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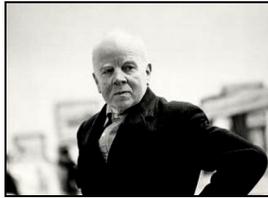
Leggit's Legitimate Interest –is from S. Kadison's collection ***Is That You Mr. Clooney?***

Looking Forward to Friday is from Bob Wild's collection ***Dogs of War***

Poor Padre Pio appeared in ***The Penniless Press*** issue 24 – March 2007

The Condition of the Working Class in France appeared in a shorter version in ***The Penniless Press*** issue 25 November 2007

Front Cover – *Rush Hour* – William Roberts 1971



William Roberts (1895-1980) was a reclusive, public-spirited modern artist, a Londoner, an urban, secular, sane Stanley Spencer. He was part of the 1914 British avant-garde movement, Vorticism, with its punchy, choppy, geometric manner. His best-known work today is probably *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel* " a memorial image, painted almost 50 years later. In the interval, Roberts's style had changed somewhat. He favoured solid but friendly figures, and positive, celebratory images of everyday life. He may be the only modernist to have painted the Changing of the Guard and a London double-decker bus.

He left school aged fourteen and started an apprenticeship in poster design whilst attending evening classes at St Martin's School of Art. The following year he won a scholarship to the Slade, where he met Edward Wadsworth and Christopher Nevinnson. Together they joined the Vorticists, an avant-garde group formed in 1914. Like many Vorticists, Roberts was an Official War Artist during the First World War. The experience had a profound effect on their celebrated view of the 'modern world'. The group disbanded and Roberts adopted a more representational approach. In a distinctive and enduring style, he recorded the social development of the working class. Dynamic and densely populated, his scenes of everyday life were always coolly contained within a balanced composition.

Roberts was often described as reclusive, and he was very wary about interviewers – especially after an *Observer* journalist whom he did speak to produced an article that Roberts felt was concerned more with his rather Spartan lifestyle than with his work. 'What kind of art critic is this, who sets out to criticise my pictures, but criticises my gas stove and kitchen table instead?' he asked. One admirer of his work has told how she saw him getting on to a number 74 bus and 'Fascinated to gain a sighting of the octogenarian recluse, she followed him to the top deck. Aided by "the chutzpah of youthful inexperience", she respectfully asked him if she were addressing Mr. William Roberts. After what felt like an interminable pause, and with his gaze defiantly averted, he replied: "I really do not know."

Illustrations

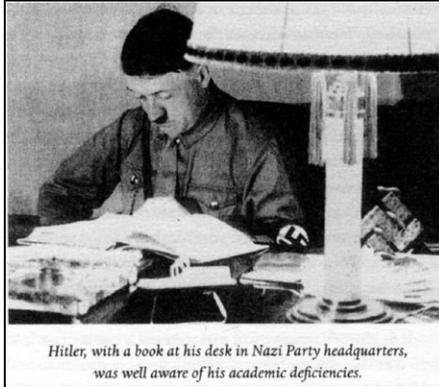
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EDITORIAL

ON REELING AND WRITHING



My dad was a great reader but when, as a kid, he was caught in this un-savoury practice, his mum would snatch the paper out of his hands and tell him to stop lazing about and make himself useful. That'd be the normal oik response in those days. Nevertheless, even though I grew up surrounded by library books the family holdings comprising six or seven volumes published by the *Daily Express* were kept out of sight in the wardrobe under blankets. Those were the years of dearth; books cost money as I discovered after the dog chewed the library's copy of Haku-lyt's *Voyages*.

Are Oik autodidacts an endangered species? Their rise and fall is well tracked in Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. He writes in 2001 and sees a decline. Some oik writers too see reading as a distraction – the canon is too vast – who can read all that stuff – who'd *want* to? This debate sprang up on the website in Oiklet 3 so we won't go over it again. I'm puzzled by this since I believe reading is the essential trigger and that those who write unaffected by the tradition, like Jackie Collins or John Grisham are after something quite unlit-erary – loot, celebrity, influence, power. Toni Morrison gets back to the primary urge:

Writing for me is just a very sustained process of reading. The only difference is that writing a book might take three or four years, and I'm doing it. I never wrote a line until after I became an editor, and only then because I wanted to read something that I couldn't find. That was the first book I wrote.

There's much on the website about creative writing and although some writers think it can be taught others advise simply reading:

Barthelme, asked by a student how to become a better writer, suggests reading the entire history of philosophy 'from the Pre-Socratics up through last semester'. The student worriedly replies that Barth has already advised his class to read all of literature, 'from Gilgamesh up through last semester'. 'That too,' Barthelme agrees, and adds: 'You're probably wasting your time on eating and sleeping. Cease that, and read all of philosophy and all of literature. Also art. Plus politics and a few other things. The history of everything.'

Quite, Don – good advice. Are there any contra-indications? Well Hitler wrote a best seller and was indeed a voracious reader but I doubt he'd have got in the Oik. Crazy yes – but what a bore:

"Books, always more books! I can never remember Adolf without books," Kubizek recalled. "Books were his world." Another early Hitler associate, Rudolf Hausler, who shared quarters with Hitler in Vienna and later in Munich, recalls his roommate reading dense tomes until two or three in the morning. According to Kubizek, this passion for books had nothing to do with leisure or pleasure. It was "deadly serious business." From my own conversations with surviving Hitler associates, it appears that Hitler's nocturnal reading habit was still in place decades later. Margarete Mitlstrasser, one of Hitler's longtime housekeepers, recounted a nightly regimen that included his reading glasses, a book, and a pot of tea. Hitler read intensely, even fiercely. The Berghof estate manager, Herbert Doring, recalled an evening when Eva Braun intruded on one of these late-night reading sessions and was dispatched with a tirade that sent her hurtling red-faced down the hallway. Doring himself exercised extreme caution. Each night before closing the Berghof, he would walk outside to wait until Hitler's reading light was extinguished. On more than one occasion, dawn was breaking on the horizon. Anni Plaim, a Berghof maid, remembered a sign outside Hitler's second-floor study that read ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

My gran would probably have snatched Schopenhauer out of his hands and told him to go and do something useful – like invade Poland. So it's not just what you read but how you read. As Lichtenberg says: A book is a mirror; if an ass looks into it you don't expect an apostle to look out.

Ken Clay December 2010

A WINNER'S END

Tom Kilcourse

A German veteran of the first world-war believed that his honourable military service would ensure his survival in the second, despite his being a Jew. He was wrong. His efforts for the Kaiser, counted for nothing with Hitler's gang and he, with his wife, suffered the fate of millions in Nazi gas chambers. Their union had given the world three children, two daughters of whom I know nothing worth writing, and enigmatic Fred: a tribute to human complexity.

To Fred's good fortune he was at school in Switzerland when the criminal Third Reich, the creation of bitter psychopaths, set out on its murderous agenda. He and his sisters survived the war as orphans. The sisters escaped with the help of the Red Cross. Fred had a flair for learning foreign languages. When I met him, in the nineteen-sixties, he spoke fluent French, German and English, the last with an American accent. This talent enabled him to set off on a career as an interpreter and, bizarrely, gained him employment by the American army in that role at the Nuremburg trials.

Fred never discussed his early life with me, so I can but wonder what effect it had on him to see on trial those responsible for the murder of his parents, and to hear in fine detail the charges against them. I know only of the man I was to meet twenty years later, a French Citizen, living in Paris and working as the Chief Executive of an international association of food chain stores. What I know of him before our meeting was told to me by third parties who had known him previously, among whom I number my wife.

Before coming to Oxford, and meeting me, my wife had moved in a Paris circle that included Fred. When his organisation offered her some vacation work in Paris I went along for the ride, and found myself also employed as a temporary statistician. Fred offered us fresh employment on subsequent vacations as administrative assistants at international conferences, so I had several opportunities to observe him in action. Our relationship with him developed and continued after we graduated, with Fred sometimes offering us accommodation in his home in France. He also visited us in England occasionally. As

time passed I found him less of an enigma, though still intriguing.

I never considered Fred a friend, though I referred to him as such when writing *The Winner*. There was always a wariness that prevented any sense of empathy on my part. I viewed him with mere sympathy and admiration of achievement, feelings that one might have for a total stranger. I cannot say how he saw me, but beneath the mutual courtesy and superficial friendliness flowed an undercurrent of conflict: a struggle of opposing psychologies.

It says more of me than of Fred perhaps that the relationship lacked warmth. I believe that life created outsiders of each of us, a condition for which Fred and I found different solutions. Whereas alienation made me a detached, asocial observer of others, he appeared to value their company and admiration. I recall his eightieth birthday party, attended by numerous intimates at an expensive Paris venue. Fred stood with modest smile as one guest after another spoke of his generosity, many relating in detail some occasion when he had been their Samaritan.

So, why would one be wary of an unquestionably generous man? In my case the reason was Fred's predilection to play mind games. Indeed, I have yet to meet anyone else who gives such credence to Eric Berne's theory in his book 'Games People Play'. Face to face or on the telephone Fred's opening gambit would be a version of 'poor me', with details of some problem he faced. Anyone rising to the bait by offering suggestions found themselves confronted with 'yes but'. The player would then find it impossible to make a suggestion that Fred had not previously considered and discounted. After several rounds of 'yes but' the unwitting victim might recognise the futility of trying to advise a superior intellect, as he or she was meant to. I seem to remember that Berne's term for this situation was 'getting hooked'.

There never was a suggestion that Fred had not thought of first, or topic on which he was not better informed, or intellectual exercise in which he was not superior: surprising in a man whose favourite author was Jeffrey Archer. Fred was certainly a prolific reader. He once lent us his Paris apartment while he visited America, and I took the opportunity to browse through his yards of bookshelves. I found them to be packed to capacity with the kind of paperback that people buy at airports to lighten their journey. Whereas most would dump these in a bin at their destination, Fred kept them on his shelves.

A WINNER'S END

Most of us like to win, but in Fred preference turned to obsession, he needed to win, no matter how trivial the matter. When my wife beat him one day in a game of Scrabble he made little effort to conceal his irritation, accusing her, with feeling, of cheating and making up rules as she played. When offered the opportunity to seek revenge in a second game, he refused, in bad grace. During another visit to our home he was parading his knowledge of history, when I made a rare challenge. Fred had identified William the Conqueror as a Plantagenet and I corrected him. When he continued to argue, I showed him a chart of the Plantagenet dynasty beginning with Henry II Courtmanteau. Again, the annoyance was apparent.

Retirement is commonly difficult for people who have held prestigious positions as it often entails some loss of identity. From being 'a somebody', one is suddenly 'a nobody' if work has been central to one's being. For Fred his position as chief executive was not simply central to his identity, it was its entirety. When he reached sixty, the retirement age he had previously decided on for all Association staff, he retired regretting that decision. Fred chose his successor, a loyal female subordinate, and persuaded the Board to make him a non-executive director for life. This led to a situation that I found amusing, but Fred did not.

When the Board made this gesture it is very doubtful that they imagined Fred living for another thirty years. His longevity led inevitably to a decreasing relevance of his contributions to discussion at Board meetings, which he continued to attend into his late eighties. Never one to deny a fellow the benefit of his experience Fred often made lengthy contributions. Furthermore, he often visited the association's offices to advise the current Chief Executive, his own nominee had failed to take up the post. That such intrusions were resented was made plain on a flight to a Board meeting in America, during which he sat next to the current office holder. As Fred poured unsolicited counsel into his companion's ear the CE drank several whiskies. Sufficiently fortified at last, he revealed his lack of gratitude by telling Fred, loudly, to 'fuck off', and proceeded to appraise the old boy of his perceived defects, his peroration peppered with expletives. Even Fred got the message, much to his bemusement and distress.

Fred's instinctive control of others was not always so amusing. Indeed, at least one other acquaintance considered him dangerous. I know what he meant. When I wrote *The Winner* in the seventies, it

was updated later, we had visited Fred's house in the countryside of Yvelines. There, I had observed the human pantomime being played out between a wealthy man in his early sixties, and a slim, self-assured woman in her mid-twenties. This primary school teacher had been the mistress of a friend of Fred's, a man whose wealth was diminishing.

Possibly seeing Fred as a surer bet, she swapped partners. Fred married her a few years later to protect her under French inheritance laws, and to give her entitlement to his pension.

I am reasonably certain that, like the Association's Board, she reckoned her lover had some ten or twelve years more to live. She and the Board were to rue that miscalculation. As the years passed she became increasingly desperate to cash in her investment, but the old chap showed no sign of dying. At his eightieth birthday party, mentioned previously, she was circulating in our midst, asking people how long we thought Fred had left. When I mischievously assured her that she would have her husband into his nineties, she came near to weeping.

Her distress was, I suspect, caused in part by Fred's addiction to mind games. I have little doubt that as his libido declined, he compensated by exercising psychological dominance of the kind that I had witnessed. There may, of course, be other explanations for the physical and mental deterioration of his schoolteacher. The trim figure had long ago surrendered to obesity, the fresh face become haggard and her whole appearance spoke of neglect. The self-assurance meanwhile had degenerated into whining self-pity. Many of Fred's friends disliked her, and some thought her mad.

If her perceived madness was the result of Fred's ploys for dominance, he was to pay a heavy price. In January 2010, ninety-one year old Fred and his wife, now in her mid-fifties, were living in their sixth floor Paris apartment, though in separate parts of it: meeting for meals only. From his numerous telephone calls we knew that he had been growing increasingly bitter for some time. When he became ill he took to his bed, and locked the bedroom door. Whenever his wife tried to approach him he cursed her roundly through the door, screaming his hatred of her. That situation endured for three days, until the Portuguese cleaning woman returned from holiday and called the emergency services. His wife explained her own failure to

A WINNER'S END

do so as acceding to Fred's wish to be left alone. When the services arrived and broke through the bedroom door they found a skeletal figure collapsed in his filth, and dehydrated. He died in hospital a few days later. A glass of water given during the three days might have saved his life.

Fred's need to be in charge reached beyond that event. Some two or three years before, he had chosen the cathedral in which the burial service should be held, written the homily to be mouthed by the priest as well as the dedication for his gravestone and his obituary to appear in *Le Figaro*: it didn't. Fred's choice of a large cathedral served only to emphasise the scarcity of mourners. The funeral was attended by few: his cleaning woman, his concierge, his wife and mine, and a few of his old employees from the Association, two of whom gave eulogies.

We acquire prejudices, values and perceptions in early life, from infancy through puberty. They are stamped on our psyche by experience. If the touch is light these are easily modified, or may simply fade, but a heavy stamp can make an impression too deep to confront. It lies buried in the soul, its influence perhaps unacknowledged. Fred was loyal and generous to his friends and staff, I and others had cause to thank him for that, but I believe that a fundamental insecurity caused him to demand a price for his friendship: subservience. I was not prepared to pay that price. For reasons we can understand, Fred tried to instil his own certainties into an uncertain world. The impossibility of that task left him restless, and ultimately in despair. I hope he now finds the peace that life denied him.

A Future Beckons (David Birtwistle)

There was a peculiar, hollow, nasal squeak coming from his new left leather shoe. When he stepped out it sounded like geese going south. Speeding up and women with prams looked up in the air and pointed. The children were wide-eyed in expectation. If he'd had a synthesizer he could have cut a record! When his socks warmed up it began to sound like a muted trombone. Back home, he put his feet on the kitchen table to give the cheese a chance to breathe and it played *Always look on the bright side of life* all on its own.



I say sir, are you sure this gun is pointing the right way? What if the Japs attack from the north?

Don't talk such rot Corporal especially in front of Duff. Johnny Jap is a man of honour and it'd be damned bad form to come sneaking in the back door

**What Duff Cooper will see in
SINGAPORE**

ILLUSTRATED this week Air-Chief Marshal Sir R. presents the first vivid and Brooke-Popham, seen above, comprehensive picture story arms akimbo at a gun post. from Singapore since the Latest indication of its reinforcement of our "Far importance is Mr. Duff East Gibraltar" in view of Cooper's new appointment as the War Cabinet's representative in the Far East. the Japanese menace. Commander-in-Chief is

Illustrated 1941

ESCAPE OF A CIVILISED MAN.

Marie Feargrieve

Maurice had made up his mind. It had taken some doing and had been a long time coming. For years he had contemplated it but life always stepped in, blocking him, thwarting him. He was walled in. Trapped. First it was the kids; he wouldn't jeopardise their security. Then it was their crises. Constant, these had been. He was a good man, a good father. You don't walk away when your kids need you. But now it was different. The waters were calm. It was time to make a move. Living with Tricia was slowly sucking the life out of him. Love: what was that? He certainly wasn't feeling it. They lived separate lives; surely it was time to leave? He wanted peace. To be on his own. No more inane conversations. The daily utterances which were speech but not communication of any worth. Apes in the jungle got more response from their mate than he did from Tricia. But, he was a decent man. He would not cut all ties. Educated and civilised, he wouldn't do the dirty and just walk out. This place had been his life, his home for the past thirty years. No, he would have his freedom but keep a caring, keen eye on Tricia. He would see how she got on. Yes, he would be there for her always.

Slowly, methodically over months, he had been making plans. He had squirreled away supplies: clothes, toiletries, tins of food, matches, a torch, books, a radio, money and duplicate keys. His was going to be a long journey, as with all epics he would do it in stages. The first stage was the hardest. He would be so near and yet so far. This first step was the cutting of the bond. Tricia was superfluous to his requirements, but she was his wife and always would be. He would leave no note on the kitchen table. What would he say? She knew it all already. No connection of mind or body. They shared the roof over their heads. This was the truth. She was a practical woman. She would cope. Maurice would monitor the result of his defection. For a while at least. She was out shopping now. He had enough time to sort a few more bits. Upstairs he found a few more useful items: a thick fleece, a penknife, scissors, extra shoes. He put his key in the lock. If she came back she wouldn't be able to get in, until he was ready. He went through the kitchen adding a thermos to his stash. In a corner was a narrow door. He opened it and switched on a light in

the dark hole. He descended the dozen or so steps into the cellar. It was unremarkable, cold and dank. It spanned the length of the kitchen above. He walked to the back of this room and pushed at the metal shelving. It clicked and slid open. Stepping forward he slid back the false wall behind him. He had entered a sparsely furnished room. A sofa, a couple of chairs, a plain wooden table, a commode and metal shelving holding various items, tins of food, household goods. Maurice locked the door, slamming bolts at the top and bottom. He smiled. His nest was ready. His computer was on the table and a TV stood in the corner. It was his. The first private space he had ever owned. Completely his. Nobody would disturb him here, unless he invited them and he wouldn't, ever. Here, incarcerated, he felt the weights rolling away. Burdens he had carried all his life. He felt good.

The parting was easy. They hadn't spoken the best part of a week anyway.

"I'm going to stay at my sisters for the weekend." She had said this Friday morning as she was leaving for work.

"Ok, enjoy yourself. I'll take a few days off, head off somewhere."

"Suit yourself." She picked up her car keys and left. He heard the car revving, the gravel crunch as she pulled away.

"Right, Maurice, action stations." Down there he had electricity, bottled water, food, radio. He went down. Sitting on the bed settee, looking around, he smiled.

He soon got into a routine. He liked the tight, organised, pared down style of living in this tiny space. After a few days, he heard her return. Feet across the floor, the telephone conversation, TV, radio blaring, water running. He was mute, silent. She would never suspect, never venture down here. When she left for work on the Monday morning, he emerged into the house. Already it felt alien, too large and light. He looked around at the trappings of his old life. Opening the fridge, already rubbish on the shelves: chocolate, dips, wine. He tidied round a bit, old habits die hard. Hearing the post plop onto the hall mat he went to check. After running a bath, the room was scrupulously cleaned of any trace of him. He was glad to return to his camp in the cellar.

On the Wednesday, he heard her on the phone.

ESCAPE OF A CIVILISED MAN

“I’m not going looking for him. Sod him. Let him disappear. He’s done me a favour. I was about to make a move anyway if he hadn’t. He’s a boring bugger, obsessed with himself. A clever arse but dull.” There was a pause. “Yes, all right. Come over anytime. We don’t have to duck and dive anymore. Bring a bottle. Come tomorrow.”

So that was her game. He wasn’t surprised but nobody likes to be cuckolded. He was irritated not jealous. *I don’t want her*, he thought *but I’m surprised she thinks me boring*. He was far from boring. Wasn’t he intelligent? Hadn’t he got one of Mensa’s highest scores? She was wrong. You couldn’t be clever and dull. It was a contradiction surely?

Well, she was obviously not going to be lonely. She had another man on the go, so he would just check him out and move on. Maurice was so civilised. He wanted her to be with someone suitable and middle class preferably.

A few nights later he heard her letting somebody in at the front door.

“Hiya baby”. She sounded pleased, a silly little girl voice.

“Hi Trish. So this is where it all doesn’t happen is it?”

Loud laughter, then silence. He pictured them kissing. A lot of stupid conversation followed. Lots of joking, playing the fool, music and the shuffle of dancing feet. A party going on above his head. It was late. No sound of him departing. Right. Ok. He sat head in hands.

He wasn’t a vindictive man but action was called for. When he heard them both leaving the next morning, he raced upstairs. Going straight to the bedroom the smell of the tousled bed enraged him. He went into the bathroom. A stranger’s razor on the basin. Her pots of creams on the shelf. His glance took in the bottle of bleach by the toilet. Unscrewing the cap and carefully selecting her favourite face cream, he squirted the thick oily liquid into the cream and mixed it round with his little finger. He giggled. She wouldn’t be so vain with a red, peeling face for lover boy, would she? Now some action was needed to render the love nest uninhabitable. Outside, he rummaged in the dustbin, finding exactly what he needed. A mouldy chicken carcass, the remains of a salmon, skin and bones stinking and some mouldy cheese. Grabbing a hammer and chisel from the shed he returned to the bedroom and forced up a few floorboards. He deposited the lumpy, pulpy pile and carefully replaced the boards. He smiled.

Nicely placed just under the stud's side of the bed, the rotten food would ferment nicely. That would dampen his ardour.

He went back down into the cellar, an evil goblin that had been up to mischief returning to his lair. He felt justified, she had thrown his kindness in his face and he had always looked out for her. *She deserves all she gets. How could she prefer that brain dead chancer to him?* It wasn't the sex he was bothered about. He knew he had a lot of hang-ups in that department. She could spurn his body but never his brain. He was erudite, he read the *Independent* for God's sake! What more did she want? That ape she was in cahoots with was pond life compared to him. Straight from the bog. How dare she bring him into his house? Right that was it. He wasn't going anywhere, he was staying. They weren't going to have it so easy.

At six o'clock he heard her key in the lock. She opened the kitchen door and stared at him. He looked nonchalant, sat at the kitchen table, cup of tea in hand. She recovered quickly.

"Where the hell have you been all week. I thought you had done a runner."

"No. Just an extended business trip. But I'm back now. Fancy a cuppa?"

She looked at him. She knew he knew. How was the worm going to turn? Maurice could read her thoughts. She hadn't the stomach for a cold war. The smug bastard. He was a cold, cruel man under that smiling innocent veneer. She would sleep on it. If finances allowed she would leave, or partition the house; the wife-next-door set up. If all else failed she could always do away with the cunning runt and bury him in the cellar. A crime of passion. It happened all the time.

Maurice could read her thoughts and agreed entirely. Many erring wives went missing, they ran off with their paramours, never to be seen again. He would keep his cellar hideout. She was the mouse to his cat. The game would continue. It was just the stimulation he had been looking for. Right here on his own hearth. A psychological tussle more powerful than sex and far more satisfying.

ALIEN TWO AND A HALF

Brett Wilson

You have a dream that was inspired by that famous sci-fi horror movie classic "Alien". At the beginning of your dream it seems clear that this time there might be a different ending, and all the crew might be eaten instead of all-of-them-except-the-one-with-no-meat-on-her.

We are out in deep space having dinner. Suddenly the guy next to you starts to vomit. Was it the starter? He is writhing on the table when this thing rips its way out of his stomach and sprints down the corridor, trailing guts behind it like a string of sausages. Nobody takes dessert.

In a few days it has grown and everybody is scared, except one crew member. "Hey!" he says. "I'm cool." He is the first to go. He has his head bitten off in cargo bay number five.

So this creature is moving around the ship. The corridors are too tight and the ceilings are too low. The toilets are in the wrong places, which is a pity since they are so popular right now.

The creature begins picking off the crew, one by one. First the know-it-all cynic. Then the guy who sweats a lot. Then the screamer. It has terrible table manners. Only you and the computer are left now. The computer tells you that you might as well spread garlic relish all over yourself and sit in a small dish of green salad. You tell the computer to go and fuck itself.

You decide to blow up the ship. You activate the control console and set the ten minute auto destruct sequence. You hurry along to the shuttle bay. You have to take corridor A21 and then stairwell M44. You cut across recreation hall 7, through hatch 45B and across loading bay 4. You take the service elevator to level 15, swing by the medical centre, turn left at the botanical garden, down through the main storage facility until you reach corridor V18. Then you take a short cut through the engineering section, past the reactor room, down through the communication lobby next to the computer suite and finally to shuttle bay 9.

You are just about to enter the shuttle when you realise that you have left the ship's cat in the control room. You go up through the communication lobby next to the computer suite, past the reactor room, take a short cut through the engineering section to corridor V18. You ascend the main storage facility, turn right at the botanical gardens, swing by the medical centre and take the service elevator to loading bay 4. You go through hatch 45B, cut across recreation hall 7, take stairwell M44 and corridor A21 to the control room.

You pick up the cat, hurry along corridor A21, then stairwell M44, cut across recreation hall 7, through hatch 45B and across loading bay 4. You take the service elevator to level 15, hurry by the medical centre, turn left at the botanical garden, down through the main storage facility until you reach corridor V18. By this time you are perspiring a great deal but still manage to nip through engineering, past the reactor room, down through the communication lobby next to the computer suite and finally to shuttle bay 9.

Unfortunately the creature is now lurking next to the shuttle doorway and you realise that the only thing to do is to stop the ship blowing itself, and you, to bits. So you deposit the cat, power walk through the communication lobby next to the computer suite, past the reactor room, jog through the engineering section to corridor V18. You race up the main storage facility, turn right at the botanical gardens, swing by the medical centre and take the service elevator to loading bay 4, frantically head butting the switches while gibbering like an idiot. You throw yourself through hatch 45B, sprint across recreation hall 7, take stairwell M44 in 3, and hurtle down corridor A21 to the control room.

You go to the control panel, which now looks like a cash dispenser. It tells you that the destruct sequence cannot now be aborted and also that you are overdrawn. Your only chance of survival is to get back to the shuttle and hope that the creature is gone. So you sprint down corridor A21, stairwell M44, recreation hall 7 and hatch 45B to loading bay 4. You take the service elevator to level 15, piss yourself by the medical centre, leave little yellow splashes by the botanical garden and squelch through the main storage facility until you reach corridor V18. You shit your way through engineering, leave a brown trail by the reactor room, all the way through the communication lobby next to the computer suite and finally to shuttle bay 9.

ALIEN TWO AND A HALF

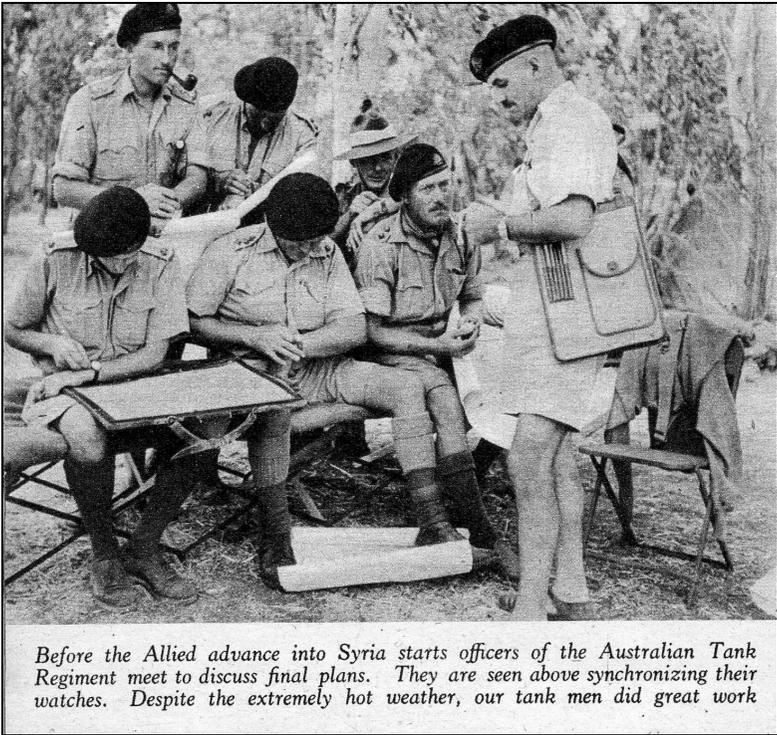
You notice, through your sweaty haze, that the creature is no longer at the entrance, so you climb aboard the shuttle and blast off. You get just far enough away, when the mother ship blows itself into a million pieces. Then you realise that you are not alone. The shuttle floor is covered in slime trails and nobody has been growing lettuce here for a while.

You are wondering again whether this dream is going to end happily or tragically. You change into a space suit, and even though you are terrified you manage to think of sex. You manoeuvre the creature toward the escape hatch using steam jets, and blow the door. The thing goes flying out of the ship but manages to hang on with its tail. You race to the instrument panel and give the creature a blast from the rocket motors. It goes flying off into space. And do you know what it says with its last breath? "Well I'll be buggered. It was a happy ending after all!"



Chuffed to little buttons. (David Birtwistle)

He pulled in at Tesco's as someone else pulled out leaving him the front parking space. He felt blessed. He had a £1 Lucky Dip. 9 million to one but if you're not in it you can't win it! Next he squeezed the tomatoes. Rock hard. Good job he tried. Next the sell-by-date shelf. He picked up a lettuce and boiled ham sandwich and a pork chop for a song. What made his day was the freezer special offer - Morecambe whelks. 3 tubs for the, price of 5! It was such a good offer he bought two lots to celebrate.



Before the Allied advance into Syria starts officers of the Australian Tank Regiment meet to discuss final plans. They are seen above synchronizing their watches. Despite the extremely hot weather, our tank men did great work

Illustrated 1941

ANZACS

Ron Horsefield

Bruce: G'day sports. We're goin to knock twelve bells out them towel-heads tonight so let's synchronise our watches.

Kev: Synchro what Bruce?

Bruce: Make 'em all read the same time. Now I make it twelve twenty five.

Baz: That'll be what Bruce? I don't have a twenty five on my dial.

Bruce: Twenty five is V Baz. So it'll be the big hand on V and the little hand on XII

Kev: What's that little extra hand that races round the dial Bruce?

Bruce: That's the second hand Kev.

Kev: The second hand!? Surely not mate. It'll be the third hand – there's already two other hands.

Bruce: The poms call the fast hand the second hand Kev.

Kev: Poms! But if the big hand is the first hand and the little hand is the second hand...

Baz: Kev's right Bruce. It's got to be the third hand. If it's the second hand then what's the little hand?

Bruce: Ignore the second hand. That's only of interest if you're boiling an egg.

Kev: What time *is* tucker Bruce? I'm so hungry I could chew a skunk's arse.

Baz: A nice foamin VB'd be grouse too. My throat's as dry as a nun's knickers.

Kev: Hey! Ripper! I've managed to stop the fast hand by pulling the winder right out.

Bruce: You daaft baastard Kev! You've stopped your watch completely.

Baz: No Bruce – just the fast hand, the others are fine.

Bruce: Let's start again. Set the big hand to VI...

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

David Birtwistle

He was looking at his own reflection in the mirror and talking to himself, trying to remember every small detail so he could put it down on paper before it disappeared into the light of day.

It was the middle of the night. I was fast asleep. Dead to the world. That sound could have been the blackbird singing. I half came to. There didn't seem to be any sense of time, yet in the eerie way in which dreams unfold, I was aware of being unaware of time passing. Everything seemed normal. Or almost. There was a beautiful scene in front of me. It had all the hallmarks of a painting, a landscape, and I was there. I was alone, not in front of a painting, I was inside somebody's garden and it was without any shadow of doubt Claude Monet's garden in Giverny in Normandy.

He felt an urgency about getting the words down now. He needed the evidence in black and white and he needed to memorise it. He had experienced a very strange and special dream and he had to capture its magic in his own words, words that come as close as possible to capturing its essence.

I could almost weigh the sense of space, the air and the light were so tactile. I was looking across the western side over the open spaces covered with blankets of tall flowers between the trees. He was talking about the garden where the legendary Impressionist had spent the last forty years of his life. These were the gardens which the great man believed were his ultimate masterpiece, beyond anything he had created on canvas. The dream too had its own tremendously graphic beauty but with it a sense of tenderness and vulnerability which made him realise it could all too quickly vanish into thin air.

I was right there somehow and it felt perfectly normal, just me amongst all that sea of colour. My consciousness seemed to expand as I felt the texture and the light and shadow. I could see, feel, hear and smell the whole garden with incredible clarity as it unfolded all around me. Then, from being a passive observer, without knowing how, I was in among the flowers, walking very, very slowly, brushing

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

against the tall stems. I could feel the sensuousness of leaf and petal and frond and I almost drowned in the sumptuousness of the fiery oranges, the gold, and the copper of the wallflowers and the ruby red of the columbine.

This garden had been designed as a laboratory for exploring colour and light, a place of experiment and inspiration and here he was, quite at ease, inside what seemed to him a painting come to life. All the complex interplay of reality, illusion, paradox and deception, he took literally in his stride.

I moved slowly, touching, brushing, looking, smelling and half-hovering, floating between the margins of different worlds, a painting which has been taken from a real place and a living garden created as the inspiration for that painting. At the same time I was inside and out, above and below, in amongst the plants themselves and able to experience a full range of sensory perception.

He was conscious that this was all a dream and it seemed he drifted back into sleep again. Then with no transition and with the ease with which a waking child rubs an eye and blinks, he was back but this time on a riverbank

I knew that in the paintings and in the garden itself this was not a river but a large pond. But to me this was a riverbank which had all the characteristics of Monet's pond, the one in the garden at Giverny and the one in the paintings. But here the water was running, moving very slowly with a nudging, tugging undercurrent, hardly noticeable until you looked below and into the grains of finely swirling silt and leaves and saw direct evidence of the laws of motion in a flowing stream. The surface was unnaturally still. Its blueness was a mirror reflecting the landscape around. The branches of the weeping willow touched the surface so this in turn entered the mirror, opened out and set itself against the clear summer sky. And over there, the green of the boat, the punt, which was silent and still in the picture, bobbed gently and almost imperceptibly on the edges of perception. And most of all, the strongest impact for me, were the creamy, purple and yellow heads of the water lilies sitting among leaf pads in islands of green on the reflective stillness of the surface. I could smell them.

It dawned on him now what he had to do and why the dream was important. Something wonderful was about to enter his life.

Then without any sound of arrival or approach, or even that slight movement in the turning of a page, you were right there. You were sitting beside me on the bank of this gently moving stream. Your left leg was bare and sunburnt and dangling over the side and your foot was playing slowly from side to side. I knew it was you. I was certain. Then the thing that was a dream became not a dream, became something actual, an existential triggering of the senses that tells you 'I am alive, here and now, this is it'. You dipped your toe in the waters as they moved so deceptively slowly and a shock wave of coldness hit the nerve endings in my own foot and entered my brain in recognition. You dipped your toe, mine felt it.

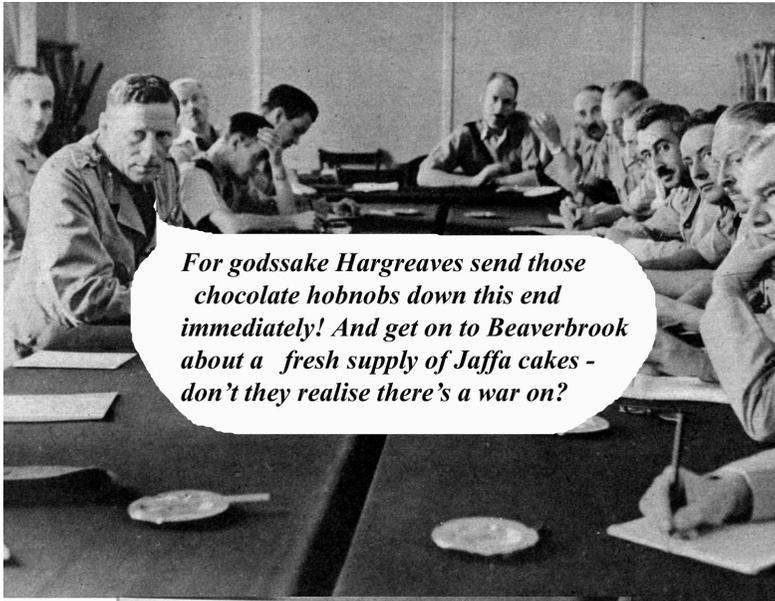
He stopped and the silence of expectation hung in the air.

What does it mean?" he asked himself, why was it so powerful?" "You described it so beautifully!" said the imaginary voice of the imaginary woman he had been addressing for the past half hour.

Now he felt the cold light of day and he sensed the mundane origins of his dream. She was some sort of embodiment of his needs. His wife hadn't given him any affection or warmth even, for years now. Hardly a smile. Somehow this other woman and this wonderful environment were one and the same. He knew what he had now. If he remembered it exactly, this wasn't just a dream but a story which would work like an incantation, a troubadour's love song whose magical formula would charm the heart of the one he sang it to. He felt a new phase of his life about to open. He went back to it and read the last bit again only louder and with controlled passion. As he finished a splatter of applause broke out behind him. He turned and his wife was standing there, her hands together, an unusual brightness in her eyes. "That's beautiful," she said. "I thought you'd gone off me." And she kissed him very softly on the lips.

Crossword (David Birtwistle)

He was struggling with the quickie. You could almost hear his brain working overtime. 4 down, Michael Caine Film (3,7,3) He was sure he'd seen it. The something something. The first word was blank 'H' blank. The second word was T blank 'A' blank T blank 'N'. It looked like 'Indian' or something like that only longer. The last word was blank 'O' blank. He wrote it out lengthways: -H- -I-A-I-N -O-. Suddenly a light went on and a bell rang. **The Iranian Mob!** He remembered seeing it! A cracking film. He'd have something to boast about tonight, now.



For godssake Hargreaves send those chocolate hobnobs down this end immediately! And get on to Beaverbrook about a fresh supply of Jaffa cakes - don't they realise there's a war on?

AUCHINLECK

Above, Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.I.E., C.B., C.S.I., O.B.E., at a conference of the accredited War Correspondents at G.H.Q., Middle East. Below, is a close-up of the General

Illustrated 1941

MY LIFE IN PRINT

Ray Blyde

CHAPTER TWELVE

Doctor Valant arrived early one morning after Sed had had a particularly bad night with Elsie, she'd got up in the early hours and gone out into the road in little more than her nightdress. He couldn't recall what woke him. He went into her bedroom and found the bed empty. The front door was open and outside it was throwing it down with rain. He threw on a mac and had a quick look around the immediate locality without spotting a sign of her. He was getting really anxious now and concerned about her welfare. He was soaked to the skin and knew also that she would be wondering around out there wet and cold and decided to ring 999. He explained the circumstances to them and hoped with all his heart that she wouldn't be found at the bottom of a river or lying injured on some main road. He put the gas fire on but couldn't sit down, his stomach was in knots with worry. He had no idea of time it seemed like an age before the front door bell rang. He opened the door to find a policeman and a WPC and in between them was a very diminutive Elsie, her hair dishevelled wrapped in a blanket.

"Hello!" said the WPC warmly. "We found her walking along the main road, she was ok, a little wet unfortunately. We took her back to the station, dried her off, gave her a cup of cocoa, and she wanted to know what was going to become of her?"

"Oh thanks, I was worried to death about her, she suffers from manic depression, it's got progressively worse since my dad died."

"Are you on your own with her?" enquired the constable.

"Well yes, at the moment. I'm expecting a specialist to see her any day."

"Have you no family in the area?" said the policewoman.

"I've got some relatives who've been a great help, but they can't be here all the time."

MY LIFE IN PRINT

"Would you like us to contact Social services?"

"No honestly, I'll be ok. Thanks for your trouble. I hope I won't need to bother you again."

"No trouble", they assured him. Sed sat his mother down in front of the fire. He realised that she was still wrapped in the blanket the police loaned her and resolved to let them have it back at the earliest opportunity.

Doctor Valant examined her thoroughly.

"She's lost a lot of weight?"

"She's not eating, I can't get a solid meal down her doctor."

"I think we'd better have her in again. Can I use your phone please?"

"Help yourself doc."

"Is that that very nice policeman Sed?"

"No mam, it's the very nice doctor that's going to get you back on your feet", assured Sed who was beginning to wilt through lack of sleep.

Elsie was taken into hospital in the afternoon by ambulance, and Sed felt a big weight lifted off his shoulders. He had reached the stage when he felt completely out of his depth trying to cope with his mother's illness. Here was the woman who gave birth to him, the strong personality who held the family together and had the biggest influence on his upbringing, disintegrating before his eyes. Mental illness was harder to cope with than physical illness, a few days in bed and you were usually ok. But this.....just went on and on. Sed shuddered as he sat there looking into space. The television flickered and the tea he'd poured out earlier had gone cold. He decided to ring the hospital to see how she was then he would ring Eadie and let her know Elsie was back in hospital, after which he thought he would go for a ride on his motorbike, that always relaxed him. Later he would pick up Gwen and go on to the hospital for the seven till eight visiting time, then he thought he'd have an early night, he felt shattered. He rode up to Gwen's, parked the bike on the curb, strode up the path and pressed the doorbell. Mr O'Neill opened the door.

"Hello Sed, come in lad, how are you?"

"Oh, I'm ok Mr O'Neil."

"How's your ma?"

"I'm just off to the hospital, I was wondering if Gwen would like to come with me?"

"I'm sure she would Sed but she's not home from work yet, they're stocktaking or something"

"Oh, right, well I'll be off then," said Sed as Mrs O'Neill appeared out of the kitchen.

"How's your mother?"

"She was ok yesterday, they're going to give her some electric treatment again."

"Would you like a drink Sed."

"Er, no thanks Mrs O'Neill, I haven't got time."

"Well, have a cup of tea in your hand!" Sed smiled to himself at the idea of scalding tea cascading straight from the pot into his bare mit.

"Thanks again, but I'd better go."

"All right Sed, give her our love. Gwen will be sorry she's missed you....."

Arriving at the ward the curtains were around Elsie's bed, thinking perhaps she was getting some treatment he wondered into the sister's office. When she saw him she asked him in and told him to close the door.

"Sit down Mr Kirk,...now I'm afraid we've got some bad news about your mother." Sed felt as though he'd been kicked in the stomach.

"She's not dead!" gasped Sed, the worst scenario he could possibly imagine.

"No, nothing like that, but she's had a stroke I'm afraid."

"What d'you mean a stroke?"

"Well, put simply it's a burst blood vessel in the brain, a sort of haemorrhage."

"Is she going to die?" Without giving him a direct answer she said:

MY LIFE IN PRINT

"The doctor's with her now, I'll get him for you, he wants to have a word." She swept passed him and the smell of disinfectant made him feel sick. The doctor obviously a junior looking no older than Sed himself seemed very hesitant and avoided eye contact as he closed the door behind him. He rubbed his eyebrow vigorously then said.

"Your mother's had a stroke I'm afraid." Sed felt a wave of anger welling up inside him.

"Did this happen after she had the electric treatment?" The doctor looked alarmed.

"No, no, she hasn't had ECT, doctor Valant's been assessing her for treatment when this happened."

"When did it happen?" The doctor looked towards the sister for support.

"It was about twenty minutes ago wasn't it sister?" She gave him a sombre nod of agreement.

"How bad is it?"

"It was a pretty severe stroke." Sed didn't know what else to ask.

"Do you want to see her?" Sed knew that's what he wanted more than anything else. As he strolled with the doctor towards the bed Volant suddenly appeared from behind the screens. He put an arm around Sed's shoulder.

"I'm sorry about this Sed."

"What caused it doctor?"

"We're not sure, high blood pressure can be a factor, and her age of course. She may suffer some speech impairment and some paralysis. But then looking on the bright side, with help she could make a complete recovery. Sed looked down at Elsie, the strong confident Elsie, his beloved mother and felt dispirited and very much alone.

"Hello mam, you're going to be just fine, doctor Valant said so and he should know." He wished he felt as confident as he sounded. She held on to his hand, her grey eyes filled with tears as she struggled to speak. Saliva spilled from the corner of her mouth, nothing came only a tiny cry of frustration. Sed sat down on the side of the bed and put both arms around her and kissed her gently on the forehead. They

had been through hell and back since his father died. He blamed the trauma of the funeral for that and thought about what Eadie had said, that life had to be endured not enjoyed. His mother depended on him more than ever now.

"You're going to be just fine mam I promise."

When he got home he felt ravenous, but because he hadn't slept properly for a couple of days he couldn't be bothered to set to and cook himself anything. He went upstairs and lay on the bed fully dressed and the next thing he remembered was the phone ringing. He turned over and looked at the clock, it was ten o'clock in the morning, he'd slept twelve hours solid. He leapt out of bed and down the stairs and just reached the phone when it stopped ringing. He had a quick wash, or as his mother used to call it a cat's lick, put the kettle on, two rounds of bread in the toaster when the phone rang again.

"Hello?"

"Is that you Sed?"

"Yeah...who is it?"

"You should know your own brother."

"Lloyd,..bloody 'ell, where are you?"

"Southampton!"

"Southampton?"

"Yep, I signed on a ship in Fremantle, and here I am. How are things Sed?"

"As bad as they can be, mam's had a stroke."

"Jesus! How bad is she?"

"Pretty bad."

"Look, I'll be home as soon as I can, ok?"

"Ok, how is your wife?"

"Well, it's a long story, I'll tell you about it when I see you." Sed felt elated, at least he wasn't on his own any more, but in retrospect had the leopard changed its spots? Lloyd's track record left a lot to be desired, anyway only time would tell. He had another phone call this

MY LIFE IN PRINT

time from King enquiring when he could expect to see him back at work, in the meantime he said he would like a word with him as soon as he could find the time. Sed knew he would have to get back to work as soon as possible because he was running out of money. He could have gone sick, Ralph suggested it, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Eadie called with a hotpot which he could pop into the oven later, and said she would come back later to go to the hospital with him. He told her about Lloyd, her response didn't allay his fears.

"Is he on the run? He usually turns up like a bad penny when he's nowhere else to go." Sed said he didn't know and expected that all would be revealed in due course. "Don't let him put on you Sed, you've got enough on your plate at the moment."

When they got to the hospital Elsie was asleep. The sister said there was no change and since she was having difficulty eating they had put her on a drip. They sat around the bed for a while then Eadie suggested they went outside for a chat.

"How are you going to manage if and when she comes out of hospital?" Sed told her he had no idea never having been in this position before. Eadie gazed intently at him before she spoke again. "You can't afford to stay off work for much longer, and to be honest your brother will be as much use as ornament!" Sed agreed he had a problem, he didn't want to put her in a nursing home in fact he couldn't see a solution to the problem.

"What should I do aunt Eadie?"

"Well perhaps there is something that can be done, what about calling in the Social services?"

"What can they do?"

"They can send someone around to attend to her while you're at work."

"Can they do that?"

"Of course. I'll arrange it, and I can call round some part of the day myself."

"Aw, that would be great aunt Eadie."

"When's that no-good brother of yours arriving?"

"Anytime," shrugged Sed.

"Well he could be of some use, if you could rely on him."

Sed went into work to see King the following day, and although he was very sympathetic towards Sed and his domestic problems paramount in his thinking was to have him back in work as soon as possible.

"How is your mother young man?"

"Not so good," replied Sed.

"Are you getting any help?"

"I'm hoping to get some help from social services. I've also got some help from a relative."

"Hum, so when can we expect to see you back at work?"

"I'm hoping to make a start next Monday, all being well." King scratched his nose thoughtfully took a deep breath and said,

"I've got a proposition to put to you." Sed thought perhaps he was going to ask him for his resignation. "We'll wait for the F.O.C." King dialled an internal line and asked Jack to come over as soon as possible. "Don't look so worried Kirk I'm not going to sack you, sit down and relax." A few moments later there was a tap on the door and in came Jack Degan nodding his head towards Sed as he closed the door behind him. "Right, well, I'm going to put that proposition to Kirk that I told you about last week." Jack nodded in agreement. "It's nothing spectacular Kirk, but we thought it may help you in your present difficulties." Sed waited expectantly. "Have you thought about going on nights, because there's a vacancy on the Advertiser, a thirty seven and a half hour week, you'd be at home during the day when your mother comes home from hospital?"

Sed appreciated King's concern but didn't want to be pushed into making any quick decisions when at the moment there were so many things to take into consideration.

"Thanks for the offer Mr King, can I have some time to think about it?"

"Yes, fine, but don't take too long. Someone will be filling the position on nights sooner than later."

"I realise that," said Sed, "I'll let you know as soon as I can."

"Right, lad, I take it we will be seeing you on Monday. In the meantime I wish you well, you're taking on a big responsibility for a young man." Sed didn't need to be reminded, he hadn't got a clue what was going to happen next.

SCIATICA QUITE GONE
thanks to BELTONA



A STRIKING TESTIMONY

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I started off just putting a few drops in my evening cocoa but soon found that a more liberal dose was much more efficacious. After only a few snifters of fifty fifty Beltona and tea I felt quite woozey and my sciatica had vanished completely. Now I'm necking the whole half gallon bottle every week, straight - no tea, and feeling well-pissed. When you think about it Beltona at 14s a half gallon is cheaper than whisky. Also my sciatica between libations is no problem since I now don't go out but just lie there, with my cat, waiting for my next fix. I'd recommend Beltona to anyone - it's a little better!!

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Illustrated 1941

LEGGIT'S LEGITIMATE INTEREST

S.Kadison

Gordon Leggit was a big fan of globalization, though he wasn't sure what it meant. He liked it because the rich and famous made a fuss about it. It was the new thing, the modern thing, and above all Leggit wanted to be new and modern. What he feared most was being left behind. That was why he'd tried to make himself a computer expert. He'd failed. He didn't have a technical brain. He bought himself an early *Amstrad* and read the manual in bed. He believed Alan Sugar was a genius. When *Amstrads* became obsolete he bought a *state-of-the-art* model. He was always buying *state-of-the-art*. He would have bought *state-of-the-art* eggs if he could have. He read so much about computers, he believed he *knew* all about them, though he knew nothing of Alan Turing. If it had been suggested to him that Alan Sugar was a vulgar money-grubber and Turing a real genius, he would have been speechless. Who was Turing? Was he a millionaire? Was he a businessman? Leggit read the *Daily Mail* from cover to cover and he'd never come across a word about Turing. But he believed he knew how to build a computer. When his neighbour's 486 went on the blink, he offered his services:

"I'll rebuild it for you. Be good as new in no time."

He took it home and dismantled it. It was as easy as boasting. Yet when he tried to replace the mother-board and to spark the thing up, it was as inert as money without a market. The screen stayed determinedly blank. The machine was as silent as a Trappist. Every day his neighbour asked him how things were coming along and every day he reassured her:

"Fine. Fine. Just one or two minor problems to finesse. It's very technical. I won't try to explain."

He became more and more desperate. Finally, he took it to a computer shop.

"I'm having a little problem with this," he said. "A friend of mine put a new mother-board in it and now it doesn't respond at all."

They kept it. Two days later they rang him.

"About your computer."

LEGGIT'S LEGITIMATE INTEREST

"Yes?"

"Some idiot's made a real mess of this."

"Can you get it going?"

"Oh, we can get it going all right. But it'll cost you."

"How much?"

"About six hundred quid."

"Christ!"

He retrieved it. Six hundred pounds was out of the question. He carried round to his neighbour and lowered it onto the kitchen table.

"Bad news, I'm afraid."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, I thought it was just the mother-board. That's usually what it is with this kind of problem. Unfortunately, in your case, someone has been abusing this machine."

"No-one's used it except me!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! What do you mean by abuse?"

"Well, modern computers are very complex. There are only a few of us in the world who really understand how they work. That's why Bill Gates is so rich, you see. Now, it's easy with such a complicated machine, in the hands of someone with no technical expertise, for the thing to be asked to do things it just isn't capable of."

"I've only used it for word-processing."

"I know. I know. It's hard for someone like yourself to understand, but believe me. This machine is ruined."

"Ruined?"

"Beyond repair."

"But you said you could fix it."

"Sharon, Steve Jobs himself couldn't fix this. Trust me. Buy yourself a new one. Get something state-of-the-art."

"That cost me five hundred quid! I can't afford another."

"Well, all you've got there, Sharon, is a very expensive paper-weight."

After that, Leggit gave up trying to build computers. All the same, he

prided himself on being able to *use* a computer more efficiently than anyone he knew. He tried to build a website for his business, but it looked appallingly amateurish, so he paid two thousand to have one professionally done, and told everyone he'd done it himself. Leggit was trying to break into the big time. He ran a corner shop selling vegetables, groceries, newspapers and wine which he imported himself from France. Every few weeks, he said goodbye to his wife and daughter and drove to Calais in his Transit, filled it with a selection of reds, whites and roses and came back to offer wine tastings and to sell what he'd bought cheap at great profit.

"The secret of business," he said to Caroline, "lies in domination."

"Make us a brew, will ya?" she said, and rolled over.

"Who else round here imports their own wine? That's what gives me the edge in the local market, you see. And if you've got the edge in the local market, there's no reason why you can't have the edge in the *global* market!"

He loved the word *global*. As often as he could, he'd use the term globalization in his conversation.

"Have you got any Cox's Pippins?" a pensioner would ask.

"Not today," he'd say. "I'm having trouble with the deliveries. It'll all be different once globalization has succeeded."

"Eh?"

"I say, globalization will make things more efficient."

"Efficient? There's nowt bloody efficient these days. And shall I tell ya why? Too much sex on the television. It's addled the brains of the young. This country's going to pot."

"The free market will sort it out, mark my words. Let business flourish and everyone will be better off."

"Business in't for't likes of me," said the pensioner, shuffling away empty-handed.

Leggit's problem was that a corner shop couldn't easily become part of the global market. There was always the chance he might become the next Lady Porter, but it could take a very long time. What he needed was an *idea*! He needed something he could put into the market and which would take off like a Harry Potter wizard. He needed something that would allow him to *dominate the market* and to *eliminate his rivals*. Didn't the Americans talk about *full spectrum*

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dominance and weren't they the richest nation on earth? He wracked his brains.

"What I need," he said to Caroline, "is a *killer* idea!"

"Pass us the tin opener, chuck," she said.

He handed it to her. It was one of those very simple tin openers you can buy for fifty pence in *Wilkos*.

"What happened to that state-of-the-art tin opener I bought?" he asked.

"It broke."

"Broke? That cost me ten quid!"

"They saw you comin', luv."

"Well, where is it?"

"In the bin."

"You didn't chuck it, Caroline! I might've been able to fix that."

"I don't think so. It was about as much use as a concrete mattress. They make 'em to break, that's how they get rich."

"That was a Conran. I bet David Beckham opens his beans with one of those."

"He'll go bloody hungry then. Fill the kettle will ya, chuck?"

Leggit was surprised at how gloomy the broken tin opener made him. It was the second *state-of-the-art* model he'd bought in six months and its failure rocked his faith in the absolute superiority of everything technically advanced and expensive. He concluded that Caroline, being only a woman and unable to understand the intricacies of mechanical things, had broken it through misuse. The idea was a sedative to his fraught nerves. It brought him back to his obsession: his need for an idea which could launch him onto the global scene. He was watching a report from Iraq where yet another car bomb planted by mad, ungrateful insurgents (what exactly was an insurgent?) had ripped bodies to pieces, created widows, orphans, distraught grandmothers, heartbroken fathers and left human flesh on the street, like so much litter after a busy Saturday in town, when a flash of inspiration came to him. Shock and awe! That was the stuff! Weren't those Asians round the corner up to something fishy? How come they managed to sell their veg so cheap? They must have some dodgy supplier, while he, the upright, straight, clean, Anglo-Saxon,

free-market, free-world, self-made-man had to buy from the regular wholesaler and couldn't make a profit at their prices. They were *distorting the market*. As a matter of fact, they were probably simply *crooked*, part of the Asian mafia. And were they Muslims? He had no idea. What was a Muslim? Were all Asians Muslims? In any case, the old guy wore a long white dress and had a beard like Bin Laden, so it was a fair guess they were Muslims. They might even be *terrorists*. After all, it's a small step from selling cut price veg to blowing up trains and buses.

"I've got it!" he said to Caroline.

"Is there any tomato puree in that cupboard?"

"It's the Muslims!"

"What's the Muslims?"

"The Muslims are holding me back."

"Don't talk soft. Have you found it?"

"Think about it!"

"Think about what?"

"How do they sell their veg so cheap?"

"Maybe they grow it themselves."

"Don't be ridiculous! It's obvious."

"What's obvious?"

"They're *criminals*!"

"Are they buggery. They run a bloody corner shop, Gordon, like you. Just find the tomato puree will ya!"

"They've got an illegal supply, that's how they do it."

"I don't think so, Gordon. They just stay open twenty-four hours, seven days a week and all the Asians shop there. They work bloody hard. You shut up and go to watch the football every second Saturday. You're never gonna beat Sainsbury's with that strategy."

"Football's important to me."

"Why not pay someone to mind the shop?"

"I can't afford it."

"Then accept your situation. *Parekh Stores* is open longer hours, that's how they make more money. Have you bloody found it?"

"It's not in here."

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“Get out the way!”

Caroline reached into the cupboard and pulled out the tube.

“Scotch mist?” she said.

“I know what I’m talking about,” he said.

“Good. Tea’ll be ready in ten minutes. Go next door and fetch Laura.”

On his way, Leggit dismissed his wife’s objections. She was just a woman, after all. And she was naïve, an idealist. She always tried to think well of people and give them the benefit of the doubt. What way was that to get on in the world? She understood nothing of the ways of power and business, while he, being a cut-throat businessman himself, knowing the sharp tricks and the sly ways, as a matter of fact, admiring a businessman for his ability to *get one over* on his rivals, well, he could see as clear as ugliness what those Asian terrorists were up to.

Laura was playing with Pragna in the little walled garden in front of her house. The two were inseparable, at school and out. Leggit looked at the lithe Asian child with her long, sleek, black hair, her wide brown eyes and her slightly crooked white teeth that always seemed to be on show as she hardly ever stopped smiling. Was she a Muslim? He’d never been curious to find out about his neighbours’ beliefs. Her dad, Bhavik, was a bus driver. He was friendly enough but didn’t drink and had no interest in football, so aroused no fellow-feeling in Leggit who liked a man who could swill six or seven and shout obscenities at a referee.

“Laura, your tea’s ready!”

“Just a minute, dad!”

“Never mind just a minute. Your tea’ll be getting cold.”

Bhavik came out of the front door, yawning. He was wearing sloppy black trousers and a crumpled green shirt.

“Just been napping, you know. Napping. Sat down to watch the news and fell asleep. Early shift today, you see. Knackered.”

“Yeah?” said Leggit.

“How are things down the shop?”

“Brilliant, mate. Fantastic. Couldn’t be better. I’m expanding, you know what I mean? Taking advantage of globalization.”

“Globalization? That’s a lot of crap, innit?”

“Crap, mate? It’s the future. Markets. It’s about a world market, and those who get in on the ground floor are gonna make it big, pal. And when I say big I mean big, you know what I mean?”

“It’s just America, innit? They want to rule the world. All this war in Iraq an’ that . They just want the oil, innit? That’s what I think, you know. It’s George Bush, innit? All for the rich he is.”

“There’s no resistin’ it, mate. It’s the comin’ thing, you know what I mean? When somethin’ takes off you’ve gotta go with the flow or get left behind. Look at Harry Potter. It’s a big thing. You can’t hold it back. I’m gonna be part of it, mate.”

Bhavik was stretching sleepily and rubbing his eyes. Leggit wondered if he might have some useful information.

“Hey, you know *Parekh’s Stores*?”

“Sure.”

“Are they Muslims?”

“Muslims? I don’t know. I don’t know the family.”

Leggit was surprised. He thought, somehow, all Asians must know one another.

“Come on, Laura, tea-time!”

The child skipped along with her father.

“What’s for tea, dad?”

But Leggit didn’t heed her question. His mind was thickened with thoughts of how to eliminate his rivals. He sat down opposite Laura who was twisting spaghetti around her fork.

“Mmm, pasta! I love it, do you, dad?”

“Yeah.”

There was no doubt *Parekh’s Stores* was his main rival, and if they were undercutting him by illegal means, didn’t he have the right to retaliate? The idea seemed wonderfully simple and Leggit craved simplicity. Sometimes, when he heard talk of globalization and inward investment in developing economies and so on, he felt very small and weak. There were people *out there* who knew the game. They were the wizards who controlled the world. Wizards? Harry Potter! Yes, it all fitted together. No wonder the book was such a success. It was true, life for most people was dull and drab. People

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had no control over anything; they just went about doing what they were supposed to do, doing, in fact, the bidding of the wizards who run the world. It depressed him to think he was one of the weak people, the people with no influence. It was terrible to spend your life not understanding how the world was run, not *controlling* anything. He wanted to be a wizard. He wanted to make things happen. But he was thwarted. He'd worked in his corner shop for eleven years and all he did was make enough to keep the family ticking over. He'd dreamed of expansion. One store can easily become two and two four and four eight. Isn't that how *Sainsbury's* became so big? What was the secret? Wasn't it only that something was standing in his way? He seemed to be getting nowhere. He was a businessman. He was prepared to be ruthless. He wanted money, big money. And yet it didn't happen. Wasn't it supposed to fall into place? Wasn't this supposed to be a society of *opportunity*? Something was wrong. He'd heard Tony Blair on the television saying terrorists were trying to destroy our way of life. There were evil forces out there and he felt they were restricting him. As a matter of fact, they were out to *destroy* him. At this very moment those terrorists from *Parekh's Stores* might be plotting to set fire to his shop. Who knows what weapons they might have? Maybe they had a direct line to Osama Bin Laden himself. Supposing al-Qaida was plotting to take over all the corner shops in Britain. Imagine that! Weren't most of them run by Asians anyway? Maybe the whole corner shop culture among the Asians was nothing but an Islamic fundamentalist front. Sooner or later they would own all the supermarkets and they'd be selling the *Koran* and prohibiting wine. Wine! Yes, that's what they'd do. They'd close down his little sideline and he'd lose his neat income. Blair was right! These people were trying to destroy his way of life. This was a fight to the death. There could be no compromise with these fanatics. They were irrational. They didn't think like us. No, it was victory or death. What would the world be like if these people won? Life wouldn't be worth living. That was the point. It was a simple choice: our way of life or *no life at all!*

"What's for afters?" said Laura.

"Rice pudding," replied her mother.

"Yummy! My favourite. Is it your favourite, dad?"

"Yes," he mumbled through a mouthful of pasta.

After tea, Leggit took a little walk. He went past *Parekh's Stores*. It was open, as ever. Didn't those people ever sleep? Didn't they ever have a holiday? No, of course they didn't. Terrorists *never* sleep! He retraced his steps and went in. The tiny shop was packed with produce. By the little counter were boxes full of vegetables: sweet potatoes, okra, aubergines, carrots, cabbages, cauliflowers. There were yams and mangoes. At the back of the store, great bulging sacks of rice were piled to the ceiling. There were industrial tins of tomatoes or curry sauce, five litre tubs of natural yoghurt, huge misshapen chunks of ginger, fat bunches of garlic, taut plastic packets of turmeric, rust-coloured curry powder and paprika. But what interested him was the rear door. He could see it wasn't too robust. He bought a lemon from the old guy at the counter who spoke virtually no English, and left.

As he was about to fall asleep, Caroline beside him already breathing rhythmically in her doze, an idea shook him awake. Into his head came the image of himself and his mates, aged fourteen, climbing into the toilets on Wolsley Park, planting the little homemade device, lighting the fuse and running for it to hide behind trees as the green door blew off and smoke billowed out into the dusk. It was a stupid act, but they were young. The important thing was the bomb. Simplicity itself: a length of copper pipe, weedkiller and sugar. The next day he searched in the shed and ferreted out a good length of copper pipe which he cut down to size with a hacksaw. He closed the shop at twelve and, saying nothing to Caroline, nipped into town for weedkiller. The sugar he took from his own shelves. In the little yard behind the shop he hammered closed one end of the pipe, mixed the two chemicals (he tried to remember the bit of chemistry he'd learned at school but all that would come back to him was something about hydrogen having one proton or neutron or nucleus or something) poured them with great care into the pipe, fearing that any moment they might react and blow off his hand, fitted a length of string soaked in petrol as a fuse and hammered closed the other end. Perfect! The neat little bomb rested gently in his palm. He was proud of his handiwork. It made him think of the great days of British rule when, by virtue of superiority in skill, invention and firepower, Englishmen had dominated the globe. He felt himself to be one of them, those great men of bygone times who had made England rich and powerful. It was only a small, homemade bomb, but with it he could fight back against the incursion of terrorism. He knew that taking the

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law into his own hands was a dangerous course, but weren't we at war, after all? Didn't he hear everyday on the TV. of *the war on terror*? And were the Americans playing by the rules in Iraq? You can't trust people like Bin Laden to fight fair so you've got to fight dirty before they get the chance to do you real harm. It was true he might set their shop alight and people could be killed, but was it possible to stand for the free market, for *our way of life*, without being willing to kill people for *the greater good*? Leggit had been a good citizen all his adult life. He'd worked, taken his family to church, voted in every election, and where had it got him? There were drug dealers in his area driving round in BMW convertibles. It was an insult. What was it all about? Why get up every day and do your job and try to be responsible when criminals get rich overnight? And now there was the Taliban and Bin Laden and thousands of Islamic terrorists and we were having to fight for our survival. Those Islamists round the corner were preventing him from expanding, they were standing in the way of his *full spectrum dominance*. If *Parekh's Stores* closed down, their business would come his way. That would be a lot of people. It was simple economics. The Americans needed oil to protect their way of life and Leggit needed customers.

At two in the morning he pulled back the duvet with surgical precision.

"Where you going?" said Caroline.

"Bathroom."

He crept along the landing, looked at himself in the mirror and flushed the toilet. He would have to go back to bed. At the head of the stairs he hesitated, then he padded quickly down, grabbed a pair of jeans and a t-shirt from the wash basket in the kitchen, pulled on his trainers and his outdoor jacket, grabbed his keys and left by the back door. It was quite warm under the cloudy sky. The street was as quiet as a spider. He liked being out while everyone was in bed. It reminded of his paper round as a teenager. It always gave him a feeling of power, being on the street before the day had started. He went quickly to the shop and picked up the bomb, slipping it inside his coat. Turning the corner into Stefano St he was amazed to see the lights on in *Parekh's Stores*! Did they really stay open twenty fours hours a day? He pulled up his hood and went quickly past. The old guy was behind the counter. He could nip round the back, light the fuse and skedaddle. But the codger would ring the police and the car

might be there in minutes and if they passed him running down Mill Hill

He took the bomb back to the shop and jogged home.

“Where’ve you bin?”

“I thought I heard somethin’.”

“Heard what?”

“I dunno. Someone creeping round the house.”

“A cat, you fool. What took you so long?”

“I thought I’d have a look down the street, see if I could see anyone.”

“Who were you expectin’, the Easter bunny?”

“Better safe than sorry.”

“Better asleep than playing cops and robbers at two o’clock in the mornin’.”

The next day, business was slow. It was one of those Thursdays when a bloke nips in for a *Daily Mirror* and doesn’t buy any fags, a woman comes in for a pint of semi-skimmed, talks for twenty minutes and ignores her child’s insistent demands for chocolate. He locked up and went round the corner. A huddle of Asian women were chatting outside *Parekh’s*. He walked past and looking in the window could see at least half a dozen customers. Was that unfair competition? They were keeping their prices low till he was out of business, then they’d shove them up. People would be sorry when his shop closed. But that was human nature. When though, would he get a chance to plant the bomb?

He went back to his shop and made himself a cup of tea. He was drinking it and idly scanning a piece in the *Sun* about how Muslims hate the British police, when he remembered the cellar. He put down his cup, turned the key in the creaking white door, flicked on the neon light that spluttered like a heart about to fibrillate and kicked in brightly, and went quickly down the stone steps. Because the cellars were prone to flooding, the Victorians had built little trap-door outlets that gave onto a trench about three feet deep which carried the water away. He pulled open the iron door that weighed more than guilt, crouched down and squeezed himself through. There was a trickle of nasty-smelling water in the trench. He ignored it and went on his hands and knees into the darkness. He wondered for a second if he should go back for a torch, but his excitement was too much.

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He shuffled along, panting, catching his head on the bricks above him, his trousers soaking. At length he heard voices above. Asians! This was the spot. He needed to leave something to remind him. He could barely get his hands in his pockets, but they were empty anyway. There was nothing else for it. With his right foot he worked loose his left shoe. It was impossible for him to turn round, so he went in reverse. It was terribly difficult and at moments he wondered if he hadn't strayed along a branching track. His heart beat madly. But eventually he backed into his own cellar to hear a voice calling:

"Shop! Hello! Are you open?"

He hobbled up the stairs and emerged into the light, one shoe on and one shoe off, like in the nursery rhyme, his trousers dripping, his hands and face black, and blood trickling down his left cheek from a scratch on his head.

"Good God!" said the customer, an old guy who came in now and again for a tin of beans "Have you been robbed?"

"Robbed? No, I've just been looking for something in the cellar."

"You're bleeding!"

"Aye, caught me head on the door frame. What can I get for you?"

"You'd better take care of yourself, mate. You've only got one shoe."

"Have I?" said Leggit, looking down at his feet, "that's funny."

When he looked up the customer had gone. He went to the cubby-hole washroom and cleaned himself up. He found a pair old trainers he'd been meaning to throw away, blew off the cobwebs and put them on. Back in the shop with another cup of tea he waited for customers. After half an hour, a woman came in, talking to herself.

"Bastards, fucking bastards, bastards!" she was saying.

"Can I 'elp ya, luv?" he asked.

"I 'ear you've been burgled."

"No, no! Nothing's happened 'ere. I just 'ad a bit of a problem in't cellar."

"It'll be those bastards!" she said. "I can't get 'em out of my house!"

She walked around the shop for ten minutes cursing and imploring unseen forces, before leaving having bought nothing.

Ten minutes later two young boys came in.

“What can we buy for ten p?” one of them asked.

“Ten p each?” said Leggit.

“No, ten p.”

“Not much. Can’t you ask your mum for a bit more?”

“Can I have a packet of crisps?”

“They’re thirty-eight p!”

“I’ll bring ya twenty-eight p tomorra.”

“No, go and get it now.....”

The kid grabbed the packet, slapped the coin down on the counter and the two of them sprinted out and down the street at Olympic pace. Leggit went impotently after them shouting:

“I’ll call the police!”

Back inside he reflected that inviting the police onto the premises wasn’t a good idea. But was he doing anything wrong? It was against the *law*, sure. So what? Weren’t they saying the Iraq war was illegal? The point was, he had *legitimate interests* to defend, just like the Americans. Who could argue against that? When it came down to it, everything was a matter of superior force. The strong rule the world and the strong always win. That was simple. But he realised that one bomb wouldn’t be enough. Planted outside their back door, it might blow it off its hinges and start a nice little fire that would quickly catch, but down there it would need a good explosion to blast the floor away and turn their shop into rubble. He’d need maybe six, eight or perhaps a dozen devices. He bought copper pipe from the plumbers’ merchant, stocked up with weedkiller and discreetly assembled ten sturdy, impressive explosives. He felt he was part of something much grander than a mere scheme to blow up a corner shop. Like those American troops in Iraq, powering through the streets in their *Humvees*, fearsome as charging rhinos, dressed in their combats and wearing shades like Hollywood stars, he was fighting for justice, democracy and freedom for *our way of life*! It brought a feeling of humility: to be a player in something so important was truly humbling.

He went home for his tea.

Sitting at the table with Caroline and Laura, eating, for the second time that week, baked potato, cheese and beans it seemed heroic that he had to keep his secret from them. Of course, he was doing it for

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his family. He imagined customers streaming through his door, queuing to be served while he chivvied his staff to be more efficient. Little by little, his lines would become more varied and adventurous; the fame of his modest store would spread through the town and people from the well-heeled suburbs would arrive in the BMWs and Mercedes to buy his wines or the curious delicacies he would import from Turkey or Madagascar. He would buy the house next door and expand but soon he would be forced to open another shop and another and before long he'd commission a supermarket made to his own design, on a site with plenty of room for parking and open aspects, so once their shopping was done people could take a walk in a little corner of nature. He would specialize in fresh local produce and this, combined with his judicious imports, would win him an enviable reputation. In expensive restaurants, over lunches lasting till four, he would discuss with venture capitalists the investment needed for the expansion of his empire. Twenty stores across the region would see him living in a big house in the country. He'd buy a farm, have all the buildings demolished and erect one of those red-brick palaces with white pillars at the front door and a sweeping drive down to the electronically operated gates guarded by two fierce, well-fed Rottweillers. There'd be a horse and stables for Laura, of course, an indoor pool and a full-sized football pitch where Rooney and Ronaldo would have a kick around after a summer barbecue. In the double garage there'd be a Rolls, a Mercedes for Caroline and enough room to tuck in an Audi A2 as a runabout for Laura as soon as she turned seventeen. When his stores moved south, colonizing the old industrial areas of the Black Country; springing up in the relaxed suburbs where young entrepreneurs of the communication revolution moved to get their children into the best schools; eventually arriving in London where he would provide swish convenience outlets off *Oxford St* or *The Strand* frequented by busy, important people who would relish his range of sandwiches and snacks; then he'd float on the Stock Exchange and, retaining a majority holding, would see his fortune swell like a force-fed goose until an aggressive bid would be made and he'd sell for two, three, four, five, who could say how many billion, buy himself an island, invite Richard Branson for his holidays and basking in the sun, a bottle of Bollinger leaning cheekily against the side of the ice-bucket, Laura and her friends from the best private schools frolicking in the pool and Caroline ordering furnishings from around the globe on her mobile, would con-

sider moving into airlines, or banking or perhaps would buy up steel mills or mines in China.

“Can I have some pop, dad?” said Laura.

“You can have all the pop you like,” he replied.

At four in the morning he got up.

“Where you going now?”

“I thought I heard something.”

“You’re hallucinating. Get back into bed you silly bugger.”

“I’ll just check.”

He pulled on an old track suit which he hadn’t worn since the time he’d trained for the London marathon and given himself a rupture, slipped out of the back door and ran to his shop. The copper pipes with fuses already fitted were piled behind the cellar door. He tucked them under his arm, checked he’d got matches and went down. Dragging through the trench with the weight of the bombs under one arm was a painful struggle, but the dream of his future and the righteousness of his cause drove him forward. The stone hurt his knees and he wished he’d thought to put on pads. Where was the shoe he’d left as a marker? He seemed to have been squeezing along for hours. He could see nothing. He had to feel every inch of the way. Just when he was almost convinced the shoe must have been taken away by a rat, he felt it beneath his hand. He stopped and let his breathing calm. Not a sound. Was the old man up there, sitting behind the scruffy counter pulling at his white beard? What did it matter? So much the better if the building fell and crushed him. These people were criminals. They were terrorists. He had the evidence: they undercut him on almost every product. It was a disgrace the police hadn’t shut them down. But he was justified. All across the world Islamists were planting bombs. On the TV every day you saw some new atrocity. They were ruthless and vicious people and they were *here*. They were running corner shops and planning to take over the world .

He laid the explosives cross-wise over the little stream of damp. But how to light the fuses? By the time he lit the last, the first might have burnt down and he would take the blast full in the face. He arranged the petrol-soaked strings so they converged at their end and squeezed them between his thumb and forefinger. He’d brought a box of long matches which he wrestled from his pocket. As he was about to drag

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the sulphured end along the sandpaper, he realized the momentousness of his action. He could still stop. He could go home to bed. He could get on with his little life as shopkeeper, father and husband and let the wizards rule the world. But why should he? Why shouldn't he do something historical? Why should he be a nobody living out a life of no significance? He struck the match. It gave enough light for him at last to be able to use his eyes. He set the flame to the fuse ends. They took and at once he realised that he'd got to get out fast. He began shuffling madly backwards. He clonked his head and scraped his elbows and knees. He could see the fire rapidly eating away the inflammable rats-tail fuses. He worked frantically to get himself away. In which direction would the blast fire? He'd no idea. Would it bring down the building above or would it shoot along the trench and set him alight? He began to panic. Sweat broke out all over him and he couldn't hold back little whimpering cries which surprised and alarmed him. He pushed harder and harder but his progress seemed to slow. Then the blasts went off, one after another. He heard each one distinctly though there was no more than a second or so between each. The force knocked him flat and the smoke choked him. The skin of his face and hands was burning. He began to sob. For a few moments he thought he was going to die, down there, alone, his wife a widow, his daughter fatherless. The fumes were tightening his chest. But he fought to keep going and inched his way back till the light from the trap-door gave him relief. He dragged himself up into the cellar. Someone was banging. The door. Was it the police? He saw himself hauled off to the station, the headlines in the *Evening News*, the shameful trial, the long prison sentence. What had he done? Dismayed, he clambered the stairs. He was coughing and retching. He needed fresh air. He yanked open the shop door and stumbled into the street and there, his face alive with dismay, was the old guy from *Parekh's*. There were two younger men with him, in their night clothes.

"What happened?" one of them said.

"Gas," said Leggit, not knowing where the words came from. "Gas explosion in the cellar."

"We'd better call the police."

"No!" protested Leggit "No, unsafe premises. They might close me down. Please. Keep it quiet. I'll get it sorted."

“You should go to the hospital. Look at your hands.”

Leggit looked down at his parched, blackened skin.

“It’s nothin’,” he muttered. “Thanks for your help. I’ll be okay. Honest. I’ll be fine.”

“Come round the corner to our shop. We’ll clean you up.”

Leggit locked his door and went unwillingly. They sat him in their little kitchen lit by an unshaded 60 watt and bathed his hands and face in cool water. They made him a cup of tea and asked if they should ring his family. Their kind attentiveness made him sob. He hung his head on his chest and cried uncontrollably. After an hour, they helped him into their battered old Honda and drove him home.

“Where the hell have you been!”

“At the shop.”

“What for?”

“I was checking.”

“Why did you come home by car?”

“There’s been a bit of a mishap.”

“What kind of mishap?”

“An explosion.”

“Have you called the police?”

“No.”

“Well don’t you think you should?”

“Not unless you want to visit me in Wormwood Scrubs.”

“What?”

“I’ll tell ya tomorra.”

He climbed into bed and curled up, his back to her. His face and hands were still stinging. The tears welled. His bottom lip trembled. He fell asleep at six.

When he woke up, Caroline had gone. He rushed into his clothes and went downstairs but she wasn’t there. Looking in the mirror, he saw his reddened face, as if he’d been under a sun-lamp too long. He hurried to the shop. Caroline was serving a young woman.

“Have you been in the cellar?” he asked.

“Yes.”

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"You should've left it to me."

"The trap door's still open. It smells terrible."

He went down and poked his head through the trap door. The stench of smoke, fire and chemicals was awful. He closed it up and went back upstairs. The shop was empty.

"You go home, I'll look after things," he said.

"What the hell have you been doin'?"

"Nothin'. It was gas. I'll get it looked at. Best keep it quiet. Don't want any trouble."

"Best seal that trap-door up if you ask me."

She picked up her bag, gave him a look and left.

Leggit rang one of his mates, an electrician who could turn his hand to anything practical.

"You couldn't give us a hand could you, Bill? Bit of a problem at't shop."

The next day, Bill tore off the cast-iron trap-door and bricked up the aperture.

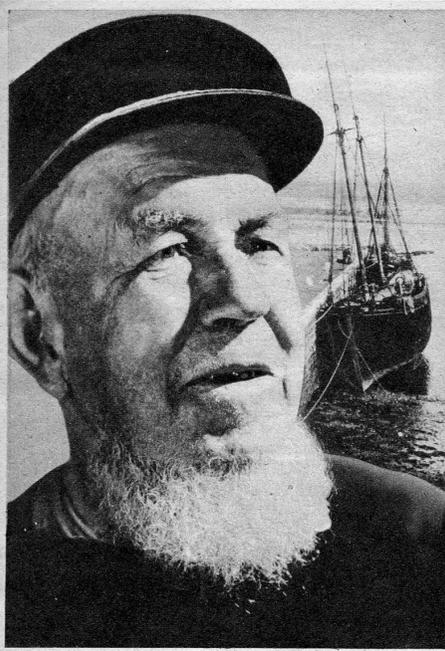
"Smells like the old weedkiller and sugar bombs down there!" he said.

"Yeah," said Leggit, "I was messin' around, remindin' meself of the old days. Say nowt to Caroline. She thinks it was gas."

A week later, Leggit went round to *Parekh's* with a big box of *Milk Tray* and a card.

"Thanks for you 'elp," he said. "Best keep the matter quiet though. Know what I mean?"

They smiled, shook his hand and graciously accepted his gift and on his way home Leggit reflected that they weren't bad folk after all, even if they were criminals and terrorists.



“Tell me, doctor... that stuff you used for my Mate's arm—it's done a power of good, cleared up in no time. What was it?”

Able seaman Peter Gurney was swimming in the Portsmouth dock when HMS Sheffield passed over him and cut off his right arm. Luckily he had his trusty bottle of Dettol to hand and quickly dabbed the stump and the severed limb before it was dragged away by the destroyer. A year later the Sheffield returned to port after a circumnavigation of the earth. Gurney again dived under the ship and found his arm, now encrusted with barnacles, wedged under the rudder. He recovered the limb and took it to Portsmouth General where Dr Ishaque Mahood re-attached it. “After we cleaned it up it looked like new—thanks to Dettol!” said the surgeon. Within two weeks Gurney was once more in The Admiral Benbow using the restored arm to lift pints of his favourite scrumpy. And later he found he could once more indulge himself in a J Arthur in front of the gas fire before retiring. “I owe it all to Dettol!” said Gurney.

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From all
Chemists



'DETTOL'
TRADE MARK
THE MODERN ANTISEPTIC

SLOVAKIA DAYS

Keith Meredith

PART 1

Picture this: the living room of a flat in a 1950's block in Trencin, Western Slovakia. It is late afternoon on a weekday in the Spring of 1968. There is a window through which a pole-mounted street loud-speaker can be seen along with a street lamp in the foreground, several other similar blocks behind, with hills in the distance. The room, sparsely furnished, has a general feeling of emptiness with a sort of semi-glamorous modernist bare adequacy. There is a television set, a radiogram and a wall-fitment with display areas behind glass panels, in which are a few carefully arranged photographs, books etc. amidst much empty space.

The walls are bare but for the emblem of Slovakia - hill surmounted by cross with two horizontal bars with a smaller hill each side - and a framed certificate, headed 'Diplom'.

Anna enters straight from work on her forty-sixth birthday. She looks cheerfully through three or four birthday cards. These are in the form of picture postcards, not folded or in envelopes. After a few moments her husband Vladimir ("Vlad") enters, also straight from work. He carries some sort of old leather or fabric shoulder bag from which he takes a small item wrapped as a present and a white cardboard box with ribbons.

"For my beautiful wife." He gives her the present and hugs her.

"I wish I were" She opens present, an item of jewellery. "You shouldn't have ..."

"That's nothing" They embrace and Vlad goes to a non-display compartment of the fitment and gets a bottle of Slivovice plum brandy and suitable glassed.

"Here's to you!"

"To both of us", Anna replied and the glasses are downed. After a pause Vlad says,

"I wonder how our Vladko's getting on in England."

"We've got a telegram from him!" She takes it from her handbag and reads aloud:

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOTHER STOP HOPE YOU AND DAD WELL STOP THINGS FINE IN BIRMINGHAM STOP YOUR LOVING SON VLADKO".

"Sounds hopeful doesn't it "said Vlad -"Seems so recently he was just a little boy, even his birth on the first day of the Povstanie."

"August 29th 1944: no, we'll not forget that! And I'm glad I was doing what was important and necessary in those days - starting the family. And you did the right thing too - being with me in those first weeks ".

"If, when we were twenty, we had looked forward, tried to imagine what it would be like now -it's definitely better than we thought isn't it"..

"That's a strange question" replied Anna,..

"Yes suppose it is - though it's difficult to separate the well-being and vitality in one's own body and mind from what's going on around us - and that hasn't exactly been better than I'd hoped."

"But there's times like now when we can shut it all out and just be ourselves together "

"Yes - though sometimes it can be in dreams only".

"Anyway: let's hope that these current changes don't foul things up", Vlad replied. Anna quickly gets up to turn the radio on: the programme is a mixture of Slovak folk songs and rather sickly, light music. Returning to her seat she gave her own take on the changes:

"But it's their spirit that's all around us: Vladko's been able to go abroad for a month, and we can hope... that we can vote for who we want to vote for, that we can turn on the radio simply because we like the programme on - and that we can really know what's going on".

"We need more freedom right enough: I'll back you a hundred percent on that. But I'm old enough and ugly enough to know that, if you're being offered something, check, check and check again that nothing important's going to be taken away: like plenty of jobs, a decent pension and a proper health service; finance to help young

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people like Vladko get to college in the first place. Some of the reformers really do support a democratic socialism, but intermingled in with them there's others...I daresay they'd claim their policies were compassionate, socially responsible an' all that but the unemployment and division their policies would create, the cold and hunger of a lot of older people, they'd all be just the same as if they'd simply said outright what they believed in and had done with it. This idea of trying to attract West German capital - that scares me. It's a capitalist country, much more powerful than us, and they'd be wanting something for their money: what are they playing at! If it were East Germany I could go along with it. This economic competition business; how can we have socialism and competition at the same time: it doesn't make sense. Either they don't know what they're talking about or they're lying - or are they talking about 'Socialist Competition' again?"

"No, they won't have "Socialist Competition": whatever else they are they're not Stalinists".

Anna refills their glasses and Vlad says:

"Let's turn to more pleasant things. So, you've got a letter from your Mum and Dad. How's things with them in the beautiful Beskidy?"

"They're both well and looking forward to our visit. They've been having good weather. The Spring flowers are beautiful, and the cherry trees and fruit bushes are doing O.K. Should be a good harvest this year".

"Yeah, it's good of them to let us have all that fruit every year, though getting it back here's a problem: half-hour walk to the station there an' so on. Never mind, if things go on as they are we should get a car in two years."

"Do you think so? While you help me with the work - it's me that preserves and bottles all the fruit. Slovakia would grind to a halt if it weren't for its women. But I'm lucky in having you as a husband: you're a good man — as men go".

"What d'you mean, 'as men go'? O.K it's pretty impressive, your fruit preserving effort. Sometimes when I go to that cupboard to get an old newspaper —"

"You and your old newspapers! If you had your own way you'd

never throw away a single copy of Bratislavská Pravda . Old magazines, old tram tickets, postage stamps - old papers of all sorts: should we apply for a larger apartment to house these - archives?"

"You store the old Slovak dresses and musical instruments for that cultural outfit you're in".

"Don't come up with that one again. They're of recognised cultural significance, used in our events and endorsed by the National Committee - and also available for Vladko's wedding, as and when".

"Yeah: still no regular girl friend: he's slipping! Never mind, there's still time ...this trip abroad: it'll give him more self-confidence... I've got an idea".

"About what?"

"Well, you know recently, instead of keeping one archival-type item each week, I've cut it down to one every month-"

"I should hope so: not before time".

"Well, I could go through all the old stuff and randomly select a third of the items and throw away the rest, unless there was something you or I really thought worth keeping. Reading through the old stuff is interesting: keeps me occupied on evenings when you're out at your cultural meetings 'n that."

"Now you're talking": She embraces him again.

"Anyway, I was going to say: Whenever I open that cupboard I'm always impressed by the jars of preserved fruit. They really do last us through the winter."

"That's it: most work is done by women. Anyway, it's time we dressed up a bit - and had some of the cake". That they do, and manage to feel a real sense of occasion, albeit just the two of them and just in their own home . Now they've put a vinyl record on the turntable: ballroom dance music and they dance to it. The sun is setting now, the blue mercury vapour streetlight is flickering in to life and the record, one of the old seven-inch 45 jobs, finishes and Anna says

"Time for another drink,"

"Cheers!"

Vlad replies "Once again Happy Birthday! Forty-six: still a young

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age...this must be our third nip..."

"It is, but who's counting...!" So far as Vlad was concerned, there was something good about being in their best clothes on occasion: kind of romantic, sexy. Anyway, they were both happy. By this time the street loudspeaker atop its pole was silhouetted directly against the setting sun and they both noticed it. Vlad said:

"Wonder what our local loudspeaker has to say to us?"

"You mean: the Oracle of Trencin". They then, having just about remembered to take the precaution of re-playing the record on the turntable, engage in fantasy take off the loudspeaker:

"Citizens of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Townspeople of Trencin - all fifty thousand of you! The following is decreed: There will be no censorship, all will be entitled to travel abroad as they wish-"

Vlad added:

"All workplaces will be organised non-hierarchically with full participation of all employees -There will be friendship and economic co-operation with East Germany" Anna rejoined:

"Slovakia is declared an independent sovereign State."

Together they finish by saying:

"Long Live the K.S.C.- Communist Party of Czechoslovakia".

Now they listen to the radio simply because they like the music being broadcast.

THE TRIP

Nigel Ford

It had rained for two years.

We had come up here in the mountains for the skiing, hoping to escape the rain. And it was true, at first there was no rain. On arrival the sky was a pale wash blue, commencing the fade into night which came with much star sparkle. The hunting and skiing lodge was built in an estate of hunting and skiing lodges of varying shapes and sizes and designed as a two apartment building with a holiday flat on the first floor. All covered in thick new snow.

The door of the ground floor owner's flat opened as we shuffled our belongings from our cars into the lodge.

"I don't like noise," she informed us. Her dog yapped in the hallway behind.

We went to bed quickly, tired from the journey, remarking that the dog on the ground floor seemed to bark a lot. We opened a window into the freezing air and listened. Dogs were barking all around. It seemed to be normal.

In the morning I rose early. I swung my legs out onto the thick pine flooring and levered up. I'm fairly heavy and tend to creak first thing. Took a step. The dog downstairs barked. Stood still. The dog stopped barking. Took another step. The dog barked. Stood still, the dog stopped barking. I awarded myself a mental shrug and walked, creaking and serenaded by barking, into the kitchen to make coffee.

The coffee percolator was located beneath the kitchen window. The rain had started again.

It rained all day. We stayed in and played cards. Any movement provoked the dog below to bark. Occasionally the landlady would thump on the ceiling and yell "Quiet!" We ignored her.

Next morning the rain had stopped but washed most of the snow away and what was left had frozen to ice.

By the time I had fixed coffee it had started to rain again.

I walked down to the small mountain town and the bus station. On the board next to the ticket office window was a large notice in red and primitive calligraphy announcing the snow depth as 170 cm for the 29/3 which was the day we arrived. This had been crossed out

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and a notice in black letters, pre-printed had been pasted across this saying “No More Snow!!!” and dated yesterday.

I hailed a policeman standing nearby who said it was a serious state of affairs. He ran off while I was still talking to him because he could hear someone shouting. Then came running back, face sweaty, eyes excited.

“I’m taking that trip! An unbeatable bargain!”

I asked where to.

“Shippingdale. On a shopping trip by coach. For practically nothing. Look there – on the notice board!”

Perhaps there would be a trip for me? Although I did not fancy shopping.

Just then a man in a beautiful grey suit, black patent leather shoes, all this adorned with an open, dark-brown, long suede coat with a fur collar, approached and asked:

“Are there any archaeological trips available. I seem to have lost my glasses and am unable to read the notices.”

I was struck by his largeness and contrasting frailty.

The notice board offers included a promising looking trip to some coastal tombs on the edge of the desert. He said that was fine.

I said I would go too. And why not indeed? From a disappointing skiing holiday to a burning sun on a restless beach with bones and stones on the edge of the desert. It sounded good to me.

My companion introduced himself as Mr Atkinson. On arrival we walked to the edge of the catwalk running along the open tombs and looked at the clean bones at the bottom. A passage disappeared into a high sand hill and obedient tourists walked down the passage, disappearing into the hot darkness of the cavern.

Prefacing the stretch of the sea was a boiling surf; not a calm spot to be seen all along the beach that stretched, straight as a dye, to the bend of the earth. The blinding white sand and the dun coloured surf and far out, further than eternity, the deep blue-green of the refreshing sea.

“I’m going for a swim!” exclaimed the large, fragile Mr Atkinson.

“Be careful,” I cautioned. Not liking the look of that ferocious brown surf.

Mr Atkinson walked steadily into the surf and stood there for a while, looking at the unattainable, smooth blue-green sea and then lay down in the surf and seemed pleased.

"The water's very nice," he called. Then shrugged off the long dark brown suede coat with its fur collar. Just then the whistle blew for our party to start our tour of the tombs. Rising out of the surf, Mr Atkinson started to walk up onto the beach.

Two school girls appeared, lay down on a nearby dune and spied on Mr Atkinson. Chins supported by hands, cheeks pushed up, squinting, unmerciful eyes. Watched him walking out of the sea in the immaculate grey silk suit and black patent leather shoes. They giggled and I was afraid he would hear and be sorely injured. We watched together, myself ever apprehensive of the cruel girls.

On gaining the beach, he looked down at his clothing, which had dried immediately, and then twisted his head and looked down at the tail flap of the jacket. One side was sticking up. He frowned, tugged the flap straight and strode up the white sand. The brown shadow of the suede overcoat hung in the water.

"You've forgotten your coat," I shouted.

The girls pealed with laughter and I addressed them sharply.

"This is not a laughing matter!"

"Why not, he's funny," protested one.

"No, he's not funny," I corrected her. "You're bad-mannered and cruel. Go and fetch the coat. Give it to him and apologise for laughing. At once!"

They scampered off surprisingly acquiescent. I felt wise and full of confidence and authority, then wondered if I had scared the living daylights out of them and should be feeling remorseful at my own lack of tolerance. At this moment a young woman approached, parents walking behind. I took out an apple and our eyes met. Without hesitation she bit into the apple. I felt immediate release.

"Do you suppose she means it?" I asked her parents.

"She's a quick mover, but very sure of herself," said the mother. "Mature for her age."

"All right?" I asked the father, who had a long, thin, hooked nose.

"Welcome," he said. "Delighted."

We caught the plane back to their home on the eastern seaboard of a

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country far away.

Sat around a careful table of polished mahogany set with silver candleabra and waited while the daughter ate the apple.

Finished, she got up and left the room.

The parents looked at each other, reached out to each other across the table, and held hands.

I sipped my coffee and sat at the kitchen table and continued to watch the rain.



Illustrated 1941

OLYMPIAS

John Royson

Vernon Kushlik was overweight when the craze for jogging started. His suits were no longer big enough, and when he wore a T-shirt one of his colleagues rather unkindly compared him to a pregnant gorilla. His wife Julia was overweight too, though she knew that her own fleshiness could be squeezed into low cut dresses and presented as a social asset. But Vernon was worried. When the children had been packed off to tennis lessons on Sunday morning he and Julia took the newspapers back to bed and read all about solicitors, computer programmers, and journalists who were exercising their way back to a healthy life.

"It's true" Vernon admitted ruefully, "We've let ourselves go," But Julia felt insulted.

"Speak for yourself!" she said, "And if you've got to resort to that sort of infantilism - poncing about the streets in running shorts - I'd sooner have a good time and die young." She lit another cigarette to emphasise the point.

In fact neither of them was actually fat or unhealthy, but they had reached those years of middle life when every pleasure had to be paid for twice. Every late night, every dinner party or extra bottle of wine seemed to add weight and put deeper shadows under their eyes. It was more difficult to recover next morning, and age weighed like a thick coating of fat around the heart. They began to feel that life was hard work, and that some earlier joys were now missing from it. Yet they had once been beautiful young people.

Their early twenties had been spent amidst the flowers, kaftans, and marijuana smokers of the nineteen sixties at university together. Vernon had shoulder length hair and a handsome face. Julia was the most attractive girl in the department, and she got a first class degree as well. Radical sociology plunged them into the political activism of the seventies; they joined pressure groups, served on committees, and became 'community activists'. Vernon taught at the Polytechnic and Julia worked as a co-ordinator for social services. They had lived together for a long time in a rambling ground floor flat, but when

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eventually children arrived they got married and moved into a big Victorian house which they restored tastefully and filled with period furniture. It was here that they built the foundation of their adult lives and developed interests which previously they had only thought suitable for old fogies. Julia fell in love with gardening, became a vegetarian, and from this went on to organic self-sufficiency almost as a way of life. She baked her own bread, wove cloth, and organised the local group of 'Natural Childbirth'. At the same time however she secretly ate lots of cream cakes and couldn't give up smoking.

Vernon was chagrined at having animal protein excluded from his diet, but he was able to join the drive to home production when he discovered his passion for wine. The cellars were re-whitewashed, he stocked his racks from the faculty's Friends of Viniculture club, and soon the whole house was full of glass fermentation jars bubbling away at controlled temperatures. And whilst the wine then aged correctly, he maintained their cars in his workshop. He developed a mania for the maximum number of miles per gallon. This was easier with his own car because he drove so correctly, but Julia was impulsive and couldn't be trusted to stay within the speed limit. In fact she thought his obsession was slightly crazy, even if it did conserve world energy reserves, but it suited her to have him in either the cellar or the workshop - out of the way, but close to hand when required.

They were busy, active people; they advanced steadily in their careers, sent their children to a private school, and went on camping holidays to France every summer in the long vacation. Yet as the years went by neither of them could escape the feeling that there was something missing. Life seemed tired and stale. The sparkle had worn off somehow. Naturally they both tried adultery as an antidote to this depression. But Julia chose her boss, who eventually went back to his wife then treated Julia as if nothing had ever happened, whilst Vernon felt so frightened and guilty about his own attempt that after two afternoons in bed with one of his third year students he was glad when she graduated and left. The eventlessness and predictability then returned, to their lives. What could they do now?

Vernon was a big man - a fatherly figure with a straggly beard and sloppy clothes. He was overweight, that was true: there was always a gap between his sweater and jeans where his paunch bulged out. But it wasn't this to which Julia objected: it was his vagueness and irreso-

luteness she found so dispiriting. He might, have become a senior lecturer, but he could hardly choose which shoes to put on in a morning, she had to make all the family decisions: she paid the bills and dealt with crises. Vernon would spend a whole day fretting about spark plug gaps but he couldn't bring himself to ask a French policeman for directions, he didn't even like being left in the house on his own, and Julia, in spite of her feminist principles, couldn't resist sometimes calling him an "old woman", fortunately she was tough and decisive enough to compensate for his weakness: she ran the home and their marriage in a spirit of brusque efficiency tempered with resentment, but once the necessities of life had been dealt with she was quite happy to lounge around reading novels or watching television - a box of something or other always close at hand. She saw no virtue in activity for its own sake. Vernon however was constitutionally unable to relax in this way: he always had to be doing something. It was this which attracted him to jogging: he could lose weight and keep busy at the same time. And so the newspaper articles, with their graphs and diagrams of achievement, finally overcame his hesitation.

"I'm going to do something about this" he announced, pulling at the loose flesh of his stomach in front of the mirror.

"Bully for you" Julia replied: "Don't blame me if you die from lead poisoning." But first he must equip himself properly for the activity. Two or three trips were made to various sports shops selecting the right sort of running shoes, a waterproof track suit, and special undergarments designed to stop chafing and frostbite. He also bought a matching hat and towelling sweatbands he had seen tennis players wearing at Wimbledon. The equipment was tried out in the privacy of the bedroom, but eventually its practical application could he delayed no longer. He was seen off at the front door by the children, who cheered ironically. Half an hour later he staggered back into the house ashen-faced, at the point of collapse: he vomited into the downstairs toilet then lay on a chaise longue in his study for the rest of the afternoon.

Such was his inauspicious start: yet within a few days he was out again punishing himself, his motivation reinforced by Julia's satirical hints about "male menopause". In fact she was glad to have him out of her way for a while, otherwise he would be hanging around her like some pet animal which didn't know what to do. Julia felt that she

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had reached a stage in life where she'd had enough of men: they were either encumbrances or traitors, and life could be made simpler by ignoring them. So whenever Vernon, uncertain what to do otherwise with his evenings, mentioned that he might "go for a run", she encouraged him.

At first it was just a couple of times each week. After overcoming the pain he felt fitter and noticed that he lost two or three pounds. The bathroom scales were brought into daily use for the first time ever, and he reported his weight each morning as if it was a matter of public interest, "Don't tell me!" Julia would say as he bounded in through the door. "Another two microgrammes gone"" But Vernon was impervious to her mockery. He did a few knee bends then stood before the open window breathing deeply before Julia told him to close it and get on with his breakfast.

"You know, I met two guys out in the park last night" he said, spooning up his yoghurt and muesli, "They've only been going out a bit longer than me. One of them has lost nearly a stone and a half. He reckons he feels like a new man.

"Feels like a new man, does he? You've not been hanging round the gents toilets, have you?" Julia asked.

"No. I usually go before I set off ... Why?"

"Nothing ... Forget it."

"Well, we're all going to go out together on Wednesday night."

"Oh, really ...?"

It was more enjoyable, training with other people. One was a free-lance accountant, the other an architect, and together they kept up each other's morale and determination. Vernon felt encouraged and spurred on by their collective enthusiasm. After their first major run he came in, dripping sweat all over the carpet.

"We've decided to do three nights, regularly, each week."

"Good!" Julia assured him in a voice which suggested that seven nights wouldn't be too much, especially if he must come parading a sweaty track suit with its sagging crotch as proof of his achievement.

But if weight loss and improved muscle tone were his objectives then it was an achievement. Vernon became slim again as he had been in

his twenties: he cut his hair short, which made him look younger, and he discovered a competitive urge amongst his fellow joggers which rubbed off to give him new energy and zest. Soon after this he announced that they were going to join the local Harriers. What had originally been physical therapy was becoming positive athleticism, the amount of clothing and equipment was reduced, and mere jogging was replaced by competitive sport.

Julia watched her husband change in this way with a sort of benign amusement. It was true: they were just adolescents really, just boys who couldn't face growing up. If it wasn't cars it was football, if not fishing or railway trains it was a return to the childhood world of running or ball games. And they still wanted to win the Olympics or the World Cup. Pathetic creatures who must show off by trying to go one better all the time, this restless male desire to win.

But Vernon felt that he had discovered a new means of salvation. Each week he ran further and faster, and instead of a baggy carcass which impeded every movement his body became a slim and efficient machine of which he was increasingly conscious and proud. He overturned Julia's dietary rules on grounds of scientific nutrition as well as personal preference, and he was quite happy to grill his own steaks after he came back from a training session. It was all hard work, but he was exercising his way into a new personality. He began to feel more confident and self-possessed: moreover he had found a dominant purpose for his life. Even his automania and wine-brewing were neglected now: every spare hour was taken up with training, training, training. The house was littered with sports-magazines, and if the weather wasn't fine he did exercises in the spare bedroom. Julia revelled in what she described to her friends as "recovering womanhood" and encouraged them to liberate themselves in the same way through creative self-indulgence. Until one day Vernon came in without his beard.

"What's that for?" she demanded.

"We're going in for the Express Marathon" he announced proudly: "It's so that flies and wasps don't get stuck in it ... Besides, it's cooler." He looked even younger than ever, taller, leaner - yet she didn't like it. For some reason she felt unsettled. It seemed to her a symbol of - well, what exactly? She wasn't sure.

Vernon was living in a different world. Every night he slipped off in

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his satin vest and shorts, and within minutes he was loping round the perimeter of the golf course, almost floating across the turf, through the sedge grass, and over the streams and bunkers. He felt united with the air that rushed past his body - even with rain when it spilled down on him, cooling his limbs. He ran on and on, exhilarated, liberated, his determination challenged by his new goal of the Olympic distance.

Since she now had unlimited scope for the enlargement of her inner life Julia decided that it was time to develop new interests. She enrolled at two nightschool classes - one on urban ecology and the other on the politics of the Third World. It might also be possible to meet interesting new people at the same time. But colour changes of the inner-city butterfly was rather boring and the other class demanded a commitment to historical research which she felt unwilling to make. The subjects didn't suit her real talents as a woman: she would be better employed doing something else.

For weeks Vernon's preparations intensified until finally his big day arrived. It would be an enormous achievement just to finish the course. After all - twenty-six miles! Hundreds of local hopefuls staggered and limped through the streets on legs which looked like rubber bands. But Vernon not only finished: he ran the race in less than three hours! All his friends started treating him more seriously and colleagues at work: stopped scoffing. But this degree of fitness and dedication meant sacrifices. He had proved his right to eat meat and carbohydrate-stodge: now there was the question of running in competitions, which meant weekends away from home.

"Don't you think the children see little enough of you as it is?" Julia suggested: "There's a limit, you know."

"It would only be occasionally!" Vernon pleaded, she responded by giving him her silent stare, the meaning of which Vernon knew only too well. It was a combination of 'we've been through all this before' and 'Go ahead if you dare, but remember that there could be consequences.' Vernon was stymied: like many people he had come to think that marriage was largely a series of prohibitions and restraints, but he felt obliged to tolerate them because the institution offered in return the comforts of intimacy which he felt he couldn't do without. So he gave up his larger scale ambitions in order to retain his wife's good favour. He held himself in lower esteem for doing so, but it was

the less painful of two evils. How fortunate that these capitulations and defeats were invisible to the outside world. He was limited to local races, but as a form of retaliation he trained harder than ever. He was all sinew and steely resolution: he seemed almost aflame with energy. Every spare moment was devoted to the toughening of his body.

Julia meanwhile had not yet found an occupation in which to absorb herself. How difficult it was for women to act freely in society! All her intelligence and her resources were lying unused like fruit going over-ripe. Almost every evening found her alone, comforting herself in such a way that she merely felt more anxiety and self-loathing the following day. Cake wrappers and chocolate boxes were crushed out of sight in the pedal-bin, but she couldn't hide them from herself. The result was that she became more grossly overweight in almost inverse proportion to her husband. And what sort of husband was he, when every scrap of his energy and attention were directed elsewhere? Julia came to feel completely isolated as a result of his selfishness. It was like a marriage of only one partner.

"We've got to do something about this" she told him finally.

"What's the problem?" Vernon asked.

"Just dropped in off another planet, have you?" She put the facts before him. There was a long argument. Vernon felt trapped, as if she was shackling him to the furniture. Then eventually she told him to choose - either one or the other.

"Why should I bother being married otherwise?" she said: "On my own here all the time. Nobody to respond to me. Nobody with whom I can interact ... Anyway, I'm not going to spend another night on my own, that's for sure."

The implication of her emphasis struck, terror into Vernon's imagination. She was overweight, but still very attractive, and there were things about her without which he couldn't possibly imagine himself surviving. Although he paced about the house like a caged puma, he stayed in from that evening onwards. But he was wily. He started getting up early in the morning to do his training before breakfast. There was even a sort of grim satisfaction in being out in the dew and cold before everyone else, so he still ran freely, knowing that she could have no grounds for complaint. Julia, although she was reluc-

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tant to admit it, looked on this development with embittered pique. He was within his rights of course, but it demonstrated the petty, side-stepping nature of this *Boys Own* mentality which put sport before human relations.

But his triumph didn't last long. He wasn't used to getting up before dawn, soon his eyes were drooping after dinner before he had got past page three of the *Guardian*, or he woke up to find that he had just slept through *World in Action*. After a few days of the new regime he was retreating to bed half way through the evening, even before the children, with apologies for tiredness.

"Well, this is no good to me!" Julia complained: "Thought you were clever, eh? ... But what's an exhausted husband got to offer?"

"My God, woman, you're never satisfied. I've got to sleep, haven't I?"

"Try the normal time, like other people" she replied.

"And my training?"

"That's your problem."

The argument really got under way when the children had retreated to their bedrooms, and it was then extended to cover issues of moral responsibilities, child-rearing, and the ideology of housework - almost everything other than the central conflict between them. They continued late into the night and then, a resolution not having been made in the usual way, it was turned into several days of bitter silence. The whole atmosphere of the house was poisoned by their emotional struggle. But eventually, being sensible and well educated people, they knew that there were agencies to assist them with such problems, so although they felt embarrassed at requesting advice rather than doling it out, they applied to the Marriage Guidance Council for a judgement.

The middle-aged woman who ushered them into a private room was warm, in her response - very understanding and impartial.

"All right Julia, you give me your side of the story, and then we'll hear yours Vernon ... Both take milk and sugar, do you?" She listened to their respective complaints without interruption, secretly thinking how-lightweight and trivial they were compared to the cases of alcoholism, incest, and persistent buggery she dealt with normally.

After two or three sessions of searching through the surface history of their marriage she gave them her recommendation.

"You know, you're both very intelligent people. I don't need to tell you that marriage is a question of both give and take - though maybe we all tend to forget the giving part from time to time. But there's no reason why with a little understanding you shouldn't both have what you want ... Julia, you don't actually want to prevent Vernon enjoying his hobby, do you?"

"No - of course not!" Julia replied, thinking back to her original impulse to be rid of him occasionally.

"And you don't want to leave Julia on her own all the time Vernon? You're prepared to make compromises?"

"Yes - absolutely" he said, conscious of the fear of being without her.

"So then why not accommodate each other. Be generous. Both make a sacrifice. Julia - you let Vernon keep up his sport and his goals. It's important for a man's ego to have ambition and enterprise, you know. And Vernon - you must fit your running in so as to leave time for your family,"

Both of them felt cheated, but they put the plan into operation a couple of days later. The only way to fit in the requisite number of miles however was for Vernon to run to work instead of driving. This wasn't too bad on a sunny morning, but when it was pouring with rain his colleagues took sardonic pleasure in comparing him to a drowned rat. He slopped through the traffic drenched in either sweat or rain. He had to carry a towel and his normal clothes as well as all his books in a rucksack which banged up and down uncomfortably on his back. On arrival at work he then scuttled into the staff toilets to perform contortions at the wash basin and get changed in the smelly little cubicles, all the time worried in case he was seen by the Principal or his Head of Department. As a result of this new arrangement he was now free to sit around in the evening with Julia, though neither of them was quite sure what to do with the time together. Vernon felt lost. Whilst he was out running there was always a purpose, something to strive for- but sitting around in the house he didn't know how to occupy himself any more. Julia in her turn felt oppressed by his clinging dependency and helplessness. So they en-

OLYMPIAS

dured each other's company rather than enjoyed it. Both of them would sooner have been doing something else.

Another result was that Vernon contracted tendon strain. He pounded to work and back every day, sometimes taking detours just to make the route longer. He knew it was unhealthy running through streets clogged with exhaust fumes during the rush hour, but he hadn't foreseen that hard pavements would damage his legs. He had to buy a new-type of running shoe and move into the gutter: tarmacadam was reputed to be softer. Two weeks later he was knocked down by an ambulance on its way to answer an emergency call.

When he regained consciousness in the hospital Julia was at the bedside and the children were writing with Biro's on the plaster encasing his broken legs.

"Thank goodness you'll be all right now" Julia said "That was a providential lesson to us both."

"But what's going to happen?" Vernon whispered in a feeble voice.

"Well, no more of this running business for a start. You've got responsibilities to a family: there's not only yourself to think about." Vernon flopped back onto his pillows in disappointment.

"Oh, and I was going to wear my new kit in the race at weekend."

"Don't you worry about that" she reassured him: "It's all in tonight's *News* in the 'Under-a-Fiver' column. You concentrate on getting better."



Illustrated 1941

LOOKING FORWARD TO FRIDAY

Bob Wild

It was better to misbehave on a Friday than a Monday at our junior school: that way you didn't have to wait for the cane. If you behaved badly on a Monday or any other day of the week you had to wait until Friday afternoon. At the start of lessons on Friday afternoon wrongdoers from the various classes would line up in front of the Headmaster's desk. Their crimes would be read out and the number of strokes announced. It was the doubtful good fortune of Standard four to witness these canings.

I was not due for the cane that Friday so on the Thursday night I was looking forward to school. We had sums on Friday morning and I was good at sums. I always finished the fractions first and I liked doing problems. I was not one of those "chancers" who put their hand up in mental arithmetic tests when they didn't know the answer. In the afternoon we had private reading. You could choose a story book out of a big box kept locked in the tall double-doored cupboard near the blackboard. I was reading *Babies of the Wild* in which fox cubs survived a thumb-biting few days in the lair on their own whilst their mother, the vixen, gnawed through her back-leg to escape from a gin-trap. Leverets were carried by the scruff of the neck out of the path of a whirring combine-harvester by an exhausted mother hare, chased for hours by a hunter's dog. I could hardly wait to know what would happen to the pine martens trapped in that hollow tree about to be chopped down.

On Friday morning we were up early but our Ernie, who was older than us, made us do physical exercises when the *Keep Fit* programme came on the wireless. Our Archie and me were late for school and I missed the chance of a game of marbles. We had to stand in the cloakroom porch with Elsie Bain - she lived nearby but she was always late - until prayers were over. It was raining and the coats piled on the pegs smelt sweaty and damp. The windows were steamed up except for one which had been recently broken. Someone had been sick on the floor. Mr. Askew, the caretaker, came in and put some brown peaty stuff on it. It smelt overpoweringly of that sweet earthy disinfectant which stays up your nose all day, and in your mind for the rest of your life.

We got told off by the headmaster for being late and when I tried to make an excuse about having a long way to come he said:

"Well I live in Bury and if I can get here on time so can you!" I said to our Archie:

"When we get home you must tell my mam our Ernie got us into trouble".

I got three sums wrong in Mechanical arithmetic and I couldn't do one of the problems. When I took my book out to be marked Mrs Mitchell said: "Well! I am surprised!" and she called me a donkey! I didn't put my hand up at all when we had mental arithmetic. Dinner time seemed ages away so I went up to the front and said, like we had been told to do:

"Please Miss may I leave the room?"

"You must wait until Carol Bell comes back" Mrs Mitchell said, in an irritated voice.

When the bell finally went for dinner-time we wiped our pens on our cloths and the ink monitors collected them. They counted them carefully and put the inkwells on a tray whilst we put our sum-books on the shelves under our desk-tops. Because there was too much noise, and Michael Hamburger had banged his desk lid down, the pens had to be handed back and we had the collection again. "Quietly this time!" By the time we had filed out and lined up in the yard for dismissal we had lost nearly ten minutes of dinner-time.

It was smelly fish and white cabbage for dinner that Friday so I didn't eat it and the rhubarb pie was sour. Spud Ellis, Brian Naylor and me pretended to go to the lavatory. When we got outside we pooled our money to get three-pennyworth of chips from Newtown Street chip-shop. We played "follows up" on the way there. I lost two of my best marbles to Spud Ellis. The chip-shop was an end terraced house which abutted on to the main road. The owner had put a door and a window at the end to face onto the road so as to attract more trade. Next to it was a red-brick building with a tall, pointed roof. "Wesleyan Church" was embossed on the door lintel. Next to the church were two shops attached to the Parkside Hotel and beyond that a new block of two-story flats. Our school was some two-hundred yards beyond the flats.

LOOKING FORWARD TO FRIDAY

The first shop past the church was an upholsterers owned by Mr. Horrocks, a man who knew my dad. The shop windows either side of the door had the bottom half painted brown for some reason so you couldn't see in. The windows were never cleaned and were coated with a thick layer of dust thrown up by the passing traffic.

Naylor, or Nay Nay as we called him, was the first to finish his chips. He used his greasy forefinger to trace over some faintly discernable letters on the upholsterer's windows. The word FUCK appeared in large capital letters across one of the windows and OFF across the other. Just at that moment Mr. Askew, the school caretaker, rode by on his bike. Spud Ellis and me pretended we were not with Naylor. When Mr. Askew had gone I said:

"You've done it now Nay Nay! Askew will tell Old Pa Hume and we'll be in trouble!"

"I didn't do it! Those words were already there!" Naylor almost screamed.

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

There would have been no need to worry about Mr. Askew though had we known that Mr. Horrocks was sitting in his van, watching us from across the road. He was a devout Methodist and a lay preacher at the Wesleyan church. "Caught them at last!" he said, out aloud to himself. "I'll be up at that school this afternoon!"

Mr. Hume, the headmaster, took us for silent reading on Friday afternoons. It gave him the opportunity to do the register and other clerical work. I didn't like him because he never taught us anything and he had his favourites. He used to put his arm around the prettier girls and give them a cuddle. With us boys he put on an angry expression.

Mr. Hume was of middle height, chubby and in his late fifties. He had a short, thick neck, a square, fleshy face and small, piggy eyes enlarged by thick, brown, horn-rimmed glasses. They were slack and he used his middle finger to push them up his nose. He had bushy, ginger eyebrows and short-cropped grey hair on a balding head. Gin-

ger hairs sprouted from the backs of his freckled hands and from around his wrists. He wore a brown or a grey suit on alternate days and a dark grey one when the school inspectors came. His tie had a tiny tight knot. The bottom button of his waistcoat was always undone. A gold watch-chain hung like a skipping rope across his bulging stomach. He was constantly fumbling in his fob-pocket, palming his watch, and checking the time, even though there was a large clock clicking away on the side wall of the classroom.

Mr. Hume kept his cane prominently on view, resting across the pegs that held the blackboard on its easel. At the least noise he would look up, uncannily always at the culprit, and his face would inflate and redden. If he was very angry his face took on a purplish hue. If he went out and came back in to a noise he would rush through the door with his legs bent at the knees like Groucho Marx, grab his cane and run up the aisles between the rows of desks swishing it from side to side, roaring and spitting:

"How many times do I have to tell you to keep quiet when I am out of the room!" He would then pick on someone, generally a slow-witted, scruffy boy with yellowish "candlesticks" running from his nose, called Barry Dunston, or his brother, Peter, who had been kept down a year. He would thrust his face to within an inch of Dunston's face and pummel him in the chest with his fist before dragging him by the ear, or hair, out to the front to cane him. Dunston used to turn his head away when he held his hand out and, like we all did, try to hold his hand slack with his thumb lower than his index finger. It was murder if you got hit on the thumb joint, like it was if you pulled your hand away and the cane caught you across your finger joints. You never pulled your hand away! If you pulled your hand away Old Hume would get even angrier, grab hold of your wrist, swipe you across the legs and give you an extra whack on the hand.

Old Pa Hume was in a very bad mood this Friday. There had only been three boys to cane and when he had announced what they had done to deserve the cane it didn't seem fair to me that they should all of them get three on each hand. They had been swinging on the cloakroom bars before school and one of them had put his foot through the window. The other two hadn't really done anything. We were all very quiet.

When the caning was over and the three of them had gone back to

LOOKING FORWARD TO FRIDAY

their classroom Mr Hume walked up the aisles looking angrily from side to side. He saw a marble on my desk and he picked it up and put it in his pocket! I had only put it in the pen-groove to look at it!

I had just got back to my desk with *Babies of the Wild* when Mr. Askew ushered in Mr. Horrocks. I kept my head down but I couldn't read for trying to hear what was being said. After what seemed hours Mr. Hume walked down the aisle, stopped at my desk and got hold of my ear between his finger and thumb:

"Come with me you!" he said, menacingly. "I want the names of those other two".

I stood in front of the class looking sullenly down at my feet.

"Well?" he said, pushing me in the chest with his fist.

"I don't know them! I was just walking past on my way back to school".

"Don't tell me lies or you'll get such a thrashing!" he said, picking up his cane.

I could feel the tears coming up as I tried to get my breath to say something. Despite gasping out that I didn't know what the words meant and that I didn't know the other two because they weren't from our school he gave me three strokes of the cane on my left hand. I tucked the hand between my legs and stamped my feet and snivelled audibly.

"Now will you tell me!" he said, his face going purple.

"I don't know who they were", I sobbed.

Mr. Horrocks was asked if he could identify the others but he could only be sure about me. He thought Naylor was one of them but he couldn't say for certain. Naylor denied it saying he had gone home at dinner time. Mr. Askew excused himself saying he had to get back to the boiler-room. Mr Hume turned around to face the class and he glared at each boy in turn. In a very quiet voice he said:

"This is your very last chance to own up. If I find out later it was one of you you'll be in very, very, serious trouble!" He turned back to me and shouted angrily. "And this is your last chance too. I'll give you until Monday to think about it. Hold your other hand out!"

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He gave me three more strokes of the cane on my right hand. I nearly bit through my lip. Tears were running down my face as I went back to my place, both hands tucked tightly under my armpits.

There wasn't a murmur from anyone all afternoon. There was no noise either as we filed out at four o'clock to put our books in the cupboard. Old Hume wasn't watching the cupboard. I pretended to put my book in the box but instead I wedged it under my armpit, inside my coat.

When we were outside Naylor and spud Ellis each gave me some marbles for not splitting on them. As they handed them over my arm slackened and the book fell on the floor at my feet. I looked round furtively and saw a head poking up just above the cellar steps. It looked like Mr. Askew. But when I looked again it was Old Pa Hume, watching us through the railings.



POOR PADRE PIO

Ken Clay

Was Padre Pio a saint? He made it only recently even though he died in 1968. Pope John Paul II, that most prolific of sanctifiers, who has cut more corners, reduced the time period between death and sainthood, and elevated more crackpots than any other Pope, drew the line at Pio for a long time. He did visit the Pio shrine in 1987 on the 100th anniversary of Pio's birth. So what held him back? Just what are Pio's qualifications? What led Cardinal Sordano to call him "a giant of sanctity"?

Padre Pio, it seems, did bugger all for most of his life, like most of the lazy sods in monasteries. His religious sayings were the usual anodyne claptrap of such banality that if you found one in a 50P cracker you'd be asking for your money back. For example:

"Do not disturb your soul at the sad spectacle of human injustice One day you will see the inevitable triumph of Divine justice over it."

"To fail in charity is like wounding God in the apple of His eye. What is more delicate than the pupil of the eye? To fail in charity is like failing against nature."

"God can reject everything in a creature conceived in sin and of which it bears the indelible impression inherited from Adam. But He can absolutely not reject the sincere desire to love Him."

"Charity is the queen of virtues. As the pearls are held together by the thread, thus the virtues are held together by charity; as the pearls fall when the thread breaks, thus virtues are lost if charity diminishes."

"The time spent for the glory of God and the salvation of souls is never spent badly."

"Where there is no obedience, there is no virtue; where there is no virtue, there is no good. Where good is wanting, there is no love; where there is no love, God is absent; where God is absent, there is no heaven."



Pio is almost rumbled – but the doc is obviously pissed

From Padre Pio *La Volonté de Dieu* : Laurent Bidot – Editions de Triomphe

POOR PADRE PIO

Granted, if we are to believe his mates, he was a bit of a laugh:

At the daily dinner table, he always kept the priests and brothers in stitches and tears of laughter. Some had to excuse themselves and would leave the room to stop their sides from hurting from laughter.

But then again this is a monastery and without TV. If comic invention was a criterion we'd be kneeling before St Bernard (Manning) of Manchester and St Chubby (Brown).

No, not comedy, Padre Pio was a physiological freak who displayed the stigmata for fifty years. From the age of 30 until a few days before his death at 81 he lost a cupful of blood a day from wounds in his hands, feet and side. He describes how this came about in a letter to his spiritual advisor Padre Benedetto on October 22 1918.

"On the morning of the 20th of last month, in the choir, after I had celebrated Mass, I yielded to a drowsiness similar to a sweet sleep. All the internal and external senses and even the very faculties of my soul were immersed in indescribable stillness. Absolute silence surrounded and invaded me. I was suddenly filled with great peace and abandonment which effaced everything else and caused a lull in the turmoil. All this happened in a flash.

"While this was taking place, I saw before me a mysterious person similar to the one I had seen on the evening of 5 August. The only difference was that his hands and feet and side were dripping blood. The sight terrified me and what I felt at that moment is indescribable. I thought I should die and really should have died if the Lord had not intervened and strengthened my heart which was about to burst out of my chest.

"The vision disappeared and I became aware that my hands, feet and side were dripping blood. Imagine the agony I experienced and continue to experience almost every day. The heart wound bleeds continually, especially from Thursday evening until Saturday. Dear Father, I am dying of pain because of the wounds and the resulting embarrassment I feel in my soul. I am afraid I shall bleed to death if the Lord does not hear my heartfelt supplication to relieve me of this condition. Will Jesus, who is so good, grant me this grace? Will he at least free me from the embarrassment caused by these outward signs? I will raise my voice and will not stop imploring him until in his mercy he takes away, not the wound or the pain, which is impossible since I wish to be inebriated with pain, but these outward signs which cause me such embarrassment and unbearable humiliation"

Nice touch that bit “I wish to be inebriated with pain,” and oddly quirky that it was the embarrassment which bothered him most. Did Pio have an English ancestor perhaps? The fingerless gloves and the sandals covered the wounds most of the time, and the hole which went right through his body (and heart) from back to front would be under the cassock – so where’s the embarrassment? A squint or a hare lip would be worse. But how is all this possible? Did he pick his scabs in that solitary cell at night where he slept for only two hours? And is this why his wounds healed “miraculously” a few days before he died when he was too feeble to scratch? Does the Pope suspect this? Is there an incriminating CCTV tape in the Vatican Archives? Hidden cameras were installed in monasteries in 1988 to discourage self abuse. We can imagine the debate which might have raged in the Vatican Sainthood Committee meeting.

Pope: “Pio’s a fuckin fake I tell you! Just cop this video. (*presses remote*) Look! You can see the bastard fumbling under his bedsheet! He’s picking them scabs off!!”

Cardinal Sordano: “No your holiness! It’s not true. Give the poor buggger a chance. He’s not picking scabs he’s bashing his beef bugle. We all do it. Under the covers is the only chance we get since you installed them cameras”

But if we do find he’s a secret scratcher then his chances rest on less spectacular idiosyncrasies. Such as his diet. He weighed 13 stones yet ate only a handful of food a day.

During the last years of Padre Pio's life Padre Joseph Pius would bring him his food. He was continually amazed to see how little was eaten. More than half the food would be left on the plate. One day his doctor friend was at the door of the cell. Padre Joseph showed him the tray. Of course the doctor didn't have to be shown the tray. He'd been around Padre Pio for years. But Padre Joseph asked him: "Could he live on what he eats?" The doctor replied straight out, "Not even a one-year old child could!" So how do you explain the existence of this man - not eating enough to sustain the life of an infant, but still bleeding daily from five holes in his body for half a century; sleeping only two hours a night; in fifty years not taking a day's vacation because he didn't want one.

Not taking a vacation?!! Shagaparrot!! He must be a friggin saint! Hang on a minute though - what would a lazy arse monk want with a vacation? He does buggger all to start with. What exactly would a vacation from all this look like? English factory workers visiting

POOR PADRE PIO

Italy are glad to pay Thompson's 500 quid a week for a regime not unlike Padre Pio's. But to get back to the diet. Pictures of Pio at table show a bottle of wine. Yes it's a pretty harsh regime in the monastery of San Giovanni Rotondo – jokes, banter, wine, all the food you can eat. What was that about vacations again? Other witnesses report:

When I finished my servings, Padre Pio would take the food from his dish and place it on my dish and say, "Dear Giuseppe, eat up," and when my wine glass became empty, he would refill it from his bottle of wine saying aloud, saluting me, "Drink up, dear Giuseppe."

So that was it. Perhaps it was Padre Pio Pisshead. St Pio the Pisshead doesn't have quite the right tone but maybe in a more enlightened future... We might even, by now, have enough Ps for a Sun type headline when the time comes. Polish Pope Promotes Padre Pio the Pisshead from Pietrelcina. Then there is this curious detail

Alongside the chair, on a little table, are the things that were in his habit when he died: a relic of the true cross which he always carried on his person, and medals that he would give to the faithful as he would go through the crowds. There were a few little white mints that someone gave him and they happened to be in the pocket of his robe. The table was such that he could nibble at something during the middle of the day.

Mints are almost pure sugar. I've known very fat people at work who ate them all the time and felt uneasy when they ran out. Come to think of it you probably could live on 10 packs of Polo and three bottles of Chianti a day. "All right you miserable cynic" Cardinal Sordano might reply "so maybe he did guzzle mints and hit the bottle but what about his supernaturally overheated body and his wrestles with Satan?" Yes indeed. Pio did have fevers which exploded medical thermometers.

Sometimes he would have fevers so high that the doctor had to use a horse thermometer because normal thermometers would shoot the mercury right through the top, so excessively hot was his body

Er..yes...if you say so Cardinal. Perhaps you could remind me... what exactly is the running temperature of a horse? Does the fact that a horse is bigger necessarily mean it's hotter? How hot is a whale for instance? "And another thing!!" the Cardinal could add:

In a letter to his spiritual director, Padre Agostino, Padre Pio wrote, "I must tell you what has happened to me during the past two nights. "I had a very bad time the night before last; from about ten o'clock, when

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I went to bed, until five o'clock in the morning, that wretch did nothing but beat me continually. He presented to my mind many diabolical suggestions, thoughts of despair, distrust in God. But praise be to Jesus, for I defended myself by saying to him repeatedly: 'your wounds are my merit.' "

In the manner of the saints who do so much to grab souls back from Satan's clutches, Padre Pio himself could suffer even physically at the hands of evil spirits.

In July of 1964, at about 10 o'clock one night, the monks heard a crash; they came in and found him dumped on the floor. He had been thrown from his bed; his forehead had been split so deeply that a doctor had to be summoned to stitch it up. His eyes were blackened; his whole upper body, front and back, was covered with contusions. So badly was he beaten, in fact, he couldn't say Mass for several days.

The cushion that was placed under his head is still in the cell. Blood from his head wound stained it. You can still see the marks of blood that ran from his head the night Satan came to beat him up.

And yet another thing

Even in death there was a similarity to the suffering Christ, whom he loved so much. When the doctors examined the dead body in the cell, they found it to be without a drop of blood left in it. He literally spilled it out in imitation of Our Lord on Calvary.

And as a final clincher there was the strange case of King George VI.

In the archives of the monastery are records of many documented proofs of Padre Pio's special gifts. One such example is of the evening when Padre Pio and a group of men were talking in the corridor of the monastery. Padre Pio interrupted the conversation and asked the men if they would kneel and join him in prayer for a soul that was about to depart from this world. They all knelt and prayed for a soul that they did not know, for Padre Pio did not tell them for whom they were praying.

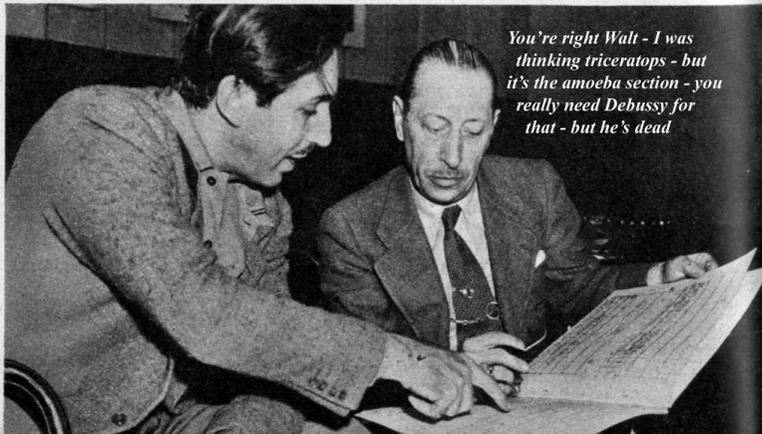
The next day, the newspaper headlines reported the death of the King of England. The men compared notes and found that the King had died at the exact time that they knelt and prayed with Padre Pio. That evening they approached Padre Pio and confronted him with their findings, and asked him if it was the King of England for whom they had prayed. Padre Pio said nothing but, embarrassed, nodded his head to acknowledge that it was the King for whom they had prayed.

Of all the worthy souls who departed between 1918 and 1968 one wonders why Pio chose this one to pray for.

POOR PADRE PIO

Such diversions, on which brochures remain strangely silent, are an entertaining feature of catholic countries; whether they be the grotesque, overblown, shrines of Lourdes (St Bernadette) or Lisieux (St Therese) or the humbler manifestations of rural superstition like Padre Pio. Pio was almost a local – he lived just over the straits in a monastery near Foggia. Perhaps that's why there's a new brown marble statue on the beach at Letojani about fifty yards north of the Lido Tropicana. It was erected in 1997 and paid for by a local lady. It stands next to a kids' playground among the slides and swings. No doubt some of those kids will be inspired by this memorial to hope that when they grow up they too will bleed for fifty years from five holes in their body.

*Look Igor baby. . .at bar 221 you change key
and introduce a quite inappropriate diminished seventh*



*You're right Walt - I was
thinking triceratops - but
it's the amoeba section - you
really need Debussy for
that - but he's dead*

*With Disney is Igor Stravinsky, composer
of "Rite of Spring." Sketches are of the first animal life. The sequence ends at the dinosaur age*

Illustrated 1941

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN FRANCE

Stefan Jaruzelski

I enter Elysee Palace with toolbag via tradesman's revolving door. Small wiry geezer enters door behind me but comes out in front. This must be a Hungarian I think since Uncle Woicjeck (former despot) warns me they only people who can do this. Geezer asks what I do in palace (like he owns place). I say I here to dismantle the Chirac showers. Former president had many girlfriends who all called him "three minutes including shower". Since he often jump on maids in corridor or cleaners in toilets it important to have shower nearby.

Geezer has heard this but says he not carrying on tradition. Wife has dumped him also he not drink although Putin got him sozzled by ruse when he ask "encore de l'eau Nico?" and push over slug of pure vodka. Yes, my interlocutor is new boss Nicolas Sarkozy. He greet me as fellow immigrant worker and we have chat. I much disturbed by new project to degrade pensions and tell him how previous administrations from Louis Philippe, Second Empire and Third Republic have constructed the best pension system in the world and given France its great cultural heritage.

Flaubert, for instance, used to drive cab round Rouen. He drive slow and give extended monologues on lives of the saints – especially St Anthony. This bore most clients but youngsters would get in, pull down blinds and do jigajig while Gus droned on. Later he get stagecoach route from Croisset to Trouville but soon give it up and retire early. Final interview go like this:

Stagecoach boss: You say you had a funny turn Gus and then the coach fell in a ditch. Funny turn? Could you be more explicit?

GF: Not quite the right word is it. But I don't know – weird like, everything sort of blurry, ringin in me head etc blah blah know what I mean?

SB: Well what am I goin to put down? Would it be *etourdissement*?

GF: Yeah! That's it! *Etourdissement*! How do you spell that?

SB: And in the file there's a complaint from a passenger, Madame Schlesinger, who says she had to go behind a tree to change her wet

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN FRANCE

skirt and top...Gus?...Gus?! Christ he's gone again! GUS!!

GF: Wha.? Yis boss. Just driftin..

SB: Well you're obviously unfit for continuing employment and since you are twenty four and have been doing the job satisfactorily for the last three weeks I'm recommending you retire immediately on 95% of full pay. What'll you do next?

GF: I think I'll stay at home with me mum and write books.

SB: Books!? Well you'd better mug up on the language that's all I can say. Think yourself lucky you're not English – they have five times as many words as us. With your struggle for the right word you'd never do more than a paragraph a year. Naturally your books'll be the property of the state and they'll get royalties if there's ever a Pleiade Edition. Har bleedin har!

GF: Would that include my letters?

SB: Nah! Nobody's going to want to read those.

And Baudelaire. He was a deckhand on the ferry between Honfleur and Le Havre but soon found this uncongenial. This is how he got to retire:

Ferry Manager: Well Chas you say you get seasick easily, you're allergic to seagull shit and that the smell from the refinery turns your guts.

CB: Yis boss. That's about it. I want to go to Paris, smoke weed and hang out with my new black bitch.

FM: Sounds a worthy aspiration. But what about this poem the Albatross? You sound like Captain bleedin Ahab with all that stuff about "hommes de l'équipage" and "vastes oiseaux de mer"

CB: But that's what poets do boss. We're all liars. We just make it up. The biggest bird I've ever seen was a fat seagull what swooped down and snatched me baguette. No, I've had it with this job. I want out. I want a bit of luxe, calme et voluptue. I'm entitled.

FM: Hmm. Yis I agree. You're well unfit for deckhand duty and since you are twenty eight and have bin a good employee for the last four weeks I'm recommending immediate retirement on 98% of full

pay – with free prescriptions for weed and opium. We don't want the missus on the game now do we? By the way what's it like with them black bitches?

And Proust. Marcel was briefly employed as a librarian at the Bibliotheque Mazarine and did turn up for one afternoon during his year long tenure proving that the discipline of work was not beyond him. He then became a ratcatcher. This suited him well since, like rats, he came out at night. But even this job faded and he asked to retire:

Chief Ratcatcher: Well Marcel you've been a good ratcatcher and your workmates say you get very excited when you bag one and stick hatpins into them to finish them off. So why do you want to pack it in?

MP: That's partly the problem boss. See, when I stick a rat I get a hard on. That's why I do it. But then when I knock off and go to the Ritz for a nosh I'm walking in with this massive stiffy pushin out the front of my pants. They don't like it at the Ritz. My mates Oscar and Andre and Jean hoot and make fun and might even lunge at my privates. They ask if I've got a rolled up pair of socks down there.

CR: Couldn't you just whack the rats with a spade like everyone else?

MP: Not really. That'd mean stretching my best Astrakhan coat. They probably wouldn't let me into the Ritz with a spade anyway.

CR: But what would you do? Your timetable is completely out of synch with normal folks by now.

MP: I'd stay in bed and write. I'm not renouncing ratcatching. If I saw one in the bedroom I wouldn't be calling the department – be like asking someone to give your missus one – no, I'd see to it myself with a special silver handled razor sharp hatpin what the Princess de Guermantes gave me for Christmas...

CR: Calm down Marcel. I can see you're getting over-excited. Yis, you're obviously bugged as a professional ratcatcher but in view of your loyal service, killing six rats in the fortnight of your employment, and your previous excellent record of service at the Bibliotheque, I'm recommending retirement as from now on 99% of full pay. There'll also be special string quartet vouchers just in case you

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN FRANCE

want to hear a bit of Beethoven at 3am. Oh, and if you are going to write might I suggest that the spare, skeletal prose of that tosspot Gide should surely be superseded by now. Make it richer Marcel. Forget about narrative drive. We don't want another trivial page-turner like the Counterfeiters.

Zola was another one. He had more jobs than soft Mick but his last one was the jackpot. Train driver. There's still pictures of him on the footplate. And of course train drivers are the aristocracy of the working class. They don't have to turn in if they have a headache or the gas man's coming.

SNCF: So you're thinking of jacking it in Emile. Any particular reason? You are entitled especially since your grandfather help lay a few lengths of track on the Marseilles – Avignon line in 1845.

EZ: Well it is a bit bestial – and I worry about what the wife's up to when I'm on the Paris – Bordeaux run.

SNCF: Yis, we get a lot of that. I see you've retired early from several key jobs: farm labourer, greengrocer, coal miner, off licencee, brothel keeper.. and all on a 98% full pay pension. Christ Emile you'll be rolling in it! On top of all that you'll have your train driver's pension and free travel for life. What'll you do next? You've done virtually every job there is. How about president of the Third Republic?

EZ: Nah! Too dangerous! Look what happened to Jules Ferry. No, I think I'll buy a big gaff in Medan, build a grotesque tower extension, put in a hideously ornate table and just write my head off. Have a few pals down at weekends. Get a bike.

SNCF: Sounds idyllic Emile. Be careful about the gas fires though.

EZ: No probs there boss. I'm poodle registered for gas – one of my earlier occupations.

SNCF: Well go to it Emile. You're a hero of the proletariat and deserve all you get.

Sarko seemed very moved by all this. He not man of culture I think like Mitterand and D'Estaing or skirt-chaser like Chirac. One worries about future of Republic if these harsh Anglo-Saxon measures are

made law. I myself aspire to pack in plumbing and become full time writer like Flaubert, Baudelaire, Proust and Zola. I prefer to do this in Paris but fear I may finish up in a flat in Hackney under the beneficent regime of the well known arts patron Gordon Brown – if I can become single parent with special-needs dog.

Lumbago Gout, Sciatica

**but Fynnon Salt got to
the root of them all**

Fynnon Salt sprang a surprise on the rheumatic acids which had been troubling Mr. S. for so many years. This is his letter :

“ Dear Sirs.—For years I suffered with lumbago, gout and sciatica, also corpulence. I am 63 years old. I commenced taking Fynnon Salt about 3 years ago. I was then just over 17 stone in weight. The missis said she wanted nowt to do with me and that I was a bit fat useless git. I chased her round the kitchen to give her a slap but found I was wheezing something horrible, me joints had seized up and couldn't catch her. Then she started going out at nights, often coming in saying she'd misplaced her knickers somewhere. So I started on Fynnon salts. Soon I was shittin an pissin like a Co-op horse. The stuff that came out! (I am sending you a sample under a separate cover). Me joints are now as supple as Nijinsky's, I weigh only nine stone seven and I find I can vault over the kitchen table with ease in order to trap her up against the cupboard where I give her

a good seein to. She isn't goin out much these nights – we both have it regular on the rug in front of a roaring fire – I refer, of course, to our nightly cuppa of Fynnon salts. The dog was also a bit lethargic so we dosed him up too. Yesterday he sprang up, howled with joy, and passed an enormous stool on our peg rug. Do you do a larger tub? We were thinking of using it to clear snow off the path. It's a bleedin miracle!!

You, too, will be delighted with Fynnon Salt, if you are suffering from any form of rheumatism. Fynnon will wash away your rheumatic acids—the cause of the trouble. Large tin 1/5 at all chemists. Trial size 7d. Including Purchase Tax.

NATURE'S SALT OF THE EARTH



Fynnon Salt

Fynnon Ltd., Gt. West Rd., Brentford, Middlesex

Illustrated 1941

HARRY

Tom Kilcourse

Harry was never a pretty sight, even before the pit-prop altered his face he resembled a damaged Picasso. The accident simply enhanced the impression of menace, the little hard-man. He was small, standing about five-six, but he projected a sense of threat sufficiently strong to deter anyone who might cross him. The hardness was more than skin deep.

My workmate lived in a two-up, two-down terraced house in Hulme, one of Manchester's rougher areas. The front door opened straight onto the pavement, there being no space for a garden. Harry lived there with his mother and his brother, when the latter was not residing at her Majesty's pleasure. Harry worked down the pit, and his mother earned her living selling newspapers in the centre of Manchester. The family had acquired a television set, black and white in those days, and Harry invited me round to watch some event, a football match, I think. This was in the fifties, when very few people had televisions, and even fewer actually bought one. Renting a set was the norm for most.

Harry's mother was out when I arrived, and we settled down in his front room while the television warmed up and flickered into life. Some five minutes later there was a loud rapping on the front door. Harry made no move. The rapping was repeated twice, each occasion ignored by my host, who sat with eyes fixed on the screen. Perhaps the accident had turned him deaf. 'There's someone at the door, Harry.'

'Aye, I know.'

It was then that a face appeared at the window. Some bloke wearing a trilby was standing on the pavement, a hand edged to his forehead as he tried to peer into the room. Harry ignored the vision. The man tapped on the window. Harry's eyes never left the screen. The man tapped again, with more force. I was now riven with curiosity.

'Harry, who's the bloke at the window?'

For the first time, my mate looked up. 'Aw, it's just the twat from Newday Electrics, he wants his telly back.' He resumed his viewing,

and the man eventually left, after pushing a note through the letter box. Newday Electrics rented televisions, and offered a rent free trial for a week as bait. Harry had taken up the offer, two months earlier.

We first became friends when working together on the early shift down Bradford pit, a long departed coalmine located where Manchester City now has its ground. At the end of each shift, Harry and I would share a shower, scrubbing each other's back, then dash to the pub across the road to down a couple of pints before closing.

At that time, the two mates I had knocked about with in Newton Heath had become serious about their girlfriends, so I was at a loose end. So was Harry. We drifted into the habit of meeting up at the weekend, usually in Newton Heath, sinking a few black and tans, and then swaying our way to fish and chips at a supper-bar. God knows what we talked about, but life was a laugh and we were happy in each other's company. This pattern continued after I left Newton Heath and moved to live in Davyhulme.

We rarely bothered chasing women on these occasions, which was fortunate, given that no self-respecting female would be seen dead with two pissed miners. The one exception that I recall simply underscored the point. We had gone into Eccles town centre for a change one Saturday night, visiting several pubs. By closing time we were well away, and staggered to a bus shelter to await our transport home. There were one or two people already there, some of them having emerged from a dance hall across the road. In the midst of these sober souls was an attractive young woman.

Feigning sobriety, I engaged her in conversation. Her response was friendly, and we followed her onto the bus to take the seat behind. I was working the chat for all it was worth and eventually she agreed to meet me the next afternoon at Davyhulme Circle. Harry paid little attention to our conversation, but stared bleary-eyed out into the dark night. My satisfaction at having won a date was destroyed instantly by an explosion of vomit from Harry's gorge, some of which splashed onto the back of the young woman's head. Like a prat, I still turned up the next day at Davyhulme Circle and waited for an hour, sheltering from the drizzle in a shop doorway.

Harry married eventually, and I met my first wife. We also left the pit, Harry to train as a newsagent with one of the multiples in that business while I went onto Stockport buses. Naturally, we saw much

HARRY

less of each other, but maintained loose contact. Passing time mellowed us both, although Harry did not lose the impression of hardness. That served him well when he obtained a house on a council estate. The semi-detached stood on a circle at the end of a cul-de-sac. The neighbours were quiet, well behaved people, with one exception. Harry learned quickly that the chap living opposite him had a reputation that cowed most of the people in the street. My old mate's reaction to that knowledge says a lot about him. He simply crossed the road and knocked on the front door of mister hard-case. When the gentleman appeared, Harry told him quietly how he and 'our kid' might react if provoked. Peace reigned thereafter.

The last time I saw Harry was in the sixties. Several years had passed, during which I had gone to Ruskin College, and he became employed by the multiple news agency, acting as a holiday stand-in at various locations. After that one occasion we lost touch.

It was late in the seventies, when I was living in Sussex, that I felt an urge to resume contact. I wrote to his employer, giving my address and telephone number to pass on to Harry, wherever he might be. Some weeks later the telephone rang, and I recognised at once the Mancunian accent and Harry's manner of speech. I was delighted to hear from him. The intervening years seemed as nothing, and we chatted amicably for several minutes. He told me which town he was in, with his own business, but not his address or telephone number.

After reminiscing for a while Harry mentioned that he now belonged to his local golf club and played there every weekend. This was so alien to the image of him I had retained that I burst out laughing, and began to pull his leg, using the kind of expletives once common to our exchanges. His silence said at once that I was in error. Harry made his excuses, and we hung up, never to speak to each other again.

The years were not 'as nothing', but had changed us both and put our relationship beyond recapture. I hope that he remains happy in his new, more respectable life. Not all oiks wish to be reminded of times past it seems.



“What do you think?”

We got a pat on the back this morning. Mr. Benson came to our shop to inspect those aircraft spars we're doing. He said he couldn't have done a better job himself. He did seem pleased, didn't he, Phil?”

“Yes, and he's the man who didn't hold with women in an engineering shop when I first came here. He's changed his mind now, though—yesterday he told us that he wants 700 more like us by the end of next month.”

“I must say they do their best for you at this firm. Think, for instance, what a lunch like this would cost at a restaurant.”

Yes a pat on the back is one thing Jennifer but I don't like it when he thrusts his hand into your blouse or up your skirt. “Mr Benson really!” I expostulated “is that an aircraft spar in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?” I had hoped to shame the brute but he did no more than push against me again and as I looked down I could see a small mirror attached to his boot which the disgusting fellow used to look up at my knickers. I protested once more and threatened to report him to Lord Beaverbrook but he then said he was entitled to such body searches since these spars were top secret and on no account could be smuggled out to the Germans. He added that I looked a bit like Marlene Dietrich but if I kept my trap shut he'd see I got extra rations. It was at that point that a copy of Health and Efficiency fell out of his overall pocket. Men!

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