

EXIT STRATEGY

By Vinay Patel

1.

A and B. A talking at B. B is watering their plants. A is like a chastised schoolchild in detention.

A: Paki.

B flinches ever so slightly whenever they hear the word.

Paki.

Paki.

Paki.

A sighs.

Paki.

B: Maybe try it in a sentence.

A: Um.

Oi, listen up, you dirty paki. I don't know what you think's going on here, but we've voted to leave now -

B: You voted to leave.

A: Yes yes, I voted to leave and so...

Beat. B nods.

B: Go on.

A: And so...I wish you'd leave. Yeah. I wish you'd just fuck off home.

A settles themselves. Checks their watch.

A: Wish I was fucking off home...

B: You promised.

A: Didn't say I was fucking off home, did I? Just all tapped out.

B: Say it again.

A: Do I have to? Would really rather not.

B gives them a look.

A: Paki.

B: Mmm yeah see I'm still feeling a twinge.

A: You're kidding.

B: Uhuh, it's deeply engrained that one. Reckon I'd still tweet in response if I heard that in public, maybe even a blog. Like a really long, heartfelt blog about the experience.

A: Christ.

B: And nobody wants that do they? Least of all me.

A: No...

B: Maybe we can we mix it up for a bit.

A: Ok.

B: Have a think overnight.

A: Ok.

B: But let's circle back to paki for now.

2.

A is ready to present. B is relaxing with their eyes closed.

A: Are you ready?

B: Yep. Go for it.

A: So I was thinking...Terry...Taliban.

B opens their eyes, glares at A.

B: That's all you came up with? The whole night?

A: No, I was -

B: I've never been called that. You're trying to get away with a soft option!

A: Look, no, I was just wanting to be a bit original, think outside the bigotry box and I imagine that hearing "Terry Taliban" would catch you off-guard if someone ever -

B: And that's a specific guy though. Like some Irish guy?

A: It gets used more generally, it does.

B: Don't think so. Back to paki for you.

A: Wait wait, let's...

They claps their hands as an idea comes to them.

Wog! Is that...that's - ? Or is that only for -

Pretty sure I've heard someone say it to a -

B: I think it's both of us.

A: OK.

B: But it's pretty old school. Does nothing for me.

A: Really?! Come on, it's still quite punchy, surely?

B: Watch.

B holds out their arm, nods at A. A approaches the arm carefully and whispers to it...

A: Wog.

No reaction from B.

B: Told you.

A: Shit.

A is really cut up about this. B can see they're trying.

B: Ah, it's alright. I've got lots of suggestions to start with.

3.

A looks frazzled, head in their hands. B quite calm, is filing their tax return.

B: I need more.

A: I don't know any more! There aren't any!

B: 'Course there are.

A: We've done terrorist, we've done every variation on rag-head, we've done twenty minutes solely on curry-related abuse...

B: And we're making progress, they don't hurt any more.

A: No?

B: Nah! Feel safe around them now. Like they're old dickhead mates who are a teensy bit salty and if they were someone else's dickhead mate you'd think they were hideous, but they're *you're* dickhead mates and so that makes it fine.

A: Oh great!

B: But there's definitely more out there, and we've got to be comprehensive with this, don't you think?

A: Sure...just I don't know what to -

B: And we're *still* not done with the Big P...

A: No! I am not going back to that yet, I hate it.

B: Well, we're not stopping.

A: Not saying I want to stop, this is just me...trying to find some professional pride, OK?

Beat.

B: I appreciate this is tough on you. Taking responsibility.

A: Yeah.

B: You seem a bit stressed. I don't want you stressed, no-one can do their best work when they're stressed.

A: Just tired.

B: I can see that.

Beat.

A: He left me.

B: Oh God! Really?

A: I mean. He was half gone anyway, you know?

B: I'm sorry.

A: Left the seat up, left the clothes out on the line, left the TV on. Domestic regression. Neglect, hoping for an excuse.

B: Sure.

A: And I know it's an excuse because you could tell he'd be planning to go for ages and I would've gone too if he asked. But he never bloody asked did he?

B: I'm sorry.

A: Everything that's happened he blamed on - he says I played a part in - he called me a thick cunt, is the long and short of it. When he found out, he called me a thick cunt for voting how I did and left. Do you think I'm thick? Do you think I'm a - Do you honestly reckon I wanted any of this? Because I thought we were past the worst of us too, didn't think we still had it in us, it was never part of the plan in my head, I just wanted something different ok, something different than what we had, something better and I know this isn't it, right, I know some horror has been revealed to you and it'll probably come for me too and it is in a tiny, little way my fault, but it can be better, I still believe that, and you're my friend and I don't think what's going on now is how we should judge this decision.

That's all.

Pause.

B: I've never thought you were thick.

Beat.

B: I think you're remarkable.

A smiles.

4.

A and B, after the exhaustion of the previous scene, now somewhat more

B: You know what, I think we're pretty much done.

A: Woo! Gonna make it back in time for *Love Island*.

B: *Pretty much* done. Still gotta slay the big beast, I'm afraid.

A is distraught.

A: I...don't know if I have it in me.

B takes A's hand.

A: We'll do it together. Ready?

B nods. Pulls themselves together.

A: Paki.

B winces.

A: Paki. Paki.

B winces again and again.

B: That's the stuff.

A: Paki. Paki. Paki. Paki. Paki. Paki.

B: It's in you. This one you have to feel.

A: Paki Paki Paki Paki Paki Paki.

B: Come on!

A: Paki Paki Paki Paki Paki Paki Paki.

B: Everyone you've ever loved has left you.

A: What?!

B: Keep going.

A keeps repeating the word "paki" as B speaks over them. The noise is cacophonous.

B: They leave because you are a bit thick actually, it wasn't an excuse, they're not the only one who thinks that, lots of people do, I do, I'd say at least thirty, thirty five percent of this country think you're thick, they hate you, more than hate me even, cause at least I'm smart, they see me and there's potential, there's a suit, a doctor, a Greater Good, a hero to someone's nan, that's why they invited us in the first place, we came after you, to help sort out your shitshow, your misdirected anger, your mismanagement of your own damn selves. How does that feel? We were invited, you were left behind, we were invited, you were left, invited, left, invited, left, invited, left, left, left, left, left, you were left and you know you deserve it.

A on the verge of snarling.

B: Sentence!

A sets off like a wound-up top, can barely contain themselves.

A: You were invited?! By who? Not by me, not by fucking me, not by anyone I care about! I want to - I want some sunglasses, I want some headphones, to even still experience you in any manner is too much just way too much so I can't wait till you fuck off you madras-munching, job-stealing, MP-stabbing, kiddy-fiddling, freedom-hating, woman-raping Paki!!

A hyperventilates. The strain has been massive. B stands rigid.

A: Sorry, I -

How you doing? What you feeling?

B takes stock. There's a long pause.

B shakes their head. Smiles.

B: Nothing. Not a single thing. I never believed it could - !

B starts to laugh. Enjoys this moment. Embraces the drained A.

You're a good friend.

A: Thank you.

B: My best friend.

A is broken.

A: Thank you.

Beat. A looks at B.

Can we do me now?