

THE CRAZY OIK
ISSUE 19 AUTUMN 2013

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10 ALBERT ROAD GRAPPENHALL

WARRINGTON WA4 2PG

Website: www.crazyoik.co.uk

*Published October 2013 by
The Crazy Oik 10 Albert Road
Grappenhall Warrington*

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Metamorphoses and **Annunciations** are from Keith Howden's **Gospels of Saint Belgrano** (PPP 2013)

Mother Returns is from Tom Kilcourse's autobiography **It's Only Me**

The Victim is from S. Kadison's short story collection **Let's Kill the Teacher** (PPP 2012)

Front Cover – Self Portrait
Alexander Lobanov (1924-2003)



If Alex looks a little odd on his self-portraits there's a reason for that. He *was* mad – a certified lunatic. The poor sod got meningitis as a kid which left him deaf and dumb.

The family were kicked out of Mologa when Stalin decided to build a reservoir. His specialised schooling ended at that point and his parents had him institutionalised in 1945. Here he became uncontrollably violent, but later, at a less restrictive hospital, simply withdrawn and subdued. He began to draw in 1953. In the 1970s he took up photography and produced a series of icons featuring himself surrounded by weapons and other Soviet paraphernalia. He died in an asylum near Yaroslav.

Dr Gavrilov showed his work to students and psychiatrists and later French galleries and museums took an interest as did a French filmmaker Bruno Decharme.

He reminds me of the late Ian Hamilton Findlay, a much greater talent but one also obsessed with military hardware. His superb classical inscriptions glorified Jacobin heroes like St Just. He proclaimed his house a temple – Little Sparta - and refused to pay rates to his Scottish council (temples being exempt). Not quite mad – but getting there.

These images (see back cover) are from an exhibition at the Lille Metropole Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art at Villeneuve d'Ascq in 2013. Outsider? Yes, Alex was certainly that – in fact he was a quintessential crazy oik.

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EDITORIAL

OIKS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In an earlier editorial (Oik 16) I likened the commie con-man Pogany to an old mate, Ivan de Nemethy, also an Hungarian. Well bugger me if Ivan wasn't plonking about on his computer, googling his name, when he latches on to that Oik editorial. He got in touch. The internet! A miracle etc.

He now lives on murder mile in Hackney as a builder and tells me: "An Oxford City contract was bodged by the council so I bought a metre of law books and sued them personally. They forged loads of documents, I proved my case and three forgers got sacked. Done all my own legal work since then, recovered around £1.4 Million (£540,000 for myself against Barclays Bank)" Yep, that's Hungarians for you. The law? Just read the books. Brain surgery? Likewise. I am now in possession of his 80,000 word autobiog and start this issue with a chunk about his origins and strange father. There's more to come. You too might be a Hungarian – check it out - they get everywhere.

But strange dads are no novelty over here. Tom Kilcourse continues his own gripping life story and introduces his surrogate dad (the real one disappeared when Tom was born). "She had met Bert, or Karl as he preferred to be called, in the Dog and Partridge pub. At least thirteen years Elsie's junior, he was a rather comic figure, a young man out of his time. His preference for a more exotic name than Bert was not his only peculiarity. His taste in music was confined to tenors such as George Locke and Richard Tauber. He was careful about his appearance, though chose a style more in keeping with Gilbert and Sullivan than the streets of Newton Heath." Bert was soon superseded by an old beau. Elsie cleared Bert's house out while he worked a shift at the sewage plant, but left him a consolatory teapot – heart of gold innit?

John Lee too suffered constant denigration from his dad who was once Mayor of Trafford. Pop thought John had a lazy mind and reminded him of this deficiency at every opportunity. John's struggles to get from under this cloud are described in *Drifting 2* in which he denounces superstition, embraces radical politics and is greatly impressed by his mate Eric's dog, Chum, which sings the Agnus Dei just like Gili, suggesting some metempsychosis between the talented pooch and his owner, a secret left-footer married to a Presbyterian termagant. Yes, it does sound far-fetched but I'm inclined to believe it.

Even more far-fetched is Tanner's account of job-seeking in Liverpool. One can hardly credit the stomach churning squalor of oik employment in the lower depths of this great city. Perhaps Tanner, like our cover boy Lobanov, has gone nuts. "Rows of rattling machines, *burping* chunks of purple meat out onto

soggy conveyor belts ... folk stood around in diseased white overalls, *squishing* the passing animal tendons into little plastic boxes ... cogs screech in the resultant pain ... various clunky things crunching and farting ... *constant* metal echoes, industrial tuba booms and *juicy* squelching ... ricocheting to and from the splattered silt walls ... in this underground bunker of a workplace ... the dank ceiling is barely two meters high, it *swipes* at your head, dripping ... and the white overall folk, they are all screaming over each other as they finger the speeding meat ... there's a big rickety boom box in the corner vibrating the Top 10 in a piercing static hiss ... so they're all screaming in the din ...” Obviously made up – like Orwell in Paris...but then again..

After more lunacies from James Bird Horobin and a weird critique of Facebook which I have left in the original Hungarian (?) we return to earth, or even the empyrean, with reasoned, civilized accounts of John Calder publisher by Jim Burns and Alexis Lykiard's comparison of the late BS Johnson, oik novelist, and buffoon Boris, mayor of London and possibly our next PM. Let's hope for happier times after Boris gets in and doubles the minimum wage. Then pigs won't be squashed into boxes but will fly freely over our heads.

Ken Clay October 2013

BACK TO BUDAPEST

Ivan de Nemethy

I was born a Hungarian bastard in the middle of the Tisza River in Szeged. Well, not exactly. Not even my father's son could have survived in the middle of a river as deep and fast flowing as the Tisza in the bitter winter of 1945. I was, in fact, born less than a tenth of the way across, about twenty metres from the West bank where the Tisza flows quite slowly and is barely six metres deep. Undiluted Hungarian blood makes me exaggerate but an English education lubricated with Catholic dogma leads me to confess. Catholic dogma lubricates confessions? A confessed Catholic sin yields a squeaky clean conscience ready and waiting for the next sin in just fifty one seconds flat – this is the time it takes a fully trained Catholic to recite three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys at penance recital speed. Believe me, this works, but only for Catholics committing Catholic sins.

Least, that's what I was told by father Damien as I grew up in fifties London. Catholicism might have matured since my pubescent stint as altar boy and gonnabe priest, but if it has, then it's passed me by. I've been out of the Catholic loop since I excommunicated myself back in 1964 on account of the Pope's aborting the contraceptive pill. But, judging by the smell of the Papal Bull still steaming out of the Vatican gates, I'm not holding my breath. I'm holding my nose and getting taller boots. Papal Bull? Does exactly what it says on the tin.

So...was I really born a Hungarian and a bastard and in the Tisza River? Hungarian? de Némethy Iván – QED. Bastard? Check my birth certificate. Born in the Tisza river? Anyone ever heard of this miracle before? Where's the book telling the World about it? You're reading it.

My father's name from 28thOctober 1945 to 17thAugust 1948 was Némethy Iván. His name for the next forty one years until the day he died was Iván de Némethy. I don't know what his name was before 28thOctober 1945 and for all I know it might well have been de Némethy Iván. My father had six and a half million reasons to be travelling incognito around the time the Nazis were jack booting the shit out of Europe.

Fifteen years of research in England, Hungary, Austria and Serbia has yielded, excluding my sister and me, just two items of evidence concerning my father. The first is my birth certificate. My father appears as a heavily inked horizontal black line comprised of seven typed dashes from a Communist typewriter with a freshly loaded ribbon. The second and last item is my baptismal certificate, dated two weeks later, in which my father is designated as Némethy Iván, a Roman Catholic handicraft artiste from the Tokaj region, top right on the map of Hungary's depleted Empire. The typewriter in the second case was badly worn, letter heights all over the place, ribbon all but dried up ... it was a Catholic typewriter.

Tokaj is a famous Hungarian wine, self styled as “The Wine of Kings – The King of Wines” and since in his latter years my father took to quoting family connections with Lutomer and Riesling at around the time he also claimed to be winning international literary prizes, I gave the clue about my father coming from a region named after yet another wine a credibility rating of Papal Bull, especially as my father was that hen's tooth amongst Hungarians, a non smoking teetotaller who cannot have known much about wines. Were it not for my father's impeccable Hungarian, impossible to replicate by any foreigner, his being a non smoking teetotaller might make me wonder if he was a real Hungarian.

I thought I knew my father on and off for forty four years but it turned out I didn't know him. I found after he was dead that my real father had been hidden behind his stories. As I grew up I grew to hate my father's stories and then, for ten wasted years, I shunned him because of his stories. I understand his stories a whole lot better now I've reached fifty eight and, like my father after he had left Hungary and come to Britain, most of my life is behind me too, but it's too late to do anything about it...except...I can...I will...I am...writing this book.

On a weekend visit in 1983, my father announced over breakfast that he'd won yet another \$40,000 literary prize – his third in as many years. I quipped that it must have been for “A very tall story”, leant over the table, kissed him gently on the mouth, told him that I loved him as he was and his stories were a barrier between us. He seemed to take it in his stride, hung onto my hands, squeezing them for ages, began to open up a little for the few hours before he returned to Blackpool. But he didn't come back to see us for three years so I

didn't raise his stories again.

That was the only time I ever challenged my father's stories. If I had a another chance (I was going to say second chance, then realised as I read the line that I must have had thousands of chances - I just didn't recognise them) I still don't know what I could do about my father's stories. I suspect I would end up living through them again, end up hating them just as much as the first time – both my father and I paying the price over and over and over again. My mother, my sister and I abandoned my father in September 1964. My father's latest story finally crushed my mother's will to keep on trying.

Ten years after I abandoned my father I tracked him down in Blackpool where he had been living for six years. He came to visit us a dozen or so times in Oxford during his last fourteen years but wouldn't let us visit him in Blackpool, until, having gone into a nursing home, he did invite us up. We met at a nursing home overlooking the sea front.

I did drive past one of his earliest addresses a couple of years after I re-found him. The house was the last one standing in a road near the town centre heading directly towards the tower. The front door was missing, the windows were part boarded up – my father, a pioneer squatter from as far back as 1962 before squatting was recognised as an Englishman's right to get his own back at the filthy rich, was squatting again. The house is long gone, buried in the footings of the ugly flyover that shoots straight as an arrow to the sea front, giving visitors more time to leave their money behind and making the filthy rich even richer. He moved seven more times before he died, not counting the nursing home. I didn't get to see any of his other homes, in fact, I didn't even know what some of them were; he usually phoned us and in those days there was no ring back.

One time I plucked up the courage to look in at Blackpool, as a surprise. As we got close I thought better of calling unannounced and rang to tell him we were less than half an hour up the road. He insisted on meeting us by the big dipper saying he wanted to treat my girls. He bought kiss me quick hats, put my girls on a few rides and then we ate at an Indian restaurant in Lytham, six miles south. He pretended it was his favourite (it was the first one we came to going south from where he lived).

Minutes after the dishes were served he jumped up, saying he had to

rush off to a Mayoral Banquet. He insisted we should finish our meal, left a twenty pound note on the table and disappeared into a taxi the waiter had ordered. We finished the meal in silence, looking at my father's empty chair, part eaten plate, untouched Kingfisher lager, a piece of chicken still skewered by his fork ready for him to lift to his mouth and chew with his meticulous chewing action. The waiters put the remnants in a doggy bag. I left them behind. I thought this charade was because of my father's stories, that he didn't want me to see that he didn't live in a mansion, but I found out years later at his funeral that in this case it was because of a story my father never told me.

Why hadn't I asked my mother before she died? I had. All my mother ever had to go on were the same stories I had, but she had at least seen the money, so maybe some of his taller stories were true. But which? There were hundreds. He used to entertain us with tales of his life back in Hungary throughout the long evenings and nights when we all worked together making miniature leather brooches for our living.

It wasn't until 1991, after the Russians had left, two years after my father had died and thirteen years after my mother had died, that I dared to return to Hungary for the first time since we had escaped in 1946. I couldn't take the risk before then because as a Hungarian abroad I had avoided national service in the Russian controlled Hungarian army and who knows what sickle the Russians might have had to grind with my mother's son, having killed my mother's father and then my mother's brother in consecutive World Wars, not to mention the problems the Russians might have had with my father's son.

Memories of my parents flooded in as I climbed into my twenty year old Jag, braved the World War 3 Kamikazes on the German/Austrian autobahns, grateful for the nightmare drive because it kept my mind, my mouth and my best two fingers occupied all the way to Budapest.

I walked around the strangely familiar Budapest streets, struggling to transcribe the unfamiliar phonetics of the shop and road signs into spoken words because I can't read or write in Hungarian, although I did find I was more fluent than I had ever realised (I always spoke Hungarian with my parents, partly out of habit, but largely because it was much easier to follow than their Hungarian fractured English).

BACK TO BUDAPEST

I had no such difficulty with the older generation of Hungarians I saw in the streets of Budapest. They needed no transcribing and most of them reminded me of my parents. It wasn't just the sentiment of my first visit to my parents' homeland, these people were uncannily like my parents. Tears filled my eyes as I recognised my mother's and my father's features and mannerisms time and time again, the old guys with their proud military bearing (I had never thought of my father's bearing as military, just proud, but then he always wore Western clothes which just don't have the same cut). Uniform was the one area where the Nazis had the Allies beaten hollow, plus obeying orders, Germans were exceptionally good at obeying orders, something the Hungarians are notoriously poor at, hence the 1956 revolution.

The old ladies had a serenity that I had never seen on my mother's face. I listened to them talking as they passed, their faces lined but not cowed, their clothing often worn but not shabby, but they didn't have my mother's hunted look and the men's strut had a definite edge on my father's even though in England my father was famous for his strut. These Hungarians were at home, a home decimated by lost wars, lost revolutions and thirty years of goulash Communism, but it was still their home. I knew then that this had been my parents' home all along and that this was where they should have stayed.

I wondered how many times during their time in England they'd wished they'd stayed in Hungary. Having escaped neither of them arrived whole in England, they both left their hearts and minds behind, making England just a limbo in which they struggled to survive for their children's sake, and then die too soon without having lived their own lives, wondering what might have been and leaving me to find out, too late, what should have been.

My father was the quintessential Hungarian refugee, extremely proud of his heritage, whilst my mother thought of herself as a disadvantaged "Bluddy Furriner" right to the end. My father's pride was an obstacle that he never overcame, not that he ever tried to overcome it, but my mother's feeling disadvantaged made her work harder and she had the better life by far, but only after she had decided to leave my father imprisoned behind his pride.

My mother had dutifully followed him to England for the sake of my sister and me. She had carried on following my father for fifteen years until she thought we had grown up. I benefited from my

mother's sacrifice, not sure my sister did because she thought of my mother as an embarrassing foreigner, with her black coat, funny little fur lined boots and her Eastern European headscarf tied under her chin, looking like the worried Russian mother with the pregnant daughter in law in "The Deer Hunter".

I have always been proud to be Hungarian so I was surprised and disappointed when my sister was ashamed to have been referred to as "that Hungarian woman" by a neighbour and even more surprised that she complained when we named our first daughter Ilona instead of some pseudo white Anglo French concoction.

I got very drunk on beer and Pálinka at a pavement bar and thought about how dearly my parents had paid for my sister and me. We weren't worth it. I checked at all the Budapest records offices and found there were no pre 1945 records for the outlying regions because they were lost in a fire, were in a different building and or were culled by the Russians to obliterate all traces of the Hungarians condemned to die in the construction of the Budapest underground or exported wholesale to die in the Gulag. Whatever the reason I didn't get to see any pre 1945 records for regions outside Budapest because there weren't any to be found in Budapest.

I asked bureaucrats in small offices, bureaucrats in large offices and bureaucrats up on pedestals so high you could see how far up themselves they were with the naked eye. I met stiff resistance wherever I went because Hungarians resent fat cat Westerners coming back to Hungary grubbing for lost Hungarian land and money. I found it difficult to overcome their resentment because I agree with them. A few of the less bureaucratic officials, if they took the trouble to listen, could tell I wasn't after land or money, that I was just looking for my father. They sympathised and tried to be helpful, but still I found nothing.

One bureaucrat, cum crook, recognising how important it was to me, smelling money, suddenly volunteered that he might, after all, miraculously overcome the insurmountable obstacles he had just listed so eloquently in exchange for a couple of hundred dollars cash (a month's salary) up front – maybe, only maybe mind you, no guarantees, no money back for failure, just might be able to find what I wanted. If he did find anything, then a few more hundred dollars cash would release the information if I posted the dollars to his private address which he just happened to have printed on a stack

BACK TO BUDAPEST

of cards inside a plain envelope in his desk drawer. I replied instinctively, without a response delaying reference to my brain, “Öreg anyád piczába!” (in your grandmother’s piss – see what I mean about the phonetics?).

I complained more than once but of course, they were all in for a cut so I was complaining to the deaf. They were blind to my Western hand signals. One of them, the one wearing a supercilious smile until I called him *paraszt* (peasant, use with caution, rudest thing you can say to a Hungarian and that tells you a lot about where they’re coming from) even came round his desk, shaping up for a fight but changed his mind when I stood up and he found he was looking at my chest. I looked down at the dandruff flecks in his receding greasy hair and on the shoulders of his cheap shiny terylene suit. It crossed my mind to make a crack about his being short at one end but I decided not to push my luck. I don’t know how to fight, I just look as if I might, and it’s saved me from my mouth a few times.

4 STALIN STAMPS

FREE !!

Have you got these four super Stalin stamps in your collection? The Hungarian 60f. purple-black mourning stamp was issued in 1953 to commemorate Stalin's death. The 1Ft. claret and the 60f. olive commemorated the 34th and 35th anniversaries of the Russian Revolution. The Czechoslovakian 3k. claret was issued in 1949 to celebrate Stalin's 70th birthday. These four historical stamps catalogued at 1/11 are yours absolutely FREE. Just ask to SEE our wizard approvals, sending 24d for postage. No need to buy anything.

PHILATELIC SERVICES (Dept. R. 22), Eastington, GOOLE, Yorks.

Rover 1954

Keith Howden

METAMORPHOSES

Birdy, this Thursday's, got it bad.
Ack-ack. Ack-ack. Coughs frogspawn
into a jelly handkerchief. Sounds like
Dortmund's defences. Chest droning on
one engine, ready to ditch in
his pint's North Sea. *Ack-ack. Ack-ack.*
Tonight he's wishing he had
the energy of that bluebottle he chased
all afternoon. Birdy reckons they must be
God's perfect creature, nature's answer
to nuclear fission. Ten licks of shit
and they're away, stocked up for
a whole day's bombing and banging. If
transmogrification exists, that's how
he's coming back, he says. But not
a frog. *Ack-ack*, he's coughing. Jim
Pilkington could stun bluebottles
and tie messages to them with a hair.
Birdy swears it's true. He's watched them
droning lopsidedly and towing
their little drogues. Ten licks of shit
he says, and he'll be back here ready
to buzz the bloody Cabinet. Or better still,
a wasp. Crawl into Thatcher's
Gorbachevs and stuff his sting
into mount Reagan. And the same thing
for that mad Matron. Soon have her
dancing and squealing when he lances
her pilot light. Worth being squashed for.
But not a frog. *Ack-ack. Ack-ack.* Jim

METAMORPHOSES

Pilkington used to write *Beer is Best* and *Guinness is Good* on those little drogues. Birdy says, a case of arrested development. Plenty of physical talent and less than a frog between the ears. Birdy envisages a million bluebottles stoked up on shit and pulling their little drogues through Jimmy Young polluted air. On every one a diatribe on bloody Thatcher's total malodorousness. *Ack-ack. Ack-ack.* It's Thatcher brings it on. He might come back as one of them, but not a frog. Jim Pilkington used to inflate them with a straw shoved up their arses. And what about the whole bloody Cabinet? If they were insects, no doubt he's coming back as an aerosol to squirt the lot of them. **Time Gentlemen -** That Charge Nurse should be metamorphosed. The loony bus frogs at the door. Its one-legged driver won a fortnight's skiing from competitions on some soap powder. Tore up the tickets, said he wouldn't want to spend two weeks of holiday with all those buggers he spent his time avoiding in the other fifty. *Ack-ack. Ack-ack.* **Come on Birdy.** But not a frog. He might meet Jimmy Pilkington. One squirt from him transmogrified, he'd make that Cabinet squirm! **We can't wait**

for bloody ever Birdy. Then, no doubt,
quick as a flash, there'd be a law
banning aerosols. No doubt some Saatchi
love of the environment, no doubt
that pious fishwife howling *Rejoice*
and oozing Finchley's concerns about
the ozone layerand frogs....

Jeff Bell

Fridge For Panties

She now wears a fridge for panties,
which to be fair I bet still accentuates
the beauty in her stride. But I remember
the days when she used to wear an
oven, and how she burnt most things
due to her faulty thermostat set to max.
With my electrical training I still feel
responsible though, knowing I could have
easily cut the supply, ah....but in my defence,
I've always liked my food well done.

She once had her own angel sing for her too,
and I remember her critical words as the music
played, "You've used the word dreams again?"
And knowing through experience she
was right, I watched as the angel started
to dig, rather than rise up into the sky.

THE GARDEN OF EROS

Jim Burns

The Fifties were, according to John Calder, "a more interesting time than the much vaunted Sixties." and he points out how the seeds of what sprouted in the latter decade had been sown in the earlier one: "The Sixties were a direct result of the Fifties and what started then." It's a point of view that those who've fallen for the line that, prior to 1963 or so, everything was drab and uninteresting, might not want to consider. But there is truth in what Calder says. And some people, and I'm among them, would suggest that it's when things are starting to show signs of developing that they're at their most interesting. The sense of possibilities is there, matters haven't become over-publicised and commercialised, and writers and artists can get on with what they want to do without too many distractions.

Paris had a tradition of attracting British and American writers, as witness the heady days of the Twenties. But the war years obviously put a stop to such activities, and it was only around the end of the Forties and the start of the Fifties that there was a noticeable return to some sort of normality. Calder says that "in 1951, the Anglo-American literary and art scene in Paris began to revive." One of the early arrivals was Alexander Trocchi, described as "a brilliant student of English and philosophy at Glasgow University," who had "impressed his professors with his ability to write original essays on both major subjects." Trocchi plays a major role in Calder's book and he was, for a time, a catalyst to events that have now become a part of literary history. By the time he got to Paris he had written short stories and poems, and he was working on his first novel, *Young Adam*. He had also started to dabble with drugs, though not to the point where they became dominant in his life. That would happen later.

Other early arrivals were the poet Christopher Logue, Alan Riddell, and Jane Lougee. All played a part in the founding of *Merlin*, a short-lived little magazine that has an honoured place in the story of bohemian life in Fifties Paris. Little magazines are now of less importance than they used to be, but, as in the Twenties, they were key outlets for work by writers who would later become better-known. Among other things, *Merlin* drew attention to the work of

Samuel Beckett. Trocchi and Lougee soon began an affair, despite the fact that his wife and children were in Paris, and they started to plan publishing *Merlin*. Alan Riddell was also initially involved but wanted to focus on publishing Scottish writers, something that Trocchi was vehemently against. It was Jane Lougee's money that would support the magazine, so Trocchi was in a strong position and soon eased Riddell out of the picture.

Calder gives a close account of Trocchi's activities and it's clear that he wasn't always scrupulously honest in his dealings with other people. Austryn Wainhouse met him at Le Mistral, George Whitman's bookshop that later changed its name to Shakespeare & Company, and reminiscing about the meeting, described Trocchi as "a great lean rascal in a raincoat, the collar pulled up, over its rim lay a long nose, claiming all the space between two little eyes, deep set, very winning, and manifestly not to be trusted." I only met Trocchi once and that was in 1964 when he was pushing his Sigma Project and its "Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds." There was a gathering of some kind in an upstairs room of a pub in London, and I recall Trocchi and Jeff Nuttall being there with a large poster-type publication called *The Moving Times* that they'd just produced. I've got to admit that I never could take many of Trocchi's ideas too seriously, and my brief conversation with him left me feeling that he might be someone to be wary of. But perhaps I'd been influenced by stories I'd heard and the fact that he was known to be a heroin addict.

Several issues of *Merlin* did appear and there was a Merlin publishing house which brought out editions of Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy*. I have a few issues of *Points*, another Paris based magazine, and one of them dating from 1953 has an advertisement for *Watt*, along with a short story by Trocchi and poems by Christopher Logue and Jane Lougee. *Points* didn't have quite the same cachet as *Merlin*, but it lasted longer thanks to its editor, Sindbad Vail, being the stepson of Peggy Guggenheim and so not being short of money. His father was Laurence Vail, a fixture on the Twenties Paris scene and published in *transition*. There were other magazines in Fifties Paris, such as *Zero*, *New Story*, and perhaps the best known of them all, *The Paris Review*, which benefited from having an editor, George Plimpton, who, like Sindbad Vail, didn't have to hunt for funds to keep the magazine alive.

There was a certain amount of literary and social mixing between the

groups which tended to cluster around each magazine, but Calder points out that *The Paris Review* group "were not bohemians: they had been to good American universities, sometimes followed by good British ones; they were typical Ivy Leaguer young Americans with a desire to make a name for themselves in literature and to have a good time as well." This isn't the place to delve into the history of *The Paris Review*, which stretches over many years, but it is worth mentioning a couple of novels by writers linked to the founding of the magazine which have some relevance to their time in Paris. Peter Matthiessen was reputed to have connections to the CIA and his 1955 novel *Partisans*, described as "a psychological thriller of ideas," revolved around the politics of the French Communist Party. *The Underground City* (1958) by H.L. Humes was set towards the end of the war and just after and was more ambitious in scope (it runs to 750 pages) but was similarly informed about left-wing French politics. Matthiessen went on to have a successful writing career, but Humes only produced one more novel before his life petered out in paranoia and drugs.

Calder mentions some other publications, such as *Two Cities* and *Paris Magazine*, the latter edited by George Whitman from his bookshop. And he says that Alexander Trocchi "both contributed and did some editorial work" for it. I have the first three issues (dated 1967, 1984, and 1989, which even by the standards of sporadic little magazines is quite a record) and Trocchi isn't in any of them, nor is he credited with any editorial assistance. Was there an earlier version of *Paris Magazine*? I've never come across it if there was.

It's now well-known that many of the young writers in Paris in the Fifties supplemented whatever incomes they had by knocking out "dirty books" for Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press. Trocchi was adept at producing titles like *Helen and Desire* and *White Thighs* under the name of Frances Lengel, and Iris Owen, who wrote as Harriett Daimler, came up with *The Woman Thing* and several others. It has been said that Trocchi and Owen had an affair and that the male character in *The Woman Thing* is based on him. Unlike a lot of pornography these books were not badly written on the whole, some humour was often present in them, and by today's standards they'd probably be best described as "soft porn" and unlikely to upset too many people. *Helen and Desire* was re-issued by Canongate in 1997 without, as far as I know, any fuss, and *The Woman Thing* is easily

available. Iris Owens did later write a couple of straightforward novels, one of which, *After Claude*, has a Greenwich Village bohemian background, and is worth reading.

Maurice Girodias is, in many ways, central to Calder's account, and his story makes for lively reading. He was the son of Jack Kahane, a Manchester-born businessman who started the Obelisk Press in Paris in the Thirties and published English-language editions of books banned in Britain and America. His list included Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Cyril Connolly's *The Rock Pool*, along with some books that didn't have any claim to literary quality. Girodias, whose wartime activities tended to be shrouded in mystery (had he been too friendly with the Germans?) began to follow in his father's footsteps after 1945 when he launched the Olympia Press which, as well as the "dirty books" referred to earlier, would eventually publish Nabokov's *Lolita*, J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*, William Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch*, Lawrence Durrell's *The Black Book*, and various titles by Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Henry Miller.

Calder gives a detailed description of Girodias's antics and escapades and it makes for entertaining and enlightening reading. He wasn't the most perfect of people and had numerous liaisons with a variety of ladies, drank, thought up crazy schemes (one involved opening an up-market restaurant), and was cavalier when it came to money. It's obvious that he had mixed feelings about what he published. He wanted to see his books sell and wasn't averse to exploiting their sexual content for publicity purposes. But he was prepared to fight a number of censorship battles, and there's no doubt that, like John Calder in Britain and Barney Rossett in America, Girodias helped loosen the restraints on what could be openly available in print. It is, of course, open to debate as to whether or not the collapse of censorship had a uniformly good effect.

Bookshops catering to the expatriate community were important in post-war Paris. They were outlets for little magazines and books, and were also meeting places for the writers. George Whitman's Le Mistral/ Shakespeare & Company has already been mentioned, and there was also The English Bookshop in the rue de Seine which was owned by Gait Frogé, described by Calder as "an enthusiastic Frenchwoman with a penchant for writers and artists." He adds that she had many affairs, but that "there is no doubt that Norman

Rubington was the serious one." He was an American painter who, under the name Akbar del Piombo, produced witty collage books for Olympia Press. I picked up a copy of one of them, *Fuzz Against Junk*, when I visited Paris in the early Sixties, along with *Minutes To Go*, a small book with contributions from William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Sinclair Beiles, and Gregory Corso, all of them then residents at the Beat Hotel in the rue Git-Le-Coeur. It was published by Gait Frogé, and Calder says it is now a "collector's item." The same visit also enabled me to obtain copies of the Olympia Press edition of *The Naked Lunch* and Gregory Corso's *The American Express*. I brought them back buried at the bottom of my rucksack in case a curious Customs decided to inspect it. Corso's oddball novel was totally innocuous and almost like a fairy-tale, and it's surprising that Girodias published it, but the green cover and the Traveller's Companion Series heading would have been reasons enough for it to be seized.

The fact that John Calder was in and out of Paris during the period he writes about means that he has numerous anecdotes and character sketches which enliven his narrative. He describes Burroughs in these words: "He dressed like a typical office-worker or the manager of a small bank in a small town, and he talked like one. No one could have looked more conventionally middle-American. But inside that head a whole bizarre world, akin to that of Heironymous Bosch or Dante was present." And I've got to agree that my first sighting of Burroughs, giving a reading in a small club called La Bohème on the Left Bank in 1962, very much ties in with Calder's comments. As for Samuel Beckett, Calder says that he was "austere intellectually and never believed that anything he did, said, or wrote could ever change the course of events; people come to their own destinies, largely through chance, and he believed, with regret, that human nature is unchangeable - that of the individual and that of the masses. Becket was basically an aristocrat in his thinking; he could sometimes help individuals but not populations, certainly not humanity as a whole."

The anecdotes come thick and fast when Trocchi and Girodias are discussed. Calder claims that Trocchi and John Esam, a poet from New Zealand, were behind the mystery of the missing money at the 1965 Albert Hall reading. Most of the poets never got paid and Calder says that Christopher Logue told him that he saw Trocchi and

Esam stuffing the box-office receipts (around £2,000) into bags. It's not the only story about Trocchi and money going astray. As for Girodias, he was sleeping with three different women, drinking the profits from the bar in his restaurant, and trying to keep Olympia Press afloat. He did have money coming in from other publishers who had subcontracted several of his best-selling titles, but very little of it seems to have reached the authors. I got the impression, reading about Girodias's problems, that he brought chaos on himself because of his failure to run any of his ventures - publishing, the restaurant, a gallery he opened - in a systematic and efficient way. I'm not sure that there was necessarily any planned deception in what he did. He simply wasn't cut out to be a successful businessman. And he was often involved in expensive legal fights with other publishers when books he'd originally brought out were taken over by them because Girodias had never bothered with proper contracts or other legal requirements. Calder provides information about such matters, and books have been written about Girodias's struggles over *The Ginger Man* (J.P. Donleavy almost made a crusade of his dislike of Girodias) and *Lolita*.

Barney Rossett wasn't as colourful a character as Girodias, but his Grove Press, and its house magazine, *Evergreen Review*, played a key part in the development of what came to be called the New American Writing of the late-Fifties and early-Sixties. And Rossett took on the job of publishing Burroughs, Henry Miller, Beckett, Jean Genet and others in America and was willing to go to court when their books came under threat. But Rossett was, from Calder's account of him, a more ruthless businessman than Girodias (or Calder) and his treatment of others not always admirable. But I don't want to give the impression that Rossett was just a sharp operator. I can well remember how eagerly I waited for each new issue of *Evergreen Review* in its early days, and the impact made by the Grove Press *New American Poetry 1945-1960*, edited by Donald Allen who may, in fact, have been the main influence on the best contents of the magazine. Grove Press also published Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (Calder did it in Britain), Jack Gelber's play, *The Connection*, and many other worthwhile titles. It's true that *Evergreen Review* went into something of a decline when it changed its format and got involved with the Hippies, Black Power, student protest, rock music, and other Sixties concerns, but its first thirty or so issues have a place in any survey of literary activity in the United States between 1957 and

1963.

John Calder doesn't make a big thing about his own involvements, though he was obviously a major presence in the adventurous side of British publishing. I've always had a high regard for him and not just because of what he did to get Trocchi, Burroughs, Beckett, and others into print in this country. Earlier, he'd published books by left-wing American writers who were blacklisted in their own country. On my shelves are novels like Alvah Bessie's *The Un-Americans*, Albert Maltz's *A Long Day in a Short Life*, and the four books that made up the first two parts of (two volumes in each part) of *The Seed*, a trilogy by Lars Lawrence, who died before completing the third part. Lars Lawrence was the pseudonym of Philip Stevenson, like Bessie and Maltz a screenwriter who could no longer get work in Hollywood. Calder also published novels by Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, and Marguerite Duras, and plays by Ionesco and Arthur Adamov. The latter "remained always short of money, and he was usually drunk. He wandered around Paris bars, always in dirty old sandals and no socks, his face a stubble and his bad breath and body odour detectable two yards away." Bohemianism of that sort seems colourful to read about, but Adamov's final days were sad ones. Having exhausted the good will of his two publishers, Calder in Britain and Gallimard in France, and unable to scrounge any more money from them, he wrote to Martin Esslin, then Head of Drama at BBC Radio. Esslin, an advocate of Theatre of the Absurd, had supported Adamov's work and would have sent some money but never received the letters. A postman had stolen sacks of mail. By the time the thefts were discovered Adamov had committed suicide.

A final minor point concerns Peter Martin, co-founder with Lawrence Ferlinghetti of the City Lights bookshop in San Francisco. Calder says that he was the son of "an Italian anarchist, Carlo Martin, who had been assassinated in New York in 1943." His name was actually Carlo Tresca and he had been associated with radical and anti-fascist causes for many years. The mystery of his death was never properly solved as he had numerous enemies, including supporters of Mussolini, communist militants, and Mafia bosses. Dorothy Gallagher's *All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca* (Rutgers U.P., 1988) looks at the case in detail.

The Garden of Eros is a fascinating book and makes me nostalgic for the days when there were numerous independent bookshop, little

magazines, adventurous publishers, and gatherings of writers that weren't organised by arts association bureaucrats. Now we have competitions, prizes, festivals, creative writing courses, and an obsession with celebrities, popular success, and money.

THE GARDEN OF EROS: THE STORY OF THE PARIS
EXPATRIATES AND THE POST-WAR LITERARY SCENE

by John Calder Calder Publications. 360 pages. £25.

Oikus: (exactly 100 words) *David Birtwistle*

History Lesson.

Nearly a hundred years ago Trotsky had declared, “England is nothing but the last ward in the European mad house.” A glance at the news headlines set his head nodding. A broken economy. More young people unable to get jobs. Students paying for their education. Petrol and food up again. Record numbers watching the latest ‘Dallas’. And we voted in a Conservative government! The pervading hopelessness made it look like Mediaeval England all over again. He realised that Socialist Realism was not the stylized artifice he’d assumed but an accurate portrayal of the forces behind a culture we’d thrown away.

Old Man as Hero: almost gone

Role-models were rare these days, certainly up their street and there was no-one for his lad to have a couple of coats of looking up to. How can you have working class heroes when there’s no work? Perhaps you give a prize for whoever survives idleness with least brain cells damaged. There was only Norman Blenkinsop, now 92. Still shopped for his mother, dug half the allotment in an afternoon, and had ten pints at night. In summer he still opened the bowling for the over-40s and pulled as anchor-man in the Tug-O-War team. Alf Tupper? No-one remembers his name!

A VICTIM

S. Kadison

When she kicked her husband out the last thing Mrs Wiswell wanted was to appear independent. She was forty, an intelligent woman who'd missed out on education being born too early to benefit from the 1944 reform; she could have got herself some training and found relatively remunerative work; but victims weren't supposed to be resourceful. Had she pulled herself up, stared hard at her new reality like a child who wakes in a strange bedroom and needs seconds to orient herself, had she let the steel that was in her intestines glint for a moment in the sunshine of public interest, no-one would have pitied her. In her mind, that was the choice things resolved themselves into; either she drew on her resources and showed everyone she was capable, could shift for herself and would sweep away the ruins of her jerry built marriage to construct in its place a sturdy residence of independence and happiness; or she sank into helplessness and called on Christian pity to come to her aid. The latter appealed to her ingrained Methodism. Religion, like every other influence, plays on the individual sensibility and imagination, and as we are as unique in our brains as our fingerprints, everyone's religion is their own. For Ginny Wiswell, the overwhelming truth of Christianity was that help must come to those who suffer; God was good and would not turn away from a soul in need; the Devil, on the other hand, took the side of those who pushed, who knew where their interest lay and how to pursue it, who provoked fear rather than compassion. These crude ideas had been fed into her mind when she was no more than a child of three and rooting in the fresh soil of innocence had grown into thick shrubs of ignorance, fear and certainty which kept all rational enlightenment hidden. It might be 1962, the rebellion of youth might be sweeping aside decades of deference, but that prevailed little on a mentality formed in the grim backstreets of a poor northern town in the twenties and thirties. She made a choice to let depression, hopelessness and despair flood the plain of her humiliated being and she waited in vain for Christian succour, as Christ himself found only abandonment on the cross.

She had three children. So did her husband but she was determined he shouldn't. Shoving him out of the door for being unable to keep

his fly zippered was also expelling him from her life and everything to do with it. She had virtue on her side and virtue knows little of the pity she sought for herself. Had anyone suggested to her that depriving her children of their father might not be the best for them, she would have been as shocked as when she discovered the apparently nice young couple in the next room at the Norbreck Hydro, Blackpool, the last time they had a week there in the summer, weren't married but were living as man and wife. When she told this in outrage to her fourteen year-old, Kath realised it was a real agony for her. The daughter had absorbed the more liberal attitudes of the time. Oh, she believed in marriage, but she didn't see why a girl shouldn't find out beforehand. And though she thought her mother's idea absurd, she couldn't but feel inordinately sorry for her. Her pain, though the result of a distorted view of things, was real. Kath looked at her mother's contorted features and her huddled posture; she wasn't one of those vulgar women who puff up their chests and loudly denounce their neighbours over the fence for their slovenly or immoral habits while leaving the sheets on the bed for six months and not telling the shopkeeper if they got too much change; in her poor little mind, formed in primitive religion in the reduced mean streets of a town where the vicious lived well and lorded, it was a given truth that a man and woman should make their vows before god prior to getting familiar. The thought of the immorality of sex before marriage almost made her physically sick.

“Well, never mind,” said Kath, “never mind. Leave them to their business.”

In spite of herself, there were moments when Ginny was glad Stan had left. The marriage was never any good. She put up with it. They got by. They got along, more or less, that was the best that could be said; but now she didn't have him making her stomach turn with his selfish ways or forcing her to wrap herself in the bedclothes so as not to touch him during the night; she had the big bed to herself and some mornings she would wake as the sunshine was making the flowery curtains transparent and she would feel content; the bed was warm; she could lie there quietly for half an hour; it was a nice room with a large, semi-circular bay and the grove was quiet; the Stag furniture was very high quality; she felt herself lucky. She heard Paul getting himself ready for school and Kath running a bath. Pippa was still asleep. For a few minutes she was able to believe life had been

good to her; but her mood was soon subverted. She found herself thinking of her status. She was a woman abandoned. The respectability of marriage, which had always meant so much to her, had been torn from her like a hand caught in a loom and ripped off at the wrist. What did people think of her? A woman on her own was always suspect. Did the neighbours connive at her satisfactions? She knew how people speculated and talked and she knew how they loved nothing more than finding fault in others. She had to turn herself into such a pillar of virtue no-one would be able to say a word. The idea of another man was anathema. She'd fallen for Stan's charm, his good-looks, his easy smile, embracing chat and suave clothes; what sort of world was it where your feelings could lead you astray so badly? A fallen world. Henceforth it was the purity of Heaven she would cleave to.

By the time she got out of bed, Paul had left the house and Kath was pulling on her gabardine. They were independent children who never gave her a moment's trouble. Paul was always out early because he wanted to kick a football in the playground. He would make himself toast and tea, clear any mess, wash his mug, shove his arms into his wind-jammer, grab his Frido and run off to meet his mates. Kath was already capable of running a household: she took two pounds from her mother, went to the Co-op, the fishmonger, the butcher and the ironmonger and came back with stewing steak, bread, flour, apples, oranges, bananas, a nice piece of cod, washing powder and change. Ginny never needed to plug in the vacuum, nor lift the iron except for her own clothes, the sheets and the underwear and towels she insisted on smoothing before they went in the drawers. The children always washed up after themselves, Paul pushed the stiff Qualcast up and down the oblong lawn and jabbed the hoe at the weeds; he even sanded the loose paint off the downstairs frames and repainted, but she wouldn't let him climb a ladder. Once a week Kath stripped the sheets from the beds and put them in the tub. Ginny almost resented that: she liked to spend all Sunday morning, from seven till twelve, filling and emptying the machine whose agitator rocked backwards and forwards with a terrible, industrial churn, dragging the heavy clothes out with her wooden pincers and feeding them through the tight rollers, pegging them out on the line for the neighbours to see. It was hard sweaty work but it made her feel good, once it was over. Kath said to her one day:

“Sue’s mum has one of the new twin-tubs. They’re much less work.”

“Won’t have one,” snapped Ginny.

There was an association in her mind between too-efficient household machines and laziness; and idleness was the work of the Devil. He wanted us to have leisure, for when we aren’t working we are prey to His foul temptations. Mrs Hothersall had an automatic and a cleaner, but what did she spend her time doing? Going from one coffee morning to another and playing whist. No, Ginny was sure that to be burdened with work was to avoid sin. She was so obsessed with finding things to do (climbing the step-ladders every day to wipe the lampshades, getting down on her knees to scrub the vestibule and the front step for the fifth time in a week) she barely noticed how good her children were.

Pippa sat up in her little bed in the alcove.

“Is it morning time?”

“It is. Come on. Downstairs.”

The child played with her posh-frocked dolls and building bricks in the living-room while Ginny went to the kitchen to make breakfast. Everything was neat. She took the mug Paul had washed and left upturned on the drainer and washed it once more, dried it and put it in the wooden cupboard. In a few days time her mornings would no longer be so relaxed: she’d made a deal with Stan – he could stop paying maintenance if he signed the house over to her. Her mind had been plagued by thoughts of being made homeless. This gave her the guarantee of a home for her and her children. Had she known the law kept her safe, that Stan could do nothing until Pippa was eighteen, that what the courts called the matrimonial home was hers for another fifteen years, she might have acted differently; but she didn’t seek legal advice. The barrister who represented her in her divorce had the stench of alcohol on his breath. Nor was he willing to listen to her story of the unhappiness she’d suffered in marriage. The legal profession was full of clever Devils. She made the decision for herself. But without maintenance she had to bring in money. She took a job as a school cleaner: split shifts, six thirty till eight and four till six. She was to start the following Monday. Mrs Buzzington, a pillar of the Railway Mission, had agreed to look after Pippa for the few minutes each day needed to allow Paul and Kath to get off to school and come home. That morning, Ginny called on her.

“Sorry to disturb you, Mrs Buzzington. Are you washing?”

“No, come in Mrs Wiswell. Hello, Pippa. Sit down, love. I was just cleaning the kitchen windows. ”

“Oh, I know. Don’t they get a mess. I’m at mine every day.”

“You have it to do.”

“Always better to be busy, Mrs Buzzington. The Devil makes work.”

“He does. Will you have a cup of tea?”

“No. I’m not stoppin’. I just wanted to be sure everything’s all right for next week.”

“Champion,” said Mrs Buzzington, wiping down the kitchen table.

“Kath’ll bring her twenty past eight.”

“Kath or Paul.”

“You’ve got good children, Mrs Wiswell.”

“They’re not bad, in spite of their father.”

Mrs Buzzington speeded up her wiping. The child sat quietly on a stool at the table chewing the sleeve of her coat.

“It’ll be fine. It’s only a few minutes every day. I’m glad to help.”

“It’s very Christian of you, Mrs Buzzington. That was Stan’s problem. He had no religion.”

Mrs Buzzington went to the sink and turned on the noisy tap to rinse her cloth.

“He caused me a lot of unhappiness, Mrs Buzzington. A lot of unhappiness.”

“Are you sure you wouldn’t like a cup of tea?”

“No. This child. I don’t know. I don’t know what’s to become of her.”

“We must just do our best, Mrs Wiswell.”

“I’d never’ve imagined it. To think of the grand lads I could’ve married. And him. He couldn’t resist any young thing who batted her eyelids at him.”

“Well, if she’s here at twenty past on Monday, I’ll be ready.”

Mrs Buzzington wrung her cloth and began to take off her apron.

“He’s caused me some grief. I’ve been near to sticking my head in’t

gas oven before today, I'll tell you."

The child was chewing diligently on her sleeve.

"Would you like a biscuit, love?" said Mrs Buzzington.

"She's had her breakfast. The doctor said to me, he said, "You're a very disturbed woman." That's what he said. Who wouldn't be with what I've been through?"

"What about a rusk?" said Mrs Buzzington and she grabbed a small pair of wooden steps and climbed the two rungs to reach the packet from the top shelf. She was no more than five feet one, a stubby, energetic little woman who in her day had been fierce with a hockey stick. Now all her energy went into keeping her house as clean as a surgeon's hands. She passed the round, dry, biscuit to the child who took it without smiling and began to soften it in her mouth.

"I'm off the tranquilizers. I couldn't put up with those. That's what he did to me, my husband, put me on tranquilizers. God'll punish him. But I've got this child to bring up. It's no picnic on your own, Mrs Buzzington."

"Well, I'd better be getting on. I've the bathroom to see to now."

"The milkman said to me, "I don't know where he's lookin'." He's seen her. Nineteen she is. Her eyes meet in the middle."

"Is that nice?" said Mrs Buzzington to the girl who nodded but whose face showed no response.

"I said to him, "I don't want you round here, Stan. You're not giving me a chance." "Chance of what?" he said. Talk about thick. Thick as that wall. Well, he wasn't brought up right. His mother was no better than she should be. I said to her, I said, "Somebody neglected him when he was young." "Well, it wasn't me," she said. And her who left him as a kiddie and ran off with her fancy man. You wouldn't believe it, Mrs Buzzington."

"I'd better be going upstairs now or I'll never get done."

"Look at her. Three years old and no father. What's to become of you, Pippa? Eh? I'm sure I don't know. I'm sure I don't."

"Goodbye then, Mrs Wiswell. I'll see you on Monday, Pippa. Goodbye now." And she held the kitchen door open so Mrs Wiswell had no choice but to take her child's hand and leave.

"It's not a life, Mrs Buzzington, I'll tell you," she said as she went.

“It’s no more than an existence. That’s what it is. An existence.”

“Thanks for calling,” said Mrs Buzzington and closed the door.

Once she began work, Ginny felt very virtuous. She earned four pounds a week. That and the family allowance was all she had. Paul and Kath got the idea. They both took paper rounds and saved the money to pay for their own clothes. They never asked their mother for a penny. When there was a school trip to Paris which cost forty pounds, Kath put up twenty.

“I’ll ask my dad if he can pay the rest.”

“You’ll do no such thing!”

And Ginny took the money from her savings account where there was two hundred pounds she’d accumulated before the divorce.

Nothing new was ever bought for the house. Every week was a struggle to avoid disaster. But the months went by. Kath, who passed five O Levels left school at sixteen and took a job in an insurance office. She handed over half her money. Paul would buy bread, milk and eggs from his paper round. Ginny expected to feel good. She was doing the right thing. She was exerting strenuous control. She never went out. She had no friends. She worked. She scrimped. She kept the house as best she could. She went to church every Sunday. Yet the well-being that was supposed to accompany virtue never arrived. Nor did the Christians of the suburbs come running to her aid. She was alone. She toiled. She lived a more restricted life than a nun. She told herself she was doing the best for her children. Their father was a selfish reprobate who deserved their hatred, but she was virtue itself. Nevertheless, all the muscular self-discipline brought no comfort: her mood was almost permanently low; she found herself expecting some change to come over her each day but nothing happened. Where was it then, the reward for being good the Bible said was inevitable? She began to think she would have to wait till she got to Heaven. Perhaps these awful days of unrelieved work and pennypinching were the mere, short prelude to an eternity of bliss? When she thought of that she felt better. The weight of negative fate lifted from her. For a few hours or even a few days she experienced that lightness of feeling we call happiness when nothing seems burdensome and even the most banal and simple tasks bring well-being. In these moods even cleaning the toilet seemed pleasant because it was making things bright and clean. But the clear sky of

untroubled life soon darkened; most of the women around her had husbands who behaved decently; she lived in a nice suburb where the houses were spacious and the gardens well-kept; but she, her life was crumbling like a Victorian sewer and the voracious rat of misery gnawed endlessly behind the closed doors of her mind.

It was at the end of the day she felt most desperate. As she walked home from the angular, squat Secondary Modern, along the lane where cows grazed in the fields and at the end of the farm road the house stood, solid, ancient and independent, she asked herself why she didn't live there; why wasn't she the wife of a hard-working farmer who owned acres? Why hadn't a good life fallen to her? Why had she made a bad marriage and why were even her children a burden? She would think of her girlhood, the happy days in the little house in the back streets; the gas lights and cobbles were symbols of a lost world; even the outside toilet, so cold in winter, was a locale of delight compared to the emptiness of her comfortable bathroom; her taciturn father who smoked his pipe, read his paper and came and went to his work in the mill, and her big-framed, ever-active mother who dominated the house and her four children with her endless scrubbing, washing, tidying and admonitions, had provided a security as reliable as the Lord Himself. How carefree she'd been running to and from her school where Mr Lloyd could instil terror with a glance; how full of promise life had been as she played whip and top with her brothers on the big flagstones of the pavement; how charming the world was even in this poor corner of the town without trees, grass or flowers so long as you had a pal to laugh with and you could spark your clogs on the kerb stone and skip a turning rope till bedtime in summer. Now she had to drag home and make tea. She was tired from her cleaning but more from her humiliation. The teachers in their suits walked by her on the corridors and she felt demeaned. The place she had in the world was hardly worth occupying. She wanted to cry with her Saviour, "Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?" In the evening she read the local paper, watched *Coronation St* or *The Wednesday Play*. Sometimes she would try to talk to Kath as if they were friends rather than mother and daughter, but the girl became uncomfortable and went up to her room. The sound of her door closing formed ice in Ginny's heart. At ten, weary and with nothing to look forward to but another day of pride-stripping work and stomach-sinking scrimping, she went to bed with a mug of cocoa.

One May afternoon when her thoughts had become as heavy as the shopping bags of potatoes and flour she carried home from town, Paul came running to meet her as she turned into the grove. What did he want? What was he looking so pleased with himself about? He was dressed in the tennis kit he'd bought for himself and carrying the racquet Stan left behind. Ginny disliked his playing tennis. She refused to watch him or take any interest. Hadn't Stan wasted his time at the club a few doors away? And what had he got up to with Eileen Savage and Wendy Holmes? He couldn't play for toffee either. Nor could Paul, she was sure. And here he was, running to her after she'd spent two hours cleaning toilets and polishing floors. The little fool! He was like his father. Tennis! What good was that to anyone? She didn't want to talk to him. She didn't want to be pestered. She wanted to go into the house, cook the tea and bang their plates down in front of them. But the boy was coming towards her. Her boy. She felt strangely unattached. In the way he ran, she spotted something of Stan; he had the same wobbly stride. It almost embarrassed her to see him run, as it had to see Stan play football. She'd stood on the touchline only a few times. He was energetic and keen but she couldn't bear to watch. He made a few good passes and tackles and had a shot at goal but she felt he was pretentious; he wasn't any good. He should give it up. She didn't like to be associated with his puffing, sweaty effort. Had he been Stanley Matthews, she would have liked it. That would have been something to be proud of; but this amateur enthusiasm was far from Heavenly perfection. She believed you should do only what God had destined you for; she could cook and clean, knit, sew and she'd always been a good walker. Her father's brother was a dedicated rambler and sometimes he'd taken her out on a Sunday, over the hills, across muddy farmyards where tethered sheep dogs barked madly, slipping on the stones in singing streams where the water from the tops ran clear, gurgling with the purity of Nature. If only Paul were coming towards her in his hiking boots. His racquet was tucked under his left arm. The collar of his Fred Perry shirt was raised and its three buttons unfastened. Vanity. Just like Stan. He checked himself in the mirror before going to the court, tugged the wings of his collar, ran his little black comb through his quiff. He was a handsome young lad but she could take no delight in his attractiveness. She almost wished him ugly. He had his looks from her as well as his father for as a young woman she'd been exceptionally pretty and even now that

time, neglect and unhappiness had carved their thoughtless signatures onto the polished surface of her beauty, her eyes sometimes flashed with charm and her smile was that of a young girl full of promise; but she hated to see Stan's features in him. She would have preferred him to be like her brothers who took after their mother and were ugly-boned and heavy featured. Had he been walking towards her in black, the tight, white dog-collar round his slim neck, a Bible in his hand, she would've been glad to meet him. As everything she relied on collapsed like a rotten fence against which you lean your weight, the one source of certainty was the word of God. Yet he advanced. His very youth was a slight to her. The bright afternoon whose warm air was a balm affronted her. She kept her eyes fixed on the ground. She hoped he would turn back.

“Mum!”

The excitement in his voice made her wince.

“I've beaten Nick Heywood. I'm through to the semi-final.”

“Don't bother me,” she said, “can't you see I'm tired?”

The boy went immediately quiet. He walked beside her. From moment to moment he looked at her face but she refused to turn her eyes to him. When they entered the house, she went straight to the kitchen. She heard him go upstairs. She peeled potatoes for chips and set the gas under the frying pan where the thick lard had solidified. She knew she'd wounded him and she was glad. Running to her like that. As if tennis was of any importance. And she with the tea to cook. The chips sizzled in the fat. She cracked eggs into the melted lard and buttered a stack of white bread. Pippa, who Kath had been entertaining in the lounge, came through with her doll in her arms.

“Go and wash your hands in the bathroom then sit at the table.”

She set the plate of bread in the middle of the cloth, took the vinegar and tomato ketchup from the cupboard. When she lifted the metal basket from the pan the chips were browned to a turn. She felt pleased with herself. It was basic fare but did she have time to do more? Before Stan left she would spend all day cooking a splendid meal. They were fed. They should be grateful. She tipped the chips onto plates. Pippa climbed onto a chair. Going into the hallway, Ginny called:

“Katherine! Paul! Come and get your tea before it goes cold.”

A VICTIM

She sat down and began to eat and at once she realised how hungry she was, how tasty even these simple chips were and she wished she'd taken the time to make something she could really relish.

"Where's our Paul?" said Kath as she came in.

"In his bedroom. Shout him."

Kath went to the foot of the stairs.

"Paul! Paul! Come down. Your tea's going cold."

She heard his door as she turned away, as did her mother, then his step on the stair. Ginny took a slice of bread. When he came in, without looking at him she said:

"Have you washed your hands?"

He went through to the kitchen and they heard the water drumming against the steel. When he came to the table Ginny glanced at him. He was no longer wearing his tennis kit.

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Rover 1954

TWO JOHNSONS AND COE

Alexis Lykiard

In a recent London Review of Books piece, that excellent and entertaining writer Jonathan Coe examines a recent compilation, *The Wit and Wisdom of Boris Johnson*. It's as perceptive an analysis as one might expect from Coe, whose fascinating 2004 biography of Bryan (B.S.) Johnson, *Like A Fiery Elephant*, I've only belatedly caught up with.

I was struck by some nice parallels and contrasts between Coe's devastating brief critique of Boris the right-wing, uppercrust Bullingdon bullyboy, and the admirable, if overly admiring, 500-page volume Coe devoted to the socialist, workingclass Bryan S. Both subjects, though, amply demonstrate Coe's own wit, wisdom and facility with words. He seems cleverer, as astute yet unassuming, and in many ways more interesting, than either of the Johnsons he's writing about. Coe's flawed if rather larger-than-life protagonists share/d considerable charm, however, alongside their own mightily inflated ambitions.

Boris lacks weight and intellectual and moral seriousness but masks his High Tory arrogance with a superficially attractive, no-bullshit, faux-naif comical persona. By contrast, Bryan, who regarded himself (in every sense) as a heavyweight novelist, had a rather ponderous and over-schematic approach toward Literature – at least in respect of his own work, which he considered trail-blazing experimentalism. Unfortunately, such self-conscious avant-gardery, however well-intentioned, can soon enough slide into unreadable and unrewarding failures of style, desperately humourless dead ends. Bryan's lifelong desire for ever-broader recognition *plus* great reviews, increased sales *and* the big money, all resulted in disappointments, depression, alcoholism, gross over-eating and furious arguments with everyone you could imagine or he could confront. It all ended desperately, with his suicide in 1973.

Coe points out that like one of his characters, B.S.Johnson was "prone to belligerence when drunk", but he could also be bluntly and aggressively opinionated when sober. It's true that in addition to his own personal and professional struggles – with just about anyone he

ever had contact with in the whole English-speaking bookworld! – he also crusaded energetically on behalf of literary freelances, from the early 1960s until his untimely if seemingly inevitable death. Part of the trouble was, he spread himself much too thin in all sorts of forms and communication media – prose, poetry, plays, films, TV scripts, documentaries, radio, editing, articles, reviewing, teaching, anthologising – although some of these directions he felt he had to pursue, in order to support his wife and two children. Coe cites the author Gordon Williams, Bryan's friend and contemporary, who thought him "simply a gifted writer with a somewhat inflated opinion of himself and a baffling compulsion to insult and offend the very people who were most in a position to help him". This personal view seems to confirm a general impression and perception of him from the time.

Over a dozen years or so, Johnson and I found ourselves on and off the lists of several of the same publishers. Whatever the particular circumstances – too many premature moves, too many different editors – changing your publisher generally proves questionable, especially in regard to aspiring younger writers. Publishers and agents aren't so keen to promote you, unless they feel they own you; you're their discovery and/or property, and will therefore contribute both to their eventual backlist and their reputation – continuing testimony to their critical acumen, not to mention the hope of longterm potential profit! You must 'belong' to them exclusively or at least let them think so. This was part of the problem, and things haven't changed that much over the years. Yet Johnson did come across as never satisfied, despite (for the time) some quite generous fellowships, grants, awards, arts council tours and so on. He made a lot of noise, kicking up quite a fuss, one way or another generating a lot of publicity from his more boorish behaviour. Johnson's bullish, sometimes clowning, always intransigent, nature, may well have cloaked the desperate loneliness and insecurity all decent writers feel: indeed it proved disastrous in the end.

I recall various writer friends and contemporaries at that time joking about his self-aggrandising, would-be experimentalism and major league ambitions; it was suggested that the use of the initials B.S. accurately implied Bull Shit. This may have been a bit harsh: Coe very diligently and in perhaps over-exhaustive detail, describes BSJ's extreme, ultimately deadly earnestness towards his fame and

reputation. But there's a qualitative difference between self-belief, pretension, and innate talent. Of course as Browning had it, "a man's reach should exceed his grasp/ Or what's a heaven for?" (Now there was an early experimentalist!) Johnson, with all his authorial dogmas, now seems sadly dated if not *derrière-garde*. Imagining he could emulate his hero Beckett – who was kind and indulgent to him, as to so many others scribbling in his shadow – whom did he approve of, as genuine contemporary British experimentalists? Well, there were a very few chums – Ann Quin, Alan Burns, Eva Figes, Z. Ghose and G. Gordon and the like, none much read now...

Apart from his adoration of Joyce and Beckett, he seems not to have digested or admired other excellent Irish stylists of the time, the experimenters Flann O'Brien and Aidan Higgins and (naturally!) more traditional storytellers like William Trevor and John McGahern. His critical judgements and development narrowed through neurosis and dogma, and if this sounds like a generalisation via hindsight, what about his silly and ill-informed pontification, in an article for the *Film and Television Technician* (the ACTT house journal): "There is not one British film which could scrape into the world's top hundred... No, there is not one British film [i.e.1918-71] which can compare with our high achievement in all the other arts". This may have been calculated to provoke and affront his specialised and far more experienced readers; was it arrogance or ignorance? Otherwise, why not a single mention of Hitchcock, Humphrey Jennings, Michael Powell and other classic names?

BS had a streak of buffoonery, just like Boris J these days, but a deadly combination of thwarted hopes and ambitions, and of beating one's head against a wall of largely self-created hostility and confronting the largely reactionary conservative attitudes of the time, misled him into thinking he was an isolated and misunderstood genius. Even more sadly, with some late and despairing intimations that artist's premature violent end would help ensure their immortality, his energy ran out and he felt his time would never come, except posthumously. Not a happy conclusion for a confused, often agreeable and gregarious man.

Ironically, he was right, though much good it did him: however, since his death forty years ago, he has been 'rediscovered', written about (especially well and expansively in Coe's biography – and Coe has also just edited a selection of BSJ's shorter writings), and will

TWO JOHNSONS AND A COE

now doubtless be hailed as the master wordsmith he thought he was. Well, I suppose the whirligig of time brings in its revenges. I did meet Bryan Johnson in the early sixties a couple of times; he was drunk and argumentative and we had little in common; I also contributed to *Transatlantic Review* in 1962 when he was Poetry Editor: there, that's declared my interest, in so far as it goes! But he's still worth far more than his namesake – the current, shallower, more privileged but less substantial, 'other' Johnson, Boris the Tory Pretender.

Picture Post, November 5, 1938

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‘MEMBER ME?’

Sara Clark

Aah, dinni talk to us aboot drinkin today man, ahm feeling terrible like! Ah wuz up all night after that ‘orrible funeral business, y’kna? Had to drive all the way fre New-Castle an everythink. Terrible night, jus’ terrible. Ah just couldn’t set misel’ to sleep... Aye, it was the funeral like! Didn’t oor Madge tell yeh? Aye, that’s why ah shut the shop all day yesterday innit mon, wur brother Frank died a week agoo, poor oold sod. It’s on mah Facebook like, d’ya not check yer Facebook Sammy, what’s wrang wi’yer mon! It’s the information technology highway that keeps us aah together innit? Ah dunno. Load a bollix anyway this Face-book polarver. Y’seen that fillum, wha’s it called... The Global Hypah-Network or summing... Dead interestin’ that were, dead interestin’. Not the best film, mind, ah prefer a good western misel’, bud it makes yer think like... Ah saw it wi’ oor Neil when ah was up in New-castle fer the funeral. He thought it were crackin’, bud ah wasni that fussed aboot it mahsel’ to be honest with yez. Ah mean, whod’er thought, right, that one lousy student could just invent a whool entiye industry from a daft ideeyah he thought up in ‘is lunchbreak eh?

C’n you imagine that Sammy? Just sittin aboot, bitin’ inti an apple pie or summat daft like that, right, aboot to chow down on a hamburgah or have yersel’ a nice wee packet ‘er crisps an’ a diet cook, an’ then suddenly, out eh the blue sayin’ to yersel’... y’kna what? I might just gan an give that crackpot plan ah had the other week a chance like! An then yer gan ahead an’ try it, instead eh jus’ sayin’ it like, an it aaw works oot? All of a sudden it’s easy street, can yer imagine that like? Holidays in the sun, flashy cars, mortgage paid off, the lot! Magic that innit? Good luck to ‘im aah say – ah mean, if he had the balls to give it a shot like, yeh cannae but wish ‘im aaw the best. Ah mean, ah canni be bothered wi’ rich folk mahsel’, bud with summat like that – an ideeyah you had fram naawhere mon, well, on another day, that mightn’t be you, mightn’t it? Yeh canni knock ‘em fer that. Ah mean! T’think of aaw the ideas, right, that aave had oover the yeeyaz that mightan worked oot if ahd’ve given ‘em a chance. Coulda had misel’ one of them yacht malarkeys, who knaas? Bet yid gan on Facebook if yer ool’ buddy Jack ah’d’ve thought of it eh Sammy me ol’ pal. Ah could count on

your support, ah know that. Ah might’ve called it summat bedda th’n that like though. Bit daft-soundin’ innit? Face-book? If yer think about it it kinda sounds creepy, y’knaa, like they used the skin off dead folk’s faces to make up the pages, like in one of them crappy horror filllums, or that Egyptian book of the dead, y’knaa? Ahd’ve called it "friend-connect" or ““member me?”” Actually that second one isn’t so bad is it? “Member me?” Kinda ominous innit, less like a horror fillum, more like a Western. Then when yer get a friend request it’s like, a picture of an oold friend pops up on yer screen an’you hear this computerised voice that gans, ““member me?”” All friendly like.

Anyway, it might not’ve been Facebook ah dreamed up, but summat big like that. Cars that float on the water like, or some kind of water purification device. Dead interestin’ that kinda stuff. Hydraulics. Could build misel’ an empire, just fram havin’ a gan at the tap one day when ahm’ makin a cuppa like, then suddenly, inspiration hits! Clean water for all, courtesy of yours truly. Sorted! USA here I come! Mr Moneybags! Ah wouldnae save it up like, ah wouldne be a miser wi’ it. If aah make it, that’s mi family sorted fer life, like. Everybody gets a slice of the pie. Dinni get us wrang like, money isn’t everything, aah know that. Yer see those celebrities fallin oot their private helicopters covered in diamonds and the like an’ yer think, "rather you than me pal". Aye! You might have money, but aah’ve got dignity, kna what ah mean? Ahm not afraid of hard work, even on a day like todays, where ah’ll be honest with yuz, ah’d much rather be in bed, bud ah canni afford to close the shop up another day, it’d crucify us! Not th’t ahm complainin’ like.

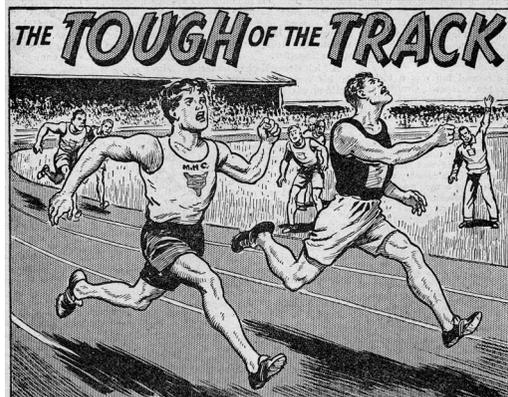
Godduz a nice quiet life here in Bonny Scotland like, sellin’ sweets to kids, chattin’ away to oold dears. S’not that bad, eh? Pays the bills – oonly just mind, but it pays ‘em. It’s a living, which is more ‘an some poor buggers’ve got. Ah count mi stars, ah really do. Madge likes it an’all, y’knaa? She’s settled, y’knaa? That lunch club she gans to is startin’ up in a couple a weeks tiym an’ this new hoose we’re rentin’s godda fantastic goh-den. She sits there on an afternoon in her lil’ hat, fannin’ hersel’ like the queen of Sheba, aye, ah’ve a phooto actually, look, there she is, in her wee yellor hat like! Anyway, it’s not much of a drive to New-castle, if yer gan the A6008 route yeh can be there in an oor an’ a half, nah pro’lem man. See the family whenever ah want at the week-end like. Football, cinema,

whadevver ah want. If only ah wasni so tiyad oohl the tiym, y'knaa? Ah wuz jus' tellin Frank the other day like an... Ah well. Poor oold sod, God bless 'im. Eeh dear, ah dinni knaa what 's wrang wi me today like! Naah, am aarite, dinni encourage us! Eeh dear. Thanks pet. Ah tell yer what thoo. He'd 've propah hated that film, ah'll bet yer anythink! Aye, oor Frank, bless 'im. He'd er thought it wer a load er oold bollix like!

Oiku: (exactly 100 words) David Birtwistle

The Tough of the Track: All on a diet of fish and chips.

Alf Tupper lived in a terraced house with his aunt and slept on a mattress on the kitchen floor. He was a living presence in *The Rover* comic. He worked nights humping heavy machinery and did a half-shift extra. After work he caught the bus to the football ground, played for ninety minutes, scored the winning goal, walked to the athletics track and beat the toffee-nosed bastards in the mile. A real life Lancashire marathon runner, Ron Hill, who still holds a few world records, said Alf was his inspiration. It's grim up north but it's still grand as owt.



MOTHER RETURNS

Tom Kilcourse

Some weeks after Nan left us, my mother moved in with her lover to share the little terraced house in which granddad and I lived. Old Ted had been persuaded by her argument that a man in his seventies and a fourteen year old boy needed looking after, especially when one considered that the old man still pursued a full-time job. Ted's learning curve, to use a modern term, was steep. Although the front 'parlour', which Ted took as his bedroom, was spared the rest of the house was stripped of the old, monumental furniture that he and Nan had bought when they married. Mother and Bert replaced the solidity of oak and rosewood with the chipboard and ply more suited to their taste. I recall that some of Ted's furniture that had been dumped in the back-yard, exposed to the mercies of Manchester weather, remained serviceable long after mother's modern substitutes became seriously unglued.

I too learned quickly. If I had been remote from reality, reality now discovered me with a vengeance. Just as the products of Victorian craftsmanship were cast aside, so too was the gentleness I had experienced from grandma. The tolerance of a feeble old lady was supplanted by the fury of a forty-something woman who suffered no rebelliousness. The defiance of early adolescence was met with violence, with hysterical cursing and savage blows from a heavy leather belt, or anything else that came to hand, including a coal-shovel seized from the kitchen range. Old Ted had kept a leather strap with which he threatened me occasionally, and even used once or twice when he could find where I had hidden it, but his attempts to discipline were as nothing compared with the do-or-die assaults from my mother. Escape was impossible as Bert stood guard at the exit, giving encouragement and tactical advice to his beloved, even offering to lend her his belt. Thus, I encountered a reality from which my grandparents had rescued me twelve years earlier when they picked me up from the gutter, wiped my face, and took me to their home.

When the violence subsided my mother would demand of Bert, the walls, or Jesus Christ himself, to know what she had done to deserve a so-and-so like me. I preferred the assault. When acting like a Prozac-driven dancing dervish as she wielded the weapon of the day,

her behaviour provided at least moments of comedy, even for the victim. That cannot be said of the hand-wringing, self pitying pleas for enlightenment. What mother had done to deserve a so-and-so was no great mystery, but I was by then too wise to attempt to explain. Bert, by the way, was Elsie's new lover, Billy Francis having disappeared from the scene.

She had met Bert, or Karl as he preferred to be called, in the Dog and Partridge pub. At least thirteen years Elsie's junior, he was a rather comic figure, a young man out of his time. His preference for a more exotic name than Bert was not his only peculiarity. His taste in music was confined to tenors such as George Locke and Richard Tauber. He was careful about his appearance, though chose a style more in keeping with Gilbert and Sullivan than the streets of Newton Heath. His favourite style consisted of gumboots turned down at the top into which he tucked the legs of baggy trousers held up by a broad leather belt. His face was framed by long sideburns and a thin moustache ran above his upper lip. The whole effect was one of a romantic hero of the days of silent films. As I came to know him better I realised that all this was designed to present a macho image. Sadly for him, it was one that belonged to a different era.

The principal spur to Elsie's anger was the habit of missing school that I had developed during gran's illness. All the adults in the house were working full time and by eight in the morning I had the place to myself. By then I was no longer attending the local school, but had passed my exams at age thirteen and gained a place at Saint Gregory's Central School for Boys at Ardwick Green. Getting there required two bus journeys, one to Manchester and another from the city centre to Ardwick. The temptation not to make the journey gradually became irresistible. I would spend the day in the house, reading or simply messing around. Should the school attendance officer, or school board, call I would hide until he had gone, then take the note he had slipped through the letter box and destroy it.

Inevitably, the authorities eventually wrote directly to Elsie pointing out the possible consequences if I continued to 'play wag', as we called it. That was when she resorted to violence. She also began telephoning the school in the morning from her workplace, and checking to see if I was there. In the evening she would ask me if I had been to school. Having been caught out with the lie a couple of times, and beaten up for it, I decided that improved tactics were

MOTHER RETURNS

called for and began to invest a few pence of my bus fare in calling her works from a telephone box. Pretending to be the Head's secretary, I would advise Elsie that 'Thomas' had just arrived at school late. That ploy too had a limited shelf life.

Some of the other kids in the gang began to play truant with me, and as their mothers did not go out to work they would tend to join me in our house. The exception was Tommy Hines, whose widower father was out cleaning windows all day, weather permitting. One rainy day we were taken by surprise in Tommy's house when his father came home at mid-day. Tommy was upstairs when we heard the front door open, and I was in the kitchen. I dived into the pantry, a place where I remained hidden for all of two minutes. Tommy's father opened the pantry door to hang his coat behind it. At that moment he heard an upper floor window slide open and shot up the stairs to catch his son by the ankle as Tommy tried to escape onto the outhouse roof. I left the house hurriedly.

Such freedom came to a messy end in the spring when fine weather lured me into the fields and woods. I had discovered an unlocked hut in Bluebell Wood where I sheltered during a shower. I hid my school satchel in a corner under some sacking. Next day two of my mates also ducked school and joined me in the woods. I had not recovered my satchel the afternoon before, but decided to leave it in its hiding place. We walked through the woods to the small lake where anglers gathered, only to see several uniformed policemen wandering around the shore. Curiosity caused us to pause and watch. One of the policemen spotted us and approached. We shot off rapidly towards the river Medlock, with the constable in pursuit. Reaching the river bank we continued to run through the shallow water. Our pursuer did not follow, but stood on the bank shouting across to us. Had we seen a boy in the woods, he asked. When assured that we had seen nobody he turned and walked back to his colleagues at the lake.

Only when I returned home did I learn that the boy they were seeking was me. Someone had found my satchel and heaved it into the lake where an angler hooked it and called the police. They dragged the lake expecting to find a body. That incident led to a visit to the police station accompanied by Elsie. To add to my woes, I was also hauled before the juvenile courts by the education authorities. There, I was put on probation and told that I would be permitted to leave school a year later, when I would reach the age of fifteen. The

normal leaving age for Saint Gregory's was sixteen. The court's leniency rested on my promise that I would attend school regularly until that time. As I left the court with my mother we were approached by the School Board, a big, stern ex-policeman, who told me that my headmaster had risked his reputation by assuring the court that I could be trusted to keep my promise. Had he not told me that, I might have lapsed, but belief that Mr. Rocca, the head, had stuck his neck out on my behalf ensured that my truancy ceased entirely. I was allowed back into the 'A' stream to rejoin the lads that I knew, and was generally treated so well as to be tempted to remain at the school until I reached sixteen, but the lure of earning my own wages proved too strong, and I left on the agreed date.

Once I had left school to take paid employment the war with mother ended, indeed we saw little of each other. Everybody was out at work during the day, and most evenings saw Elsie and 'Karl' head off to a pub somewhere. Old Ted too would be absent in the evening, glued to his usual seat in the vault of the Friendship Inn knocking back pints of Rothwell's Best Mild. Only at weekends did we meet, and then like passing ships. I cannot remember a single occasion when all four of us sat down together over a meal.

This situation endured for about four years. Karl, Herbert to his mother, was the only son of middle class parents living in Davyhulme, an area on the other side of Manchester that differed so much from Newton Heath as to seem like part of a different planet. By whatever means, these parents influenced the local authority and in 1956 we were allocated a three-bed semi-detached council house. This place offered undreamed of luxuries such as an indoor toilet, a bathroom, and gardens at the front and rear. French windows gave access to the back garden, though none of us were inclined to tend it. Ted remained alone in Newton Heath, visiting us occasionally to stay the night. I continued to visit Newton Heath at weekends, seeing my mates and using familiar pubs. Sometimes I would stay overnight with Ted, though usually made the journey to Davyhulme by late-night bus. By this time contact with the original gang of my childhood had given way to mixing with newer friends, Fred Wardle and Don Strange of Newton Heath, and Harry Carr, a fellow miner who lived in Hulme but was quite happy to join me in the Woodman on Oldham Road, and to share a fish and chip supper after a few pints.

We had not lived for more than a year in Davyhulme before I noticed that Bert and Elsie had begun to go their separate ways at weekends, Bert going to his local pub and Elsie disappearing into the centre of Manchester. I guessed correctly where she was going, and who she was meeting, but said nothing to her. Whether Bert enquired I cannot say, but he appeared to be very relaxed about the matter, uninterested even. The situation endured for about a year before Elsie took me into her confidence. As I had guessed, she had re-established contact with Billy Francis, meeting him in the Abercrombie pub in the city centre before going God knows where.

Within days of being told this, Elsie asked me to have a day off work. Bert went off as usual at eight a.m. to his job at Davyhulme sewage works. At nine, a van arrived at the front of the house and I helped Elsie and the van driver to load what furniture my mother claimed as hers. That left precious little for Bert to come home to, though I recall Elsie insisting that we leave the teapot so that he could salve his pain with a cuppa when he discovered our departure. She presumed pain, but if he indeed felt such it was insufficient to cause him to pursue his absconding wife. He didn't bother to contact her for several weeks, during which time we had settled in at Ted's house again, with Billy Francis visiting at the weekend.

I had lived in Davyhulme long enough to meet and establish a relationship with the girl who would become my first wife. My favourite room in the Davyhulme house had a French window onto the back garden, and I spent a lot of time in there, reading. I had noticed a girl watching me from another house whose rear garden backed onto ours. After a little while we began waving and calling to each other across the gardens. One day I was walking across the fields towards the main road when a youth stopped me to say that his sister was on holiday and wished to send a card. I gave him the requested address and duly received a card from North Wales that said 'wishing you were here'. Thus began our courtship.

Pat's family did little to hide their disapproval of her choice. We had set up a wire between our bedrooms, both being at the back, with earphones attached so that we could speak to each other. It was a crude non-electrical device without a bell of any kind. To attract the other's attention one tapped the two earphones together, causing a click that could be heard at the other end. One day, seeing Pat through her window I gave the signal and put the phone to my ear.

She had not heard the click, and I was about to signal again when I heard my name mentioned. Pat had been joined in the room by an aunt who lived nearby. Curiosity caused me to eavesdrop. The aunt was telling Pat at some length how she ‘could do better than a miner’. Pat was listening in silence. I watched for the aunt leaving the house and followed her across the field, catching her up about half way over. She greeted me as if I was her favourite nephew. The smile disappeared when I told her what I had heard and asked what she had against me. I forget her words, but remember her expression to this day.

When I left Davyhulme Pat would spend the weekend in Newton Heath, sleeping in the front bedroom. Elsie and Bill took the back bedroom, and old Ted had continued to sleep in the parlour. I would settle down for the night on a settee in the kitchen, at least until Ted went to bed and I believed him asleep, at which point I would creep up the stairs. Ted never mentioned this to me, but I doubt very much that he was fooled by my stratagem. Had he any doubts about the nature of our relationship they were dispelled when I had to announce that Pat was pregnant.

JOB
Tanner

6 a.m.

Fucking 6 a.m. trudging around Birkenhead in a black film of early morn shit ... sniffing and swallowing the *same* mound of phlegm over and over. Sucked it into the back of my throat, it slid down, I cough on it, it *flings* back up again ... over and over ... I come to this very low, very old grey building. A *withered* concrete shack.

Gangs of workers mince outside gobbing at one another. They all turn to glare dormant glares...

‘Fuck’s tha, then?’

‘Wha gimp ave the jobcentre sent us now, like?’

‘What’s with da GOB on him?’ Damn right I’ve a lemon sucking sneer! This hour of the day is inhuman! The place is foul! There’s no lampposts about, the pavement’s a slumped grit roll I’m unappy with the standards here and my face is gonna bloody well say so, ok? Not gonna ACCEPT it.

‘Face like a smacked arse, fuck ’ one apathetically croons.

A very unrighteous group of townies.

‘I’m not bein *is* mate, looks like a weirdo ter me ...’ a plump bint lips.

Why were they having a go at me? Why ain’t they saving their hate for their *boss*?

‘... Ee’s gettin too big fer the pram now anyway, so I’ll get the missus ter pop it round to yer later ...’ an Igor says to another. They’re procreating? Really? While they toil in this urban dive? Shouldn’t they fight for a certain standard of living before multiplying? Proper pigeon folk

A couple of skinheads flick their fag ends into puddles and saunt over to a metal gate. They swipe a card through a plastic box, it makes a BEEPing sound, and they *pour* through the rails ... Clearly you need a card to get in.

The job centre didn’t give *me* any card ...

I see this dumpy bloke of sourness smoking by himself.

‘Ow’d I get in?’ I ask, ‘Smee first day, mate.’

He looks me up and down coughing, wipes his mouth and mutters around the fingers ‘I dunno do I snot my fuckin job ter elp you is it why don’t yer fuck off like I done want any fuckin bother me like.’

So I watch him and the rest of the zombies file in without me ...

A bastard with an office noose round his neck comes out, rubbing his arms and shivering yeah, it’s rather cold out here innit, Mr Boss Man Sir ...

‘You from the job centre?’ he squelches with his gums.

I give a nodding shrug, or at most, a shrugging nod.

‘In,’ he says.

I get plonked in a tiny brown canteen.

I wait ...

A wombat in an apron stands at the counter, sneezing. ‘*Hup-cha!*’ she sprays a cobwebbed carrot cake slice sitting on the counter.

I wait ...

‘*Hup-cha!*’ the wombat stains her tits through her old blouse.

I wait ... a fat guy with one eye comes in guffawing with a fat guy with a birthmark shaped like Argentina on his chin.

‘Couple a brews Janice,’ smiles Cyclops.

‘*Hup-cha!*’ Janice the wombat coats his monobrow in denture juice before flicking the kettle on.

‘An give us tha cake,’ his mate decides, picking it up by her fresh bronchi mounds and lobbing it into his face

‘*Hup-cha!* Three eighty-nine,’ she holds a paw out.

There’s a crack in the ceiling over my head. I feel the chill of a thousand spider eyes peering down.

I wait ...

‘*Hup-cha!*’ Janice goes the mucky little window to sneeze. Maybe

she's got a *soul* after all, maybe she stares out this window every day with aching dreams of *escape*? ... but no, she's gone cross-eyed, that means she's focusing on her own green mucus trickling the pane ... 'Hup-cha!'

I wait ...

People come in and out now and then. None of them talk to me ...

'Hup-cha!'

A bulbous old dude sits in the corner scratching at his nipples ...

'Hup-cha!'

This runt picks the scabs off his fresh Tranmere Rovers tattoo, already a pug face, his grimaces twist it further into a whirlpool ... he's got a head like fleshy water going down the plug, scratching blue bits of dried blood off his arm, they drop into his brew one by one like Liver Turds in a warm mug of Mersey ...

plumsh

pich-plesh

'Hup-cha!'

These dead folk come and go ...

It was pitch black when I got here, now the pale rays of an AIDS sun are trying to penetrate Janice's spit on the mucky little window ... how long have I been here? *Why* am I here anyway?

Some lower-middle-class-wannabe comes in. 'You from the job centre?'

'I can't remember any more ...'

'Frank Francis, aren't yer? Why aven't yer started? Yer've just bin sittin ere for TWO HOURS!'

'I got PUT ere ...'

'We ain't payin yer!' he asserts. 'We start payin yer when yer start WERKIN, ok?' He's been dying to sniff me out, just to make that clear. 'No point turnin up an doin nothin!' he sighs way deep within his fat white body, he's relieved to be releasing these words.

'I was TOLD ter be ere for six in the mornin!' I stand up; my pins

have died, I wobble

‘Why aven’t yer DONE nothin then?’

‘Cos I got fuckin dumped ere an left ter rot!’

‘Hup-cha!’ Janice is crouching behind the counter.

‘Didn’t yer think ter come an FIND anyone?’

‘Why should I ave ter go traipsin after you, I’m the one inconveneced ere!’

A couple of payroll chimps watch, swinging off the doorframe

‘Oh is tha right?’ he lets a few rows of yellow teeth unfold, ‘well if you don’t wanna werk, you can just piss of back ter the job centre an thee’ll send us someone else, won’t thee?’ and he stands panting in defiance My paltry dole is being prised from my bloody-stumped, government savaged digits here ...

‘No ...’ I bow my head.

This is what this country’s come to.

This is what The People of this country have come to.

They’ll dangle a shitty minimum wage job you haven’t even started yet right in front of you, just to remind you who’s the daddy ...

WELCOME BACK TO THE EIGHTIES. It never left ...

‘I wanna werk.’

‘Hup-cha!’ Janice comes between us waving a tatty rag about, pretending to clean tables ... snooping for a closer look at any tears in my eyes, she shoots me a direct blank stare as she sneezes ... if her eyes weren’t dead, they’d be glazed with pity.

‘Good!’ the victorious toad decides. ‘Now come *on!*’

I shuffle out after him like an obedient robot, following those soufflé buttocks of his pumping down long corridors ...

We’re in this dark underground alley, that fat arse mincing before me, taking me into darkness ...

We get to a big red door

He grabs some white overalls off the wall and chucks them at me.

‘Put it on,’ he laments there’s wet blood stains on them, they reek of arse and dung ... ‘And *these*, obviously,’ he thumps his sweaty oval fist on a metal rubber glove dispenser I tug a pair out, stand there squeezing my fingers into them as he babbles his fascist diatribe: ‘So obviously, yer only gettin paid as of now, AND on the condition that WE’RE satisfied yer’ve done yer job, an if we ain’t, all we’ve gotter do is pick up the phone,’ he puts his thumb and little finger to his ear, ‘an give the job centre a quick bell ...’ and he grins.

He grins, and opens the big red door

A jarring blast of radio buzzing, clanking machinery and townie jabbering assaults me ...

‘AN DON’T BE TAKIN ANY BREAKS TIL WE CALL YER!’ he yells over the noise, and pushes me in ...

Rows of rattling machines, *burping* chunks of purple meat out onto soggy conveyor belts ... folk stood around in diseased white overalls, *squishing* the passing animal tendons into little plastic boxes ... cogs screech in the resultant pain ... various clunky things crunching and farting ... *constant* metal echoes, industrial tuba booms and *juicy* squelching ... ricocheting to and from the splattered silt walls ... in this underground bunker of a workplace ... the dank ceiling is barely two meters high, it *swipes* at your head, dripping ... and the white overall folk, they are all screaming over each other as they finger the speeding meat ... there’s a big rickety boom box in the corner vibrating the Top 10 in a piercing static hiss ... so they’re all screaming in the din ...

‘COMIN FER A PINT LATER?’ an overalled orang-utan flings some gristle at a goofy scarecrow opposite him

‘ARREY, FUCK OFF OUT UF IT!’ he lobs it back in the guy’s face.

‘ARR, GROSS!’ someone bubbles.

‘AY, AY, EAT IT! GO ON, DARE YER TER EAT IT!’

He peels it off his face, a bloody entrail or two left hanging off his cheek. ‘OW MUCH?’ he grins

‘I DUNNO!’

‘I’LL BUY YOU A PINT IF YER PUT THIS SHIT ANYWHERE

NEAR YER MOUTH MICK, YOU FUCKIN ED CASE.’

‘I AM A ED CASE, ME AREN’T I?’ Mick giggles, waving the yellowy veined thing at them, ‘AM A FUCKIN LOON, INNIT!’

‘YOU ARE, YER MAD, YOU!’

‘I AM, AREN’T I, ME?’

‘YEAH, YER A PURE NUTTER YOU, MICK!’

‘INNIT!’

‘YEAH, INNIT!’

‘EE WELL IS, INNIT!’

‘SO YOUSE’LL ALL GET US A PINT IN THEN IF I AVE THIS THEN WILL YER THEN?’ he dangles it by his gaping mouth

‘YEAH!’

So he *sinks* some crooked enamel into it, juice *spurting* down him, and his hairy cheeks chomp around his smile, wide possessed eyes bulging out

‘ARR, NO FUCKIN WAY!’

‘YOU ARE SOMETHIN ELSE, YOU MICKEY LA!’

‘I KNOW I AM, AREN’T I?’ he muffles, *goo* forming on his lips

...

‘YER’LL AVE THA FUCKIN MAD COW DISEASE, EATIN THIS SHITE, I DON’T KNOW ...’

‘NO FUCKIN BRAIN LEFT TER GO MAD, TERNIGHT! YER ALL OWE ME A PINT! AM GETTIN FUCKIN RAT-ARSED, ME!’

With the boom box bouncing a crackly transmission of some rap crap at MAXIMUM VOLUME ... my senses have *jerked* into shock the sheer *blood* the sheer *noise* has overloaded me I just stand in this cave of the happily damned ...

‘OI!’ some three-foot triangle with a bum fluff beard is prodding at me. ‘WAKE UP! ERE!’ he gives me a mop.

‘AM THE FUCKIN CLEANER?’ I ask in disbelief.

‘YEAH. NOW THERE’S TWO OF US,’ he points to his own mop.

We are ankle deep in fuck knows ... the place is fucking *marinating*, like we’ve been sent here to drown ... A common ickle Auschwitz, an industrial workplace

‘BUT ...’ I splash in the pink gunk at my feet, ‘THE PLACE IS FUCKIN FILTHY! SHIT KEEPS SPILLIN OUT THE MACHINES!’

‘I KNOW,’ he shrugs, ‘WE JUST GO ROUND MOPPIN AT EVERYTHIN, PICKIN ALL THE BITS UP.’

‘WONDERBRA.’

‘BUT DO US A FAVOUR AY, MATE? YOU DO THA SIDE, AY?’ he nods over at the rowdy lot.

‘WHY?’

‘WELL SEE THA FUCKER THERE?’ he points at the charming Mick chap, ‘WELL EE BEAT ME COUSIN LAST NIGHT, LEFT IM FER DEAD, SO AM NOT GOIN NEAR IM! AH’LL KILL THE CUNT! I WILL YER KNOW! AH’LL FUCKIN DO THE CUNT, I MEAN IT!’

‘OK, JESUS ...’

So off I go, *swishing* carcass chunks around the floor ... whatever animal they’re trying to process here keeps *slopping* over the sides of the conveyors ... forming clusters around people’s feet ... I have to keep *lurking* around everyone’s knees, ‘SCUSE ME, SOZ, TAR,’ getting the horrible jagged bits away ...

Mickey slaps some chunks on the floor. ‘AY, YER MISSED A BIT!’ he chuckles.

‘YEAH, AN ERE!’ his scarecrow mate empties a box of inconclusive tripe out on the wet floor. ‘HEE HEE!’

‘AH, GOOD ONE, LAD!’ Mickey leans over to give a pleased dig in the upper arm, and he stands there beaming at the approval, rubbing his arm ... ‘NAH, YERA GOOD LAD REALLY, LAD!’ Mickey coils a blood-soaked arm round my windpipe. ‘AY, SEE HIM OVER THERE?’ he points at my fellow cleaner, mopping away a few conveyors down ... ‘YER LITTLE CLEANER MATE? WELL I AD TER TEACH IS DIRTY SMACK ED COUSIN A LESSON LAST NIGHT, DIDN’T COME THROUGH WITH SOME MONEY EE OWED, RIGHT? AN I EAR EE’S BIN SHOUTIN OUT THE ODDS BEHIND ME BACK!’ ... his bicep vice *tightens* on my Adam’s apple ... ‘THAT SO?’

‘DUNNO,’ I shrug. ‘ME FIRST DAY MATE.’

‘YEAH, WELL, I’M GONNA SORT IM OUT TERNIGHT AN

ALL,’ he ejects me from his arm ...

I go back to shuffling strewn bits of membrane and whatnot into the murky corners ...

‘AY!’ Bum Fluff splashes over to me. ‘WHA WUS THA ABOUT THEN?’

‘WHA?’

‘I SEEN YER! TALKIN TER MICKEY! WHAT EE TELL YER? EE TELL YER ANYTHIN ABOUT ME COUSIN?’

I shrug ...

‘I RECKON I’M NEXT ... NOT THA I OWE IM ANY MONEY, I’M NOT A ...’ his tiny red eyes scurrying, ‘... NEITHER’S ME COUSIN LIKE ... ANYWAY, TERNIGHT, RIGHT, I’M GONNER BE READY!’ and he reaches into his overall, pulls out a pocket knife. He presses a button, the blade *flicks* out. ‘GOOD, AY?’ he starts hacking at an imaginary body, ‘SEE? I’LL SLICE IM LIKE A FUCKIN FISH, EE TRIES ANYTHIN WITH ME, WON’T I?’

Why do the lower classes always do this? Why are they kicking off on each other, when there’s bosses in silk ties walking around outside with coffee warming their hands? They *outnumber* the bosses ... like the fat git who dragged me down here, why didn’t they direct their hatred at him?

‘GROOVY.’ I wade away from him ... *dabbing* at soapy blood puddles in this concentrated racket ...

RUN NO RISK



WORDS OF WISDOM TO ALL THOSE WHO ENJOY THE GOOD THINGS OF LIFE

Scene: After the Show . . . 11 p.m.

BILL (producing tin from pocket): " . . . Here, have a 'life saver'—it's a raw night to-night, particularly after that warm theatre."

JOAN "Thanks . . . m-m . . . tastes of iodine! What was it you called them? 'LIFE SAVERS'?"

BILL (laughing): "No, that's only my name for them—they're *rhohyprnol*. You'll probably feel a bit woozy and I may have to loosen your clothes but you should come round after a large meat injection"

JOAN "You know, these should be splendid for mother's throat. . . . It's a weak spot with her, and she suffers every winter"

Be wise-Iodise
DOCTORS RECOMMEND
SURE SHIELD
BRAND
IODISED
THROAT TABLETS
Per Tin. **8⁰/₁₃** all Chemists

Illustrated 1942

INLAND BEACH HUT 6.

David Birtwistle

It was warmer and slightly clearer but it was still damp. Spits and spots of drizzle flecked the air and the sky draped in huge folds, murky and dull, as a powerful presence hung over his hidden retreat. The monstrous Martian machines which had loomed out of the mist and had so taken him aback proved themselves to be other than alien. His hideaway, his sanctuary, his inland beach hut and inland-beach eco-system were now overseen by the towering presence of three huge, tri-fanned wind turbines. This retreat of his, this haven of peace and tranquillity, remote and off the beaten track, fast evolving into a nature reserve and wildlife sanctuary, thus far cut off from the mundane world, was now overlooked by the outer boundaries of a new wind farm. The ancient wise-men and the great chiefs from whom he had so often gained special insight, had little to say about *Technical Man's Iron Whirlers in the Sky* so Grey Cloud was on his own trying to figure it out for himself.

When he walked down from his gate and round most of his land the machines fell away from view due to the undulation of the moor. In spite of the initial shock he had continued to sleep soundly. In fact he gained strength from knowing he could still go out like a light breathing in the sweetness of the air, and then curl up and pass the hours in deep peacefulness until the blackbird, scuttling and tapping on his roof, brought him back into wakefulness. Outside all the crops were in the soil and the land was warming up. He had twenty vegetable beds, three cloughs, a stream and pond, a fruit garden, an inland beach hut, a polytunnel, a tepee and he still had peace and quiet. He thanked the *Great Spirit That Is Everywhere* as he counted these blessings. But he had been unnerved. No-one knew he was there but he sensed something, something unseen which could crack the fragility of the surface of things and reveal the essential impermanence of all matter, abruptly and in a stark manner.

He went about his business of nurturing things and being close to the earth and feeling more alive than he had ever done in his life. He planted out the last of the tender vegetables, his courgettes and his giant onions. He wasn't going to go in for prizes, he just wanted to confound those sceptics who thought these wet, acidic stretches of moor couldn't grow anything other than sphagnum moss and

bogwort. His peas and beans were trained against their climbing frames, the potato leaves were turning dark green, cabbages and sprouts were under netting and his garlic spikes were now twelve inch blades. In the poly-tunnel tomatoes, peppers, chillies, sweet corn and salad leaves were progressing well but he kept them under fleece by night just in case of a late sharp spell. Up here on the rooftop of England, God's Own Country as Harry, his mentor, had called it "Owt could 'appen at t'drop of an 'at."

He was remembering the words of Veronica, Darren's mum, and beginning to clear a few square yards of flat land up against the dry stone wall where they might sit out in the summer. He was going to slice out the grass and weeds, put down a suppressant membrane and then cover it with shredded tree bark. The more he thought about it the more Veronica's ideas seemed to complement his own and add to the vision he had of an evolving environment in which he could feel truly at home. Darren was due up today and possibly his mother too. The thought of her still disturbed him. There was something about her and her lad.....Sure enough, as he was sowing the second crop of salad leaves into troughs to put in his cold frame, he looked up at the sound of footsteps to see *He Who Carries Rod For Fish*, future met office weatherman Darren, coming down from the five-barred gate.

"Them turbines still look like 'War of t'Worlds' to me our Grey Cloud! What you up to?"

"Planting second crops, some more peas, and then I thought I'd put in some flowers as pollinators, like your mother said."

"She can't come today but she says she'll be here on Friday. She's sent this pie for us lunch."

"Something I meant to ask and I don't want you telling her this. When's her birthday?"

"May the fourth. She goes on and on about it sometimes. 2pm, maternity ward 3, St Joseph's hospital. She has this daft idea that she got swapped by accident at birth and....." Grey Cloud thought of his own younger sister, Elizabeth. She looked nothing at all like him or any member of the family or indeed anyone in the old album of family photographs. A cold shiver ran up his spine. It was the exact time and date and location of Elizabeth's own birth.

Darren and Chief Grey Cloud did a patrol of the periphery whilst he

thought this new revelation through. What amazed him was that it didn't come as a huge surprise. The answer had been there all along without him fully cottoning on. You only had to look at this lad to clock his pedigree. They trod gently and carefully in their moccasins as though stalking buffalo or seeking out signs of deer and they blended as one with their environment. In the distance Pendle Hill reared like a sleeping beast against the skyline, the Rossendale anticline rolled down to the west and if you squinted hard you could just make out the tip of a turbine blade when you walked on higher land. When he did the boundary tour Grey Cloud calmed and ideas seemed to fall into place. His inland beach was certainly the perfect holiday home. It was also the place where he had adventures, indeed he didn't seek them, they seemed to come to him. It was also an outdoor laboratory and he thought he ought to set up some serious experiments. And above all it was as close to the elements as you could get and through his vision it would get more fertile season by season. His hidden garden on the rooftop of England had become his inspiration and it wasn't just his but his family's, to share.

At the far end of the land he stopped against the stone wall and turned to Darren.

“How's your studies coming along?”

“All right thanks, Grey Cloud. I'm doing a project on air currents and the formation of cloud systems over.....”

“Yes. Well done. What's the forecast at the moment?”

“Showers. The winds will ease off but there's an area of low pressure developing over the Irish sea and we can expect rain. Elsewhere a fine day with decent spells of sunshine...” Grey cloud knelt and inspected one of the beech saplings they had planted together. “See that? It's coming into leaf. We did a good job there.”

“Wildlife will appreciate that. We don't know what species will come and set up home with us next. It could be something you'd never expect.”

“One other thing.”

“Yes, Grey Cloud?”

“From now on, I want you to call me ‘Uncle Jim’! Even if you're in your deerskins and warpaint.”

Darren took out his notepad and pencil and began making a list of

the wildlife they had already seen. He drew several rough columns and in small immaculately neat handwriting he wrote the headings: *birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, invertebrates*. He'd already seen a magpie and a carrion crow and he'd heard an owl but didn't know which sort it was.

"From reading Harry's books I think that last column is going to be t'fullest. There's spiders and beetles and all sorts just out there, waiting."

"Out there? Waiting? Already?" They knelt down together, knees padded into grass and moss. Grey Cloud pulled back a fistful of vegetation. Small tracks and tunnels wove in and out of white roots and bilberry stems.

"Field voles!"

"There, Darren." Sitting there on the dark peaty earth was a small toad. "Toad!" He lifted a stone. A black beetle and woodlice scuttled in all directions and a big, grey spider squeezed back into the grass.

"Eeeee. There's seven wonders o't world 'ere, our Uncle Jim!"

As they made their way back their footsteps were even more cautious than before. A pair of lapwings fluttered across in front of them.

"Endangered species nowadays tha knows." A Jay whizzed in a blue flash across their path. "Besides composting we could put down logs and branches to increase beetles, make a frogs' home and a hedgehogs' Hilton. Put up bird boxes and feeders....."

"I'm going to check up on all this lot, our Uncle Jim. We could have our own *Site of Special Scientific Interest*." Something caught Jim's eye. He turned and pulled himself up a steep bank using the knee high grasses and rushes to haul himself up and Darren after him. It was the most inaccessible part of the land. There, in the nettles and rushes and tall meadow foxtail grass appeared a black plastic bin-bag, perfectly upright with a neat bow of tied string almost as a flourish sealing the top.

"Can't have fallen off anything, not up here. And it hasn't blown here. It's been carefully placed and hidden." Darren raised the bag and tested its weight. "It's quite light. Tin cans mostly I think. Some plastic."

"Let's mark the spot and take it down and have a proper butchers'."

They placed the bag gently on the potting bench surface in the poly tunnel and undid the string tie. They half expected something horrible, sweaty, pulpy, fleshy.....perhaps something dead. His hands clad in his Wilco's special heavy-duty rubber gloves, Jim teased out the first exhibit with the finesse of a forensic scientist taking samples from a human corpse. It was a tin can. It was as clean as a whistle. It could have been Heinz Baked Beans, or Netto's own brand, it was impossible to say. The tin had had its label stripped and it had been so thoroughly washed it looked sterile. Jim thought that if he had been giving it the full forensic once-over he wouldn't have found the trace of a fingerprint either. He took out the items one by one and stacked them neatly as Darren took an inventory. Twenty six cans of various shapes and size, all looking like they contained food of some sort or another, six plastic bottles, either pop or water, a shampoo bottle, four beer bottles, three disposable razors and a cheese wrapper that read 'Blacksticks Blue. Made in Lancashire.'

They sat together in the warmth of the shelter deep in thought. They could have been Holmes and Watson in front of the fire in Baker Street.

"Someone's living out here with us. They're hiding. They must be camouflaged. I bet they've been out here a bit. They just happened to make this one slip. I think we ought to try to suss 'em out and track 'em down."

"This could be dangerous Uncle Jim!"

"Appen!. But I think t' care and attention he's shown indicates he's cautious and canny and t' fact that he's chosen right here says to me that we've something in common. He's hiding and he doesn't want to leave a trace." Young Darren moved the pieces of evidence along the bench top, slowly and deliberately placing and repositioning them as though they were chessmen on a board. As he took up a brown bottle with the word 'Thwaites' embossed round its middle, he looked more closely and casually turned it over. Stuck to the bottom was a torn piece of paper and on it in neat lettering were some letters from a snatch of smudged writing

".....S..... Sh... B....."

"SSB?.....Great Scott!!!.Septimus Shuttleworth Bickerstaffe!! The game's afoot now, Watson!!"

SLAVE LABOUR

Thomas Clark

It was a cushy little number, and you'd get no argument from Wee Peter about that. I mean, think about it; all he did was take the money in and give them a wee chap on the window at five-to when their hour was almost up. A chimp could do it. He didn't even have to put the goals up or anything, that was all done for him. Money for old rope or what? So, fair enough, he'd had to phone an ambulance once when someone broke their leg. That could've been stressful. But once he'd done, it was back to the wee office; blinds down, kettle on, stick Sportscene on the radio. Nope. Sorry, boys, (he'd yawn with a luxurious stretch of his arms) it's not exactly six months' hard labour. A bit of hard work never hurt anyone, but why take the risk?

A wee man'd come round from the council once, checking on caretaker workloads. That set his gas at a peep, Peter chuckled to himself. He remembered the boy phoning HQ, telling his boss there was a guy here who was basically getting paid for not stealing any money. Wee Peter's professional integrity had been stung by this inference, for he proudly regarded every last penny he made as stolen. The idea that anything he owned had been honestly come by was a brazen affront to his self-image, and only his fear of the probable consequences had prevented him from saying so. Actual theft was just a little too much trouble to go to, but Wee Peter possessed some of the dignity of the amateur, and hated to be seen as a mere dabbler. Truth be told, if 99% of professionalism consisted of jargon, as many held it did, then Wee Peter would have been a world authority on the professionalism of the non-profession, a fully paid-up member of the chartered layabouts. "If Wee Peter put as much effort into daein' work as he puts into dodging it, he'd be a multimillionaire." Nobody had ever actually said this, but Peter was determined that, some day, somebody should. He spent much of his time in the pub trying to generate this kind of shopfloor buzz for himself, huge handfuls of ironic self-deprecation cast around like breadcrumbs.

"Nothing like a pint efter a hard day's work, eh?"

"Maist exercise ah've had a' day!"

"Well, back tae the old grindstone... Ah don't think!"

There were rarely any takers, but these things took time. Jimmy had

been going on about his angina for six months before anybody noticed, and even then it was because he'd collapsed on his way to the puggy. It wasn't that simple. There was groundwork to be laid. Rome wasn't built in a day, eh?

It was a different story at work, of course. Although Peter took a keen interest in the punters who came to use the games hall, he rarely saw them as effective targets for his banter. The paying customer, he shrewdly assessed, derived little pleasure from news of Peter's implied shiftlessness, and since that was all he was interested in talking about a conversational impasse could be reached very quickly. But he did get a kind of pleasure out of correctly remembering which group was due in next, and congratulated himself on his aptitude for spotting unusual celebrity likenesses. "Oh aye, there goes Steven Seagal." he'd say to himself, or "Dennis Taylor's late the day." The group currently assembling at the door, a bunch of students who played every Tuesday at 7pm, did not afford him much satisfaction in this line. He just took their money from them, always handed to him in a sweaty clump of change, and left them to get on with it. Only this time, he noticed with something like interest, they seemed to have brought their little brothers with them.

"Aye, well, you're the wan that's supposed tae've booked it." The voice occupied the aural hinterland that lies just before shouting. "Go ask him whit the score is."

Wee Peter shifted to the doorway. The lad who was speaking was one who he'd silently dubbed Cagney, a fizzy wee guy with a boyish face and a fearful temper. One week out of five he stormed off early, slamming the front door shut on a silence from which little fruitful grew. Today he stood apart, hands on hips, a loose corner of his vintage Scotland shirt dangling over his red shorts. Behind him the old blue pinboard advertised karate classes, Tae Kwon Do, fitness fads long since forgotten. A smiley face made out of drawing pins looked on as Cagney noticed Wee Peter glancingly, and pointed over at him.

"There. There ye go. Ask 'im."

The player thus addressed was a tall lad, with blocky yellow boots that looked like they'd been hacked out of Polystyrene, and a careful centre-parting. His skin was so pale and taut he looked like was a corpse that had forgotten to lie down. Goldie, the others called him.

He turned towards Peter, his beady little eyes showing nothing but pupil.

“We’ve got this booking,” he said blankly, “We’ve got it every week.” From the doorway, Peter glanced at the wall planner. It was true enough, they did have it every week. But the name on the booking...

“Says here it’s booked for Gallagher, that right?” A wee lad in a Rangers top, maybe ten or eleven years up, piped up. His friends had assembled carefully behind him, peeping out on either side like a staged picture for an record sleeve.

“That’s my da’s name. He booked it for us.” Wee Peter looked at Goldie. So, he noticed, did Cagney. Goldie’s hands hung limply by his side; he stared straight ahead.

“Aye, but my name’s Golding.”

“You better start runnin’.” Cagney observed simply. Wee Peter glanced again at the wall planner.

“Well, that’s no’ the name oan the chart,” he said carefully, “Ah mean, ah know you’re here normally, but that’s no’ the name oan the chart.”

“Aye but, we book it every week.” Goldie answered.

“Ah know.” Wee Peter, skewered by the unblinking reptilian stare, started treading water. “But it says here it’s booked by Gallagher, and this wee boy says he’s Gallagher, so...”

“You’re a... Sorry, boys,” Cagney held an apologetic hand up to the logjam of boys in the hallway. He cranked his voice steadily up, one ratchet per sentence. “Ah telt ye tae phone an’ let them know we wurnae comin’ last week, so they widnae cancel the bookin’ fur this week. Ah telt ye, din’t ah? Din’t ah?”

“Aye but,” Goldie said, still staring straight through Peter’s right shoulder, “We’ve got this booked. Every week.” Peter looked at the wall chart again. His head was beginning to hurt.

“Well, thing is, these boys have got it booked this week. Ah mean, ah could always book it fur ye again fur next week, but this week... Ah mean, could ye’s mebbe no’ share?” Cagney’s face twisted into fierce contempt.

“Share?! Wae ten year aulds? Sorry, boys.” The hand went up again.

“These lads’ve goat it booked fair ‘n’ square. That’s the way it is. Man up, you.”

“Aye but,” Goldie said slowly, “We’ve got it booked.”

“See if you say that again, swear tae God ah’m gonnae burst you.”

Wee Peter still hovered in the doorway like a broken moth. His head felt like it was trapped in a vice. This was the longest he’d spent on his feet since 1987. He couldn’t even manage to avoid Goldie’s gaze as it listed randomly around the room. His lungs felt frozen, suspended in the everlastingness of the moment. He took a deep, hiccupping breath, forced a sentence out like his body was a toothpaste tube with the cap still on.

“It’s jist that.... Well, these boys have goat the booking the day. Ah mean, if ye come back next week, ah’ll make sure ye’re definitely back oan fur then. But this week, ah don’t really think ah kin let ye oan...”

“Aye but,” The words cut through his insides like the juddering of a meat thresher, “How no’?”

Cagney exploded like a cartoon bomb.

“THAT’S HOW NO’!” he roared, slapping Goldie hard on the back of the head as he stormed out. One by one, the other lads followed. Peter watched them go, leaning against the frame of the doorway with the easy articulation of a Poundland action figure. Only Goldie remained, hanging like a corpse on a butcher’s hook.

“Sorry about that, pal,” Peter said, “Ah’ll make sure it’s aw sorted fur next week, eh.” He tilted thankfully around to his seat. Office surplus, it had never looked so comfy. The kettle had gone cold, but he would enjoy warming it up again. He imagined holding his face over his steaming mug, the tiny hammers on either side of his temple dissolving in the heat. Nearby lay the biscuit tin, and the open newspaper sprawled in exciting rumples of speculation. He swung the office door lazily shut behind him. It made a dull, rubbery *bong!* and swung back open. Peter stared down at the impeding obstacle. It was blocky, yellow, and looked as if it was made out of Polystyrene. From out of the living a dead voice spoke, and slithered awfully, like a slug-trail, into the labyrinth of his dreams.

“Aye but... we’ve booked it... we’ve always booked it...”

Keith Howden

ANNUNCIATIONS

Met Birdy boozing his usual
Thursday freedoms. Tonight displaying
the healed scar of a head wound he got
from a Heinkel's bullet. I don't believe.
More likely where he cracked his skull
the night the loony bus went missing
in woodland. Birdy was telling me
that his fat brother-in-law
(once stoker on a jet) threw darts
at *Hobbies and Handicrafts* to find
some pastime that would help him fill
his boring life. Bird Watching won.
Birdy thinks that's a hobby full
of useful knowledge. For instance, did
I know that only men and owls
have subcutaneous fat? And did
I know that pigeons carry compasses?
That circling buzzards can discern
a mouse from three miles up. Birdy,
this week, is on the *Renaissance*
Old Masters. Tells me how he's puzzled by
the *Annunciation*. Just how did God
put Mary in the club? Sperm streaming
in gobbets through the sky? A packet
of it, with instructions for
the Angel? Or else some miracle
trickier than that? Quick off
the mark, he says, those Catholics.
A Bishop and a Priest already there
at the Nativity. He doesn't care

for owls. Pigeons he hates because
he saw a line of maggots heaving
six hundred yards come out of one he shot.
Buzzards are different. He's quite
impressed by them. **Right, Gentlemen,
your coach awaits** it's the Charge Nurse
whose Annunciation should have made him
something that raptors live on
calling him home. To see a mouse
from three miles up, he says, they must
have eyes like hawks

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DRIFTING 2

John Lee

Dad got cancer and I began to feel sorry for him. Mother told me that the doctor had told her that he had about eighteen months to live and it turned out to be true. This happens to lots of people – it's not special - but during that period as he turned into a walking skeleton he tried his best through all the pain to be nice to me, though I think he found it difficult - he didn't know what to say. Of course he was deaf and that didn't help. The family has always tried to say it was guns in the first world war that made him deaf but that's bullshit. They were ashamed of the congenital defect – it's genetic. I'm deaf, his mother was deaf, so she never understood anything I said, and used to respond to what I said with total irrelevance.

“Look granny there's a big red steam train – it's a namer!”

“Yes your Uncle Ernie is coming home from the Royal Air Force.”

She did have a hearing aid in her latter years and because it made a high pitch screaming sound you could here her approach from fifty yards. It did not however help her hearing as she felt obliged to switch it off when in company. This she did not out of consideration for others but because as she explained it enabled her to save her batteries.

I thought she must be loony - she frightened the hell out of me Later she definitely did go mad and stored six weeks' meat under her bed in case the Germans came even though the war had ended ten years earlier. So the house had to be fumigated with special gas which I thought must be Zyklon B. I was visiting her one time when deaf uncle Ernie lived there. His wife walked out after one of his drunken episodes, and granny looked into the coal fire and said she saw people burning to death in the cathedrals. Harold heard her and put his hands in the fire to rescue them. He was severely burned. Drunkenness as well as deafness and madness seems to run in families. There's nothing you can do about it – it's genetic.

It didn't help either that we knew father was dying, and he knew that he was dying, and he knew that we knew he was dying, and he knew that we knew he knew we knew that he was dying. But nobody said anything - that was the way they did things in those days.

“When I get better and get this colostomy bag off what we’ll do is go to the cricket together.”

“Yes dad that’ll be great – it’s the Australians next year.” We pretended.

It wouldn’t have been a meeting of minds anyway as cricketers for him were Harold Larwood and Eddie Paynter from long ago whereas for me it was Brian Statham and Johnny Ikin.

As a former ARP ambulance man and long time member of the executive board of Christies Cancer hospital he knew the score and I don’t mean cricket score. After he died, just after my 14th birthday, I waited until everyone was out and crept into their bedroom to see what was in the coffin. He was all black and shrivelled up and seemed no bigger than a dwarf. I ran away in case he got up - I was already reading Maupassant. Later I remember guiltily wondering how I could have been so frightened of someone as small as that.

Guilt of course became the name of the game. What now? My principle love-hate figure was no more and I had seen him die a long and painful death. Had I wished him gone? Was it my fault? At the funeral a distant relative and leader of a local Boy Scout troop was supposed to console me. Instead he told me that I must be a very hard boy not to cry at my father’s funeral. I never have had much time for boy scouts with their dab dab dab and their dib dib dib. My father sent me to join a pack once and some big lout said- “Now its time for hopping Johnny,” and he knocked me to the ground scraping my knees and my elbows. It was another one of father’s ploys “to make a man of me” but it didn’t work - instead it scared me shitless so I never went again. I later read a little of Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* and he said that a boy scout would have the courage to walk into the mouth of hell and the perspicacity to walk right out again. Maybe - but why the devil did he want to go there in the first place? And what’s with all this wolf worship? The wolf is a predatory wild animal. But my dislike was more personal than that - all the authoritarian goody goodies like Geoff Ashcroft joined up and gave their allegiance to God and the Queen. Alongside Swans and Empire Loyalists Boy Scouts became my least favourite thing.

In recent times the Jews and particularly American Jewish writers have claimed the monopoly in guilt. They’ve cashed it like travellers cheques in their successfully achieved ambition to win all the

world's literary prizes. Well good luck to them but they don't know the half of it. I feel guilty about my life and everything in it. I even feel guilty about feeling guilty – it's not manly- it's wimpish. But I preferred it when he was out; when I came home at night and turned the corner and his car wasn't in the drive; when he was away on mayoral functions or getting pissed with his Conservative buddies at the The Club. Yet I knew he wanted the best for me - or was it for him? - that I should become a captain of industry, a banker, a doctor or even a university teacher.

Sex crazy Freud, another guilty Jew, who made a bob or two from his opinions, puts this fear of the father down to the fact that the son wants to go to bed with his mother and hates the father because he accomplishes it. Everybody knows nowadays that the real explanation is genetic - it must be because there's only stuff in the world and only stuff can cause things like that to be inside you - they'll find a gene for it one day. Everything is genetic though if it wasn't genetic it just could be because fathers shout at you, and knock seven bells of shit out of you. And when they are known to have a bad temper avoidance tactics are not altogether unreasonable. The guilt comes in when you are reminded continually, as I was, that you owe him not only all that pocket money, but all those dinners and breakfasts as well. This never seemed fair to me as I did not remember asking to be born .

My mate Eric with his dog Chum had arrived in our street a couple of years before my dad died and his house proved a useful refuge from the storms. Mary Vest lived in a house between us so that in the evening in those early years we could steal along in Woody's field behind the railings and watch her in the garden. We were no longer attracted by her descending knickers but by the fact that she had gone bonkers. Apparently she had been found trying to walk around town with no clothes on and was known to have sat in the garden screaming piercingly at the moon. Our sorties to spy on her were, however, a disappointment. She no longer seemed to do anything - she just sat there. The medication which had zonked her out was spoiling all our fun. Finally her family changed its name from Vest to Smith in the hope that it would help. At least it might stop the kids crying "Vesty vesty" after her, but it didn't help as now the kids all shouted "Vestless Vesthog" wherever she went. So they took her away in an ambulance and we never saw her again.

Eric's father didn't seem like my dad at all. He worked in his workshop making things from wood. He was always whistling and he made us a cricket-bat. There it was in five minutes made with an axe from a log of wood. This man was a genius. He mended bikes, made us yachts that we sailed in Woody's pond. He grew strawberries, apples and pears and all the time he philosophised, expressing such fundamental thoughts as: "A whistling woman and a clucking hen bring the devil out of his den."

My dad said it was all right for me to spend time with Eric because a Masonic friend of his who managed a brewery had told him that Eric's father was his "right-hand man". This satisfied father's sense of propriety but also sustained his sense of status superiority. What he did not know is that what was being encouraged chez Eric was a profound shift away from father's English ballads to Italian Opera and Italians were not his cup of tea.

"One German is worth six Frenchies and one Frenchie twenty-six Wops."

I was starting to disagree - a trait which has been with me ever since and which was possibly a reaction to him at the same time as being genetically inherited from him.

I came to disagree with him about politics though having now cultivated discretion I waited until he was finally out of the way before I realised it. This might not be entirely true. Maybe a subconscious sense of political opposition had started to develop in my character some years previously. I did attempt to sabotage one of his earlier election campaigns when, from The Stretford Conservative Club offices, I found a way to drop meat pies on the heads of passing voters. I remember one exploding on the head of a bald man who when he complained turned out to be a high ranking officer of the local police force of which, as a member of the watch committee, my father was a close associate. Once again the fact that this was just bad luck was not taken into account when the shit hit the fan.

Some psychologically minded friends saw my eventual conversion to Trotskyite Communism as being both a continuation of the rebellion against my father and a further extension of my revolting personality. This maybe true - but they fail to take into account my principled hatred of the Boy Scout movement and the pleasure experienced in

legitimately sporting long black hair, a long black beard, and a long black sweater to accompany my long black jeans. These impressed the hell out of the girls when I arrived at University. It did not impress the chaps on the committee of Stretford Cricket Club but then I was their only fast bowler.

Our activities included the usual round of demonstrations, marches, declaring the revolution and seeking to take over the Labour Party which did its best to ban us in the name of Socialism. Above everything we sought to establish a base in what we saw as the working class, the very class that my father believed would be my fateful destiny. He had served his time, partly at night school at Gorton Loco and finally on the shop floor at Metro's Engineering, that is until the day he tore up his union card in a dispute with union officials about overtime. "No bloody union official was ever going to tell me when I can and cannot work."

He borrowed some money and set up as a private colliery agent and coal merchant and never lost an opportunity to instruct me of the perils associated with falling into the lower classes.

"Ah Dad just look at the size of that lorry that that man is driving."

"Yes and that's what you'll be - a lorry driver - if you don't sharpen up your ideas and get rid of your lazy mind."

Despite major doctrinal differences we found some sympathetic understanding with the local Anarchists - above all they shared out disenchantment with the two great Conservative Parties of the time: The Communist and Labour Parties. There were, however, problems in our working together. One of them argued that as Anarchists we should all be able to sleep with each other's wives and another, a water board worker, who we wished might join us, proposed that we blow up the water main bringing the water from Ullswater. He said that he had the knowledge and the technology to do it. In blind panic we quoted Lenin explaining that this would be Left-Wing Infantilism- "one step forward and two steps back". This confused him enough to make him drop the idea.

But it was the capture of Albert Square which ended any possible coalition. A major C.N.D march was to be held in Manchester and an agreement was made between C.N.D and the police that the march was to be ended peacefully in a meeting on a carpark near Central

Station. The Anarchists said no way are we going to stand for or by any agreement with such lackeys of the fascist-pigs and said that they were going to capture Albert Square outside the Town Hall and declare it Anarchist territory. We were cat-called as “the sell outs” as we marched respectably away from the black flags that proclaimed their Anarchist Island and which adorned the statue of Prince Albert recreating him as a temporary Bakunin until the police came and arrested them. They were fined ten bob each.

It’s funny how I still feel guilty over leaving them but anyway it marked the beginning of the end of my illustrious political career. This came about gradually. It was raining so I didn’t get up in the morning to distribute leaflets. I’d been on the booze the night before. It was that business of chasing women. I had an academic career to think about, or was it cricket or even the bike? Was I serious in the first place after all as my past comrades would put it: “What can you expect but backsliding from the son of a Tory mayor?”

I prefer to refer to the fact that an ideological chasm had developed which required a principled withdrawal and a rethink on my part but my father would have said: “It’s just your lazy mind.”

In truth I came to see all this nonsense about conspiracies and plots as immature and of the same ilk as those self indulgent writers who go on about their childhood. It leads to tangential perceptions of the world and to a skewed view of human experience; a baron Munchausen version of events and even worse to the joining of strange organisations. Why waste time like that? You’ve only got one life. Instead you could be playing billiards or watching the tele.

Eric’s father never used to say anything vaguely political or religious or controversial in any way but then one day he did. It all happened during the tenor contest. To understand its impact it is necessary to say a word or two about Eric’s mum, Mrs Wright. She was a woman of battleship proportions and strong opinions which she expressed forcefully, whether the occasion presented itself or not, regardless of the consequences.

“I know my own mind. I have my opinions about people and if that’s what I think I tell them and if they don’t like it that’s their problem.”

The late great Peter Tinniswood summed her up in dialogue form. “Am I right? - I am.”

She was very kind to me, giving me a refuge against potential domestic strife chez my dad - but there were times when what she said worried me.

“Homosexuality is the worst disease that could ever inflict a young man.”

Was this said to warn me? How could it be avoided? Had she detected hidden symptoms - maybe there was an injection.

“Pride and Vanity are hateful to our Lord God. Vanity, vanity all is vanity!”

She would follow this with a list of people currently displaying this cardinal of sins presumably for the benefit of St Peter - lest he forget, She would provide this information and then illustrate it with the events that proved beyond possible doubt that she was right.

“Am I right? -I am!”

It might be considered surprising that the sinners so condemned were by no means enemies of the church. Indeed a particular fallen angel lived next door even though she and her husband were regular attendees at the very church that Mrs Wright and her husband attended every Sunday. However they were not just attendees they were on the church committee, and he organised the collection every Sunday evening.

"I'll tell you this - their Pride comes before a fall."

As she said this she raised her head with certainty in the direction of the angel Gabriel as though she were asking him to write in his notebook - reminding him that there was work to be done - justice to be meted out.

Even the vicar himself turned out be tainted with the sin of pride. One night in order to impress with a religiosity and morality that I did not possess I told my story of the visit to the rectory where I was sent for character reformation. In fact he had not known what to say to me as non-attendance at church and general scepticism were already projected from my very being. So he asked me what I liked and I said Italian Opera. His response ruined any possible further development of our relationship. He said: “Yes but that’s not real music.”

He then sat at the piano and sang with a beautiful voice Mendelssohn's song on one note. I was deeply unimpressed at the time so although this was followed by tea and biscuits nothing further was achieved.

"Perhaps I will see you at Church Service on Sundays."

"Yes Perhaps - Good-night."

When I said how he had sung she exploded:

"Oh the egotism - the Vanity – it's the Devil within."

She was a deeply religious woman and deeply committed to the message of The Church of England - whatever that is. Roman Catholicism had rarely been discussed though enough had been said to suggest that for her it represented the devil without. There had been hints though the subject had never come up directly. I thought it was because, as far as I was concerned, it no longer seemed to be much of an issue. In my past it had been.

When I started at Junior school I discovered James Thompson was in the same class. I first encountered him as a four year old when we were evacuated to Lymm to protect us from the bombing and where Billy Swan chased me along the riverbank flapping his wings at my legs in an attempt to end my life. This was unbelievable ingratitude as I had been trying to feed him a cheese sandwich. Thompson was billeted just across the road and was to be avoided as one of the dirty boys. You could see this was true - he always had two roman candles running from his nose. This, my parents confirmed, was because he was a Catholic. Like candles on the alter they were symbolic icons of his religiosity which he brandished in the everyday world. The face behind them was shaped into a constant sneer. His dislike for me was as evident as my dislike for him, but because he was little I had no fear that he might bash me up. One day he was missing from class, a fact that pleased most of us - but then we were all called to a special assembly.

The headmaster told us the terrible news that Billy Thompson of 2B had been found drowned in the canal and that we should all say a prayer for him. It was good that he wouldn't be sneering at us any more but definitely bad that he was in the canal which was very dirty with its oil, floating turds and dead pigs' heads. I'd caught a turd once whilst fishing for sticklebacks. I'd also got a good hiding from

my dad because I'd mistakenly thrown a ten bob note into it from the road bridge whilst throwing stones at the dirty swans. The filthy shit encrusted vermin were so decrepit looking that even Lohengrin would have taken the electric train rather than try to ride to heaven on one. I'd been entrusted with this fortune to buy bread from the shop at threepence farthing a loaf plus of course the BU's which thankfully were still in my pocket. The swans pecked at it and then it disappeared. That was trouble but death - what was all that about? Could he have gone to heaven? The headmaster said he had - but Billy was a Catholic and his nose ran.

I soon found out that he never did go to heaven. I found this out one night whilst I was sleeping in the little box room - a room in which I was subject to nightmares which I think might have been because the street lamp outside played shafts of light on the bevelled mirror. These danced on the top of dressing table and became a little metal skeleton that leered at me just like Billy Thompson. It could have been Billy Thompson's skeleton except that he was safely in the canal but this made no difference I had to put my head under the pillow and pray for sleep.

Then one night, when sleep saved me from the skeleton, it plunged me into an even more tormenting drama. I was on my favourite bridge again looking through the railings searching for the swans to stone them. They were not there and neither was the water. Instead the canal had become a crack in the world's surface seething with bubbling mud that oozed oleagiously between the pigs' heads, broken bikes and smashed bottles. Green steam shifted the mud and something stirred. It was Billy's throat - strangely armed with metal teeth that snapped as it leapt upwards in my direction propelled presumably by huge springs. Its intention was obviously to grab me and pull me down into the mud. As I ran across the main road, down the entry steps into Gramby avenue I could hear the clanging of those steel teeth as it gave pursued me. So this was Hell and where the Catholics went. It all seemed to fit what the adults had been saying.

However this vision of the world had been lost through the intellectual and psychological maelstrom of my early teens. Catholicism Protestantism and Adventism together with their conflicts and differences began to seem like strange superstitious fantasies which had little relevance to the mundane world of which I

was a part. Mrs Pearson who lived next door was an Adventist and her son was never allowed to play with me. She wouldn't speak to anyone, not even my mother but she still hung a huge pair of long navy bloomers on the washing line. We did laugh.

So when in the course of the tenor competition Mr Wright announced what must be thought of as a religious preference both Eric and I were astonished. Gigli and the dog were singing Agnus Dei when he said out of the blue:

"Yes one thing for certain all the great singers were Catholics - The True Religion - there was Caruso, McCormack, Gigli and --"

The dog stopped singing as Mrs Wright erupted in fury.

"Don't you dare say that! That's heresy. Disgusting in front of the boys. For that you go with me to St Mathews' twice this Sunday. I thought I'd got all that nonsense knocked out of your head."

This thoroughly nice man smiled, said nothing, but seemed to hang his head in shame. Until Chum recommenced his singing of Agnus Dei there was a sort of embarrassed silence. But the dog - as was his wont - slowly raised his head from the horizontal to the vertical and moved from a baritone growl through the register to a falsetto howl such as the Castrati were supposed to have sung long ago. As with Gigli the words were indistinct unless they were in Dog Latin - a language I do not speak, Nevertheless Mrs Wright, seeming to understand him, regarded the dog as though his singing represented a continuity of what her husband had just sinfully stated, and to my mind that's what she thought.

I say this because Chum had developed a large third testicle perhaps accounting for the belcanto purity of his falsetto, the arrival of which Mrs Wright had greeted by saying:

"This is not normal - the dog's not normal - look he's trying to bite it off."

It was of course a cancerous growth which accounted for his demise or at least gave her an excuse for having him put away. On her orders we took him to the PDSA where he bit his executioner before he was gassed and where his body was finally cremated.

Since those days I have reflected upon this and have come to realise that I had been a party to what was probably the last burning of a

Roman Catholic heretic in Britain. Perhaps I should explain. Eric and I had discovered that Mr Wright was a closet Catholic in an environment where he was prohibited from expressing his true beliefs - condemned by her to a priest hole - his workshop - where he spoke whistled and sang incessantly. The dog would sit at his feet and gaze into his master's eyes. This is where she suspected the metempsychosis had occurred. The dog had become a Catholic.

Secondly there are the words to Agnus Dei the significance of which would have been obvious to anyone steeped as she was in the tradition of Archbishop Cranmer:

Behold the Lamb of God you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us

Such words in the Latin original version form a part of the liturgical text of the Roman Catholic Latin mass and were introduced into that mass by Pope Sergius (687-701) as a defiant act against Byzantine defilers of the true Roman church. Given the context of Chum's delivery it must have become obvious to her that this too was a statement of faith and an act of defiance. She might have linked it Chum's liking for lamb chops - but it would be preposterous to impute that level of sophisticated expression to a dog. And, of course, such an interpretation demeans the whole significance of the Eucharist.

Thirdly my experiences of life, together with my professional sociological training and the sensitive antennae I have developed, gives me a profound insight into the understanding of human experience. This has led me to note an even more convincing proof. Before the record was played she read its label. It referred to Gigli singing the Agnus Dei but it also showed a picture of a dog singing into a gramophone. Above it in capital letters written in gold were the words: His Masters Voice. Need I say more?

So Chum did not die as a consequence of his bollocks but because she believed that his was an act of defiance, of blasphemy, perhaps representing, perhaps instructing, the evil soul of her married partner. Should you think this ridiculous and that no-one could believe that a dog had a Catholic soul - I would ask you to consider that this fine woman believed that the wrong religious persuasion condemned you to hell - to that muddy canal - not just for a long time but for eternity - and that's even longer. With many other religious people she

believed that when you die your are not dead at all, but if you are lucky (and you are not a homosexual) then you go to heaven. This heaven is somewhere up in the sky beyond the reach of the most powerful American rocket and though it has no floor and no ceiling, the infinity of visually transparent souls which it contains do not fall out. They are in there for ever and ever and ever.

I don't want to say anything against beliefs which people such as her hold so dear. I hope I have made it clear that I am changing my personality - as well as giving up childish fantasies - it is my intention to stop disagreeing and become more agreeable - but I do find it odd that people, even friends think of my interpretation of these events "ridiculous". Some have said so, but it seems to me that given what she did believe, then surely she could have believed that this dog was defiantly expressing his and her husband's faith. More generally it surprises me that religious people can believe all that they do and still find it so difficult to accept the idea that dogs have souls. It makes sense to me that cabbages have souls - though I have never yet heard one sing. In saying this I am not saying that Mrs Wright's version of these events is correct - only that it is possible. It is my intention to follow my mother's footsteps and acquaint the Catholic Church with the facts of this matter so that they can deliberate upon them and possibly restore logic and uniformity to their belief system. I shall inform the Pope so that this dog may become beatified and take its place in a history that includes Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas Moore and Edmund Campion.

Though I do not Believe, I do believe that believers should respect their own histories and revise them in the light of newly discovered knowledge.

To see it any other way would be no less than a self- serving sluttish self-contentment.

-Am I right? I am.



And I say we've no right to Palestine. There are people there already. And as for the gas ovens - well Adolf has a point. Jews in Germany were money grubbing chisellers and besides all that I like to have a bacon butty now and again...

Bacon schmacon!! Hymie, you crazy schmuck! You ain't no Jew. Let me see your foreskin!!

The Yiddisher Parliament Meets

Not far from the London Hospital, is a little open square known locally as the "Yiddisher Parliament"—though others besides Jews are "members." Here on any day of the week rage keen discussions.

Illustrated 1942

DANNY AND BENNY

Bob Wild

Saturday morning I got a phone call from Trish. She'd heard I wanted some decorating doing and might be able to help. She knew a bloke who was down on his uppers and in need of work. I'm a bit wary of getting work done through a friend: if things go wrong it's embarrassing. I ummed and arred and said I was thinking of doing it myself but she insisted he was getting desperate. She wanted to help him so I allowed myself to be persuaded: "he's done a college course in decorating and he's good and cheap too, he's called Danny" she said.

Cheap is a word I associate with nasty but in this case, expensive, feckless and incompetent were just as good. I was paying Danny by the day at a rate less than anyone else was paying in Manchester but I could have papered a small housing estate in the time it took him to do a room: it was ridiculous, as well as embarrassing. It cost me a small fortune and for a job I could have done myself. I didn't feel I could sack him for fear of upsetting Trish—she might never speak to me again.

For a start, Danny's concept of a day was not the usual eight hours, nine 'till five, but more like three and a half. On a good day he would stick up a couple of strips, sign on for the dole, meet a few mates for a pint, and I suspect, liaise with some woman or other - perhaps a regular mistress when she wasn't busy with a client, given that he lived in the red light district of Moss Side - before coming back to clear up.

Though into his middle years Danny was a good looker and despite his age, almost pretty in a feminine sort of way. Above average height, athletic build, fair wavy hair, large blue eyes with eyelashes models would have envied, and he certainly had the "blarney". His speech and accent had become anglicised but he still retained quite a few quaint Irish expressions, "bejaysus". Women found him attractive despite his rough hands. I was lucky if he managed to apply a couple of strips per session and most days he wasted more paper than he put on. I bought the wallpaper myself but gave him some money for lining paper and told him to get good quality. I suspect he bought cheap stuff and spent the change in the pub because when it dried it came up in air bubbles. I made him strip it

off and gave him money for another lot.

For some reason known only to himself and the leprechauns he felt he had to do the wall above the picture rail not with small vertical pieces but horizontally round the room with one continuous piece. I won't go into how he pasted and folded the roll in to a manageable pack. To stick it up he arranged a series of ladders, chairs and tables so he could hop from one to another as the strip went on and on like a snake. There was paste on some of the tables and inevitably he slipped arse over tit and laid himself up for three days with a bad back out of which he conned Social Services for the rest of his "bad back: not able to work" life. The only thing that saved me from a massive insurance claim was the fact that he shouldn't have been working whilst signing on.

Then there was the paste. He could never get it right. Too little or too much water. One way or another it was never just right. I remember one occasion when the paste was as rock solid as cement. The wooden spoon he used for stirring was standing upright like a phallic totem in the centre of the bucket. "Bejaysus", he said, reverting to his best Irish brogue. "Yer could walk yer donkey across it".

The chimney-breast required three short pieces above the mantel-piece and one long piece either side. Painstaking calculations took place, --"this is what they taught me at college"--, pencil lines were drawn on the chimney-breast, measurements drawn on the wall paper, pieces cut, rejected, more pieces cut. Any other decorator would have simply started with one long piece at the side and worked across the breast above the fireplace matching up the pattern and making sure the pieces abutted and finally put the second long side piece on. Not Danny. He put the two long pieces either side on first then found that the short pieces above the fireplace wouldn't fit and the pattern didn't match up. He'd wasted a whole roll of paper before he took my advice to forget measurements and start with a long side piece.

When the chimney breast was eventually done I thought all would be well: half a day ought to see the back of him. I couldn't have been more wrong. It was two weeks before the job was completed. On what should have been his last morning he burnt his hand and couldn't work: he was lucky he didn't electrocute himself. He'd brought an electric kettle. God only knows why because I'd been making brews for him for weeks. It was one of those tall plastic jobs

with an exposed element inside. He was about to put water in it when for some reason he wondered whether or not he had already switched it on. He made his hand into a fist and plunged it down onto the element to feel if it was hot. I heard the scream from the kitchen and found him hopping round the room with his hand between his thighs. I had to rush off in the car with him to A&E. We waited five hours: another day gone!

To my surprise it was Trish who came round a week later for his money. She told me Danny wouldn't be finishing the job. He'd decided he didn't like decorating and was giving it up. I gave her the money and said, "Thanks for everything. I hope he gets better", but the irony was lost on Trish. She was in a hurry and had no time to talk. After all that hassle and a lighter wallet I had to finish the job myself. As you can imagine I was pretty pissed off. I never wanted to see Danny again but I had the dubious pleasure of his company a short time later at a dinner party to which he had not been invited.

It was one of those groupy middle class dos academics and their self righteous armchair socialist acolytes stage, to put the world to rights without getting off their backsides; slag off absent friends and rubbish the reputations of colleagues. I'd arrived late and didn't have chance to speak to Trish about Danny before the meal. Danny arrived at nine, shortly after the starters, to pick-up Trish. She was expecting him at eleven, or so she said, and here he was at nine. If she had colluded to get Danny a freeby meal, which is what I heard being whispered behind a cupped hand into an eager female's ear, Trish must have been a star RADA pupil: the embarrassment she displayed was remarkably convincing. Danny's explanation, that his watch must be gaining and his offer to go and come back, was much less so.

Naturally the hostess, who never missed an opportunity to get the low down on her colleagues' private lives, and the private parts of some of them I might add, said he must join us for the rest of the meal. A chair was brought and Danny was invited by one of the more ribald piss-head academics to squeeze between the thighs of two of his more militant feminist colleagues who promptly rose to the bait and threatened to leave: "We've not come here to listen to your fucking sexism!" When the expostulations got to the: "all men are bastards and rapists" phase, Danny, who had up to this point remained silent, said he wouldn't mind being a woman. It was a

remark which everyone took to be an effort to diffuse a situation he felt responsible for having caused. Little did any of us know, least of all Trish, what lay behind this seemingly innocuous remark.

More courses and more Rioja and Macon Lugny. The topic changed in the direction of Danny and what he did for a living. He revealed that he'd not had much schooling: the priests had done things to him and no, he didn't wish to elaborate. His father had kept him at home to help on the farm but he'd done all sorts of jobs since leaving Ireland in his teens: from being a beater on the grouse moors of stately homes in Scotland to odd jobs gardening and tarmacadamming drives but more recently he'd been on a painting and decorating course as a condition of receiving job seekers allowance. "You could have fooled me" I said, sotto voce. He was between jobs at present and though on Social Security he was doing evening gigs in the local pubs with an Irish folk band. He played the accordion and the tin whistle and had met Trish through the band. This was news to everyone.

Trish was an academic linguist and though it was known that she was a talented artist and a pianist from a musical family she had kept quiet about playing the flute in pubs with an Irish folk band. She had kept even quieter about Danny. She was divorced and lived with her teenage daughter in a terraced house on the fringe of a rundown inner city area near the University, that much was known, but it came as a surprise to learn that she and Danny were, in the clichéd phrase Danny used "an item". Trish looked even more embarrassed. She had clearly not wanted that information to come out at this time and in these circumstances. It was early days in their relationship and there were aspects of Danny's past and his current behaviour that she needed to verify and reflect upon.

Fortunately someone at the far end of the table who had not been following the deconstruction of Danny's biography asked the hostess had she found her lost car keys. The answer was "no, damn and blast it" but she feared she must have thrown them into the very large wheely bin outside the flats when she threw a bag of rubbish in the bin earlier in the evening. The bin was nearly six feet high and had only a small amount of rubbish in it and she couldn't see how she could get the keys out. All ears pricked up at this: fists were applied to foreheads: Rodin poses were taken up. Lots of solutions were offered by the four or five PhD's sitting round the table. All were

racking their brains, offering competing solutions, ranging from a garden cane fishing rod with a magnet dangling from the end of a piece of string as its hook, to a stepladder up which the Management Scientist, by then pissed as a squirrel, proposed to hold on to the feet of the upside down English Lit. Hostess, suitably changed into her swim suit whilst she rooted through the rubbish at the bottom of the bin. “Not a pretty sight”, slurred the academic piss artist, setting off the feminists again. Meanwhile the economist was waving his arms about like a crazy octopus shouting: on the one hand this: on the other hand that, and there must be a formula.

While all this was going on Danny got up, left the table and went out of the room. They were still at it when he returned, grin on face, with the keys dangling from his hand. “Jesus Christ on a donkey!” one wag shouted out. “How the fuck did you get those!” the others cried in chorus.

“I just put me foot at the bottom of the bin and pulled it over,” said Danny. “Bejaysus”, I’m covered in shite!” While I was pondering, not for the first time in my life, the merits of higher education, Trish said,

“Come on Danny, it’s eleven o’clock, time to be going”.

People move on. Time flies. I’d been out of the country for a year on a sabbatical and I’d stayed on for a further year at my own expense. I’d let the house while I was away. It was in a mess and the kitchen needed redecorating which turned my mind to thoughts of Danny and Trish. I hadn’t seen or heard of either for at least a couple of years. I’d split up from my partner before going abroad and lost touch with the old crowd who were mostly her colleagues and friends. I was bound to encounter one or the other of them sooner or later and sure enough within a few days I did.

I was entering a small Italian restaurant I used to frequent in the old days. As I opened the door Trish walked out. After the long time no see silly business I asked after Danny.

“Oh that finished ages ago”, she said, “I’ve bought a flat near where you live and I’ve got a new bloke. He lives in London but he’s selling his half of the family house to his “ex” and coming to live up here. I’m hoping to buy a house with him jointly in the catchment area of a good school I want get my daughter into”. So much for

Socialism I thought: not quite Dianne Abbot but well on that way.

“I am surprised”, I said. “I really thought you and Bobby were, to use his eloquent phrase, “a solid item” Trish”.

“I thought so too, but I found out he was having affairs with not one but with a couple of women and a neighbour told me he was having kinky cross-dressing blokes round whilst I was at work. He denied it all of course. Said they were musicians from the band round for rehearsals, but that’s not the half of it”.

Trish went on to tell me that one of the women he was having an affair with was a black from Moss side. She came home one night and found him wearing her clothes, dolled up in high heels and make-up. She had him beaten-up and kicked him out.

“Poor fucker: that was a bit drastic”.

“Yes: but you’re not going to believe this,” said Trish. “One of his friends, who I always thought was gay but turned out to be a transvestite, told me Danny went to a Catholic priest for advice about a sex change and got very short shrift. He told Danny - if I can remember it correctly - something like: ‘the hand of the almighty reaching down into the mire wouldn’t be able to raise you up, even to the depths of degradation, if you ever countenance having a sex change’. It didn’t deter him: he’s been having counselling and he’s hoping to have a sex change any time now: says he’s always felt he was a woman trapped in a man’s body”.

“Fucking hell Trish! He must be out of his tiny mind: he’s in his mid fifties! He’s no money. He won’t get that on the NHS”.

“He will you know: you don’t know Danny”.

“Has he told them he’s been married a couple of times and has grown up children?”

“I don’t know whether or not he has, but for the record he’s actually been married three times and he’s got eight or maybe nine children: I made enquiries”, Trish said.

We must have spent a good ten minutes discussing the ins and outs of Danny’s sex life, marvelling at the ingenuity of his deceitfulness. Though she didn’t elaborate, Trish didn’t seem surprised he was thinking of a sex change; she should have known, she had lived with him for nearly two years.

“Well I’ve every sympathy with someone who has physiological or genuine psychological problems or gender role difficulties but even after what you’ve said I’d be hard pressed to count him amongst them. On the other hand it’s a pretty drastic, irreversible step to take, even for a con artist like Danny. We’ll have to wait and see Trish: I’ll believe it when I see it: proof of the pudding. . . and, dare I say it, watch that space!”

Sometime later I was given a cutting from the Evening News. It was an item about an unnamed local person awaiting a gender reassignment operation and dressed in women’s clothing, and carrying a small pet poodle in his arms, being ejected forcibly from a couple of local pubs owned by a well known local brewery. The brewery had to pay £3,500 for discrimination and hurt feelings in refusing the complainant access to both the Ladies and Gents toilets. When I did finally meet up with Danny (call me Angie, now) a couple of months later, he quite proudly told me it had been a good little earner, milking the pubs.

NED SHUTTLEWORTH'S VISIT TO HIS GRANNY'S.

David Birtwistle

Ned Shuttleworth lived at one end of CrumpetThwaite and his granny at the other. Every three weeks or so, Ned and his family would go over to visit her at the weekend. Ned didn't like this at all.

"Not again, Dad," he would say.

"Tha'll go and tha'll like it; even if I've got to belt you one." His dad would reply.

"Righto," Ned would say.

The journey was one mile, two furlongs and five chains give or take a rod, pole or perch. And so, all the neighbours up the street would come outside, dressed to the nines in their siren-suits and mufflers, liberty-bodices and balaclavas and give the Shuttleworths a right good send-off.

They went to Granny Shuttleworth's on the corporation tram and this always made Ned feel worse. For some reason the Shuttleworth's trip always slowed the tram down. Ned and his dad and his brothers, and their little sister Alice, would have to stand at the corporation tram stop for nearly twenty minutes whilst his mother slid on and off the running board trying to get five suitcases through the tram door at once.

"Hey our mum, you're flat on your face again," said little sister Alice.

"Our mum'll never get on with you nagging after her," said dad.

And slowly but surely, Mrs Shuttleworth finally squeezed on. This procedure was repeated at the other end until finally Mrs Shuttleworth squeezed off and all six of them walked up the steep, cobbled hill to their Granny's.

As his dad knocked on the old front door, Ned stood by his side and practised smiling so that his granny would think he was pleased to see her. No sooner had she opened the door than she lunged at Ned and cracked him round the back of the head with a bottle of Friar's Balsam.

"Get in there, out of the rain, you daft 'aporth" she said.

"And get off my best carpet with those boots on. To think I spent all

that money for a young beggar like you to go traipsing all over it!"

Ned sat down by the fire out of harm's way.

"And you can get out of that chair for a start!" said his granny. "Since your mother's staggered up that hill with all those suitcases, you can let her get warm first."

"Aye. Righto granny," said Ned, and he sat on the floor in the opposite corner and idly watched a cockroach limp along the fender. His granny went over to her big, black fire-range, opened the oven door and took out a large earthenware dish.

"Not black peas again," thought Ned

"Now get a bowl of these black peas down you," said his granny. "They'll put new life into your bones and warm the cockles of your heart."

For the next hour Ned just stared into the fire as his mum and dad chatted to his granny about the weather and the people up the street.

"Get away from that draught," said his granny, looking round sharply and staring at him with eyes like chapel hat-pegs. "Next thing we know you'll be catching consumption and saying it's my fault."

Ned moved to an old, broken wickerwork chair and stared into the fire, and he dreamed of his granddad when he was alive. And he remembered him coming in and filling up a large zinc bath in front of the fire and sitting in it and scrubbing himself down with as loofah.

And for a minute Ned felt good, and he thought of his own bath time when he sat there making tunnels in the scum with a toy diver from a cornflakes packet. And he remembered the time he'd got a cheek stuck in the plug-hole and his big toe in the hot tap.

"By gum, it wasn't half funny," thought Ned

Until his dad had come in that is, and clouted him round the head with a scrubbing brush. Just at that moment the voice of his dad came suddenly into his dream.

"Well, see you soon granny, and thanks for a lovely tea."

"Tea?" thought Ned. "What's going on? I didn't get any."

"Aye," said his granny. "And next time you come Ned'll have to be on his best behaviour, or else!"

“Tataa,” said his mum and dad.

“Tataa,” said his granny.

“Say ‘Tataa’ to your granny,” said his mum and dad

“Tataa, granny” said Ned.

“I should think so too,” said his granny.

“Thank God for that,” thought Ned.

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Several pages would be needed to list the published works of **Jim Burns** but we mention his poetry collection *Street Singer* (Shoestring Press 2010) and his essays *Beats, Bohemians and Intellectuals* (Trent Books 2000), *Radicals, Beats and Beboppers* (2011) and *Brits, Beats and Outsiders* (2012) are published by Penniless Press Publications

Alexis Lykiard is a poet, novelist and critic. His latest collection *Getting On* is published by Shoestring Press. A complete listing of his many publications is on his website www.alexislykiard.com

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