

God if only I was genius clever like the unibomber, I could really give it to them. Explode their smug, elitist world of words to a cyclone of letters, dots and dashes. And I'll film it too. So I can watch the fall out. See them sifting through the detritus of punctured phrases, severed metaphors and decapitated dialogue. Oh, how they will wail, like the Ukrainian mothers on the TV news. And I won't stop there; I'll move on to the libraries and book shops. Of course the Big One will be Amazon. But they'll get me before that. I'll end up inside with nothing to do but read. All those classics, reminding me I'll never be good enough. Or the mediocre book club favourites. They're worse. They're proof, aren't they that really, it's not such a Holy Grail. It's just having connections. Or striking the right balance between 'quirky' and commercial. Anyone can be a writer now, can't they? That's the beauty of the digital age. The great democratisation of the media. If you can tweet, you can blog; if you can blog, you can 'build your brand'. That's how it's done now, isn't it? Got to market yourself. It's not enough to pour your heart and soul into these characters you've grown from a single sentence. It's not enough you've made a world for them to live in and struggle in and die in; like others do their children. Not enough you murdered your darlings like that Uni professor told you. Yeah, the one that went on to give you a 69 on your dissertation after they'd promised you a first from the very first draft they saw. No; they didn't even call it. Had to get the second opinion of some prissy poet in residence that was always suspicious of your socialist attitude to literature. Not enough you kept going after ten rejections. After you found out that JKR got

knocked back, what was it, thirteen times? Not enough you still sent your fourteenth submission. Not enough you started your second novel anyway, because maybe number one was just a little too niche for a breakthrough writer. Not enough you worked the day job and wrote through the night. Not enough you put up with your narcissist partner's complete disinterest in your creative output. Not enough you spent your summers saving and writing while colleagues lounged around the South of France, sipping wine over their Good Reads lists.

I remember reading. I miss it.

But who has the time? The middle class: that's who. That's who reading's for, isn't it? Let's just be honest. I was idealistic for a time. Returning to education after fifteen years on a production line will do that to you. I went into teaching thinking I could light some magic touch paper. Like the adverts. An over-prescriptive curriculum soon cured that. The one piece I remember was this story a bottom set kid wrote, called 'The Psych Ward'. It was so bad we pinned it on the wall in the English office. We would read it on rough days. It got us through. And honestly, there was more literary value in that one 'badly written' tale than in my entire oeuvre. Better to be truly bad than blandly average. And what right did we have to ridicule that kid's work? Anyway, I carried on. Number two turned out to be more of a novella. Even more niche; not enough word count for your buck. Number three? Set in a school; who wants to go back there? And then I went from 'write what you know' to something I know absolutely nothing about. I was misguided, I see that now. Only a Muslim can tell a

Muslim's tale. You probably think I'm racist now. Now number five; that was when I thought I'd finally done it. An actual genre piece. OK, not crime, but horror's up there, isn't it? Female protagonists: tick that box. Bit of black humour thrown in; don't want to take myself too seriously. But it's all become so corporate. Now they expect you to have an 'online presence'. Prove you're committed to putting yourself 'out there'. And of course, read their entire catalogue and tell them which of their existing authors you're most like. Tell them why you fit their bill. Oh, and write an elevator pitch. Basically: do your day job, *and* write *and* do their job as well. And there's so many now. Even the 'independent' ones. It's like, who hasn't been published? Now it's all, 'we want new voices', isn't it? I should be writing this in third person, so I can use they/them/their. But that was book number six. And look where that got me. There's only so much rejection a person can take, you know? Even us Northern, working class stalwarts. I mean, look at John Kennedy Toole. I've thought about faking my own death. Leaving a note that my dying wish is to be published. Maybe pen a few lines to the fucking Guardian as my suicide letter. But I'm too much of a coward. Even to fake it, let alone do it for real. They say suicide's the coward's way out, don't they? I say it's the bravest act of them all. I mean, what greater unknown is there? If it's brave to climb a mountain, it's got to be braver still to leap into the precipice. I like to imagine there's a special members' only place for all the jumpers somewhere. Some dinner table conversation that would make. And then I hear about this anthology. For authentic working class voices. One of those 'tales from the

margins' things that are becoming more and more mainstream. But I get that old flicker of – dare I say the word – hope. Could this be my break? Of course the answer's no. I'm the wrong sort of working class. They're looking for another Rita not a Jeremy Kyle contestant. Even as I pen this, I know that it's futile. And not in some ironic way either. I don't imagine for a second that by using this metatextual trick I might actually subvert the status quo. Because it's the wrong kind of meta as well. I'm kicking them in the teeth when I need them to bite. See – I told you I'm not clever enough. And besides; only male writers can get away with an unreliable *and* unlikeable narrator.

My trouble is, I can't bear being average. I *refuse* to be average. I reject that label, thank you. I'd just like to be talented at one thing. Or recognised; remembered at the very least. The life oh so ordinary is becoming oh so unbearable. So, my mind is turning more and more to destruction. Like that story, where the kids spend days and days meticulously orchestrating the perfect demolition of the old man's house. But I'll do the publishing houses. Tear them down, agent by agent, writer by writer, book by smug fucking book. The Costa winners. The Man Booker winners. The crime writers' fucking guild. I'll be famous for fictional genocide. The Pol Pot of literature. But let's not stop there. Since we are in the realms of fantasy, after all – let's take this scenario to its most extreme. If I could take out all the publishers, why not fiction itself? The Storykiller. Imagine it: a world with no make believe. Not just books, either, is it? That's the arts gone. Poof. Just like that. What's left?