

THE CRAZY OIK
ISSUE 10 SUMMER 2011

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The Good Fight and *For Me Boss* are from Paul Tanner's collection *Dole Anthems*.

Bonny Scotland and *Haunted* are from Tom Kilcourse's latest collection *More Short Stories*.

Actress is from Nigel Ford's collection *One Dog Barking*.

Front Cover – *The Sirens and Ulysses* (detail) – William Etty 1787-1849



William Etty's huge painting *The Sirens and Ulysses* 10 ft x 15ft was last displayed in 1857. For the next hundred and fifty years it mouldered in the basement of Manchester's Moseley Street Art Gallery. Mouldered is probably the right word since it was in bad condition with pieces cracking and falling away. But maybe Victorian sensibilities had a role in its neglect since Etty was considered almost a pornographer, fascinated as he was with flesh – usually female flesh. In 2000 restoration began and six years later it was back on view.

Howard Jacobson, Manc oik and novelist, looked again at Etty, *inter alia*, in his TV presentation of *The Genius of British Art* – an episode entitled *Flesh*. Howard's take on this was that it's modern prudes who are suppressing this stuff, that the monarch, Victoria, was as horny as a horntoad and that the contemporary patrons of art were also lechers who couldn't get enough of it. Etty did die rich and, if not famous, at least notorious. Certainly the contents of the Lady Lever gallery at Port Sunlight support this contention (see Ron Horsefield's *Salammbô* on p 92) with lots of Ettys on display.

Maybe a woman is required to break this taboo – just as we accept Jewish jokes from Woody Allen and the repeated “niggers” from Samuel L Jackson in Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*. And so it is the crusading curator of York Art Gallery, Sarah Burnage, has set up an exhibition of one hundred of Etty's works running between June 25 2011 and January 22 2012. Etty was born and died in York but even there much of his bequest to the gallery has been hidden until now.

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EDITORIAL

ETTY REDUX

You may think this issue of the Oik should appear in a brown bag on the top shelf at a filling station. But I suppose if you do you'd have stopped reading the Oik long ago. We make no apologies for drawing readers' attention to a great English artist many of whose works are in North West galleries. *The Sirens* is a recent addition to Manchester's Moseley Street while the Lady Lever at Port Sunlight holds many more (see Ron Horsefield's account on page 92). Well not quite a recent addition since it's been hidden in the basement for the last 150 years. One wonders why.

William Etty, (1787 – 1849) described as a shy bachelor, persevered against parochial prudery, became an RA and got rich. His speciality was the nude and he spent some time in Venice much influenced by Titian. They say he couldn't draw; they said that about Titian too, but he was a genius at rendering flesh. A mate of mine quietly ogling *Andromeda* in the Lady Lever, was accosted by a scouse philistine who proclaimed it "pornographic". What a compliment. Bill would have been proud. But decide for yourself at the great Etty exhibition on at York until January 2012.

This intro may seem off the point for a literary mag but the Oik seeks to widen your horizons – to become more eclectic. To this end we have Brett Wilson introducing us to the ideas of that crazy electrician Eric Laithwaite (Newton was wrong said Eric) and then collaborating with Marie Feargrieve to explore the mysteries of art authenticity – particularly apropos the Greenhalghs, Bolton oiks who managed to fool many in the art establishment. Mysteries? Hardly; it's what happens when rich git meatheads scramble for a unique object. Among others the Greenhalghs fooled the Wildenstein Institute with a fake Gauguin. As I write this a Monet, agreed by all the top jockeys to be the real thing has been given the thumbs down by the same institute. It was on TV (*Fake or Fortune* BBC1 June 19th) Are they discredited, shamed, exposed? No. Seems like the art industry is as corrupt as banking.

Elsewhere, in a purely literary vein, we have great stories by Ken Champion and S. Kadison and two new crazy oiks Andrew Pidoux and Zohar Teshartok. Sean Parker, much mentioned in the Oiklet as the distinguished author of *Junkyard Dog*, shows us a mode unlike his usual Raymond Chandler and Bronwyn Wild turns in a sensitive piece on the Holocaust. The Wild family now have four contributors. Stalwarts Dave Birtwistle, Tom Kilcourse, Tanner and Nigel Ford prove there's no lack of authenticity here. Ray Blyde's autobiography is nearing its end – the next chapter will be the last. Ray himself is in fine fettle but shows no inclination to pursue immortality any further.

Ken Clay June 2011

THE BEAT YEARS

Ken Champion

The same battleground. Smells of cooking fat, polish, disinfectant, oven heat and new coconut matting filled the cramped scullery and pushed their way around the living room. The sounds of slippers feet, a moist hand agitatedly brushing a brow, then the same hand using an apron as a towel, the squeal of a fork inside a saucepan, the knocking of crockery, all became a whole, unutterably familiar.

My mother, tall, angular and in her mid-forties, with a thin face, long nose, worried eyes, and clothes which in spite of their obvious age still retained a neat, well pressed appearance, scuffled from the kitchen with two laden plates and placed them hurriedly on the tablecloth, almost dropping them. She drew her breath sharply and putting a hand to her mouth urgently sucked her fingers.

Shaking her hands quickly she wiped them heavily down the front of her apron, went back to the kitchen again, reached up and pulled the window sash down. She returned and seated herself and with quick nervous gestures patted her black, greying hair.

Sitting opposite her was my father. His eyes were small but rather bulbous, his nose creased, causing his upper lip to bare an expanse of gum and a ragged line of nicotine-stained teeth. He looked like an angry rabbit eating cabbage.

‘Len, must you make so much noise?’

She tried to ask the question pleasantly, only a glimmer of disapproval showing. She waited for a response and when none came she leaned forward with her wrists resting on the edge of the table and her knife and fork raised at the same angle as her body leaning toward him.

‘Must you make so much noise?’

A disinterested mumble came from under his nose at this carefully enounced repetition and the munching noise increased. She leaned back with a sigh of fatalistic acceptance and began eating.

It did not then occur to me that she was an unwilling captive. It was 1958. I was seventeen years old.

My father was a caretaker at a local factory, my mother a cleaner at a city bank. They were both proprietorial; it was 'his' factory, just as it was 'her' bank.

He had one of the previous Sunday's papers spread out on the table to the side of him and in between scooping large mouthfuls of food into himself he inclined his head to one side and read the cartoon page slowly and carefully, his cheeks bulging and lips silently forming the captions. Occasionally he stopped chewing and frowned, his mouth hanging open. Understanding would come and with an infantile, sucking laugh he shook his head, tutting with pleasure as he looked down at his plate, flicking small particles of food from his bottom lip and, sticking a fork through a new potato and a cube of meat, would guide the heaped piece of cutlery into his mouth as he turned his attention to the paper again.

After a few minutes his head jerked up and he frowned once more, looking across the space between them.

'What's the matter with *him*, then?' he asked, jerking a thumb towards me.

Observing this nightly enacted scene from an armchair, I continued staring at the earthenware butler sink six yards away while their meal was finished in silence. I leant forward and pushed a hand under the cushion I was sitting on and pulled out the book both Tony and I had bought copies of the day before. It was Jack Kerouac's '*On The Road*.' I slumped back and with aggressive interest began to read.

My mother cleared the table, opened the door on the side of the scullery and through the net curtains I saw her open the outside lavatory door. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my father lean across to the television. I tensed. The quick look at me before flicking the switch told me the mood he was already in or which I had unknowingly put him.

Drawing my breath, I run a forefinger down the centre page, opened the book out either side, determined to concentrate wholly on reading it. He gripped the underneath of his chair and half-sitting turned it and himself around to face the set no more than three feet away and stared blankly at it. The room lightened as the blue-grey glow appeared. Despite myself I looked across and saw a detailed close-up of a small, fat, hand with tiny tapering fingers. A smooth voice explained that it was a detail from, '...one of his greatest works,

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‘Madonna and Child.’ I didn’t know who ‘his’ was, but certainly wanted to find out.

The hand disappeared into the bottom of the set and the finely executed folds of a garment with minute cracks interlacing the whole area slowly followed. The curved, unblemished chin and the small thin lips of a woman slid into view and then the buttons underneath were suddenly pushed in and snapped out again and there was the noise of cheering and applause as a bulky woman announced in a proud and jovial voice that she came from Manchester, at which the tall, lean-faced man hovering restlessly above her laughed wildly and shouted,

‘Has anyone got an umbrella?’

The unseen audience cackled uproariously. The man held his hands in front of him and waved them up and down and when the noise trailed away pulled grinning, giggly faces at the camera, repeatedly crossing one knee over the other and asking her what prize she had in mind. It seemed she was going to win something simply by living in Manchester.

Straining to speak as gently and as pleasantly as I could, I asked him why he had switched channels, why he had ‘turned it over.’

‘Wha’? Oh, it was only talkin’,’ he answered quickly and grinned with delight as the fat woman complained jokingly that if she didn’t win, her husband would divorce her.

I looked at him; his thin, uncombed mousy hair hanging loosely from a barely discernible parting, the weak, stubbly chin, the watery eyes and that complacent grin. I turned back to my book and the meaningless words. I stared at ‘Moriarty’ and kept repeating it quietly, over and over - like ‘ever’ which I said endlessly as I tried to sleep at night and to grasp the concept with a final ‘ever’ - the same word, until it was just an absurd sound, and felt the loneliness, the anger again.

Turning my face to him, voice quivering, I stammered, ‘Do you know, you put that thing on regardless of...of what’s on, what time it’s on, you watch...inane, trivial...anything that makes you think, challenges you...you...’

I was clenching my fists on my knees.

‘Look’, he bellowed, standing up, hands tightened on either side of

his thighs,

‘What about you and your bloody books? Read, read, bloody *read!*’

He grabbed the paperback from my hands and threw it at the wall behind me. It seemed to float before it hit and in a moment of schizoid irrelevance I wondered what pages it would lay open at as it landed

I saw my surroundings with frightening clarity; my mother, returned from the lavatory, bending over the sink, her blotchy arms, the speckled grey gas cooker, the tiny living room, the grey fireplace with its stepped sides, the worn floral mat raggedly spread thin on the linoleum, the dingy passage, seen through the distorting frosted glass panels in the door. And like a final perception, the claustrophobic inevitability of it all. It wasn’t the only time it had happened. I was eleven when he first did it, but now the shock wasn’t quite as great.

At least I could tell Tony about it.

I’d known Tony since we’d started at the local Tech. in the East End four years before where we’d learnt the rudiments of the building trades and had both opted for painting and decorating. (‘Get a trade in yer ‘ands, son’ was the stereotypical advice from my father). We’d seen each other virtually every day since. He had come across to me, all blonde hair and blue eyes, while I was nervously waiting outside the main entrance on the first day with scores of other boys. He told me a joke.

‘This bloke told his friend that he’d made an awful Freudian slip the other evening. ‘What was it then?’ asked his friend. ‘Well, I was having dinner with my mother and meant to say, ‘Would you pass the butter please?’ But it came out as, ‘you fuckin’ bitch, you fuckin’ ruined my fuckin’ life.’ I liked him immediately

He took to me, he once said, because although I played football I looked as if I wrote poetry as well.

Tony had a younger sister with dark hair and eyes who looked rather Latin and who he occasionally and affectionately called ‘kid’, much to her fifteen year old annoyance.

It was she who opened the door to me, Tony was behind her, but she obviously hadn’t seen him. Then she turned, jumped up and put her

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arms around him, her legs for a second kicking back behind his waist and nearly pulling him over.

'Tone-eee', you're back, you're already home.' she shrilled as if he'd been away for a month instead of returning from a building site, then playfully biting his ear, said a quick hello to me and ran, giggling, through to the kitchen before coming back again.

'Just a minute, hold on.' said Tony, 'Is that lipstick you're wearing?'

'Yes, it *is* lipstick, I'm wearing it because I *want* to, I'm going out in it and I intend to *continue* to wear it.' She puckered her face.

'Quite satisfied?' She looked very pretty.

'Thank you,' she said sarcastically, taking silence as assent. The front door opened and shut quickly, the sound of her hurrying heels could just about be heard.

'She's gorgeous,' said Tony warmly, taking a tobacco tin from his pocket and rolling a cigarette. He didn't roll it very successfully. He never did.

I liked the feel of that house, solid, but light, and envied him his relationships, especially with his mother, who I could hear moving around upstairs. His father had left soon after his sister had been born. He never spoke about it.

It was raining. The colours of streets and buildings were washed away and a steady drizzle dropped flimsy layers of cool wind and a fine blurred greyness around people hurrying along. We walked quickly, sometimes with one leg in the gutter, playing a game with ourselves, trying to maintain a steady speed without leaving the pavement completely and having to admit failure as we gave wide berths to groups of teenage girls leaving the local cosmetic factory, mincing along in their tight skirts, their umbrellas held in a raggedly line above their bouncing, giggling heads.

Tony liked the rain, it sent peace down to him, he said, and he could wander about and look at people in their self-sufficient little worlds and stand on corners and gaze at the cars as they waited for the spots of colour to give them the right of way. He thought that in the rain things in cities became themselves and were nearer to their own particular truth. They were alone then, virtually ignored by people whose dominant perceptions of them were as shelters of some kind, not as aesthetic objects, part of our designed material world, rising,

sometimes awkwardly but firmly in the rain.

We marched down the street, the rain heavier, blowing into our faces, Tony's jacket flapping behind him, the front of his shirt turning into a clinging brown. I didn't know where we were going, it somehow didn't matter with Tony, but I guessed it was Lou's. He stopped and took his jacket off, putting it over his head and clenching the bottom of the lapels around his neck, looking suddenly feminine, like a factory worker with a thick headscarf tied under her chin.

There was a bus shelter further down the road, the rain splattering from its roof in the red neon glow from the fascia of a late-opening pie and eel shop. I ran towards it. Leaning over a tubular bar, getting my breath back, I saw Tony standing in the middle of the road, cars splashing past him, putting a foot tentatively forward each time tail lights went by. It was fascinating to watch. It was like a slow motion film sequence of a dancer stranded from the chorus and uncertain of her routine. But whatever he did, and he did sometimes look a little unsure, unknowing, it was, somehow, impressive.

Seeming to guess the picture in my mind he flung his arms rhythmically in the air and as a gap in the line of cars appeared he made swimming motions, pawing his arms through the air to the shelter. He leant against the inside, took deep breaths, patting his chest. Then he sniffed.

'Is that vinegar?'

He looked across to the pie and eel shop and screwed up his face in pain, his full, blue eyes blinking. Some people have an allergy to pollen, some to cats. Tony's was vinegar. He suddenly looked pathetic, didn't appreciate my laughter.

'Do you know what that brown stuff is?' He pointed to the shop. 'It's evil, intellect shattering, it's... I can't breath, can't think. I'd like to write an advert.' He moved his hand across in front of him, thumb and forefinger curled, shaping the words, 'Do you want to be a moron? Have plans to be a cretin? Then buy our vinegar. Let's go to Lou's.'

'Intellect' was a word Tony used and alluded to a lot. We would debate, argue, discuss, were opinionated and often uninformed. I would cross the park to Tony's house, his mother usually letting me in, and he would be pacing around the living room agitatedly.

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‘Don’t you see? It’s a con,’ he would say, ‘we’re tied to our behaviour by a piece of metaphysical string, always being pulled back to actions, intentions, attitudes.’

‘Are we talking ‘conscience’ here?’ I’d ask. He’d spin round.

‘Yes, yes, but where does that come from? Is it innate? Internalised from the world around us? And it’s all about control, isn’t it.’ he’d say excitedly. ‘You could perm all of our values and behaviour with programmed and learnt behaviour - there’s so many options - but whatever’s doing the asking, ‘conscience’ as you call it, it’s socially controlling us and...’

And so he’d go on and I’d go on; at his house, at my house - our respective mothers hesitantly bringing us cups of tea in the front rooms - walking around the local streets, the parks, sitting in cafes, especially these, talking, babbling, gesticulating into the night, feeling that there should be people flocking around us with gold pens glinting in the street lights, writing down everything we were saying.

Of course, nothing we were saying was new. There were bits of Marx, Freud, existentialism, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and a lot of what we said was probably sheer nonsense. We weren’t aware. What did *we* know?

Lou was leaning across his counter, elbows on a newspaper spread between milk and sugar filled cups and, for once, was not telling anyone who would listen that he could have been a ‘coiffurer’ because in Italy his father had been a hairdresser and he was to follow in his footsteps, never explaining why he hadn’t. The café’s steamy, sour warmth, tobacco smoke, damp clothes hanging from the brass hooks of the clothes stand was a familiar, welcoming cavern.

We hung up our soaking jackets, Tony wiped his face vigorously with a handkerchief, his shirt dark and saturated. He sucked his tea noisily and put it down again on the chipped marble topped table.

‘I want to get away.’ he said, looking down.

He glanced up at me, waiting for it to sink in. I couldn’t quite understand what he meant.

‘Get away? Where? Get away and do what?’

He tutted impatiently.

‘Just get away, somewhere, anywhere.’

‘What about your job? Your apprenticeship? You can’t just pack it in.’

‘course I can, I can always go back there if I want, and there’s less reasons stopping you than there are me. You’re not exactly in a state of bliss at home, are you?’

I incongruously giggled, stopping myself instantly, unsure of what was underneath it, what sounds and turmoil it would turn into.

He stretched back in his chair, smugly, as if he’d proved a point. He was so sure of himself. I felt annoyed. I didn’t know why.

He leant forward eagerly.

‘Don’t you see, it’s simple, really, it is.’

‘I know it seems like it, but...’

I didn’t know what I wanted to say. I rubbed my hands over my face, like a child might; pushing its nose up and pulling its eyes down to look like an ogre.

‘Well, are you coming with me?’

I felt more annoyed. I criss-crossed a pool of spilt tea with a finger and flicked little splashes of it away from me.

‘I’m still going.’ He said quietly.

I could see Lou amongst his crockery reading his paper and I wondered how he could stick inside this place all day with its stained ceiling and walls and the, ‘two airships on a cloud, mate.’ and ‘babies on a raft, Lou.’ for sausages and mash and beans on toast, and while mechanistically producing them, thinking, perhaps, of pleasant banter as he trimmed people’s hair back home in the sun.

‘I’m going tomorrow.’

‘Tomorrow?’ I asked incredulously.

He leant closer to me, ‘I’m going to get the tube, and the nearest main line station it takes me to, I’m...’ he shrugged.

‘There are only two lines you can get from our station.’

‘Don’t tell me; don’t tell me, I’m just going to go. Anywhere. I don’t want to plan anything, just go. I’m taking fifty quid with me, that’ll do, should be enough. I’ll take my chances with digs and things.’

‘That sounds all right sitting here, but...’

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He held his hands up in front of him, 'I'll be okay.'

I stared down at the table, the spilt tea about to drip between my knees.

'You're not sure, are you,' he asked.

'I can't.' I almost shouted. 'I just can't.'

He said nothing. He sipped his tea, eyes looking at me over the cup.

'I'll send some money home to help them out, of course,' he said.

'I don't suppose I'll be coming, Tony.'

He slowly got up. 'Okay,' he said softly.

'Ta-ta boys,' said Lou as we went out, not looking up, still smiling.

I sat in the bus absently counting the fag ends and matches in the channels of the wooden floor, with Tony bending his head back and looking into the night through a condensation-free patch on the window that he'd wiped with the side of his fist.

'What's you mum going to say?'

He looked blankly in front of him and shrugged, as if he hadn't grasped the question.

'I don't know where I'm going to go. I'm fed up with streets, though,' He waved his arms expansively. 'Still, if I land up in streets, well...' He shrugged again.

'I want to do things I'll remember. Do you understand?'

I didn't answer. Neither of us said anything until we got off the bus and walked the short distance to his home. He asked me in, I declined.

'Come with me.'

'Drop me a line,' I said, forcing a grin and playfully punching his arm. I walked away, not looking back. As I turned the corner I kicked a stone viciously along the road, it ricocheted and clinked into the base of a lamppost. Behind it, a dog, resenting the interruption to its ablutions, barked at the dingy world around it and trotted away.

I tried to finish the last few pages of Kerouac's book that night lying in bed, and realised I hadn't talked about it with Tony. There hadn't been time. I'd imagined us sitting in Lou's bursting with it; its

energy, rawness, poetry, the adventure, the colours, all of it, talking about it until Lou started putting the chairs on the tables and still continuing outside long after hearing him bolt his door.

I didn't sleep, I wondered where he was going, would he actually go? I imagined him wandering around somewhere on his own, stopping someone and saying,

'Tell me about things.'

This could have meant anything, but they were really feelings; feelings from bits of wood, a doorknocker, clouds, from an old woman, the silhouette of a child playing around a lamppost, an articulated lorry, the smell of paint, of hotdogs at half-time at Upton Park. Tony had an almost psychotic obsession at times to become other people, not just those that were obviously different, anyone; it was a rampant empathy. He wanted, when the mood took him, to become even programmed creatures. I had seen him sit on his haunches for half an hour staring at his sister's kitten, hardly moving, saying nothing, like a method actor performing in abstract for his introvert audience of one. He would talk to, or merely observe, a stranger and barely out of earshot, say,

'I know that person, I *know* him.'

And his intellectualising. We would, perhaps, be walking silently in a park, and he would jump on a bench, an imaginary lectern in front of him, frown down at someone in an imaginary front row and say gravely,

'There must be no 'your' truth, but a whole truth, there can be only one; an unfeeling intellect devoid of everything *except* that intellect. Even the most unemotional intelligence distorts the object of knowledge. We need an...untouched 'isness' - I like that, sounds like a virgin Greek goddess - an intellectual god, some sort of mythological machine, and if the work gets too much for it - and don't forget, there is one whole complex truth in every square millimetre of everything - it should have a whole group of these machine-like gods to help it, an authoritative intellectual body, an AIB, without emotions...human character. Nothing must distort clarity.'

He'd scythe his hand as if he were decapitating his audience, which would consist of me, and possibly a pigeon strutting disinterestedly in front of him. He'd look down at me, shrug his shoulders

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dejectedly and ask me what truth was, as if I had known the answer all the time and had purposely withheld it from him to make him miserable.

I couldn't picture him away from England, I couldn't see him in scenes of rural wilderness, endless deserts, the hot, orange-groved landscapes of California, wearing a T-shirt and not his tie - the mark of the skilled artisan however paint spotted it might be - putting beer before food, he was too young to legally drink alcohol anyway, and instead of coffee and Benzedrine it would be weak tea and lemonade, and it wouldn't be jazz, sex and aimless driving sitting next to Sal Paradise gazing out of a car window at the continuous road - perhaps it was *me* who wanted to be sitting there - nor LSD, mescaline and free love, rather Wills Woodbines, and sketching from the black and white photos of happy, healthy looking women with their brushed out private parts from Health and Efficiency magazines, rubbing a pencil line on cartridge paper with his finger to emphasise the curve of a breast.

There would be no New York jazz joint or Mexican whore house, his would be no tale of chill dawns and madness, I couldn't see him being a 'western kinsman of the sun' couldn't imagine him seeing San Francisco, 'stretched out ahead the fabulous white city on her eleven mystic hills.' Perhaps didn't *want* to.

I think I cried that night

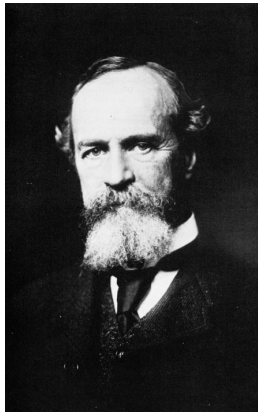
When my father died some years later I didn't cry, though I tried to, but was reminded of both him and Tony when, clearing out my life shortly afterwards before moving from the East End, I found Kerouac's story, dog-eared and torn, at the back of a bookshelf. A week later, in the early morning mist by my father's grave, I laid it carefully on the wet grass like a book of remembrance.

Twelve years after this I heard Tony had been living in Liverpool and was now back in London. He'd never communicated with me. I wondered if a city in the north west of England had been his 'search for the edge.' I was given his address, it wasn't far away from where I was living.

I never went to see him - twelve years was a long time, at least it felt like it then. What had happened to him? How long had he stayed in Liverpool? Had a nasal twang replaced his posh cockney? Had he

married? Obvious questions. I let them lie unanswered. I did see him once more, though.

A few months ago I was coming out of a shop in Carnaby Street - I was working nearby, still decorating - when a tall, very slim, rather exotic looking woman brushed by me, giving me a quick smile, drawling, in what sounded like an American accent, 'Hey, excuse me,' and ran across the road to a smartly dressed man half turning away from her as she put her arm in his. Twenty yards further on he opened the nearside door of a sports car and she slipped casually in. It moved away, the man driving it was Tony.



William James

I must admit with some regret that my former prose style of crystalline purity manifest in such works as *Pragmatism* and *Varieties of Religious Experience* has, not to put too fine a point on it, deteriorated somewhat consequent upon, but not entirely, one must allow, as a result of, since other factors may have intervened, in brief - the vagaries of the ageing process and perhaps an organic alteration of my cerebral cortex, for a survey of such considerations I refer readers to my magnum opus *Principles of Psychology*, - deteriorated as I say, and believe, with an instinctual and incontrovertible conviction, if not by rational analysis, after extended contact with the prose works of my brother Henry.

BONNY SCOTLAND.

Tom Kilcourse

To be honest, I never fancied Scotland, even for a holiday. The wife once tried to persuade me to go walking on one of the islands, but I found an excuse not to go and she went with a friend instead. That was about ten years ago, in 2010, I think. She came back enthusing about the place, saying the people were nice, the scenery was fantastic, and so on. Left to her, we would have gone there the following year, but I got in first and booked a fortnight in Spain. I'm not a big fan of the Spanish, but I prefer them to the caber tossers up north. At least Spaniards know how to play football, and if you can't understand what they say it's because they're speaking a foreign lingo. That's not so with the Scots. I worked for two years with a bloke from Glasgow, and never understood a word he said, and he thought he was speaking English. Barbara had got the bug though. She went to Scotland a few weeks after our Spanish trip, and every year since, with her pal.

Still, needs must, and this morning I headed for the border by country bus. I thought I'd get luckier that way, sneaking in by the back door, sort of thing. Last month I tried to get to Glasgow by train from Manchester, but Scottish uniforms got on at Carlisle and started checking everyone's papers. I was kicked off the train without so much as a by your leave, while a Polish bloke in the next seat had no trouble. Some others were put off as well, all English. I didn't even get a refund on my train ticket. This time I got the train up to Berwick in Northumberland, stayed overnight and got the bus for Dunbar. No chance! As soon as the bus started to pull over I knew my luck had run out. The Scots got on board and asked for papers again. The bloke in the next seat was English, but he had a letter from some firm in Edinburgh offering him a job. He didn't even look up as I was ordered off, but I saw him looking at me through the window as the bus pulled away. I could swear I knew him from somewhere. The face was familiar, but I'm damned if I can place it. Ah well! There's nothing for it now but to wait for the bus back to Berwick. There's one in an hour I'm told. Whew! It's flaming cold here.

God! How things have changed since that October night five years

ago when I danced for joy with hundreds of others in Albert Square. The town hall was ablaze with lights, fireworks were let off, and everyone got legless. Freedom at last! No more bloody directives from Brussels, stuff your kilos and litres, Britain was again a free, independent country. Oh, what euphoria as we embraced complete strangers and sang God Save the King. Magic! We were free to negotiate with Brussels on trade, free to pass our own laws on immigration, and so on. Britain was as important to them as they were to us. Trade yes, union no, was the buzz. It would have worked too, if it hadn't been for the Scots, treacherous bastards. After all we've done for them they decided to have a referendum of their own, with the result that they broke with us and stayed with Brussels. I couldn't believe it.

Mind you, it didn't seem to matter too much at the time, and a lot of us said good riddance to the jocks. In fact, I remember some of the lads in the Woodman cracking jokes and laughing about Scotland going down the pan. Harry Hardacre had worked up there for a few years and he said their economy would collapse without our support. He said English firms would pull out to get away from Brussels bureaucracy. How wrong can you get? The exact opposite happened, with big companies moving to Scotland to stay within the EU. I always thought that Hardacre was a bit of a dick-head. When Brussels got tough in negotiations, even more firms jumped ship, and as jobs disappeared all those East Europeans who had settled here went as well, some of them to Ireland. In other words, jobs went north, and job holders followed them if they could. That meant those with EU passports. People like me were stopped from crossing the border because we are no longer EU citizens, and the EU has strict immigration laws. Bloody great!

I was working as a plumber's mate for a Polish bloke. He upped stakes and moved his business to Dumfries without even giving me any redundancy pay. EU law says that I can follow him if I have a job to go to, but he hasn't bothered to answer my letters. I might get in if I can show that I have Scottish blood, so I tried that angle. My gran on my mother's side came from Lennox Town, I think. I've written to Edinburgh about that, but haven't heard anything yet. There's hope though. Jack Kelly, a mate from the Woodman, got into Ireland because his dad was from Galway. He's the only one of

BONNY SCOTLAND

the lads to make it to date. Tommy Shaw tried a different route. Some Bulgarian bloke in his street was moving to Peebles, so Tommy hid in the furniture van. He got to Peebles OK, and a police cell. They kept him locked up for four days before sending him back.

If only I'd known then what I know now, I'd have been less chuffed about the result of the referendum. But how could we know. The Daily Mail had been banging on for years about Brussels and how the Europeans were running our country. East European immigrants were everywhere, taking our jobs and pushing up house prices, but we couldn't do anything about it because they were from the EU. Politicians in the big parties didn't want to know, especially the ones filling their boots in Brussels. The Brits had had enough, and when a referendum was forced out of the government by minority parties like UKIP and the English National Alliance we turned out in our millions to give two fingers to foreign rule. Hey, hang on! I've just remembered who that bloke was on the bus. The last time I saw him was on the telly, singing the praises of UKIP. I voted for the bugger.

Ah, well! Here comes the bus back to Berwick. I'll try another route next time, perhaps into Ireland via Belfast, they reckon the border's full of gaps over there, then to Edinburgh by air from Dublin. I know it's a long way round, and not cheap, but I need a job. Besides, I've got to get into Scotland to save my marriage. That friend the wife went walking with turned out to be a bloke, and Scottish. The bastard got her a work permit and she's living now in Dundee.

MUMMY'S NEW BOYFRIEND

S Kadison

Every April in the late 1960s a group of easy-going teenagers from a little, industrial Lancashire town took off for St Ives, found jobs and rooms and stayed till the end of September. During the winter they hunkered down in the northern cold and damp, lived with their parents, worked in shops, offices, factories, on building sites and met up a few times a week to reminisce and plan. Most of them were run-of-the mill youngsters, but two were out of the ordinary: Meg Park who could sing like a diva and Jem Illingworth who drew beautifully and fluently. Meg sang outside *The Sloop*, on Porthmeor Beach in Fore St among the holiday crowds accompanied by one guitar player or another and Jem drew portraits which he sold to the subjects for half a crown. They were the only two who didn't need to work and the others who did split shifts in hotels, bars, restaurants and cafes admired and envied their talent and income. They were all trying to be bohemians, but serving egg and chips on rainy lunchtimes or changing beds in a little guesthouse were serious dampers on the sense of living beyond the customary routines and values. Of course, there were the beach parties, the little fires lit at balmy midnights, the cannabis and the sex. The idea of free love was in the background like a tiny cooling breeze on a sultry day, but they paired off and felt reassured by faithfulness. It was only three or four summers. Jobs and marriage broke the group up. But it was something to look back on, something not to have missed.

Meg Park married a fireman and sang in pubs until her daughter was born and Jem Illingworth went to art college only to find there was no work afterwards but teaching. Teaching art in schools he couldn't think of: he was too gentle to discipline children and his own schooldays had been marked by resentment of teachers who threw their weight around. He couldn't see why school shouldn't be voluntary, which made him an outsider. He freelanced a bit as a teacher of drawing and then uncomfortable with squatting in his parents' house took a job as a draughtsman for an engineering firm so he could afford his own flat. He disliked the routine and found his colleagues frosty. He liked them as people and tried to get on with them, but as employees they were wary of him. His attitude wasn't

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right: they were trying to make careers and he was trying to enjoy life. One of the other draughtsmen said to him:

"We'll never make the big time working here."

"Maybe not the big time, but a good time," said Jem.

The restless months went by. He drew and painted in the evenings and at weekends; he met up with the old crowd and relived for a few hours the atmosphere of heedless enjoyment and anticipation of a different world. But Monday morning soon came round. He was at the bus stop at seven thirty. He'd come to rely on the salary. The months became years and somehow it seemed life had slipped away from him.

He was twenty-seven when he met Louise.

She wasn't arty, rebellious or restless; she worked at the Town Hall in administration. She'd started there at sixteen and being intelligent, diligent and ambitious had risen to a senior post. But Jem didn't think about that. She was pretty and charming and after years of come-day-go-day relationships it was a delight to have someone he could feel committed to. She complained his flat was messy and she didn't like him spending long, intent hours drawing but she was so touchingly slim and shapely and they spent such carefree evenings and weekends together, he shut out all thought of anything negative and let himself enjoy the ecstasy of new love. She was twenty-seven too and eager to start a family, so within a year they married and bought a little house in the quiet suburb where Jem's parents lived. When she became pregnant Jem was thrilled and watching his little daughter come into the world, seeing the woman he loved sweat and strain and grunt and tear to deliver this wrinkled little package of joy was the best and most transforming experience of his life. That everyone on earth had come into the world in the same way meant nothing to him; it was newness. He was a father. He was lifted out of himself and Holly became the centre of his being.

When dark clouds began to assemble in the sky of his happiness he ignored them. All his life he'd ignored unpleasantness: violence, greed, exploitation; they weren't part of his sensibility. Oh, they were real enough, but he had one life and couldn't change the world, so he made a small enclave of generosity, friendliness and tolerance and felt that was the best he could do.

"It's too small," Lousie began to say.

“It’s fine for three of us.”

“But what if we have another? Or two more?”

“We’ve got three bedrooms.”

“Look at the size of them.”

“Who needs a big bedroom? All you do there is sleep.”

She threw the comment back at him and they didn’t have sex. His sweet, joyous satisfaction turned into dismal misery and on the long walks he took alone by the river to calm his frustration, he realised how he’d let his happiness depend fundamentally on their intimacy, her generous opening to him, and for that he’d been willing to treat her materialist conformism as a midge in summer. He agreed to moving house and increasing the mortgage. She wanted him to push for promotion. They needed two cars. Her friends all had more than one holiday abroad. She wanted a new bathroom and then a new kitchen.

“What does all this stuff matter?” he said flopping onto the sofa and opening a book about Goya.

“It matters more than those books you’re always reading.”

Had it not been for Holly, he’d have cleared out, gone back to a little one- bedroomed flat and pseudo-bohemian relaxation although there was no bohemia in this little place. He realised they’d been trying to do the impossible. The conditions that sustained alternative communities were being wiped out. He’d been sucked into a system he despised. What kept him going was his love for his daughter. That outweighed the irritations of conventional marriage by far. Louise, he realised, wasn’t relating to him. He was *husband*. He took on in her Catholic mind the characteristics a husband must have. She spent more and more time at her mother’s. They went shopping every Saturday. They came home and talked about what needed to be done around the house. Louise made a list of things he should be getting on with: the bathroom tiles, painting the kitchen.....He found a quiet corner and read about Chagall.

But the hours he spent with Holly were bliss. At home together he read to her for as long as she liked. He drew for her and showed her the rudiments. By the time she was six she could sketch impressive cats, tigers, rabbits, robins, daffodils, trees. He smiled to think she might have his talent. He took her to the best parks, the library, the

MUMMY'S NEW BOYFRIEND

nice old Italian café which served home-made ice-cream. She held his hand as they walked through town and he imagined everyone must look at them and be charmed by the bloom of their simple mutual love. And the child did love her father. She climbed on his lap and snuggled to sleep and then none of the cares of his life counted for a fig.

Shortly after Holly's seventh birthday Louise announced she was going back to her mother's and taking the child with her. He remonstrated and pleaded the girl's well-being but she insisted she couldn't live with him: they were incompatible; the marriage was a mistake; she didn't share his values; she wanted to find someone like herself and be happy again. She went. The house was sold. He got his portion and moved into a little flat where he could do what he liked. He saw Holly every Tuesday and Thursday evening and every second weekend she came to stay. He tried to make things just like they'd always been. But little by little he noticed changes in her he couldn't fathom. She was less affectionate and responded indifferently to his suggestions for fun. The hours went by so fast he'd hardly time to start getting on the old footing than she was away. One Saturday she said to him:

"Mummy's got a new boyfriend."

"That's nice," he said. "What's his name?"

"Colin."

"Is he good fun?"

"Mummy says we're moving."

"Does she? Where to?"

"Spain."

He put the plate he was wiping in the drainer and turned to the window. His heart was thudding to break his ribs.

"I don't want to go to Spain, daddy," the child said and started to cry.

"It's okay, sweetie," he said, picking her up. "You don't have to go. You can stay with me. We'll have great fun, eh?"

When Louise came to collect her he said:

"What's this about Spain?"

"You'll find out. All in good time."

“Holly doesn’t want to go.”

“She’s a child. She doesn’t know what she wants.”

But when they were alone he lost his temper:

“For fuck’s sake, Louise. I’m her father.”

“So?”

“So she needs her fucking father. Children need fathers.”

“Do they?”

“I think so.”

“Are you sure it’s not you who needs a daughter?”

“Well of course I need her. She’s my fucking daughter. It’s my place to bring her up.”

“She’ll be fine. She’ll have everything she needs.”

“Except me. Don’t you think she needs to keep her relationship to me?”

“No, I don’t, Jem. Frankly I think you’re bad for her. She’s a bright girl and she needs to be pushed. She can get on in life. All she learns from you is how to sit around reading and drawing.”

“Picasso spent his life sitting around drawing.”

“At least he made some money from it. You don’t make a penny. It’s a waste of time. I don’t want her to grow up like you. I want her to get on.”

“You should want her to be happy.”

“Oh, happiness. You don’t live in the real world, Jem. Everybody manipulates everybody to get what they want. Don’t you understand that?”

He couldn’t answer. His nerves were badly shocked. This pretty, apparently charming woman he’d loved was a monster. He was bereft of means to make contact with her.

He discovered Colin owned language schools in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao, employed young linguists with TEFL certificates and made a fortune. He went to a solicitor to see if he could stop Louise; it cost him thousands to lose the case. The arrangement was he would fly out to see Holly once a month. She would stay with him for a few days at Christmas and for a week during the summer. He

comforted himself with the thought of his monthly visit. He booked no frills, stayed in a cheap hotel, explored Madrid with her. But a visit was cancelled because they were going to Malaga and another because she was to stay with Colin's sister, then he was ill, he didn't have the money. Three months went by and he didn't see her.

His little flat was full of pictures of her. He sent her sketches of birds, flowers, trees, people. He recorded messages on tape telling her all he'd done and everything that was happening and asked her to do the same for him, but nothing arrived. He wrote to Louise to protest she was turning the child against him. She didn't reply. One wet, windy October evening he followed the swollen, swirling river to the old, wooden tram bridge. Through the gaps in the boards he could see the mad water smashing its head against the pillars and the white crests rising up defiantly, falling back to join the next surge. He jumped up onto the barrier, stood still for a second then launched himself headfirst. He was swept fiercely away and his body jammed against a pillar of the next bridge.

They resuscitated him but knew he had brain damage. He was unconscious for three weeks. When he came round, the doctor was surprised he could speak. She asked him what year it was. He had no idea. Who was Prime Minister? He said Harold Wilson. What was his phone number? He didn't know he had a phone. His physical recovery was relatively rapid. He was able to walk around the grounds, his appetite was good; but when he was taken back to his flat he didn't recognise it. A clinical psychologist worked with him for months and little by little he pieced together a picture of who he'd been.

"Who is this child?" he asked holding a picture of Holly.

"Your daughter."

He shook his head.

Going back to his job was impossible. He'd accumulated a little pension and with benefits had enough to exist. Every day he went for a long walk by the river and once, coming back through the town, someone he didn't recognize stopped him on the street.

"Jem! How are you?"

He smiled and shook the proffered hand.

"Remember me?"

“I’m sorry.”

“Vic. Vic Toulmin. We used to go to St Ives together. I played guitar for Meg Park. Remember. We shared a room one year.”

Jem looked into the man’s face and in his head there came a series of images: a beach, breakers rolling in beneath a blue sky; a fire at night; a girl on the street singing; a young man with long hair in torn jeans and a t-shirt sketching holidaymakers; a pretty girl with a slim waist; a birthing room and a baby’s head stretching the lips impossibly to force its way into the world.

“Vic?” he said. “No, I’m sorry. I don’t remember.”

He let go of the hand and walked on.

MATTHEW BARON

ST. MACHAR'S BAR

One with the lads
after turning the fields.
We gather no crops
but harvest cups and shields.
Muddy boots in the corner
off the winding street,
where others pour in from
too many to greet.

The drinks hardly balance
on the worn wooden shelf.
No talk of philosophy
or the nature of self.
Just plenty of ale
quaffed on precarious seating,
some men stand
jealous of those sat eating.

What sights have been seen
since its construction?
The bar room brawls,
Over some obscene obstruction.
Was it here when soldiers,
Khaki sodden in blood
returned from war
wearing boots of foreign mud

Populated by students,
faces often vexed
at extortionate prices
of university texts.
And men in flat caps,
all avoiding their wives,
sip beer beside them,
forgetting their lives.

Players stumble in
with 'Post-match hobble'
others stumble out
across the dust and the cobble.
Outside the window
the night bus passes,
we all take note
and return to our glasses.



A pensioner snoozing on a deck chair at Bognor Regis claims he was assaulted by a large black woman. “She was gigantic, steatopygous, built like Serena Williams. She hooched up her short skirt and bounced up an down on me flaccid member like a succubus! It was horrible!” Police said there were no black women in the whole of Bognor Regis that day but the victim insisted on retribution and a line-up was arranged at short notice by D.C. Plodd, a promising youngster on secondment from the Met.

HAVE A WONDERFUL HOLIDAY

Zohar Teshartok

Impatiently Yitzhak tore the coloured wrapping paper off the retirement gift he had received from his work place and his eyes spotted an exquisite globe. After many years of devoted work at the travel office “Global Tours”, scarcely missing a day, he got a symbolic gift that expressed appreciation for his commitment and devotion to his work.

He placed the globe carefully on the table of his living room and looked at it from different angles. The surface was a coloured relief featuring mountains and valleys, deserts and seas in appropriate colours and concrete shapes. Another look taught him the names of the countries and their capital cities marked by a set of little flags, placed on models of miniature cities.

The globe itself was set in a wooden frame that served as a base for the axis around which it rotates. Arrows were attached to the frame pointing to the flag of the country and its capital at the end of the rotation. At that moment Yitzhak decided to rotate the globe and travel to the location pointed at by the arrow for a long vacation free of everyday worries.

As the globe rotated, Yitzhak gazed at it waiting to see where he was going to spend his spontaneous vacation. Lands and cities passed swiftly in front of his eyes while he tried to guess to what country the arrow would point when the rotation came to an end. Finally the arrow pointed to “Israel-Jerusalem”. The result came as a surprise to him, as he and his family had been residents of Jerusalem for five generations and he decided to try again, and like before he looked apprehensively to see where it would stop.

To his surprise the arrow again showed “Israel-Jerusalem” and the same result was repeated after he had rotated the globe for the third time. This co-incidence aroused his suspicion that the mechanism inside the globe was out of order from the very beginning. With his deft and skilful hands that he had used in the past to repair office equipment in the travel office aided by the technical sense that he possessed, Yitzhak dismantled the parts of the globe encircling the mechanism, and arranged them side by side on the living room table.

A thorough look at the mechanism showed him how the cog wheel and the metal parts of the set of small flags that rotated the globe, worked in harmony. After a few slight alterations he assumed that he had achieved his aim and from then on he needed only a few minutes to reassemble the globe back to its original state in order to realize his plans for a vacation.

Certain that he had succeeded in restoring the mechanism of the globe, Yitzhak rotated it lightly. At the end of the rotation the arrow showed a different outcome – “Bern, Switzerland”. From his long experience as a travel agent he knew that at this time of the year the beauty of Switzerland is revealed in its full glory and the weather is eminently suitable for a long relaxed vacation. Therefore he immediately began to make the necessary arrangements for his trip.

“Global tours, Shalom, Nurit speaking. Can I help you?” this was a new travel agent who had probably replaced him and therefore did not recognize him. However, this did not interest him as his mind was set on realizing his dream holiday as soon as possible and he requested tickets for a flight to Switzerland in business class for the coming day.

“Sorry Sir, because of the holiday season all flights to the destination you requested are full for the next month. Could we interest you in other destinations such as Spain or Italy?” Yitzhak did not believe his ears and refused to change his plans and accept her suggestion to fly to another destination although it might have been a good substitute.

The travel agent tried another suggestion: “Sir, if you are not interested in another destination abroad, perhaps I could suggest a wonderful holiday in the country. Do you know how beautiful Jerusalem is at this time of the year? You can spend a wonderful holiday there, Sir....”

Her suggestion was answered by loud shattering sounds. After Yitzhak had finished smashing the globe on the wall and tearing it to pieces, he went into the bedroom and locked the door. As long as it depended on him he would never leave it again.

TANNER

THE GOOD FIGHT

There I am
at me till
wearing a T-shirt that says
'Ask Me About Our Bonus Card'
like a sodding sandwich board

and as I scan a woman's
1kg of oven chips
I ask her
'Would you like to sign up
fer one of our bonus cards, madam?'
and she looks up,
shakes her head in disgust.

'Good fer you!' I tell her.
'Never give yer details out
to a supermarket,
yer never know
what the company bastards do with em!
Yer never know
oo the corporate bastards
sell your personal information to
an fer what purpose!'

She shuffled out with her chips
quickly,
as my manager shook
his grey little worried head at me

and I had never felt
so fucking pure.

REDEMPTION

Bronwen Wild

After he died I took it away before it was relegated, with the accumulated detritus of my father's eighty years, to the rubbish dump. My brothers and I took what we wanted from the house in the way of furniture, books and pictures and no-one commented when I extracted the battered black case from the cupboard under the stairs and carried it out to the car together with a box of books, a painting of the house and a little round Victorian piano stool.

It was sometime before I opened the case and took out the mandolin. The belly was fine; the eight strings intact, the mother of pearl and tortoise shell decoration in perfect condition and every one of the ivory pegs in place. It was the back that was so shocking. Where there should have been rows of immaculately cut strips of shiny wood melded invisibly together to form a swelling round there was a heart stopping gash, the slivers of wood smashed and splintered. It had been like this for as long as I could remember, since before Sol Cohen gave it to my father. But to see the wounded instrument afresh was unbearably painful.

Sol and my father had been at school together in the 1920s. Sol was Jewish but his family had been in England since the 1890s and though his mother still maintained a kosher kitchen and all the family spoke both Polish and Yiddish they did not go to synagogue and were to all intents and purposes assimilated, even if life, in safe and tolerant Britain, had not always been without its hurts and difficulties. My father and Sol were both clever boys but there had never been any chance of my father going off to university when Sol did in 1925. They remained close however, as Sol climbed the academic ladder in the Dept. of Slavonic Studies at London University.

I met him many times at my parents' house after the war; a handsome man with greying, curly hair and penetrating eyes. I'd heard the stories of his visits to Poland in the thirties to visit his colleague Aleksey, a distinguished scholar who had retired to the little town of Grodno from his post at Warsaw University. Sol loved Polish literature and poetry especially and introduced me to the wonderful epic poem, "Pan Tadeusz" by Poland's national poet Adam

REDEMPTION

Michiewitz .It was another of his stories though that gripped my imagination more; a story tragic and fascinating at the same time.

In the same apartment block as Aleksey there lived a man called Jakub Levanovski and his daughter Hanna. Jakub was the conductor of the Grodno Jewish Children's Orchestra. Sol had a photograph of the fifteen children holding their mandolins with Jakub in the middle. It is torn, stained and faded, impossible to reproduce here. Hanna, his daughter, is on the back row, third from the left. The children are wearing school uniform, the girls in dark frocks with large white collars and the boys in high buttoned jackets. Several times, Sol told us, he had been invited to these mandolin concerts. The music he heard was a revelation! The instruments, he said, became literally "vessels of song", the melodies reminding him of the human voice complete with laughing and weeping.

"The rhythms were so compulsive I could not stop my foot from tapping on the wooden floor of the hall. The music got faster and faster until you felt dizzy as though it were you dancing and whirling around. Hanna had a lovely voice and she sang songs to the accompaniment of the rest of the mandolins. Sad songs they were, about hunger and longing. One of them I remember particularly. It was called "Es Brent"—"Our Town Burns." Prophetic, considering what happened later."

What happened later, of course, was the destruction of European Jewry. Grodno's 25,000 Jews were rounded up, including Jakub and Hanna and the other children from the orchestra, and forced into the ghetto. Aleksey never saw them again nor did he know for sure what happened to them; whether they died of starvation or were transported to the concentration camps.

Many Jews, striving to find enough money to buy bread and potatoes and the occasional chicken, had been obliged to sell their most precious possessions; their clothes, china, jewellery.....and their musical instruments. After the war, Grodno, a beautiful baroque town, became part of Belarus and of course, Communist. There was not much opportunity for private enterprise but nevertheless a few small independent shops survived. It was in front of one such that Aleksey paused on a fine Spring afternoon in 1948. It was a shabby little place selling second hand goods and not far from where the ghetto had been. Peering in at the dingy collection of bits and pieces

he saw the mandolin, forlorn and dusty, its back broken. The shop keeper admitted that he had bought it from a Jew in 1942. Aleksey paid him a few zlotys and took the instrument home, convinced that it must be one of the mandolins used by the musicians in the children's orchestra before the war.

All this Sol told us when he brought the useless instrument to my father's house a few months before he died. In the seventies Sol had managed to get a visa for a brief visit to the by now very old Aleksey, who had insisted on the mandolin going back to England.

"You will be able to have it mended and maybe one day someone will recreate Jakub and Hanna's music again."

For one reason or another Sol had never done anything about it and neither had my father. So it was up to me it seemed. I took the mandolin to a shop called Hobgoblins in a street off Oxford Street in London. They sell Irish harps and viols and penny whistles. They also mend instruments and blithely insisted that it would be 'no problem' to fix the mandolin! I collected it a few months later now perfectly restored to its former lovely condition. They told me it had been made in Poland around 1829.

I have decided what I must do. With the help of a Polish organisation in London I managed to find Eva, Aleksey's grand daughter, I wrote to her and had a reply. She thinks, like I do, that the mandolin should be in the Jewish Memorial Museum in Grodno. I'm planning to fly to Poland this summer. Even if it is not Hanna's mandolin, it is a symbol of that wild klezmer music produced by Jakub and the children of Grodno and which fell silent all those years ago.

LAITHWAITE'S SPIN

Brett Wilson

It was December 1974. In those days the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures were delivered prior to Christmas, with the final lecture given on Christmas Eve. Since their inception (beginning with Faraday in 1825) the purpose of the lectures has been to make science accessible to young people, and when they became televised (in 1966) it was Eric Laithwaite who gave the first one. But it was the second set of lectures, given in 1974 for which Laithwaite would become infamous. So what happened in this magic year? What is it that lives in the memory of so many who were privileged to see it?

Eric Laithwaite was born in 1921. He was an electrical engineer and proud of it. Essentially, this means that he favoured physical intuition, crucially above that of mathematics. In one of the lectures he demonstrates the inadequacy of mathematics to deliver a coherent description by sticking a block to a plane with jam. As he raises the plane, he describes what mathematics tells us the block should do. The block does something else.

Born in Atherton, Lancashire, Laithwaite joined the RAF in 1941, where he became a test engineer. He attended Manchester University in 1946 studying electrical engineering and earning a Masters for work on the Mark 1 computer. It was his doctoral work that began an interest in the linear induction motor with which he was associated in the 1960s. He became professor of heavy electrical engineering at Imperial College London in 1964.

Laithwaite was a maverick who enjoyed championing the ideas of amateurs over experts. In 1974 he had been approached by an inventor named Alex Jones who claimed to have created a reactionless propulsion system. The device utilised a pendulum to drive a wagon intermittently along a table top. Laithwaite believed that 'he had seen something impossible' and he went on to claim that Newton's laws of motion could not fully account for the behaviour of gyroscopes.

When Laithwaite was invited to deliver a lecture to the Royal Institution in November 1974 on a subject of his choosing, he took the opportunity to demonstrate the behaviour he had observed. It's not known exactly what happened during the demonstration (the

lecture was not published by the RI, although Laithwaite's account appears in his book *Engineering Through the Looking Glass*), but what followed in the following Christmas Lectures was an impassioned exposition of the behaviour of gyroscopes and an angry attack on the Royal Institution.



Eric Laithwaite

My fifteen year old brain was more than ready to accept Laithwaite's assertions. But now it is Eric Laithwaite the performer that draws me in. I don't have a full set of recordings of those lectures, only fragments, but it is enough. He makes his entrance from the back of the lecture theatre, spins a small gyroscope and places it on a line that reaches to the stage. The gyro dances downwards where is caught by his assistant. Laithwaite has not said a word.

He is a master showman. He presses a button, there is a bang and a flash and we are reminded that the audience is young. I can see he is

one of those rare performers who allows himself the time to think on stage. The freshness and force remind me of Jacob Bronowski. Like Bronowski he is able to employ simile to good effect. He invites 'Alice' in the audience to read a passage from *Jabberwocky* and reminds us that gyre and gimble refer to gyroscopes.

With increasingly larger gyroscopes he illustrates precession, the apparent lack of angular momentum, the translation of the centre of gravity. He is enthralling, on the edge of discovery himself. He also has courage. As he says "We *dare* to make the intangible, tangible." This edge, this willingness to goad the establishment is all too evident in his exposition. Here is how he describes science: "The Jabberwok was a monster with many heads. It was representative of the way we divide our sciences into physics, chemistry, biology..... then we take one of those like physics and divide it into heat, light, sound, electricity..... then we sub-divide that and so on. Now some of these heads of the Jabberwok are really laws of physics, and some of them look into mirrors and see their own reflections and they then think there are more of their kind than there really are. The idea of the profession of science as a monster is not a new one...." He quotes Martin Gardiner: *The really big bangs occur in physicist's heads when they try to put together the pieces handed to them by the experimentalists.* "It is the job of the engineer to interpret science. You mustn't let it become so pure that it becomes a nonsense. As far as I am concerned I go along with Humpty Dumpty. 'When I use a word' says Humpty Dumpty 'it means just what I choose it to mean. Neither more nor less.' And so say I with emphasis.... For after what I thought to be a clear exposition of a subject in this theatre last November, my use of the conservation of momentum principle was interpreted as a claim to have created momentum out of nothing. How anyone with a PhD could get that wrong I cannot imagine. After that, half the crackpots in the kingdom are writing to me solving the world's energy crisis. It's like the whispering game at a party. After that follows the slings and arrows. You have no idea! Freeman Dyson made these comments writing in the *Scientific American*: 'Most of the crackpot papers that are sent to the physical review are rejected, not because it is impossible to understand them, but because it is possible. *Those which are impossible to understand are usually published*.'" (Laithwaite's emphasis) The young audience laughs and claps. They all get the joke: *the establishment are idiots.* Laithwaite expects sophistication in his audience.

When he talks about the unwillingness of scientists to listen, there is anger in his voice. Would a presenter be allowed to be angry by the media school generation? They are all Pollyannas these days. He concludes in forceful tones: “‘I see nobody on the road’ said Alice. ‘I only wish I had such eyes’ said the King in a fretful tone. ‘To be able to see nobody, and at that distance too!’ Lewis Carol must be laughing at us all.”

Laithwaite continued to investigate gyroscopes, acknowledging that they worked in accordance with Newton’s laws, but continued to believe in reactionless propulsion (a patent was granted in 1999 after his death). But was he right? Laithwaite was a man with intense curiosity and a desire to communicate. He had seen his work on the induction motor, and its application to magnetic levitation, cancelled. But perhaps he still craved attention, and this drove him to attempt something radical. There have always been eccentrics in the history of science and they have often been derided and marginalised. He had strayed into a wonderland of physics where his normally faultless intuition could not be relied on. Towards the latter part of his life and career the usual honours that were given to a scientist of his level of achievement were denied. But it is Laithwaite the performer who strikes me now.

Mr Laithwaite you were a crazy oik, but how dull the world would have been without you. ‘Beware the Jabberwock my son, the claws that scratch, the jaws that bite.’

SIX OF ONE AND HALF A DOZEN OF THE OTHER.

David Birtwistle

The call came out of the blue. Henry had spent the past few weeks watching his bank balance slowly dwindle and painfully tightening the notches on his ample belt. His pension gave him a bare subsistence, if that. If he stayed in and avoided anything at all that hinted at minor luxuries he could just about get by. If he wanted to live as he was accustomed, go out to the pub, put on the odd bet, eat a few take-aways, then he'd have to find a job and in this financial climate that was a near impossibility. For three weeks out of four he had to chill out, or doss about and fester and vegetate as he used to call it, but it wasn't ideal. So when Mike phoned him up with a proposal he had his complete attention.

"Look, I've got a proposition. Say 'No' if you want, but just hear me out. Our Mathew's got a new job. In fact it's a serious promotion. He's spotted a special deal, a holiday, on line. Two weeks in Dubrovnik with tours of the Dalmatian coast and Montenegro for half price. He thought that to celebrate he'd take me and Sheila with him and his missus. Are you with me so far? That's flights, hotel, transfers, a tour guide, a really good deal. Too good to miss, in fact. So here's the point. Would you be willing to house-sit for two weeks so that we don't have to put the new dog in kennels? You'd live here, stay in the guest room, there's the big TV, Sky sports the lot. We'd leave food in the freezer and stock up on beer and wine. You'd be house-sitting for two weeks, you'd have very little to do, just keep an eye on things whilst we're away and feed the dog. Sheila would feel a lot better about going away knowing you were here."

The dog was a golden Labrador pup. It was small but Henry knew it would get bigger and grow into a daft, fat lump of blubber but it was no problem to him. Mike had bought it for Sheila after their youngest left home. He said 'Yes' almost without thinking because he knew, instinctively, it was just what the doctor ordered. It was a sign that his luck was changing. Two weeks free board and booze, five minutes from the shops and the pub.' You can't get better than that,' he thought. 'Yes. That's fine. I can handle that.' 'Good. I'm making out a list as we speak. Everything you need to know. Alarm code. Emergency numbers. Neighbours. Which shops to use if you need them. Which pubs are which. And I'll come and pick you up and I'll

drop you off at home when we get back. Our flight's at six.

He'd been to Mike and Sheila's a couple of times but he'd never stayed over. It was very neat and tidy from what he remembered. Not very big but compact and set into a quiet road a quarter of a mile from the shops. One of the first things Mike had said when he moved there, years ago, was that he could come home on a Friday night, park up and not need to use the car again all weekend. Everything he needed was within walking distance. Things had changed a bit since then, supermarkets had seen to that but basically the house and the location were the same. The only thing that had really changed in a slow, subtle way was that Mike had developed an obsession for leaving this comfortable and ideally placed home base at every opportunity he could find and would go off gallivanting all over the place on so called 'holidays'. So obsessive was he that it seemed as though he had a Book of Destinations and loved nothing more than going through it frantically, page by page, ticking places off. And when he got back he would talk endlessly about the airport, the cost of tickets, the flight, the delays, the hotel room, the en suite, and never mention the place itself. Still, thought Henry, 'Whilst the cat's away..... '

It started off well and got better. The first day there he quietly sussed the place out, checked the dog and then let himself into the cushioned folds of the sofa and flicked through the channels on the large, high-definition TV and practised getting used to the zapper. The only thing that puzzled him slightly was the front room. Henry thought of the front room as a parlour but this one had had a polished table with a bunch of artificial gladioli in a glass vase and six chairs pushed under it. It reminded him of one of those Morecambe tea-rooms but there were no table cloths or doilies on it. He thought they must play cards on it although a baize top would be much better than the deep polish. He wasn't really into art but some of the paintings on the wall he'd seen before in WH Smiths or that stall on Stockport market. They were scenes of exotic places or imaginary landscapes. He didn't pay much attention to them but he did like some of the ceramic dogs on the shelf above the picture rail. On the opposite wall were Toby jugs, plates with paintings on them and memorial cups and mugs.

The odd thing was that apart from the parlour, the 'Snap and Happy Families' room as he called it, everywhere was comfortable but

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spare, without any form of decoration other than wallpaper. Everything was subordinated to comfort. In the small breakfast bar in the kitchen, the stools had soft, foamy tops you could sink into and the small downstairs loo which he could only just squeeze into had a fluffy pink cover on the seat. This made it warm to sit on but he would have to remember to raise the seat when he was standing in front of it, he didn't want an accident. And that reminded him that when he got comfortable in front of the television with a crate of beer and a pizza, he'd use the plastic bucket he'd seen when he first tried to go to the loo and ended up in the scullery.

He felt light-headed already. The joy inside him stemmed from being in peaceful, cosy surroundings in a house he couldn't afford himself. Even the air in the room seemed like light pillows stuffed with Turkish Delight. He sat on the sofa, stretched out and felt the cushions yield beneath him. He unbuttoned his shirt, which to be fair was bursting against his front and he unbuckled his belt. Then he took off his socks and eased himself into place. With a minimal, effortless movement he pressed the remote control. In these surroundings he could happily watch anything. It suddenly struck him that not only was this a huge TV taking up as much room as a fireplace but it had channels he had never seen before. 'I wonder,' he thought. Pressing the next button he moved through virtual world after world until he stopped at Sky Sports. The England world cup qualifier against Uzbekistan was tomorrow. Today he'd be in clover with cricket, boxing and speedway, and tomorrow..... With High Definition you thought you were there. He could be here as comfortable as he'd ever been in his life and he could be somewhere else at the same time!

On the worktop of the breakfast bar were three dozen cans of Boddington's bitter, a dozen cans of Carlsberg, a wine rack with six bottles of red and six of white and a bottle of gin. He thought to himself, 'A bottle of tonic is less than a quid. I can't grumble at that.' Stuck to the orange tiles with Blutack was a list of phone numbers catering for every emergency. Henry cracked a can and began looking for the food. An extra large casserole dish on top of the microwave had a note sellotaped to it. 'Hot pot. All yours, Henry. Bon appetit. Everything else is in the freezer in the garage and labelled with instructions. Just help yourself.' He lifted the lid and sniffed. It was rich and herby. 'Gosh. There's enough here for a family of eight,' he thought and slipped it into the oven and set it on

high for five minutes.

Opening a can of dog food he felt in charge, almost like the master of the house. He spooned half of it into the right hand plastic dish and filled the other side with water. He certainly knew how to look after a dog. It came and went inside its own time zone and being small used the cat flap in and out of the back garden. As the oven heated his meal and a rich aroma scented the kitchen air he sat on one of the bar stools, drank contentedly from a can of lager and looked around the kitchen. At first he couldn't see any plates, knives and forks, dishes, bottles, jars, washing up equipment, towels or anything at all. He was puzzled and began opening cupboard doors. What he found astonished him. Precision stacking. Things were stowed away tighter than on board ship. Spices, chutneys, pickles and sauces in one, pasta, rice, pulses and noodles in another, a whole dinner service incredibly interlocked in another. 'If I got one out I wouldn't know how to put it back' he thought. 'I'd better get some paper plates. How they do all this is beyond me. And another thing. Where's all the clutter? Surely they keep all the jumble and all their old paraphernalia somewhere? Where's the stuff they don't use but never throw out? It must be somewhere.' A thought descended on him and a light lit up. Perhaps that's why they're building the extension! And a new sense of understanding entered his being. That's what extensions are for!

Henry woke up with a jolt. He was flat out on the sofa with an empty wine glass in his hand and the TV still on. He had decided that the double bed in the guest room was too pristine and he didn't want to sully it. It was so warm downstairs that he had slept comfortably in just his vest and underpants and, like the true Englishman he was, he kept his socks on. He checked the carpet. For a second his heart missed a beat. But no, no mess or stains, no wine or food had dripped onto anything obvious. After two helpings of hotpot and a bottle of red he'd slept like a log. He smiled to himself. What joy, what heaven.

He didn't want to use the immaculately clean grill pan he'd seen stacked behind the plates so he decided to go for a leisurely stroll and see what he could find. It was a clear, mild morning, the leaves were out on the trees, the birds were singing, the bees were buzzing around the flowers and when he turned into the high street the small shops and banks and post office and cafes seemed to reverberate with

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life's small excitements. It felt just like a holiday and it was beginning to completely reinvigorate him. He stopped by the hole in the wall, put in his card and withdrew £50 hoping this would last him. He picked up a Daily Mirror, called at the bakers and bought a bacon and two sausage barm and sauntered around chewing mouthfuls of true nourishing goodness. The sun smiled gently on him and reinforced his sense of well-being. 'This is better than Benidorm' he thought and it made him think of places he had visited. 'It beats Blackpool hands down. Better than Turkey, better than Crete. Sun but not too hot. No flies, no insect bites, real ale and bacon butties that taste right.' He took the last third of his sandwich into Ladbroke's betting shop. He cast his eyes round the walls and the banks of television sets tuned in to the day's racing. There were only two other people there. He sat at a table, checked the odds, wrote out a betting slip and backed two horses one in the 2.15 at Kempton and one in the 3.30 at Ayr. 'Would you like coffee?' asked the nice young lady behind the till. 'No thank you very much. That's very good of you but I've a nice home to go back to.' Filled with warmth he went back walking on air. The butcher's shop he passed looked really good, the vegetable and flower shop a delight to behold, the aromas coming out of the cafes were enticing, and passing the coffee shop almost made him swoon. By the time he reached home he had redefined the world around him and his place in it. Here was the very centre of the universe. There was everything anyone could possibly ever need, the sun shone and he hadn't a care in the world.

That evening as his second day's helping of hotpot warmed in the oven he settled on the sofa and flicked through the channels until he found Sky Sports 2. Watching David Beckham return imperiously to the national side and stroke the ball gloriously around the park and Grouchy nodding in a beauty and Rooney work like a Trojan, running back to tackle, probing forward, out wide to assist and then taking a run at goal himself, Henry felt proud to be English and that night he slept the sleep of the gods.

The next morning he decided not to shave in case he left his whiskers in the highly polished bowl. So he straightened himself up to his full height and went out to seek the shops by a different route. This time he turned right after the school, past the old church and down a cobbled street with cottages. A fresh smell of strong sweet coffee hung in the air as he looked into the art shop full of framed

watercolours of local scenes which he liked but couldn't afford. Then he looked into the new and antiquarian bookseller's and browsed among the volumes of local history, two of which he promised himself he'd buy when he got some pennies and his new spectacles. He was in a gentle, timeless backwater with another small, snug cafe and a pub The Nag's Head at the end on the corner. To Henry the whole ambience reminded him of a picture he'd once seen on a nineteenth century calendar, the England they now market to tourists. He called in Ladbroke's and collected £26 of winnings. He decided to invest in two well done double bacon and sausage barns with brown sauce and buy a few vanilla slices for his lunch. The rest of the money he would save for a rainy day. Today was sunny and he was on a roll.

After that his only expenses were at breakfast time. Each day he would wander at a leisurely pace around the shops, greet fellow passers-by with a cheery 'Good morning,' buy a paper and stroll about like a man of means. By the end of the first week he'd met the dog twice, decided 5 nights on the run with hotpot was enough and lobbed the remainder in the bin along with the paper plates, pulled out two smaller freezer tubs marked 'Corned beef hash' and 'Toad in the hole' and left them on the windowsill to thaw out. He'd seen some form of football nearly every day, watched the darts, the cycling and the golf, seen the odd game show, enjoyed a documentary on Measuring your own carbon footprint and he'd spent some time sitting looking out of the window feeling pleased with himself.

The second week he discovered another bakery a few yards past the wine merchant. He thought the pies were the best he'd ever had. His task for the week was to sample everything they had on offer. Steak and Ale was an instant hit and so difficult to resist he decided he'd eat them in tandem, a steak and ale plus.. ...The first day he'd had two steak and ale with a tub of mushy peas, the second day steak and ale with a meat and potato pie, the third day with a Cornish pasty, the fourth with cheese and onion, the fifth with steak and kidney pudding and on Saturday to celebrate he had two steak and ale, three sausage rolls, a cold pork pie with mustard and a tub of hot baked beans. Lunches were blissful and he'd had a full bacon breakfast to set him up for the day and an evening meal out of the freezer to look forward to.

It was Sunday and they were due to return. Henry went round the

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house with a fine tooth comb although in truth there was no need since he'd hardly touched a thing. He opened the loo window and really scrubbed at the wash basin with his discarded socks after giving in and having a shave. It was raining gently but still warm and the dog came inside for the first time. It sat in its fluffy cot its eye on the food tray and its ear cocked to the cat flap. There seemed to be a certain understanding between man and beast. At 10.30 the phone rang for the first time in two weeks.

'We're at the airport and we'll be there within the hour,'

'Have you had a good time?' asked Henry.

'Yes but the flight was late and we had to hang about at the airport. The hotel was so-so, the en-suite helped. Tell you when I see you.'

An hour later Mike and Sheila arrived to find the house and the dog looking remarkably as they had left it.

'Dog no trouble?'

'He's been fine.'

'Find the food all right?'

'Yes thanks. How was the trip?'

'Well, the hotel, we had the en-suite but if we'd had to pay...Thank God we had the en-suite that's all I can say. I tell you what, I tried my debit card, I tried my credit card, I tried my visa, I tried my American Express. If it wasn't.....'

'What on earth's he blathering about? He's just had a holiday. He should be over the moon.' thought Henry. 'I ask you. Chip and PIN. Anyway on the flight back we tried to get an upgrade, but this hostess, flight crew, call 'em what you will, she wasn't having any.....'

They must have seen something of interest in a fortnight.

'And another thing. Waiting in the airport coming back. That was a nightmare. Some sort of electrical storm and air traffic control.....'

For the past two weeks this house has been perfect. I could retire here.

'So, where was I? Anyway. I turned round to this cabin crew, air hostess, call her what you will and I said to her.....'

'I'll see you next time you go away' said Henry and pulled the door gently behind him.

'There could be anything up to half a dozen holidays in the pipeline here' he thought.

THREE UNEASY PIECES

Marie Feargrieve

Imprudence

I considered doing it, told myself don't be crazy and did it anyway. I am ashamed and feel stupid if truth be told. But no excuses. It was an act of unadulterated thuggery. I had woken up that morning in a strange mood. At war with the world in general and me in particular. The milk was off, so no cereal. The rain was hammering down and my face in the mirror didn't look as good as a bag of spuds, so not a good start all told. The bus was late. No matter, I wasn't needed anywhere or fast. Seats were scarce. I sat behind a guy with a bald head and a type of Long John Baldry pigtail or ponytail. Whatever. All of three inches and skinny to boot. I stared. Lank, useless, offending. It wasn't planned. My hand shot out. Swift and peevish. It was gone. I gaped at his bare neck. The pigtail lay hairy and pathetic in my palm. I threw it down, a legless centipede, under the seat. 'Course I'm ashamed. The guy reckoned he'd been assaulted. Whinger. I'd done him a favour. Felt good.

Madness

It is the emptiness behind the eyes. Staring at me like a dumb rabbit. A response, a jibe, a dig, anything would have been better than her stupid silence. She turns to walk away. But I haven't finished.

"Turn around." My voice is calm. I lunge. A hank of hair wrapped around my fingers. I look at her on the floor. The carpet needs cleaning. My heel grinds into her nose. Something explodes and sticks to my shoe. I step back, stumble, arms catch me, hold fast.

"My god, are you mad?"

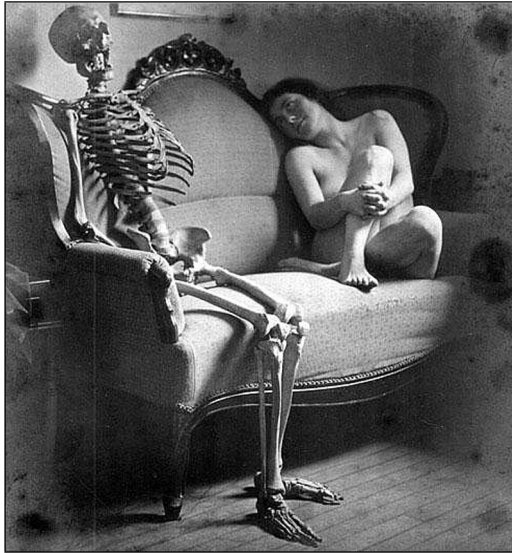
No. Not mad. Her passivity makes me angry. Too many blank eyes. They don't fool me. They see only too well.

Reunion

I'd had my doubts about the whole thing. Too late now. I was here. Hand on silvered door panel. My face stared back at me. The years rolled down disguised as tears. She would be a complete stranger to

THREE UNEASY PIECES

me and I to her. Was I good enough to finger her velvet life? Mine had been and was all prickles, sharp edges. I gazed ahead, seeing nothing. This place wasn't right. Too much swank and glass and chrome. Well cut clothes and tailored affectation. A hand touched my arm. I turned to see grey blue eyes, the outfit calm colours of perfection, the embodiment of cool. Inadequacy pricked my skin in sweat. Sudden anger hit below the ribs. The guilt is hers. She threw me away. I will scratch the glass house of her life. My tongue unsticks , flicks, "Long time, no see Mother."



That diet's not working Edith. Just look at the state of you! Fat thighs, huge tits, hands like a bunch of bananas. Why not take up smoking? Just look what it's done for me.

MY LIFE IN PRINT

Ray Blyde

CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

The first night Sed started work on the Advertiser he came in straight from the hospital and felt bushed because he'd been up since eight a.m. Luckily the work wasn't as hectic as the daily. Most of the copies went to north Wales, or at least the early additions did. The staff on nights were mainly middle aged and one or two were close to retirement. Old Tom Naseby was said to be over seventy. He was a Yorkshireman from Leeds. When he wasn't beachcombing on Wallasey seashore, he used to go and with his ninety nine year old dad every other weekend. Sed noticed very early on that there was an air of deep despondency over the chapel, this became more apparent as the night wore on whenever the overseer appeared at the end of each edition. There was a lot of yes sir, no sir, and touch of the forelock for Sed's liking. George Danson had been a very effective branch secretary at one time and a very large thorn in the side of the management. They couldn't beat him so they made him up to an overseer, and now he was a bigger thorn in the union's side. He knew trade union law chapter and verse, so it was very difficult to pull the wool over his eyes. He also attended quarterly union meetings at Central hall and told those who complained that he was a fully paid up member of the union and had a perfect right to be there, and if this wasn't bad enough he had a very short fuse which intimidated everyone who came in contact with him. He told Sed that as long as he did his job and didn't cause trouble they would get along fine. Sed, for his part had no intention of causing trouble, anything for a quiet life, he had enough problems of his own.

One evening Sed was ten minutes late coming in, having left the hospital in good time he got caught in traffic coming from the Liverpool Sheffield Wednesday match. He parked his motor bike in the loading bay and ran up the stairs to the third floor to find Danson waiting for him at the top. Danson looked at his wrist watch and indicated with a sweep of his arm that he wanted him in his office. Sed looked around to see if the F.O.C.. was in the vicinity, he wasn't. Sed had no intention of going into the office without a union official.

"Where's Pierce?" he asked the man on the moulding press.

"He's downstairs, anyway he won't go in with you he's shit scared of Danson," Danson stood impatiently in the doorway of his office looking as if he was about to burst a blood vessel.

"Get in here Kirk!"

"Not until I get an official to go in with me!" replied Sed stubbornly.

"I don't think you're in a very good position to dictate terms to me young man." He could see that Sed, whatever the consequences Sed was not going to be bullied into complying. He grabbed the nearest interdepartmental phone and instructed Pierce to come upstairs. A few minutes later the lift doors opened to reveal a white faced Pierce.

"What 'ave I done wrong now?" he was visibly shaking.

"Look," said Sed "Danson wants to give me a bollocking for being late which is fair enough, but I'm not going into that office on my own."

"Why not?"

"Why not, don't you read your rule book?" Pierce shrugged his shoulders.

"We always go in on our own.!" Danson put his head around the and said

"Get your backsides in here now or you'll both be out through that door over there!" Pierce jumped with fright.

"Yes Mr Danson." and shot passed Sed like scalded cat. Sed followed and closed the door behind him. Danson was livid. He pointed a forefinger in Sed's direction and said.

"I know what your little game is Kirk and I won't stand for it!" Sed looked down at the floor and scratched his right eyebrow.

"I don't know what you mean?"

"Oh, yes you do, you're trying to undermine my authority." Sed looked at him incredulously.

"I'm in a bit late for which I apologise, how can that undermine your authority?"

"Don't play silly buggers with me lad. Not only are you late again, this is the second time this week, but you've taken a man off the job at a crucial time in the edition to come in here to hold your hand."

"That's not true!" It was Sed's turn to be annoyed "Its in the rule

book that no one is permitted to meet the management unaccompanied."

"Don't quote union rules to me lad, I wrote most of them before you come up." Sed nearly reminded him in that case he should have known better, but decide he'd already said enough, perhaps too much, Danson at this stage in the proceedings had cooled down somewhat. Pierce just stood there like a tailor's dummy with his eyes popping and his mouth wide open.

"So, Mr F.O.C.. what have you got to say in Mr Kirk's defence, now that you are here?"

"Nothing, nothing Mr Danson, can I go back downstairs?"

"Not before we hear what Mr Kirk's got say for himself. Why were you late again Mr Kirk?" Sed had had enough of this charade and was just about to tell Danson to stick the job up as far as it would go. Sed did his utmost to retain his composure, he bit his lip and tried to explain to this vile man why it was that he was late twice in one week. He sketched out the background to his mothers illness, and how he was trying to keep the home going. Danson's reaction was surprising.

"I'm sorry to hear about your mother lad, you have my sympathy, but this is your bread and butter. Look, how would it be if I let you go a bit earlier in the morning but do your utmost to get in here on time at night?" Sed was a bit taken aback at the offer.

"Well thanks that would be a help."

"Right, well, we've got a newspaper to get out. What'ye gawping at Pierce?"

"Nothing Mr Danson."

"Well, get back to work!" Outside the office Pierce looked gobsmacked.

"Bloody 'ell Sed I've been 'ere seven years and I've never seen 'im so accommodating, jeeze." Sed smiled a smile of deep satisfaction.

"Perhaps the answer is don't let him walk all over you, stand up to him." Pierce rubbed his hands together gave Sed a grin revealing teeth big enough to eat an apple through a picket fence. A week later they held annual chapel meeting to elect new chapel officials. Pierce was adamant that he wouldn't stand as F.O.C. for another twelve

months, he'd had enough. Some one proposed Sed, this was seconded. Sed for his part thanked them for the vote of confidence, but besides his current domestic situation he thought he hadn't been working there long enough. This excuse was howled down the general consensus was that he was just the man for the job. Every other man in the department turned the job down. Sed was appalled.

"Look someone better do this job, you can't afford to let Danson think that he's got you running scared!"

"Well you do it then, said old Tom Naseby. "you're the only man 'ere that's not scared of 'im."

"Go on," said someone else, give it a try for six months!" Sed looked around at a demoralised chapel.

"Look, it's not fair to expect me to take this job when I've only been here three weeks."

"Yes, but you've already proved you're not scared of Danson."

"None of you should be scared, you've got the backing of the union?"

"Huh!" growled Naseby. "Everyone knows that the branch secretary is scared to death of 'im. Only last month we called McCreedy in because we had a case of victimisation. We was fobbed off again." A rumble of assent ran through the assembled meeting. Then Pierce spoke for the first time.

"I was the one being victimised!" Sed looked at him incredulously.

"You!" he said addressing Pierce.

"Yeh, he treats me like shit, so I've decided I won't do this job again." Sed looked about him shaking his head.

"What were the rest of you doing while this was going on?" There was silence to this enquiry "You should have been backing your F.O.C.. He can't do the job without your support, and now you're asking me to do the job.....?"

"No!" came the rejoinder. "You've shown already that you're capable of the job, we'll back you to the hilt," said Naseby emphatically. Sed's mind was in a whirl. Could he do the job justice with things as they were at home, or would it be worse trying to work here with the pressure from the management and Danson in particular.

"Ok," said Sed finally, "I'm not prepared to do the F.O.C.'s job." There was a moan of disappointment from the assembly. "But for the

time being I'm prepared to do the Deputy's job until I feel more confident about it, and don't expect miracles. This man's no pushover, he knows his rulebook like the archbishop of Canterbury knows his bible, and I may end up as demoralised as our friend here." Sed waited to see what effect if any his suggestion had on the chapel. There was a general discussion then Tom Naseby stood up.

"I'll take the F.O.C.'s job, I'll do it till the end of the year, if I'm not sacked before then. By that time I'll be retired anyway. Sed grabbed Tom's hand and said,

"Great Tom! I think we'll make a good team."

Sed, Naseby, and the new clerk of the chapel Alan Diamond went into see Danson to introduce the new chapel officials. Danson was not impressed. He cocked a rheumy eye in Sed's direction and said he hoped he knew what he was letting himself in for.

"They'll be making the bullets for you to fire Kirk, and if you're irresponsible enough to go along with it you'll find that when the chips are down the chapel will withdraw their support." Naseby flared up at this suggestion.

"That's not true!"

"Of course it's true, even when I was the F.O.C. of this chapel it was an uphill battle trying to get their backing." Naseby and Diamond looked deflated. Sed realised at that point how Danson used his power over the chapel. He knew he could do what he liked with them because he was right, they were a weak chapel. The management knew what they were doing when they promoted George.

"All right, so now we know who you are get back to work." When they got outside the office Naseby looked deflated.

"Now you see what we're up against." Sed thought for a moment.

"Danson's good there's no doubt about that, so to get the advantage we will have to cut off his supply of information!"

"How d'ye mean?" said Diamond vacantly.

"Well according to what I'm told Danson usually knows in advance what's going on in the chapel?" Naseby nodded.

"E does."

"Well who's telling him?" Naseby and Diamond look at each other and they both came up with the same name. "Pierce!"

"Exactly! every time Pierce went into the office to see the overseer, Danson would put the frighteners on Pierce to tell him if the chapel were planning anything constitutional or unconstitutional."

"We had an idea that was going on, but we couldn't prove it." said Naseby.

"He wouldn't have got away with it if someone had gone in the office with him. So in future nobody goes in the office unless accompanied by an official OK?" They both readily nodded in agreement. "It will be easier now that Pierce is no longer the F.O.C.."

Things back home were shaping up nicely, Lloyd was as good as his word he kept his job, ran the vacuum cleaner over the place, and cooked some exquisite meals. Elsie was due home anytime. The hospital told him that they could do no more for her. She was as good as she was going to be. Friends, relatives and colleagues at work thought he was taking on more than he could manage. Some suggested he had her put into a home, but he was emphatic as well as angry. She was his mother, she'd looked after them all through thick and thin. She never had an easy life, left school at twelve and went into service as young girls did at the turn of the century. She married late in life after looking after her own mother who eventually died of senile dementia. Sed regretted not knowing her. She was another strong woman who brought Eadie and his father up on her own after his grandfather was killed in the first world war. So come what may, he was determined to do his best. Gwen had been a tower of strength, she came over most days and stayed with him until he went to work.

Their romance was on the backburner, they had the odd kiss and cuddle, but never seemed to get enough time on their own, either he was in bed and she was at work, or Lloyd was always around, there was no privacy. Gwen had warned him about this aspect of night working and anticipated that when his mother came home things could only get worse. One evening he had a phone call from Eadie telling him that Tom had incurable cancer and asking him if he had time would he call to see Tom. She was very upset and apologetic about bothering him at this time. Sed readily agreed to visit Tom, and arranged to go up the following afternoon. Torn had not made a big impact on the Kirk family life. He was sort of always there, popped up his wages every week, sat there in the easy chair smoking his pipe and spitting in the fire when Eadie's back was turned, but he was a good skin. Sed remembered he was always inquisitive about

Sed's love life. Tom's eyes would light up as Sed described in detail what went on with a particular girlfriend. Sed made it up most of the time to see the look on Tom's face. When he got to Eadie's she ushered him into the kitchen, gave him a cup of tea and one of her home made scones. Her eyes filled up as she told him that Tom hadn't got long, days, weeks perhaps.

"I'm sorry about Uncle Tom aunt Eadie, if I'd known he was so ill I would have been down sooner, I mean you've been coming down doing favours for us....I had no idea Tom was so ill." Eadie grasped his hand and patted it.

"It's all right Sed, we've coped, you've got enough on your plate at the moment, anyway, go on up he's in the front bedroom. He's lost a lot of weight Sed." Sed made his way slowly up the stairs and heard a muted runny cough as he pushed open the bedroom door. Tom was propped up on numerous pillows, his shock of grey hair was standing up like Stan Laurel's. As far as Sed could see he wasn't as bad as he had expected. He'd lost a lot of weight and had that yellow tinge to his skin that terminal cancer patients usually have. He didn't look as bad as his father did just before he died. Sed leaned over the bed grasped Tom's large bony hand and said

"Hiya uncle Tom, how are you?" Tom stared at him for a moment trying to focus, coughed again.

"Hello lad, how are you?"

"I'm fine Uncle Tom. Aunt Eadie said you were a bit under the weather, and I had to come and see you to cheer you up." Tom smiled and nodded his head.

"Aye lad, it's good to see you, ow's yer mother?"

"She's making progress, we hope to have her home shortly." Tom developed another fit of coughing.

"Ah....phew, this coughing takes it out on me."

"Shall I get you a drink uncle Tom?"

"No lad, if I drink any more of Eadie's tea I'll die of tannic acid poisoning, anyway what's happening with you these days...you know?"

"What d'you mean Uncle Tom?" knowing full well what he meant.

"You know lad, er..... yer love life...so to speak!" Sed looked into

Tom's eyes and realised that he needed a boost, he was obviously very depressed, and who wouldn't be under the same circumstances.

"Well," said Sed eventually. "I met this bird in the Grafton two weeks ago. She was a peach Uncle Tom." Tom pushed his bottom lip forward and cupped his hands in front of his chest. His eyes were bright with expectancy. "Yes she had bigger breasts than Jane Mansfield! I took her home, and as luck would have it her parents were out." Tom started making a gurgling noise in the back of his throat and the colour came back into his cheeks as he leaned forward so that he wouldn't miss an iota of what was being said. "We didn't waste any time uncle Tom, we started snogging on the settee, and I could tell that she wasn't going to be satisfied with the heavy petting." By this time Tom was in a state of apoplexy.

"Go on yes," gasped Tom his eyes standing out like organ stops.

"She tore the clothes off my back uncle Tom. I mean I was exhausted fighting her off. She was a big girl."

"Bloody 'ell! lad....Tell me ...did you get your...end away?"

"I was all of a lather uncle Tom...I didn't know what to do for the best." Tom was getting seriously agitated by now and Sed was worried that the suspense might bring on an early demise. Tom pushed one bony leg out from under the bedclothes. Sed thought with some alarm that he was going to get up. Sed pushed it back and covered him up again. Tom grasped his arm firmly and shook him violently.

"Jesus Christ lad, don't leave me in suspense!"

"Ok, uncle Tom take it easy. Well she just lay there waiting."

"Typical, typical of you young 'uns, you've got no go in ye these days. You don't just stand there looking at it." Sed thought they had reached the point where this send up had gone far enough. However, Eadie saved the day by knocking on the bedroom door and entering with a tray of tea and sandwiches.

"You look terrible, has he had a fit of coughing Sed?"

"No," said Sed, "He's fine, I was just talking to him about work," he lied, Tom waved her away angrily.

"I don't want any more of your bloody tea woman!"

"Oh, oh, well, the bloody tea as you call it is not for you, it's for Sed.

Anyway why're you so upset the lad's come down specially to see you." Tom shook his head with irritation. Sed looked at his watch anxiously and said,

"I'll have to be going aunt Eadie, I'm in work at eight."

"Aye, lad, you'll come again and let me know 'ow ye got on...you knowat work?"

Sed assured him that he would.

"What were you telling him Sed?" queried Eadie as they came down the stairs.

"Oh I think he was chuffed that I'd got this job, and I was very lucky to get into printing aunt Eadie."

"You certainly were!" Sed could tell by the look in her eyes she didn't believe a word he was saying. In retrospect aunt Eadie would have to watch herself when she got into bed tonight thought Sed.

TANNER

FOR ME BOSS

Look you diluted soul
of mortgage paying, company pleasing
pie-chart sweating / profit margin sniffing
sack of wasted cardigan meat
you win
I will lie
I will be polite to you
from now on
because I need your piffling paycheque
because I need to exist
but I can hate you
in my head
in my head
I can imagine you withering
with every cancer going
and even some
new dormant ones
as yet undiagnosed
like cancer of the half-soul
I wanna evolve
I wanna sprout wings
I wanna fly over
all the bosses and supermarkets and job centres,
the wind sounding like Jeff Buckley
through my feathers
as I drop righteous turds
on all your heads,
and I can imagine that
because my mind
is not your property,
only my body
and only during shifts
I can hate you all I want
on the inside
end of.

DIFFERENT STROKES

Brett Wilson & Marie Feargrieve

In *F for Fake* Orson Welles recounts the story of the beginning of Picasso's blue period. Picasso has been away from Paris for several years and his friend invites him to see an exhibition of his (Picasso's) works. Picasso walks through the gallery, carefully inspecting each painting. Before leaving he says "Juan, none of these paintings is mine. They're all fakes."

"But Pablo" he says, pointing to a specimen in the corner "I saw you paint that very one."

"Ah" says the great man "Even I paint fake Picassos."

Welles fabricated the story. His film is called *F for Fake* after all. But the point he is making, in an entertaining way, is that sometimes it's hard to tell who the real fakers are. In the case of the Greenhalghs, the fabrication goes on in the family shed at the bottom of a council house garden in Bolton, so the answer seems pretty clear. Or does it?

Shaun was born in 1961 to George and Olive Greenhalgh. He continued to live with his parents until his arrest in 2005 for forgery. An elderly aunt (Jessie) and a 52 year old brother (George) were also living at the same address when they were raided by Scotland Yard Arts and Antiques unit. The British Museum had alerted the police when they detected an irregularity in an 'ancient Assyrian tablet' sold by the family. What they found was a house littered with copies, including three previous attempts at the Amarni Princess (a statuette of Tutankhamen's sister, circa 1,000 BC sold to Bolton Council in 2003 for £440,000). DC Ian Lawson was present at the arrest: "There were blocks of stone, a furnace for melting silver on top of the fridge, half finished and rejected sculptures, a watercolour under the bed, a cheque for £20,000 dated 1993 and a bust of an American President in the loft. I'd never seen anything like it."

The family researched lost masterpieces in art reference books at their local library and were successful at building a convincing provenance. The elderly George acted as confidence trickster. In court, he claimed to be a veteran of World War Two with a bullet in his head, whereas in reality he had been a deserter spending the war

DIFFERENT STROKES

in prison. George was described by the prosecution as a fantasist who had been passing off fakes for years before Shaun got to work.

Forgery is not unique to art. Astronomer Arthur Eddington threw out sixteen photographic plates that didn't support Einstein's theory, so convinced was he that general relativity was correct. The experiment can still be found in several text books as proof of the theory. Cyril Burt is a case of a scientist whose reputation was ruined when it was found that he had been falsifying data to support his ideas of inheritance (in studies of twins). But it is artists who are perhaps the strangest breed.

One of this group, John Myatt, was jailed for forging Picassos and Renoirs in what was portrayed by Scotland Yard as the biggest art fraud of the twentieth century. He is now one of the country's fastest selling artists. His 'legitimate' fakes fetch thousands of pounds and are collected worldwide. To create them he said he was "adopting the techniques of the artist and searching for the inspiration behind each great artist's view of the world." He made Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*, reproducing the gauzy impressionistic manner and the shadowy depths with a command of the broad spectrum colour palette. He produced a Ben Nicolson still life with equal skill, and this in contrast to a perfect reproduction of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Pandora*, all sensuous, flowing organic form and sumptuous colour. Clearly he is a forger who takes art seriously.

Another strange character was Eric Hebborn. Making hundreds of drawings and artworks he went so far as to write a *Fakers Handbook*, giving instructions to would-be forgers. Hebborn *did* go to art school and became part of the international art scene, forming friendships with artists and art historians. Anthony Blunt, who is now infamous for being a Soviet mole and was one of his friends, lit a fire when he told Hebborn that a couple of his paintings looked like Poussins. He went to Italy and began to copy the style of the Old Masters: Corot, Van Dyck, Rubens, Jan Breughel. They could paint flesh, still life, landscapes, and frescoes, allegorical depictions with movement, great drama and beauty of *plein air* impressionism. Hebborn did the same. His career in forgery had begun.

Myatt and Hebborn were men of intelligence and a certain *savoir faire*. Shaun Greenhalgh was different. He was untutored, naive, an oik even. But his forgeries were varied and equally as convincing. His sculpture of *The Faun*, a ceramic by Gauguin, was authenticated

by the Wildenstein Institute and sold by Sotheby's for £20,000. He had sculpted in a very primitive form such as Gauguin had explored: the cloven hooves, the crouched position, the horned head, all basic but powerful representations of a creature from the underworld which Greenhalgh mastered.



Faun



Greenhalghs

The Greenhalghs must have known that their fraud would one day be detected. We can speculate that while they enjoyed the sweet success of their deception, they may have entertained the notion that those who dealt in art were *de facto* conspirators, motivated by greed. But money did not seem to be the driving factor in their case. Like many forgers, Shaun Greenhalgh is a man of exceptional proficiency, who perhaps judged rightly that he could never be successful in the art world. He may have been wrong about that, but it's noticeable that he possesses characteristics opposite of many those who are successful today. He is a shy man with no obvious ability to explain his ideas (if he has any) and could not act as an advocate for them. Today's artists are typically publicity seeking, in the main only too

DIFFERENT STROKES

ready to cease hard work in exchange for media exposure. Their art is technically lightweight, usually a combination of the found and the conceptual, sophisticated only in its marketing and justification. Does that make it worthy of attention? Does that make it art? The forger may be the only genuine modern artist.

I recently went to an exhibition of an internationally regarded artist. In a programme describing his life and methods, various worthies discuss ‘inner space’ and ‘meaning’. Even the greatest philosophers have failed to get near what this concept is about (apologies to C.K. Ogden) so I am more than a little sceptical when I hear it bandied in this context. Now I know that sometimes even great artists are part hustler, part confidence trickster, and Picasso is perhaps an example of this, but the whiff of snake oil has got ever stronger as the modern age has matured. This is especially true when applied to conceptual art, found art, and its scion. So another interpretation of the Greenhalghs’ action is as an instinctive protest: *the king has got no clothes*.

A TV programme from the 1980s takes three paintings by successful modern artists, who are likely to be unknown to the man in the street, and pits them against a fourth, painted by a monkey. The presenter asks passers by to select a favourite. You won’t be surprised to learn that the monkey fairs no worse than his hominid cousins. What is it they say about the wisdom of crowds?

Socially inept, forgers are nearly always self taught and therefore fail to soak up the art college spiel and zeitgeist. The only thing absent is lack of talent. Many have mastered the astonishing skills of the masters of the past. In contrast with their contemporaries, they actually *can* draw like Durer and paint like Caravaggio, while many millionaire modern artists are unable to produce their own works, relying on others to do it for them.

The commoditisation of art is inevitable, and the rate at which fakes are accepted as genuine, the willingness to believe, has been cited as a reason to mock a system that is not rewarding talent. Shaun, a self taught artist, believed that he would never succeed and instead took to forging other artists’ work. The forger is the best classically trained artist of the modern age and Shaun Greenhalgh is a magisterial example, and consummate oik. His fate is the fate of many oiks: misunderstood, rejected, punished.

HAUNTED

Tom Kilcourse

They were an ill matched pair, my mother and father. So different in every way from each other that I often wondered how they came to be together. His undemonstrative behaviour contrasted sharply with her boisterous, fun-loving vitality. She loved The Rolling Stones, while Dad preferred Acker Bilk. He read books whereas she confined her interest to fashion magazines. She was gregarious, but he was a loner.

As a small boy I was drawn to my father, while my younger brother, Kevin, was closer to our mother. It is difficult to explain why Kevin and I differed in this way, except to say that I was always driven by curiosity. Whenever I had a problem, or asked a question, Dad would stop what he was doing, listen, and respond quietly, doing his best to explain. Mother always appeared too busy to do that.

To call father a loner is not strictly correct. I recall many occasions when I accompanied him to his allotment where he spent as much time chatting to others as he gave to tending his vegetables. Those were times of great contentment for me in which I enjoyed a sense of permanence and security. That sense was shattered by the split between my parents, never to be wholly recovered.

Yesterday was my fortieth birthday, a day of celebration in a family gathering. Mother, still vivacious in her mid-sixties, came in the afternoon to help Carol, my wife, prepare dinner. They were joined in the evening by Roland, mother's husband, and by Kevin and his family: Debra and their two daughters. Our own two boys were also there, of course. We all live within a radius of a couple of miles, and often see each other at weekends. We are seen as a very close knit family.

The evening passed very pleasantly. After the meal the children amused themselves while we adults chatted about this and that, with the odd joke thrown in about my age. Though I joined in the laughter, the apparent conviviality left my inner self untouched. At odd moments, I found myself studying Roland with a hint of sadness. He is a decent enough man who did his best to give Kevin and me a good upbringing, but I am ever aware of a distance between us. It is not resentment, as such, over his part in breaking up our parents'

HAUNTED

marriage, but his presence always raises in me the ghost of my father, who did not reach his fortieth birthday.

We had lived in Loring Street, in an adequate though not spacious terraced house with a small garden at the back. I was about ten years old when the atmosphere there changed subtly from one of relaxed geniality to an air of unspoken tension. Our parents never quarrelled in our presence, but we both sensed that all was not well. Matters came to a head one morning after father had left to go to work. Mother told us boys not to go to school that morning, a request unlikely to displease us. At about ten, a van stopped outside the house. With the help of the driver we loaded some bits of furniture and household oddments into it, items that mother identified as specifically hers. We all left with the van.

Our destination was Roland's house, a much grander place than our own, where mother's paramour lived alone. He was a widower. It was to be our home for the rest of our childhood. Mother and Roland still live there. Kevin took to the place at once, and I confess to feeling shame yet at my own readiness to accept the greater comfort, with little thought for my father's feelings.

It took several months for our parents to sort out the details of their divorce settlement. We knew nothing of this at the time, but discovered much later that Dad was forced to sell the Loring Street house, and to pay maintenance towards our keep. The court gave him the right of access to Kevin and me, and we eventually made the first of many visits to his new home, a small apartment in a Victorian villa near Brookdale Park. His rooms were fairly cramped and, weather permitting, we usually spent the afternoon in the park or going to the pictures. Every other week, Dad would pick us up in his little Fiat towards the end of the morning and return us to Roland's house for seven. This was the pattern throughout each year. In August he would take us on holiday to a caravan site in North Wales. There was little to do there other than walk or go on the beach. Kevin compared it unfavourably with the holidays afforded by Roland and mother, which invariably involved a flight to some sunny spot abroad. After the first year Kevin had to be persuaded by mother to endure another stay in Morfa Bychan.

During the fourth year of this arrangement, Kevin complained openly of being bored. Father did not chide my brother, but I saw the look of sadness. I was fourteen at the time, and felt some

responsibility for Kevin's behaviour. He was eleven. I duly gave him a ticking off when I believed Dad was out of earshot. Though Kevin did not complain again, his behaviour left no doubt that he was not enjoying the holiday and could barely wait for Saturday morning, and the return home. The night before our departure I heard gentle sobs in the darkness. I thought it was Kevin, but realised after a minute or so that it was Dad weeping. Kevin was asleep and unaware. I never mentioned it to him.

The following year, father picked us up as usual at the beginning of August, but announced that there would be no trip to Wales. We thought at first that he had decided to take us elsewhere, given Kevin's displeasure, but that was not the case. Dad explained that the week would be spent with him in his apartment, with perhaps a day out to Blackpool as a treat. During a walk in the park Kevin did a runner and went home. Mother telephoned Dad to let him know my brother was safe, but refusing to return. I stayed with him for two days before following Kevin's example. I never saw my father again.

Unknown to us, father had lost his job some weeks before we were due to go on holiday. He could not afford to take us away. I am haunted still by the question: had I known the circumstances, would I still have deserted him? With the awareness of adulthood I like to assure myself that I would have stayed, but I remain unconvinced that the insensitivity of youth would not have won out. Seeing Roland always stirs the ghost anew.

Father committed suicide two weeks after we abandoned his 'holiday'. He was thirty-nine.

IMAGINE

Sean Parker

Funerals always seem to be cold affairs, full of sad faces dribbling tears down reddened cheeks as rain drummed on umbrellas as black as a raven's wing. This one was no different. I lit a cigarette, smoked it inside a gloved fist and waited until the crowd of mourners had sad-eyed me with their condolences before hurrying home to watch the next episode of whatever soap took their fancy.

I walked back to where my old man had just been laid to rest. My mother died when I was a kid so I don't have too many memories of her, except for one particularly loud shouting match, but this man now lying at my feet provided me with enough good times to last a lifetime. Little did I know that within a few weeks I would be staring at another headstone.

Vêcut et Mourut

Le Guitariste

Et Compositeur

Django Reinhardt

1910-1953

I have no need to imagine anything about Jean Baptiste Reinhardt, or Django as he was more commonly known, because I was brought up with him. My guitar-playing father was obsessed with both the man and his music; most of the time it was like having an invisible brother around the house.

No doubt many of you out there haven't got a clue what I'm talking about, but that's your loss, and if you don't like it, tough, you can always come looking for me, everybody is entitled to one mistake, right?

I was putting my old man's record collection in to some kind of order when a photograph slipped out of the cover of a 45 entitled Django's Guitar. It was a picture of Django and his son Babik. I deciphered the words scrawled across the photograph as "To H, as always you have my gratitude. Django."

My father's name was Harry Collins.

Now what the hell did that mean?

To most Django aficionados his incredible guitar playing was legendary, as was his penchant for tickling trout or playing pool when he should have been performing with Duke Ellington and his orchestra. And even though he could barely write, he was a great admirer of classical music and would spend hours studying the work of Bach; it was not long before he was composing music as exquisite as any of his classical counterparts.

The more I learned about the man, the more the signed photograph bugged me; to the extent that one day, in the middle of June, I found myself in France, Samois sur Seine to be precise; staring at Django's headstone; still looking for an answer.

It was the time of the annual festival held in his honour so I spent the rest of the day watching his devotees do their stuff. Last up on stage were Django's son Babik, and his friend Biréli Lagrène. They finished off the festival with the classic *Les Yeux Noirs*, Black Eyes to you peasants.

I caught sight of Gary Potter, a Django contemporary from Liverpool who had played at a number of my nightclubs in Manchester.

'Hey, Big Charlie,' he shouted. 'How's it going?'

'Fine, Gary, you were on top form today.'

'Thanks, Chas, you still looking for Django's ghost?'

'No, just a glimpse of the man, hopefully through Babik's eyes.'

'Have you spoken with him yet?'

'No, but I'll catch him later.'

When the applause had died down, Babik walked past with his arm around his friend Biréli. He caught sight of Gary and walked over. The two men shook hands.

'Thank you for coming, Gary,' said Babik, 'we appreciate it.'

'My friend, the pleasure was all mine.'

Babik smiled and turned his attention to me. I was about to say something but he winked and said, 'Tomorrow afternoon, Charlie, right? One o'clock on the river bank next to the big oak tree.'

I frowned and then nodded.

The two men walked off.

Gary looked up at me. 'I thought you hadn't spoken to him.'

'I haven't.'

'Then how. . .' He left the rest unsaid.

I shrugged. 'Maybe he recognises a fellow trout tickler when he sees one.'

'Trout tickler? Charlie, you own a string of nightclubs, the only thing you tickle is somebody's ribs on a Saturday night.'

'Then I guess I'll have to wait and see what tomorrow brings.'

Gary smiled. 'Good luck, mate, but watch out for Babik, he's one fey Gypsy.'

'Ain't they all?'

Gary walked off with his guitar case in one hand, a fag in the other and with his thin shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

I spent the rest of the night in a bar surrounded by photographs of the great man himself; I found out later that it used to be his favourite haunt. Then I got waylaid by a couple of village ancients and finished up drinking cognac, smoking Caporals and clacking domino tiles on beer-stained Formica dotted with cigarette burns; maybe some were Django's. I could just about manage to translate urban French into some kind of English.

One of them had bushy eyebrows that went up and down like a seagull on the wing when he spoke. He told me what I already knew, that Django was born on the 23 January 1910 in the village of Liberchies, near Charleroi in Belgium. His family of Manouche-travelling gypsies lived between France, Germany, northern Italy and the Benelux. Django's mother was named La Belle Lawrence, his father Jean Vees.

His friend made it all nines and threw me a gap-toothed grin when I rapped knuckles on the table. He continued with the story; cigarette bobbing up and down as he told me about that fateful day. It was the 2 November 1928. Django was only eighteen years old when he lit a candle next to a bunch of artificial flowers and set his caravan on fire. He suffered serious burns and very nearly lost a leg, as well as having only the index and middle fingers functioning on his fret-

playing left hand. Within days of the accident and whilst still in hospital he began to work on his mutilated hand. It took him almost two years to perfect a technique using the thumb and first two fingers; this unique style was to influence guitarists for generations to come.

The two old men took it in turns to proudly explain how Django conquered America. Between 1935 & 1945 he played with many famous American musicians including Larry Adler, Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins and Johnny Hodges. He went to New York in 1946, first as a guest-star with Duke Ellington's orchestra and then as an attraction at New York's 'Cafe Society Uptown'. Ellington once said "Django is all artist...He's one of those musicians who is unable to play a note that's not pretty or in good taste. Sure, he is also Europe's pre-eminent jazz instrumentalist of all time."

The one with the bushy eyebrows abruptly changed the subject.

'Sometimes,' he began, 'on a sunny afternoon we can hear Django talking to the fish, coaxing them to the river bank so he can tickle them for dinner.'

I stared into the old man's eyes to see if he was winding me up, but he looked to be deadly serious.

'How do you know its Django,' I asked. 'It might be his son Babik.'

I received another gap-toothed grin. 'It happens when Babik is touring with Biréli.'

'Oh, right.'

At midnight I exchanged kisses with the two ancients, that was a first for me, honest. Then I staggered one way as they walked a straight line the other.

Yeah, right. You lot should try keeping up with a couple of old soaks, you wouldn't make it to the first rap of gnarled knuckles on Formica.

At one o'clock the following afternoon I was leaning against the oak tree when a smiling Babik Reinhardt approached. He looked like his father, solidly built and with the same dark, Gypsy look about him.

'Come on, Charlie, let's sit on the riverbank.' After we had settled on the grass he said, 'My father used to sit on this exact spot.' He gave a soft laugh as if remembering. 'It was usually when the pressure got

to him Solitude was his answer to any and all problems.’

‘You mean the pressure of work?’

‘No, Charlie, he could play any piece of music with the best and never feel intimidated by any venue, but ask him to sign a cheque and he’d wave his hands about in disdain; as if such a thing was way beneath him.’

‘Yeah, I heard he could hardly write.’

‘It took Stephane two months just to get him to scrawl his name on a scrap of paper; even then it was barely legible.’ He looked across at me. ‘Do you know much about my father?’

‘You had him for nine years; I’ve had him for most of my life.’ I smiled to take away any unintended offence. ‘My old man reckoned Django came out of his mother’s womb playing the guitar; after he died I kind of inherited him in his will; along with his genius.’

He smiled. ‘Some legacy that was.’

‘I couldn’t have asked for a better one.’

‘Thank you for that, Charlie, it was very kind of you.’ He offered me a Caporal and lit both with a brass Zippo. ‘I understand you’re looking to unravel a mystery?’

‘I am, but how did you know?’

Babik shrugged his shoulders. ‘I hear things.’

‘Funny, that, seeing as how the only person who knew about the mystery in the first place took it to his grave with him. I only came across it by accident.’ I slipped the photograph from my inside pocket and held it up for him to see.

He shook his head. ‘I don’t remember the picture being taken, but who is H?’

‘Harry Collins, he was my father. I’m trying to find the story behind the photograph.’

‘I’m sorry, Charlie, I have no idea.’

For a while we were quiet, both glancing at the surface of the slow running river; wrapped up in differing thought of the past. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what Django would have been thinking about, sat in this very spot all those years ago. Would Harry Collins have been occupying his thoughts and if so, why? I guess I’ll never

know now, one way or the other.

When I opened my eyes Babik was nowhere to be seen. I turned to my right and saw a man lying next to me; he had dark, swept back hair and a neatly clipped moustache.

Jean Baptiste Reinhardt smiled up at me before placing a finger to his lips. He was stretched out on his belly in the long grass and with his sleeves rolled up his thick forearms. I watched in amazement as he lowered his hands in the water and with those magical fingers began tickling a speckled trout.

Later that evening we were sat at a small table in his caravan. I smoked in silence and watched in awe as his fingers glided across the frets of his beloved Maccaferri. Once Clair de Lune had drifted into silence I was into his ribs.

‘Django, my father loved you as a brother but he went to his grave leaving me with an enigma.’

Smoke drifted lazily around his smile for a few seconds. ‘You mean the photograph, yes?’ he asked quietly.

I took it out of my coat pocket and showed it to him. ‘How did you know?’

His lazy smile changed to a look of mischief. ‘I hear things,’ he said.

‘It must run in the family.’

‘I survived the war because I played the kind of music Germans liked, which made them forget I was a Gypsy. As the war came to an end they had no time for jazz, which put me in a different light.’

‘Yeah, I can see that.’

‘I decided to leave Paris and was put in touch with the underground movement. They passed me on to a liaison officer who got me out but in doing so, this officer risked their own life to save mine.’

‘Jesus. My father, right?’

Django shook his head. ‘No. The liaison officer was your mother. In 1950 I met up with her again in Paris. It was she who actually took the photograph.’

I shook my head. How the hell could I have missed it? My mother’s first name was Helen.

‘Was my father with her?’ I asked, hoping he was.

IMAGINE

‘No.’ The look in his eyes said it all.

‘Then I guess that’s it.’

‘Charlie, I would like to ask you a question.’

I nodded for him to continue.

‘What happened to the two fingers on your left hand?’

Now it was my turn to smile because there were no secrets left anymore. As I started to explain, his image began to fragment inside the cloud of swirling smoke. Moments later he was gone and I was alone. All I had left were the bones of a speckled trout on an oval plate, a smouldering Caporal in a glass ashtray and a Maccaferri leaning against the edge of the table.

I had unravelled the story behind the photograph but also, I now knew why my father was a good six inches shorter than me.

If you haven’t worked it out give me a call, but on the other hand, pardon the pun, I might just take it to the grave with me. It’s been tried before.

See you next time around, right?



THE GREATEST SEX PERVERT EVER

Andrew Pidoux

The moon has been appearing at the windows of respectable ladies at night, and, to put it a little insensitively, mooning at them. It has been pulling down its trousers – trousers that can only be seen by astronomers because they are basically the colour of night, like dark matter – and flashing a full white peach at the often half-naked women.

The first to report the phenomenon was a lady who lived in Hampstead in northwest London. She had just come back from a pub that was located on the corner of her own street and was named, I think, the Ball and Socket. She had only had one drink, she claims, though of course the tabloids were quick to suggest, at the time, that she had probably had a good deal more, a tack they quickly had to change as other women began to come forward with their stories. This woman, whose name, I should have mentioned, was Valerie von Smith – a descendent of the von Smiths of Bavaria, who own the famous brewery there – was climbing back up the stairs of her house to bed, when she became aware of being followed. At first she didn't think too much of it, because it was only a vague feeling, and just the type of feeling that, she knew from experience, she was so often prone to experiencing at night when her husband was working late, as he was that evening. Of course, little did she know that it was really the moon, even then, following her pervertedly through the gorgeous round window that overlooked her stairwell.

Feeling a little unnerved but telling herself not to be so silly, Valerie von Smith then proceeded to take a shower in the beautifully fitted bathroom that her husband, much to his personal expense of time, had lovingly installed just a few months previously. Even then, despite the fact that the only window in the bathroom was a "frosted" one that her husband had deliberately selected to bolster his wife's peace of mind (even though the bathroom overlooked nothing but fields on that side), Valerie felt herself being scrutinized as she self-consciously soaped her legs and arms and washed her hair. She couldn't, of course, account for the feeling, and had she been looking out of the window at the time, all she would have seen a blurred, fragmented patch of whiteness coming up over the fields.

THE GREATEST SEX PERVERT EVER

It was only when she had finished her washing, patted herself down with a towel, doused her freshly scrubbed limbs with talcum powder and walked through into the bedroom that Valerie von Smith suddenly saw, in all its lecherous proportions, the moon's face jutting in through the bedroom window. The curtains, it seemed, had been accidentally left wide open, allowing the moon to seize its perverted opportunity. Naturally, enough, Valerie von Smith began screaming at the top of her lungs, but before long she managed to gather herself together enough to pull the curtains furiously closed and called 999. She also, it is believed, called her husband at his office to regale him, in distressed tones, about the terror that had been stalking her. It is thought that her husband calmly instructed her to stay inside and lock all the windows and doors, and kept her calm with his voice until the police arrived on the scene.

To the credit of the Metropolitan Police they acted, right from the offset, in a way that was completely noble and appropriate in the circumstance, treating Valerie's complaint with utmost gravity and thus setting the tone for the way this criminal has been dealt with ever since. Even on that first night, however, the most difficult aspect of the case, both practically and legally (for no legal precedent had been set) – namely, that the moon was always going to be uncatchable and effectively unpunishable – presented itself to the boys in blue, who naturally enough were stumped as to what their response ought reasonably to be. Once they had secured Valerie von Smith in her house and instructed her to remain calm, essentially repeating the instructions that her husband had given her verbatim, they went outside to confront the sexual offender and do their best to arrest him.

The chief inspector began by addressing the moon in reasonable language, to the tune of:

“We know that your position in the sky has caused a great deal of happiness and satisfaction over the years, that you have inspired lovers and poets alike, lit the way for the lost and prevented people from getting attacked in darkened alleys, and even we boys at the Met have used your services on more than a few occasions when our batteries on our torches have run down. Basically we acknowledge that in the past you've likely saved quite a few lives and so your presence until now has been tolerated, not to say welcomed, by our community. However, what we believe has gone on here tonight

regarding the woman inside this house and yourself is, if true, a very grave crime indeed, and as such we are placing you under arrest so that you may be taken to a court of law and brought to judgment. You do not have to say anything. But it may harm your defence if you fail to mention when questioned anything you later rely on in court. Do you understand this, sir?"

The moon, at this point, apparently did nothing, but just stayed there in its same position. One of the chief's subordinates then evidently expressed to the chief that perhaps the moon had not heard the charges, being so far way, and that maybe he should try saying them again but in a louder voice. The chief inspector was apparently sceptical of this at first, because, he said, "if he didn't hear it the first time, he likely won't hear it the second", a logic that he apparently modified when he was handed a megaphone by another of his officers, who kept it in the back seat of his car for just such occasions as this.

The charges were duly repeated, the tone of them remaining essentially the same, even if, according to some of the crowd who had begun to gather, the content varied somewhat and now sounded more threatening, if anything. Still the moon did nothing. Valerie Von Smith had come to the door of the house again, much to the consternation of the counsellor who had been assigned to her with the purposes of calming and soothing her and who now tugged at her dressing gown from behind as she poked her face through as much of a crack in the door as she felt safe to create.

"I tell, you," she was saying in something between a whisper and an angry shout, "he's trying to get away, he's trying to get away. Five minutes ago he was right in close, he had his nose up against the glass. Now look how far he is."

"We think he's too far away to arrest at this point, madam," said the chief inspector, as though he had been concurring with his subordinates about the issue, when in fact he hadn't, according to bystanders who had been arriving on the scene since the employment of the megaphone.

"That's my point exactly," said Valerie Von Smith, inching open the door a bit further. "He's trying to get away, I tell you," she repeated.

The police chief then began to audibly confer with the four other officers present, all of whom went into a kind of huddle in a semi

THE GREATEST SEX PERVERT EVER

circle around him. It transpired that most of them in fact agreed with Valerie von Smith that the moon was likely trying to make an escape, and two of them bolstered their assertion by saying that they had seen the moon move very slowly toward the treetops over on the other side of the field by a couple of inches, even as they'd been standing there. This evidence was seized upon enthusiastically by the chief inspector, who had been reluctant to give credence to Valerie Von Smith's claim before, "due to the emotional state she's in." According to certain onlookers, it was as though something in him had "clicked" at that moment, and he became much more resolute in his actions. He unbuttoned the gun from his holster on his hip and aimed it, with two hands, across the field and right at the moon.

If there's many negative things you can say about the moon in the light of this episode, the fact that it's cowardly isn't one of them. The moon didn't bat an eyelid, it didn't flinch a muscle. The chief inspector, wanting to give the moon an ultimatum but realising that he had put the megaphone down and would be unable to pick it up again without putting down the gun first, snapped at the officer who was standing nearest to pick it up and then dictated his final demands for the other officer to repeat.

"Listen," said the chief inspector.

"Listen," boomed the sergeant.

"We've given you fair warning," he said the chief inspector.

"We've given you fair warning," repeated the sergeant.

"But now is the time to surrender."

"But now is the time to surrender."

"Or we will fire on your ass."

The officer was a little reluctant to repeat the word *ass* – which the chief inspector had only used, he said later, because he was carried away in the moment – and in practice he simply left the word out:

"Or we will fire on your...."

"Do you understand me?"

"Do you understand me?"

The moon said nothing.

"All right, it's your funeral buddy," said the chief inspector, and

then quickly instructed the officer not to repeat that, before smiling winningly at an old lady who was standing with a sceptical expression at the front of the crowd, without lowering his weapon.

When the shot rang out that night, it was only the first in what has become an ongoing campaign – one that has drawn police departments across the entire country into rare and total cooperation – against a criminal that the *Daily Mail* has memorably described as “The Greatest Sex Pervert Ever.”



Martin Heidegger

*Heidegger sometimes thought so hard that
the back of his head fell off*

ACTRESS (PART 2)

Nigel Ford

DICK

Doc Jackson looked purposeful striding towards me in his blue bib trousers and jacket overalls with tools dangling here and there. A cigar stuck out of his mouth. I wouldn't want to smoke a cigar this early.

'Are you going to sing to keep our spirits up Dick?' he asked 'Very funny.'

'That's a keen looking spade you've got there,' Doc said. 'What are you thinking of doing with it?'

'I have to dig around this red mark carefully here and expose the cables.' I told him. He wouldn't know much about these things. 'There's one about 20 centimetres down and another at around 60. The cable 20 centimetres down is the telecommunications cable and the one at 60 is the electricity cable.'

'Is there only this one to do?' Doc asked.

'There're a few further up. Not the yellow marks. Those are the facilities pipes. Edwin only needs to know where they are,' I said 'I'll borrow a spade from the pub and give you a hand,' Doc said. 'I can knock up the buttresses when we have a trench to put them in.'

* * * * *

The rain was going to make Edwin's job difficult and being the JCB driver he would take a lot of blame should the project turn into a disaster. As the trench was dug the waterlogged soil would cause problems by sliding back down into the trench and recovering the cables. Edwin could see Doc Jackson and Dick in the headlights, looking into a hole. He'd better get out there to see what was up.

'You're looking at trouble in this weather with these holes, Edwin,'

Doc Jackson shone a torch into a hole. The cables exposed by Doc and Dick's enthusiastic digging were now partially concealed by washed back soil. 'By the time the trench is moved along to this hole the bottom cable will be nigh on invisible.'

‘Soil slippage,’ Edwin said. ‘I was concerned about it. The dark makes it difficult.’

‘You need someone to keep the cables clear as the trench progresses,’ Dick said.

‘Irene can do that.,’ Edwin said. ‘Make herself useful. Once I get going it won’t take long before I get here. Who dug this out? I need more light’

‘That was me,’ Doc said. ‘Looks as if we might need a trowel or something, chaps.’

‘Don’t suppose you thought to bring a trowel with you, Dick?’ Edwin asked. Dammed if he was going to be responsible for everything.

‘fraid not,’ Dick said.

‘I’ll go and get on with those buttresses,’ Doc said.

‘I think I’ve got one in the cab,’ Edwin said, relenting. Jackson was some yards away by now, moving towards the materials covered by the tarpaulin at the end of the lane.

* * * * *

‘That’s more like it,’ Edwin thought, back snug in the cab. The surface of the lane shone asphalt black in the water. The world shivered in the growl of the JCB, and vibrations trembled his knees as the machine bullied powerful lights down the lane, illuminating the scene, and slashed the mirror of the water surface. Someone appeared, lifted up an arm in the headlights. He opened the cab window.

‘Aren’t you supposed to be wearing a hardhat?’

Edwin sighed and turned off the engine.

‘What?’

‘Aren’t you supposed to be wearing a hardhat?’

It was donkey jacket; he saw the silhouette of the upturned collar and a hardhat, looking up at him. He was unable to see the expression of the man in the dark. He might be joking.

‘Nah,’ humorous repartee Edwin felt, would be appropriate. ‘I’m

hard-headed.'

'Droll,' donkey jacket said. But he didn't sound as if he thought so. 'Who's in charge?'

'Dick is,' Doc Jackson's voice came from behind donkey jacket. He was carrying a construction that looked like a buttress. 'Dick's in charge. The chappie further on down the lane, if you want to talk to him. He's all in yellow. As a matter of fact I believe I saw him crawling about in the trench with a trowel.'

'This man here is not wearing a hardhat,' donkey jacket said to Doc. 'He should be. So should you if you're involved in this.'

'The Municipality failed to mention that,' Doc said.

'I don't know about the Municipality, I represent the Council. Safety regulations clearly state anyone involved and on the site of a construction project must wear a hardhat,' donkey jacket said.

'We've seen no document and heard nothing from the Municipality to indicate this was required,' Doc retorted.

'Dick's wearing a hardhat,' Edwin said to donkey jacket. 'You should talk to him.'

'Why should I talk to him? If he's wearing a hardhat I'd have no cause. What would be the point?' donkey jacket asked.

'He's the project manager,' Jackson said. 'He's the chap looking after the safety aspects of this show. I'm sure Dick will have a satisfactory explanation. He's very thorough.'

* * * * *

The mains cable that Edwin had partially uncovered had lain protected in the blue clay for several decades. The rubber casing that contained the sub-cables was now abruptly exposed to the air, initiating a basic chemical process and causing the rubber of the casing to perish at lightning speed. If a torch had been focused down there the process would have been visible to the naked eye. But the process was allowed to proceed in the dark and undisturbed.

* * * * *

Edwin had become impatient. They needed to get on. He climbed down from the cab and stood facing donkey jacket. 'I'll go and get Dick.'

'Doctor Jackson and I will stay here until you return with him. We need to sort this out,' donkey jacket said. Jackson wondered how the man knew his name.

The rubber casing had dissolved completely in several places. The sub-cables were now vulnerable. In one place the tip of Dick's sharp new spade had penetrated through to the upper sub-cable. This now glowed blue.

'We'll all go,' Jackson said. 'We'll all go and gather everyone together so we can discuss this matter properly. There is doubtless an explanation.' He bent down and laid the buttress in the road. 'Very well,' donkey jacket said. 'We need to get this sorted.'

They left, their silhouettes bowed against the rain blown into their faces by the strong sea breeze that momentarily picked up again, tearing arbitrarily down the lane from the High Street to The Duck. In the trench the top sub-cable's blue glow turned brilliant orange, sparked and cracked and the copper threads separated and curled away from each other in a junior melt-down.

The street lamps that had been playing patterns on the slashing crystal rain went out. The freezer in the back kitchen of the pub fell silent. The lights in the windows of the houses lining the lane extinguished. The flickering light of a candle appeared in one, and then in more. Edwin, Doc and donkey jacket found Dick standing in a hole holding the trowel that Edwin had given him.

'Here you are,' Edwin said to donkey jacket. 'Here's Dick.'

'What's your part in this?' donkey jacket asked Dick.

'To dig out the cables so that Edwin can see them,' Dick said.

'I'll get back then,' Edwin said.

Donkey jacket ignored Edwin and continued to speak to Dick: 'I realise that. I meant, what's your position of authority in all this?' Edwin strode back up the lane to his JCB.

'I'm the project manager,' Dick said. 'Why have all the lights gone out. Is there a power cut?'

‘No idea,’ donkey jacket said. ‘But that’s not the point. The point is that I’ve confirmed your position in this. They said you were. The others. Had to make sure though. Part of my job description.’

‘And what would your job be?’ Dick asked.

‘He’s a consultant for the Council,’ Doc Jackson said. His cigar had gone out. Sodden through.

‘You keep quiet doctor, if you don’t mind,’ donkey jacket said. ‘I can speak for myself.’

‘What’s the Council got to do with this?’ Dick asked. ‘Ours is a voluntary project sponsored by the Municipality, Southern Power and Telemore. The Council’s not in the picture.’

Donkey jacket turned to Dick and spoke in a tone of voice that sounded consolatory, but Dick wasn’t fooled.

‘There are a few points the Council need to know about. Rules and regulations. Routine. I’m here to ask about them. I ought to have been instructed to contact you earlier on, in the planning stages, but no-one contacted us.’

‘I can’t see any harm in that,’ Dick said. ‘What about you Jackson? What do you think?’

Doc Jackson turned to face donkey jacket. ‘I can’t see any harm. I don’t see as you had call to be rude though.’

‘Nerves,’ donkey jacket said. ‘Working under stress. Sorry.’

‘Ask whatever you like.’ Dick’s phone rang. ‘Yes? Is that you Edwin? What do you want? Go ahead. And get a move on, we’re running late. Be careful with those cables.’

‘Behind schedule are you?’ donkey jacket asked.

The JCB started up again with a grumbling roar. The noise caused the three men to turn as one and look up the lane. They saw the leg of the excavator rise convulsively through the blaze of the JCB headlamps.

‘Yes,’ Dick said. ‘Hiccup over the cable position markings.’

‘Solved now,’ Doc Jackson said. ‘All fixed aren’t we Dick?’

‘Yup. Soon be back on track,’ Dick said.

‘Be that as it may,’ donkey jacket said. ‘About these questions.’

‘Be my guest,’ Dick said.

‘Equipment. Is it approved?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘How do you mean “approved”?’ Dick asked.

Doc Jackson did not join in the conversation. He stood silent, in a contrapost position, and stuffed one hand in his pocket; studied the stuttering, poking progress of the JCB’s leg.

‘I mean what is it and where did it come from?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘It’s our own personal stuff,’ Dick said.

‘Is it. What about the JCB?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘We rented it for the day,’ Dick said.

‘Did you. Who from?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘Macko Machines,’ Dick said.

‘Local are they?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘Yes. They gave us favourable terms,’ Dick said. ‘ACTRESS is in their interests too.’

Donkey jacket made a note. ‘The equipment. No one’s wearing any except you. How’s that?’

‘What would they be wearing?’ Dick sounded interested.

‘Same as you,’ donkey jacket said. ‘Reflexive overalls. Work gloves. Hardhats. Industrial footwear.’

‘I’ve got those from when I worked for the Council,’ Dick explained. ‘They can hardly be expected to have the same.’

‘I see. Kept them after you left the Council did you. Right. Let’s see,’ donkey jacket clapped his hands together and wrung them. ‘Plans; of the existing cables and such?’

‘Edwin’s got those in the cab,’ Dick said.

‘Excellent. You seem to be well prepared,’ donkey jacket said. ‘How long is the project to take? What’s the schedule?’

‘Just today. By this evening hopefully,’ Dick said

‘Really? That’s remarkably speedy. Give the Council a lesson or two,’ donkey jacket laughed, a dry chortle. ‘What about gravel? Got that organised have you? Filling up as you go along. Nice and tidy. Safety for pedestrians. Don’t want any accidents. Don’t want any court cases. Damages. Insurance quibbles.’

‘Irene’s seeing to that,’ Doc said, turning away from studying the antics of the JCB and taking a step to move closer to Dick. This made Dick feel smaller, as if Doc Jackson had moved in to protect him.

‘A woman! Signs of the times. Got a heavy vehicles licence we hope?’ donkey jacket asked.

‘She used to work on the buses,’ Jackson said.

‘O good. Experienced,’ donkey jacket said. ‘That doesn’t look like being a problem. Your JCB driver. Edwin? Is that his name? I gathered it was. Licensed and qualified I assume.’

‘Yes,’ Dick said. ‘He’s an experienced driver I believe.’

‘Right. Believe. How about building permission?’ donkey jacket asked. ‘Only we haven’t given any as far as we can see. Have you got that in fact? Not unknown for us at the Council to slip up. Right hand doesn’t always know what the left is doing. Anyone got it on them? Edwin? In his cab? Someone? No? O dear.’

‘We’re not building,’ Doc said. ‘We’re digging a trench, old man.’

‘You’re rearranging the scenery,’ donkey jacket nodded. ‘Permission required from the town planning office. Cable laying routes. Can’t have just anyone digging up the shop. Where would we be?’

‘We’ve got the plans,’ Dick said. ‘From the people who laid the cables.’ Donkey jacket wagged his head.

‘Not good enough. Needs to be official. Plans need to come from the town planning office.’

‘Shit!’ Jackson said.

‘Going to be a lovely day after all!’ donkey jacket said. ‘Toodledoo.’ ‘Everything all right?’ Dick and Jackson turned as one. Edwin had approached without them hearing. He had left the JCB with the engine running some yards away. He peered at them uncertainly.

‘Not really,’ Dick said.

‘We forgot about having to get building permission,’ Jackson said. ‘Nonsense,’ Edwin said. He slapped his jacket pocket. ‘I’ve got it right here.’

PHYLLIS

Doctor Jackson and others persuaded me to make sandwiches for the ACTRESS project that's to start in the early hours of this morning. I've made the sandwiches de facto, but Irene has promised to cut the crusts off the sandwiches for me and slice them neatly and diagonally. I find that difficult; I can't exert enough pressure on the knife.

There are five all-told to cater for including myself, not that I shall be able to eat a morsel, it all being so thrilling. They had a lovely concert the radio earlier this morning from Notre Dame. Bach, gorgeous. I did enjoy it.

Dick the newsagent yesterday, he does enjoy a chat, wanted to know what I was up to buying all that cheese and pickle and ham and mustard and eggs and cress. Imagined I was having a party, silly man. Ever so sure he was, convinced of it "Phyllis," he said. "What ever are you up to?" Wanted to know who was coming. Such an inquisitive fellow, quite a one for gossip.

I decided to buy a new pot of Colman's mustard because my own was old. I got the ready-mixed because I noticed last time I made mustard from the powder the result was unpleasantly lumpy and very weak. That was the mustard I was referring to, the one that was old. When I told him I was going to make sandwiches for ACTRESS he became excited. He told me he was going so far as to close up the shop for the whole day tomorrow, in order to devote his time to working on ACTRESS and do his bit for the Mayhem Lane Maintenance Association. As project manager no less.

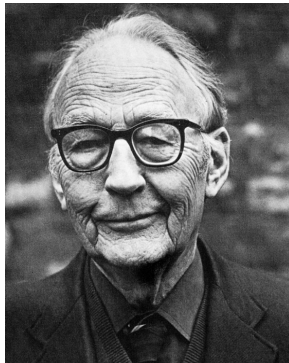
I realise it will be difficult for me to carry a great pile of sandwiches over to Irene at the pub, even if it's not far, situated just at the other end of the lane. I decide to take a taxi, such an extravagance you think. But it's considerably less expensive to take a taxi when I need to get somewhere than to continue to drive the car. I gave that up some time ago when I was stopped for speeding. The policeman was very understanding. He said that sometimes when people grew a little older, their concept of speed altered. So I decided to sell it. The car. The garage man who serviced the car for me sold it. Such a nice man. So helpful.

ACTRESS PT 2

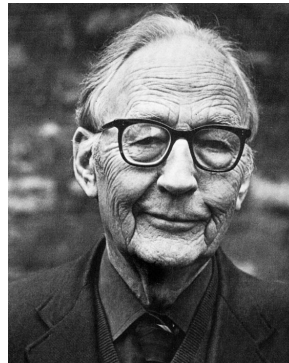
The taxi driver was a very pleasant man, handles my sandwiches very carefully. With exaggerated caution you might say. Then again, men, they don't know much about food preparation. Talked about his wife constantly during the ten minute trip. Longer by road you see, in terms of actual distance, you can't drive straight down the lane from my house. It's one-way, so you have to drive around it. Such a lot of problems they seemed to be having, it was very bewildering. I do hope they come out of their marital crisis, "marital crisis" is how he described it, unscathed. He dropped me off very near the pub but out of sight. I didn't want to cause a stir. By arriving in a taxi I mean, it was a luxury after all.

NIVEA Visage Pure & Natural Anti-Wrinkle Day Cream

Effective anti-age skin care with 95% ingredients of natural origin. Free from parabens, silicones, colourants and mineral oils.



Before



After



Salammbô

SALAMMBO
MARMOREAL FRENCH HORN BAGS #2

Ron Horsefield

The editor reminds me that my series on Marmoreal Hornbags of France hasn't got past one (Oik 4) and that even if I don't go to France there's a grade one marmoreal hornbag on my doorstep – Maurice Ferrary's Salammbo at the Lady Lever Gallery at Port Sunlight. I recalled this statue vaguely and planned to revisit the gallery with my consort Enid (a severe critic of all things hornbaggery) who'll make sure I don't disgrace myself.

Lord Leverhulme knocked up this fine Beaux Arts building in 1922 and filled it with his treasures. He was immensely rich but started off in true oik fashion as the son of a Bolton grocer. He became a soap magnate. He didn't invent the stuff, or even make it to start with – he marketed it. He was a salesman of genius. Before him oiks used to buy soap (a distress purchase no doubt) in chunks off a big block, like cheese. Bill had the bright idea of cutting it to a standard size and wrapping it up in fancy paper. It caught on and soon Bill decided he'd better make the stuff too and bought an existing soapworks in Warrington. This plant still exists with Lever's name over the door. As the business grew he built a huge new soap works on a Wirral wilderness and called it Port Sunlight (after the soap). His workforce lived in mock Elizabethan houses and at the end of the estate, landscaped and tonsured like the gardens at Vaux le Vicomte, emerged The Lady Lever gallery.

Bill probably got more excited by the wrappers than the soap and started buying saccharine pics of tots blowing bubbles to use on adverts. His proclivities were essentially of the hornbag persuasion but, being a salesman of genius, aware of the limited sensibilities of hoi polloi, he chucked in Victorian narrative painting and medieval armour just to get oiks through the gallery door. Nevertheless his basic aesthetic is obvious as soon as you get inside – hornbags grace every room, a particular favourite was the greatest ever English painter of female flesh William Etty (1787-1849). It's a tribute to Congregationalist Bill Lever that his passion for Etty took such a public form. Etty, born in York, was considered almost pornographic during his lifetime, and perhaps even beyond it. His bequest of 40

works to his home town gallery remained hidden in a basement for years. This year there'll be a major exhibition at York. I guess there'll be a few blank spaces on the Lady Lever's walls when that opens on June 25th. So Etty looks like being rehabilitated – unless Mumsnet intervenes.

But I digress. I was bewitched once more when I set eyes on Moggsie's Salammbo set in the centre of a gloomy rotunda surrounded by dusty busts of old farts like Gladstone, Napoleon and Charles James Fox. Salammbo, eponymous heroine of Flaubert's novel, was a Carthaginian princess who entered a barbarian camp to recover the sacred veil of Tanith. As protection she coiled a large snake round her. Moggs does Sal in marble and the snake in bronze. Very horny when you think about it – and it is no doubt the source of this trope among modern strippers who appear with boa constrictors. But who was the model for this masterpiece? Some Latin Quarter street urchin I guess. Ferrary born 1852 was an exact contemporary of Bill Lever born 1851. Did Moggs introduce Bill to this girl when he visited his studio in 1900? Imagine those two late forty year olds haggling over the price. "Go on then Moggsie. Fifty thou and I get half an hour with Sal in the back room. The snake's not still on the premises is it?"

One expects the guardians in places like this to be ignorant scouse philistines but I'd noticed a quite intelligent looking ancient on the desk reading a Bohn's Classics edition of The Odes of Horace. He seemed to be the only official present and I asked Enid to distract him by asking about the inscriptions on some Roman cinerariums down at the other end of the gallery. Enid's eyes narrowed interrogatively but she complied, probably glad to get away from the disgusting spectacle before us.

Alone at last with Salammbo I crept over to her plinth, mounted it and lustily embraced her marmoreal magnificence. Was it the rasping of my zip or did I hear "Baise moi Ron! Je t'adore!" Well, strictly speaking I suppose she would have spoken a Carthaginian pidgin. Perhaps it was the spirit of Flaubert recalling his night with the Gypo harlot Kuchuk Hanem. Then, as I readjusted my trousers next to a bust of Caracalla, I saw the ancient returning.

"We frown on frottage" he said.

"Frot?! Wot?!"

“You were assaulting Salammbo.”

“Ooo no! Not me squire!” I brazenly attempted the demotic. “And anyhow what’s wrong with it? The statue of St Peter in the Vatican has had its toe almost worn away by pilgrims”

“Your impulse was far from spiritual I believe, but let’s check the CCTV” He went back to his desk and rewound the tape. There on the tiny grey monitor I saw a writhing, groaning incubus mostly from the back.

“Extraordinary! Chap’s wearing a pullover just like mine!”

The ancient slid open a cupboard door to reveal a stack of tapes labelled *Salammbo Humpers*.

“I’ll have to put this in the archive and draw it to the attention of the curator. You may be invoiced for any damage. Salammbo’s buttocks have been noticeably abraded over the years.” I could see the game was up. I’d been caught bang to rights.

“Sod that you miserable old git!” I snarled “Here’s fifty quid. Give us the tape!” hurriedly as Enid approached.

“Er...perhaps just this once” he snatched the fifty and put the tape in a gallery bag.

“What’s that then Ron?” she asked.

“Oh...just discussing Salammbo with the guardian. He’s surprisingly well informed for a scouse oik. He’s given me a tape of an early Godard film based on Flaubert’s novel. Catherine Deneuve is Salammbo with Depardieu as a barbarian.”

“Not heard of that one. Look forward to seeing it”

As we were getting in the car I made an excuse to go back. There in the bogs I pushed the tape down the U bend. We were almost at Daresbury before Enid noticed the bag was missing.

THE ODD COUPLE

Marie Feargrieve

He had the dirtiest of jobs. The clothes had to be sorted before washing. The bags had to be tipped out onto the floor, the different stains checked and the clothes put into piles. So, you had a snot pile, a blood pile, food stain pile, wine pile and on the sheets especially, a faecal and urine pile. Gross, I know. In those days nobody offered you latex gloves and he never asked for any. The linen was taken in from hotels and restaurants and nursing homes. Some of the stuff was only fit to be thrown out. Jay didn't seem to mind his job. It was a job I suppose and unemployment was rife. He got on with it. A stoic. I suppose his tasks were on a par with sewer cleaners and the slime and grime men who are sent in to clean up flats and houses, when somebody has died, and lain there for months, undiscovered and maggot ridden.

He was unusual to look at, or at, least some thought so. I never did. He looked unwashed, shabby. His hair was long and usually greasy. He favoured drainpipe trousers and wrinkle pickers, when they had gone out of fashion decades before. There was a bell on a multi-coloured string around his neck. A throw back to the hippies of the sixties. The one thing that made me stare like the uncouth kid that I was, was a large scar, still livid, running from eyebrow to chin across his left cheek. He scared me a little. Different and dangerous somehow. He was effeminate and looking back, most likely gay, but that never occurred to me at the time.

The entrance to the laundry was through the sorting room, where Jay dipped his delicate hands into the filth, throwing the detritus to left and right. He was shy. His tone was quiet and diffident. Hushed. No aggression. *This is me, take me or leave me.* I was a student, taken on for the summer to do various jobs, fill in where needed. I was mainly employed on the calendar, a huge machine with rollers which smoothed and ironed linen. I was stationed at one end, ready to catch and fold everything as it was spewed out after being fed in at the other end. It was boring, repetitive. And I was useless. The machine was speeded up; the women at the other side were old hands who worked speedily and efficiently. I was the novice. Fighting clouds of white cloth, I ran up and down the machine. I was lost under huge

blankets of snow, acres of it until I was buried. Hilarious to the rest of the shop floor.

“Shift yourself grammar school kid.” This was from Aggie after I conceded defeat and hit the large, red button to stop the monster. The giant rollers shuddered to a halt.

“What the hell you doing? It’s her fault Mr Moseley, she’s useless.” This was Dolly. Those women were unforgiving, took no prisoners. I was soft, looked on as a middle class kid. A huge crime. No snob like a working class snob, although I didn’t see this at the time. Aggie had toothache to boot, which was amazing as she only had two brown ones, stood up in the middle of her lower gums. Lichened, drunken tombstones. It made her vicious and I got the brunt of it.

“Leave her alone” Shouted Dennis, one of the van drivers.

“You can bugger off Den. Come here. Give us a feel!” Sharon one of the younger women moved towards him. He ran towards the stairs and up them two at a time, to the canteen.

“Which side does he dress on Shaz?”

“Don’t know, it’s too small to find! Know what I mean grammar girl?”

No I didn’t know. I knew it was salacious. The women laughed. Bang went the big red knob and the rollers rolled. I did my comic dash along the length of the calendar. A manic extra in a Laurel and Hardy film.

One morning as I entered through the soiled linen room, Jay was already at work. He stood in front of me, bashful, embarrassed.

“Do you fancy a coffee here at break with me?” The question came quickly. He pointed to a little cubby hole type place in the corner.

“OK.”

I did go and sit with him at mid morning to the smirks and suggestive asides of the women. Our conversation was the usual stuff. He lived with and looked after his elderly father. We talked of his previous jobs, all dead end like his present one. I told him I was doing ‘O’ levels and which subjects. He was thirty two. I was sixteen. Childlike was Jay. Naïve. A Peter Pan figure with a man’s torso and a blemished face. He didn’t swear and he didn’t drink or

smoke. I never asked about his disfigurement and he never told. I drank the coffee in the chipped, pot mug and went back to work. This daily routine continued for the few months that I was there. One morning he unwrapped something from a paper towel. It was a delicate china cup and saucer that he had brought from home. He handed me my coffee in it.

“That’s better” he said. I held it in my hand, eggshell translucence and muddy brown instant, a strange mix. He was pleased and I was touched. *Here come the odd couple* jibes continued, but it never bothered us. I suppose we were odd, but who is normal? He could have been Jack the Ripper, but in my inexperience I trusted him. I liked him. It was bizarre.

He invited me for Sunday lunch with his Father but I never accepted. It was a friendship incarcerated in a place and time and the place was in this hot house of work. Maybe in the outside world, other undercurrents would cloud the waters and destroy it. It was too delicate to survive exposure. I think we both felt and understood this. I refused the invite and Jay wasn’t hurt and didn’t question why. I never met him in the outside world. There was nothing wrong with that. After a few months I left and never went back. I did think of Jay. He was one of life’s square pegs. I hope he did OK.

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