THE CRAZY OIK
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A Communist Odyssey by Jim Burns first appeared on the Northern Review of Books section of the **Penniless Press** website

Employment, Pre Mobies Post "Job Seekers" and **Birkenhead Market Bogs** are from Tanner's collection **The Ism Prison** – Penniless Press Publications 2012

A Nazi Helmet is from S. Kadison's short story collection **Let's Kill the Teacher** published by Penniless Press Publications in 2012

Front Cover –Dmitri Orlov (Moor) (1883 – 1946)
Death to World Imperialism (1919)

Capitalism Devours Everything (1920)

Lenin used to bang on about imperialism but it's doubtful if soviet workers and peasants would have recognised the concept if it jumped up and bit them on the arse. Marxism is replete with such abstract entities. Try to imagine an icon for the slogan: Victory to the Labour Theory of Surplus Value!! What they would recognise biting their arses would be the bug-eyed gigantic caterpillar of Dmitri Moor's great 1919 poster. Imperialism is looking pretty ratty and one wonders if the pin pricks of the proletarian bayonets are up to the job. World Imperialism wasn't slain and indeed the Soviets got into the act too once they'd found their feet. These days Globalisation might be the new behemoth. Even more abstract – but the monstrous caterpillar still fits the bill.

Dmitri Orlov was born in Russia in 1883. He was studying law at Moscow University but abandoned his studies to set up an underground print shop. Orlov later worked as a left-wing political cartoonist and was often in trouble with the censors. Influenced by the work of Olaf Gulbransson at *Simplicissimus,* he tried to establish a similar magazine, *Volynka,* in Russia. However, the magazine was banned by the Russian government.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Orlov concentrated on producing posters in support of communism. He signed his work Moor, after a character in *The Robbers* by Friedrich Schiller.

Illustrations

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

POGÁNYISM

Hungarians – what are they like? I used to work with one – Ivan de Nemethy. His dad, a minor aristocrat, brought him out of the Commie paradise in 1956 in a handbag. Years later he got young Ivan a suit on appro for his Oxford interview. Ivan got in, the suit back went back the next day and then he did nothing for three years but tinker with his motorbike. He came out with a third (nobody actually fails at Oxford) and joined us. We soon realised the truth of the old joke that a Hungarian can go into a revolving door behind you and come out in front. Ivan lasted a couple of years and then, disgruntled at not being CEO, joined Black and Decker as the top dog's PA. Soon after they were both out of a job when B&D went bust.

Pogány sounds similar. Jim Burns' account of this commie conman fits the stereotype. Josef Pogány "one of the most insolent and totally amoral climbers that the revolution threw to the surface" could just as easily have been a rich capitalist. The Yanks loved him. But he wasn't really a communist, or a capitalist – he was a Pogányist. The odyssey came to a typical end. Joe got shot.

Youssef Rakha describes another revolution; the Arab Spring which seems to be taking a fresh turn in Egypt with Morsi's claim to be supreme leader. Robespierre made the same mistake. Youssef's analyses will be published next year by Penniless Press Publications. He writes fluently in English being a graduate from Hull University. Two other Hull graduates also feature in this issue – John Lee and Tom Kilcourse. Librarian Phil would have been proud – or, more likely, be turning in his grave.

John describes the horrors of life in the RAF as a trainee defender of world imperialism. Tom, as a temporary diversion from his life story, has a snipe at creative writing with his account of Norman, a colossal egocentric bore (perhaps a Hungarian). The Oik website has enough already on the creative writing industry so we won't go into all that again – except to quote a letter in a recent LRB "It's odd that so many students told 'find your own voice' so often find the same one"

No such boring conformism in the Oik. To cite only one example: Tanner's front-line despatches from the great dystopia which is Liverpool recall the obscene yet hilarious energy of LF Céline (of whom Tanner is a great fan). Our other oik contributors, we hope, display a similar quirky oddness – the kind which would get quickly removed by the conventional creative writing pedagogue.

So, as the early Pogany might have said "Death to the Imperialism of Literary Conventions!!" *(thunderous applause*) . Later his slogan would have become: "Fill Your Boots!" "Long Live the Booker Prize!!" "Never Start a Sentence with And!!!" And that's our last word on the subject

Ken Clay Jan 2013

A COMMUNIST ODYSSEY

Jim Burns

Revolutions often throw up curious characters. I first came across József Pogány (or John Pepper, as he became later) when I read books like Theodore Draper's *The Roots of American Communism* and Benjamin Gitlow's *The Whole of Their Lives* many years ago. Both had information about his activities in the United States in the 1920s, but said little about who he really was and what happened to him. Gitlow, an early communist activist, had known him personally, and provided some colourful descriptions of Pogány's appearance and habits, though they may have been shaped by Gitlow's turn to the right in later years. By the 1950s he was testifying for the government against some of his old colleagues. And he was not always reliable with his facts. He said that Pogány was sent to the salt mines by Stalin in 1929, but that was not what happened.

József Pogány was born, as József Schwartz, in Budapest in 1886. His family was, as he himself said, petit-bourgeois and Jewish. He went to a prestigious private school, and though not an outstanding scholar he read widely and mixed with fellow-students interested in Marxism. His leanings were towards history, sociology, and philosophy. He changed his name to Pogány in 1903, probably to divert attention from his Jewish origins. In 1904 he entered the University of Budapest and in 1905 he joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Thomas Sakmyster says that Pogány submitted a dissertation on the political views of János Arany, an important 19th Century Hungarian poet, and "received his doctorate degree summa cum laude."

Pogány had spent time in Paris and Berlin and wrote for left-wing newspapers and magazines. He also wrote plays, one of them about Napoleon, though they weren't staged at the time. He didn't always create a good impression among the people he associated with, and some on a left-wing publication he worked for in 1912 described him as "a loathsome, ambitious, and dishonest person who pursued his own interest in an unprincipled way." Even Pogány's wife, in retrospect, said: "My husband was not a pleasant individual. Indeed, he was aggressive and supercilious, and as a person of great learning he disdained those who were less educated."

Hungary was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to the First World War, and some of Pogány's journalism got him into trouble with the authorities. He received jail sentences, but never actually served time due to the outbreak of war. He was called up, wounded, and then got himself re-classified as a war correspondent. It was noted that he played down his socialist beliefs, and although this brought criticism from SDP members it was likely that his actions were necessary because of strict censorship rules. And Pogány would have been aware that withdrawal of his press credentials could lead to his being forced to return to military service.

He welcomed the onset of the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the end of the war in 1918 brought turbulence to Budapest as the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart. Troops returning from the war formed Soldiers' Councils to represent their interests, and these became the focus of agitation by Pogány and other radicals. A group of soldiers forced their way into the residence of Count Tisza, the former Prime Minister, and accused him of being responsible for involving Hungary in the war. Shots were fired and Tisza killed. A tribunal in 1921 heard evidence that Pogány had been present and that he fired the first shot. But the people who gave this evidence later claimed they had been forced to provide false testimony. Sakmyster notes that historians are still divided on the question of Pogány's culpability in this matter.

Pogány's activities with the Soldiers' Councils, and his journalism, increasingly brought him to the attention of right-wing elements in Hungary. He forced the National Council (a coalition government) to dismiss two successive Ministers of Defence by "using violent rhetoric and the threat of military force." His actions were seen as preparing the way to power of the recently formed Hungarian Communist Party, led by Béla Kun. As Sakmyster says: "Though the CP's membership was quite small, it managed to play a highly disruptive role in late 1918 and early 1919." Communists attacked the government, agitated at factory gates, and developed their influence in the Soldiers' Councils. Pogány was not alone in thinking that, for a revolution to succeed, the support of at least major parts of the army was essential.

Pogány had continued to be a member of the SDP, but he agreed to an alliance with Béla Kun and a new government was formed with

the aim of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat. Pogány became its People's Commissar for War, though not everyone was happy with this development. Gusztáv Gratz, a Hungarian diplomat and historian, referred to Pogány as "one of the most insolent and totally amoral climbers that the revolution threw to the surface.... His fanatical determination was simply a means to satisfy his swollen ambitions. He imagined himself to be a Napoleon." And Sakmyster mentions that he "annoyed both his new and former colleagues with his haughtiness and histrionic manners." People who knew that he had once written a play about Napoleon thought that he was taking on the airs of the French Emperor. The play was actually produced while Pogány was active in the revolutionary government, but received largely negative reviews and closed after a few performances.

The break up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to territorial disputes, and Hungary was invaded by Serb, Romanian, and Czech armies, with their actions appearing to have been approved by the major victors in the First World War. The accession to power in Hungary of a communist government had not been looked on kindly, and Pogány was seen as one of the more militant leaders of the revolution. He was given the role of commissar to the First Division which was opposing Romanian forces. He did have some small successes in inspiring troops to launch a successful counter-attack, though it was claimed that he only achieved this through a large loss of life. And the Romanians quickly regained the ground they had lost. Pogány drew criticism, too, because at a time when many people in Hungary were experiencing food shortages, he gave lavish banquets at his headquarters to which he invited artists, writers, and especially attractive actresses. It wouldn't be the only time that Pogány displayed a penchant for a hedonistic life-style.

The Hungarian revolution soon collapsed (it took just 133 days) and, as right-wingers began to hunt down communists and socialists, Pogány fled to Austria, where he wrote a book about the White Terror that was underway in Budapest. This made his name known in Russia and Germany, and he and Béla Kun were sent by the Comintern to Berlin to help start an uprising. Pogány went to Hamburg to co-ordinate a rising there with the one in Berlin, but failed to receive a message saying that the Berlin communists had called off their action due to lack of support. There were suggestions

that Pogány may have been informed in time to cancel events in Hamburg, but chose to go ahead. The result was that, despite thousands of workers responding to calls to strike and demonstrate, the police easily crushed the rising, killing and wounding large numbers of people.

Neither Kun nor Pogány acknowledged that their planning had been at fault or that they had miscalculated the strength of the opposition. Speaking to a meeting of party members Pogány said that the European working class had committed a "gigantic historical mistake" by not responding to the invasion of Poland by the Red Army. And he explained away the failure of the Hungarian revolution and the fiasco in Hamburg by stating that small defeats were "the necessary preliminaries to final victories". It's difficult not to think that Pogány, like so many left-wing theorists, had little or no real contact with ordinary workers and their concerns.

Sakmyster describes Pogány returning to Moscow in "a cocksure, satisfied mood," unaware that German communists had complained about his ineptness. Stalin and Trotsky agreed that what had happened in Berlin and Hamburg had been a disaster, and Lenin spoke harshly to Pogány and Béla Kun. Trotsky, it was said, treated them with contempt. Because of his actions in Germany, and his failure to resolve divisions in the Hungarian communist community in Moscow and Vienna, it was decided to send Pogány somewhere it was thought he could do little damage. He asked to go to the United States as a Comintern delegate to the Hungarian-American Federation of the Communist Party of the United States(CPUSA). His request was approved largely because the CPUSA was small and, at that time, insignificant, and it was thought that he would not be able to get up to too much mischief. It would seem that his taste for scheming had been underestimated. As Sakmyster remarks: "Like a moth to the flame, Pogány seemed unable to resist immersing himself in the factional struggle". As the miniscule CPUSA was riven with factional disputes it was inevitable that Pogány would soon be involved in them.

Pogány's brief when he arrived (illegally) in New York was supposedly limited to working with the Hungarian-American Federation, but he quickly went further than that. The CPUSA had been driven underground in 1919, but a legal party had been formed under the title of the Workers' Party (WP). Pogány managed to give

the impression that he had been sent to help guide the policies of the WP and resolve its differences with the underground element. His reputation was established because he could legitimately claim to know, Stalin, Lenin, Zinoviev, and others. And he had participated in actual revolutionary situations in Hungary and Germany. That they had been failures, and that Pogány had a reputation for divisiveness, was not clear to leading American communists such as William Z.Foster and Earl Browder.

Pogány managed to persuade himself and others that his presence in the USA was essential to the future of its communist party. Initially unable to speak English, he immersed himself in American culture, and was quickly able to converse and write in English in a way that the Americans found surprising. He went to nightclubs and cinemas, read newspapers and popular fiction, and talked to a wide variety of people. According to one American communist, Pogány almost overnight had become "an orator of dazzling facility and effectiveness," who spoke in English "faster and more furiously" than many native-born Americans. To emphasise his near-conversion to American ways Pogány re-named himself John Pepper. With the Executive Committee of the Communist International now insisting that the underground and legal sections of the CPUSA combine as the WP, Pepper threw himself into the factional fighting. James P. Cannon later remarked: "The factional fights before had been rough enough, but the game of 'killing' opponents, or people who just seemed to be in the way, really began with Pepper." Pepper himself, boasting about his skills when dealing with opponents, told Benjamin Gitlow: "If you want to see how a pig is stuck as you never saw one before, watch me."

The Comintern's policy had changed from direct revolutionary activity to one advocating a popular front, and the formation of mass workers' parties along the lines of the British Labour Party. Pepper immediately adopted the new policy and wrote a pamphlet outlining its virtues. It became something of a best-seller, at least in the world of radical politics, and Sakmyster estimates that around 20,000 copies were sold, including three to the FBI. That organisation was hunting for Pepper because of his communist activities and the fact that he was an illegal immigrant. In addition, a warrant for his arrest had been issued in Hungary, where he was accused of 228 murders, 18 burglaries, and a couple of counterfeiting crimes.

Pepper began to dominate the WP, but at the same time it was obvious that he had not lost his liking for the good life. Asserting his authority as a special envoy from Moscow, he drew on Party funds (the "Moscow Gold" that anti-communists claimed financed the CPUSA) to finance "a personal lifestyle that hardly seemed proletarian." He rented an apartment in Washington Heights and claimed that it was the headquarters for the Political Committee of the WP. Sakmyster adds: "He dressed foppishly, drank expensive cognac and wine, and at times dined at fine restaurants. And he seems to have taken advantage of his position of power and influence to engage in sexual dalliances with party secretaries and female comrades who took his fancy." None of this was done in secret, and Pepper told other leaders that they ought to drink good wines and have love affairs, saying that they were good because they helped revive the energy and quicken the impulses. It was some years later that James P. Cannon, looking back on the early days of American communism, said that Pepper was "more American than any hustler or corner-cutter," and that he was a "manipulator deluxe." Cannon was referring mainly to Pepper's political dealings, but his comments could easily be applied to his personal involvements.

The factional fighting among American communists is fully detailed by Thomas Sakmyster, and repeating the details here would take up far too much time. But it's worth noting that opposition to Pepper began to grow, especially among home-grown communists like Foster and Browder. They looked on him as a "European style intellectual with no contact with American workers." He still had supporters among American communists, but it was increasingly being pointed out to Moscow that many others considered him as the prime cause of the continuation of factional disputes.

Pepper was recalled to Moscow, where he soon realised that there was a growing rift between Stalin and Trotsky. Ever the opportunist, he attacked known Trotsky supporters among American communists, and he made it clear that he supported Stalin. He also used his connections to Zinoviev and others to get preferential treatment for housing and other matters. He thrived on the atmosphere in Moscow and "With his fine-tuned opportunism, polished debating skills, and experience in factional struggles, Pepper had no difficulty in acclimatising himself to the political culture prevailing in the Comintern and the situation created by the power struggle underway

in the Soviet leadership." When he sensed that Stalin and Bukharin were conspiring to oust Zinoviev, he began to distance himself from his one-time benefactor. Sakmyster calls Pepper "a shameless opportunist," who "seemed willing to abandon friends and drastically shift his political views or ideological preferences if he decided that his own political survival and future success were at stake."

He continued to write about a variety of subjects, and set himself up as an expert on India. He also claimed to be knowledgeable about Britain, though British communists in Moscow looked on him with disdain. When the General Strike took place in 1926 he wrote a pamphlet in which he expressed the view that the end of the strike would lead to the Communist Party of Great Britain becoming a mass organisation. It was probably another example of a theorist having little or no contact with events on the ground and no real understanding of the people involved in them.

Pepper's own standing in Moscow was in decline, and it was reported that, at a meeting between Stalin and some American communists, he was sharply rebuked by the Soviet leader when he tried to add to comments made by Benjamin Gitlow. In 1927 he was told that he had to go to Korea to help organise the small, local party. It's possible that being given this assignment was almost a punishment arranged by Stalin. Korea was not, at that time, considered of any importance. The strange thing was that Pepper never actually entered Korea, though he submitted a report claiming that he had. He almost got away with his deception, few people in the Kremlin being interested in Korea and none of them having any experience of the country. But someone with knowledge of the situation in Korea did eventually read what Pepper had written and queried it.

He should have been investigated and disciplined, but somehow managed to persuade the Comintern that it was necessary for him to return to New York, where the various factions within the CPUSA were still warring with each other. Sakmyster suggests that it was Bukharin who most likely persuaded other members of the ECCI to let Pepper leave for America, and that it may have been Jay Lovestone, still a strong supporter of Pepper, who convinced Bukharin that the CPUSA needed him. Pepper arrived in New York in March, 1928, and promptly involved himself in Party matters, though he assured opponents like William Z. Foster that he would refrain from personal attacks and divisive actions. People who had

joined the CPUSA after Pepper had gone back to Moscow were naturally curious to see him, though they were not all impressed by what they saw. Whittaker Chambers, later to become notorious as the accuser of Alger Hiss during the anti-communist years after the Second World War, described him as "a short, arrogant figure," who "strutted down the centre aisle of the meeting, staring haughtily to the right and left, but seeing no one - a small man swollen with pride of place and power."

Pepper and Lovestone were in agreement about the idea of "American exceptionalism," the theory that political, economic and social institutions in the United States differed in certain fundamental ways from those in European countries. According to Sakmyster, their enthusiasm for this idea, and the proposal that, in Lovestone's words, American capitalism was "positively and definitely upward," would lead to even more intense factional wars and the eventual demise of the Lovestoneites. When Pepper realised that a new policy was coming from Moscow, and that it involved a "left turn" and local communist parties engaging in a "revolutionary upsurge," he continued to argue that it had no chance of succeeding in America. He for once appeared to be taking what might be called a "common sense," as opposed to a theoretical view of the situation.

In Russia things were rapidly changing. Stalin had begun to isolate Bukharin, accusing him of "Right deviationism" because he opposed the "left turn" policy. Trotsky, of course, was already in disgrace. And, in the United States, James P. Cannon had thrown in his lot with Trotsky, and Jay Lovestone was slowly losing his position within the CPUSA because of his support for Bukharin. Pepper's lies about his Korean mission had been discovered, and he was ordered to return to Moscow. He delayed doing so and went into hiding in New York. When Moscow ordered that William Z. Foster, a key opponent of Pepper's faction, was to be appointed General Secretary of the CPUSA, Pepper considered breaking away and forming a separate party.

More evidence of his lax moral behaviour came to light when it turned out that he had seduced both of the stenographers allocated to him by the CPUSA. He had promised to marry both of them, despite already having a wife in Russia. Matters came to a head when Pepper abandoned one of the women concerned in preference for a younger, prettier one. The spurned woman then threatened to make public the

details of where Pepper was hiding, and was only persuaded to change her mind when appeals were made to her Party loyalty. Pepper continued to prevaricate about returning to Moscow. He was expelled from the CPUSA and, on their return from Russia, where they had been attempting to make a case for the legitimacy of the Pepper/Lovestone faction, the leading Lovestoneites (Lovestone, Gitlow,and Bertram Wolfe) were also given their marching orders.

Pepper did eventually go back to Moscow, but he concocted a story about a fictitious trip to Mexico and delays due to a revolution in that country, a bout of malaria, and difficulties booking a passage to Europe. Once in Moscow he discovered that he was almost isolated, few people wanting to be seen associating with him. One of those who did visit him was Bertram Wolfe, who had lived in Mexico, and Pepper pressed him for information about Mexico City, what it looked like and which were the main streets and buildings of significance. When he appeared before the International Control Commission (ICC) he at first lied about going to Mexico, but then told the truth and attempted to blame the Lovestoneites for encouraging him to go into hiding while they struggled to maintain their position within the CPUSA. He was found guilty of failing to carry out directives, and of engaging in "persistent factional, opportunist, and rightist activities," and was expelled from the Comintern.

The expulsion had the effect of depriving him of privileges he had in terms of housing and other matters, and it also meant that he was denied access to Party publications so was unable to function as a journalist. He couldn't go on missions overseas, take part in Party debates, or sit on committees. In addition, everyone seemed to turn against him, and he was called a careerist, a charlatan, a political parasite, and an agent of the international right wing. Only his wife, who he had virtually abandoned while he was in America, stood by him, though she had no illusions about his deviousness and his philandering.

Pogány (he had reverted to his real name) was given work in the foreign trade department of Gosplan, the Soviet planning agency, and immediately went out of his way to show that he was an ideal worker. He began a campaign to regain his membership of the Comintern and wrote an article for publication in various communist newspapers in which he attacked former allies like Lovestone and

Gitlow and confessed to his "errors and misdeeds" during his visits to the United States. He also made it clear that he was now a convinced supporter of Stalin. His membership was restored in 1932.

By 1934 the first signs of the Terror, the purges of supposed counter-revolutionaries and other malcontents, were visible. A list of 3,000 suspected spies, provocateurs, wreckers, and oppositionists had been given to the NKVD, and it included many Hungarian, Polish, and German communists who had been living in Russia. They were accused of being in league with Trotsky, Zinoviev and other disgraced Bolsheviks.

Sakmyster says that it's more than probable that Pogány's name was on the list. In 1936 his old comrade, Béla Kun, was arrested after being expelled from the Comintern on the grounds of factionalism in the Hungarian CP and opposition to the new Popular Front policy. Pogány's turn came in July, 1937,and he was accused of participation in a counter-revolutionary organisation. He was tried, convicted, and shot on the 8th February, 1938. Sakmyster thinks that his trial probably lasted less than the twenty minutes it had taken to convict Béla Kun.

Thomas Sakmyster, summing up Pogány's life and activities, says that his "personal shortcomings were so egregious that he consistently failed to gain the confidence of those whose support he very much needed and his zeal for "self-aggrandisement was so powerful and his opportunism so blatant and shameless that he disgusted even those who were initially impressed by his intellectual prowess and reputation as an authentic Bolshevik." He cites Pogány's attacks on Zinoviev, who had helped him in various ways, as an example of his opportunism. And his repudiation of Jay Lovestone, his closest ally in America and one of his few personal friends, as pointing to Pogány's willingness to abandon those who were no longer of any use to him. In his final words, Sakmyster is of the opinion that, had he not chosen to be a communist revolutionary, and instead gone in for a different career, Pogány could well have been a success in America: "One can certainly imagine that Pogány would have succeeded in the American business world, particularly in advertising, for which he had a real flair."

A Communist Odyssey is a well-documented and fascinating book. It may be that some of the details will be of interest only to those with a specialised awareness of certain areas of communist history.

The factional fights and personalities in the American Communist Party can almost bewilder at times, though to say this is not a reflection on Thomas Sakmyster's scholarship, which is thorough and praiseworthy. He writes clearly and intelligently.

Does his book tell a tragic story? It's hard to feel much sympathy for Pogány. He was prepared to treat other people in an offhand and ruthless manner, and his unprincipled behaviour was noticeable right from the start of his activities as a radical. I don't doubt that he would have been prepared to shoot his opponents in the CPUSA, had it been necessary to do so, and if he could get away with it. I can't help wondering what was going through his mind as he was led away to be shot?

Jim Burns reviewed A COMMUNIST ODYSSEY: THE LIFE OF JÓZSEF POGÁNY/JOHN PEPPER by Thomas Sakmyster Central European University Press. 249 pages. £45. ISBN 978-615-5225-08-6

OIKU: Getting away with it. Guerilla Art: installation in progress. *(David Birtwistle***)**

He was making a ‘living wall’ on the derelict building. He’d built a high-rise, vertical garden and was painting the other half with stark imagery from his socially relevant repertoire. His intention was to remain subversive without becoming institutionalised, to speak directly to the disenfranchised. He painted the fire-escape which led to bench seating on the roof. When it wasn’t raining, to the east, you could see the Beetham Tower. To the west you had a clear view through the ad-agency window into the strategy group’s meeting where you could actually witness them creating the new opium of the people.

ALEXIS LYKIARD

A COUPLE OF QUIBBLES

1. TALKED DOWN

Listen Up! the dunces see fit to exhort us.
Redundant and meaningless,
mere nonsense in trendy dress,
it's not stuff our English grammarians taught us.
As yet another ridiculous phrase, this one I'll resist 'to the
end of my days'.

2. AS MUD

"To be honest we
all would want to see
more transparency"
an official spokesman soberly maintains,
as though he somehow did just that, or could,
being most 'clearly' blest with vatic vacancy.
He cites *Lessons To Be Learned, Positive Gains...*
Meanwhile, the Government Plan proposed will be
Proactive — Guidelines For The Common Good.
Desperate to *Deliver Excellence,* he
fails to convince the sceptic lobbyist,
who grins in beatific boredom, pissed.

WHEN YOU OFFER JONES A LIFT

As an Austin owner you cannot help feeling a bit pleased with yourself—and your Austin. Now that so many motorists—like poor old Jones—have had to lay up their cars indefinitely for want of spares, it's particularly gratifying to have your Austin still carrying on—piling up the miles of trouble-free motoring. Too bad for Jones, of course. If he'd followed your advice he'd be riding in an Austin of his own to-day instead of in yours. Well, well, it all brings home the practical wisdom of your choice.

Jones, poor devil, has a Volkswagen. He got it on a visit to Germany about the time he joined the Gestapo (foreign section). He says if Jerry invades he intends to get it out, put a swastika on it, and drive ostentatiously round town giving the fascist salute. He's been assured by Goebbels that the VW is a very fine car, designed by the Fuhrer himself, and that the Austin is a piece of shit – a flying turd in fact. He says Austin will be probably become German after the war. What nonsense!

Still, in many ways, Jones is a thoroughly nice chap in spite of his odd quirks. That briefcase he's carrying probably contains info on the Spitfire he will send to the Luftwaffe and the satchel on his shoulder will be a bomb he plans to explode when Winston next visits the factory. Silly sod!

Otherwise, as I say, a splendid fellow. I've invited him and Gertrud over for dinner this weekend to meet the Finkelsteins but warned Alice on no account to let the conversation get onto Nietzsche and Heidegger. So you see, we Austin owners are tolerant and forgiving. The VW isn't a bad motor, a bit noisy perhaps but it always starts first time – nevertheless -

. . . Aren't you GLAD you invested in an AUSTIN

Read the Austin Magazine—it contains useful tips—4d. Monthly 8.A.146

NOT MADE FOR NORTHERN WEATHER

Written and translated from the Russian by Maia Nikitina

She was still unsure what she would do next when a taxi pulled up a couple of meters away. She watched as its doors opened and two young men came out. Before they could shut the door, she was there, getting in, telling the cabbie to drive to the airport. He nodded with a smile, and then got back to his conversation on the phone. It sounded Bashkirian.

She felt the cold through the thin fabric of her coat. It wasn't made for the northern weather. Another reason to go home, she thought, shaking slightly – she'd done what was expected of her. The funeral had been arranged, so had the wake and she paid for it all, using the savings she'd made over the years from her pension. Her father had been very organized too. It turned out that he'd set up his own funeral fund. Her niece would sort out the rest. She didn't have to stay, did she? The skin on her hands was rough and red, she was starting to cough. Bronchitis, she remembered. She hadn't had it for years, not since she moved to the South.

The cabbie finished his conversation and turned to her while they waited at the lights. 'Cold', he smiled, and she smiled back. His phone rang again and before he picked it up, he pointed at her coat and shook his head. She hugged herself tighter but the cold seemed to have reached her bones.

The truth was, she didn't want to stay in that cold apartment on her own. There was no TV, it was all so naked, so bare. So different from the last time she'd visited, a few years before. It didn't go well that time either. Father was worried that she'd upset her niece, his granddaughter, and eventually she just left. Just like this time. He was better off without her, it seemed, they all were. Her mother, who had died seven years earlier. Her father, who was now at the mortuary waiting to be prepped for his own funeral. She shouldn't have gone to see him like that, she thought now. It had made her feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, as if she had seen his bare soul, without the protection of clothes, authority, words, facial expressions. She had always seen him through a child's eyes,

as a strong, tall, tough man who didn't talk much. Now the image she would always carry was of a small sharp face and the hands, those ugly hands, those arthritic fingers with the skin as rough as on her own hands now. Suddenly she remembered how she walked in on him sitting on the toilet, naked, when she was five. The memory was new, she must have blocked it out of her mind then but now she saw the scene again, his vulnerable shame and her embarrassment, and his sharp words ordering her to get out of the bathroom. Maybe she should stay. She was his daughter, after all. People would wonder why she wasn't at the funeral.

The car stopped again. Traffic. This city seemed to want her to stay now. The cabbie turned on the radio. '…Stroganski, died at the hospital last night after a prolonged illness. The funeral will take place tomorrow at the Mikhailovski cemetery. And now to the financial news…' The driver turned the sound off again and twisted his body so that he could see her and the road at the same time. It looked like they were here for a while.

'It's a shame about that guy, Stroganski. I used to watch his programmes. Clever guy. And still young, only seventy one, they said.'

Stroganski? That Stroganski? Her favourite journalist, she suddenly remembered. Seventy one. Not that much older than her, almost from the same generation. Her father was ninety six. It's funny how we feel entitled to decide what a good age is for death, she thought. Seventy one is too young. Ninety six is fine. He's had a good life, she remembered herself thinking when she'd found out that her father had died. Almost a century old.

She had been expecting it. When you have a ninety six year old parent, you expect them to go fairly soon. She didn't think it would happen so quickly but she had sensed that she should come and see him for the last time. Then she made up excuses. It was too cold up North right now, in the middle of February. She'd wait until April. She didn't have a warm coat and why would she buy one if she lived in the South – just for one trip? She couldn't afford it. The airline tickets cost three times her pension. Besides, after that last visit, would he even

want to see her? They seemed to have some peculiar kind of harmony, her father and her niece. She knew that the girl wasn't kind to him but he insisted that they were okay and last she heard, her father was re-writing his will to leave his apartment to his granddaughter.

And then the phone call came. Her niece. 'Granddad is dead.' She was on the next flight, in her light coat, with her savings tucked into the middle of her bra. She was calm. She wasn't upset. At least not as much as now, when she heard about Stroganski. What was wrong with her, she wondered, what kind of daughter was she? Calm at the news of her own father's death, upset to hear that a journalist that she had never seen in real life had passed away.

Memories were coming at her now, things she hadn't thought about for years. Her mother, shouting at her father in yet another fit of jealousy. Her brother, also dead now. She remembered how she once asked him to let her stay in the empty flat he had, just for a couple of weeks, until she and her husband moved to the South. Their lease had finished, everything had been sent to the new address, and they just had to tie some loose ends at work before they left. They were short of money and could barely afford food but he said no, and they spent the next two weeks in a freezing damp room of a basement apartment that they somehow managed to find through friends. Her bronchitis developed into pneumonia and she spent the next month in hospital. And her father? He never really said much. He just went about his life, with the regularity of a robot. He was up every morning at six. He went to bed at eight at night. He always read a newspaper, always the same one, at dinner. He always had a tiny smile on his face when her mother nagged and then he would carefully roll the newspaper and disappear in the bedroom.

Maybe she had imagined it all. Imagined that they didn't treat her the same as her brother. Imagined that they didn't seem to care as much about her. After all, they clothed her, fed her. True, her clothes were mostly second hand, and the best food went to her brother. But they did care about her in their own way. And who would blame them, when her brother was always ill, he always seemed to have some incurable disease

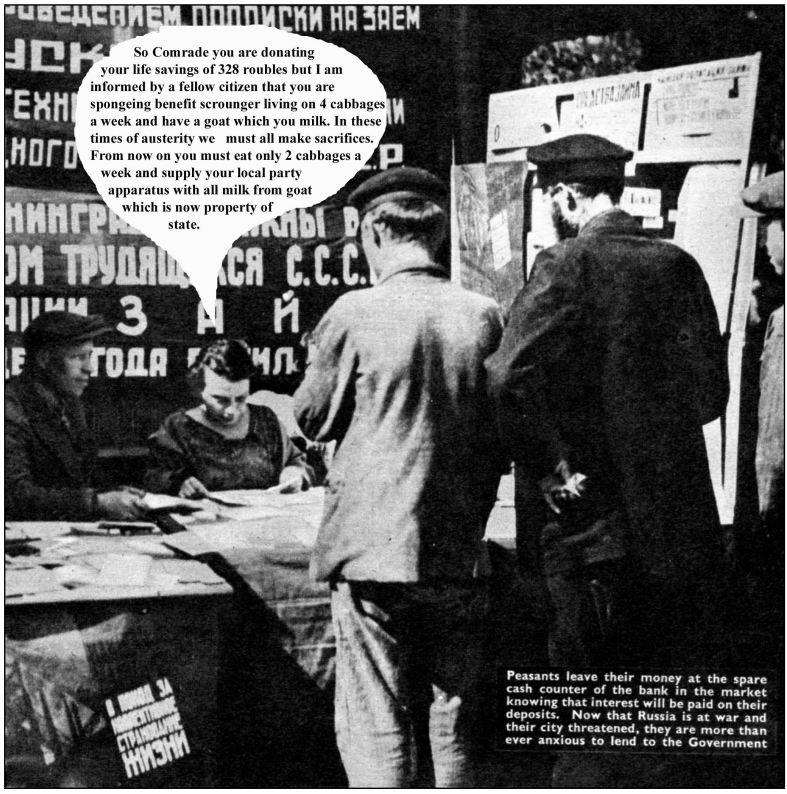
that wasn't deadly but was dangerous enough to secure parental attention. She can't possibly be saying that he was faking it, how would he, there were constantly doctors at the house, frequent trips to the hospital. And yet…

The driver switched off the engine. 'No point burning the petrol, we won't be moving any time soon.' He thought for a few moments and turned to her again. 'There's a metro station here, about five minutes away. Gets you straight into the airport. Just turn right after the traffic lights.' She took out her wallet but he stopped her. 'Didn't get you there did I? Besides, you are my last client today, been working all night. Going home now. I never charge the last client – sets up the good luck for next time.' She didn't know whether he was just saying it to make her feel better but she thanked him anyway. 'And don't worry,' he said as she climbed out, 'don't stress. Whatever it is, it will all get sorted in the end.'

The metro was new. She used to walk this distance from here to the airport where she worked for a few months years ago, she remembered now. The snow would crackle under her fur boots and she'd cup her hands to her face every now and then and blow warm air to keep it from getting frostbite. She tried that now as she approached the station but the cold wasn't going away.

Inside, it was busy. She bought a ticket and was going through the barriers when she heard her name. Probably calling someone else, she thought, pushing through.

The train was warm. She thought about the voice at the station. She was certain now that it belonged to an old classmate; she couldn't remember her name anymore and she felt relieved that she had managed to get away. With any luck, she would get a ticket on a flight before noon and she'd be home by dinner. She imagined sitting in her comfy armchair, watching her favourite soap on her old TV set, with a cup of tea in her hands and a chocolate that she'd take tiny bites out of and make last for the whole episode. And then she would put on a cardigan and take her poodle Bim out for their usual walk in the warm evening light. She'd walk slowly along the alley and Olga would be there with her two Dobermans, and Anna would tell them more gossip about her daughter-in-law.



Illustrated 1942

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA

John Lee

Instead of service in the trenches of Gallipoli and the Somme like my father my service memories are based in pissing little hamlets in the wilds of Ayrshire, Camarthenshire and in the flat lost meadowland of East Norfolk. Perhaps it was character forming after all, I don't know. From the vantage of the local Conservative club, where he spent all his nights, the friends of my then dead father said it would be good for me; the forces would make a man of me. They saw me as less than a man; long hair, disheveled clothing, permanently dirty shoes and a shambling propensity to arrive late for all appointments unless they were in a pub. But though my service career made a difference it was not what they anticipated. I went on shambling much as before but I did so with a more cynical self-righteousness and I became a Communist, an achievement of sorts though they wouldn't think so. I took my character into the forces with me, that was the problem, mine and theirs, and the resentment I felt at "serving my country" and which coloured most of my experiences, has never quite gone away.

RAF West Freugh was my first prolonged experience of low life. The Glaswegian cooks and their assistants next to whom I was billeted scared the shit out of me and left me puzzled as to how human contact might be made. Like many other bewildered adolescents I had often found it difficult enough talking to people, seeing where they were coming from. I easily felt embarrassed and inadequate – though you learn techniques to mask it and get by. This I now see as part of the difficulties of growing up; harder for some than others. But suppose you suddenly have to live with or besides different kinds of animals – people that to you seem to come from another planet – what do you do or say?

Before ever reaching West Freugh I had had a kind of warning of what living alongside psychos might be like. Basic training at square-bashing camp was not my thing and a sojourn in the hospital-extensively with Asian Flu had been more about escaping the attention of the RAF regiment ground combat instructor as about any medical condition.

I didn't like rifles – they went bang in your face and if you were

frightened of them, as I was, they jumped when you pulled the trigger and they knocked shit out of your shoulder. This might have been why most of my bullets seemed to have gone into the next man's target. This was noticed by the rockape instructor who addressed the group in a display of phoney eloquence. They liked to entertain.

- Oh I think we 'ave one ere. Another of 'em.

He continued by likening me to a former trainee, seemingly my counterpart, who after the instruction "Commence firing!" had shot the red flag.

-Are you going to be an officer then? It's twats like you that they make into officers. I've seen 'em. I salute 'em but they daren't look me in the face. Anyway I'm watching you so fucking wake up or I'll ave yer.

The echo of the voice of my father who said I was a dreamer, had a lazy mind and would never amount to anything. And then of course there was the woodwork master – I was his chopping block.

-My chisel slipped sir-

- I see boy- so your chisel slipped, well stand there and watch it and when it slips again let me know.-

I stood for over an hour. They're such clever fuckers.

Anyway the sergeant was as good as his word and when I failed to clip the barrel on my bren-gun and commenced firing as ordered the barrel went plop in the sand five yards away- he noticed and was on to me like a shot.

-You! You arse-hole! The RAF has gone to the trouble and expense of buying you a gun to shoot Japs, Russians and Chinks with- and you throw it at 'em. For that you can chase fucking butterflies.-

And this is what I did – dancing up and down the Wilmslow mud – ruining the polished finish to my boots – destroying the work of the previous evening .

Once the bastards have fingered you they never let up – its too late- you're done for – no point in even trying anymore. When it came to sticking the sack of sand with an attached bayonet as part of a twenty yard bayonet charge – we all had to do it- I really tried. I didn't miss and I buried the bayonet as far as it would go. But it made no

difference – he was at me.

-You! I didn't hear you scream when you did that – do it again ten times and I want to hear you scream louder than a Vulcan bomber.-

Everyone laughed though they all knew he'd said this a hundred times before , but I had to do it whilst the flight was granted a smoke break so they could watch and cheer. I was exhausted and my throat was sore. What was this all about? I was scared and depressed. Many trainees have commented that they could not understand why the Japs Russians and the Chinks who saw someone tear-arsing towards them with a fixed bayonet would be particularly bothered whether they were screaming or not. This is not good thinking. You scream for You – to take your mind of what your doing and this applies as much in training as it does in real trench warfare. But RAF trainees like me didn't need to take their minds off a hail of machine gun bullets but rather to take it off the sheer stupidity of running across a muddy football pitch to stick a sack of shit

Only two months earlier I had been studying Shakespeare and Wordsworth at school and though I was prepared to change and become a lethal man-of-action, a jungle fighter, if that's what they wanted – anything for a quiet life. It didn't seem to be happening, so I reported to sick bay where to my pleasure they found that I had a temperature so that I was sent to the station RAF hospital where I was to be treated for a contagious disease No more screaming on the camp football field at least not for a week. But at the end of my convalescence I came across something worse. There arrived in the next hospital bed the dirtiest airman imaginable. Small and squat with a snotty nose roman candle, the lot He looked at you sideways. I knew him to be a newly recruited regular in the same flight as myself though he seemed to have been missing for some days. It was nickishing to see how after three weeks' service he had turned his new worsted uniform into a multi-contaminated foodsoiled dish rag. I had thought it would be impossible to survive even three weeks in the Royal Airforce looking like that and It turned out that I was not far wrong.

- Are yer right there Jimmy? Will yer see what I've got here?-

It was the Glasgow Gorbels voice that I came to know so well, but as he had a kind of grin on his face I took it that he meant me no harm.

-What's that then?-

I was curious not so much as to what he had, but about his eccentric conversational opening.

-Look at this then Jimmy-

Oh Jesus no! More fucking trouble! He pulled out from under his pillow a bayonet of the very kind I'd been using to deflate the sand bag or to stick all those Chinks Japs and Russkies as the instructor put it.

-Er where did you come across that then?

I was alerted to the need for care and did not want to suggest anything illegitimate about his possession though I knew that to bring a weapon into a sickbay was a serious offence.

-Tuk it from behind that twat on the range – yus know the one that made yus run up and down with the rifle – he's no as fucking smart as he thinks he is-

-No I think you might be right there, but what do you think you might do with it?-

-What did yus think I wus goin to do with it? Pick ma bleeding nose? When some fucker whose got it in for me tries it on – I'm going to stick him good-that's what.

-Yeh but I can't think that anyone's got it in for you though, not especially anyhow-

-What the fuck de yus know then? There's allus some cunt got in fer me – are yus one of they then?

The need for care had grown urgent so I got the topic round to a discussion of Celtic's chances in the Scottish league. I clearly knew nothing about the subject and I'm not sure he did either but the grin had gone from his face and he spent the rest of the night eyeing me. Next morning, thankfully. I was dismissed from sick bay and had to leave my newfound friend. Even then in my naivety I suspected he was serious trouble and I proved to be right as I came across him again some few nights later when I was took my turn on guard. The guard house contained police cells which were supervised by the RAF police who we were there to assist as subservient auxiliaries. In one of the cells was my former bedspace neighbour from the hospital. On requesting information as to his presence I was told.

-The silly bleeder's only tried to stick a bayonet in someone – so he's

for court-martial and a long stay in Colchester.-

After four weeks service, two of them in the guardhouse, he was now to spend at least the next five years in prison and the poor sod hadn't even managed to fulfil his one ambition. He'd only tried. But even so he was not the star prisoner in the slammer that night. A quite different character with a posh way of talking occupied the next cell. The corporal MP expressed some admiration for this character and explained why.

-He's working his ticket or so he thinks. He was on parade when he started jumping up and down making monkey noises. He does it now every so often and always when a senior non-com or officer comes to inspect. When they go he talks quite normally though he says he's mad and must be released from the services so that he can go to Oxford University. We don't know if he's cracked or just bloody smart.-

My own view was that he was bloody smart and this was confirmed when I was able to talk to him through the bars. He told me that he was buggered if he was going to waste two years in this outfit and that if he kept it up they would in the end have no option but to declare him medically and mentally unfit. His opinion was that even if they knew that he was faking they would not be able to prove it and would continue on the basis that that anyone persistently faking madness must be crazy anyway. Psychiatrists think that way though they aren't as smart as he was. He made the further point that dismissal from the forces on grounds of mental illness would he no hindrance to taking up a studentship at Oxford indeed quite the reverse.

I never knew whether he made it or not though I know that he was soon to left Wilmslow to go before a medical board. His story travelled like wildfire amongst the new recruits giving rise to rumours and speculation but also to the discussion as to why we didn't all do that. Why did we supinely accept their stupid and pointless commands? I did meet conscientious objectors who did hospital service and things like that and they clearly had a better time than we did. However most of these were religious – this was accepted by the authorities as a condition implying conscientiousness. But this was something I did not know how to be and my reason that I didn't like doing military service – an honest reason- wouldn't count. Some said that if you could find someone

who had committed suicide this would be grounds for release but I never had that kind of luck so I don't know if it was true

As a consequence of my illness I was backflighted and joined a group of Jordie shipyard stevedores. Though they didn't speak a word of English I soon found out that they were dominated by a huge man who returned to the billet pissed each night after the nocturnal hunt for "waff minge" (the sexual parts of female RAF recruits) at which he was apparently very successful. He was reasonably pleasant to me – I was obviously no kind of threat to him – and I figure he thought my bookishness exotic, By and large his attitude to me involved a kind of protection against the sneers and veiled threats of the others who I think with some justice saw me as a snob, a posh talker who read books and failed to join in at the evening boozing ritual.

One of Ian's main claims to fame resulted from an encounter on parade that involved him in a confrontation with the drill instructor. Like most of his ilk the D.I. had drawn down the peak of his cap, Nazi style, in order to make his sadism manifest. He had learned to scream in a high pitched manner and to move like a clockwork Corporal Himmler. I suppose these were acquired as tools of his trade just like any other – though you had to be a nasty sod to ever take it up in the first place. Anyway Ian was stood to attention when a wasp buzzed his face and he flinched and knocked it away with his hand. The DI rushed forward and stared in his face (as was their way)

-Keep bloody still you – I hope it stings you-

Ian who towered over him responded

-If it fuckin does I'll ram it down your throat-

An astounded flight watched the DI walk slowly away as though he had not heard this piece of gross insubordination which one expected to lead to a charge, the guardhouse and at least two weeks' jankers. The general consensus was that the DI himself faced trouble for what he had said – though an alternative explanation was also pretty good – he was just shit scared. This should have been warning enough for the others who decided to take action against Ian's late night noisy drunken arrivals. They made him an apple-pie bed, folding the sheets and blankets so that he couldn't slide in after his next revellery. He arrived back at about one am and I was wakened by the crashing of

flying beds and the screams of shock and astonishment as every bed and nearly everyone in the billet went flying into the air – an awesome demonstration of strength and fury. It was followed by a bruised silence and then a muttering of discontent at the fact that my bed and I had remained untouched. I remember wishing that he'd tipped me as well. Why was I always the bleeding outsider?

Another thing I learned from basic training was the ethos that characterised service life – the cynicism which expressed a felt-need to respond to the emptiness of it all – to just about everything you did. You learned it, you made others laugh with it and the more experienced you were in the life the more it was a badge denoting that experience and the wisdom you had acquired. It was the prerogative of the wise, of the long time served regular and of the national serviceman just about to be demobbed. It was not a characteristic of the "Sprogg"- the I newcomer like me, whose nose had to be rubbed in the shit to show him what the life was really like – pointless. As I moved towards demob I did my best, as did all the others, to make the newcomer realise how unhappy his next two years was going to be. That was my contribution. I suppose this was making a man of me but nobody I ever met said publicly that our national service had any point or purpose. Anybody doing so would have been courting utter contempt.

On receiving my first 48 hour leave I, like everyone else, had to pass by the guardroom to be inspected. A military policeman interrogated me. It was his job to be a shit and to frighten me with the possibility of losing my pass. He demanded my service number, it was trouble if you forgot that. I gave it him. Then he demanded the RAF motto. I gave it him – Per Ardua ad Astra.

-And what does that bloody well mean?-

-By hard work to the stars-

I gained little from my scholarship and he sneered with contempt.

-No it fuckin doesn't – it means if you make a fuck up, make sure its well hidden. Anyway who wants to go to the fuckin stars? Who do you think you are Gargarin?

He let me through the gate after having hinted more about service life than all the education lectures. But I still had a lot to learn.

Lectures revealed further insight into service life. One such was

given by a flight sergeant instructor and his topic was how to survive a nuclear attack. As he explained the trick was to get in a corner of the ground floor of a large building and that way when the building fell down or was blasted away you had more chance of surviving. He went on to explain that within a half mile radius you will be killed by the heat blast and radiation. Any of the three on their own would kill you. But after half a mile the heat won't get you, but the other two will. After a mile the heat and the blast won't get you though radiation might but probably the combination of the three will do for you anyway. Beyond that you should be quite safe. He concluded his lecture-

-Of course this is all based on the one megaton bomb we dropped on the Japs. Now they have fifty megaton bombs so you're all fucked anyway-

This man, a long time regular, had seen real wartime service somewhere but he was near demob and we were national servicemen – the useless timewasters inflicted on him in order to qualify for a pension.

His next lecture advised us how to deal with nerve gas – never up to that point used in warfare because it was so deadly and difficult to control.

-What you have to do is carry this little tin of atropine and inject yourself with it. But because the bloody stuff is poison and could kill you you mustn't use it without the presence of the said nerve gas. Now the brightest of you will be asking how it is detected? What are its characteristic signs? Now that's the bloody trouble there aren't any. So if you see all yer mates around you dropping dead you might take a chance with this stuff. If it's you that drops dead then you die knowing you might be helping yer mates though you wont be around long enough to be proud of it.-

Both lectures were greeted with guffaws of laughter – nothing is serious except for jankers and Colchester together with the possibility of being backflighted "to the days of bows and arrows" with which we constantly threatened – that would mean doing basic training all over again.

Nobody I came across personally really saw the point of any of this and the undercurrent of cynicism demonstrated this fact. However unquestionably there were politicians and high army officialdom

who had a purpose in mind and this followed from their many years of experience in flinging British troops at one enemy or the other .The idea for those whostill entertained such fancies was to turn us into a lean mean fighting force with each of us no longer subject to the whims of individuality. The hours of bull and boredom, the smoke breaks where you "crashed the ash together" the parades and endless rifle drill and even the disquisitions on Waafs' knickers were all supposed to contribute to this production. An order is given and like a robot you snapped to. To show how all this had been achieved basic training ended with a pass-out parade in which success was demonstrated by the unity of movement of a whole squadron. Parents, local dignitaries and high ranking RAF officers were assembled for this march-past and the presenting of arms in a final salute

"Mother look how they've made a man of me."

We marched onto the parade ground with myself in the centre of the front rank. The command rang out: "SQUADRON PRESENT ARMS". This was when I dropped my rifle.

OIKU: Legacy: one small town. *(David Birtwistle)*

If he hadn't come across Parkour he'd be on the human scrapheap. He'd trained and grafted and sweated until he made Olympic gymnasts look like Steven Seagal. He ran along the pavement, vaulted two cars, rolled over a van, leapt across an awning and shinned up the side of the old town hall. Up top he had a heightened sense of being alive and he remembered his granddad and the stories he'd told him. He looked down at the town square and on the white concrete were the black smears where the braziers had burnt patches during the picket lines.

Boy's Own Paper 1954

KEN CHAMPION

40's Noir

It's the lighting; a beach hut's sculpted shadows,
a white face pushing from a darkened porch,
Mitchum in Acapulco heat, slatted light

across his jacket, Greer walking in against the sun,
a Mexican Dietrich strolling a highway, headlights
stroking her back before she becomes night,

the palms, fedoras, wise guys, bars;
the evening park, a tram's *Nighthawks* figure,
kids playing floodlit footie round a lamppost,

the hall glow through the fanlight, lincrusta,
dad's torch searching the cellar for the nail jar,
Aunt Flo upstairs hoping I'll pencil a seam

down the back of her painted legs while
Uncle Harry's away, her face under mine,
garish, by the cheap bedside lamp.

INLAND BEACH HUT (III)

David Birtwistle

That night a storm blew up. The wind screeched in the trees, sparks flew up the chimney stack, the pot-bellied stove glowed like steam engine boiler and the rain thrashed on the roof. The timbers and the window panes were pelted with pellets. He could feel the wooden building sway but it was well lashed down, it was weather proofed and its lid held. He was inside a shed which was inside a storm and separated from it by half an inch of tongue and grooved board. He got up, put on his winter clothes and unlocked the door. The gale was so strong he could hardly open it. The small copse opposite was a seething mass of flying whips. They flayed the air until they sounded like cracking pebbles being swept up the beach by a high sea. He shut the door and sat down and got his breath back. He tried to feel the storm and understand they way it blew.

He had never felt anything like this ever in his plush, cocooned house down south. With the weather raging about him, the rain drumming on the woodwork, the wind howling up the chimney stack and the flickering light from the log fire he felt like he was inside the soundbox of some gargantuan instrument. This was beyond the thrills of any adventure he'd ever had. Here he was, in the middle of the night, putting the kettle on and soaking up the power of the elements. The excitement of being in the eye of the storm as it crashed about him and threw everything it had against this small shelter was up close and personal in a way he'd never known. It was him against the wild.

From being a softie to being sceptical to being inspired by his mentor, Harry, the transformation was almost complete. He felt it in his bones. He was starting to go native. Something akin to an obsession had overtaken him. Harry had told him he could become another Great Harwood Hughes, the famous secluse. He wasn't sure who he was but he fancied giving it a go. After a while he put on his reading lamp and leafed his way through the small collection of books Harry had left him. The pools of reflected light made the small hut seem like the captain's cabin on the Hispaniola. Tools, barometer, pots, pans, a fishing net stuffed with blankets and clothes, and a little library of Harry's books. Dr Hessayon's Vegetable

Expert, Wild Flowers of the British Isles, a couple of Collins Guides, some recipes and a book in large print, Native American Culture.

As he settled down and perused the book the large print made it easier to read in the flickering light. As the wind boomed above him he read about a Great Tree of Peace and found that all plants had spirits. As these new ideas unfolded they did so in a way that seemed perfectly normal to him. Understanding life, it said, was a personal experience and not a religion as he had been brought up to believe. It was a journey! The sentences resonated in his mind. All creation has life, the rocks, the trees, everything that is visible. Why hadn't anyone told him this before?

As daylight came it turned calmer so he went down to see his old mate, Pete, to see if he knew anyone who could make him some clothes to order. "Funny you should say that. There's a Country and Western night on tonight. She'll be there. Most people will be dressed up." When he arrived he was amazed to see a horse tied to the bus stop. When he went in he was flabbergasted. 'Running Bear' was playing on the sound system and there, right by the door was an Apache chief in a war bonnet looking as impassive as that Red Indian they used to have in the TV shop window. Over by the piano was Wyatt Earp twirling a pair of pearl-handled six guns. Buffalo Bill was standing at the bar. General George Custer with white gloves, a Comanche brave with a pipe of peace and a tomahawk……Pete introduced him to Eileen. He asked her if she could make him some buckskin boots, an Iroquois tunic with frills and a headband, all faun or brown to blend in with the landscape. She whisked him straight into the ladies and measured him up.

After a few days working on the land, adding goodness to the earth and looking for signs of spring in the trees and the shift of the wind and the song of the birds he went down and collected his parcel. He tried it on there and then at his friends. Pete said that he looked like the real kipper's knickers. He was so made up he drove home in full regalia, parked up and slowly walked the perimeter of his domain. He was in the half crouch of a plains Indian listening for the distant hooves of buffalo. As he moved in his soft leather boots gripping his Bowie knife he began to feel the land underfoot and sniff the air in a different way. Plants and birds became important in a way they never had before. It was a new, simplified view of existence. When the group of gravel crunchers came up the track with their rucksacks and

maps and polished hiking boots he wanted to scream at them. "You're yakking away and counting off the miles instead of listening and looking, YOU GREAT DOLLOPERS!!" But the voice of the ancients came to him: "The Indian prefers the sound of the wind darting over the face of the pond…." And he knew he had something they had missed out on. Plus they hadn't noticed him at all in his Red Indian buckskins blending in perfectly with the harsh wintry slopes of the Pennines.

He thought of all those people he'd met whose creative urges were blocked by living together in a crowded city crammed, cheek by jowl, having no idea about the essential solitude required to be a fully human being. The football matches and the illusion of solidarity from paying a fortune to shout yourself hoarse along with 50.000 others. Or paying an average person's life's savings for a cruise on a ship with thirteen decks, four thousand passengers and two thousand crew!! It was a claustrophobic nightmare. He picked up a pigeon feather, slotted it into his headband, and started to do a rain dance. "Aaaaah Aaaaah Eeeee. Iiiiiii. Oooooh". If any body had seen him they would have thought it miraculous. Fortunately they didn't.

Back in his inland beach hut he leafed through the recipe book and found a dhal. Apart from the lentils and the spices he could grow everything himself – onions, courgettes, peppers, garlic, tomatoes. He looked through his Dr Hessayon again. Mid to late February was the very earliest you could plant anything and that was indoors. Especially up here. He checked his potatoes. They were starting to sprout. Outside it started to sleet. He picked up the Native American book again and opened it at the section on Drum Religion. This was all about creating a sense of togetherness through ritual. Leaping about to tom toms with the whole tribe! This wasn't what he wanted to hear at all. It was too much for him. He went back to Harry's recipes and became inspired. Why not vegetarian charcuterie? Potato, leek and onion chitterlings? With mustard and fennel! Swede and beetroot brawn! With extra garlic. Celeriac and broad bean faggots with mushrooms and horse-radish. What could he do with Haslet? Whilst all the other 65 million population were jam-packed into little boxes plugged into social network sites eating chicken tikka take-aways he was out here, alone, in this cold, drenched bog of a place earning himself a virtual Michelin star.

In the morning he polished the sign Harry had given him which said

'Inland Beach Hut' in Latin. He thought perhaps 'The Last Roundup' might be more appropriate. And he remembered the retirement homes down south: Sunny Haven, Tempus Fugit, Bon Voyage, Weak Bladder Gardens, and On the Way Out. It was drizzling again so he decided to do his weekly shop. For some unaccountable reason he bought the local paper. The headline caught his eye. 'Fracking to start. Earthquakes to come!' He read it from cover to adverts. The local farmer, Silas Scroggins, has sold off fifty acres to a development company who drill for gas in the shale. "That's right here, next door to me! If we don't do something it'll be Custer's Last Stand all over again."

He woke up early next morning and immediately gave thanks to The Great Spirit That Is Everywhere. He cleaned his teeth and walked slowly round his land in his moccasins. He checked the stream, the sacred water that ran through his land and he checked the trees that had taken such a pummelling in the wind. He gave thanks for the breeze and for what he had come to love most, literally his very own breathing space. Then he looked up to his left. On the mound in the large field a hundred or so yards away, was a solitary digging machine with its arm and bucket at rest. He feared for the worst.

He headed straight for the library and went on the net. "Hydraulic Fracturing. A well-bore is drilled into the rock and highly pressurised fluid is injected in order to extract petroleum or gas. Concerns about the environmental impact have caused it to be banned in certain countries. Geologists say that the Ohio earthquakes were directly tied to fracking. It is also highly probable that shale gas test drilling near Blackpool is the likely cause of earth tremors. A tremor of magnitude 2.3 hit the Fylde coast in May last year. Experience in the USA shows it could also pollute air and water supplies." The Pendle Fault ran directly under his land. He had to act. But first he had a score to settle with the devil himself, the epitome of evil, the farmer Silas Scroggins…… "There's a bottle of Hemlock Chardonnay and a jar of embalming fluid coming his way!"

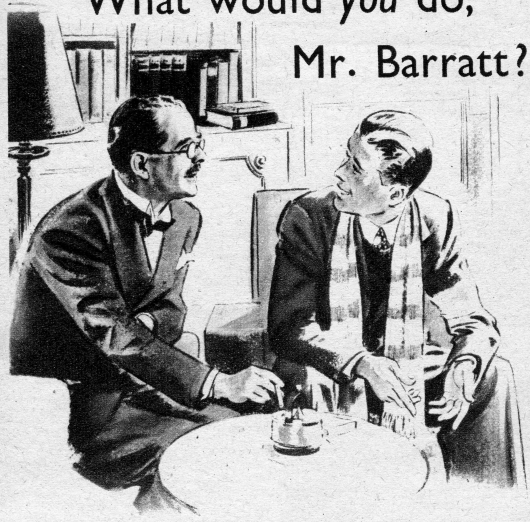
To be continued……..

Can he stave off environmental disaster? Has Satan done his worst?

Will the Great Spirit intervene? Are there any other cards for him to play? Or is life just a hill of beans in this crazy world?

2

"What would *you* do, Mr. Barratt?



"The chap next door has joined the Home Guard. Another pal of mine up the road is a warden. And I would be doing something — if my feet were any use. But what's the good of a warden who can't walk? What would you do, Mr. Barratt?"

"Look Jones I sympathise with your plight and feel especially concerned that you can't get about in your Volkswagen. It must be particularly galling to be offered lifts by Austin drivers. Your feet look perfectly normal to me and the X rays reveal no malformation, however it is obvious you are under stress – perhaps you're worried about the situation in Stalingrad and North Africa. You are suffering from what we podiarists call cold feet – an essentially psychosomatic debility. I conclude from our discussions that you'd be loath to stick a pitchfork into an advancing SS man and hence a spell in the Home Guard would be a gross infringement of your human rights. Consequently I'm giving you a note absolving you from such duties. The note will also entitle you to double rations of corned beef and I think I've got a bit of weiss-wurst I can let you have."

"Thanks awfully Mr Frankfurter. I knew you'd understand. By the way did you know they're broadcasting Fürtwängler's Tristan tonight – just after Haw-Haw."

Walk the **Barratt** way

ANDY SMITH

Al Capone's bat

The bat is classically trained of course
in all the arts and literature of a modern
century
pushing toward another one,
but hangs around the place a lot
upside down most of the time,
but sometimes it sits on its belly
at big Al's table, sniffing all that food
and smoke and wine,
while big Al stubs a big fat cigar into the ashtray,
the bat wings up to the ceiling
and looks down upside down and slightly sideways,
as Al takes out a revolver from his gut and takes a
shot at the bat but misses and puts a hole in the ceiling,
the bat flies around the room clumsily,
Al takes another shot at it and misses,
takes the top off a burning candle,
Al is fat and stupid and dying from some disease
he can't quite master,
he starts picking up things and throwing them at the bat,
an ashtray,
a full bottle of wine which smashes
leaving a big gash of red against the wall,
he looks at it and admires it for a moment
then looks for something else to throw,
sits down on a chair and stares at the bat,
Al feels clever for a second then forgets it,
gets up and moves over to the fire place
to warm the backs of his legs and
strokes that big red gash on the wall,
smiles
with those big greasy lips.
The bat
flies between his legs and up the chimney,
hangs onto the side and waits upside down
and a little sideways,
till the night turns into morning

NORMAN

Tom Kilcourse

Norman habitually delivered didactic platitudes to shadows. He addressed anyone he encountered as an object of his own imagination, a stereotype constructed with minimal reflection. He advised on all manner of things without troubling to ask beforehand about one's experience in life. Any attempt to debate a point with him, or to suggest that he had misunderstood a concept, was met with raised eyebrows and a pitying shake of the head. Norman responded to what he thought one meant, rather than what one said, and his interpretation of meaning sprang from the stereotype. He saw himself as a polymath and invariably opened any conversation with the information that he was a member of MENSA, the association for eggheads. Many were impressed, initially, but familiarity with the man tended to erode any favourable perception. One mutual acquaintance suggested that in Norman's case MENSA stood for **M**y **E**go **N**eeds **S**troking **A**gain, a cruel, but shrewd observation.

My house faces onto a small park in which benches are spaced out along winding gravel pathways. From the bay-window I sometimes watch my neighbours strolling in the sunshine, or seated on one of the benches exchanging small-talk. Norman was a common sight there, ambling through the park with hands clasped behind his back, eyes sweeping the terrain in the manner of a general surveying a parade ground. As he approached, local people could be seen to rise hurriedly and walk briskly away. Even the arthritic elderly managed a sprint towards the park exit as Norman neared.

Should someone remain seated Norman would halt before them, raise his eyes to the sky and make some prediction about the weather. He believed that all Englishmen broke the ice with comments on the weather, and Norman considered himself the embodiment of all that was English. Having engaged the other in what passed for conversation he would take a seat and launch into his lecture of the day. To Norman, discussion was an alien concept. His delivery would be unbroken save for the occasional brief pause to check that his audience remained awake. Any attempt to respond was seen as an unnecessary interruption, and possibly impolite. The tiniest detail of whatever event he was describing would be

explained as if the whole would be rendered meaningless if the most trivial item was overlooked. The only reasonable response was to stand up and walk swiftly towards the park gate.

Some people were reluctant to adopt this tactic, fearing that Norman's feelings would be hurt. They presumed a sensitivity that he failed to display. The man was impervious to any alternative ploy, be it attempts to change the subject, affected yawns or one's eyes glazing over. I confess though to my own reluctance on the one occasion that he caught me unawares. I learned then that Norman knew no embarrassment. Nothing was too personal or banal to escape mention as he revealed that his marriage had broken down, his wife having run away with a speedway rider. A rough type, apparently.

As he psycho-analysed both his wife and the type of man she seemed to prefer, there was not a word of contrition or recognition that Norman might have had the teeniest bit of responsibility for his wife's departure. I was assured at length that she would soon regret her error and recognise how preferable life was with a cultured member of MENSA. Nor was there any recognition that I may not wish to hear the ins and outs of his marital problems. I eventually made my excuses and escaped, swearing never again to be caught out. He had not asked a single question throughout the encounter.

Imagine my despair therefore when I attended a meeting of my local Writers' Circle one evening only to find that Norman had joined. When I entered the room he was in full flow to the Circle's secretary bemoaning the decline in appreciation of English grammar. The secretary's expression displayed signs of mild panic. She sighed in relief when time to begin the meeting gave her an excuse to move away. Norman immediately looked round the room for another ear. I lowered my head to avoid eye contact.

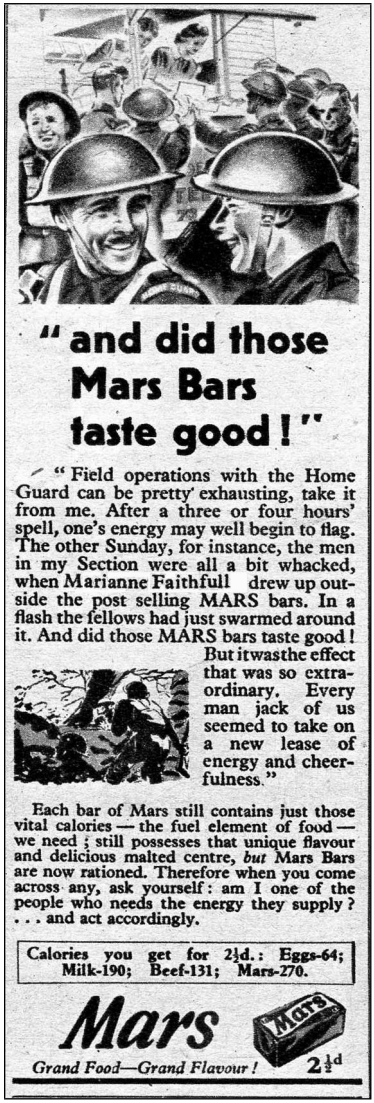
The circle met fortnightly with a different member on each occasion reading aloud from their latest creation. At the end the rest of us would offer what we believed to be useful feedback, always conscious of the need to encourage a fellow member and of our own exposure at future sessions. Such restraint seemed beyond Norman's grasp. Throughout the reading he appeared not to be paying the slightest attention, looking round the room sighing and giving the occasional shake of the head. When the Secretary invited our opinions Norman delivered his critique from the paternal heights in

tones of a tolerant master addressing a clumsy apprentice. The word ‘patronising’ does not nearly convey his manner.

As it happened, the reader on that first occasion was far from being the Julian Barnes of our little group. Susan French was enthusiastic, but her prose lacked depth. Therefore, we thought that perhaps Norman’s criticism was understandable, though harsh and insensitive. We were wrong. Norman’s behaviour was identical during four consecutive meetings, even when the reader was Toby Nash, generally regarded as the master wordsmith of our circle. That session degenerated into a confrontation between the two men, with Toby becoming heated in the face of Normans unwavering censure. The rest of us sat in shocked silence. Attendance at our meetings began to fall.

By the time Norman’s turn to read came round our numbers had dropped to single figures, nine. I attended the meeting filled with curiosity as to how the self-professed oracle would perform, half expecting a master-class but hoping for a debacle. My hopes were fulfilled. Whereas other members read their stuff while seated, Norman stood, holding a paper in his left hand while the right waved around or stabbed the air to give emphasis. His usual monotone was absent, giving way to dramatic verbal switches between a near whisper and something approaching a shout. The whole effect was most theatrical. As for the writing, clarity had been sacrificed on the altar of cleverness. It was the product of a human thesaurus, meant to baffle rather than enlighten. People began to leave. By the time Norman finished the audience comprised the Secretary, myself, and Toby Nash openly laughing.

Norman never attended the Writing Circle again, nor did I see him in the park after that evening. What happened to him I cannot say, but if you encounter a tall, sombre figure who announces on meeting that he is a member of MENSA, I advise rapid withdrawal.



Illustrated 1942

EMPLOYMENT

Tanner

The smoking room was like a broom-cupboard. They could only get about six chairs in there, and nearly everyone smoked ... I liked being in there when it was empty. I was becoming a boring old misanthrope. I'd only just left school and already I was seething, like some News Of The World enthusiast. Quite the pleb, was I ... The dumb managers would leave their fag packets in there and I'd nick them. Ha ... Thing was, it was in the canteen, which wasn't much bigger, sectioned off by cardboard walls, and it had this big window on it so anyone in the canteen could see you in there, and vice versa ... I'd be puffing away and two workers would come into the canteen, and I'd see them trying to work me out ... their dead fish fellow pleb eyes would shift suspiciously, then shoot a quick glance at me, then their mouths would yap frantically ... then they'd giggle.

Alec smoked. Alec was da boss. Most workers would be huddled in the smoking cupboard at any given time, bitching about him:

'Ee comes in ere, callin the shots, an then ee buggers off for a few days! Then ee comes back, bosses us all about some more, then ee's gone again!'

'Yeah!'

'Ooh, don't I know it, love.'

'We're the ones who do all the graftin, while ee's at home watchin telly, yet the moment an inspector's comin round, ee's ere non-stop fer free friggin days, lecturin us!'

'Too right.'

'Innit?'

I'd just sit there, sucking on my cancer stick and listening ... 'He's a fuckin tit!' Pete would declare. Pete liked to declare a great deal. 'Three nights in a row I've ad ter lock up of a night! It's just been me and those new little shits!'

Then everyone looked at me ... Me and the two lads at the induction were the very delightful new little shits he was referring to ... Pete

would follow us around, telling us what we were doing wrong, even if we weren't doing it ... Everyone clearly wanted me to leave the smoking cupboard when this subject came up, so they could bitch without restraint ... So naturally, I sparked up another ciggie with the calmest of arrogant confidence. Just to piss them off.

'Yer break done yet, Paul?' Pete hissed through clenched teeth. How the hell do you hiss the name Paul? Well anyway, he could do it, believe me.

'Nah,' I yawned. 'Got a good five minutes, like.'

And they'd all sneer ...

It's not so much that they hated me, it's the way they needed to remind me at every opportunity ... So yeah, I'd be hearing all sorts about Alec, and then when Alec came in, they'd all illuminate like a row of northern volcanoes.

'Alright Alec mate, how yer keepin?'

'Alec, mate!'

'Ey, got inta trouble recently Old Al, ey, ey, ah ha ha ha!'

And then Alec would start projecting his drivel.

'Not too bad, not too bad. Was just havin a gander at that display in the cheese section, yer know that should really be tided up.'

And they'd all go:

'Oh yeah, I'll do it afta lunch Alec.'

'I'll see to it now, like Alec.'

And etc. And etc.

Customers adorn every shelf ...

'Scuse me, tar, soz,' I recite, wedging myself into their foul, flustered shit-bags of bodies … always *apologising* and *thanking* them for getting out of my way, just to put out a company product on a company shelf that the bastard gibbering public can purchase, putting pennies in the pockets of the bastard gibbering company … stuck going round and round on the inane wheel of enterprise that's crumbling around us …

A baboon with a British Bulldog tattoo on his neck jabs me.

‘Ay, why don’t YOU get on a till? Yer seen these queues, kid?’

‘I don’t ave a till.’

‘Why don’t yer? AY?’

‘Bloody ell,’ I wince away from his puffy face of shopper hatred. ‘Cos, I just don’t today. An anyway, there isn’t any MORE tills ere.’

‘Well why aren’t there? AY?’

‘Yeah,’ his obese strumpet missus clears her flappy throat, ‘why don’t YOU get yerself trained, an get another till put in ere, an get on it? AY?’

‘Oh yeah, sure thing like! I’ll just magically WIDEN the store, an construct another friggin fully-werkin checkout, so’s you two can get yer snouts in yer crisps sooner … got a screwdriver on yer?’

‘Cheeky piece a – ’

‘Or any cement, an bricks an hammers and spades, an whatever the bloody ell else I’ll need?’

‘You – ’

‘Lecky! Got some electricity on yer, yer know, so’s I can power up this MAGICAL CHECKOUT I’m about ter materialise for yer?’

‘You better ope I don’t run inter you outside yer shop, lad,’ wheezes the male baboon, and his semi-female accomplice grunts, rubbing his sausage arm in pride ...

‘That I do ...’

Ever-present bystanders oggle me, machine-gunning their deductions, as I glide to the exit for an impromptu tobacco picnic ...

I was always made to collect the trolleys at the end of the day. At closing, without fail, mighty Alec would have me called to the info desk and tell me to do it ...

The car park was bloody huge. You’d find trolleys in the prickly red bushes at the far end of the park, dumped there by chavs, or scallys, or whatever we’re calling the human rats of the streets nowadays ... Most of the time, they’d still be there, riding each other around in them, cackling their laugh of hatred as they crashed one another into the walls of the building, or parked cars to set the alarm off ...

‘Arr mate, am gonner throw yer under tha lorry!’

‘Arr mate, fuckin don’t!’ the one in the trolley would scream,

squirming his trapped torso and reeling his skyward legs, ‘don’t!’

And sometimes they’d pick the trolleys up over their stubbly heads, hurl them over the bushes onto the main road behind, and you’d hear the screeching of brakes … ‘ARRR, LAUGHIN MATE!’ they’d cry in ecstasy, grinning toothless mouths ...

‘If yer think yer getting this trolley, yer’ve gotta nutha thing comin, gay boy!’ they’d spit at me.

‘Fine,’ I’d sigh, ‘I don’t wannit.’

‘YOU STARTIN?’

‘Ee is mate, ee’s tryna be all cleva wiv yer, innit la!’

‘WONNA GO DO YER, GAY BOY?’ .

I’d just trudge off towards another one … .

And there was the avoiding of cars ... Nobody can drive. Everyone is a bad driver. Too much panic, you see. And I’d be in the middle of the car park, pushing a row of ten or twelve trolleys in front of me like a rickety steel caterpillar, with cars swerving all around me ... People would wind down their windows and yell at me to move. Sometimes the younger drivers did it on purpose, would half-consciously ram into you just to kick off ... the inevitable cake-faced tart beside them in the passenger seat, beaming as their furrier half used a rightless tax-payer as a punch bag ...

Half the time I wouldn’t even try. I’d get a few trolleys, the nearest ones to the building, then I’d sod off to the furthest corner of the car park and have a smoke ...

They locked me out to do it. Since the store was closed, they couldn’t risk the public thinking it was open, so they’d lock me out in the sodding rain amid the circus of disaffected ... I’d go to the doors and have to press this button that made a buzzing sound inside, to let them know I was ready to come in ... And then they’d do the dirty trick of ignoring it. I’d see people inside, standing by the info desk or around the tills chatting – if I stood still for a moment I’d get a severe bollocking – and they’d just leave me out there to freeze. Sometimes they’d come to the doors to point and laugh:

‘RIGHT YOU CAN FUCK OFF OME NOW!’ they’d shout through the glass.

‘YEAH, YER DON’T NEED PAYIN, DO YER? HA!’.

On average I’d spend a good fifteen minutes with my soaking, frozen

thumb on the buzzer before one of the fat managers would waddle over, fumbling with their precious keys ... Sometimes it would be Alec. He was the worst. One time:.

'You collected them all?' .

I nodded..

'No you aven't! Look, there's one over there!' and he pointed to some barely visible object right at the other side of the car park. 'Come on, it's only one. If it is a trolley.' .

'Well go an find out,' he growled, and locked me back out. The other warm workers had gathered behind him to watch. Through the glass I saw him go up to them, shaking his head and complaining, and they looked from me to him, and nodded their heads in agreement. How very professional. Bitching about me to other employees. When he wasn't there, every single one of them would moan about him, but when he was present, oh, they just adored him.

I braved the rain and walked over to this supposed trolley. It was a half-burnt car door ... and possibly etc.

'Mr Tanner to the manager's office please, Mr Tanner!' thunders through the air, and the skin of my face swells in warm disgust – how dare they! They just click their fingers and I'm supposed to go running forthwith? I go to the door and knock with one white knuckle ...

'Come in!'

There's Pat, the blithering turkey that interviewed me, sitting in his throne. 'Sit down,' he nods at the little plastic chair, which I flop into, feeling the bones of my legs throb in a rare state of rest ...

'Now, don't be alarmed,' he coos, 'but I'm just going ter do a brief assessment, yer know, let you know how yer getting on, an maybe you can tell me how yer doin, alright?'

'Yeah.'

'OK. Well, yer doin quite well … I suppose … Still a bit quiet, though. That's not a bad thing … but we do need people at this store ter be *approachable*, yer know? We want customers ter feel … invited, yer know?'

'Hmm.'

'Hmm, yes … So we haven't got a problem with you bein … yer know, you keep yerself to yerself, and that's fine, but if you could

just maybe, yer know, work on yer general demeanour, that'd be great, OK?'

'Hmm.'

'Because we want you ter be happy! We want you to enjoy workin here, you see. It's all about positive thinkin, and …'

The sound goes down … I zoom in on his wet, flailing mouth … I could take out my pocket knife, yank his poor tongue out and slice it off … then I could run out of here with it … easy … imagine his dumb lifeless eyes, imagine how they'd boggle when I reached for his face, how delightful … what have I become?

'… But like I say, it's not really a problem as such. Just as long as you appear approachable to customers, that's all we ask. You all right with tha?'

'Hmm.'

'Good. Now … physical appearance … Well, you look more or less fine. Do you iron yer uniform much?'

'Er, yeah.'

'Just, I've noticed the top is quite creased sometimes. But that's OK, that's all right! Just, if yer could make sure it's washed an ironed when it needs ter be, that's all … OK?'

'Hmm.'

'Hmm. OK. Tar. Well, that's it really! So, how are you findin it, workin ere?'

'Hmm. Er, yeah, fine.'

'Yer fine?'

'Hmm.'

'No problems with anythin?'

'Er, no.' Only the constant physical demands, the incessant bossing, those worthless non-entities of co-workers that endlessly harass me, the ugly deranged public snapping at my neck every thirty seconds, the shitty pay and the general, all-encompassing nausea that permeates my entire waking life, I thought …

'OK then! Well, thanks fer yer time. Back ter work, then!'

STACKS

Ken Champion

It was the Flying Fortress that brought back the instant prejudice - not, for some reason, the 'Memphis Belle' parked on the edge of the apron outside the hangar - and of course it came from dad. It was his father's teenage 'bleedin' Yanks' response to the 'They're over 'ere, overfed and over sexed - and you're underfed, under sexed and under Eisenhower' wartime joke. It had passed onto James; another bit of familial internalization lasting for ever.

He was at Duxford, a museum now but once a Second World War operational aerodrome. On a nearby wall was a large black and white photo showing, from the foreground to the background of a high, wide, stylized columned façade, a sea of helmeted soldiers sitting backs to camera. In front of them, mounted centre top, was a huge concrete swastika - all reeking of the Moderne, of fascism, of a deep, controlled mass hysteria. He felt a childlike awe. He felt also a momentary guilt as if his aesthetic sense and the appreciation of the shot had pushed out the emotional meaning. It was a willing seduction, burying the repugnance of death.

James Kent was here partly because he'd overheard an enthusiastic train conversation about the place and because he had time on his hands. There was a paucity of new clients. There'd been no referrals for some time and two of his long-standing patients were now coming once every two weeks instead of one. It could be, of course, that they were finding his therapist fees difficult, though he hadn't increased them for five years. There may have been other variables, but he couldn't be bothered to think what they were.

He went out of the hangar to the parked civilian airplanes on the edge of the runway: the Ambassador, Britannia, the VC 10 and, wandering into a second hangar - the sight making him feel less sombre - the elegant lines of the Comet. He needed a coffee. It was a choice between 'Wingco Joe's' - a strained alliance of transatlantic nomenclature - and 'The Mess,' a tidy, characterless space serving little but tea and buns. He chose neither. On the train home he recalled another photo in one of the hangars of a Lady Bountiful frowning down at a bedridden airman and amused himself by hearing, 'Rectum?' 'Well, it didn't do 'em much good, ma'am.'

It was still light and warm and although walking around the lake in Wanstead Park would have been a more appropriate summer evening experience he wanted a little urban stimulus, so broke his journey and wandered around Dalston and Hoxton, the latter - known by workmates when he was an apprentice as 'oxton' - he'd never liked. When a child it was seen as an inner city slum even by people living where he did in Plaistow, and the image overrode whatever he saw as he looked briefly around him.

Turning a corner he saw a shop tucked between a warehouse and a storage unit with second-hand books, prints and photos displayed outside and similar bric-a-brac, plus furniture, mirrors, lighting and clothes inside. A large African man sprawled on a thirties sofa asked him, with a big grin and a cockney accent, if he was interested in anything. James told him he was just looking. The man explained that he and a mate had just pooled their scant resources to see whether a growing local professional demography would enable them to make a living.

'Hey,' he said to a broad, long-haired man putting up a wall picture, 'let's

take pictures of people as they come in.' He waved a mobile camera.

James suggested, a little disinterestedly, they stick them on the inside of the window below an 'our customers' sticker to make the place feel more communal.

'Nice idea,' said the long-haired one, turning to him and smiling.

James recognised him; but wasn't sure from where, then as he came towards him, hand outstretched, he did. He was an ex-patient.

'How are you?' James asked lightly.

He just smiled some more. He rarely smiled when James knew him.

'Fine, fine.'

James wished them luck with their venture and left. He was thinking how incongruous it was for someone as bright as this man to have a shop - too much time doing nothing, waiting, restless. Then he was at James' side.

'Mister Kent, I'd like to see you again; as a patient, of course.' He seemed nervous.

'I'm sorry… it's the same, really. Could I? I still like the jokes you

used to tell me; you know, the hotline with the automated messages: 'If you're obsessive-compulsive, please press 1 repeatedly. If you have multiple personalities, please press 3, 4, 5 and 6. If you - ''

'If you need to see me again you have my number'

His ex-client seemed hurt for a second, as if he expected a consultation in the street, then thanked him and went back to the shop.

On his way home James thought about Roy Brookland who he'd last seen four years ago. He remembered something the latter had written for him. When clients did this he'd ask them to tell him what they'd written and to look at his eyes while doing so. Writing what they felt, thought, could be an escape from actually feeling it

When Brookland had done so James knew he wasn't emotionally experiencing his words; he'd turned them into images of the words, could see them in his mind. He was very visual, partly because he'd been escaping himself, not facing what was there, denying, in effect, that he lived in his own skin, *had* to live there. Thus, a sometimes intense preoccupation with the design, the architecture, the feel of houses, buildings, streets was a facile, part compensation for not facing his fear of real relationships. James knew how utterly lonely he had to be.

He'd left treatment suddenly. James had called him, written to him; there'd been no reply. He'd assumed rather lazily that he was feeling better, stronger, and felt he didn't need help any more. James once asked him what he did for a living. He'd just shrugged. 'This and that.' he'd said dismissively.

James lay on the couch in his study, as he occasionally did when attempting to understand better the patients who had sat and tried to relax on it, and remembered more of his ex-client: the intense annoyance .when James would say or do something he felt was 'unintellectual,' such as watching football on TV when he came to him - as James turned it off he'd sneer - or forgetting who wrote 'Catch 22,' what *chateau forte* meant and many random opinions, bits of behaviour and an arbitrary lack of knowledge he selectively hated.

James was of course - to the man's child - his father; the man that had never been aware of or understood his needs since his birth. He came, detachedly, to recognise this. Sometimes his cognisance would

be immediate, but to transfer this into an emotional awareness was too difficult for him. Perhaps, James thought, he'd left him because he knew he wouldn't, couldn't get better.

He looked in his filing cabinet - preferring the texture of paper to the bright flatness of a monitor screen - and found a short play Brookland had written. centred on the '68 student revolution in Paris. James occasionally went to fringe theatres and would seek out someone involved in the show, tell them of his client's work and whether they knew anyone it could be sent to. He managed to find someone who read plays for a small theatre company based under a South London railway arch. Brookland sent it and was asked for a writing CV. James remembered what he'd said to him.

'The written word is all; surely; no matter who writes something it's *what's* written. I refuse to be a supplicant.'

He though it was about power and writers meant to 'feel like Twist with his bowl.' It was, for him, a case of who you knew and being young.

'I feel like sending them a forgotten Strindberg or Chekov play and telling them I'm 75, live in Scunthorpe and have never written anything in my life.'

Whatever James had said to him: how talented, creative, perceptive he was, he wouldn't, couldn't accept praise. He could win the Nobel Prize for literature, James thought, but his emotional impoverishment would swallow it up like a cloud, it would vanish; yet recognition was something he seemed to crave more than anything else.

James found what he was looking for with the play:

'The 'me' is a tiny creature living inside the 'I', the body, watching the 'I,' - the constructed 'I' - all the time, watching the face, limbs, the flesh age. (Sometimes I feel that when the body's too old, I'll find another vehicle for myself - or rather, for 'me,' as there is no self - and carry on.)'

This was an interestingly warped account of the 'known' and the 'knower,' and was, James knew, him escaping, forever escaping from whatever he was so frightened of.

He rang James the next morning. There were no patients the following day and he agreed to come. He was on time, sat down

and, attempting a wry smile, looked across at James.

‘Well, here you are again,’ said James lightly, ‘Anything new?’

When James had last seen him in this room his hair had been short, cropped and he’d worn his usual tie.

‘It’s the same really, like I said, just … the same. I wonder if serial killers feel like me: everybody composed of just moronic molecules, just mechanisms that get in the way.’

‘You mean, your way. And you’re not going to kill anyone, however you feel. Who do you hate most, men or women?’

‘They’re just… bodies.’

‘You reduce every person to that because you’re not facing very early feelings toward both your parents, especially your father. I told you this some time ago. I know you remember.’

He shifted uncomfortably, was quiet for a while..

‘I like windows, not just when they’re lit at night and you imagine warmth and love there, but on a bright day and the glass and glazing bars glinting…’

He looked far away for a moment, almost smiling.

‘I remember you telling me this.’

’Mostly, I love chimneys, there’s something about them.’

‘You’ve never mentioned this before.’

He didn’t respond, his face returning to the same vacantly musing expression.

‘I was on a flat roof recently in Soho, plants and stuff, a friend lives in a top flat, and I could see the chimneys of the terraces stretching out into perspective. I stood by the chimney stack; it was bigger than I thought. I wanted to hug one of the chimneys. It seemed huge. I reached up, but felt frightened, horrible, I couldn’t.’

He narrowed his eyes and grimaced. as he said it. Then he relaxed, was quiet for a while.

‘I was thinking about the big one near the slag heaps at Becton power station. When I was a teenager I climbed to the top of one of the heaps. They’re not there any more. Perhaps, like my life, they’ve turned into a hill of beans.’

He paused, looking sad.

‘You know, it’s as if I saw you yesterday, nothing has changed, nothing has happened, time doesn’t move. I carry you about in my head, anyway.’

‘That’s because you won’t, can’t, separate.’

‘I know,’ he said quietly.

He got up suddenly, took out his wallet and held out a cheque. James shook his head.

‘Thanks.’ He turned to leave..

‘I wish you wouldn’t go again.’

‘I have to.’ .

’You’ve been here ten minutes. I don’t really know what your reasons are for going, nor… why you’re starting a shop, but - ‘

‘Because I can’t do what I used to do.’ he said over his shoulder.

He opened the front door and walked quickly up the path. In answer to James’ unspoken question, he said, without turning his head,

‘I was a civil aviation pilot,’

James caught a glimpse of angry, bitter eyes as he looked back for a moment while opening the gate. He didn’t close it.

There was a dull, slowly building shock: the realisation that this man who lived inside himself in a tundra of a place where nothing grew, had controlled a faked ego and a body that pulled levers, reacted to instruments, spoke to Air Traffic Controllers, joked with his co-pilots and stewards, looked casually out of toughened glass windows at mountains, seas, clouds - James wondered if, like his passengers, he’d seen shapes in them - had made instant decisions: on whether to switch to computerised control in a tropical storm over Malaysia, if and when to abort a trip if there’d been a violent passenger aboard, and whether to actually climb a gangway and get into his aircraft.

James wondered what his old friend and colleague Thomas would have said about some of this. He thought he knew what it would be.

‘Chimneys are the father’s penis, James. As a young boy he was terrified of loving his father, he looked into his eyes and couldn’t, just couldn’t love him, it was… wrong. The intriguing, fascinating thing about chimneys for him is that from a sunlit, tree-framed

distance they are, if you like, perhaps soft penises, things that won't hurt him, but, close up, they are hostile, brutal, nightmarish. And yes, before you say it, this is before culture gets in with its taboos of incest and homosexuality. This is primal, James, and I'm surprised there's not more people messed up, more queues outside places where people like us work.'

Then he'd probably say, as he'd once suggested,

'I'm coming to the conclusion that the id - that ineradicable bundle of animal instincts, just to remind you quasi-Freudians - within the child wants to be taken over by the father, at an unconscious level, wants to be fucked by him.'

James had grimaced. This last was too Freudian, even for him - he probably didn't want it to be true - though it could have been pure Thomas. He could hear him saying, 'That's the look I get from fellow analysts. I can now understand how Sigmund felt about the reaction to his theories by the Viennese middle classes.'

James felt disappointed, weary, it seemed so pointless. He'd done nothing for Brookland. He'd carry on as he was now for ever. Maybe he should have tried harder to persuade him to stay; the year or so he'd seen him for was no time at all, a mere beginning. James guessed that he hadn't been told what he'd done for a living - and perhaps had still been doing when he was coming to him regularly - because he thought he'd be shocked, certainly surprised. He was. He was curious about how he'd got through his assessments, psychiatric checks - he assumed he'd had them - but, as he'd been like he was virtually all of his life, he'd have acted it; it wouldn't, perhaps, have been too difficult.

Brookland didn't stay in his mind for long, but a month or so after he'd walked out James met a friend at the old Reeves Paints factory off Kingsland Road. They talked mostly poetry; his friend wanting James to have a final proof-read of his erstwhile collection before sending it to publishers. James took it with him and went towards a nearby café he'd enjoyed some time before.

He was vaguely aware that he was near Brookland's shop, in fact, virtually had to pass it. From the corner he could see scaffolding along the front of it. As he got nearer he could see a man sliding tiles down from the pitched roof. The cheerful African from the shop was

standing on the edge of the pavement looking up, listening to the clacking, swishing rhythm of the spinning tiles. James went across to him, received the big grin.

‘Hello, I know you. I’ve got a picture.’

He pointed to his shop window, at the rows of small photos. stuck on a large sheet of paper.

‘We did what you said’.

James commented that his business seemed to be doing okay and asked how his partner was.

‘Well, a little strange. I’m a bit bothered. He went up the scaffold the other day, in fact he’s been up there more than once. The roofers were away for lunch, though he does it sometimes after they’ve knocked off. He climbs up, looks at the chimneys, sometimes as if he’s waiting for white smoke to come out to show the pope’s been elected. I’ve watched him. He goes up the roof close to ‘em, never touches. He’s crazy. I love him, though. But he didn’t like it this morning. This plane flew over, unusually low, really, and he pushed his fists in his ears. I thought he was gonna flatten his head. He looked shocked.’ He laughed.

‘That’s a bit danger - ‘

‘No, you can see it’s boarded above the gutter, he’ll be alright But yesterday I heard this crash and there were bits of broken chimney like pottery on the pavement. I don’t know how it could have got there unless it’d been thrown down, really. But he said nothing when he come in again.’

‘Perhaps you shouldn’t mention I… it’s okay, doesn’t matter.’

James again wished his business well, and left.

As he walked he was thinking that if Thomas was right then Brookland must have been so frightened: the old, soot-grimed chimneys getting larger as he moved towards them, seeming, perhaps, to symbolise his father as an awful nemesis. It must have taken nerve to climb the scaffold each time. He briefly wondered if the phallus was circumcised - it certainly would have been for Freud - for the chimneys, going in slightly towards the top and the thick-lipped head, could have represented an uncut one. Maybe he’d seen his father’s, erect or otherwise. The fear would then, perhaps, have been engendered by the reality, not just the symbolism - if, of course,

Thomas was right. Perhaps, just perhaps, he'd smashed or broken off one of them and threw it down in an attempt to destroy his father

Trying to push these images away James realised he needed fresh air. He remembered there was a roof garden café on top of the Reeves building. He turned back to it, climbed the stairs, opened the door at the top and immediately saw a newly pointed chimney stack against the side of the café. He sat with his back to it, sipped his drink and took deep, refreshing breaths. He looked around him. On the slate roofs were chimneys. Everywhere.

He was at Hendon RAF museum; it was like the previous museum, but with fewer hangars, the planes crammed in, not so many hanging from the ceiling, more military aircraft, information, stories.

When he came out he looked up and saw a large Boeing climbing higher in the sky. He imagined the cabin crew, practised and efficient, a smart, smooth-faced American-looking pilot like an advert for Lucky Strike smiling at a curvy stewardess, she grinning back. He froze it there, turned him into a Tussauds waxwork, into the man who was once his patient, and looked closely into his face to see what he was thinking, hiding.

He remembered then the immaculate navy blue, brass-buttoned Captain's jacket hanging in the centre of one of the walls of the shop. There was a rack of quite singular garments below it, but he doubted if the coat was for sale. It could, he thought, have been for effect, though for Roy Brookland it was, perhaps, a defiant, gleaming badge of courage.

TANNER

PRE-MOBIES, POST-"JOBSEEKERS"

They told me I was no longer a mere dolie,
O heavens no, this was the modern world
and my place in it was a 'Jobseeker'
and as such
I must go to some place in Birkenhead
to do some 'Jobseeking' under their watchful eye
to prove I was worthy of the title ...

So I had to ask mum for some money for the bus.
She grudgingly handed a fiver over,
bus it was for the bus, and only the bus, ok?

The bus was late.
The driver didn't have change.
I had to let him drive on,
buy a can of coke
and wait for the next one
... which was late.

It broke down on the flyover
and the driver said we had to wait
for another passing bus to jump on
... one passed, but it was with a different company
... another passed, but it was going a different way
... yet another passed,
ran by the same company
and going our way
... but it didn't stop.

So I walked it.

I got Birko,
and managed to sniff out this
rectangular shack pivoting on the Mersey front.
I went in
and the bloke at the desk said I was too late,

and as such I might not be worthy
of the ‘Jobseeker’ moniker bestowed upon moi
... my claim was now under re-assessment.

I waited for the bus back home.

After forty minutes
I had to nip into a greasy spoon
just to get blood back into my fingers.
They served me some sort of pasty
with cold pink innards
that mashed up my
cold pink innards
and made me puke this mishmash of
cold pink innards
into their toilet.

I used up the last of my coins
in an ankle-deep piss bucket of a phone box
trying to get through to mum at work,
and begged her to transfer some money
into my account
for the bus home ...
She grudgingly did so,
but it was for the bus, and only the bus, ok?

I went the bank but the shutters were down
due to unforeseen maintenance.
The manager was outside fending off the rabble,
trying to shove everyone into the endless queues
for the cash machines.
Of course, the lowest cash machines dispense are tenners.
Whereas mum only transferred a fiver.

So I walked it.

On the flyover
a radish face
with designer urban clobber I could never afford
asked me if I had any spare odds on me.
I screamed at the insensitive cunt until he evaporated

... I didn’t see a single job the whole trek back.

It's Park Lane, but not London's swank highway. It's Liverpool's Park Lane, where Indian seamen and West Africans, nearly all Battle of the Atlantic men, go shopping when ashore. This Indian seaman wants a new oilskin for use on his next voyage. They are rare bargainers with the marine stores are the Indians

Illustrated 1942

THE BODY CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT THE MIND (2)

Youssef Rakha

Two years before 9/11, the Wachowski brothers' The Matrix seemed to predict something of cosmic magnitude. Not the levelling of the World Trade Centre, exactly, but something like a new and impossibly difficult beginning after the definitive end — of humanity as we know it, of science-based civilization, of freedom as a value or state of being, confined to a particular set of material practices. Anyway, with the benefit of hindsight, The Matrix made a strong case against Francis Fukuyama's end-of-history hypothesis. The logical conclusion of liberal democracy was not only the "desert of the real", as Slavoj Zizek eventually noted, but also the perfect starting point for global insurgency. The fight that could no longer be between capitalism and its mirror image would not be, as the film presented it, between man and machine, nor would it be between the west and Islam (the majority of westerners, after all, have as little empirically to do with George W. Bush as the majority of Muslims with Salafism, even less with its jihadi and takfiri formulations). The fight would rather be between the paradise of Samuel P. Huntington and all that it actually costs — Saddam and Al Qaeda included. To the contemporary human being, even the contemporary Muslim, Neo is of course a far more attractive messiah than Bin Laden — hence the rational world's greater sympathy for Neo — but consciously or not, both perform the same function of resisting a system designed to cheat people not out of material advantage as such but out of seeing what their existence entails. Without a live mind that directs it, the body of the people is as good as dead.

Under Mubarak in Egypt, under whatever it is that Mubarak stands for — military-based, as opposed to simply military dictatorship — freedom remains at a premium. By freedom I do not mean simply political freedom, the right to "peaceful" protest, to personal safety against state- and (by extension) Washington-endorsed abuse, to participation in public decisions, or to the flow of information and ideas. I do not mean simply economic freedom: quality of education and employment opportunities, work ethics, the relative epistemic and material security required for developing an interest in any rights at all. I do not even necessarily mean social freedom: access to

minimally humane public and private space, recreational leeway, or channels for interpersonal contact not based on financial exchange. I mean freedom from the burden of the lie which, while reflecting deprivation from all the above, also involves that idea of resistance — expressed, as it must be under the circumstances, through identity. We are where we are because they are where they are; our edge is that we are different from them. In itself this is perfectly true; the relevant questions however have to do with who they are and how to reposition things sufficiently for us to be elsewhere. Neo, you will remember, could only battle with the machine from within the Matrix, on its own terms, in his virtual as opposed to physical incarnation; and if in the process he virtually dies, then he has died physically too; because, as Morpheus tells him, "The body cannot live without the mind."

Democracy only goes so far, then — but surely the answer is neither autocracy nor theocracy. It is not because neither of those two alternatives have been able to stand up to democracy in the first place; if anything they lend it credence, they strengthen and glorify the Matrix, they make the machine seem not only the best of all possible worlds but the only world that is possible. And if the body cannot live without the mind, in this sense, then resistance — like communism, like jihad — reduces to a mere aspect of the matrix. It is true enough that Arab and Muslim identity — the driving force of resistance, in our case — has proved incredibly flexible. Identity is flexible enough for the matrix of liberal democracy to run through it whether as is or in altered form. It is flexible enough to provide the machine with a pretext to kill, and to be the instrument of death. It is flexible enough for Mubarak to suggest, in the last address he gives before stepping down (probably on American orders) that he will not step down on American orders — and for a sizable part of the population to be taken in by that — even though Mubarak's principal job for decades has been to carry out American orders without the least consideration for the feelings or interests of his people. Such flexibility is possible because, unlike the force with which Neo must contend, the substance of the global order is human and discursive. Identity does not prevent the very symbol of Arab-Muslim resistance, Hassan Nasrallah, from expressing unconditional support for a Syrian regime which — never having been chosen by a majority of Syrians — is happy to commit mass murder on the streets. Nasrallah is no messiah after all. The body cannot live

without the mind.

And so it becomes possible, by recourse to identity and resistance — the same lie by which Saddam, Al Qaeda and Hassan Nasrallah are smuggled into Arab and Muslim minds as Neo-like figures when in fact they are agents of the Matrix — to see the events of January and February not as a people's revolution (and it is true that a good 80 per cent of the Egyptian people did not have the freedom to participate in a revolution) but as some kind of conspiracy aimed at destabilizing the country, destroying the economy, compromising the security of the people. Yet in the absence of a vision for the future, let alone a global movement which, unlike the Soviet Union, unlike Pakistan or Iran, is both ready and able to content with liberal democracy, what is even the most glorious of revolutions if not a bid to take full advantage of the Matrix, to enjoy "the real," as Morpheus puts it: "what you can feel, smell, taste and see… simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain."

Protestophilia

It's been an aeon since Egyptian cyber-activists decided to try grafting the virtual world onto reality. The result was breathtaking at first, surpassing the initial plan to put an end to police brutality and the emergency law—which plan, thoroughly forgotten since then, was never implemented. But with apparently good reasons: the protests and, perhaps more importantly, the regime's idiotic response to them, seemed to have far more important consequences: Mubarak not only became the first president in Egyptian history to leave office in his lifetime, he also stepped down against his will; plans for his son Gamal to succeed him were stopped in their tracks; and a precedent was established for "the people" gaining rights by sheer force of collective will, independently of institutions.

The protests were not translated into a political force, however, with the result that the first "people's revolution" in Arab history was summarily betrayed by the people. Where it was not bulldozed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces or SCAF—to which Mubarak handed over power—political space was filled "democratically" by Islamist forces (for which read, in practice, sectarian ultraconservatives and/or religious fanatics who found their way into politics through advocating stricter or more pollticised

forms of the religion of the majority). Such forces have had the overwhelming support of the people—a fact established early on by the result of SCAF's otherwise useless referendum on constitutional amendments, the passing of which the Muslim Brotherhood and its Salafist allies took it upon themselves to achieve—partly because they offer a divinely sanctioned alternative to failed "nationalist" autocracy, partly because they had filled a void in basic services in the provinces under Muabarak, partly because their brand of ostentatious religiosity (which, incidentally, is far from orthodox, historically speaking) chimes with the Gulf-influenced conservatism of large sectors of society.

Never mind, therefore, that the Islamist shadow regime—the institution of the Muslim Brotherhood, for example: a state within the state—is even more reactionary and no less corrupt than the supposedly deposed regime itself. Its early alliance with SCAF at a time when SCAF was turning into the archenemy of the revolution established its readiness to sacrifice the will of protesters on the ground in return for institutionally enshrined political gains.

Thus the parliamentary elections took place while peaceful demonstrations were being murderously suppressed by SCAF; and the predominant view among the "revolutionaries" (who are generally assumed to be "liberals", for which read more or less apolitical, in contrast to the "Islamist parachutists" or ideologised beneficiaries of regime change) was that it was a civic duty to vote and that boycotting the elections would result in "Islamists overtaking parliament". Few boycotted the elections, therefore, with the result that Islamists overtook parliament. And they have since performed horrendously—something the cyber-activists fully concede, even though some of them voted for some Islamists in the parliamentary elections—to the point of backing up an interior ministry more or less unchanged since before the revolution, proposing laws against the right to demonstrate, telling blatant lies and otherwise replicating Mubarak's National Democratic Party, and attempting to monopolise the drafting of a new constitution. Boycotting the parliamentary elections wouldn't have stopped this, it is true. But it would certainly have made a difference: By agreeing to participate in a "democratic process" with a forgone—counter revolutionary—conclusion, the revolution acquiesced in crimes against humanity being committed at the same time. And it was this

willingness to operate through the very institutions whose incompetence and corruption had given rise to the revolution in the first place that proved decisive in the battle for legitimacy between the status quo and the new ephoch promised by 25 January. On the ground, in practice, ipso facto, a democratically elected parliament "represents" the people (including, since they have voted, the revolution's people); protests disrupt "the wheel of production"; and SCAF is "properly" in charge unless it undertakes underhanded action against such Islamist figures as the former presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail…

So when the protests they've been defending online finally fizzle out and stop happening—whether because the pro-SCAF "honourable citizen" majority can no longer put up with them or because there is no longer much that they can achieve—the task of the cyber-activists reduces to fighting against the reinstitution of the (political) status quo. This they do, not by advocating a boycott of the political process, not by acknowledging the political vacuum to which the revolution gave way, not even by pressing on with campaigns against SCAF and/or the Muslim Brotherhood—which, like the protests, are no longer as effective as they might be—but by embracing the constitution-less presidential elections and supporting a particular candidate therein.

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For weeks now the cyber-activist discourse has centred on Abdel Moneim Abul Fetouh not only as the "moderate Islamist" but also as the "liberal" candidate—practically the only one with any chance to win against Amr Moussa (now that both Omar Suleiman and Ahmad Shafik have been disqualified, Moussa is seen as SCAF's choice of president, whether due to recent SCAF-overseen legal developments or conspiratorially since the beginning). Never mind that Abul Fetouh is a pillar of the Muslim Brotherhood who (though admittedly in discord with the Guidance Office since 2009) resigned in order to run for president—even though, in the absence of a constitution specifying the president's powers, he cannot possibly know whether he will be able to implement the programme on which he is running. Initially the Brotherhood had vowed not to field any candidate, but since that changed (and the pro-Abul Fetouh cyber-

activists have had a bonanza of sarcastic commentary on that perfectly predictable development), the story is that Abul Fetouh could not have become the Brotherhood's candidate anyway because of his differences with the Office.

Some have gone so far as to say he is the Brotherhood's "secret candidate"—to the chagrin of the cyber-activists being discussed here—though the latter make the same assumption when they claim that Moussa has been SCAF's secret candidate all along (and I am not suggesting that they are wrong or that Moussa is a good candidate).

Once again, however, campaigns for boycotting the elections are proving unpopular—and the arguments have centred on to what extent Abul Fetouh might represent the (liberal) revolution and to what extent not supporting Abul Fetouh means benefitting the counterrevolution embodied by Moussa. The suggestion that Abul Fetouh—whether or not he is loyal to the Brotherhood just now—is a committed Islamist whose increasingly high standing with "liberals", let alone his actual rise to power, will give political Islam even greater (spurious) "revolutionary cover", has prompted charges of Islamophobia against those who make it. While Islamists may well support a relatively sensible, seemingly honest "moderate", why should supposed anti-Islamists be facilitating the process whereby political Islam has inherited an essentially liberal revolution and already contributed to turning its value system on its head?

By now, of course, this has already happened with MPs who, when criticised for sectarian, reactionary, fanatical and otherwise patently illiberal positions (pro-female genital mutilation and pro-sexual harassment laws, for example) would find ardent defenders among the cyber-activists who claimed the critics were classist, undemocratic or lovers of the Mubarak regime. It has happened in such a way as to indicate that pro-Abul Fetouh cyber-activists are following in the footsteps of generations of left-wing intellectuals who, out of empathy with "the people", had contributed to perpetuating the status quo far more than to changing it—as often as not by endorsing or condoning conservative policies or attitudes on the pretext that, while such an orientation may be seen in a negative light by "you and me", it was the best of all possible worlds "for the people": the majority or the zeitgeist or the lowest common denominator. But there is nothing vaguely moral, progressive or even

politically astute in pandering to what has become, thanks as much to SCAF policy as to the unholy marriage between Islam and Islamism, the post-25 January lowest common denominator.

The charge of Islamophobia remains the apotheosis of that position, anyway: You are just like Mubarak; you are scared of collective self determination; you have individualist or classist issues with the largest legitimate faction of national politics. Or, more to the point: What could be preventing you from engaging democratically with the political aftermath of the revolution, if change is what you have wanted?

Should these arguments be coming from Islamists, I would respond with the statement that it is you who are giving a largely imported, essentially sectarian orientation—neither moral nor, properly speaking, religious—an undeserved political privilege. You are, in other words, ISLAMOPHILES; and I have every right to be concerned about the consequences of your retrograde and ruthlessly capitalist policies, the way in which Islamic law would allow you to meddle in my private life and eliminate fundamental aspects of my public life, and the essential contradiction in your use of liberal-democratic means to reach totalitarian-theocratic ends.

But to my fellow liberals, the cyber-activists, the revolutionaries, I say only that you are PROTESTOPHILES; you cannot get over the initial euphoria of Mubarak stepping down; you cannot accept the fact that, through your very good intentions, you have become peripheral to a political process that, morally, even politically, you can only reject. So, instead of conceding that the revolution has been politically defeated, you trail the shadow of a creature that does not exist: the liberal Islamist. And it is you, neither the true Islamophiles nor I, who will suffer the consequences of your hysteria.

Illustrated 1942

A NAZI HELMET

S.Kadison

In the wooden garage were a gas mask and two helmets: one the standard issue Tommy's tin hat ; the other a black, close fitting, stylish Nazi model which covered your ears and protected the back of your neck. The swastika was undamaged. When little Paul Hawes played soldiers with his friends, he always wanted to wear the Nazi helmet; the British one reminded him of a plate; it sat on the top of your head like a recently-landed flying saucer; he thought it dim and plain. The Nazi one, on the other hand, spoke of intelligence and distinction. It was made not just to protect your head well, but to look good. Paul imagined that the men who wore the British hat must have been slow and helpless, like the boys in school who couldn't yet recite their tables, but the black helmet must have belonged to someone quick and independent who knew how to look after himself. Because he was a well-brought up boy whose mother insisted he observe Christian virtue, he never took the black helmet for himself but always offered his friends first choice; all the same, he would say:

"Which helmet do you want? This is the British one."

Usually that did the trick, but one or two boys would reach for the Nazi hat and Paul would feel humiliated: he thought he looked ugly and stupid in the green helmet. They played in the garden. There was a square of crazy paving in front of the oblong bay of the back room and a little rockery which dropped down to a five yard stretch of lawn, to the left of which ran the path of flagstones his dad had laid. To the right was a flower bed of mostly roses behind which was the thick privet separating the garden from the Haldane's. Then came the big square lawn where he played football and beyond that the lilacs and rhododendrons where he thought he'd seen a snake so his dad put on his boots and grabbed the hoe from the shed and came to sort it out; but it was merely a fallen black branch dotted with white fungus. All the same, Paul thought his dad a fearless hero. He'd been in Italy during the war and had told his son about getting up in the morning and lifting the snakes from his tent. What was a possible adder in the undergrowth to such a man?

The garage was to the left if you were facing the garden from the

crazy paving and attached to it was a little sloping-roofed shed one of his dad's relatives had built. Paul loved both these constructions: the garage was a frame of thick beams to which tongue and groove had been nailed and the corrugated roof was held in place by strong timber triangles joined by heavy nuts and bolts. It fascinated the boy. Someone had sawn the timber, measured and joined and made this splendid thing stand. It seemed to him more marvellous as a construction than the house because its innards were visible. And the little shed too where the smell of the wood was still fresh and the joints fit together perfectly made him think it would be wonderful to grow up and be able to build such things. He had a little joiner's kit his uncle and auntie had bought him for Christmas and he sawed and hammered but nothing he made ever looked neat or held firmly. It was a mystery. One of those puzzles adults don't talk about, as if garages and sheds were the most natural things in the world.

On the crazy paving, Paul had built a den. He'd disobeyed his mother by moving some of the flagstones left over from the path, then in the garage he'd found a long piece of black hardboard which he used for the roof. He felt bad about not doing as he was told, but his mother said if he tried to move the stones they would fall on his toes and he'd have to go to hospital like David Bernal who fell out of a tree and broke his leg. It wasn't true. He'd moved them and his toes were fine. They weren't the full big stones. Just the bits his dad had broken off, so even he could move them though he was still only five and a half. He liked to sit in his den even when he was on his own. He had made it. It was his. Not even his big sister was allowed in it without his permission. It was much better, though, with a friend, even a friend he didn't like very much such as Nigel Heath. It was hard to find a friend you really liked. Most of Paul's friends were all right. The important thing was to have someone to play with. Paul knew he had to be kind, even to people he didn't like, because his mother told him that was a good thing to do and Jesus would love him for it. So he was kind to Nigel, most of the time. He let him wear the Nazi helmet if he wanted and he let him sit in the den, though Nigel said it wasn't much of a den because it only had three sides and no door or window. Paul wanted to punch him. He'd worked hard to move the stones and the thing about a den was you could hide there, even if it didn't have a door or a window. Nigel was always saying things weren't very good. He lived in a big house at the end of the avenue and they had a lounge where children

weren't allowed to go. Nigel took him in there one day. It was just a big new-smelling room with a carpet, a sofa, two armchairs and a coffee table, but Nigel told him not to touch anything and to take his shoes off before he went in. Paul thought this very strange because children were allowed everywhere in his house. He could climb on the sofa with his shoes on and so long as they weren't muddy his mother wouldn't say anything. There was no room kept closed and giving off the odour of a furniture shop. Nigel said his mum and dad came and sat in the room on their own; his dad would drink whiskey but he wasn't allowed to smoke his pipe. The children had to stay in the long, narrow room at the side of the house. Paul liked that much more because the carpet and furniture were worn, there was a toy chest and you didn't feel as if you'd be sent to prison if you made a mess.

The day they went in the special room, Nigel showed him how to play a simple tune on the piano. It needed only one hand and three keys but Paul thought it remarkable. Why was there no piano in his house? He remembered his mum saying something about Uncle Harry having piano lessons because he was the oldest; she never got a chance. She said it in that funny tone of voice she used when she talked about things or people she didn't like or which got on her nerves. Was that why they didn't have a piano?

One day they were playing wars and Paul had the Nazi helmet. Nigel had no helmet at all because John Champland had taken the British one; instead he had Paul's dad's RAF cap. It opened out like an envelope and sat softly on your head. Paul said it had to be worn at an angle because that's how he'd seen it in a photo of his dad during the war. Every time Nigel ran to attack the McKernan's, the cap fell off. If he stopped to pick it up, he got pelted with clods.

"You wear this," he said to Paul.

Paul looked at the blue-grey object. It offered no protection. It wasn't the kind of thing to wear in battle. But it was his dad's. He'd worn it when he was fighting in Italy and Egypt, which were countries very far away where it was very hot. He took off the Nazi helmet, handed it to Nigel and pulled on the cap. He wondered if it made him look like his dad; but when he charged up the avenue towards the McKernan's it fell off and lay on its side in the road.

That night, after tea, he sneaked into his parents' bedroom and

looked at the picture of his dad on the dressing-table. He was smiling in a special way; a big, beaming smile. It made Paul think of sunshine and happy days. His dad was young in the picture and very smart in his uniform. The cap perched on his head at a cocky angle. At the other side of the dressing-table was a picture of his mum and dad on their wedding day. His mum was very pretty and slim. Her dress had a long train and in her hands was a big bouquet. She was smiling too, the crooked little smile that everyone said he had and was just like hers. His dad wore a dark suit and very shiny shoes and his smile was as broad and sunny as in the air force picture. He heard the door open. His sister's head appeared.

"You'll get killed if they find you in here!"

By the time he was ten, Paul no longer played soldiers. The helmets were still in the garage somewhere, but he never thought of them when he parked his bike or turned it over to take off the wheels and clean it from one end to the other. His dad had taken him to a big warehouse to buy it. Whenever there was something to buy, his dad always knew someone. Paul got his football boots from Tommy Henderson who used to play in the first division and now had a little sports shop on Chapel St, on the way out of town. Henderson was a grumpy man and Paul hung back behind his dad.

"How are you, Tommy? Some boots for the lad. What have you got?"

The men shook hands but Paul noticed Henderson didn't look his dad in the eye. He disappeared into the back of the shop. Paul's dad looked down at him and winked. Henderson appeared with three boxes. From the first he took a pair of sleek, black and white boots in soft Italian leather with Di Stefano's florid signature in gold on the side. Paul tried them on.

"How do they feel?" said his dad.

"Fantastic."

"We'll have 'em, Tommy. Usual discount?"

Paul saw a shadow cross the shopkeeper's face.

"Not lost your cheek, Bernard."

"Get nowhere without it, Tommy."

Paul carried the boots to the car in the box. He couldn't wait to run

out on the field in them, but at the same time there was a strange feeling hurting him. Later that day he heard his mum and dad arguing:

"Why can't you pay like everyone else?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's embarrassing, Bernard. You do it everywhere. When we went to the Vic and Station with Neville and Kath you had to go and find the chef and ask for ten per cent off."

"He's an old friend of mine. We were in Egypt together."

"And what did you get up to?"

"Don't start that."

"And Paul with you. Do you have to do such things in front of the child?"

"I got twenty per cent off those boots. Paul loves 'em."

"We aren't paupers. We can afford a pair of football boots for the lad. Have some pride. Pay the full price."

"What good's that?"

"What good is it? It means you can hold your head high."

"I can't?"

"It's demeaning."

"Why?"

"Because it's almost begging. And it's making use of people. Tommy Henderson is supposed to be a friend of yours."

"He is a friend. He got me free tickets to the cup final three years running."

"That's not what friends are for."

"I don't understand you, Jessie."

"I don't like it. It's not right. Just pay the asking price."

"What if people offer me discount?"

"That's different. If they offer you accept with grace. But to ask is ….."

"Is what?"

"It's not the way I do things."

"No, but it's the way I do. I've saved us a lot of money. When this house was rewired….."

"Yes, and you expected our Bill to do the joinery for nowt."

"He's your brother."

"That doesn't mean he should work for nothing. I wouldn't ask him. You shouldn't."

"I don't understand you. I don't understand your family."

"Don't understand just do as I ask."

Paul went to his room. He took the pristine boots from their box and ran his thumb over the leather. They were the most stylish boots he'd ever seen. None of his mates had any so neat. But what his mother had said troubled his heart. He hadn't liked what had happened in the shop. He would have been happier if his dad had just paid the money. It made him feel ashamed that Henderson had called his dad cheeky, his face had been stern and he'd kept his eyes lowered. He lay on his bed and thought of the day they went to the big warehouse. His dad walked in as if the place was his and bounded up the stairs. A man in a brown overall stopped them:

"Can I help you, sir?"

"Where's Stan Billington?"

"He's in his office, sir. Can I get you something?"

"I need to talk to Stan. Tell him Bernie's here."

"Bernie who, sir?"

"Just say Bernie's here. He'll know."

The man walked away across the cold wooden floor while Paul's dad started to lift and stack the bikes . He found what he wanted.

"This is the one, Paul. A belter! What d'you think?"

The frame was wrapped in brown paper so Paul couldn't tell the colour but it had drops and ten gears and was much smarter than the second-hand tracker he was riding round on. Billington appeared, a tall man with a bald head in a dark suit and shoes whose heels clacked rhythmically on the boards. He approached quickly and held out his hand to Paul's dad.

"Bernie, how are you? Haven't seen you for years."

"Fine, Stan. Bike for the lad. He likes this one. Can you do me twenty per cent?"

"Twenty per cent? That's our mark up."

"Aye. For an old friend, Stan. You want tyres you know where to come."

"Fifteen."

"Done."

The men shook hands and smiled. Paul's dad took out his wallet and counted the pound notes. He wheeled and carried the bike to the car and once home, Paul peeled off the brown paper to reveal the shiny blue frame of a BSA Golden Fifty. He rode it round the block. He went to the park to show it his mates. He cleaned it after every outing. But now he was confused: he loved his bike but the way his dad had behaved made him feel small. And what had he been getting up to in Egypt? Paul felt his mum was right, though he wasn't sure why. His dad was almost a stranger. It was funny how he was sometimes frightened when he was with him. He tried on his boots. They were belters all right, even if his dad had made Henderson sullen and grumpy.

One morning, Paul's dad wasn't in the house at breakfast time. His mum and his sister said nothing but he knew something was wrong. Then his dad didn't come home some nights and when he did he didn't stay very long or was gone in the morning. When he got up one day, still in his pyjamas, Paul sneaked into his parents' bedroom. The quilt and the covers were pushed back on both sides. He shoved his hands under and felt the warmth. Both his mum and dad had slept there. He was glad. There was something about a mum and dad sleeping in the same bed that was very good. He wasn't sure what it was but it made things feel better. Nigel's mum and dad had single beds and Paul thought that was strange. Nigel told him that sometimes his dad slept in the spare room and Paul puzzled over that. He pulled the door to quietly but when he got downstairs his dad wasn't there. He took a slice of toast from the plate in the middle of the table and sat down. His sister was reading a girls' magazine and his mother was fussing over breakfast.

"Get dressed, Paul. You'll be late."

She brought him a mug of tea, as he liked it, black and sweet.

"Did you see her?" she said to his sister.

She nodded.

"And what is she like? A tart no doubt."

The word he didn't understand stabbed at Paul's heart. The way his mother said it was so full of cold hatred he froze inside though he kept on chewing his toast. Who was she talking about? He knew it was something to do with his dad. He went off to school with his new boots in his duffle bag and during the day the thought of what had happened at breakfast time dwindled and he was happy with his friends busily getting on with his work. After school there was a match against Sacred Heart. There was always a special kind of rivalry when they played against Catholics. The Catholic boys called them proddy dogs, and sometimes, walking home on his own they would shout at him as they passed on their bikes:

"Hey, proddy dog!"

It was puzzling to him. He was friendly with Mark Clapham who went to Sacred Heart and with Joe Bylinksi who went to St Teresa's. It was queer to call people names because of the school they went to. All the same, he felt a little more nervous than usual about the match. It was six-a-side. Every year there was a tournament in the town and some schools struggled to get eleven players, so they made it six. Mr Keogh chose the best six players and they practised every Thursday night. Paul was ball monitor and took his responsibility of inflating the leather "casies" and keeping them dubbined very seriously. It was one of the nice things about Mr Keogh: he gave everyone something to look after so everyone had a little bit of importance and they all worked happily together and were an industrious and smiling class.

He laced his new boots tight, pulled up his blue and white socks, folded them over and adjusted the elastics his mother had made for him to hold them up. When he ran out onto the field, they felt so light and comfortable he seemed to move more swiftly and dribble more skilfully. He was on the right wing. Rob Kellman was on the left. Mr Keogh had taught them to get the ball to the wingers, take it wide and fast and cross it to Marty Nelson who was tall and strong and could jump for high ones. Paul loved those moments of zipping down the line, outrunning a defender and whacking the ball so it

floated in front of goal. They were some of the most blissful seconds of his life. He didn't care about winning or losing, it was the sheer joy of having the ball at your feet, feeling the strength in your legs and getting things right; but he enjoyed the competition too. He liked to scrap for the ball, to fight off a shoulder charge, to leap over a sliding tackle.

The pitch was wet and muddy. The ball soon became heavy. He ran and ran and crossed and crossed till at last Marty leapt like a salmon and slapped the forehead covered by his blonde fringe against the sodden surface. The goalie threw himself towards the post but the ball sailed into the corner and Marty ran over to Paul, his face spattered with dots of rain-sodden earth. They scored six. Marty got four, Paul one and Rob one. They won six four. Paul's boots were wet and filthy. In the classroom where Mr Keogh had oranges for them, he took off his kit and pulled on his clothes. He walked home happy with his duffle bag over his shoulder.

His dad's car was outside.

He went through to the kitchen. His mother was doing the washing-up and crying. He stood and watched her a few seconds.

"We won six four," he said. "I scored one."

"Go and talk to your dad."

"Where is he?"

"In the front room."

Paul put down his duffle bag. He went reluctantly through the little dining room and into the front room. His dad was sitting on the sofa wearing his dark overcoat.

"How'd you go on?" he said.

"Won six four."

"D'you score?"

"One."

"New boots, eh?"

Paul sat next to him and looked at the coal fire his mother had set and which was flaring vigorously.

"Has your mum said anything?"

"No."

"Well, your mum and me aren't going to live together any more."

The boy sat quietly but didn't listen as his dad talked some more. At length, his dad got up and left the room. He heard his parents' voices and then the click of the front door latch and the sound of his dad's engine.

"Come and get your tea," said his mother.

In the days that followed a quiet gloom descended on the house. His mother went about her housework with a closed face and mouth and his sister washed her hair, put in rollers and sat at the table reading a girls' magazine as usual. He went out in the garden in his cleaned and dubbined boots to kick a ball around, or carefully rubbed between the spokes of his bike wheels with a cloth hooked over his index finger. One night, when he thought of riding to the park, he realised he needed new batteries and went to his mother.

"And where d'you think I'll get the money for those?" she snapped.

He went back to the garage and polished till his bike gleamed from crank to gear lever. In his bedroom he counted the notes and coins he kept in the top drawer of his tallboy; then he worked out how much he could save from his pocket money; but a terrible thought seized him: what if she didn't give him any? He wasn't old enough to get a paper round. Perhaps he should sell his tracker. It might bring a few shillings.

When he got up next morning and went down for breakfast, his sister was already in her grammar school uniform and his mum had a letter beside her on the table.

"Sit down and get some toast. Here," she said, taking half a crown from the pocket of her apron, "that's for some batteries."

"Thanks."

He put the coin in the breast pocket of his pyjamas.

"This letter is about school," his mother said, picking it up. "You'll be going to the secondary modern. You'll be all right there. Howard goes and he's doing fine."

Howard was his cousin, his mother's brother's eldest son, a talented artist who'd won a prize in the county competition. His sister chewed her toast and turned the page of her magazine.

"I'll make you a cup of tea," said his mother. "Then get dressed

quickly it's nearly half past."

Paul went off to school with his boots and his ball in his duffle bag. He didn't know what to make of the news. There was something bad about it. His sister went to the grammar school and he knew it was supposed to be better. He knew that failing to get in was a bad thing but he was friendly with lads who were already at the Sec like Andy Black and Brian Gillespie who he played football with on the park and they were all right. In the playground, everyone was talking about the letters.

"Have you passed?" was asked a hundred times.

Nigel Heath came up to Paul and asked the question.

"No."

"You'll go to the thicko school. That's what my mum calls it."

Paul would have liked to punch Nigel's pink lips, but he turned away, took his ball from his bag and began kicking it against the school wall.

The following Saturday Paul was in the garage when the door opened and Nigel poked his head in.

"Are you playing?"

"Yeah."

"Have you still got those helmets. We could play war."

Paul went to the old cupboard with the rusty hinges, pulled open the doors and rummaged. He found the Tommy's hat first. Next to it was the RAF cap. The Nazi helmet had been shoved behind some half empty tins of paint. It must have been his dad.

"Here," he said, and he held the Nazi helmet out to Nigel. "You wear this."

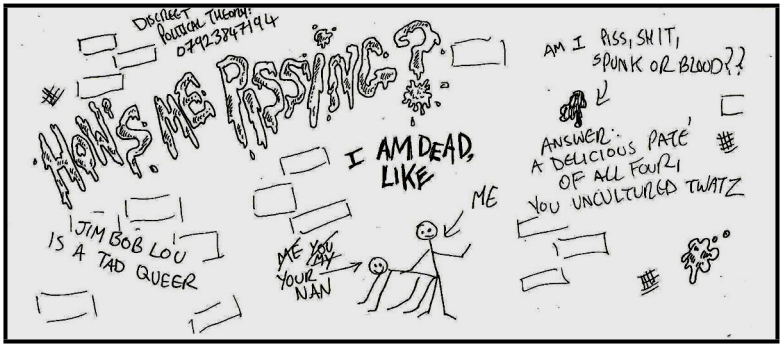
Then he pulled the RAF cap down tight at the same angle as in the picture that used to sit on the dressing table and smiled as broadly as he could.

TANNER

BIRKENHEAD MARKET BOGS

Uncontrollably tapping my shoes
in an inch or two
of what the pure-bread scousers over the water
would term the piss of woolybacks – plackie scouser piss if you will,
behind swollen old men
and scrawny young lads
in a stagnant row
even though there's space
at the long brown urinal
no straight bloke uses ...
we just splash uncontrollably in the piss
trying to work out which one of us is an undercover nonce ...

the door of the last cubicle is hanging off
so I can see it's empty,
I go in there and try to shut it
but it nearly comes off its one hinge
and I look down into the
week-old orange nutty slop,
try to undo my fly with one hand
because the other's over my nose,
start pissing onto the slop
with my head cocked
to read the notes on the hanging door:



some chap called Neil reckons
he has tapes of himself
fucking his thirteen year-old daughter,
says I should ring the number below
if I fancy a copy
and Nancy Boy from Runcorn
loves sucking off paki dicks,
he also leaves his number
just like Anonymous,
an China boy who needs someone
to stay with
and he'll make it worth their while ...

I zip up and step out
careful not to rub my arm
against the deliberate smear
of shit on the cubicle wall ...

pass the row of terrified
young and old men ...

get to the sink and scrub my hands
in the dark fat water bubbling out,
run a finger through my hair
to have a voice tell me
YOU LOOK LOVELY ...

I look at him in the mirror:
a bony weasel face
maybe in his early forties
wearing baggy denim
and a large hoop earring,
he strokes his salty goatee
as he looks me up and down ...

I shudder
knowing why the dykes are dykes
and far more kick-ass to boot
and then I be gone.

Illustrated 1942

THOMAS AND ROGER'S STORY

Peter Street

Thomas thought he was doing really well at school. He had lots of friends and his maths book was full of red ticks. That was until Mrs Gregory's Year Three class when all the other kids in class had started working on fractions. It was also the time when a big hole just seemed to appear in Thomas's head when everything to do with maths and logic just seemed to dribble away never to be seen again. He tried looking around to see if any of the other kids had also suddenly grown holes in their heads. No. They were all hard at work with their heads still brimming with their maths. Some of the other kids were even chewing on their pencils as though they were enjoying the lesson. Bored, Thomas started playing with the green crayon he found in his blazer pocket. Before he knew what was happening he'd got the crayon stuck up his nose. He tried with his best nose-picking finger to get it out. But it was well and truly stuck.

Christine Brookes, the girl near to him, seeing what had happened, started laughing. Soon all the class were laughing. He was beckoned to the front where Mrs Gregory told him to blow his nose. Hard, harder than he had ever done before. There was more class laughter when a dollop of snot and crayon shot into his hand. Not only that, but he then had to walk down the aisle to get to the toilet. The teasing from that lasted almost two days.

Because his brain was no-where it should have been, Thomas was now being called the Class-Three-trouble-maker. So in the end, he thought it was only natural for him to become the trouble–maker. He wasn't going to be a nasty spiteful trouble-maker. No, he was going to be more of a sort of prankster. Yes, a prankster. His favourite prank was played on Miss Goody-Two-Shoes Simpson, who was always given the best Monday morning monitor job of filling up the ink-wells for the start of the second lesson. Every time she reached Thomas's desk she would always pull a face. Thomas would make an even uglier face back. She would then tell teacher while shedding crocodile tears. Of course they believed her. That was the morning when teacher caught Christine Brookes whispering across the aisle to Teresa Lease. Teacher stomped from her desk and without warning or saying anything hit Christine so hard across the face she knocked her glasses on the floor and broke them. Thomas's punishment with

the ruler on the back of his hand for pulling his face was mild compared to what had happened to Christine.

Miss Egan would always ask the class to give Simpson a big clap because Simpson never spilled a drop of ink onto anyone's desk. Thomas couldn't resist sneaking into class during the break to fill, with his Mam's Andrew's Liver Salts, as many inkwells as he could manage in the time. When Miss Goody-Goody Ink-Well Filler started her job while snooting at everyone, ink began to bubble all over everyone's desk. Miss Goody-Two-Shoes wasn't even told off.

Mr Greenough, the Head Master, gave Thomas three of his very best for that one. Thomas's best mate, Roger, told him to rub his hands with candle wax before going into the Head Master's office. Roger convinced him the cane would slide off, so it wouldn't hurt as much. It still hurt. Maybe, more because his hand was almost red raw with the candlewax?

Thomas's Mam was called in around once a month. The school thought of sending him to the nearby St. Paul's even though it was a Proddy-dog school. But his Mam being the devout Irish Catholic (Republican) freaked, saying she would make sure he would improve. His parents even bought a Robinson Crusoe book which they leaned against Mam's Bible on the front room shelf. They now had two books in the house. Neither were ever read.

With their hard earned cotton mill money, Thomas's parents paid for him to visit a private maths teacher who gave up on him after just three sessions because she believed him to have no concentration and he was also lazy. Thomas, really, really wanted to learn but it just wouldn't happen. Yes, he could count up to a hundred but as soon as he tried to add numbers together or do division, the numbers wouldn't move like they seemed to do for the other kids. Or those same numbers would just disappear never to be seen again

…….

Roger was a blond, good looking lad, who never had dirty hands or knees, and you could always cut paper with the creases he had in his short pants. Both his parents were professional people in their town of Bolton, Lancashire. He was always driven to school in his parents' shiny black Humber Hawk Mk V1 and when in class he always sat next to Thomas. After school they would sometimes meet up on Astley Bridge Park where Thomas would try and help Roger swing

across the monkey bars. Roger never once made it all the way across. After playing on the swings Thomas would tell him about the various wild birds like the shrikes, blue tits or the clever magpies who visited the park.

The two of them would sometimes rub candlewax on the park slide then watched from the railings while the other kids went flying off the end and then laughed when they landed in the puddles of water.

Roger was the only one who didn't laugh when Mr Horricks hit Thomas, hard on the side of his head with the board duster. That teacher made the class laugh even more when he said it was to knock some sense into Thomas. Again, only Roger didn't laugh.

That was the weekend when Thomas tried teaching Roger how to kick a football. But his timing was so far out they both gave up. It was usually after Saturday Confession at Holy Infants Church when Roger would sneak a couple of hours away to meet up with Thomas and they would sometimes spend a few hours in Thomas's house playing with his toy fort and lead soldiers while both boys wore gas-masks. A couple of play times at Thomas's house, Roger would wear some of Thomas's spare clothes and they would then dig for hidden treasure in Thomas's backyard. Later Roger would try and help Thomas with his maths and reading.

1958 was their Eleven Plus year. Roger tried his best to tell Thomas how to go about working out the answers. The teachers' eyes kept Thomas and Roger separate. She then seemed to keep an eye more on Thomas than any of the other children. Thomas hadn't a clue what the Eleven Plus was for. But he came up with the theory that he would answer the same number on every page, that way he was sure to get something right. Wrong.

The two boys planned more play time together in their big summer holidays of that year. They chalked notes on the stone flags in the yard about what they were going to do and where they were going to go. Thomas was going to show Roger how to light a fire without paper and only using only two matches. Roger thought this was impossible.

Friday. All the wood they had been given permission to collect from The Wolfenden Street Timber Yard was waiting in the outside toilet ready for when Roger was free. The two boys had talked about building the biggest bonfire that could possibly be built in Thomas's

back yard. Thomas even had a couple of buckets of water ready in case the fire went out of control. His Mam brought the boys the two best potatoes ready for roasting in the embers of their fire which the boys would enjoy with best butter dripping down their chins onto their fingers.

Saturday. Thomas waited and waited.

Roger's parents may have got to hear about the planned bonfire. For some reason that was never made clear they decided to take Roger sailing around the Anglesey/Welsh coast. It was around the time when the two boys should have been building their bonny in the back yard when something went wrong with the family boat they were sailing. Roger drowned in the autumn/winter of 1958.

OIKU: The Right to Roam. Kinder Scout. *(David Birtwistle)*

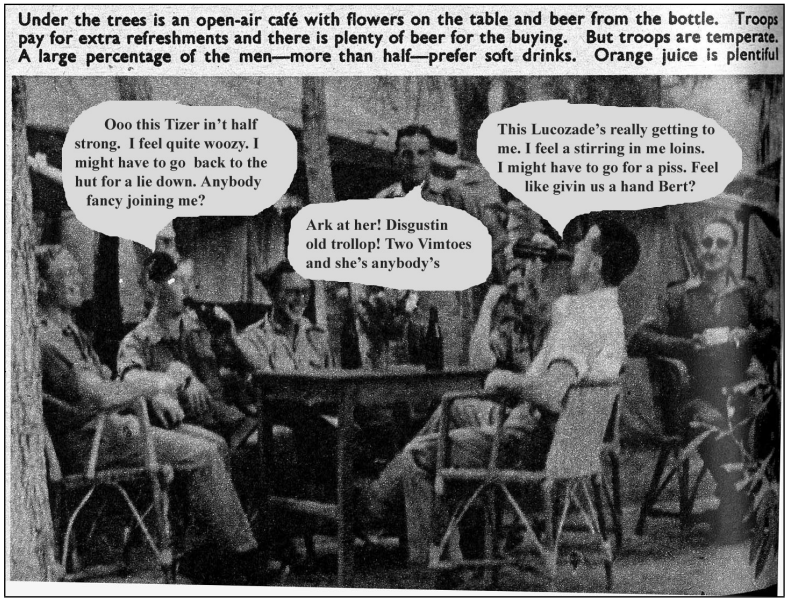
He pulled up on the A624 at Hayfield in Derbyshire. They had a good pie shop there. He got out and started mooching about. He wondered what had become of the British Workers Sports Federation which triggered the passing of the 'Access to the Countryside' Act after the Mass Trespass. He bet it had disappeared or been watered down or absorbed like the NUM or the WEA or bourgeoisified like true, activist Dadaism. How could he rekindle the old fires? 'That's it! They're always looking for new Olympic events. How about including 'The Long March' and 'The Great Leap Forward'?

ALEXIS LYKIARD

OBJECTIVE BURMA
(dir. Raoul Walsh 1945)

Errol Flynn's Burmese
days: Hollywood heroics
and no Brits around

just Yanks killing Japs,
jungle war as Tarzan rules –
good guys never die!



Illustrated 1942

FLAMOUS

Chris Carr

'Robinson! Did you flood the toilets?'

'No sir.'

'Well let's put it another way. Did you plug up the sinks and turn on the taps?'

'No sir, honest sir. It wasn't me sir.'

Ever since a full bucket of water drenched and flattened poor Mr Pringle going into the science lab, teachers knew most things of this nature were down to him. If it wasn't water it was fire alarms. There was something strangely missing about Josh Robinson, something beyond mischief, something that maybe the school should have diagnosed.

Cookery class and he was at it again. Forgot the eggs in the mixing bowl and being the half-baked kid that he is he pulls the sponge out the oven and cracked them on top somehow thinking they'd soak through.

'That's a novel idea,' said Miss Clegg smiling down on three plastic-looking fried-eggs that threatened to slide off the half-deflated cake. That wasn't the strange bit. The strange bit came two seconds later when Robinson leapt on the back of Sharon Adebola. She'd only just got her cake out the oven when he's on her trying to wrap a tea-towel around her head. She dropped the tray, dropped her gloves, dropped the gauntlet and dropped him. One punch and the lad was on the tiles rolling around in cake.

'I was trying to put her head out,' was his excuse. He kept on telling Miss Clegg. 'Her afro was on fire. I was only trying to put her head out.'

'I wouldn't mind,' announced Miss Clegg to a near full staffroom, 'but her hair wasn't even on fire.'

'He won't amount to much,' said the Maths teacher.

'He'll not go far neither,' said Geography Jones and even head of History reckoned he had no future.

Word in the staffroom was pretty conclusive; Josh Robinson was a

flaming nuisance.

'But he can't half swim,' said the sports' teacher from his defensive position behind the back of a tabloid. 'Like a swordfish he is. He doesn't mess about in the water.'

'Being able to swim isn't going to put food on the table.'

'I'm sure there's many a shark that'd tell yer different Miss Glegg. Well I'm recommending him to County level.'

Two years later and the name Josh Robinson fell through the front door of his house. He'd been accepted to work poolside during the 2012 Olympic Games in his home town of London. 'Yes,' and he punched the sky with both fists as he screamed it.

He went to work and he did his work until he knew everything he had to know for when it all got started. Then one day a special man turned up and even though he had white hair and a funny voice, everyone had to do something else. You weren't allowed to speak to him unless he spoke to you and if he did speak to you, you had to say, 'Yes Lord Mayor, or No Lord Mayor.'

Josh Robinson stood at the end of the line and there was something about the name on his badge that made the Lord Mayor stop. He looked at it, examined it. About to walk on, he looked again and even when they spoke for that minute or so, twice the Mayor peered down at the name badge.

No one knows what went through Robinson's mind at the time, not his family, his teachers or Sharon Adebola. *Hello*, *Okay*, didn't have a clue and for a while the Daily Star had no inkling neither. All Josh can recall is going up to the high-diving board, as requested, and when he saw the Mayor staring over the edge that's when he ran at him and it was like falling through an electrical storm the flashes and splashes.

'You're in deep water,' said his supervisor when actually he was now poolside but there were cameras and microphones and notepads and people wanting his address and his phone number and that's what it's been like ever since.

Josh Robinson doesn't live in Hackney no more. He hides in rural Bucks. He can see them from his house though, lurking in his lane with their microphones and cameras and note books and everything

else, but if they step just one inch onto his driveway, he'll turn the fireman's hose on them.

He knows how to put them out all right.

Illustrated 1942

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