

LYNCH'S ROAD

by D.D. Armstrong

The following extract is from D.D. Armstrong's first book *'Lynch's Road.'* This hard-boiled novel tells the connecting stories of three people from different walks of life, all reading the same gripping autobiography of Gilyan Gates, a West London drug dealer. As Gilyan's story unravels in a powerful and often dangerous series of events, the three characters are provided with a number of frightening reality checks and wake up calls driving this enthralling tale. Masterfully written, Lynch's Road takes readers from the luxurious back drop of London's middle class and media execs to the grimy crime-ridden streets, only a stones throw away.

'Commanding, Gripping, Genius, Class' - The team at Smash & Grab certainly thought so, but if you don't believe us, here's your chance to read Lynch's Road and find out for yourself.

The traffic was light as Claire hastily made her way to her semi-detached house in Chiswick. Immediately kicking off her shoes she made her way straight up the stairs and into the bathroom. Lighting the aromatherapy candles ‘feng-shui’d around the mint green suite, Claire ran the taps and poured a healthy portion of bath salts into the kidney shaped tub. It was time for relaxing. Fiddling with her Bang and Olufsen sound system she selected a CD and strip-teased to the sounds of Prince. Throwing her clothes into a pile on the bedroom floor, she grabbed a towel and her silk robe. Testing the scented water Claire smiled and hurried to retrieve her handbag. She pulled out the book Marcel had given her. Tying her hair in a bundle Claire slipped out of her robe and climbed into the tub. Slowly she submerged her body beneath the warm bubbles. Claire hadn’t a clue why Marcel had chosen to give her the autobiography of a drug dealer, but with an open mind she began to read.

THE JOURNEY OF A SLAVE

By Gilyan Gates

CHAPTER 1: CROSSROADS

The Journey of a Slave.

They say that life is a constant journey from the moment of birth, to your final breath, but have you ever asked yourself what is this journey?, and where exactly is it taking you? Are there any tour guides, maps, crossroads, trains, planes or automobiles that will make the journey any easier? Perhaps you asked, who else is on this journey and do we choose our companions upon the way? Is this journey what I really want, and ultimately will I be happy when the journey is over? Of course you have, because you are only human. But what and where are the answers to assist you on this mystical and often mythical journey. Some may tell you it lies in religion, but with so many contradicting, conflicting and all too often confusing religions, with hierarchies, dogmas, sacred scrolls, scriptures, and new age life energy answers, how do you make the right choice?

There are those who will say that it is buried in the histories past. But if history is quoted “doomed to always repeat itself” where, oh where does that leave the likes of you and me? You see, there are some questions that you

can't answer, and I try to say this without being patronising. It's like when a child asks a question, for example "Why is the sky blue daddy?" and you reply because God made it that way (that's if you are amongst those who have chosen a specific religion to guide your journey). Now, the child with all their innocence and zest for life continues "...but why did he choose blue, Daddy? Why not red or green?" In reality no matter what you tell your child at this point to supplement their newly found thirst for knowledge, will be irrelevant, because just like that child you don't know the answer. So what do you do when looking for answers? - Me? I deal with the questions that I can answer.

It was a cold autumn night as I headed to Darren and Jane's flat. They lived in a quiet council estate at the back of Fulham, behind the South Park. The estate was always deserted at night, which is how I usually preferred it. I rode my bike past the shops at the front of the estate and towards the block that they lived in. Reaching into my pocket I read the time on my mobile phone. It was approximately 3:40am as the ring tone broke the eerie silence.

"Hello, Janey," I said. "Where are you? at the phone box? Okay luv, meet me upstairs... Yeah, that's rightsweetheart. I'm just outside the block".

Looking at the last number I knew Jane was on the other side of the estate, probably racing to me. When shottin', juggling, or running gear (whichever you prefer to call it) you become accustomed to recognising the numbers of the local phone boxes. It helps you get an idea of who was going to be on the end of the line, asking for what and how far you were from them. Amused I smiled realising I had finally perfected my wide-boy accent. For some reason the punters seemed to respond better to the Jack-the-lad voice. It knocked the edge off the reality of what we were doing. It was as if they preferred giving their money to a cheeky toe-rag than a predatory drug dealer. It made the impersonal, personal and placed us all in the same boat. Thinking of the punters and me in the same boat, my smile quickly disappeared and I let out a sigh. *Whatever...*

At the block I rang the intercom. Darren, Jane's husband answered the buzzer. "Who is it?" he said in a strong Irish accent.

"It's me, Gil."

"Oh come upmate, come up," Darren said, buzzing me into the block.

I rolled my bike into the tiny lift and pressed the button for the second floor. Reading the graffiti on the walls I thought to myself, *'Yeah I like Darren*

and Jane, they're good punters always got the right money, no complaints, no short change'. It was how you wanted all your customers to be, hassle free.

As the lift opened, Jane came running up the stairs. "You alright, Gil luv," she said. "Sorry to call you out so late."

"It's alright, darling." I said propping my bike up to hold the lift door. "I'd rather you phone me than someone else."

"No, no, Gil," Jane said opening the front door. She ushered me in. "I always phone you and Mel first. You're the best out of all the lads round here. You always come nice and quick. Some of these other guys tell you they're gonna be five minutes and they take all of half an hour. I don't understand why they can't be like you, Gil? Either they've got it or they haven't."

"Well that's the problem right there, Janey," I grinned and tugged on my coat. "Not many of them got it like me."

"That is so true" Jane smiled with her black mouth. Her thin lips caused her oily face to wrinkle. "Darren!" She called inside. "Gil's here!"

"Ahhh you alright, Gil." Darren said coming out the living room. He was about 5'10 with greyish brown hair. He walked with a slight hunch and a heavy limp, which made him struggle with every step.

"I'm cool, bruv. How's the leg?"

"Ah it's still bad." Darren said pulling up his trouser leg. His pink ankle had swollen to the size of a small melon and showed signs of bruising. "The swelling hasn't gone down. It's gone all hard round here." He prodded at his leg. "I think it might be infected."

"Oooww," I said pulling my face. "Daz, mate you wanna go to the hospital and get that sorted out. That, don't look right brother. How long 'as it been like that?"

"Almost six weeks now. It weren't so bad at first, but now I tell you, Gil my man, I just want to chop it off."

"Oh put you leg away Darren." Jane said slapping Darren's back. "Gil doesn't want to see that. I told you not to go and buy from Inches, now look at you."

"Well how was I suppose to know he mixes his shit with fucking brick dust?" Darren waved his fist.

"I flipping told you!" Jane slapped him again. "You never listen. Just shut up and give Gil the money so he can get out of here, he doesn't want to stand around all night listening to you."

Darren rolled his eyes and smiled. "Sorry Gil."

"It's alright mate." I said spitting out the contents of my mouth into my hand. "What did you want?"

"Ah can I get two and two, Gil my man?"

Using my jumper, I quickly wiped the saliva off the wraps. I picked out two red and two blue. I always wrapped my work in different colour bags so I could automatically identify which was brown and which was yeng. I exchanged them with Darren for £80 in crisp notes. As I counted my money, Darren squeezed the two blue heroin wraps to see how much was product and how much was wrapping. He handed the two red wraps to Jane. Quickly she disappeared into the living room as Val stepped into the passageway, followed by her gormless boyfriend, Rufus.

"You alright Gil?" She said preparing to soften me up. "Listen, luv, true we all just brought those off you." Val indicated to the wraps in Darren's hand. "Could you throw in another rock to buff up the pot?" She said giving me a quick wink and a nudge.

Repulsed, I looked at the sloppy white woman in her early forties who tried to fit into a pink velour tracksuit, two sizes too small. Her love handles hung out, with huge stretch marks on display. Disgusted, I watched as she plucked at a discoloured thong from between her buttocks.

"No." I said, keeping it plain and simple.

Throwing back her mousy brown hair, Val clapped her hands together as though praying. "Please Gil. You know we're gonna phone you again tomorra. Go on luv."

"Yeah" Rufus added to her plea. "Come nah, Gil."

"No." I said, unmoved.

You see if Darren and Jane were the type of punters you wanted, then Val and Rufus were the type you didn't. I could see their play instantly. Somehow Val and Rufus had managed to meet up with Darren and Jane, just as they got some money. They'd probably helped Darren and Jane sell some goods or something. Now, because they helped Darren and Jane sell the goods, they claim they're owed a smoke. Jane then calls me to come round, and after Darren makes a purchase, Val then asks for an extra stone, claiming that the purchase was for all of them. If I then gave them the stone, that's Val and Rufus's free smoke, plus anything they take from Darren and Jane.

Right, this is where a hustler distinguishes between a punter and a 'cat'. The punter is that sweet customer that gives no problems. All they want is their wraps, good gear, a quick service and they're happy. The 'cat' on the other hand is just like that annoying house cat that's always there when you

want to eat, always begging, always whining and always moaning. A 'cat' is always scheming on a free stone or bag. Always got a story about why they're short with money and always wants some tick or credit, which they'll pay back tomorrow or at the end of the week. This is why they're called 'cats' because all their whining sounds like cat meows. That persistent meow, that makes you want to kick them. Now, you see I have a lot of time for punters, but little time for 'cats'. If they didn't make me so much money I'd put them in a bag and drown 'em.

"Oh come nah, Gil." Rufus said, placing his hand on my shoulder. Then he quickly decided to move it. "Listen, Gil, me get paid at de en' of de week man. Don't worry, me mek sure me pay you back."

Rufus was a dark skinned Jamaican with short fat dreadlocks that stopped just short of his shoulders. He covered them at all times with a black woolly hat that had an embroidered cannabis leaf. His big hands were forever dry and hard from labouring on the building sites.

Val and Rufus were a right pair. They suited each other. He was the so-called breadwinner, but Val called all the shots. There was something about them that irritated me. It was as though they thought they were smarter than you, like they constantly planned to get one over on you. They'd give you every excuse, try every trick and when you didn't budge they tried to make you feel guilty. In my early days some of their tricks worked, but by now I was a seasoned vet, and the same gags didn't cut it in tonight's show.

"Nope, can't do it mate," I said moving to the door.

"Come nah, Gil man, me giv' you on Friday." Rufus said desperately.

"Nope."

I guess it wasn't the fact that I didn't believe I'd get my money on Friday. I was growing accustomed to hating 'cats' like Val and Rufus that couldn't take no for an answer. They'd abused the trade relationship we had in the past and I didn't see why I should compromise now. It was strictly Sparks' rules now; NO Tick, NO Change, NO Shorts.

"Please Gil, me begging you." Rufus said blocking my exit. "Friday, me pay you back Friday."

"Nope." there was almost a smile on my face. "When you can go in Sainsbury's, pick up whatever you like, and tell them I'll pay you back on Friday, den come back and we'll talk. Otherwise I think you need to phone Inches, I hear he's got some good brick dust."

Rufus held his arms wide in surrender. "Gil, why you gwanin like dat?"

Smirking, I shrugged my shoulders opening the door. Rufus continued to beg.

"Oh leave him, Rufus!" Val yelled in frustration. They were still behind me. "He's a tight bastard anyway." I wasn't going to reply to her insult, but she persisted.

"Are you listening? you tight bastard!! I hope your mother's proud of you! She probably charged you when you was born, for climbing out her cunt!"

In an instant I answered Val's question. I was listening. I hit her twice in the mouth with the butt of my phone. As she crashed to her knees, I followed through with a kick to the mid-section and a blow to the temple. Rufus jumped in to save her, but as I turned on him, he backed up. The slamming of Darren and Jane's door quickly brought me to my senses. I grabbed my bike and hurried down the stairs. I looked at my hand, my knuckle had already begun to swell. As I rode out of the estate, I could see Val banging on Darren and Jane's door. I knew they weren't going to open that door anytime soon. Val stood outside, mouth bleeding and dazed. Good, I thought, I hope I knocked out a tooth.

I started peddling faster as Rufus chased behind me shouting, "Yo, Gil, come back man! You must hav'fe tick me till tomorrow for that star. You can't just beat up my woman like so. Come man, sort me out!"

Fleeing the estate, I hadn't noticed the patrol car approaching on the opposite side. My heartbeat rose as my eyes met with the officer in the passenger seat. His blue eyes scrutinized me as we drew level. I watched them dart from me, to the wretched crackhead running up the street calling my name. Instinctively, my legs began pumping rapidly. I didn't need to look back to know they were going to give chase. I heard the change in gears and rise in revs. Immediately I formed a plan. Cutting down a side road, I tried doubling back on myself and headed towards South Park. The gates were locked, but I managed to throw my bike over. Climbing over, I heard the sound of a reversing car speeding towards me. Peddling, I sped across the desolate park. From the darkness behind me, a white shirt clambered over the gate. As I reached the far side my bicycle chain came off. I threw the ridgeback to the floor. Scaling the spiked fence, I jumped down. The sound of sirens was in the air. I could hear 'blue eyes' calling. "Stop! Stop!" He cried.

I bolted to the top of the street and across the Wandsworth Bridge Road. I looked at the looming towerblock in front of me. I didn't want to run inside and be trapped, but without my bike I would never make it home. Luckily I

knew the intercom was bust. I ran in and up to the first floor. I made sure 'blue eyes' was giving chase. I could hear his heavy shoes slapping against the stairs. Jumping off the balcony, I looked up while 'blue eyes' stared down. He was out of breath and I smiled.

"Stop!" He shouted, but I was on my toes, as I saw the patrol car shoot past.

I headed for Townmead Road and the back of Sainsbury's supermarket. I could hear the sirens closing in on me. Running out of steam, I refused to be caught. Reaching the back of Sainsbury's, I climbed into one of the large disposal bins and hid.

Sitting in a pile of waste and rubbish, I tried to catch my breath. My chest heaved up and down. I tried to control my lungs, but the smell of rotten eggs was suffocating. For the next hour, I sat in the rancid spot thinking of three things. One I wasn't getting arrested tonight, two I was gonna kill Val and Rufus, and three - it was amazing what I would do for a little money and the thought that I was living.

The next morning I began dwelling on the night's events. It would be one of the many times when I would look at my life and query, what was I doing? Where was I going in life? I had too. Gradually I realised if this was living - then it wasn't living right. I wondered whether this was all that was out here for me? How the hell did I get here? and was this what I truly wanted from life? In truth, compared to some of the things I've seen and done, the event was - *minor*. Yet it still marked a point in my life, a point in my journey where I was met with a turning point or a crossroad.

You see if there are crossroads and turning points in your life. Then it truly seems as though we are on a journey. Faced with this fact, does it mean that your journey or my journey can be determined by other factors in place from before we are born? The answer must be yes. If you agree then would it be fair to say that a whole generation, or number of generations, or even an entire race maybe placed on the same journey. While on my journey I stumbled upon factors, which were installed centuries ago that would mean the misguidance of many black brothers and sisters that are still relevant today in the 21st century. Like my ancestors that walked in shackles and chains before me, my peers that walk in present day Nike Air's, and for my successors that will walk in the footwear of tomorrow. This is my journey, a journey of enlightenment, a journey of conscious awaking, and a journey of realisation. *This is my story 'THE JOURNEY OF A SLAVE.'*

Finishing the first chapter Claire was fascinated by the author's introduction, she wondered where the book was heading. Engrossed by the theme, Claire thought it might make a good documentary. She flipped to the front pages to read the author's brief.

Gilyan Gates was born in West London. 'Journey of a Slave' is his real life account, detailing his escape from the lure of the drug dealers and criminals that plagued his area.

Sighing, the passage made Claire think of Marcel, she pondered whether he'd been exposed to similar scenes detailed in the first chapter. Running the hot water Claire posed what would happen to Marcel now he'd left Nedu Associates. *Marcel wouldn't sell drugs* she concluded *he's not the type*. Reaching for the soap Claire paused, she thought she heard someone coming up the stairs. Then dismissed it, remembering she still needed to feed her cat, Thompson.

