

# Death of a Ronald

## An excerpt from the novel *Fuck You, Clown*

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### Part 1

“Get in the car.”

“What?”

“Get in the fucking car.”

This was when I realised how sick Mr. Giggles was – when we kidnapped the Ronald.

The Ronald wasn’t that old – early twenties perhaps. Barely old enough to shave his nuts, that was for sure. He was dressed in the costume of red, white and yellow, holding a fistful of balloons. They ought to have taught him enough to know that some cars are best avoided, like you’d avoid the toilets near the waltzer.

The vehicle stank of booze with crushed cans littering the footwells. Us four clowns sat inside. I was driving now, hands at ten-to-two covered by fingerless driving gloves. Between my fingers sat a cigarette that had burned down to the filter. Behind me was the Pierrot, his white costume covered with beer-stains, his black and white make-up smudged grey most places. Mr. Giggles rode shotgun, sitting nearest the pavement. He raised a pistol: “Get in the fucking car.”

The Pierrot stepped out and motioned for the Ronald to enter. The kid looked up and down the street – nobody had noticed. He climbed in. The Pierrot followed, sandwiching the Ronald between him and Fat Clown. The door closed and we drove off.

Clowns consider the colour blue unlucky, so the ovals around Mr. Giggles’ eyes should have been a warning. Even if the Ronald had known that, it wouldn’t have helped. He didn’t even know enough not to approach four clowns in a car.

“Where are we going?” asked the Ronald.

“Shut up!” screamed Mr. Giggles. The car weaved down the road. We passed a police car sitting on a side-street, but the coppers didn’t notice us.

Fat Clown reached into a bag between his legs and pulled out a six-pack. He passed cans to everyone, including me and the Ronald. The new passenger looked at the clowns around him, popped the can open, and drank some beer.

Mr Giggles turned round, his arms resting on the back of the seats. He stared at the Ronald, belched, then asked: “So, you want to be a clown, do you?”

“No. No. I’m an actor.”

“You’re an actor? Then why are you wearing clown drag?” Mr. Giggles belched again, and the Ronald failed not to flinch. “You see, the deal’s like this: you’ve got two choices. You can become a real clown and we’ll look after you, making sure you get paid.”

“And... what’s the other choice?” The Ronald’s voice wavered like that of a kid hearing McD.’s was out of Big Macs.

“You really want to know?” asked Fat Clown. “Tell him, Mr. Giggles.”

Mr. Giggles guzzled more beer, spilling some on his trousers. He burped again. “We have ways of dealing with people who flirt with our thing. But you don’t want to know about that. Now, down your beer and grab another.”

The Ronald drank the rest of his beer and blubbered, close to tears. He'd been chosen from a large pool of actors because of his ability to represent Ronald's core values: energy, warmth and compassion. Those values must have seemed a long way off. He might have heard rumours from other Ronalds about the dangers of the job but probably never expected to be clown-napped himself.

"Are we going to a clown bar?" asked Fat Clown.

"No!" shouted Mr. Giggles. He turned to face forward, to the Ronald's relief. "If we take a Ronald there, everyone will want a piece of him. This one's ours, boys."

## Part 2

We drove for hours. I was by far the best driver, but Mr. Giggles could cope with motorways, even when drunk. We stopped a couple of times, for beer, and half a dozen other times to piss at the side of the road. We sung a few songs and that, along with drunkenness and exhaustion, meant the Ronald was no longer as scared. He really should have been.

As dusk fell, we turned onto minor roads and by dark we'd reached a dirt track which we followed to a wire compound. The Pierrot stepped out and staggered to the gates. He'd left the car door open, and the Ronald shifted towards it.

"Don't bother," growled Fat Clown and the Ronald meekly rested both buttocks on the seat again. The Pierrot undid the padlock and pushed the gate open.

The waste-ground was covered with rusted metal, busted neon displays, and old wooden sideshows streaked with mould and stains of clown piss. The car moved slowly, the Pierrot following in the darkness behind. A huge wooden structure appeared in the headlights, once the entrance to a House of Fun, showing a massive clown's face with the mouth as the door. In front was a patch of empty ground and we stopped there. We all left the car, Mr. Giggles leading the Ronald, and we stood in the headlamps' glare.

"So, then!" said Mr. Giggles. "Chief Happiness Officer? Well, entertain me! Can you juggle? Backflip, and you can go home. If you make us laugh, we'll let you go."

The Ronald turned and ran. We watched as he stumbled, falling headlong into a puddle. He pushed himself onto his knees, all fight gone. Most of his make-up had been splashed away but for the garish red smile. Below the greasepaint was the face of a frightened young man. The Pierrot walked over and dragged the Ronald from the puddle.

"Please," begged the Ronald when he was in front of the clowns once more. "You can't do this! I'm a human being." He'd been thrown to his knees by the Pierrot and hadn't bothered to stand again.

"You're not human, not dressed like that," said Fat Clown. "You're not even a real fucking clown. You're just a sales pitch."

"Oh, God, please, I've got parents, they love me." He was crying, gasping between the sobs.

"I'm going to get some beer from the car," I said.

"You do that," said Mr. Giggles, not turning from the weeping Ronald.

I sat in the car, drank beer, and watched. I crumpled the can when I'd finished, tossed it into the darkness, and opened another. The other three were teasing their victim. At first, they made the Ronald stand and took turns kicking him on the arse, laughing as the boy turned and turned, failing to avoid the blows. I went between laughing and feeling sorry for the kid. It could have been any Ronald we found that day. This one might have stayed out for a couple more beers the night before, called in sick, and someone else

would have been kidnapped and taunted in his place. And besides, if he had made them laugh – well, the Ronald wouldn't be in this mess if he'd had an ounce of talent. How hard can it be to make four drunk clowns laugh?

Two cans down, I grabbed the last four and left the car. Each of the clowns took a beer except for Mr. Giggles, who turned it down with a shake of the pistol: "Give it to the Ronald. Let him have a last drink."

We toasted, forcing the Ronald to clink his can against each of ours in turn. The kid tried not to cry, but shuddering sobs overwhelmed him.

"What d'ya make of him, Jack my Lad?" Mr. Giggles asked me, gesturing with his near-empty can.

"I feel a little sorry for him," I said. Maybe it was luck that had made me a clown rather than a mark like the Ronald.

"If you're going to do it, just get it over with." I fiddled with the driving gloves, suddenly embarrassed to be there.

The Ronald took a deep breath and howled as loud as he could, but not for long. Two shots to the head, and the Ronald was dead.

Nobody said anything. We stared at the body. What an appalling mess.

"How many more of these fucks do you think there are?" asked Fat Clown.

"About as many as there are aspiring drama students who'll never play Hamlet."

The others walked back to the car, but I stayed where I was, staring at the body. There was less blood than I'd expected. I wondered how Mr. Giggles could do something like this and why none of us stopped him. Whatever the others said, it was a human being under that boy's make-up – I wondered if the same was still true of us. The others had gone, probably to catch some sleep. I returned to the car, its headlamps still illuminating the scene, the dead body. I turned off the engine, reclined the driver's seat and tried to sleep.