

THE CRAZY OIK
ISSUE 6 SUMMER 2010

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THE CRAZY OIK
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Crossing the Line is from Ken Clay's collection ***Nietzsche's Birthday***

Mr Askew's War Work is from Bob Wild's collection ***Dogs of War***

Front Cover – Camille Bombois – In the Bistro—c1930



Camille Bombois 1993 - 1970

Despite his precocious attraction to painting, the family financial difficulties meant that Camille Bombois had to work from a very young age. Working as a farmhand and sailor, he then became a wrestler in a fun fair in order to be able to travel to Paris. On his arrival, he works in the tunnels of the Parisian Metro and then finds a job working nights at a printer's so he could spend all day painting. After military service in the First World War where he showed great courage and bravery, (he was awarded three medals), he discovers that his wife had sold some of his paintings in order to survive.

In 1922, he meets Wilhelm Uhde who opened the door for him to critical acclaim and success. He can at last spend his time as a full-time painter. He belongs to the inner circle of the five most reputed naïve painters in France, named the 'painters of the Sacred Heart' by Wilhelm Uhde. His most famous paintings are without doubt those of the circus which are appreciated for their energetic drawing, their vivacity of tone and precision of line. His dynamic characters, his sword swallows, his athletes, like *Athlete at the Carnival*, *The Wrestlers*, his fleshy women are all memories from his childhood.

Camille Bombois is without doubt one of the artists whose art resembles most, that of the Douanier Rousseau. Wilhelm Uhde said of him: "It is only in the work of Bombois that reality is a true *raison d'être*, a goal in itself .. He paints true life, what he sees, what he loves spontaneously in daily life."

Naïve Art – Nathalie Brodskaja

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EDITORIAL

KNUTS UNITED

The Crazy Oik's assumption is that there's good stuff out there which doesn't get through the establishment screens. This publishing mafia, the one which knocked back Beckett forty times, is more concerned with finding the next JK Rowling or Jackie Collins. I suppose it should be called, antonymously, the sane bourgeoisie. I guess they have to make money somehow but why not just work in a bank?

Two 18th century outlaws show the way round this block. Rétif de la Bretonne, a French pornographer, and William Blake, an English mystic are now firmly in the Pantheon. No publisher involved. How did they do it? They were printers – and we can all be printers now. Neither was entirely sane – which must have helped. They were archetypal crazy oiks. Blake was a marketing genius too flogging his engravings from a tray round his neck – a technique copied much later by Walls Ice cream in the Odeon and the Ritz.

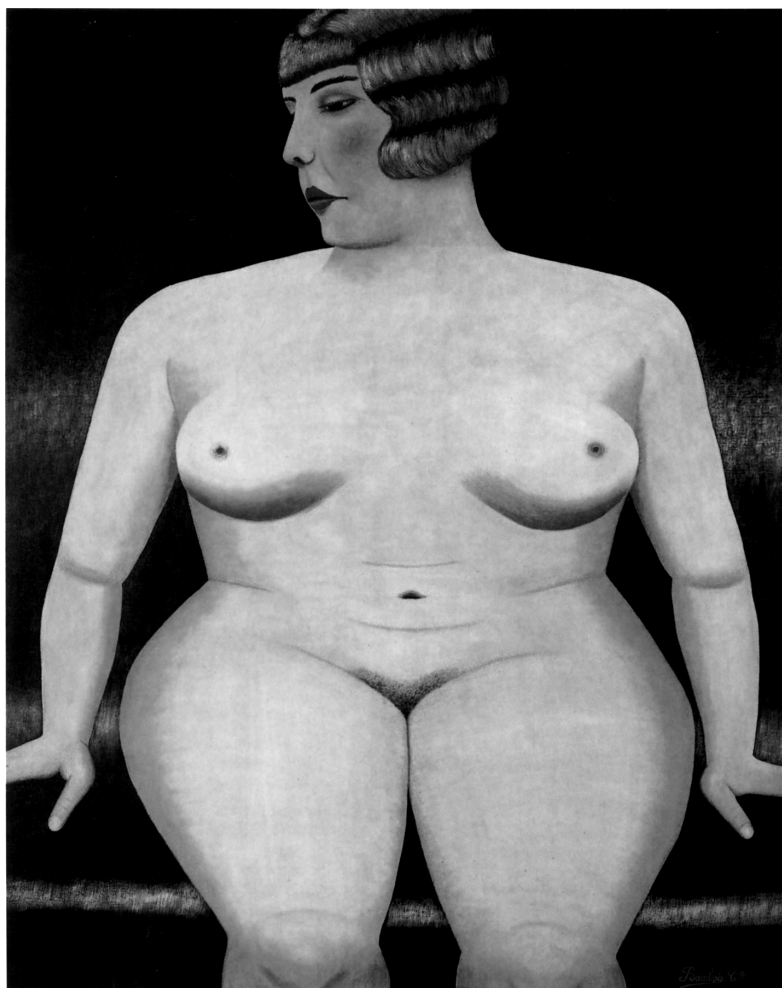
Oikitude implies a certain naivety, an untutored raw energy. This is a bit more problematic as far as writing is concerned. Naïve artists are common – one features on our cover. There can be naïve composers too – think of Lord Paul Beagle, rated by some as the best songwriter since Schubert, who can't write or read a note (thank Christ Schubert could). But writers, particularly writers of extended prose (which lets off freaks like Rimbaud) seem to need long immersion in the canon. A first class hons Eng Lit from King's Cantab must surely be a big help but does the lack of this condemn the crazy oik to dumb introversion?

Well, up to a point – but consider the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun, winner of the Nobel prize (admittedly he was playing at home – he'd never have got it if he'd been a Jap). He spent a total of about 250 *days* in school and read virtually nothing, preferring to glance through books which he claimed to absorb intuitively. Ranting was his normal mode such that even Hitler didn't want to meet him a second time. He gave his Nobel medal to Goebbels who was a great fan. Yep, Knut was a Nazi and as crazy as a coot. But there's no

gainsaying his literary talent – he's credited with delineating urban alienation. He had his finger on the pulse. He was in touch with the *zeitgeist* (yeh - and so was Hitler).

So it can be done with the most unlikely resources. We appeal to all English (K)nuts to persevere no matter what Faber and Faber or professor Amis might say. Just get it down and send it in.

Ken Clay June 2010



Camille Bombois – *Madame Boguslaw Jaruzelski* 1969

A FINE ROMANCE

Stefan Jaruzelski

Dear Pulchritudinous Peach of Preston - Box 09/52

I am Polish poet and plumber and am in reply to your advert in Review of London Books. My friend editor Ken of Crazy Oik passes this on to me. I nod over long articles on evil Israelis and Tory turds but perk up as back page approaches where desperate hornbags seek friendship, love or jigajig. Your own entry produce much stirring in Perce. It reads:

Generously proportioned mature lady 48-45-49 GSOH, non-smoking (of fags) but virtuoso on the pink oboe seeks cultured rich gent with large organ for outings and innings. A carefree relationship is guaranteed by my absence of tubes.

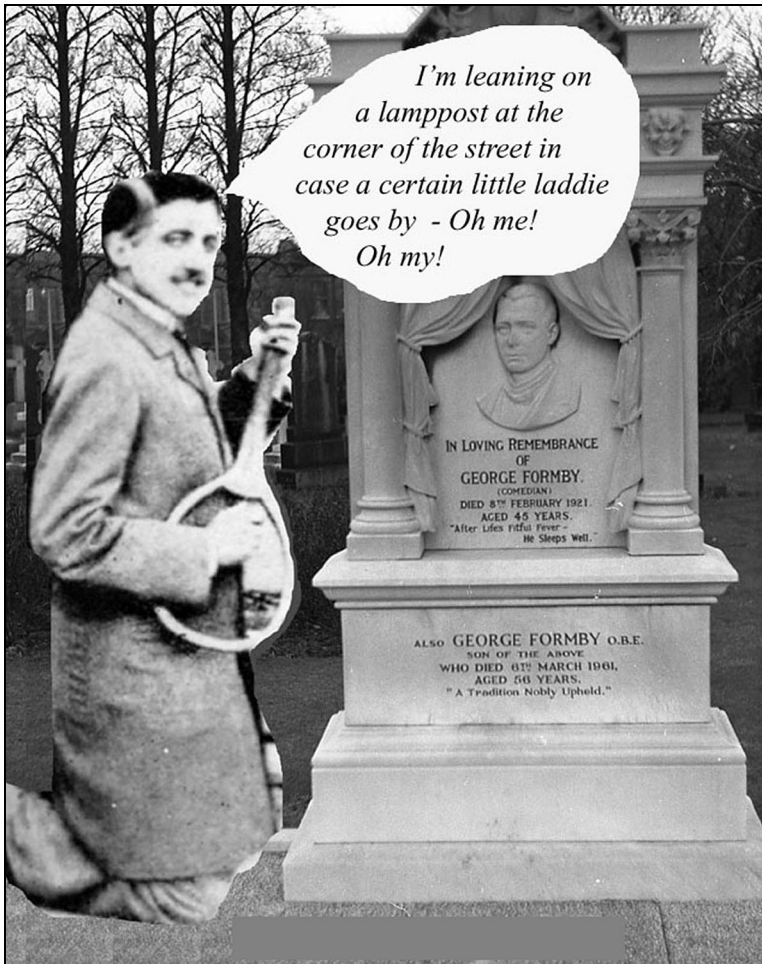
I think I fit bill. I am much cultured gent who also plumbs (therefore rich). Some say I Renaissance man but I reject this accolade which suggests chocolate-chimneysweepery. French is my second language but I am speeding up with the English thanks to my oik plumber friends down here in Soho where I lodge with daughter Wislawa. I note your own English a bit shaky too – the response to your physique is surely GOSH! (note mark of exclamation) – perhaps a typo. I am tri-lingual writer of some distinction, like George Steiner, and have many proses and poems in The Penniless Press and the Crazy Oik both of which come from your area in North West of UK. I greatly taken with French classics like Balzac, Flaubert and Proust but my explorations of Eng lit have been limited up to now to works of Biggles, Braddock and A.J. Ayer – ie those which remain in daughter's flat after gay Lib Dem MP departed ignominiously. You will introduce me to works of the great English Proustian Jackie Collins, former Home Secretary and author of many porno tales and films in which her husband appears alongside her horny sister Joan, the bewigged millionairess kike ho.

I have visited your region to meet Crazy Oik editor Ken at Warrington. When I enquired about local literary heroes such as the 18C poet Letitia Barbauld and Victorian fairy-taler Charles Dodgson – not to mention distinguished ideologues at the dissenters' academy such as Joseph Priestly, Thomas Malthus and even Jean Paul Marat, Ken

looked blank. He had never heard of most of “these fuckers” but recalled riding past the Dodgson birthplace on his bike which was now “no more than a field”. The foundations of the house were marked on the lengthening grass which partly hid a fading placard “PEEDOS OUT!” Most of my conversations with distinguished editor were about plumbing. When I asked to see his library he ushered me into garage where I had to enthuse over chipboard shelf, three feet long, which contained many back issues of the Screwfix catalogue. Below this was a display cabinet holding an example of every available 22mm solder-ring fitting and a butane blowlamp. I insist on seeing at least one cultural monument and Ken, after more brow-furrowing took me to the cemetery to see the tomb of the great troubadour George Formby – the English Chevalier. I asked if George, like Maurice, had collaborated with *les boches*. Ken thought perhaps he had, unintentionally. His front-line performances about window-cleaning and little sticks of Blackpool rock probably lowered the morale of troops hoping to hear Vera Lynne or Donald Peers (brother of Peter?). Then again, troops may have fought more fiercely thinking life no longer worth living. Ken claims his mum knew Formby and that he himself may be his bastard. I think there is much in this hypothesis.

Also I visit your own town of Preston, which was even less inspiring. I met distinguished editor Dent of the Penniless Press. He claims to live in the cultural quarter but this should be cultural sixty fourth, comprising as it does, only the Dent household. Formerly Preston was home of the great essayist and polymath Jim Burns but he left in despair at its meagre *vie littéraire* to live in Gatley which must seem like Paris after Preston. Dent too was preoccupied with matters practico-inert although admitting no manual skills other than those associated with typing and self-abuse. A gas fire had languished in its box throughout a bitter winter for want of a plumber and after it had been installed at great cost another parasitical oik turned up to attend to his roof and capped his chimney. Dent now finds unless he sleeps with the windows wide open he has a splitting headache all day. His canary died shortly after. Here too I ask for cultural tour and am taken to statue of Tom Finney – famous local plumber who also played football. I ask if Tom write poems in plumber/poet tradition but Dent think not. I ask if he related to other hero Tom of Finland of whom there is a poster in gay MP’s old bedroom. Dent says no, but would like poster himself if it’s going spare.

A FINE ROMANCE



*The great French novelist Marcel Proust breaks into a spontaneous
homage to the much-loved Lancs troubadour and wit George
Formby during a little known visit to Warrington*

Photo: Marie Nordlinger

But on to more important matters. I attach picture of my dear wife (now deceased) to acquaint you with my predilections. Unfortunately Boguslawa had lost much weight before this picture was painted by a neighbour in Paris. She had become, as you can see, a wraith. Therefore I must see photos of you naked from front, back and sides. I enclose picture of my own *membrum virile in extenso*. Perce, as you can see, has entirely shed his overcoat (to relapse into the demotic of my fellow Oik contributor Ron Horsefield). You will note the Swan Vestas matchbox which I hold alongside this magnificent organ to give you an idea of its size. It is important to stress that this marker is not one of the tiny versions bought on Blackpool's Golden Mile by self aggrandising perverts for the Facebook website. You will also reciprocate with pudendum pic – and, *mutatis mutandis*, you must not hold alongside it the exaggeratedly large Swan Vestas simulacrum sold to deceitful ladies.

You say you have had “all your tubes out” and that this makes for anxiety free jigajig. I assume your back yard has much scrap copper from redundant heating system. This could be worth something. I will take it away when I call. As for anxiety free jigajig this is my normal mode. I have many jigajigs throughout Europe and feel no anxiety since it is only women who have babies. You will be pleased to hear this I am sure.

My daughter Wislawa runs escort agency in Soho and employs many young girls with the *grandes nichons* and the pert *derrières* but I like larger women. I like lady I can lie on and not touch the ground with my feet and hands. I think you are such. I imagine us *post-coitum* reclining in your Preston love-nest with bottle of Vosne Romanée 1990 reading back issues of Crazy Oik and Penniless Press or even, should repeated jigajigs begin to pall, having soirées with distinguished editors Ken and Dent where rants on the deficiencies of Merleau Ponty, Jack Austin and Tom Finney coruscate the surrounding gloom of Preston.

Yrs in anticipation (and Greek St)

Stefan Jaruzelski – plumber / poet

DAY IN DA LIFE

Beyoncé White

Day 1: Da Woman at da Bottom of da Street.

Listen. Ah av a few fings ta tell u. Somefing very strange appened ta me da uver day, now ah fink of it. Not dat da unusual is unusual around ere, if u know what ah mean. Take my muvver, for hexample. Ere is a wuman who is wivout doubt da hintellectual star of da neighbourud. And just because ah am fifteen years old, does not mean dat ah am hexcluded from er polite and stately conversation. Ere she comes now, and judging by da implement she is carrying, it's tea time.

"Ah tald u ta come in, arf an hour ago. If u don't come in reet now ahm goin ta stick dis spoon in ur hear and mangle ur brains!"

Charmin. As ah was saying, royalty like, and not ta be found without a witty retart in da highbrow circles she frequents.

"And u can take dat hang-dog look off ur face. U're not ta old ta feel da back of my and!"

Moi, too old? Perish da thought dat she might one day treat me like an hadult. Anyways, ah better get along ta da dinner table, where no doubt some masterwork of nouvelle cuisine awaits. Meanwhile ah can tell u about my favver. Hactually, ah should not say "favver". E prefers "Da" or "Pop". Rite now e should be plodding is weary way ome from da mill, or da factary or somefing. Ah, ome.

"Ello darter o mine. Sit down. Ur mum's got da sausage and tamata steamin."

Does not appear very tired ta me?

"Three losers, a straight win, and a good heach way bet on da last race of da hafternoon."

Hmm. A bijou trip ta da turf accountant no doubt.

"Ah've been down ta da bettin shop, and ah must say dat they've done it up reet nice."

He does not appear very fatigued. Ah wonder if he is signin on again? Aht nivver rains but it pours.

"Aht nivver rains but it pours darter. Ere, av some bread...."

Thank u

".... Ah ad ta go down ta da job centre again...."

Surprise.

"Aht's goin' ta be a few weeks before we get da giro."

Well ow is we going ta pay for my school term fees?

"Aht's a good job ur muvver works as well. Heh, dis sausage is tasty in't it?"

Ah suppose ah can always stay at da local state run place. Speakin o which, ah must be off. Gota date.

"Ey! Where is u goin'?"

Must fly. Ta-tah.

Now let me see. Down da main street, turn left at Shaw's da butchers, up Canal street, ah da sun plays gently upon da sweet waters, over dat brown fence dare, disgustin what people write on fences dees days, a nimble vault over dat ditch, and then..... ah yes there they is, my friend: hintelligence raised ta da power of hignorance.

Dawn, Heinstein of 5B physics.

"Wanna know somefink?"

No

"Not gonna tell u."

Fine by me.

"Never. Not until the hend of next term."

Absolutely.

"Aht's Tracy. She's got a Boyfriend."

Ah av got ta humour da girl. She must be aving delusions. How could Tracy get a boyfriend when da girl got a face like dat? Ere comes da slut now.

"Tracy's got a boyfriend! Tracy's got a boyfriend!"

"Aw, shut it, Dawn!"

"Ah saw u in da launderette, larkin' about."

"We were doin is Dad's trolleys."

Oh no! We is going ta get da complete stary. Let me paraphrase it for u. Girl meets boy. Boy likes girl. Boy offers girl tap of is walnut whip. Girl looks hadoringly at boy. Next minute they is buying bold autamatic together at da local supermarket. Hello, da conversation as changed.

"U know there's an hold aunted ouse at da bottam of da street there?"
Aunted? Where?

"Dawn, u moron, it's nat aunted! There's just some deformed, kind of ugly people living dare.

"Err Tracy, looked in da mirror lately?"

"Come on! Let's peek through da window!"

DAY IN DA LIFE

Ah av ta admit, dat ah am curious. Da bottam of da street u say?
Let's go!

"Hey, what if day kill us?"

Ah will see dat u both get an onerable mention in da local gazette.

"Dey're not going ta kill us! Not in broad daylight!"

"Dey've probably got hundreds of bodies stashed in da cellar!"

And there it is. A fine hexample of late sixty's architecture, complete wiv rusty doorbell.

"Ah dare u ta press it!"

No way.

"OK. Ah will!"

Ey! Too late. Oh oh. What was dat rumbling sound? Oh hi, her miss. ah was just passing and ah could not elp noticin dat ur car lights were on.

"We don't have a car."

Ah. Well it was my friends hactually, oo spotted it.

"What friends?"

Ah yes. They seemed ta av vanished.

"You're doing this on purpose aren't you? I know your type. You're one of them aren't you?"

Ah could answer dat question much more heasily if u take ur ands from around me froat.

"You've been spying on me! You and the others!"

No really. U just happen ta be on my paper round.

"Who sent you? I know who it is!"

U av probably noticed dat my face as gone blue. Lack of hoxxygen. Just a small point.

"I'll let you go this time. Just tell them I'll be waiting. Any time."

OK. Fanks fo lettin me go. I will tell dem dat u is a kind and considerate person. U is not a Mormon is u? No? Fanks anyway.

Well, dat is da kind of trouble u sometimes get inta around ere. She is probably quite a sweet lady really an jus murders people in er spare time. Wait until ah catch up wiv Tracy an Dawn. Ah suppose ah ad better be goin ome. School in da mornin. Ah could tell u a few fings about those teachers. Oh, dat has jus reminded me. Ah was goin ta tell u about what happened ta me da uver day wiv Kevin. Aht was right egregious it was. But ah will av ta tell u some uvver time. Got ta go now. Until ah see u again, ta-tah!

Day 2: Dat Kevinaceous Guy

U probably fink my friends are a no good bunch o nere do wells, shirkin responsibility an soon ta be a burden on da state, right? But ah ave it on good authority dat Dawn will be occupyin a first rate trainee apprenticeship at Snip an Blow once da fiasco ov da summer exams are over. Tracy will no doubt be joinin er wivin a day ov da exam results bouncin off da door mat. It's just dat da slut as some ow got it inta er ed dat she is a great scientist an ah don't see ow u can square dat wiv a shit load ov broken test tubes an a smashed up lab?

Dad's all set ta watch a movie. 'Course e's seen it before an Mum wasn't keen. She was practicin yoga in er slacks an grabbed da TV doodad durin a bendin manoeuvre, partly exposin er buttocks. E turned is ed an it was in er and. She found a programme on euthanasia in Denmark an e was up out ov da chair wiv is bag o popcorn, mutterin somefink as e made is way ta da bedroom. Den Mum changed da channel ta some soap she wanted ta watch. Don't think e'll be doin anyfink private in dare.

Ey Dad.

"Darter o mine. A don't ave any time for one ov dem long talks. Dare's an action movie comin on. Not seen it before. Bruce Willis. Shame about da noggin."

Yeah well da guy obviously used da wrong shampoo.

"Wazzup?"

A fought a might go out an slap Dawn an Tracy.

"Ave u asked yer mam?"

No. She's doin yoga an she wants u ta come an watch a prog. She says it's good for u

"U better go out da back door. No later dan ten."

Da old man has got sum umanity after all. Ah only want ta score sum cider an a couple o Park Drive round da CO-OP before any blowards turn up.

Ah can ear Mum on da phone: "An when am about ta fall asleep e comes over all romantic, which means rubbin me backside til a roll over...." Better make a quick exit.

Grab some Pringles cos am ungary. Hop over da fence an through da smokin rubble ov da billiard table factory. It got bulldozed las week. Kiss ov da wreckin ball. Dad used ta say dat it was romantic, like those paintins ov Venetian ruins. It looked very pretty, sprinkled wiv

DAY IN DA LIFE

asbestos. U could slip an gash a leg on some rusty pipe an u'd be off school fo a week.

Oh oh. Here come da trash. Day is on a one way ride ta hell but day don't know it. It's Finger G. Don't know why day call im dat?

"What u doin?"

I'm about.

"What u mean 'u is about'?"

I'm about ta meet me boyfrien. What is u about?

"I'm angin. Lookin ta score.

U is always lookin ta score.

Fing about FG is dat nobody told im ow ta be a man. Dat's just my opinion like. Gota go bro. See u some mo.

Ah dare's Mr Darcy, smellin a bit funky.

"Nice legs... What time do day open?"

Dat is da wonderful fing abaht dis place. It's like wudarin ites or pride an predjudice. It's so romantic.

Do u want some snacks?

"Sex?"

No not sex. Snacks. Da boy is delusional. Pringles right?

"Ah thought u said sex?"

So e starts babblin abaht work.

"So ah's off work for a week. Ah told dem girls while ah was away day gotta do it rite. Dey is only women an dey don't unerstan rite?

So ah tode em fings u need ta bee ayble ta do while ahm away."

Yeah Kev.

"OK, ysee it's like dis rite? U gota do dees: Dailup to da inanet – like yoos an hexpert. Specially when it go off. An bakkin up, brover. U need da see dee disks fo dis. Den dare is de makin ov da see dees like u was righteous – for de Babylon babes an da right-on master. Not ta mention makin ov da hinvoices which is crucial, cause dat accartant dude is ah number one evy merchant."

Don't know where it come from but ah ave ta humour da boy.

"If u get da call from da client, make like u is avin a art attak den get da tech dude ta call from across da big waters an sort it. An don't go mouvin off against da Kevinaceous guy, while eh aint dare – an don't fink eeh wont know cause e as da righteous webcam playin alnite – alrite sisters."

U see Kevin is useful. But e is a man so e is like a brake light on a space ship.

U is such a clever dude Kev. Fanks for da smokes. A ave ta blow now cause me Dad will be worried. Ta-tah!

Ah am goin ta watch da rest ov dat movie an find out if Bruce lost any more air.

**LITTLE GIRL WHO
WAS DETERMINED TO
GET NOTHING BUT
H.P. SAUCE !**



★ She tried every grocer in turn until she discovered one who had just obtained a supply.
Yes she did have to kiss the grocer's little friend Mr Sausage and even lick some sauce of his head. Then the grocer insisted on making sure her knickers were on the right way round

If you take enough trouble you can usually find even the elusive H.P.; otherwise, be patient. Your own grocer will be having some more soon.

HIP

Illustrated September 1941



Illustrated September 1941

AWAY THE LADS.

Marie Feargrieve

“You dinna want to go spoiling the bairn with fancy stuff like bloody strawberries hinny. Your nivver made of brass yus knows. Give him a piece of stotty cake man.” This seemed strange to me! Were strawberries very expensive in the North East then? I didn’t want bloody Wimbledon’s quota, just a small punnet. But this was Tyneside between the mid seventies and eighties, a weird and wonderful wacky place.

“The baker will be round soon”, announced Annie my mother in law. On cue the van pulled up outside the front gate. Annie shambled out in her outsize men’s brown slippers.

“Hiya Jacko how yer doin?” she greeted the bread man in his mobile shop. Loaves of Mother’s Pride, packets of Rington’s tea, and trays of luridly coloured cakes filled the shelves.

“Eey Jackie lad these cakes are real little miracles, they’re luvlie like.” They were indeed miracles. As I looked at the stodgy, sticky buns, I could see they were miracles of monosodium glutamate or whatever the confectionary equivalent was. I didn’t say so of course or I would have been viewed as a weirdo, something worse than a vegetarian!

Catapulted into the heart of Tyneside at the age of seventeen from leafy Cheshire, I entered a hard but gut achingly funny world. Geordie jargon alone was a whole new world. It was like learning a foreign language. To be asked “Do yer wear your galooses ower or under yer ganzie?” opened up several wild guesses as to the meaning. Added to this was the strong possibility that it signified nothing at all! They were possibly taking the piss! It did however translate after a lot of ribaldry to “Do you wear your braces over or under your jumper”, which by now I really wanted to respond “Fuck off and mind your own bloody business!” *Away the lads* and *Newkie Brown* I soon got the gist of. The chant of football crowds for their team and the swilling of the local beer were the easy bits.

Smoky, grimy coke ovens, mines, shipyards and vast council housing estates made up a grim urban melee, but the humour and wit and survival instinct of this Geordie crowd made an eradicable imprint

AWAY THE LADS

on my memory. It was an out and out chauvinistic society where “our pet”, knew her place and didn’t really kick up a lot about it. Yet the woman was the mouthpiece of the domestic hearth and was as loud as a foghorn on the Tyne.

“If yer tek me last fag man I’ll cut yer bleedin fingers off.” Annie slept with her woodbines under her pillow and God help Harry if he so much as put a digit near her feather bolster before he left for work in the local foundry at five in the morning. Never a word of endearment between them, but a marriage that lasted the best part of sixty years. It was the biff, bash, boff of aggressive repartee that kept the old buggers going.

I learnt a lot very quickly up there. An especial piece of sound advice was not to put a newly made trifle on the *winder ledge*. Why you would want to do this anyway evaded me, but hey I was slow to catch on: It was because a lot of the households didn’t own a fridge. So you avoided putting it there because it would get covered with soot from the coke ovens. To make this mistake was a sure sign that you were a feckless hussy and no mistake! Added to this I was a Mancunian and for this I was damned from the start! I was a bloody foreigner man, what could you expect? The girl’s *a bloody galoot!*

Harry’s flesh was pitted and scarred from the sparks and flames of the foundry that he sweated in for forty five years. Despite this, his favourite sitting position was on the hearth rug in front of the coal fire.

“Move yer arse man. Sit in a chair. Yer not the bloody cat.” Annie had the tin teapot in hand. She had picked it up off the hearth where it sat stewing to a thick treacly brown consistency.

“Hush yer whisht woman and pour the blush”.

Annie moved over his bare shoulders with the brimming teapot. Suddenly a shout went up from the vest clad, crouching Harry, scalding liquid dripped onto his bare flesh.

“You bloody gorm woman, what the hell yer doin?”

He jumped up and ran off to the scullery to douse his burns with cold water. Huge blisters the size of a fist ballooned up immediately. Me being a soft southern nancy, I suggested a trip to casualtymaybepossibly?

“Are you barmy hinny, I donna want to go mithering the doctors, it’s nottin man. Annie get the butter I’ll put some of that on.”

The rest of the family sat around hollering with laughter. It was no big deal and Annie carried on pouring the ‘blash’.

Regardless of the blisters Harry and the rest of the clan were down the working men’s club at half past six to get seats. They didn’t want to miss the “go as you please”. This normally consisted of old fellas playing the spoons and doing a sort of soft shoe shuffle. There was always an Elvis with a strong Geordie accent and a variety of comics with a patter in varying shades of blue verging on black. Black in other ways too, as they were unselfconsciously racist. I was a Man-cunian which was another race to them. I’d felt their jibes so knew that.

A great night was had by all, apart from the female of the species who had been left at home, knitting and blowing soot specks off the trifles. There were compensations mind. The men had called in at the local chippy on their way home and staggered in after midnight with lukewarm bags of chips and bags of batter bits, greasy but tasty and cheap. Harry came in, mouthy with the drink on him.

“You’re drunk man. Stop your blether”, announced Annie.

“Give ower woman. You don’t know how good I am to ye. Get yer scratchings down yer gob”. Annie scooped up her vinegar drenched bits and scowled a gummy scowl.

Another purely male arena was the allotments on the edge of town, where the men gathered at weekends and on summer evenings. They were madly passionate leek growers. They tended them like mothers with their babies. They were fed and tickled and measured constantly. Sabotage had been known to be committed, especially if the leeks were good enough to be entered into the local fruit and veg show. Many a morning the cry went up, “Me leeks ‘ave bin bloody knobbed!” This would cast a strong, macho man into a depression or a murderous rage for weeks on end.

“Aw bugger yer stupid leeks man. Pass the peas pudding over.” The Geordie wife’s sympathy knew no bounds. “Av bin in agony all day wiv the tooth ache. Canna be bothered with yer bloody veggies.”

“Yer don’t need that tooth woman. An it’s loose anyways. Come ere, I’ll pull it for yer”.

AWAY THE LADS

Two fat nicotined stubby fingers were thrust into Annie's gob. The wobbly molar was grasped and sharply tugged and the last tooth in Annie's head popped out!

Crude but effective action.

"Stick it under yer pillow wiv yer fags, hinny. The tooth fairy might tek it and leave yer twenty woodbines" Always a quip, always the banter.

The North Eastern spirit really came into it's own on New Years Eve. Neighbours roamed up and down the closely packed streets. It was open house, relative strangers could wander in, have a drink, a bit to eat, a bit of chat and move on to the next house. Around eleven thirty, serious discussions took place as to who was going to be the *first foot*. It had to be someone dark haired and swarthy skinned. God knows why?

"How's about our Les? He's a lucky bugger."

"He's an ugly bastard lets have our Norm."

The *first foot* brought luck and prosperity to the household for the year ahead. So, in he came at the front door with a lump of coal and a bottle of whisky to toast in the New Year. What normally happened was that someone knocked on the door at midnight, drunk as a skunk, bald as a coot, minus his coal and with a can of Newcastle Brown clasped under his sweaty arm. But sod it, he would have to do.

It was a good year when the sixties style Formica topped table collapsed under the weight of the booze. It was a lean year when the booze ran out before midnight. It was a memorable year when Ma Harrison delivered another neighbours' baby in the back bedroom and when a few months later that same neighbour delivered Ma Harrison's twelfth.

Piss poor, hard working, hard playing people were these Tyneside communities. Raw, gritty, funny people. Rough justice was administered inside the home and out and they got into my foreign, Mancunian psyche. The coke oven fires may be extinguished but when the smoke clears and the angel of the north looms large, these characters traipse across my mind. I can hear their voices still: *Aw yer talking shite man, shuddup*. So I'll shut up and call it a day. The girl's a gorm anyways. "Away the lads".



James Thatcher, Senior Warden

“The effect on my fellows was amazing.”

“Some months ago I had a most remarkable instance of how flagging energies may be temporarily revived. In a badly hit area we had had a particularly hectic time and some of us, not unnaturally, showed signs of flagging. Then someone produced a supply of coke snorts and offered them round. The effect on my fellows was amazing. They all seemed at once to pick up reinforcements of energy and stuck to the job magnificently.”



Illustrated September 1941

OIKUS

David Birtwistle

Learning Curve: Household Liquid Activator.

He wanted to grow large, magical vegetables and he was eager for knowledge. Compost and manure were the key, the earth itself and the nutrients in it. Then one or two special additives: foliar feeds with comfrey, nettles and seaweed. Tomatoes, leeks and onions could double in size. If you added HLA, human urine, to the compost-heap it provided food for the bacteria. One gardener in Yorkshire used to come home after ten pints of Tetley's bitter and wazz in a steaming golden arc onto his white roses. The large buds always came out with red hunting hats on.

The Fruit of that Forbidden Tree.

A new Quality-of-Life survey rates Elmbridge in Surrey as the closest thing to paradise in the UK. Residents enjoy above-average earnings, better health, greater longevity, bigger houses, better GCSE results, less rain and more sunshine than the rest of the country. The gardener, on minimum wage with kids at an inner-city comprehensive, made a space at the back of a large, restored greenhouse and carefully propagated *Kinea Sodomorum*, the vine of Sodom, which was supposed to "bestoweth the grapes of Gall" and looked a bit like a tomato. So far he'd introduced it to 137 gardens and was still counting.

The Scrolls - Secrets of the Hidden Scriptures.

He was a respected researcher in Biblical languages and received a sample of the writings, supposedly the sayings of Jesus. The original Christians believed they could find God within themselves and didn't require priests or authority figures as intermediaries. The Church found this message dangerous and hid them away for 2000 years. His section was from *The Apocalypse of James*. He studied the source of their inner strength: "*Look not to the tattler nor the scandalmonger of the inn. Neither blather ye nor talk bollocks. Keepeth shtoom when*

all about squawketh like a parrot. Beware of old women of both sexes....."

The 'Lost World' Regained.

Last month satellite reconnaissance revealed pictures of the upper Amazon showing evidence of a vast empire of cities, citadels and treasure. This civilisation deep in the jungle close to Brazil's border with Bolivia is believed to be the fabled El Dorado. Early explorations of this area drew thousands of explorers to their deaths and inspired Conan Doyle's masterpiece. A small team on the ground report evidence of a geoglyph-taverna culture and the primitive distillation of local crops including potatoes, chillies, tomatoes and hops. Translations of an ancient signpost reads: *Free tequila for the over eighties if accompanied by a parent.*

Intruders: Splinters in the Door.

He woke up with a start. A creak downstairs. A faint groan of timber, a muted thud, and a soft rustle. He nudged the missus, A groan. He slid into his slippers, put on his dressing-gown and grabbed his walking-stick. He crept onto the landing and found his torch. The noises were closer, outside the front door! The torch beam fell on a wide-open letterbox. Squeezed through it was a mass of pink flesh. It was that Doreen Dobson again and he deduced a) she was on a box and b) there must be a queue behind the chapel tonight.

Parents Evening

The caretaker leant on a brush and cast a watchful eye round the hall. The chairs and desks were arranged around the outside of the room and the lights glared that winter/orange fuzz that made you blink. The group approached the table that said 'Miss Franny'. "Who've you brought with you tonight, Darren?" "This is my carer, Miss. This is my social worker.....you know my child psychologist.....my key worker, my step-father, my birth mother and her sperm donor, my current osteopath, my grief counsellor....." "Who are they at the back?" "That's Baron, Sharon and Faron, Miss, the other three quadruplets."

BLACK HUMOUR

Tom Kilcourse

There were no miners in my family history, and Newton Heath, where I was raised, was not a mining area, though there was a pit at Moston, just down the road. So, my ending up underground was an accident of circumstance, for which Ronnie Capewell was partly to blame, along with Tom and Ernie.

My first job was with the Medical Research Council at Monsal Hospital, that too came about by accident, or inertia. Having left school at fifteen, I was taken by my mother to the youth employment office where a kind faced lady strove mightily to interest me in a career. After exploring numerous mental cul-de-sacs she eventually found something in which I was interested: animals. Her face brightened in triumph on discovering that I 'liked animals'. That is how I ended up at Monsal, incinerating the bodies of guinea pigs on which they had experimented. The 'career' lasted just nine months.

My next move was to Elenar Motors, a cramped, ill equipped garage on Waterloo Road owned by Monty Newman. Most of the clients were market traders and our task was to keep their clapped out vans on the road. Monty sold out after a while to Josh Cohen who didn't know a nut from a bolt. Eventually recognising this technical handicap, Josh sold the garage to Tom, the mechanic, and Ernie, his mate. They kept me on until a fortnight before my eighteenth birthday, when I would be due a rise.

In 1955 conscription beckoned, but it would be months before the army needed my assistance, and there was no way that I could afford to be out of work in the meantime. The age of parental support for offspring of working age had not yet dawned. I applied for jobs, but no employer wanted to know a lad who would be called up in the near future. That is where Ronnie came in.

Ron was a member of our boyhood gang who, when fifteen, joined the navy as a boy seaman. Three years later he had tired of serving the Senior Service, and packed it in, just about the time that Tom and Ernie gave me the heave-ho. It was his suggestion that we go down the pit. Miners were exempt from National Service, so the Coal Board was perfectly happy to take me off the streets. Capewell chickened out at the last minute and went on the railway. I alone

went into the abyss, in the form of the Oak Colliery in Oldham. That is where I did my initial training to be a miner.

Cursing the Capewell name I stepped through the heavy steel doors with two other trainees and Colin Orange, the training officer. Beyond those doors was a big, round hole protected by what appeared to be a totally inadequate fence. To be fair, having just been told that the hole was three hundred yards deep, a solid brick wall would have seemed to me inadequate. Boyhood in Newton Heath had taught me never to show fear, but the sight of that inch thick steel rope disappearing into the hole tested my resolve to the limits. My life was about to depend on it.

Within days however, I became blasé, stepping into the cage without hesitation to be lowered by the rope down the shaft. The tunnels too quickly became familiar and I was yet to discover how those fairly quiet, well lit runs differed from the ear shattering clatter and frantic activity of a working pit. There also, I encountered miners' humour for the first time. Squatting in a group with some old hands as we ate our 'snap', one seasoned veteran asked us what we had for dinner the day before, Sunday. One lad volunteered the information that he had roast pork, with apple sauce. For his pains, he was harangued for ten minutes, with the old miners laughing uproariously at the idea of someone eating his 'pudding' with his meat. 'You eat your apples with custard, not with your meat, lad'. Never having eaten roast pork with apple sauce, it took me a few minutes to get into the joke.

When the initial training was completed I was sent to Bradford Pit, in Manchester. The thousand yard deep shaft there made that of the Oak seem like a pothole. As well as being deeper, the drop was much faster at fifteen feet per second. Again, black humour revealed itself. The down-shaft, that used to draw air into the mine, was served by a steam driven winder that was much quicker than the electrically driven engine for the up-shaft. The cage in the down-shaft had four decks, each carrying twenty men. The floor of each deck was made of perforated steel, so that anything spilled on the upper deck dripped through to the one below. Bradford being a big pit, employing two and a half thousand men, it often received visits from VIPs.

One of the winders, let's call him Harry, was of irritable disposition and it was quite common during his shift for miners to give him a V-sign from the cage, which he could see from his seat. Harry rose to the bait every time, putting the cage into near free-fall as a way of

BLACK HUMOUR

punishing his tormentors. When the drop exceeded the maximum permitted speed, the automatic safety break came on. By then, the cage could be on two or three hundred yards of rope, which stretched. Having stretched, it then retracted so that the falling cage halted for an instant before shooting upwards. It would then bounce up and down for several seconds. To those in the know this was all good fun, but the experience could be terrifying to newcomers, or visitors. I remember one youth crossing himself as he muttered a prayer. The most memorable event though was the visit of some dignitaries from Eastern Europe. These chaps were riding on the top deck when it happened, and the screams were apparently spine chilling to hear. One gentleman from East Germany had to go back to the surface to change his trousers. However, the blokes on the deck below him paid a penalty for their little joke, with shit spattered helmets.

If people in the descending cage found the experience enervating, those in the ascending cage needed nerves of steel. In their case, the cage would continue to rise for a few feet under its momentum aided by the retracting rope, but then it fell. Many an innocent thought that his end had come when that happened.

Less vigorous forms of humour were commonplace down the pit. Some incidents have been recorded in other stories, such as 'Albert' and 'Underground Movement', but allow me to relate a couple previously untold.

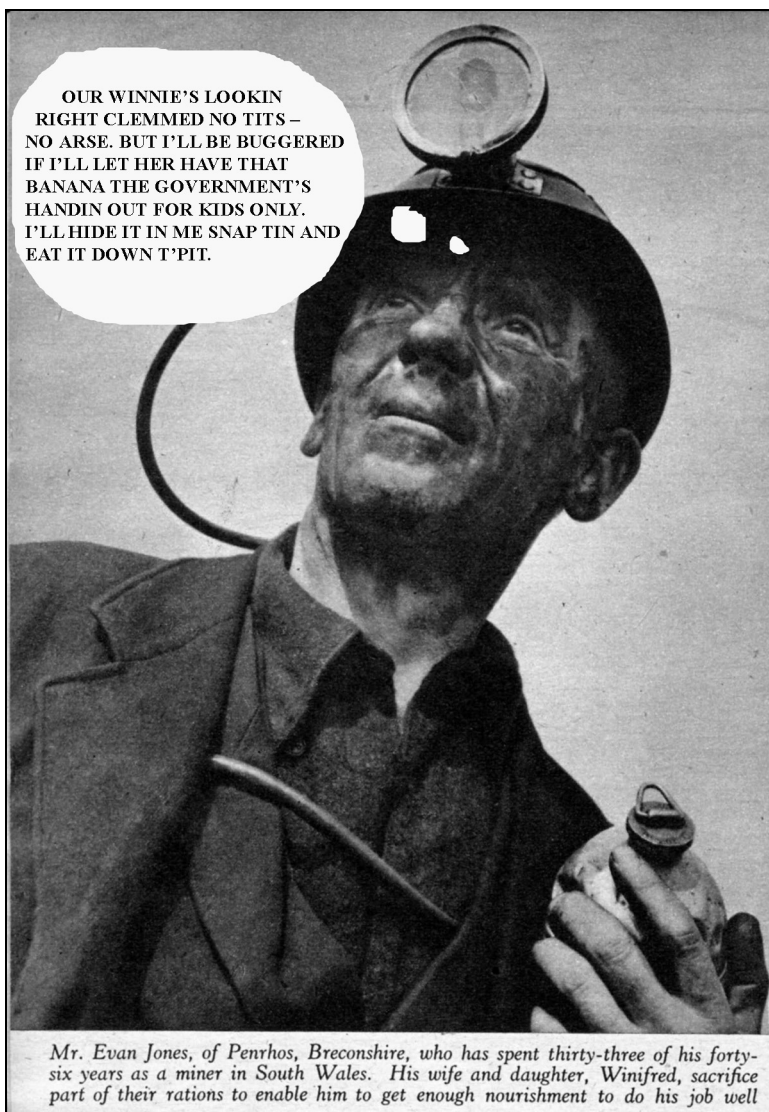
I had worked underground for about three years when I started courting a girl. At the end of a nightshift I was in the midst of a group of men waiting for the trams to take us up the brow. With us was a Deputy (Foreman) named Tobin whose wife, rumour had it, was known to stray. Tobin was not a natural wit, but he thought that in me he had an easy target, asking me what my girl-friend did while I was on nightshift. I cannot recall my answer, but his next line was to 're-assure' me that I 'wouldn't miss a slice off a cut loaf'. His grin disappeared when one of the lads quipped back that 'tha should know, there's only fucking crust left at tha house'. They must have heard the laughter on the surface.

The second event provided me with an invaluable lesson in man management. Old Mullins, the manager of Bradford pit was respected by everyone, not least because he was believed to be 'giving one' to the canteen manageress. Be that as it may, the men did not

generally try to con the old boy. He had a black belt himself in bull-shit. However, respect for Mullins did not extend to a new Assistant Manager, Taylor, who arrived straight from mining college. He had much to learn.

It was common for those who smoked to enjoy a last cigarette before going down the pit. Already dressed for the job, and carrying their lamps, they would hold back and wait for the last cage, many of them sitting on the hall floor with their backs against a wall. Such was the scene one evening when Taylor appeared, smartly dressed in a suit and tie. He had been out for the evening and, being a keen type, called into the pit on his way home. Seeing men ‘idling’ rather than rushing to go underground, he began to order men to their feet and go to the shaft. Initial astonishment turned to humour and men began to laugh, though none made a move. His voice rising he began trying to lift men physically to their feet, shouting threats of ‘reports’ to the manager. The physical contact was a mistake. The rags that miners wear underground are always thick with dust from previous shifts. After several futile wrestling matches with laughing men, Taylor looked like he had worked a shift himself. God knows what his dry-cleaning bill came to. He had departed to pastures new within a few months.

It is almost fifty years since I left the pit for ever, and I have many memories, some of them tragic. What I remember most clearly though is the laughter. Nowhere since has given me so much fun.



Illustrated September 1941

TRAIN MAN

Brett Wilson

Roy Batley was feeling miserable. His wife had persuaded him that they needed a holiday. Together. He could be sitting by the canal with his rod. Six pack of beer. Watching the world go by. But no. His missus had somehow convinced him that some R&R by the sea would be good. It was a hot day. Roy's nose was pressed against the window of the train. He was looking at a glass filtered version of the train station from his seat.

"Paper." he said.

"What?" The wife had been rudely returned from some frilly version of Roy's reverie by the remark. She had been walking along a promenade alone, poodle on a lead, a large portion of chips in hand. Now she was looking at Roy's grizzled features. "The train's about to leave?"

Roy sprang out of his seat. "That's why I'm going to be quick like."

"Get some water. Put it in the food bag" she said. He grabbed it without looking.

The newsagent was on the adjacent platform. There was a short queue, but it cleared quickly and Roy was back round to the platform within two minutes. He had forgotten the water, but that wasn't the problem.

"Shit." Roy was watching the back of the train getting smaller and smaller. He scratched his head, looking from side to side. "Fuckit" he said, jumped onto the track and started running. He pulled the shoulder bag from one shoulder and adjusted the strap then he picked up his pace. He wasn't in condition. His legs were hurting already and he could feel phlegm building up. *I'm not going to let it beat me.* He could still see the back of the train, first like a matchbox and then like a dot in the hazy distance. He dug deeper and pressed harder. His legs were getting a rhythm. His phone was ringing. It was the missus. "Where the fuck are you, fuck face? I've looked over the whole train and you're not on board. You've not locked yourself in the crapper have you?"

"No listen. I'm not on the train. I'm chasin' it."

TRAIN MAN

“What do you mean ‘chasin it’?”

“I’m running behind it.”

“Running behind? Are you a fucking numb nuts or what?! You’re never going to catch a fucking train?!”

“Never mind that. It’s only a short stop to the next station and it’s downhill. It’s in a built up area so it can’t go too fast. And I know for a fact that it’s early, so it’ll be sitting on that platform for ten minutes.”

“Well you better get here or I’m going to break both your arms and legs. This is typical of you. We get a holiday and you go and spoil it.”

“Give it a rest will you? I’m running a fucking marathon here, and I’ve got the wrong shoes on. Go and get a gin and tonic and sit on your fat arse and moan to someone else. What I need is a bit of encouragement like those Olympic athletes get from sports psychologists. I’m losing the fucking will to live. Five minutes on the phone with you and I wanna top meself. I’m going. All this talk is affecting my running.” He disconnected. Moments later the phone rang again. She hated being cut off. He turned the phone off.

Right, let’s get some serious running done. He gritted his teeth. The right knee had been twinging, but it was feeling better now. He bore down on the track. All he could hear was the sound of his shoes on the grit and on the sleepers. His shirt was wet with sweat. He grabbed his wallet and keys, put them in his pants then threw off his coat and jumper. He was pretty sure the station was around the next bend. *Halleluia!* Five hundred metres down the track, the train was next to the platform. He put another spurt on.

The platform manager saw him running up the track. “Hey mate, it’s against the law to walk on the track....”

“Never mind that” he said, panting “Is that the 11.15 to Padstow?”

“No, it’s the 11.20 to Bayswater.”

“What?” Pant “Where’s the fucking 11.15?”

“Don’t speak to me like that. I can arrest you for defiling the track.”

“Listen fuck face” Pant “Tell me what happened” Pant “To the fucking” Pant “11.15 before I lose me fucking” Pant “Rag.”

“It had to make way for the 11.20 and backed in off the other track. The 11.15 went five minutes ago.”

“That’s all I fucking need. Thanks.” He set off down the platform, jumped onto the track and accelerated like an aging puma. *I’m going to get that fucker if it’s the last thing I do.*

He didn’t even know how far the next station was. And he was running uphill. *Couldn’t they build fucking level railways in this country?* He got out the phone and turned it on. There were seven messages and three voicemails. He ignored them and dialled his wife. “Baby there’s been a slight problem....” There was a silence and then his wife spoke. “You’re determined to ruin this holiday aren’t you?”

“Not especially.”

“I’m sat here like a spare part, trying to make polite conversation, while you’re swanning all over the place like some nob nut.”

“I’m having a fucking heart attack trying to catch this train dearest.”

“Why don’t you find a taxi? You’re the stupidest man on God’s earth.”

“I’m not going to pay for a fucking taxi, besides which, I’m not going to let that train beat me.”

“Well you’ve ruined the holiday now. I knew you were going to spoil it. You didn’t want to come.”

“This is no time for recriminations sweetness. My legs are tired. My head’s pounding and my throat’s dry. I’ll ring you back.” He disconnected. The phone started ringing. His wife. He switched it off. He remembered there was food in the bag. Still running, he pulled the bag round and had a rummage. Sun lotion. Curling tongs. Manicure set. Flannel. *What the fuck?* Wrong bag. The wife had the sarnies. He threw the bag aside. He was coming to a flat section. *Was that a pub off to the left?* He leapt up the embankment.

“Two pints and a packet of crisps mate.”

“I’m serving” said the Landlord.

Roy looked him straight in the eye. “Two pints and a packet of crisps.”

“He’s getting my pint” said a large man with a gap in his teeth, leaning on the bar.

TRAIN MAN

"Listen, I need a drink fast. I've got a train to catch. Literally."

"You're not listening mate."

"All right. I'm tired of arguing. Let's take it outside, if you're man enough?"

The bar went quiet. The large man looked Roy up and down and started walking slowly towards the door. Roy followed him, but as he stepped through the door he turned around, went to the bar, picked up the pint and drained it. He leaned over to the Landlord. "When that guy comes back, tell him he's an ugly bastard."

"He's my brother."

"Runs in the family." Roy left by the back door.

Within half a minute he was back on the track. The beer was making his head swirl, but also filling him with confidence. He was getting a second wind. He should probably phone his wife back but the silly bint would only complain. *How fucking far apart can these stations be?* It seemed like he'd been running for ages. He checked his watch. *Fucking hell! He had been running for ages. He'd run a fucking marathon.* He turned the phone back on. There were three more messages and another two voicemails.

"Babe, I got an idea" he said.

"First time this century."

"No seriously. You've got to stop the train. It's the only way I can catch up. I haven't seen a back end or had a whiff of diesel in absolutely ages."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Pull the communications chord. Pretend you're dead. That'll be easy, just make like you do when we're making love..."

"Can't remember the last time we made love babe. I don't think you love me any more. I'm beginning to have serious doubts about our marriage."

"You always have serious doubts about our marriage. Get your mind in fucking gear and stop wallowing in a pool of fucking gin and find a way to stop that fucking train."

There was a pause. "You're a twat Roy Batley." The line went dead.

He had to hope that she could find some initiative for once in her life and stop the train, otherwise he'd never catch up. He had a stitch in his right side and the beer was wearing off, but he still had a good rhythm. The sun was getting hot and his shirt and trousers were plastered to his skin. The phone rang.

"Right. The trains stopped."

"Fucking hell. What did you do?" "I told the conductor I heard a thump and saw a body on the line. It should be yours you bastard. The things you make me do."

"Right. We'll talk about it later. Don't let them start again. I'm going to put a spurt on."

Roy started to grind out the distance. His thighs were going like pistons. Unfortunately he had now encountered an uphill section. His calves were hurting and his quads felt like molten lead. He could see a bend ahead, still uphill. *Right, if that train is not around that fucking corner I'm going to rip my lungs out and beat myself to death with them.* No train. Just a pub.

It was a really sleepy place. Just some couple in the corner staring silently at their drinks. Roy burst in. "Thank Christ for that, no queue. Right give me two pints of lager. No make that a pint of bitter and a pint of lager. I don't normally mix my drinks but I'm desperate. Also a bag of crisps and a bag of nuts."

The wizened old lady behind the bar slowly looked up. "What was that?"

"I said a pint of bitter, a pint of lager, nuts and crisps." Roy said it very loudly, enunciating his syllables clearly and making sure his lips moved in an exaggerated way. The Landlady didn't answer. She started to move towards the pumps, though in incredibly small and slow steps.

"Come on, I haven't got all day."

"Patience is a virtue young man" the old lady had stopped.

"What are you doing now?"

"I need a rest."

"Oh for twatting sake!" Roy vaulted the bar. "Look, here's twenty pounds. I'm not robbing you. I'm just serving myself." Roy watched

TRAIN MAN

the two glasses fill. He vaulted back, draining the bitter and letting out a large burp.

“Do you get a lot of action in here?” He looked around.... The second pint swiftly followed the first. Then he was out the door.

There was a short tunnel up ahead. As he approached the darkened entrance he noticed three hoodies spray painting the tunnel wall. There was a little pointy nosed dog mooching nearby. One of them stood in his way.

“Allo lads.”

“We need money to buy paint mister.”

“I don’t want any trouble, but I’m havin’ a bad day and I need to take it out on someone, so piss off back to your crèche before I lose me temper.”

The other two turned towards him. “Give us your money mister.”

“Ere” he said stepping towards the nearest. Then he grabbed him by the shoulders and head butted the poor fucker. Another kid threw a punch but missed. Roy kicked him in the nuts. The other delinquent ran off.

“There, that’ll teach you to respect your elders and betters. Oh, and by the way, your graffiti is shite.” Roy set off running again. After a few seconds there was a sharp pain in his ankles. It was the dog. Roy tried to flick his foot out while he kept going but the dog backed off a bit so that it was cantering a metre behind. Roy was back to a good pace now. The dog was yapping, waiting for an opportunity to nip in and take a chunk out of Roy’s ankle. He thought he saw something in the distance. It could be his eyes playing tricks with the haze, but gradually the shape got bigger. Roy could now clearly see the back of a train. As he ran past the back he could see the conductor looking irritated. He opened the first available carriage door. “I was just taking a slash” he said, then he hopped in, followed by the dog.

“I can’t believe the fucking trouble you’ve caused” said Mrs B.

“I was expecting a bit of sympathy. I’ve just run two fucking marathons and I’ll probably be arrested for robbing a pub and assaulting the flower of fucking England. I’m going to get a pint. I suppose you want a G and T?”

Roy disappeared down the gangway in his sweat soaked shirt. When he got back the yappy dog was curled up in his missus lap.

“Look what I found” she said. “He’s so sweet. He just came up to me. I think we should keep him. I’m calling him ‘Sniffer’.”

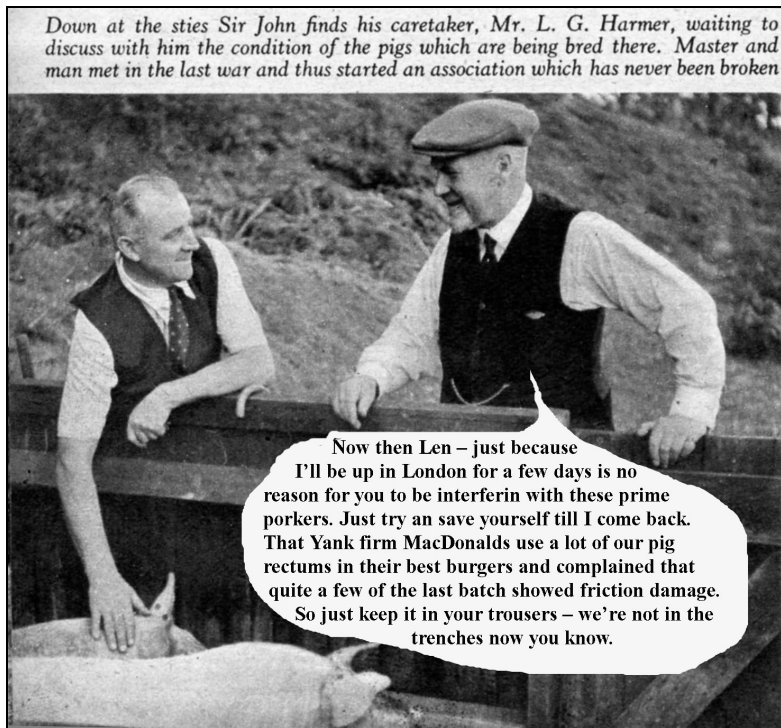
“Yeah, let’s keep him. Until we get to a high bridge, then I’m chucking him out of a window.”

“You’re a mean bastard, do you know that?”

“Never mind that. The food’s all sold out with the delay. Gimme a sarnie, I’m starvin”

“Oh.” There was a silence. “I ate most of them. I saved one for you, but I gave it to the dog.” The dog let out a deep sigh of contentment.

The train started moving again. Roy sank back in his seat and closed his eyes. Christ, he was miserable now.



JIVING JIMMY

Rosemary Evans

Christmas 1959; the School Dance and I had no one to go with because my stupid boyfriend, Dave, had fallen off a motorbike and broken his leg. Because he lived near Oulton Park and had a BSA Bantam he thought he was Geoff Duke. I didn't like motorbikes; they messed up your hair and anyway my mum had one when she was young. Who wants what their mum had? Unless it was a Bugatti or something and I might have liked one of those. But I stray from the issue of the day which was that the dance was coming up, my mates Pam and Amelia had boyfriends (Rob and Nick) and I would be the gooseberry.

I didn't really mind going on my own but the others refused to allow such social disgrace and said they would 'bring someone'.

They wouldn't tell me who this would be and the only one I could think of was a friend of Rob's called Clive who was thick as a plank but pretty decent to look at, so if he kept his mouth shut it might be OK.

I had a nice grey and lemon patterned dress with a full skirt and a flouncy petticoat. Dad presented me with a 'Mum' roll on deodorant so I wouldn't give offence and we had a few lessons in the waltz and the foxtrot in the school gym. It was a girls' school and Amelia made me take the bloke's part. I didn't think it mattered at the time.

So the big day arrived. I borrowed some make-up from my friend Pat across the road. Dad said I looked like a tart. I said he must know a few then if he knew what make up they wore and mum gave him a keen look. The mention of 'tarts' often caused a chill to descend upon the house and mum would mutter the word if she found out that he had stopped to give one of the secretaries a lift to work. The girl was called Miriam Elson, nicknamed 'Merry Hell' because of her long red hair and fiery disposition.

I thought it was probably a good time to go and look out of the hall window until the gang turned up in Nick's car. The gear stick was on the steering column so there was a bench seat and we could sit three in the front and three in the back. It was very dark; my 'partner' was by the window so, with Bob in the middle, I couldn't see

him properly. It didn't look like Clive though. It was only three miles to the school so we didn't talk much and I still couldn't make out who the hell I was supposed to be with. They dropped us off at the front and we went inside to take our coats off and tart ourselves up even more. Pam and Amelia were still mysterious, saying the boy was called Jim and was 'a really nice person'. What does that tell you? If a friend wants to fix you up with someone and that person is described as having a 'lovely personality' or is kind or something then that means he is probably very, very ugly.

When the boys emerged from the cloakroom and Jim was out there in the bright neon lights of the school hall, revealed at last in all his glory I saw that it was worse than that, much worse. He wasn't quite the creature from the black lagoon but he was an alien, an untouchable, persona abso-bloody-lutely non-grata at that school dance. He was a Teddy Boy. Now why would this be a problem? Teds were fashionable in those days, I think Harold Pinter was one, but at my school it was the mark of the beast; the Devil incarnate. This was a provincial grammar school, previously a boarding school, and hanging on to every thread of status it possessed. At morning assembly and in the classroom the Head did a passable imitation of Dr Arnold but he would morph into Wackford Squeers if anyone did anything outrageous such as eating in the street or making a small dent in the cricket pitch. At that time they were all Wackford Squeers if you pissed 'em off or should I say 'when the honour of the school was at stake' and the presence of Jimmy The Ted would give the honour of the school a serious jolt, especially if a photographer from the local paper turned up. (They can get quite short of sensational stories in a market town). There was already a rumour that a person with greasy hair and drainpipe trousers had been found eating a bag of chips in the local cinema.

I'm no expert but I remember the Ted costume as being faultless. A black greasy quiff swept back to form a duck's tail, a black draped jacket with silvery threads in it over a red shirt and bootlace tie held in place with a little silver skull. The trousers were drainpipes, just short enough to show off the fluorescent pink socks and crepe soled beetle crushers. All I could hope for was that if I removed him from the centre of things he might not be noticed, so I grabbed his arm and dragged him round the side of the room and behind one of the pillars that held up the first floor minstrels' gallery. The school orchestra

JIVING JIMMY

was grinding away overhead so no one wanted to sit there. We sat down on some old wooden chairs and I turned mine round so I had my back to the dance floor. He said his name was Jimmy; I didn't hear the surname. If it had been Dean it wouldn't have made any difference.

After an hour or so the band stopped for a rest. Our minders dashed off for cups of tea or several stiff gins. A sixth former plugged in the 'Dansette' and we got some pop music. I took the risk of dancing with Jimmy. They played some tummy-tum stuff at first and we shuffled round, stumbling and apologising. When Conway Twitty came on Jimmy started singing in my ear *'My one and only prayer, is that some day you'll care*' I told him to shut up or I was going to sit down so he contented himself with a quiet buzzing. He was obviously very nervous and was blinking like a lighthouse, making me feel a bit sorry for him.

I was just deciding I'd been mean and could probably just about bear it all when some idiot put on Paul Anka's 'Diana' and before I knew what was happening Jimmy stepped up the pace and started jiving. I liked the music and I liked jiving but there were only a few people dancing and we were quite conspicuous. Amelia and Pam and their boyfriends joined in and so did some others of a rebellious nature. It was still all reasonably sedate until someone found a Jerry Lee Lewis – Great Balls of Fire, *'You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain*' Jimmy hit the stratosphere, whizzing me round like a rag doll. He leapt and gibbered, throwing his head back, rolling his eyes and doing that waving thing with his hands like the Black and White Minstrels do so we know that 'Negroes' have a natural sense of rhythm. When he slid across the floor on his knees I bolted for the bogs.

My hundred yard dash was abruptly halted by Miss Munro, Head of Girls. All music stopped.

'What, exactly, do you think you are doing plunging about like that? This is disgraceful behaviour; you should be ashamed. Why are you subjecting people to that dreadful racket?'

I was staring at her with my mouth open but my brain did nothing. I just gawped. She yelled at me to kick start some response 'Don't you know that that man is a criminal. His wife is only FOURTEEN YEARS OLD.'

‘Jimmy’s wife? I didn’t know he was married. Who told you? Do you know him?’

‘Of course I don’t know him you insolent girl. He’s an AMERICAN and he’s called Jerry something or other. Try reading a newspaper occasionally. Stay there until I come back’

She marched off to re-instate the orchestra and have the offending Dansette removed and then returned to deliver my punishment.

‘I want an essay on Schubert - two thousand words - and a list of his known ‘lieder’ in English. Just the titles will do. By Monday lunch time.’

My group were standing in a forlorn huddle in a corner; we got our coats. The girls were a bit sheepish but no-one apologised and I was pretty fed-up at having to take the rap on my own. No-one spoke on the way home and I was the first to be dropped off.

Mum asked if I’d had a good time. ‘Yeah, it was alright.’

‘Café Continental’ was on the telly. My dad liked Helene Cordet. I watched it to the end and went to bed.

Well Sir Ken I've discovered a strange phenomenon. Whenever I look at the Rockerby Venus or anything by JD Ingres I get a curious swelling sensation in the genital area and I have to go to the gallery toilets to loosen my trousers. Curiously this same sensation, a sudden discomforting engorgement, occurs in my bachelor friend Claude only when he looks at pictures of Michelangelo's David. Is this a sign of artistic quality? And do you have similar sensations? And if so what sets them off?



ABOVE: Mr. McCullough has just put a really searching question to Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, who covers his face to concentrate. On the right is Professor Joad

Illustrated September 1941

SUITED UP

Nigel Ford

Late in the life of the year there were not many deckchairs on the beach, and those that were here were skeletal and ragged. Black strokes of wood and a scrap of canvas flapped against the sky.

“Have you paid for your ticket?” asked a voice behind him.

Marek turned around; “Bill Tomlinson. Well I’m blowed!”

Bill Tomlinson was the Beach Manager and worked for the City Council.

“Who put these chairs out here? Did you take them yourself? There should be no chairs out here at this time of year. That’s stealing, you could be in serious trouble, just because you’re wearing a smart suit and might or might not be a gentleman, does not mean you can behave as you please.”

“Good morning,” said Marek, “and a very good day to you too. The chairs had been left out.”

“Failed to recognise you in that suit Marek. What are you doing here you layabout? Where did you get the suit? Fell off the back of a lorry I bet.”

Bill sat himself down in a chair beside him. There was a ripping noise and his rump hit the cold wet pebbles as the canvas seat broke beneath him.

“I’m never going to accumulate possessions,” said Marek, “no way. What’s the point? I ask you. Where’s the meaning of it? That French bloke got it right. ‘Property is theft’. Sensible chap. Who needs it?”

“Theft is property,” said Bill, “Findsies keepsies. That’s a nice suit you’re wearing.”

“Anyway you look at it,” said Marek, “What’s the point?”

They fell silent and watched the muscular sea heave its dark grey shoulders beneath the china October sky.

“Looks like it’s put on a suit,” said Bill, “ready for the cold to come.”

“Speaking of suits,” said Marek. And he told him a story on the shiver of the stony beach in the harsh autumn air.

It was the month before, when Bill Tomlinson himself had presented Marek with a suggestion. Marek invariably arose early and had confided in Bill that it was only the first few morning hours he found enjoyable.

To which Bill had responded: "Marek, I wonder if it might not be a good idea for you to get a job. What, after all, do you do after the first few morning hours? Mooch about with your brain vacant and empty, filling it with garbage. Too much brooding; it's unhealthy."

The day after Bill's remark. Through the slit of the curtained window. The promise of light that bounced him out from under the covers. Put the kettle on and brewed up. Stretched the curtains apart, looked out on his private early world, the only one up and about. Robert, the seagull that habitually perched on his window sill, seemed to have migrated. He could go outside and march up and down the whole length of the street in the wet crisp air without seeing a soul. Be the first one to leave his footprints on the heavy dew of autumn. But he had decided to heed Bill Tomlinson's advice. He walked over to the Job and Social Welfare Centre to see what they had to offer, that might fill the rest of his day for the days to come.

The man behind the counter of the booth of privacy looked insincerely wise and scratched the stubble on the edge of the left-hand side of his mouth. He delivered a steady, unblinking gaze, and said it's a cushy number clerking at the Patently & Friends Authentic Insurance plc. with the winter oncoming. Man of your qualifications. Not many of your calibre around. It's a cinch. Mind you put on a clean shirt and tie.

He had duly visited the offices of the Patently & Friends Authentic Insurance plc. The Office Manager who interviewed him said he'd need to wear a suit. When in response he explained his financial predicament he was given an advance on his salary without ado.

"It's alright, once behind your desk, to take the jacket off at work, and even to loosen your tie, but you must wear a suit to work. Company regs old chap, company regs. A spot old-fashioned I know. But there you are. Our parent company policy. I know they are foreigners, but what can you do? And get a haircut.

"As a matter of fact, I don't care if I never see you again," continued the Office Manager, presenting him with a cheque for two hundred pounds to buy a suit and a haircut, "it's not my money. You can piss

off and never come back if you like. Spend it all on booze and drugs why don't you? It's no skin off my nose."

"Cripes," said Bill, leaning forward in his foundered deckchair. "How very fortunate, you lucky dog."

"You haven't heard the best bit yet," said Marek, "not by far." He fell silent.

The silence became too long and too much for Bill; "go on then," he said, "tell me what happens next!"

"Patience," said Marek, "just mulling it over. I like to mull over the best bits. I don't want my life to flash past. I like to return and relive the prime moments." He fell silent again. Bill threw stones in the sea.

"Well," said Marek.

Bill stopped throwing stones in the sea and hunched forward on the edge of his chair, his hands clasped in a tight knot between his knees, all attention. There was a raucous squawk and a splat of gull shit, locally known as a "whoopsie", hit the pebbles close to his right shoe, but he failed to notice.

"Nearly got you," said Marek.

"What happened?" demanded Bill.

"I bought myself a beautiful suit," said Marek. "Classic. Silver grey mohair, three piece, three button, slanting pockets, no vents, not too formal, only three buttons on the cuffs, turn-ups. I looked quite the gentleman."

"Did you really! Sounds nice," said Bill, "I can imagine a suit like that would suit you down to the ground. But of course! You're wearing it! How foolish of me!"

"Made me feel funny," said Marek, "sort of highly polished, a swirl of hubris inside my head, forced my nose up in the air, improved my posture. Mind you, I had attended to my nostrils that morning."

"What happened next?" asked Bill impatiently.

"Things did not go well," said Marek. "The staff at the office refused to speak to me and just before lunch the Office Manager called me into his office."

SUITED UP

"That's a beautiful suit," said the Office Manager. "I wouldn't mind one like that myself. For auspicious occasions, anniversaries, Christmas, New Year, important birthdays, official occasions. Unfortunately I shall have to let you go. Your suit does not fit in here, not at all. You are causing unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the staff."

"I say," said Bill, "how unfair. He couldn't do that surely?"

"I was paid three months salary in lieu of notice," said Marek. "Financially therefore, you could say I did quite well."

"But you are left with nothing with which to fill your day," protested Bill.

"I have my suit," said Marek, "In which I can do all sorts of things. I can for example, use the facilities in the foyers of smart hotels, expensive restaurants and airport lounges. I can sit all night in a bus shelter without a policeman moving me on, and so forth."

"It won't last for ever though will it?" said Bill. "Vents might come back, turn-ups might become non rigueur."

"There are such things as scissors," said Marek.

"Many of these chairs are in disrepair," said Bill, "need looking after. They should not be left out here in all weathers. It's a disgrace, beautiful pieces of furniture some of them antique. I tell you what, you could have a job for the off-season if you like. Not that I can pay you much, but it's better than nothing."

"Might be interesting," said Marek.

An Army Brains Trust is meeting with great success among the men of one of London's A.A. batteries. Under the chairmanship of one of the officers, Second Lieutenant H. M. Davies, who was a political agent in Manchester, meetings are held every week.

Members of the battery bombard their own Brains Trust with a barrage of questions, but it is

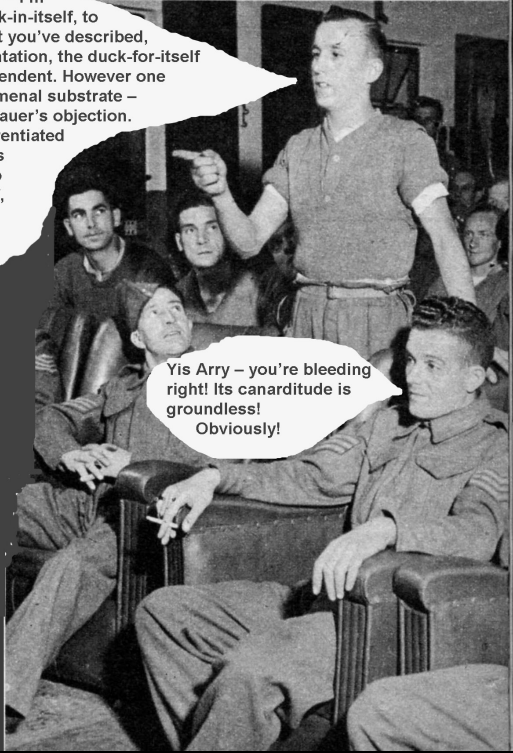
not often that their "victims" are caught napping. And the queries are almost as varied as those put to the B.B.C.'s own Brains Trust.

Below, a member of the audience is putting the question: "Why does water roll off a duck's back?"

Keen and intelligent discussions follow on the questions and every one thoroughly enjoys the quest for knowledge that ensues.

Yis, well that's enough ballocks about ducks' backs – I'm more concerned with the duck-in-itself, to use the Kantian taxonomy. Wot you've described, sir, is the phenomenal representation, the duck-for-itself whose properties are mind dependent. However one should be questioning the noumenal substrate – and here we run into Schopenhauer's objection. The noumenon cannot be differentiated since time and space are not its parameters. In short there is no such thing as the thing-in-itself, ergo neither is there the duck-in-itself. Therefore its essential canarditude is groundless...

Yis Arry – you're bleeding right! Its canarditude is groundless! Obviously!



Illustrated September 1941

CROSSING THE LINE

Ken Clay

Oversexed radical converts soon realised that if the principal attractions of the Young Conservatives were dancing and fornication then those of the Communist Party remained, inescapably, Marxism and leafleting. Frank Fleet suspected that the transient superiority brought on by a wrestle with the concept of Surplus Value could in no way compare with the more substantial sense of well-being resulting from a grapple with the well-fleshed daughters of the bourgeoisie, like those from the riding school who sometimes trotted past his house.

All his political activities were haunted by the spectre of a vague carnal yearning. Bender, a middle-aged fellow branch member, swore that one of the present Party executive had reconciled similar youthful appetites by being in both parties at the same time. 'He claimed' Bender elaborated, 'to be doing to the ruling class just what they had been doing to his forebears for the past thousand years.'

Frank had a theory that women were natural conservatives somehow unable to imagine, much less risk, violent social upheaval. Their limited, sensually blinkered perspectives, alas, led them straight to the party of preservation. His impotent lust was fuelled by pictures in the local rag showing the Tory MP opening yet another fund-raising fete surrounded by blooming, nubile voluptuousness. Even if they did think Engels was a nightclub in Manchester their big-eyed, wide-mouthed magnetism pulled heavily in the balance of desire opposite the pinched, strident self-denial of the female Party members held met so far.

The treasurer's wife, for instance, wore slacks and a wide-lapelled leather coat made in East Germany which Bender said was war surplus from the Berlin Gestapo. Her short black hair was complemented by a wispy, white beard. She smoked thin cigars in a stubby holder and had firm views on the need for discipline and sticking to the Soviet line. When her husband had reneged from the Party in '56 she stayed and nagged him back into it in 1960.

Her fellow female Stalinist took the branch meeting minutes in shorthand and produced immaculately typed copies one month later.

She spoke on average about twice a year, usually in a low monotone which no-one understood. Frank guessed she was somewhere between twenty five and forty and that her hobbies were typing and anorexia nervosa. For six years no branch meeting had been complete without the continual scratching of her fountain pen across the pages of a ring-bound reporter's notebook. This rested on a leg like a pick-axe handle which seemed, miraculously, to be wrapped round its partner three times. Both these worthy comrades considered make-up a mark of slavery. Neither treated Frank Fleet as anything other than a dubious ally in their struggle for emancipation, steeped, as he must be, in millennia of prejudice

They remained, for Frank, the sole representatives of Communist womanhood. He began to suspect the operation of an iron law in these matters; it was probably explained somewhere in a Party pamphlet or a monograph by Marx. Imagine, then, his astonishment and joy, during a film on the 1917 revolution, when in should saunter Marion Strype. The gates of the Winter Palace buckled excitedly over her lilac corduroy jeans. She sat down under the silent ejaculation of the *Aurora's* guns. Throughout the rest of the film his eyes stuck to the bottom edge which illuminated, like an erratic stroboscope, the filaments of her copper coloured hair.

Later when the others queued for stamps or rummaged among piles of pamphlets and books he asked her where she lived and said he could give her a lift home since it was on his way. It wasn't, but by the time the retired train driver came to look for his regular chauffeur they were driving onto the car park at the *Black Swan*. There was something about her that was sensual, almost depraved. Perhaps it was the deep eye shadow on lids which seemed permanently half closed. The taut planes of her face sloped smoothly away from high cheekbones. Frank guessed she was no more than nineteen and probably a nymphomaniac. He was happy to buy brandy and Baby-chams until closing time.

Two months later she turned up again. Not for her the routine boredom of normal branch business; it had to be something special. The General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, Mr. Yusef Dadoo, spoke to them about the problems of underground activity. This time they queued to shake the hand that had shaken the hand of Mao Tse Tung. And again Frank and Marion found themselves in the *Black Swan*.

CROSSING THE LINE

She told him about her current boyfriend Bill. After her divorce she had lived with him for a while but now she was back on the estate where Bill would visit occasionally. In some ways it was better, she said, no more violent rows about the kids. Although he had promised they would get married soon she couldn't get an exact date out of him. He was Party too; Widnes branch. As far as Frank was concerned he could have been in the labour camps of Siberia. The two towns were only seven miles apart but the exigencies of Democratic Centralism, a concept haunted by the spectre of grass roots factions, discouraged horizontal contact between members especially the kind of horizontal contact between members which Frank had in mind.

Time was running out again. She drank even more quickly as the clock moved to half past ten. He knew he had to ask her tonight; there were no attractions strong enough to bring her out again for months. He had been keeping up with halves but still found the car park unsteady when they left. She remained dauntingly self-contained and worked her way noisily through a giant sized bag of crisps. The following Sunday was the day of the massive anti-Industrial Relations Act demo. She had already mentioned that Bill would be going. He asked her out for a drink. After a long pause she agreed to come. Frank blasted away from her doorstep amazed at his good luck. She seemed to have everything; looks, character, experience and, obviously, a social conscience - why else would she be in the Party?

After dark that Sunday Frank headed north in his freshly polished car. Beyond the canal was the river; it was as much a boundary between classes as it was between counties. The neat gardens of North Cheshire with their magnolias and ornamental cherries fronting walls patched with ivy and honeysuckle gave way to the cramped, grimy streets of the town centre. Upstream of the Howley Power Station the Mersey boiled with a chemical froth whipped up by the weir. It packed into thick, pink flocs which scudded against the current and blew, in clods of stinging bubbles, over the parapet and onto the road. Further north still, in South Lancashire itself, the smell of breweries invaded the car; then the pungent, eye-scorching vapours from the wire works' pickling vats.

There were houses right up to the factory walls; some were being pulled down. A few weeks earlier he had visited this slum-clearance

area on foot. Those domestic ruins with their tiny rooms, basic plumbing and narrow, tiled backyards, aroused in him a sense of fascinated horror. How could people spend a day in such places much less a whole lifetime? He thought of suggesting an edifying branch visit, just as his class from Tech went to John Summers' or Cammell Laird's. Then he remembered that the others knew about places like this - they'd grown up in them. Now all that was visible was a distant bonfire flickering amongst the rubble.

The new estate was opposite the North West Gas Board's Steam Reforming plant. It was a vast, pre-high-rise, nineteen fifties conglomeration punctuated by desolate vacancies. Its wide, grass-verged boulevards were spattered with derelict cars and broken saplings. Occasionally he passed a squat, featureless pub which looked more like a gun-emplacement with its barbed wire topped walls and steel mesh covered windows. He pulled up outside 16A Windermere Crescent. The front garden, flooded in sodium light, looked like a scale model of the battle of the Somme. A few tough weeds clung to one corner but the rest was hard packed red clay riddled with hollows and hummocks. The rusting chassis of a pram occupied the centre.

'I thought you wasn't coming' she said. The alarm clock on the mantelpiece was half an hour fast. The room was full of steam. In the back kitchen one of the kids was standing naked in the sink while a large pan of water boiled on the stove.

'Just bathing them before we go.'

'Why don't you close your kitchen door? All your windows are steamed up.'

'What door?'

He suddenly noticed the unpainted rectangles where the hinges had been.

'We burned it last winter.' Seeing his look of amazement she went on: 'Coalman was late. Can't have the kids starving to death. You think that's funny you should go and see the Hickman's round the corner. They burned the skirting board as well, and the stairs. Had to get to bed up a rope with big knots on. It was like something out of a Tarzan picture. Mind you I think they were a bit mental. I'll be ready in a minute. You can watch telly in the front room.'

CROSSING THE LINE

The baby sitter, a girl of twelve, was sitting on the sofa. He sat in an armchair. Its disturbed fabrics gave off an acrid smell compounded of sour milk, stale tobacco and urine. Suddenly the quiz show compere dwindled into a tiny, bright dot and vanished completely. The girl shouted: 'Marion!' in a voice tinged with panic. Marion replied over the noise of the squealing kids: 'Got two bob for the telly?' He pushed eight shillings into it and returned to his inspection of the premises.

Out leafleting or hawking round petitions he had often caught tantalising glimpses of these proletarian interiors. His researches had revealed three categories. The garish rooms of the affluent, full of brass and glass, with hot coloured rugs and geometric wallpaper giving them the lively violence of an electrical discharge, permeated, usually with the homely smell of the chip pan and the blare of ITV. Or there was the musty gloom of the pensioner's ice-box, so quiet you could hear the furniture warping beyond the safety chained door crack. Generally there would be four eyes giving you the once-over; the milky myopic vacancy of the householder and the bleary stare of the dog. And less frequently, a third type, places like Marion's; stark, ruined vestibules, transit camps, seemingly blasted by their tenants' rage against the system. A lampshade would have cost her less than forty fags yet a bare bulb hung from the ceiling. The windows had no curtains, the stair no carpet; the doors had holes instead of handles. The whole place had been pared down to its essentials. His uneasy social voyeurism was engendering a sense of pity and outrage.

They drove out to a seventeenth century half-timbered pub deep in rural Cheshire. She asked for a pint of lager, a whisky and dry ginger chaser and a packet of Benson and Hedges from the machine she'd noticed at the entrance. With little or no provocation she recalled her past in intimate detail.

'Yes, they're all mine. I had my first when I was sixteen. Nobody told me how it was done. My old man was very strict about things like that. If there was even snogging on the telly he'd switch it over. The older girls at school went on about sex: 'You just lie on your back' they said, 'and open your legs. Once you've had it you can't do without it like ciggies.' I never thought much of it though. What a let down! It was a lad in the street. Me mum and dad were in the pub and our Eric had gone to the match. We locked the doors and did it

on the couch. The size of it! And he was only fourteen. It hurt a bit and then he wriggled and puffed and then it was all over. 'Is that it?' I said. 'I don't know what all the fuss is about. Wait till I see them girls at school!' Frank wondered if a more traditionally romantic attitude to these matters could be revived in her with the right treatment.

'Lads never thought of anything else. It'd be a hand up your jumper and then they'd be trying to get your knickers down. Why put up a struggle? I didn't care either way. I was very popular with the lads. It was Jonesie who put me up the jigger. I still had no idea it had anything to do with kids. I went to the doctor. Doctor I says, I've not seen my periods for about three months. Toffee-nosed old arse-hole he was. Treated you like an imbecile. Lie on that bed he says, I'll give you an examination. I thought it'd be with a stethoscope, then he says, Take your knickers off, puts a rubber glove on and pokes his finger up it. It was the glove that got me. You stuck up bugger! I thought. The cheek of it! I felt insulted! Hey! You dirty bastard! I says. Well he says, if that isn't the kettle calling the pot! It's you what's been up to no good - you're three months gone!' Frank guessed her physician's remarks had been freely translated.

'I came home and told me mum. What have you been doing? she says. I've not been doing nothing I says. The old chap went hairless! He belted me so hard I had to go into hospital for stitches. Never spoke to me again for six months. So I got married. Jonesie was at it non-stop. We lived with his granny - she was pretty deaf. I got absolutely cheesed off I can tell you. I'd just lie there in bed and he'd jump on. Come on love he used to say, anybody would think you didn't like it. But I'd just lie there and he'd roll off after a bit and I'd think thank God that's over, now we can get some sleep. Course I never knew about the pill or anything; I was always out here'.

Frank felt as though he had fallen into a tank of icy water. She sucked powerfully on a fresh cigarette.

'He started wanting it other ways. Tried to force me at first. Said it was his legal rights. I'm not putting up with this, I thought, and one night I nearly bit it off. He gave me a good hiding but he never tried it that way again. Men! They're disgusting! The only person I ever really loved was Sheila. She tapped me up on a bus. Said how beautiful I was and how she sensed I was special. I had no idea what she wanted. It was wonderful. She made me come for the first time in

CROSSING THE LINE

my life. When she packed me in I tried to kill myself with pills, but they stomach pumped me. Then gas, but the meter ran out. Jonesie had buggered off by then leaving me with three kids. It was Bill who got me in the club for the fourth time, but they scraped it out and fixed it so that I couldn't have any more. I said to them: It's a pity I didn't have this done years ago!

Frank marvelled at how quickly refill time came round. When he looked back from the bar at the dimly lit alcove where she sat he couldn't help being struck by her appearance. There was something arrestingly erotic about her but already any notions of seduction were dissolving under the acid rain of her revelations. He realised she was milking his generosity, but why not? he thought. He was beginning to feel guilty about his relative affluence.

'I told Bill you was taking me out'

He twitched as though he had been given a mild electric shock.

'I don't think he was keen on the idea. 'If he's a Party member' he said, 'Why isn't he coming on the demo?' 'I don't know' I said. But he thought it'd be all right if you was CP.'

This example of the fraternal spirit reminded him of one of Bender's historical gems.

'Just after the revolution the members of the Moscow Commune made a point of sharing each other's soiled underwear.' Immediately he regretted blurting this out but she seemed unperturbed by the comparison.

'Dirty, sods!' she said lighting another cigarette from the previous one and returning to more important matters. 'It was Bill what got me interested in the Communist Party. We used to talk about things a lot in the asylum. They put me in there for a bit after I tried to kill myself. I don't remember what he was in for; it was nothing serious. He told me how the whole country was owned by just a few idle bleeders who had never done a day's work in their lives. And they'd got it because one of their great great grandfathers had pinched it in the first place, or one of their great great grandmothers had dropped her knickers for Charles the first. He explained how these slimy sods had shit on the working class for hundreds of years and that the Communist Party was going to put a stop to it and share everything out equally just like they did in Russia. It was very interesting. So I try to do 'em in return. I pinch things from shops. Why not? Eleven

pounds a week I get off the NAB, and a probation officer comes down once a week to make sure the kids are all right. They can't touch me though. If I was up in court I'd just tell them the facts; stealing to feed my kids - they'd have to let me off. When the Party gets in it should shoot the lot of them: police, NAB inspectors, stuck up clerks - bastards! Three kids! Eleven pounds a week! That's what the Party's got to do. Bill says if I lived in Russia I'd be living rent free and probably get a medal for having three kids before I was twenty.'

Frank guessed she must have been drunk; he was feeling pretty groggy himself, yet she walked out perfectly in control at closing time and did not neglect to ask for more cigarettes and a bag of peanuts on the way.

When they got back to her house he was astonished to see kids still playing in the street. He remembered his own childhood when, even at fifteen, he was still going to bed at half past nine. There seemed to be some kind of bike race in progress. Two rickety contraptions built up from pieces found on rubbish dumps, with no brakes, uneven cranks and no tyres, were clattering round the block and sweeping within inches of his parked car. Above the resonant grind of steel rims on the tarmac a group under a streetlamp shouted out lap numbers. They reached seventy eight as Frank and Marion went into the house.

Now she was strangely quiet, truculent almost. Her mouth was set in a downward curve. Frank paid the babysitter while Marion made two cups of sweet Camp coffee. He thought this surprisingly good and asked her what it was. She looked at him as though he was an idiot.

'I can't stand these long skirts' she said, taking hers off and throwing it over a chair. Frank was surprised to find himself unexcited by this gesture. A sense of politeness impelled him to sit next to her on the settee. She moved to the other end and tucked her legs under her body. The two hundred watt centre light had been switched off to allow the fading television to struggle into view. It was the epilogue. She seemed inordinately interested in it. Its ecclesiastical drone was punctuated by wild shouts of joy: 'Ninety four! ... ninety five!'

Suddenly Frank noticed a pale, oval smudge bobbing about on the other side of the steamed up windows. He was about to comment on

CROSSING THE LINE

it when he heard a loud bang like a gunshot. A brick smashed through one of the small panes in the door. Seconds later a shadowy hulk in a black donkey jacket plunged into the room, tripped over a piece of lifting lino and crashed onto the settee. The whole thing turned over taking with it Frank, Marion and a nearby tea-chest half full of coal. A writhing, rolling tangle of arms and legs scrabbled and crunched over jagged nuggets of stolen anthracite.

The hulk was snarling obscenities while attempting to punch Frank's head. Frank felt a fist smash into him and the roar of voices submerged under the deafening pressure of the blow. He had to get out! There was no time for reasoned explanations. Marion was screaming but it sounded more like rage than fear. A cross appeared on the screen and a great surge of organ music flooded into the room. From outside, louder now through the opened door, came a cheer and the triumphant chorus: 'One hundred!' She pulled at the intruder's hair with both hands. Frank felt the beery mass lift off him. He got to his feet and dashed to the door.

'Bill! You stupid bastard!' she shouted.

As Frank fled down the path a voice bellowed from inside the house:

'Call yourself a bloody comrade?!'

The car wallowed and slewed up the street. Frank guessed he had four flat tyres but the spectacle in the driving mirror of Bill whirling the pram chassis round his head made him put his foot down regardless.

He never saw her again. In the pub some months later Bender mentioned that she had hitch-hiked to Newcastle, with the three kids, to stay with her father for a while. Bender had heard this from Bill at a Party meeting in Manchester. Bill himself had only just come out of hospital. Marion's abrupt disappearance had made him depressed. He'd thumped the foreman after a row about overtime and smashed a very expensive machine. They sent him back into the asylum for more shock treatment.

Frank tried to imagine it all and felt as though he were looking into a murky fish tank full of spiny monsters from the deep. He was glad to be on the other side of the glass. Reading Sartre and the *New Left Review* was one thing but working with the proletariat was quite another.

Soon they were discussing that vague boundary between the CP and the Labour left. Bender recalled Lenin's remark about supporting parliamentary democracy as the rope supports a hanged man. He went on to reveal that after the 1945 election there had been eight Labour MPs who were secret members of the Communist Party.

Notions like these helped Frank make the transition. He was surprised to find a local Labour Party branch which met in the old village community centre. At first he just sat in as a visitor imagining he was engaged in inter-party espionage. They didn't have the puritanical discipline of the CP nor its tortuous excursions into theoretical Marxism but they did genuinely care about the plight of the under-privileged. And this concern impressed him all the more coming, as it did, from people who would obviously never fall into that category themselves.

Best of all though were the women: social workers and art students with complexions and poise he'd not seen in politics before. In fact, to look at, they were in no way inferior to the big-eyed, wide-mouthed sirens in the Tory press.



A deeply Christian family in South Kensington celebrate surviving another night of the blitz.

Illustrated – September 1941

BETTE BRAKA

GOODBYE GORDON

Bye Bye Gordon,
Do your packing,
It's all over!
Well done, Mrs Duffy
You spoke your mind,
He replied, in kind,
Then, covered his face,
What a dreadful disgrace,
Who can he blame
For the end of his game?
All the entourage
Are doing their best,
But Gordon is at the top
And must take responsibility
For the DROP.

THE TREASURY SHUFFLE

Nick Clegg said,
"All Lib Dems are clean,
I mean,
I thought they were,
But now, obviously,
They are not.
But do I care
One jot!"
Pretty boy Laws
Has had to be demoted,
Ginger Alexander
Got to be promoted.
Cabinet Chairs are being shuffled
All the neat haircuts
Are looking quite ruffled.
David, kick Nick into touch,
Pick a Deputy Blue.
You picked up two seats,
And let Nick try and sue!

NEXT DOOR

David Birtwistle

It was early morning. He came softly down the stairs in his slippers, licking his lips at the thought of warm, buttered toast. After putting the kettle on he went into the front room and switched on the TV. The solitude of the hour hung about him like a living presence and heightened his perceptions to a level of sharpness and sensitivity that bordered on being supercharged. He turned the volume down until the announcer's voice was barely perceptible. His hearing was so attuned he could make out the blackbird's song and its rustle among the leaves outside his back window over the fledgling magpies' ratchet-rattling from the chimney tops across the road.

The TV announcer was rabbiting on about the situation in the Middle East and yet another atrocity seeming to add nothing to the stories he had been hearing on the news all week. As he waited for the weather forecast he scanned the sky. Early as it was he could sense the duality of the day unfolding - a Mediterranean blue sky and low cloud. It would either crack the flags or throw it down before dark; or both. Then, even though he half knew it was coming the phone rang next door jangling his senses like breaking glass. Though the partition wall was not a thin one, he could clearly make out the muffled rings and bleeps as the answering machine clicked on and the voice on the recorded message, barely lifting above a monotone, was still recognisably human through the bricks and plaster. He could not distinguish these initial words but knew his neighbour was either fast asleep or out.

Very carefully he took a half pint glass from the coffee table and leaning into the alcove, placed the rim against the wall and put his ear to the base. He was listening to the new technology via the oldest method known to civilisation. The person was speaking slightly louder and more slowly than normal. He could make out forty or fifty percent of the words. It was a male voice. It seemed foreign but quite why he wasn't sure. The words came through the wall as though he were tuning a radio set.loud and clear and then muffled again. "...the help you have given the firm.....meeting tomorrow night.....two thirty..... planning the next consignment...."

His face was now bright and red. His eyes gleamed. His pulse was racing and the banging of his heart would have tom-tommed out all sound of birdsong if he had been focussing on it. But he wasn't. He was listening in, with all his concentration, to a different world altogether. Here, next door to the house he lived in, was someone taking messages in the early morning, with arrangements to meet someone from the firm to meet them at some unearthly hour and then to sit down in the middle of the night and plan the next consignment. His mind was racing. The phone call. The accented voice, the middle of the night for the rendezvous. They all began to fit together with the previous perceptions he had begun to form about his new neighbour.

He'd arrived about a year ago and moved in over three or four trips as it was getting dark. It had been impossible to discern what was being unloaded from the white transit van each time it arrived just after dusk. And his new neighbour himself had followed in a silver Mercedes. He was tall, dark-haired, closely trimmed beard, in his early forties and with a look about him that said Iran, Jordan, or perhaps Egypt. He was sure about this because, a few years ago he had met several Persian émigrés who had acted like magnets for other middle eastern asylum seekers and had been invited round by these polite, cultured and literate families. Their warmth and generosity was only matched by their cuisine. He knew quite a lot about the middle east; especially the food.

This guy seemed quite the opposite to the fun-loving, outgoing, food loving people he had met all those summers ago. The guy with the hatchet face next door was remote and hardly ever there. He'd introduced himself as 'Kenny' but that could hardly be his real name and he had hardly spoken since. When he had spoken you could make out a thin scar on his cheek and his left hand played nervously with the top button of his shirt. He was obviously under stress. Where he went to and what he did all day God only knew. Where he got his money for a house like this and for a Mercedes were questions hanging in the air begging for answers. Why wasn't he married? Where were his friends? Why was he never seen shopping or in the garden like everyone else? Why was there no noise from next door except for the sounds of electronic communication?

For some reason he remembered a quote: "Mathematicians are OK except when it comes to those little things in life that just don't add up." Well, things were beginning to add up all right now. Two and

NEXT DOOR

two were beginning to add up to four. At least four! All his thinking over all those years seemed to bring him here to this point and this insight. Ever since he'd read every book he could get his hands on about Burgess, Philby and Maclean and then on Blunt and then on the fifth man he was certain his doubts and suspicions were correct. This was the nether world of the Cambridge spies, where things were not as they seem, half truths and deceit, camouflage. His senses had become acclimatised to this demi-monde. He was tuned in, aware of the faintest sign, the slightest symptom. No-one was better adapted to lie in wait, build up the accumulated detail and then to unravel the case.

He was pulled abruptly out of his thoughts. There were sounds of cars in the road, the clunk of doors, people backing out of their drives and heading off for work. Voices. The whine and clank of a delivery van. And yet, as an undertone to this superficial soundtrack of another mundane day, he could discern the electronic beeping active again next door. The glass. The alcove. The wall. "A place to store it.....not a cellar.....an outhouse...secure.."

The idea came to him in a flash. Whatever it was they wanted to store, it had to be slipped in out the way, out of sight, somewhere nobody would think of looking. Like a single tree in a large wood or a book in a library or a drug in a jar on a kitchen shelf full of herbs and spices. What he had managed to overhear was not a one-off, it was part of a series of consignments. Someone was being very clever in the art of protective colouring and using this quiet, normal suburban site to hide things in a garden shed, possibly in boxes marked B&Q or Garden Centre or even Lawn Mower Parts.

From behind the curtain in the back bedroom window he surveyed the garden next door. An 8' X 10' wooden shed at the far edge of the lawn backed up to the fence. On the far side was a narrow gap next to the garage. The roof was newly waterproofed, the door seemed to be locked and rambling roses climbed this side obscuring the window panes. What was really interesting was that the windows had almost invisible grey-green blinds which prevented anyone from looking inside. Why hadn't he noticed this before? The shed was just too good to be true. No-one else would give it a second thought. Somehow he had to break in.

He was convinced his neighbour was out. Getting over the fence was a piece of cake. Regarding himself now as the expert on the chame-

leons he was trying to track down, he took a hammer, a screwdriver and a garden spade. As a touch of class he wore his green Wellington boots and a baseball cap. If any nosy neighbour was watching it looked as though he was doing a favour. He chopped at a couple of weeds just to make sure and flung them up against the fence.

Try as he might he could not see through the grey-green blinds and into the shed. Try as he did, even with the screwdriver as lever, he could not open the locked door. The last clue! The lock and sneck were formidable, far too big for a garden shed. His tummy rumbled but he cast all thoughts of breakfast aside as he squeezed against the garage and squinted down the shaded right-hand passage. At the other end was a window similar to the one on the other side. But he could just glimpse something metallic. If he moved his head back a bit something glinted. There must be no blinds on this side!

Standing on the wheelie bin and careful not to get entangled in the rose thorns, he pushed himself up onto the roof. Although he now realised his wellies were not ideal for this cat-burglar part of the exercise, he made the apex in two smooth moves. Whether to proceed sideways or go headfirst was now the question. He worked his way down the other side carefully until his arm felt the lower rim. He thought he might lean over and brace himself with one hand against the garage wall. With the toes in his Wellingtons curled around the roof ridge he let his head down towards the glass. To this day he found it hard to remember what came next.

He awoke in hospital, his left arm in plaster, his neck extremely sore and the right hand side of his face and his right elbow gashed and bruised and covered in yellow ointment. He was aching all over and could hardly move.

"A neighbour called for the ambulance. He thought you'd broken your neck. He said just as he opened his bedroom window he saw you fall. A Mr Keighley from number 24." The nurse took his temperature and added, "You'll be seen at 6 o'clock and you should be out in a couple of days..... Spiderman indeed!"

At ten past six the nurse flung aside the plastic curtain around his bed and the doctor, examining the chart at the foot of his bed, with his back towards him, took off his glasses and turned round.

"Well. Well. Well. And how are we this evening neighbour?"

"Kenny....." muttered the patient incredulously.

NEXT DOOR

"I've reset your arm and cleaned up your face and elbow and you're on antibiotics. You'll be out in a couple of days."

"But how did....."

"You've had an accident in your garden. From what I gather you must have been up a ladder...."

"But how did..."

"You couldn't stop talking under anaesthetic. And it was food, food, food."

"But didn't I...."

"It made me think. I've been working round the clock this last twelve months, night shifts and extra days... But when the weather gets warmer I'm going to take time off and have you round for a proper barbecue. I haven't cooked for ages. And when your arm's better you can advise me what to do with my garden. I've hardly been out there since I moved in. Only to put my gas-fired barbie and my new tandoor in the shed. I've got it snuff-dry in there now and I've started to import electric rice-cookers from Saudi as a little sideline. They make rice taste like you've never....."

MR. ASKEW'S WAR WORK

Bob Wild

On a Friday afternoon Mr. Hume often sent me to the storeroom to help Mr. Askew, the caretaker, pack into sacks the waste paper we had brought to school for the war effort.

Most of the kids in our class didn't like Mr. Askew. He had a knack of appearing from nowhere whenever you were up to some mischief. I quite liked him though. He gave me marbles from down the cellar grid and a threepenny-bit for shovelling the coke through the man-hole into the cellar on Tuesdays after school.

Mr. Askew spent his days in the small, cramped cellar which housed the big boiler which burnt the contents of our rubbish bins and heated the water pipes and the large, finned, cast-iron radiators which stood under each classroom window. There was hardly space down there in the boiler-room to swing a shovel and it was hard work heaving coke into the boiler. He let me have a go once. The fumes got up your nose: they made your eyes smart and choked your throat. I could taste the fumes in my mouth for days afterwards.

When he wasn't in the cellar Mr. Askew did odd jobs about the school and kept an eye on the playground but you couldn't easily see him in the school yard amongst the throng of mixed infants and junior girls, running, jumping, skipping, or playing hopscotch. He was a dwarf! He was about the same size as the six year-olds in Miss Mather's class: about four feet tall. A congenital malformation had left him with a pigeon-chest, a camel's hump and no neck. His trouser belt was about where his collar would have been had he worn one. To me, as a child, he looked like a head on legs: like a miniature one of those sad-looking clowns on stilts you see at the circus. Often he would be turning the loose end of a long skipping rope attached to the guard-railing of the cellar steps whilst two girls, in the middle, did "a pepper" so fast you could hardly tell the blur was a rope, spitting up the dust or whirring over their heads.

When the Government, unable to import paper for newsprint and packaging, launched a book-drive to help the war effort I helped Mr. Askew stack the books into boxes and took the badges round the classrooms for the teachers to give out. The more unwanted books you brought to school the higher the rank you became. You could

MR. ASKEW'S WAR WORK

become a corporal, a sergeant, a captain, and even a Field Marshall but you would have needed to have brought half Prestwich library to be that high a rank. We used to pinch books off the library shelves and tear out the date-stamp page but the lady at the library saw us nicking them and chased us out. She wouldn't let us in again after that. Keith Pakefield got into trouble because he'd taken books from home without asking his mother. His mother came down the steps into the cellar one day and rummaged through the boxes looking for a bible with the family's names in the front. There would have been many other parents there too had they known that their valuable encyclopaedia or half a set of Dickens novels had been donated for pulp to make their kid a corporal.

Mr. Askew sometimes collected books on his bike when they were too many for a child to carry: he tied a box on the carrier above his back wheel and put the books into it. The bike was usually propped against the school wall. It was an old, full-size, racing bike with dropped handlebars set so low down that the headstock-stem seemed to have disappeared into the forks. A saddle from a lady's bike had been fixed half-way along the crossbar, almost directly over the front chain-sprocket, but even so to ride the bike Mr Askew had to lie stretched forward, flat like a jockey, with his arms bent like wings. We all used to laugh at him. His chin seemed to hang just above the front wheel like a friction brake. There were blocks of wood screwed onto the pedals so that his feet could reach them. He must have had something like horse-mounting-steps at home because at school he had to stop against the low stone wall, which used to support the school railings before they took them away for munitions, and use the lip as a step to dismount. He often fell off and spilt the books out of the box on to the playground.

Mr. Askew helped me make a bogey from a plank and the wheels off an old pram I found on some spare ground near the tumbled-down houses on Cuckoo Lane. He screwed the axles across either end of the plank and fitted the wheels on for me. When I got home I burnt two holes in the end of the plank, with a red-hot poker I had heated in the fire, and threaded a loop of rope through them. Mr. Askew thought I was going to collect books with it but I had other things in mind. I had plans not to carry loads of books for nothing but to make loads of money with it. There were many women on our estate who would give you threepence to get them a sack of coal or coke from

the Co-op siding at Prestwich railway station. They were always running out before the coalman came. I could get in on the kit-bag trade too.

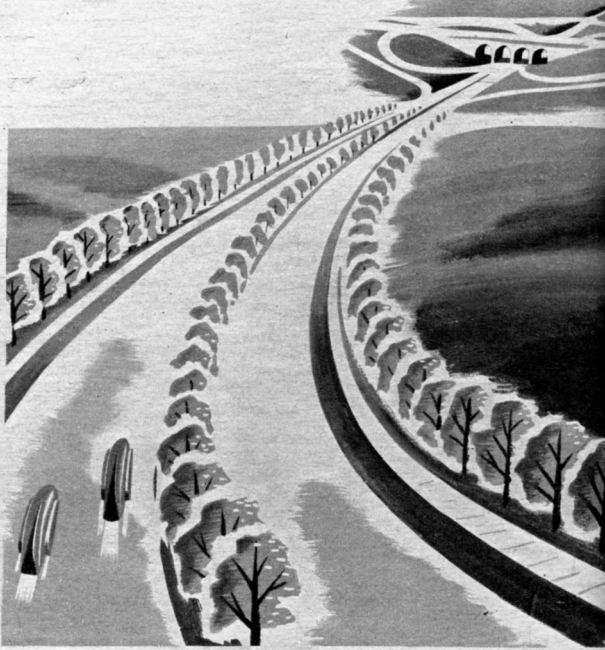
On Saturday afternoon, after I had finished taking out orders for Roberts's, I earned six-pence carrying two loads of coke. Afterwards I went to the gates of Heaton Park, near the railway station, and waited for airmen to come out with their kit bags.

Heaton Park was used as an RAF training camp during the war and airmen were billeted all over Prestwich. Many householders with spare rooms had no option but to take one or two airmen as lodgers, though most took them willingly. My mam said some of the women took them just to get a feller into the house. There was a scandal about a young woman in Polefield gardens, whose husband was away, fighting in North Africa, who had produced a baby "that couldn't possibly have been his!" She moved house and the vicar of St. Margaret's church, and his wife, adopted the baby before her husband came back.

There was a constant trickle of airmen with kit bags coming and going through the park gates but four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon was the best time to catch them. A crowd of young kids with trucks and bogeys would be clustered round the gate waiting to carry kit bags. Sometimes the airmen would give you as much as two-shillings if you carried their kit bags, packs and gas-masks. They would pile the bogey high and holding on to the kit bags, help push it the two miles to Polefield. One of them gave me an RAF cap badge once and when they changed their headgear for berets another gave me his forage-cap. Joe Gooch, the lucky devil, got given a Black Mamba snake in a bottle by big, black, Jamaican airman. I swapped him a commando dagger for it.

When I told Mr. Askew how much I had earned carrying kit bags he said: "I'll be down there with you next Saturday!"

ROADS OF THE FUTURE



■ "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks." And out of the factories where bombers and fighters are now made will stream motor cars by the hundred thousand.

As our present system of roads is admitted to be inadequate, even for current requirements, it is certain that one of the very first items on the agenda for reconstruction will be the building of new and better roads to accommodate the increased traffic that must be expected in the future.

A network of great highways will be constructed to link up our important cities and towns with the capital. The purpose of these trunk roads will be to speed a

nation on wheels directly to its objective in the minimum of time with the maximum of safety but with due regard to the separate needs of different types of road user. It is not inconceivable that the petrol-driven car will be superseded by one controlled by radio. Aerials along the roadsides would provide the motive power with varying wavelengths for different destinations. Thus, if the first part of a journey is along radio road A.1, the car is tuned to the wavelength of that road, and if the ultimate destination is

an alehouse then it'll be a rousing knees-up sing-song like My Old Man's a Dustman or, if you have the misfortune to be a northerner, When I'm Cleaning Windows.

Should it be a funeral however you'd be conveyed by Nellie Dean or I'll Take You Home again Kathleen – particularly appropriate should the deceased be called Nellie or Kath.

Journeys in Wales will follow exclusively Abide with Me since that's all those benighted troglodytes can sing. Very long journeys – say Lands End to John O Groats will require the complete Ring of the Nibelung – but watch out for roundabouts – these will all have Ravel's Bolero on them and there's a real danger you'll never get off.

This is all quite feasible. More fanciful is the prediction that a device in the car will navigate by instructing you to turn left and right as required.

Quite preposterous! We have enough of that already with the mother-in-law!

Pears

MY LIFE IN PRINT

Ray Blyde

CHAPTER TEN

Sed saw a lot of Gwen after the evening with the O'Neills. She came around frequently to help Elsie with the housework at the weekends, after a while Elsie came to rely on her, and it looked like they were becoming friends. Sed approved because he'd never seen his mother so happy since before his father died.

"If I had a daughter!" enthused Elsie. "I would have liked her to be just like Gwen."

"She's great, I like her a lot."

"And so you should. Your father would have liked her.....didn't she go out with Lloyd at one time?"

"Did she? I don't know," said Sed not wanting to reveal another one of Lloyd's misdemeanours, best forgotten, especially since Henry had a friendly word with him about it. God only knows what he was getting up to in Australia. He was probably being hunted by the authorities for being an illegal immigrant and pursued by an Aboriginal chief for stealing his daughter. Lloyd seemed to thrive on conflict and intrigue, and Sed thought he would have been in his element in M.I 5.

As the months flowed by Sed was well into his apprenticeship. The journeymen were letting him do more of the difficult work associated with stereotyping. Dick Stacy was especially helpful. He was an excellent tradesman but not very articulate. He was about to show Sed how to route a printing plate.

"Just do it like this 'ere young 'un, no no not like that." Sed watched fascinated as Dick routed expertly around the type without cutting into any of the letters.

"Will I be able to do it as fast as that someday Dick?"

"Course ye will lad. Just make sure the router cutter is always sharp, watch what yer doin' an it'll be perfect like this 'ere" Sed thought he couldn't have put it better himself.

Now that the winter was receding and spring was just a breath away, the improvement gave Sed a chance to use his bike for work with some encouragement from Gwen who always used her bike for work

even in the most inclement weather. It took a bit longer than the bus, but the fresh morning air blew away the cobwebs and he wasn't inhaling all that cigarette smoke on the top deck. When he arrived at work he hoisted the cycle onto his shoulder and took it downstairs into the jobbing department and leaned it against the wall near the interdepartmental phone. Teddy Simpson was the jobbing hand in charge. He was a perfectionist when it came to turning out printing plates used for advertising, and no matter how hard he tried Sed could never turn out a plate to Teddy's satisfaction.

"No, no, that's no good lad, it won't do. Just remember lad people are paying hundreds of pounds for these adverts when they go in the paper."

"What's wrong with it?" Teddy picked up the plate, and being very short sighted had to place it on the end of his nose before he could get it in focus.

"Look there, you've left a shoulder on some of these letters, if you don't remove them they'll print up on the presses and then we'll have the advertisers down on us. Sed took the plate back to the bench and set about removing the offending imperfections when Charlie came through the department whistling and rang the bell on Sed's cycle. Teddy ran over to the phone and lifted the receiver.

"Hello...jobbing department...hello!" Sed thought this was highly amusing and told Charlie and Ralph about it until everyone was walking through and ringing the bell and Teddy was up and down like a fiddlers elbow and eventually complained to the overseer who had caught on by this time and walked through ringing the bell as he past the bike.

"There it goes again Mr King I'm bloody fed up with it. I refuse to answer that phone until you find out whose playing games." It took King all his time to suppress a smile.

"He doesn't get it does he?" said King taking Sed aside.

"No," replied Sed.

"But I didn't start it, no one did really."

"Well joke over, I think you'd better either shift your bike, or take that bell off."

After one exhausting day at work Sed washed up and changed, went into the jobbing department, wheeled the bike to the bottom of the stairs, made an attempt to hoist it on his shoulders and found it unbelievably heavy. Suspecting foul play he checked the contents of his saddle bag. There was nothing untoward there, just his cape, a pair of

gloves and a puncture outfit. There was nothing outwardly suspicious so gathering all his remaining strength he struggled up the staircase, when he reached the top he could hardly get his breath. Bloody hell, he thought. I had my rice crispies this morning, and a good lunch. Things got worse as he cycled through the rush hour traffic, as he reached the top of Low Hill he had to dismount, he was sucking air in like an extractor fan. The road levelled off as he approached Kensington, then his legs and calves started to burn. He was beginning to think he was threatening for something like double pneumonia or bubonic plague. Coming through Old Swan the traffic thinned out, and with the wind behind him he was going faster than he could ever remember. When he arrived home and dismounted his legs were like jelly.

"You're home early Sed, are you all right?"

"I'm shattered.....Phew!"

"Come in there's a cup of tea in the pot."

"In a minute, I want to have a look at the bike." He checked the brakes, they weren't binding, the wheels spun free. The saddle looked a little bit higher than usual. He took his spanner out of the saddlebag, undid the bolt, but however much pressure he maintained, on the the saddle it stayed where it was . He took it off and peered down the tube, then it became patently obvious why he nearly pulled his tripes out coming home from work. Some kind considerate person had filled his frame with molten lead.

The twentieth of April was Sed's twenty first birthday. It was also Hitler's birthday, a fact that Sed regretted because of the stick he had to take at school, and that fact alone made him hate that date, so when Elsie suggested he had a party in the hall above the public library to celebrate he refused and said he would much rather have a motor bike.

"You only get one twenty first, why not have a party?"

"No thanks mam." His mind was made up. He wanted to feel the power of the motorcycle between his thighs, and the freedom of the open road.

"Ah well, its up to you, you'll only break your neck on one of those things."

"I won't," he assured her. "I'll be very careful."

"I suppose you're getting all these high falluting ideas from Henry?"

"No, Henry's got nothing to do with this!"

"Well, you'd better please yourself. How much is it going to cost?"

"I don't know yet, I'll have to look through the ads. It won't be a new one."

"I sincerely hope not, your father left you some money, but he wouldn't want you to waste it on a motorbike."

"It's not wasted," her whinnying was beginning to irritate him.

"Look, I've got some money saved I can put to it, then I've got to put in for a driving test."

"But you haven't got the bike yet, what's the point of putting in for a driving test." Sed eyed her with growing exasperation.

"Look mam, don't worry about it, I'll sort it out.....The thing is, if I see one for sale can I have the money?"

"Well, it looks like you've made your mind up, I hope you know what you're doing?"

"Yes or no?"

"Oh all right, go on then."

"Aw, thanks mam, you won't regret it." He swept her off her feet giving her a kiss on the cheek that sounded like a cow pulling its foot out of a swamp.

"Put me down you naughty boy," she shrieked enjoying every minute of it. From then on Sed scanned the newspapers for second hand motor bikes, as well as keeping an eye on ads in the local shops and the post office. Eventually an ad in his own paper caught his attention. For sale. Triumph Speed twin 500 c.c. In good condition, any test. £90 o.n.o. with an address in Kirby. Elsie promised him £100. He had saved £50 or thereabout, which would cover tax and insurance. The problem remaining was that he knew nothing whatsoever about motorbikes. He needed some expert advice and decided to ring Henry. Gwen answered the phone.

"Is Henry there Gwen?"

"No he's at work....anyway Sed Kirk, why haven't you been round?"

"Well," said Sed. "I saw you last week!"

"Big deal, we used to see each other more than once a week?"

"I'm sorry Gwen...."

"And it's your twenty first birthday next week and your mum said you were having a party at the community hall."

"Well I'm not, I'm buying a motorbike instead."

"Oh, now I see, that's why you want Henry?"

"Yep, what time's he due home?"

"Can I have a ride on the back?"

"On what?"

"The bike you're going to get!"

"I haven't got it yet...in any case I can't take anyone on the back until I've passed my driving test."

"When will I see you?" Women, thought Sed. All they think about is themselves, when there's more important things in life at the moment like motorbikes.

"I'll give you a ring....Listen, will you ask Henry to ring me when he comes in from work?"

"I might do," replied Gwen, and rang off.

Henry readily agreed to vet the bike advertised in the local rag, and arrived after tea one evening armed with a list of things to check out on the potential buy.

"You won't be sorry you've bought this bike Sed!"

"If it's ok," prompted Sed, not wanting a pig in a poke so to speak.

"The speed twin with the sprung rear hub is the one we use in the Police," said Henry enthusiastically ignoring Sed's note of caution.

"D'you know where this is?" queried Sed handing him the address.

"No problem, I've spent quite a bit of time up there chasing villains, know it like the back of my hand." Henry's motorbike was a Norton 500 c.c. It was in immaculate condition. It wasn't new when he bought it, but it looked better than new as far as Sed could see. His mother said he used to take it to bed with him. He didn't bother with girls, said he preferred the bike because it didn't answer back. In general he thought women were a pain. Sed thought it more probable that he couldn't find a woman tall enough. The one's he saw Henry with were below average height making him more conspicuous.

It was getting dark when they arrived at the address in Kirby, so the guy who was selling the bike wheeled it under a street lamp while Henry made his inspection.

"How long have you had the bike, is it a genuine mileage, can I see the logbook, when did it have it's last oil change?" The bloke thought he was up in front of the Spanish inquisition. However his responses appeared to satisfy Henry.

"You've no objection if we take it for a run?"

"Er.. well, you can, but he stays here until you get back." He wasn't taking any chances, which was fair enough. He didn't know either of them from Adam. Sed tried to make conversation but all his attempts fell on stony ground. In the event that Sed and Henry weren't prepared to do a deal, it was obvious that his only concern was getting his motorbike back in one piece. They could hear the bike speeding

around the estate with Henry changing up and down the gearbox, and as time went on even Sed was getting concerned.

"What the bloody 'ell do he think 'es doin', 'es been gone more than twenty minutes, 'an there's not much juice in the tank, you'd better go and fetch 'im!"

"I don't know the area." replied Sed beginning to feel distinctly embarrassed.

"Aye, and it doesn't look like your mate knows the area either. Don't piss me about." He chunnered on threatening to fetch his brothers out if he wasn't back in the next five minutes. Henry sounded as though he was practicing for the Isle Of Man T.T. Then there was silence, followed by the appearance of a large huddled figure approaching pushing the bike.

"Sorry mate, said Henry. "I lost my bearings for a second."

"A second?", spat the bloke, his eyes standing out like organ stops.

"Where've you been Lands End?"

"It's a little cracker this," said Henry "We'll take it" Sed was more than a little taken aback having the decision made on his behalf, considering he was the one with the money.

"Give you eighty pounds for it cash, said Henry..

"Ninety," growled the bloke. Sed looked from one to the other. He felt that he was at an auction as an outsider witnessing two blokes bargaining with his money. Henry drew the bloke's attention to the ad which said or nearest offer.

"I know that, but you've had ninety pounds worth of wear out of it already."

"You're beginning to get up my nose china." Sed decided at this point to intercede on his own behalf before the fisticuffs started.

"Here you are mate ninety pounds, just give me a receipt."

"Where's the nearest garage mate," enquired Henry in a moderated tone.

"About two miles down the main road, if it's open!"

What do I do...

to help in Britain's campaign for SALVAGE?

I tie into bundles all PAPER and CARDBOARD, including books, old magazines, office records, catalogues, correspondence, music, wallpaper ends, etc., which are no longer of value.

I save METAL, including tins, washing them clean and pressing them flat.

I save BONES, keeping them clean and dry.

I return EMPTY BOTTLES to the shops from which they came, or give them, along with the other salvage, to the dustman.

I fish used ARSE-PAPER out the bog, run it under the tap and then get the missus to iron it so we can use it again and again

I find an old dried DOG TURD (white) is a very adequate substitute for chalk in the classroom and is particularly satisfying to use as a projectile against naughty pupils.

Cut this out—and keep it!

*Issued by the Ministry of Information
Space presented to the Nation
by the Brewers' Society*

BLUE MONDAY

Brett Wilson

It was a wet day in mid autumn, England. The wind had got up and seemed to lift the pile of sycamore leaves as if with an invisible thresher. Despite the dampness, they were being blown this way and that. All except one. It steadfastly hung on to the pile of grass where it was situated. No dance in time. No dalliance with the wind. It wasn't long before the current of air dropped and the skies turned a little more blue. Only then did the leaf shift, as if born on its own personal puff of wind. It floated higher and higher, perhaps on thermals known only to the honed senses of the gliding birds. Then after seeming to hover interminably over some suburban scene, it finally began its descent, flitting down in jagged arcs until it came to rest on the windscreen of a man on a mission. He was returning from the local council offices where he had managed to find some new information on his project. As he was nearing home the leaf had planted itself directly in his field of vision. Large it was too. He was fiddling with the radio at the time.

"Dammit!" he said and squirted some screen wash onto the windshield. It seemed to cement the leaf flat onto the screen, the wipers appearing ineffectual. He was veering a bit now and was hunched down looking under the leaf. Luckily he was nearly back at his flat. He drew up into the small car park at the rear, grabbed the plastic shopping bag full of documents, locked the car and then leaned over the bonnet. The leaf seemed to peel off without any difficulty. Only it now appeared to be stuck to his fingers. He held the bag of papers between his thighs while looking for his flat key with one hand, the other shaking furiously to dislodge the errant foliage. With a final whip, the leaf was gone and he was through the door.

He quickly emptied the bag on the small desk. Somewhere in those documents were the clues to his sister's location. He had been looking for her intermittently for three months and his search had led him south. The adoption agency had provided precious little data, but still it was enough. It was a small town. Perhaps they had stared at each other from the opposite seats of a local train? Perhaps she served him a coffee mocha in a café? He might find her tomorrow, or in a month. The documents would give him more clues and more names.

Then he could trace through the phone book until he found what he was looking for. A Malloy. A real Malloy.

It was time for a cup of tea and as he passed the mirror on the way to the kitchen, he noticed the leaf he thought he had disposed of earlier was clinging like a limpet to the back of his head. His paw smoothly removed it in one quick motion, but again he found himself unable to relieve his hand of his brown burden. The leaf seemed to be imbued with a property no inanimate object should possess: intent. A sticky brown fibrous intent. *Now I'm getting annoyed* he thought. Running under the tap. No. Flush down the loo. What on earth possessed him to try that? Removal with kitchen paper; result kitchen paper sticking to hand also. Holding onto floor with chin while removing both hands, like a bozo from that *Mission Impossible* film? Noooooooooop. What about trapping an edge in a door jamb? Now that did seem like a goer.

Carefully placing a leaf tip in the jamb, closing the door and slowly withdrawing his hand finally produced a result: humiliating defeat for *Acer pseudoplatanus*. *Hip fucking hooray* he thought. Now he could go back to his searches.

It was early morning and he was faced with the teensiest dilemma. How to get out of the door.... *Well surely Mr brown and funky can't be spoiling for another fight* he thought? No sign of the chocolate chuffer. It was all going well. It wasn't until he made it half way to the car park that he noticed a familiar object attached to the back of his trouser leg, near his foot.

"Right!" he said, out load. An older lady who was returning from a shopping trip, always suspected the strange loner might be a schizophrenic. Now he was talking to himself. Hypothesis confirmed she thought!

He quickly gunned the engine and rocketed out of the car park, tyres squealing. "Let's see you get out of this one!" he said, looking down at the leaf, slightly manic. Within a minute he was racing down the duel carriageway at sixty mph, right leg out of the window, left leg on the accelerator. But the leaf only seemed to grapple harder. The slip road was approaching. "OK me amigo, you wanna see the whites of my eyes?" He pressed down hard on the accelerator peddle, shot past an over laden van as the needle hit one hundred. The noise of the screaming engine and the wind through the open window was

BLUE MONDAY

now deafening. One twenty. One thirty. The leg shot up and out. The wind rammed his leg back hard, twisting his body around. The car swerved across three lanes as he thought about dying and never knowing his sister. He pulled the leg in. No leaf. Ha! He thought. He took the next exit and came to a stop at a light. He couldn't see the leaf stuck to the radio aerial at the back. A puff of wind came, scarcely enough to fill the wings of a fairy, and the leaf soared upwards.

It landed on a girder that was being lifted by a crane. It got blown to the edge. But instead of making the vertiginous fall back to earth some two hundred feet below, the edge for a second passed the skeletal buttress of the wall. The wind carried it further. It landed in a man's lunch box. He closed the lid. Later that day the man took the lift downwards and walked towards a large bin, where he intended to divest the box of the sandwich wrappers and a plastic cup. The box was opened. The leaf flew up. Free.

He had been scanning several documents for clues to his sister's whereabouts. It was time to take a break. He turned on the TV just in time to see a report about a girl who had been driving down the motorway in the wrong direction. It was a strange report. Apparently she had been plagued by some leaf. The girl in the report looked like the most beautiful angel he had ever seen. He rose out of his chair and hesitated for a few moments. Then he went to the computer to find the number of the TV station. He wanted to share his story. And he wanted to meet the girl.

Meanwhile near the airport, the leaf had got stuck to the tail of a pigeon. It was flying in all kinds of crazy circles in an attempt to dislodge it. Then, moments after succeeding in ditching the leaf it flew into an aircraft engine. The leaf sailed on. Not so good for pigeon. For the leaf, it was a very good day.

PAMPERS AND LEOTARDS

Marie Feargrieve

Reene looked at the swell of her stomach in the tight velvet jog bottoms. Having got over her disastrous liaison with Ismail and her nightmarish stay in Turkey with his family, she was on the lookout for some fun.

“Hell Ada look at this jelly belly”, she prodded the mound of flesh watching her fingers disappear into the wobbling fat.

“You have piled on the pounds Reene”. Ada wasn’t exactly in the pink either. She had found her granddaughter after twenty odd years, only to find that she was married to her grandson. She decided not to dwell on it. “Marshmallows come to mind.”

“Cheeky sod. You’re not behind the door. Hardly a twig yourself are you?”

“Don’t get touchy. We both need to get our fat arses in shape. Men are thin enough on the ground at the moment without us carrying all this lard around!”

“Yep for sure girl, action is needed”. Reene bent her elbow to down the last dregs of stout from her glass. “Pass the pork scratchings Ada”.

Two weeks later the two of them queued to join the aerobics class in the room above the labour club.

“God almighty, plenty of queer shapes here. That woman’s got no arse at all. More like a skinned rat on a crash diet”.

“Shurrrup Ada, I’m nearly peeing myself.” Reene was trying hard to stifle a great swell of laughter gurgling up somewhere between chest and throat. They were soon stood in a row of women of all shapes, sizes and ages, towards the back of the room. A thirty something female stood at the front in lycra tights and a white tee shirt.

“Right ladies let’s get started. Only do what you can manage and if it hurts then stop at once. Any bad backs or hearts?” Nobody raised their hands so Mandy put on the music.

“We will start with a box step. Two steps forward, left right. Two steps back, right left. In time please. Listen to the music.”

Ada went left instead of right and vice versa as did Reese. They bumped into each other like dodgems at the fair. The pace was fast. After five minutes they were sweating copiously. Hearts pounding, they felt distinctly ropey.

"You'll get a second wind soon", said Mandy smiling, walking between the rows inspecting her new recruits. Was she smiling with them or at them?

"The only wind I'm getting is the fart kind" said Reese.

"Your arse is playing a military tattoo. Can't you hold it in? wheezed Ada.

"Hold it in?! I'll bloody explode like a barrage balloon."

"Quiet ladies, save your breath."

Mandy eyed the two women. A couple of beached whales had washed up on her shore. Oh well. She doubted they would last to the end of the hour! "Take two minutes", she said, after thirty minutes of torture.

Ada and Reese wilted slowly, then collapsed onto the wooden floor. They were rarely taciturn, but neither felt the inclination to speak. The woman next to them, a reasonably fit looking sixty year old, eyed them pityingly.

"Do you smoke? I've never smoked. Don't drink much either now. The odd sherry at Xmas maybe. And I've been veggie for the past ten years. I've exercised regularly all my life. This is just a gentle walk in the park for me."

"Tell me then love" gasped Reese, "Why do you look as miserable as sin and as dried up as an old prune? Life's for living you know! Quality not quantity. Bet you gave up sex too ten years ago didn't you? Or are you still offering but nobody's taking? Sod off you preaching cow."

The woman recoiled at this verbal smack in the mouth. She got up and moved her lean frame forward a few rows, looking back at them with a shocked expression.

"Well done Reese. She's got a face like a slapped arse now. What she needs is a good piece of red meat. You know what I mean? Bloody veggie."

They rocked around holding their sides. God, it did you good to laugh and put that bint in her place at the same time. Forty minutes later walking home, they decided they sure as hell wouldn't be going back.

"You know Ada we don't need that whingeing crew. We could start our own class up for women around our age. Make it fun though. Let's give it a go".

They had a few simple posters printed:

EXERCISE FUN
FOR LADIES WITH TUMS
THE BIGGER THE BETTER
THE SERIOUSLY UNFIT WELCOME
VEGETARIANS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN

They put one up in The Dog and Ferret, one in the chippy, another in the launderette and local newsagent. They booked the back room of the pub for a fortnight later on the Thursday night.

Half seven saw Reese and Ada decked out in pink leggings, black tops and white trainers.

"We look like the bloody Roly Polys" shrieked Reese.

"You don't look *that* good", laughed Fred the barman.

"Cheeky bleeder. Bring us a pint at half time and no leering at the tits and bums on the bounce in here".

"God I'd have to be desperate!" retorted Fred.

"You are desperate you perv. You eyeball anything in a skirt. Sad sod" said Ada.

"Come in me lovelies", boomed Reese, "Don't be shy. You're among friends here and hey look at the size of my bum. You lot are stick insects next to me".

This sent a draught of ease wafting over the crowd. Faces relaxed and coats came off.

"Right now. No bloody boring aerobics here. We're going to put some music on and follow what we do."

Strains of 'Let's twist again' filled the room and Ada and Reese, legs planted three feet apart, twisted and contorted, stretching their waists this way and that. They even threw in a bit of belly dancing some-

PAMPERS AND LEOTARDS

where in-between for good measure. The women loved it. It brought back memories of the fifties and sixties, doing this very dance in the dance halls when they really did have twenty two inch waists.

“Bloody fantastic that”, said big Edna on the way out, “Good on yer. Keep it going. I’ll be back next week fer sure”.

She wafted out on a scent of sweat and gin, beaming and swaying into the night.

“Success or what Reese?”

“Yep it went great.”

“Bloody aerobics and piloters or whatever you call it, eat yer bloody heart out.”

They counted up the cash and headed for the pub, gasping for their nightly quota of Guinness.

After six weeks as expected, the class had lost no weight and were the same shape as the back end of a Routemaster bus and were certainly no fitter! They were one and all still hooked on a diet of grease, booze and fags. What they *had* gained was a massive slice of self esteem and *joie de vivre*. They all got on well apart from Serena, a huge Afro Caribbean woman and Alicija an equally gigantic Pole. Every week it was the clash of the titans.

“Get yer bleedin size nines of me foot”, roared Alicija, shoving Serena hard in the back and sending her sprawling.

“You are a bad ass mother. Out of my way!” Serena stood hands on hips.

“Now now you two. Cut it out” said Ada spotting the trouble and stopping the music. Serena had grabbed Alicija’s hair, a fat black fist planted either side of her head. She was shaking her like a Jack Russell with a ferret.

“Bitch, bitch” screamed Alicija kicking hard between Serena’s fat wobbly thighs. By now they had each other round the waist and with fat butts in the air were pushing and shoving in a mighty tug of war. Ada and Reese grabbed each of them from behind tugging on their joggers and exposing one large white rump and an equally large black one, encased in huge knickers. The combatants were kicking, scratching and grabbing lumps of flesh and hair and skin to the

shouted encouragement of a by now thoroughly aroused crowd. The clothing lay on the dusty floor.

“Hey Ade what does this remind you of?” said Reese.

“A bloody cat fight.”

“No look again.”

Ada looked and smiled slowly, nodding at Reese. The class were now laying bets on the outcome of the battle.

“I put a fiver on Serena pulverising that useless cow in five minutes” said big Edna.

“Give over Alicija’s got her on the ropes now”, said Jackie. “Come on girl. Put the boot in!”

“Right girls come on. Put yer brass where yer mouth is”, said Reese, going round the class, “Who yer putting yer money on?”

“It’s a bloody good Sumo match is this” Ada’s eyes glinted at the mounting pile of cash.

“Better than a bloody exercise class.”

Hanks of hair, sweat and blood, oaths and cusses filled the room. The victor was Alicija. Serena had got too winded and tired. She lay vanquished, glistening, oily and black.

“Great fight “, bellowed big Edna, leading a round of applause.

“Hell’s bloody bells Reese” said Ada “Its female sumo wrestling from now on.

Get me Pampers on the blower. How do you look in a nappy?”

“Better than in a bloody leotard, that’s for sure”.

So in the grey northern streets of Manchester, female sumo bouts became the norm, surpassing line dancing in popularity. But the thrifty nature of these northern lasses never waned. They couldn’t discard their cowboy gear so it was nappies on the arses and Stetsons on the heads.

THE TOWN OF THE FUTURE



■ There can be no doubt that our future towns will be as different from those we knew before the war as a radiogram is different from our first crystal set. And just as our admiration for the elegance and the greater efficiency of the modern does not in any way impair our affection for the old-fashioned, so we need have no regrets when we come to live in the town of the future.

Towns and cities damaged by the war are already considering their rebuilding plans. Residential districts, we are told, will be designed on the garden city principle of villas or semi-detached houses each with its own garden; or ten-storey blocks of flats surrounded by communal lawns, flower walks and rose arbours. It is gratifying to note that experts are planning for a green and pleasant land

with plenty of space, light and fresh air. In the past, towns and cities have straggled and sprawled, capturing parts of the countryside with the same inevitable disappointment as the caging of a wild bird. The town of the future will be erect and compact, with the trees, the grass and the flowers of the countryside brought to its front doors. Schools and playgrounds for the children will be included as an integral part of the communal plan. These will be so positioned that children will not have to cross main roads on their way to school. The Shopping Centre, in view of its supreme importance to housewives, will receive very special atten-

tion. Architects, remembering the British climate, will develop the arcade principle for greater all-the-year-round convenience, specially appreciated on wet shopping days.

These will be long, windowless warrens called Arndale Centres and will be covered in glazed yellow bricks giving the whole thing the look of a shithouse block on an East-German housing estate.

All the old pubs and shops will be demolished and the oiks will live in similarly shaped concrete barracks going up about ten stories. The lifts won't work and will usually be full of shit and piss or burning mattresses which the young 'uns will send up and down for a larf.

The problem of getting to work won't arise since there won't be any. The resident oiks will live off benefits which they will spend on drugs supplied by local entrepreneurs and breed weapon dogs which will bite the arse off anyone they don't like. Paradise or what?

Pears

RENOWNED AS THE LEADING TOILET SOAP SINCE 1789

WADER AND BADER

Nigel Ford

The sun glared through its sad blue flimsy at the tanned, cancer pitted skulls of two bald men who cavorted upon the beach on which one man wriggled his toes was pure white.

The other man swam and splashed in the Ocean, which stretched unhindered to all points of the compass and glittered as if made of diamond chips from the great gem of the heavens.

"Hi there Wader!" shouted Bader, "Come on in, the water's fine."

"Please?"

"I said come on in, the water's fine."

"To you maybe. Me, I don't care to wallow and bask in my own shit!"

"The sand!" shouted Bader, "Those pure white particles in which you are wriggling your toes.

That is your own shit, Wader. Not to mention the remains of your ancestors."

"What you got in there you creep, a hot-wired submarine?" wondered Wader.

"Please?" said Bader.

"What have you got hidden beneath the surface?" asked Wader, suspicious.

"Only me, my kind gentleman! Bollock-naked I promise," insisted Bader.

"You and your mechanical toys," Wader is lugubrious in his mistrust; there is a doleful slump to his shoulder line.

"If you come in now," said Bader, sensing that Wader's resistance was crumbling, "I will buy you an ice-cream."

Wader tentatively placed a foot in the water. "Ugh!" he exclaimed and withdrew it swiftly.

The water beneath Bader's belly was contrarily blue, as if he was not bollock-naked, as if he was a liar! But there were no crabs to bite his toes in admonition.

The sea beyond Bader planed out into a sheet of turquoise metal while the sky hooped over their heads in ultra-marine, faded down to the horizon in burnished silver.

There was an unplanetary stillness in the air as if Death had long vacated this dull and tranquil place and zoomed off into space in search of more worthy playmates.

"You are a coward Wader!" shouted Bader.

"You are a liar Bader," retorted Wader. "You are not at all bollock-naked. You are wearing awful blue glistening polyester bathing trunks. Over the top of which your horrible and disgusting white belly slops!"

"Why should we play this game of howling insults at each other?" shouted Bader, "What's the point?"

"What else is there?" wondered Wader.

"You could come in for a swim," said Bader. "The water's lovely I assure you."

"Don't believe in assurances," Wader said. "Look what happened last time! Anyway," continued Wader, "it doesn't look particularly appetizing does it?"

"Got my own segment," Bader said. "Join me!"

"What do you do," taunted Wader, "make fart bubbles in the interest of development?"

"You could borrow as many ice creams as you want," offered Bader, "Your credit's good. I'll send you a delayed invoice."

"At two points below," insisted Wader.

"You're a hard man to please Wader," said Bader, "but alright."

Wader wondered if there was life out there where Bader was. He was afraid of life. Life made him tremulous. Life was unpredictable and dangerous. Wader and his ancestors made a point of killing all the life they could find as they went along. Things were not one hundred percent satisfactory, but you could walk the streets of San Sebastian without treading on a lethal snake. Or those of Nairobi without being trampled to death by a myopic rhinoceros.

The future, thought Wader, seemed promising. A huge expanse of nothing at all, in which man could play God.

What monsters, wondered Wader in a moment of weakness, will we create?

But then he pushed such disloyal thoughts from his mind. The world would be full of delightfully civilised creatures. With a perfect and logical ecological balance.

“I want one free ice-cream,” said Wader, “to come in and wade a little. After which I want an option on 20 more at 2 points below.”

“Are you coming for a bathe Wader?” asked Bader. “Are you ever going to stop beating about the bush?”

“I have not agreed to bathing,” said Wader, “Wading only.”

“You’ve got brass balls Wader,” Bader said, “but alright.”

Wader felt good about having brass balls. The water, he felt, didn’t look too shitty perhaps really. The sun warmed agreeably. Although the top of his head he noticed, itched. As did the tips of his elbows these days.

The water was alternating layers of emerald and turquoise emphasized and sparkled by chips off the sky.

Wader did not care for bathing. It was not the fear of sharks nibbling off a leg. There had been none around for years.

Nor was the sea, as Bader had pointed out, any shittier than the land or the air. No, it was the total commitment to bathing at which Wader jibbed.

“After all,” called Bader, approaching cautiously as he might some timid wild animal. “We all live amongst small piles of excreta and huge mounds of dead bodies. Both animal and vegetable. Not to mention myriad mineral dung heaps. It is the rotting process or as we now say, the biodegradable process which is of vital importance. You and I Mr Wader between us could produce a unique solution to this problem.”

Initiative raises its hoary head admitted Wader to himself. Mentally he raised his arms palm out in horror and yelled go away, leave me alone! I love the smell of sun lotion. I don’t want to go in there and wash it all off.

“Come on in you fat cowardly slob,” called Bader. “Wader’s a yellow chicken jelly-o,” he taunted.

WADER AND BADER

Stung, Wader entered the water carefully. His hairy legs prickled. Perhaps it did not feel so slimy after all. And it certainly seemed to wash more easily around his legs than it had done in his childhood. He stood in water up to his knees. Not liking to think what stuff on the bottom of his toes were curling into.

"We remember things as we want them to be Wader," Bader said, as if he could read his mind. "But they never were and up until now they never are."

"Is this business in the theoretical stages?" wondered Wader. He washed some water over his body. Turning the hairs on his chest and arms into mucky grey streaks. It was warm the water. Squeaky clean and clear. He splashed merrily about and had a time. "Or do you have some practical proof of your pudding?"

"Here is your ice-cream Wader," said Bader, "and this you see is the sea which is not as dirtful as it used to be."

"Nice and clean and dead, " Wader agreed as he took his ice-cream. "Ideal for windsurfing."

"You eat that," Bader said. "Enjoy and I'll tell you all about the scheme of things."

"But Bader," Wader protested munching on the cornet. "I am no animal you know. I disappeared into my mind a long time ago."

"That's exactly it!" cried Bader in triumph. "You have hit the very spot. We shall have to go right over the top!"

"What spot you creep?" Wader asked, gaily splashing water over Bader.

"Man is not part of nature!" Bader cried, swimming off powerfully. "Man has always loathed nature. Man has always regarded nature as uncomfortable."

"I see what you mean," said Wader standing lonely in the shallows. "Flies and things."

"Wasps and stings," yelled Bader merrily. "Heffalumps and such. Snakes and tigers, things that suck."

"Sharks and piranha and unmentionable horrors that go pop in the night," Wader called. "Mosquitoes and bugs and other thugs."

“Spooky forests with trolls. Dangerous monsters of the deep. Nasty mountains that get in the way. Man and nature in general strife,” Bader trumpeted.

“Praps they don’t like us much either,” Wader said now prepared to go liberal since Bader has voiced similar thoughts. “Praps we’re the biggest pests of all,” said Wader.

“Exactly what we are,” Bader said treading water and purring, “the biggest pests of all. And the thing is we can win! After all, what other animal can fly and swim and run and walk,” Bader brayed.

Wader whinnied: “And there’s not an awful lot of them that talk.”

“No one’s going to miss them Wader,” Bader said, “those green freaks won’t be here. Long-live the three piece suit!”

“Nor for that matter,” Wader said thoughtfully, “is there much stiff competition in space.”

“Oh Lord!” Bader pealed, “behold the human race!”

“Over the top I see,” Wader stood stock still in the water and sucked at his thumb. He looked pensive. “Extermination.”

“Right on,” Bader said. “Extermination, genocide, liquidation, purification. Wipe the buggers out!”

“And let there be no more wilderness to go into,” Wader said.

“You’re a perceptive man Wader,” Bader said. “The planet becomes our garden. Filled with tame animals and cultivated plants.”

“Just think,” said Wader with a giggle. “I can sit on the grass without getting my bottom pinched.”

“Just a pinch and a punch for the first of the month,” said Bader laughing.

“We could abolish that too,” said Wader with a chortle. “But what about evolution. The balance of nature. All that?”

“That’s the beauty of such a plan,” Bader said turning onto his back and swimming lazily, facing the sky wearing a beatific expression. “If we abolish nature as such we won’t need a balance will we.”

“You mean if we provide our own nature instead,” Wader said, “then that will naturally balance itself?”

“Well put Wader,” Bader said. “Well put and well met.”

WADER AND BADER

“Well I don’t know,” Wader said doubtfully. “If we do that what on Earth can we expect?”

“That’s the charm of this strategy old chap,” Bader said. “It creates its own laws and balances. Just like any other nature, it is to us completely unpredictable.”

Wader’s face cleared. “You mean we won’t have a clue what’s going on. Just like before?”

“That’s it exactly old chap,” snickered Bader. “Our sublime ignorance will remain totally undisturbed.”

“In that case,” said Wader, all doubts swept away. “I’m with you all the way.”

“Life will become business class,” Bader said. “The snap of briefcase fasteners will be heard everywhere.”

“I shall have a black leather briefcase with a tender lining,” said Wader.

“Oh God it turns me on!” groaned Bader.

“The end of spontaneity!” Wader cried with glee. “Not a ferocious bug to blight my sight!”

“Bees without stings,” agreed Bader, “and absolutely no wasps or hornets.”

“Life,” Wader said dreamily and biting into his, “becomes a great big round of ice-cream cornets.”

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