

## Hooligan of Cork City

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This is a true story of a young man I knew when I was living in Cork. Here I'll call him Adrian. We had become friends during the time when you didn't need any common interests to become lifelong friends, just proximity and pressure. But still, it happened that we bonded over our shared distrust of authority. I saw less of him during secondary school, and even less after the Junior Cert when he dropped out because of issues with an alcoholic father and chronically unemployable mother. Soon I'd finished my Leaving and it was around the time I started going to CIT, now MTU, that I was so bored I began distilling and bottling high quality poitín in my student accommodation. Often I'd traverse Washington Street on Thursday nights, when crowds of drunk students fermented at bus stops and the pissed girls in leather skirts dined on silver squared bin tops, and I would go by myself right into the middle a little drunk myself and declare my wares like a ringmaster, and a few were always guaranteed to buy something and they'd let you keep the change. I went on like this for weeks, getting sadder and drunker each time, when finally I was surprised to see that I'd just sold a bottle to Adrian. I had bumped into him and not realised who he was until he handed me the money.

He was still his same old self, a razor straight fringe and fade and a wispy moustache on his lip. He wore Adidas hand-me-downs with a fancy pair of Calvin Kleins and as we went to share the warm vodka I noticed how opulent they looked compared to the rest of him. He told me how he'd gotten them and how he'd been getting a lot of things since I'd last seen him. His Northside friends would often goad him into petty thefts like stealing e-scooters or pick pocketing but he was ambitious and he said to them if you're gonna rob then at least do it well.

On one occasion in a back alley on Washington Street, he had gathered a group of friends and watched from the shadows the entrance to a student accommodation apartment complex.

"I know you've done well with the student gaffs before, but do you have to pick the busiest street in the city?" said a member of his gang.

"And on the busiest night of the week?" someone else chimed in.

Adrian told them, "If you prefer stealing nothing but tins of beans then by all means stick to the outskirts."

"At least blind man Cormack in Blackpool doesn't have a security lock on his door like outta a James Bourne film. We break open that yoke there and the Siochana will be here like piss on a snowman."

And then instead of Adrian rebutting, an odd thing happened. Though he hadn't had a drink all day, on command became drunker than drunk, acting as hammered as someone with twelve pints in their belly. To the apartment's entrance had come a pair of young men wearing their best pub jeans. They were idling by the door arguing about something that happened in class when Adrian stumbled up to them, said "excuse me," and squeezed between them right to the entrance. There was a silver keypad by the door and as the two men continued debating, he started pressing random numbers into it. After every five digits a loud beep would sound. Still, even though he didn't know the code to the door he continued inputting random numbers,

and the obnoxious beeps blared again and again. The two men felt uneasy and their debates dwindled until finally they turned to the drunken young man trying to get into their accommodation (clearly a student since he was wearing GAA shorts and a backpack) and said "Having trouble there?"

"No not at all," slurred back Adrian and fixated right back on the keypad, frantically pressing digit after digit as if the next combination was sure to work.

So they looked on at the poor drunkard trying to get in and urged multiple times to let them help, and only after denying them multiple times did Adrian finally capitulate and let the relieved pair put the code in. "Nine, and then five. I was putting in five first!"

"No worries, man."

Adrian held the door for them drunkenly as they passed and he kept holding the door until he was sure they had disappeared into their apartment when he stood up straight, gained his composure, became cold sober once again and motioned for the rest of the gang to run inside. "Ladies first."

I guess it was a stroke of genius for Adrian to figure out that the best loot was the easiest loot. And the easiest loot was in the student accommodation apartments, where the kids were gullible and the prices were higher than Adrian's gang could comprehend. Because of success after success, everyone soon saw the merit in the operations, where they'd never know what the next haul would bring. Soon, in some manner, Adrian had swindled every student accommodation complex in and around the city.

In response to a slew of burglaries, a complex just off Grand Parade introduced unbreachable security measures. CCTV cameras observed every corner. Instead of locks or codes, each room was accessible only with a plastic keycard given to students and checked by a security guard who was stationed at the reception 24/7. Despite his friends

urging him to move to something simpler, Adrian persisted and took their warnings as a personal challenge. Through the school's website he found the names and Instagrams of the residents and narrowed them down to the wealthiest suspects. One of them consistently posted himself playing his guitar (poorly) on his story. Anyone who has time to play guitar poorly must be wealthy, Adrian told me. The keycard pass was a plastic card attached to a bright yellow ribbon, so he acquired an old yellow vest from his friend who cleaned a warehouse, and diligently cut it into a neat strip about an inch wide. On a quiet night he went to the complex with his friend (residents were allowed to bring one guest), and Adrian made sure the guard could see the ribbon hanging out of his pocket.

Usually, students never bother locking their doors because they put their faith in entrance security, and they haven't encountered enough real poverty or theft to be afraid of it. But here, each door they passed could only be unlocked with the keycard the two men didn't have. Adrian, seeing a flock of American students passing, put on his best general Irish accent.

"Excuse me," he said to the girls, "I don't suppose that ye know your way round this place?"

The girls looked at one and one of them said "She does!" and Adrian said:

"That's a lovely accent ye have. Are ye from Donegal?"

The girls giggled and told him "No, we're from the US."

"What a coincidence" said Adrian, "I have a great-great-grandson living in the US!"

The US girls must've found him fairly funny because when he showed them an Instagram picture of the guitarist and asked them in what room he would find his fellow bandmate they obliged without hesitating. And once they were on the street and gossiping about something or other, they thought nothing of the fire alarm that flared

up from the building they had just been in.

The two men scoured everything, from the kitchen cupboards to the bedroom dressers. They stripped the place bare. An electric guitar and amplifier, sherpa jackets, Canada Goose jackets, jewelry, a PS5, a goat horn, whiskey, runners, sound systems, fancy looking soap. Someone was keeping those good Fox's cookies in the cupboards and they took those as well. What the boys couldn't fit into their backpacks they threw out the window to an accomplice who was on the street beneath the window. The only thing Adrian didn't bother with was textbooks, although he told me he had once grabbed a Jane Austen novel. And so, with the alarm still blaring, they waltzed back out onto the street without a single eye on them, schoolbags filled to burst.

Eventually, Adrian and I said our goodbyes. I didn't know what I thought of his escapades, but I knew I was glad I commuted. In any case, I'm glad I didn't say anything, because I could see that he was a restless person, unsatisfied, always clambering farther and higher than his peers, repulsed by the sight of them stagnating. And in that sense he was more innovative than anyone I knew. In another life I'm sure he would've done very well for himself but as it was he had to do the best with what he had. And he did it very well. Occasionally an article will drift into my feed about some student rooms that got swindled, and the first thing I do is always rush down to the bottom to see if there's a report of arrest, and there never has been and anyway, I'm sure they'd put it in the title.