

Abbas

Strangeways

October 2024

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My probation officer told me I gotta write, so here we go.

So, I want to tell you why I set fire to your hotel in July – well, first thing to say is that it wasn't just me. There were loads of other people. All different ages, men and women, some kids even. And they weren't all white neither. Anyway, there were hundreds but it was just me and a few others (the unlucky ones) who got nicked or got caught on camera later. That was me and I thought I'd got away with it but no – they bust into my house when we was watching it on the telly and arrested me in front of my kids. They're only 3, 5 and 8! Too young to see their old man getting cuffed and taken away in a police van. Anyway, I gotta tell you why I threw the bottles and that I'm sorry for what I did. You see, I don't have nothing against you. Not personally like. But you gotta see it from my way of thinking. I've got the three kids, rent to pay, food to buy and stuff, but no job. I haven't had a job since after covid. Four years and I've been living on benefits, my old woman giving me this and giving me that, the oldest one asking me for games and that that I can't afford. It's depressing and it's giving me mental health – do you understand? So when the little girls died it all went off – out on the streets and in my head too. We was sure he was an asylum seeker, you know, and a terrorist - not wanted in Southport. I had to do something to protect my kids!! It could have been my middle one – she loves dancing. So that's why I joined the rest of them and threw the petrol and stuff. I'm sorry for what I did. And I'm glad you didn't die. But do you understand why I did it, now?

Darren

Southport

November

Dear Darren

Thank you for your kind letter. I touched that you take the trouble to write. I will try to answer, but please excuse my English is not so good.

I try to understand why you and your friends attacked us that night. Like you, I watching the television and see the news about the killings. I could not believe it! Here, in Southport, a place I love! I cried, think about my own three girls who still are in Syria. Southport is safe place compare with where I come from and my wife says Abbas! You must go to UK. Find a job. A house. A safe place to live! Always, she says this. And so I escape, come here. Dangerous journey.

And then, I hear shouting, glass smash on the window, fire in street...

So I do understand. And I do forgive. Because, Darren, you and me – we're not so different, no?

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