Or possibly days. No, it must be years because she writes it down.

Perhaps it was a character on TV that hadn't spoken for days. Or perhaps reality was on the blink again.

Without warning, the room tips sideways and becomes soft all round. My arms are wrapped across my chest and tied behind my back. My head is fuzzy and full of drugs.

Why?

I was talking, speaking for the first time in years, and then... Then I realised, that my psychiatrist must be Reality. It was so obvious that I hated myself for not

seeing it earlier, for allowing Reality to make a fool of me for so long.

And so I dragged Reality to the sink, filled it up and held her under. She wriggled and jumped, but this war of attrition was soon over. Psychiatrists, it would appear, do not have the staying power of soap.

When Reality had died, I dropped her to the floor and went in search of a nurse to show her the corpse. Through her tears, I heard her call on Jesus to explain why I had done what I had done, but they either did not hear or choose not to give an opinion. And who can blame them.

Then it was voices, hard and angry. And needles, sharp and expressionless. And then cocooned. Dumped like bad meat in my favourite padded cell. At last, safe and warm.

It was the question about my mother that convinced me to kill reality. After all, only an enemy of mine wouldn't know I was an orphan.

Or is it the man on the telly who's an orphan?

I never can remember. Perhaps I'm on the telly now. If so I'll just wait for the adverts and get up and leave. I hope it's a food commercial, I'm starved. Or is it the man on the telly who's hungry?

Only time will tell.

Time, my mortal enemy.

Reality is dead.

Death to Time.

**THE END**