

# IT WAS ALL A ZINE



# THIS IS A zine?

## WHAT IS THIS YOU ARE READING?

Not just this introductory essay, but what is this zine, which seemingly has no identity?

I called it a zine. Is it, though? Isn't it just a load of stuff? Well, yeah, it is. So what? What's your fucking problem? Geez, you've been reading this for fifteen seconds and already you're spoiling for a fight.

Let's both calm down.

Perhaps it's in your hands because you're bored, or I'm bored, or maybe we're both bored. Maybe we're both looking for something to fill that widening chasm between now and then. And we're frightened of being left to our own thoughts. God forbid.

It's fair to say that you might not even be that interested in reading what you are reading, but feel an annoying sense of obligation to at least give it some justice, because this is yet another project that one of your mates has put way too much time into for minimal return.

Maybe you feel sorry for one of us, for some of us; for all of us, even. And if you do, we're grateful for your sorrow. We'll take all the sympathy we can get right now. I will personally steal it away and pour it all down my gut, just for a small semblance of vitality.

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# GRETEL

BY WESLEY COOKE

Gretel has eyes as blue as new knives and the light behind them is older than Dirt and time and war and prostitution. Gretel has eyes as blue as new knives And their favourite colour is back-of-the-eyelid red; the blackest of reds. Be careful. Be careful. Be careful! How Gretel hates to be told. Poignant whistlers? Great white sharks? Comets in the night's sky? Gretel bites her nails to the quick of the quick of the quick of the quick To spite herself and her friends. The pain is exquisite – the throb and the stab, But the blood's no match for the blackest of reds. Those back-of-the-eyelid-reds. Simpsons skies and pigeon shit greys and dreaming of squats in the seventies. Gretel's into guerilla installations; she's on tag and guilty as zoot-toking chavs. SL-1, Fukushima, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island; her fetish fits tighter than the Charity shop sheepskin she has on whatever the weather. Here is a thing Gretel made from a thing for us pretty things to think about:



There is surprisingly very **little** written about the effect of **nuclear war** on **children**, even though nuclear weapons have been with us now for 37 years. In 1961 a Professor from New Jersey named Milton Schwebel gave a questionnaire to some 3,000 students at **the height of the Berlin blockade**, asking them whether **they thought** war was going to occur. A large majority of the students in Junior **High and High School** in the **United States** questioned at this time answered **yes**. In 1962, just after the Cuban Missile Crisis a professor Cybil Escalona **from** Alberta Einstein College of Medicine interviewed some 350 youngsters from 4 to adolescence. In **the United States** at this time **there was great talk** about civil defence **and** questions included what they thought **the world** would **be like** in ten years and in **what** ways would it **be different**. Professor Escalona didn't mention nuclear weapons **but more** than 70% of the **students questioned** spontaneously mentioned **the bomb** in their responses. In recent times between 1978 **and** 1980 **the** American Psychiatric Association appointed a task **force** including Professor John Mack, who is co-editor **of the book** Last Aid, and Dr Bill Beardslee. They interviewed some 1,000 children in the Greater Boston Area asking them several **questions** about their **thoughts and feeling** about nuclear weapons. Once again a surprisingly large majority of **those who** responded were concerned about nuclear weapons; thought about it a great deal; and more than 70% **responded** that the United States **would lie** in ruins after a nuclear attack. **There was** almost **no belief** that nuclear war was a survivable option **for the United States**. The lack of studies about **children** in the United States **and** in other parts of **the world** in **this** nuclear issue is **reflection** of another kind **of denial** that adults have about children. We suspect that they are shielded and don't know a great deal about the **frightening** or horrible things in the world. **Messages on the** nuclear issue include **TV** news, magazines such as TV guide going to **more** than 20,000,000 homes, Time Magazine with a **circulation** of 24,000,000 and Newsweek – all **of** these had in **the last** six months front covers with reference to **nuclear war**. Another magazine – **Science** 83 in a recent edition shows a nuclear weapon over the pole and hitting somewhere in the centre of the U.S – the article **is about** the electromagnetic pulse of **the earth** being affected by a nuclear war. Other examples include an **article** in the Boston Sunday Globe magazine **about** civil defence – running away from the bomb. Even the humor magazines have

been hit. In the Harvard Lampoon edition of Newsweek – Nuclear Arms and Terrific Legs – A **Life** magazine article shows **some** of most frightening **pictures** of nuclear **weapons** systems in **the United States**. **Pictures** of B52 bomber crews scrambling to **their** planes and the underside of a B1 bomber. All these photographs are taken with the maximum effect of frightening or showing the **power of these** weapons. A recent survey asked Americans what percentage of their **free** time they spent doing various things. **Playing** video games **and** watching TV occupied 58% of their time, which was three times more than **having conversations with other people** and five times more than sexual activity. **There** is a video game called missile command, a rather **old** game, the object being to fire your missiles off to destroy incoming enemy attacks and **protect** you cities. If you fail your cities end up in flames which are geographically demonstrated by the computer and if you completely fail and lose the game, there's a large explosion which says 'The End'. In **the United States** anyway there's a computer electronic **voice which** tells you the game **is** over. **Other new** video games include Gorf, the Wizard of War, the object being to prevent a neutronium bomb from stopping you, and **Atlantis**, where the object is to prevent the **city** from being totally destroyed. **Graffiti** is another way that kids and people are exposed to nuclear weapons. These include: – Next war **is** nuclear war; Nuke egg and his mother: 'Stop World War Three! These are all over Boston now, **especially** one which is a mushroom cloud and says 'Today?'. That **stencil** is **on sidewalks and** on the sides of **buildings**. I **understand there's** a fair amount of similar **graffiti** in London. That amount **of** exposure is not unique to **the United States**, those headlines and news magazines and graffiti are **all over the world**. We wanted to interview as wide a range of children as possible. We saw close to 150 children and young people in this study and tried to standardise the protocol of questions so that we would not interfere with what they were saying. In other words not jumping in and correcting misinformation, or challenging stereotypes, most of trying not to reassure them, which is the hardest thing in interviewing children about this issue, but the most necessary.

The above text is taken from 'THE HUMAN COST OF NUCLEAR WAR'  
ISBN 0 9507935 1 5

Gretel has scars they number the stars and all paid for by middle-aged men. Andy Warhol's old phrase chimes new every day all thanks to webcam fuckery. Gretel has scars they number the stars, cross hatched and raised. Almost tribal. Gretel hires cars in dead women's names to be abandoned in motorway lanes. Between three and five in the morning, the notes left behind aren't joking. Dog-log browns and all of the greens; avocado and malachite and mantis, Gretel goes searching for some kind of calm in the cynosure of city lungs. Gretel has eyes as blue as new knives they draw lines through the middle of society. Gretel has eyes as blue as new knives they draw lines through the centre of things.



ARTWORK: FINLEY STYLES

# SUICIDAL SQUIRREL

BY ABIGAIL DAISY

This morning  
I saw a squirrel fall  
from the tree  
facing my office window.

I could swear that our eyes met  
before she dropped  
from the branch to her death.

She must have seen  
the misery contained  
within these four walls  
and elected  
to end her life  
there and then.

The poor fucker  
probably thought  
*"if that's what life is  
then I don't want any part of it."*

I don't blame her.



# BREAKFAST IN VENEZIA



**BY KARL PALOWSKI**

Sunlight pierces through the room from moth-holes in floral curtains from a bygone era.

This room has seen better days.

Perhaps the people running the hotel thought if they waited long enough, fashion would embrace it as modern again. But over forty years have passed, and it doesn't look like fashion will be re-embracing it any time soon. The only chance for relevance is if you consider it part of an overpriced museum exhibit at 100 Euros a pop.

The radio by my bed with five station pre-sets might be worth something substantial in antique value, if it worked. I wonder when exactly it broke for the last time and the hotel realised no one would care if they fixed it or not.

My head pounds. I am spitting feathers. And I cannot get back to sleep.

It is 8.20am. And I am three bottles of Veneto Merlot hung-over.

They serve breakfast in a large, formerly grand room on the first floor.

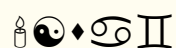
A tan-leather-skinned man in an old tatty hotel uniform greets me at the entrance and asks to see my room key so he can mark it off a list. It is a bizarre ritual which the hotel staff and guests continue to entertain, when, quite clearly, no-one else would be eating here other than the hotel guests, and even then, only begrudgingly.

The scrambled egg is soggy. Perhaps it keeps better when it is soaked in the disillusioned tears of hotel guests. The bacon is drenched in the grease of a chef's indifference. The sausages resemble dogs' dicks.

The coffee machine whirrs and would just about fit in, but only in a hospital cafeteria. The orange juice machine comes with an unwritten warning: "Caution. May contain orange juice (but don't count on it)."

I sit and eat wet scrambled eggs, dripping bacon, and dogs' dick sausage. And I wash it down with cafeteria coffee and a mysterious drink masquerading as orange juice.

I watch the people sat around me. They have all seen better days. This hotel has seen better days. I have seen better days. We have all seen better days. And, as the rancid taste of disappointment lingers on my tongue, I hope to fuck we will see them again.



# LEFT TO WANT WHAT WE ARE WITHOUT

**BY STELLA WALTERS**

In front of our window  
I am not the first, nor the last  
I stare at the white moon

I stuffed my skin with what was left of him.  
Have learnt to index the days.  
Both went on living, one  
American voice  
This was not mine to use  
Or yours

Nothing has changed: the same  
Since our father died

The ladies beneath the lawn  
Born long after he ceased to live  
Lie in their beds remembering  
Holidays in Spain, while I,  
Jangling on inside the cage  
Upon their knees  
Chop up the dry remains.

Clean up what you can.

Fifteen years later  
From under an older roof  
We stand before our father  
Things have been shifted.

The dirty second-hand  
Was broken now; the ferry drawn  
We ate in a small dark room.  
You stand where you are  
Waiting for bait  
Through centuries  
Locked in rage.

His stories were mostly warnings.  
They come through again  
Growling like a dog.  
They seize me with violence.  
But they told me it was a respite.

You hold up your photograph  
And bravely miss my company  
Watching nothing. Each of us wonders what  
The distances spin.

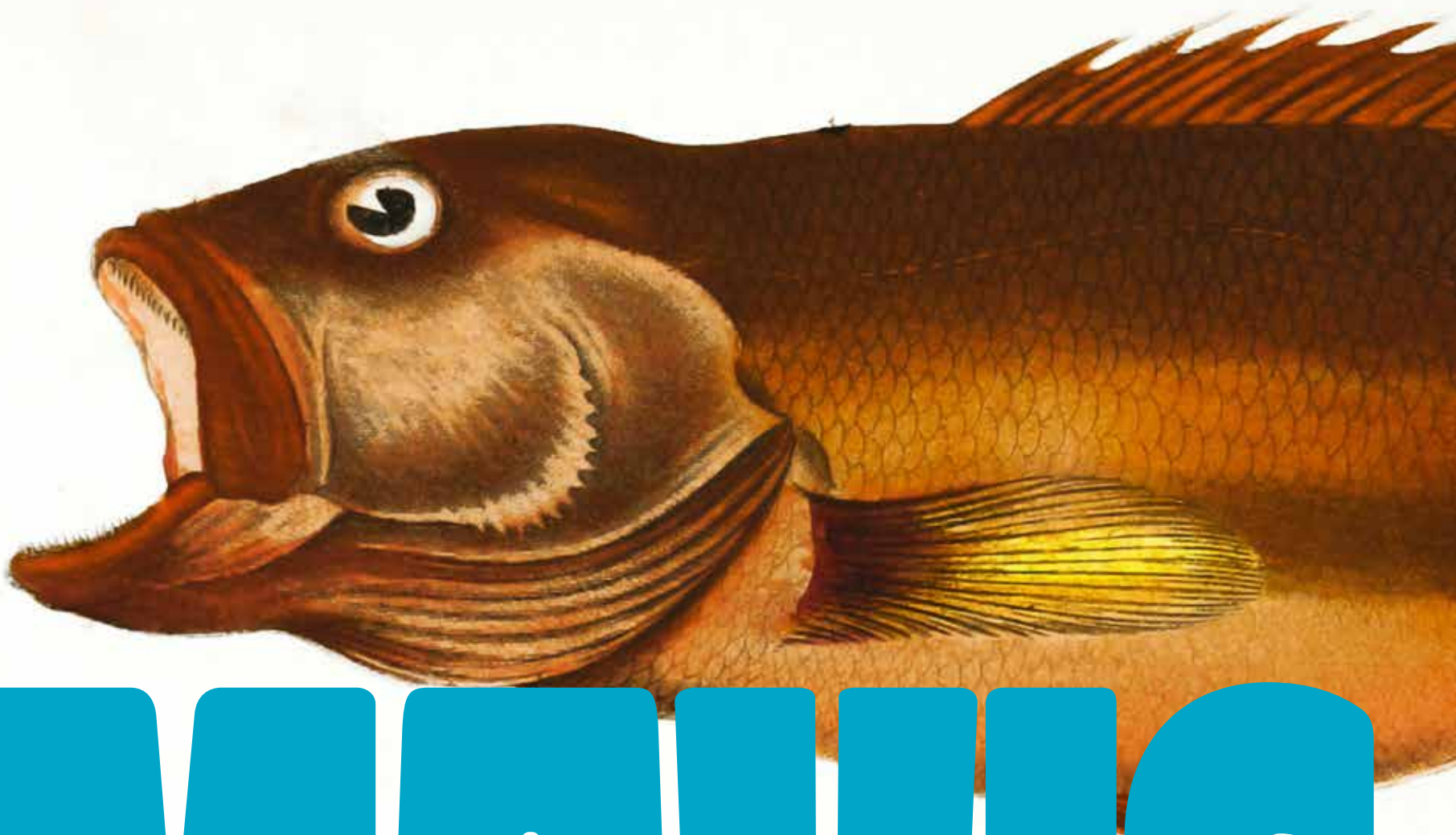
If I pick at the scars inside my brain  
I find you.  
You look at me, absurdly vital.  
It's then you ask for him, say you expect  
England turned sodden on his departure  
As if for a moment  
You had forgotten me.

Left to want what we are without

What you lost won't be forever







# MAUIS

*BY KARRIM JALALI*





The first thing you should know about Mavis is her pantry smelt of old wasps. Maybe you don't know what old wasps smell like, but don't worry, my friend. You will.

Mavis was in her mid-fifties when I met her. I was told she was the sort of person who arranged to meet people at times like "three thirty six", and when she was on her way to see friends and family, she would frequently tell them that she would be there in "eighteen minutes" or something like that. Basically, she didn't see the point in rounding to tens or fives. She found it arbitrary. I suppose it is, when you think about it. That said, she wasn't going to waste time by giving those estimated times in seconds. That, as far as I can tell, was something that she saw as a step too far.

So how did I meet Mavis? Well, that's a funny story.

I met Mavis when I worked as an Antisocial Behaviour Officer. The job I did is probably not what you immediately think of. It wasn't to do with ASBOs, and noise nuisance, and vandalizing teenagers, and shit like that. I was employed when a person had been invited out by friends, but had decided they were going to stay in. I'd basically go 'round to their homes and say, "Hey, come on. Stop being so antisocial. It's a Friday night. Go and have a few drinks with your friends."

I was good at it. I was persuasive. I had mad skills, bruv. And it was a fun job for a while. But the fun didn't last.

For the first few years, I persuaded about 80% of the people I was tasked to meet. That's a good percentage, by the way. Most people doing that job would be happy with anything over 20%.

The problem with having such a high success rate is the other people in my team would get insanely jealous or think I was somehow cheating the system. Needless to say, I didn't get invited out on many after-work socials, which was kind of ironic given the job we did. I was antisocial I suppose, but not really by any choice, more by imposition.... which reminds me of my sex life: I'm celibate, but not by choice.

I think I should probably say something about what I said a few moments ago. I don't want it to be the elephant in the room, so to speak. I don't want you thinking I hadn't noticed it immediately when I said it and didn't instantly regret it, because I did. I really did. I'm self-aware, you see.

So, yeah, I said "needless to say" which is a really dick thing to say. I sincerely hope you don't think of me as a dick because of that slip up. I don't normally use that phrase. In fact, when people use it, I pick

them up on it. I interrogate them about it. As far as I'm concerned, if it's 'needless to say', then don't fucking say it. You know what I mean?

So, I'm really sorry about that little blip there, but are you happy for me to move on?

Good.

Right, so, where was I? Oh, yes. My success rate. My boss had complaints about me from the rest of the shit-rag bastards that made up my team, but my boss liked me. Obviously my boss liked me. I was doing a bloody good job and she was reaping the rewards. But my boss didn't want a mutiny on her hands either, so she started giving me the hardest cases we had.

Well, after that my success rate plummeted. My commission rate plummeted too. The rest of my team were loving it. They still didn't invite me out, though, maybe because my success rate was still 40%, which, I'll add, was pretty much twice as high as nearly every other person there, so they still fucking hated me, but probably half as much as they did before. Put it this way, they were definitely enjoying me struggling. They were real fucking sadists to be honest. And as I tell you all this, it makes me wonder how I put up with it all for so long.

I know what you're thinking. What's all this got to do with Mavis? Who's Mavis? Blah blah blah. Well, just steady on, yeah?

Mavis was one of the hard cases that my boss assigned me.

Obviously.

If you were paying attention, you could easily have second-guessed that.

Mavis, to be blunt, was a right cunt. When I showed up at her door, she was apoplectic. I didn't even manage to introduce myself and tell her why I was there before she racially abused me and called me a 'whore'. She couldn't stand an Asian woman coming to her door and she made it known in very clear terms.

And she slammed the door in my face. The thing about her response that was particularly ridiculous was, as you can tell, I'm a pale, ginger thirty-eight-year-old man. Apart from aging from what I was then to what I am now, which was, hmm, what would it be, yeah, about eleven years... so apart from that, I have not changed in race or sex – you know, just to make that clear, in case you were wondering...

because they do amazing things in science these days.

Now, as I was still the employee with easily the highest success rate in our company and took pride in the work I did, I was not going to give up so easily on Mavis. So I knocked again. And again. And again. And again. And again. And... well, you see, I was quite a persistent fucker.

So, Mavis, she called the police on me, which is fair dos really, given I was on her property, and, although she had racially abused me (in a sense), I was pretty persistent. And you could easily argue (and I'd agree with you) that my approach might have come across as a bit harassmenty.

So the police turned up just after I'm waiting outside her door after knocking on it, saying, "Excuse me, Mavis. I'm just letting you know, I'm not an Asian woman, so if you do dislike Asian women and you don't want to engage with an Asian woman, you can engage with me because I'm a white, ginger man."

Just as an aside, because I think it's important for me to say this: there is a lot of prejudice against gingers. It's a bit weird actually. In America, they bloody love gingers like me, but here, so many people think it's okay to give others a hard time just because they were born with hair follicles of a certain colour or whatever. It's outrageous. I mean, obviously I don't think it's as bad as full on racism, but it's in the ballpark. Or at least nearby the ballpark. Well, whatever, let's not get bogged down on the similarities of anti-gingerism and racism.

I'm kind of thinking I might be losing you, and I really want to tell you more about Mavis. It's very important.

So, anyway, the police turned up, like I said.

"Excuse me sir, we've had some complaints about an Asian woman who has been harassing the poor lady who lives here. You haven't seen an Asian woman around here, have you?"

Mavis, evidently, was clearly not very well in the head. This made me feel like more of a shit for pestering her for being anti-social. Maybe she just wanted to stay in. And that was her fucking prerogative. That was the thing that was really dragging me down about my work at that time. I knew deep down that some of the social events I had encouraged and facilitated people's involvement in would probably be well shitter than just staying in all night, watching youtube clips of people falling off ski lifts.

So I explained to the police officer that I hadn't seen any Asian women, but I would keep a look out, which seemed to satisfy him enough, because the police officer said, "righty-ho," and then knocked on Mavis' door.

"Hello, Mavis. It's PC Plod," or whatever his name was. "Hello, Mavis. Mavis, are you there?"

Well, this fella was an Asian man, so I was very worried about how Mavis was going to react to him, but she opens the door and says, "I'm so glad you're here. I have just had a terrible ordeal."

And the policeman goes straight inside.

Now, as I said, I was, and still am a really persistent fucker. But I was also worried PC Plod would put two and two together and come up with four,

you know, which would be to work out that her complaints were actually about me. And I had been a bit harassmenty to Mavis, so I decided it was probably best I headed off for a bit and come back later when the police fella had gone.

So I came back an hour later. But I had a bit of a brain wave while I was away, so, this time, I arrived dressed up and made up as an Indian woman.

I knocked on Mavis' door.

"Excuse me, my name is Amisha. I am an Indian woman who has come to see you because your friends have invited you out to the pub and you've decided to stay in."

Well, straight away, she opened the door.

"Amisha! So lovely to see you."

And Mavis invited me straight in.

"Mavis. Do me a favour. Can you join your friends at the Queen's Head pub? They're all meeting for a glass of sherry. It will be lovely for you to see them."

But Mavis was having none of it.

"Amisha, come on through and have a look at my flag collection."

She brought me into her lounge, and showed me historic variations of the same flag: the flag for the British East India Company.

"Amisha, I tell you. I long to go back to the days when we didn't have to apologise for civilizing savages."

It's fair to say, I wasn't keen to keep her on this train of thought. I just wanted to get her to meet with her mates so I could get myself home and collect my commission the following day, so I kept trying to move the topic on and persuade into her going to the pub with her friends. But it was easier said than done.

"Wouldn't it be fun to be at the Queen's Head right now, sharing a drink with familiar faces in a good old traditional British pub that respects the monarchy?"

I think you can probably already tell with the sort of shit that Mavis had already come out with, that this wasn't a bad bespoke effort for trying to get her out of her home and socialising with friends. But Mavis was a tough fucking cookie. And a dry fucking cookie. In fact, I think she might have just been a biscuit. Speaking of which, as Mavis was mid-way through explaining to me the difference between the first flag of the East India Company - the flag between 1688 and 1801, and the final flag before they dissolved in 1874, she stopped in her tracks, and said, "Oh, how rude of me. I must make you a good old cup of British Darjeeling tea and get you some biscuits."

This is just how Mavis thought. I mean I had no problem with the hospitality aspect, but I did have a problem with her thinking tea from Darjeeling was British. That said, I wasn't there to debate her on these things. I was there to get her to the pub with her mates, and to get the fuck out of her home and back to mine, so when Mavis insisted that I must have a cup of British Darjeeling tea, I accepted her offer graciously only because it gave me more opportunity to work my magic.

Mavis made her way out of her lounge, into her kitchen, and that's when I smelt it.

Mavis had opened up her pantry and the scent hit me like a sledgehammer. I had never smelt old wasps before, but fuck me, it was amazing. As in beautiful. I kid you not, and you probably won't believe me as I tell you this, but old wasps, not young wasps, old wasps - still living, mind - smell absolutely wonderful.

Of course, I had no idea what the smell was when I first smelt it, so I picked





myself up off Mavis' couch to investigate.

"Wow, Mavis, I hope you don't mind me coming into the kitchen, but that smell is absolutely beautiful. What is it?"

And there she was, the pantry door open, her clothes removed and placed in a small heap by the washing machine. She was stark bollock naked. Well not bollock naked; fanny naked. But her nude body was covered from head to toe in wasps. I shit you not. To say I was perturbed would be a fucking understatement.

"Mavis. What the fuck? Are you okay? I'll call 999."

"No, no, my dear. These aren't like those bloody Indian wasps. These are British wasps. They're far more civilized, my dear. Don't you just love that old waspy smell? They're like a fine wine. Just like a fine wine often tastes better as it gets older, wasps smell better the older they get. Ooh, you should smell a wasp when it's on its death bed."

"Mavis. Don't move. I'm worried they're going to sting you. I'll call for help."

"No, no, young man. No need for that. They're my friends."  
Now this response really bugged me, or, to put it better, confused me. I wasn't sure if she called me 'young man' because she knew I was the same person from before (and that I was actually a young man and my make up and outfit and attempts to disguise myself as an Indian woman were so ridiculous that she could see right through them), or whether my disguise was effective because Mavis' mental disposition saw white folk as Asian and Asian folk as White, and males as females and females as males. But as Mavis is no longer with us, we will never know for sure.

One other thing she had said earlier had also troubled me. It's a bit of a myth wine gets better as it gets older. When that is true - which is certainly not always the case - but when it is true, it's only true up to a point. At some point, the wine will taste shit if you wait too long to drink it. And plenty of fine wine is there to be drunk when it's made or within a short time-period afterwards. So since Mavis had put my concerns about her being covered in wasps completely to rest, I felt it was only right and appropriate I challenged her on her wine misconception. Perhaps if I could persuade her on my wine point, she might be more persuaded to join her mates at the Queen's Head for a Sherry.

But Mavis was a right stubborn bastard.

"You haven't got a fucking clue," she said. "Who the hell do you think you are, coming here and telling me about old wasps?"

"I'm not telling you anything about old wasps. I appreciate that you seem to be the wasp expert here. I was just saying that your wine analogy needs some work and is not entirely accurate."

Well that really set her off. And got us both into a bit of a verbal tussle.

"You perverted scumbag. You only came here to see what my naked body looks like covered in wasps?"

To be honest, in every work visit I had ever made, a tiny part of me did always wonder what the people I'd be visiting would look like naked and covered in wasps. But it wasn't perversion. It was curiosity. And it was frankly a disgrace for Mavis to conflate the two.

"How dare you, Mavis? I have been nothing but kind to you. And you make these accusations against me, a perfectly innocent Indian woman."

Mavis calmed down a bit after that. It helped that the kettle clicked off to signal it had boiled, so Mavis took out some loose-leaf tea and made a proper batch in a teapot, still covered in wasps, of course.

"Please, go back to the sitting room and take a seat, young man. You're my guest after all."

"Can I take anything through?" I offered.

"No, I'll manage, and anything I can't, these old wasps can take."

And take they bloody did. They brought some biscuits on a plate through, placing it one of the nest tables by the armchair I was sat in. And can you guess what was on the plate?

No, not old wasps! For fuck sake, is anyone paying attention here?! It was millionaire shortbread. What a fucking result that was. I bloody love millionaire shortbread. Say what you want about Mavis, who was a strange fucking woman, and blatantly racist and misogynistic, but she had fucking good taste in biscuits.

At this point, it's probably worth me asking: is millionaire shortbread definitely a biscuit or have I made an embarrassing faux pas? Shall we take a vote on it?

Who thinks that millionaire shortbread is a biscuit?

Oof.

And who thinks it isn't a biscuit?

Wow. I really wasn't expecting that. Well, I think it's biscuity enough to be considered biscuit, so there you go.

Anyway, so as Mavis came back through to the lounge, with a little less wasp coverage than before, still naked, of course, she went to put the teapot down on the nest table, along with one of the two cups she was holding. And just as she was about to do that, another swarm of beautiful smelling old wasps departed her naked body in order to quickly place down a coaster.

I don't know what you think about that, but I have to say, it was a great relief to know that old wasps not only smell sensational, but also respect wood. To be perfectly honest, it was also quite a bonus to get an extra glimpse of Mavis, if you know what I mean. Oh, come on! I'm only human.

So we let the tea brew, and the wasps maneuvered themselves and settled so as to avoid being sat on by Mavis as she took her seat on couch. And we didn't say a word for about three minutes. I just sat there, taking in the profoundly beautiful smell of old wasps, thinking to myself, "Wow. How have I only just found out what old wasps smell like? I need to share this with the world."

A few days later, Mavis had to be sectioned. Her physical health deteriorated rapidly too, and she died a few weeks after I met her. I wasn't that fussed when I heard the news because she was a massive bigot. The thing that really got me was I never managed to convince her to meet her friends. Oh, yes, and I lost my job. My company found out about my Amisha moment and felt that making myself up, and dressing as an Indian woman was completely inappropriate and allegedly "brought the company into disrepute". I think they were just looking for an excuse - I threatened them because I was so much better at the work than anyone else. But to be honest, I would have left anyway. I had something far more special to work on. What you might describe as my calling.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why you are all here, at our company launch.

This has been a long time in the making.

You've heard of Old Spice. Ladies and gentlemen, I bring you Old Wasps. The first and only perfume made from 100% old wasps.



# CATALYST

## BY GRANDE PAPÀ



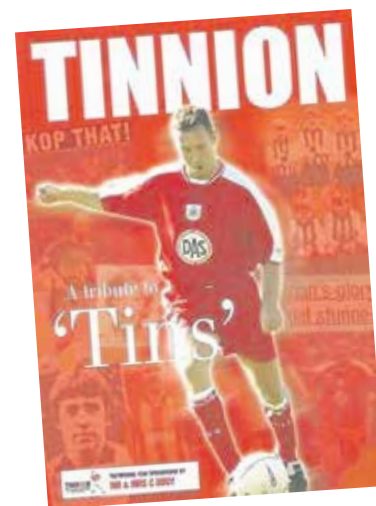
I used to read Big Daddy magazine.  
635 Cubic Feet up in the tape machine.  
I remember the Paul C feature.  
How he used to wear the Stetson (?) and  
schooled Large Professor.  
The sense of discovering arcana.  
And the portable turntable advertised on  
the back inside cover.



The name was changed to Grand Slam  
magazine then.  
Probably due to a copyright issue.  
I read it on the coach to the LDV Vans final.  
It was somewhere around the time of Brian  
Tinnion's testimonial.



I still have my copies and associated CDs  
(somewhere).  
Been carrying them around since the end  
of my teens.  
There was always an advert for a night  
called Off The Hook.  
It is funny what shapes your decisions  
when you think.



A whole world opened up through those  
pages.  
Just as one loss opens up another.  
He sent me an article from RP.  
I still think about those tears when you  
remembered reading CVG.



And I can still picture the module  
handbooks that I threw away.  
So lovingly put together.







PHOTOGRAPHY: BARNEY SMITH

# EMPATHY

*BY LUCY UCHOA*

I heard a word today which I wasn't sure if I'd ever heard before. Empathy. My colleague couldn't believe it.

"You must have heard it. Perhaps you've heard it before but never really paid attention to it," he said.

"Yeah, I suppose so."

I had to ask him to explain what it meant. The concept seems very foreign to me. According to my colleague, most people have this empathy thing. According to my colleague, lacking empathy is a good indication of being psychopathic.

On hearing his explanation, I immediately told him that although I had never really known of the word, the actual practice of empathy was very important to me. Really, though, I had absolutely no idea that people thought so differently to me.

"Oh, it's terrible that some people can go through their life without being able to conceive of how other people might feel," I said, perfectly aware of the irony and doing my best to conceal my true nature.

He agreed. "Yes, it's terrible, isn't it?"

I don't like this man. I've decided I am going to follow him home from work and kill him while he watches TV.

# COMPLAINING ON VALENTINE'S DAY

**BY IONA MATTHEWS**

A 2014 university study  
in customer complaints  
found a general trend  
for companies to receive  
a spiked increase in complaints  
on Valentine's Day.

The authors suggested that  
lonely people,  
being more abjectly aware  
than ever  
of having no romantic partner,  
took to complaining  
as a distraction  
for their misery.

I was less than impressed  
when I read the study.  
To me, it was clear  
that the spike  
could have been  
for a variety of reasons,  
and the authors were speculating  
without sufficient evidence.

I emailed the university  
to complain.  
And I received a reply,  
three days later  
on 17th February.

## CUPID

**BY ALICE TOWNSEND**

Dipping the arrowhead in poison  
Cupid impaled himself  
And the world mourned  
But none more than him

They held a humanist ceremony  
Packed with well-wishers  
Leading out into the hallway

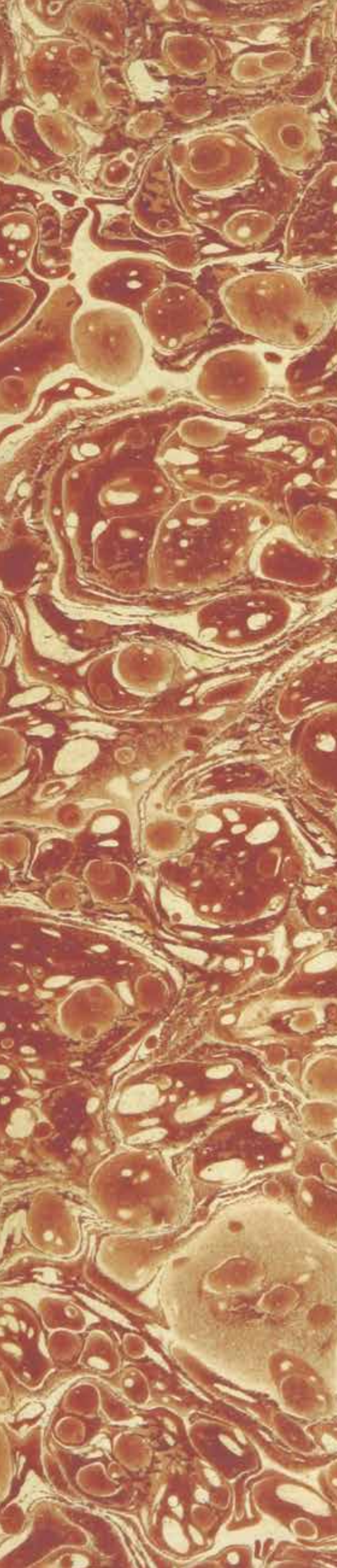
How did you know him, they ask  
And she doesn't know how to tell them  
That she was a just another number  
He hadn't even bothered to save











# MOB NOTES

BY TRISTRAM BELLOTTI

I am I, again, at once my own father and my own son with the added bonus this time of feeling like I might be feeling all this from the perspective of my unborn grandson. This stuff is the greatest! Like fluid whizzing around wherever your soul or tired tissue brain takes you. I've learned more about my place in the world here in this space than any shrinko or pinko could ever make me thinko. I don't talk like this! Can you hear me Denver Colorado? I am my father, my son and my holy Unborn child, I travel the gut linings of ancestrers scooping up all the stuff that doesn't work on paper.

I feel so happy this time that I lay on the wooden decking as the others get on around me. I instruct silently, telepathically to the small lad and he obliges pulling the shiny silver plastic off the card roll into a translucent sheet for me to lie under and sweat. Despite being in the top decking in the sun I came to realise my people were struggling, children estranged from their parents. One boy doing some woodwork wet himself and as the pee ran down his shorts and onto the decking I felt my heart ache unbearably. Oh my god I'm so sorry I had no idea you didn't want to be here. Of course you don't want to be here! How could I be so stoopid! Come here, let me hug you, hug the life out of your poor tired little soul. I need to hug you I'm suffocating I feel so wretched my stomach is twisting my lungs are collapsing. My darling child I'm so sorry I love you, I want to help you please let me help you, I need to help you! My heart is empty without you. What is your name? I never even asked your name before!

Let me take you back to your mother . Where is she? What do you speak? Where were you from? What can I do for you? Anything? Forget the wood, don't be scared of me please. Don't blame the guy wedged between high quality decking and the heavens above. I am a pig in a pen like you. Now I've hurt you I must heal you and have you near me forever. My beautiful rescuee. Not like that. All you would need to do is give 200 dollars and you get paraded around with gold crusted flatcaps like a war hero for the rest of your days by cushy restauranteurs. Do Islamic countries have this epidemic? Giving ungraciously. I want to, I really want to. If you dare laugh at the radio I'll shoot you people. I am not that man. I am a kind man, tell them, please! I did not choose this way. I want to I do. I have friends who end sponsors at a click but I don't want to end like that.

■•△×%☒

A mother wheels her infant boy over to the only remaining payphone in the district, grey in plastic and metal outside an equally futuristic fictional antiquated urban dive. the boy answers. he is talking to the past. it is dad alright. dad before he croaked it, dad before he bit the plastic dust sheet. two smokers lean out the great whiplike district, pointing and discussing the sudden shiny monolith over their heads. Windows bigger than you could believe.

×△•□%◆

A subcortical connection is made - maybe it's the smells or neuro-wiring getting too tangled, transferring information and places in my mind overflowing, absorbing into neighbouring pulses, connecting accidentally with sensors alien to them 🧠 but I get sucked back there 🧑♀️ . Suburban roundabouts, one of the old city's claims to a gothic masterpiece calling out to us from across a dingy wooden table carved into our minds without windows, a side street in Spanish Morocco with a bag full of petit filous on the way back to a bare room with both children stuffing themselves into a cheap wardrobe whilst their parents recover.

♠️🌀•☒

Whilst just dozing off someone just told me "dreaming is very important. We are all equal in dreams. We can inhabit others and others inhabit us."

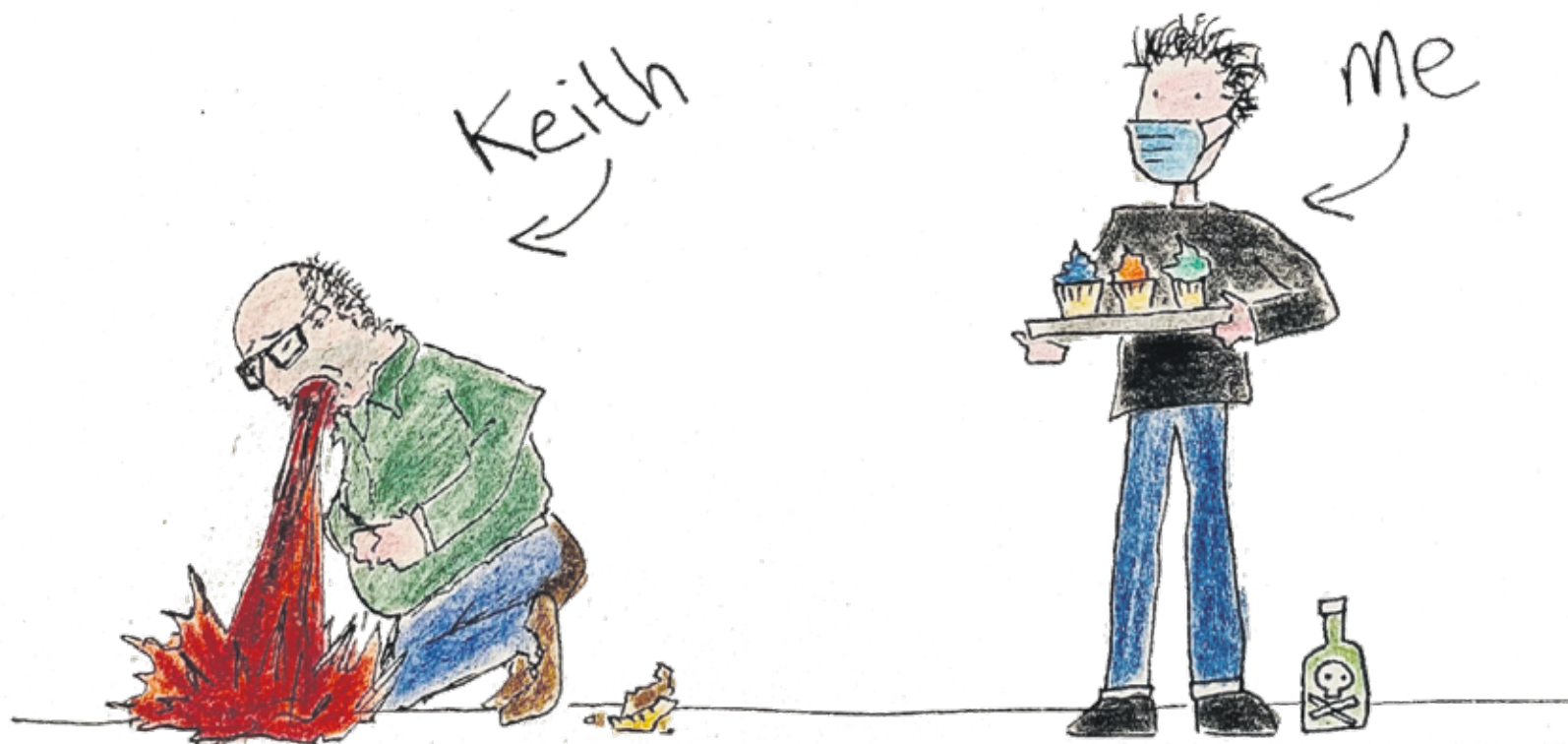
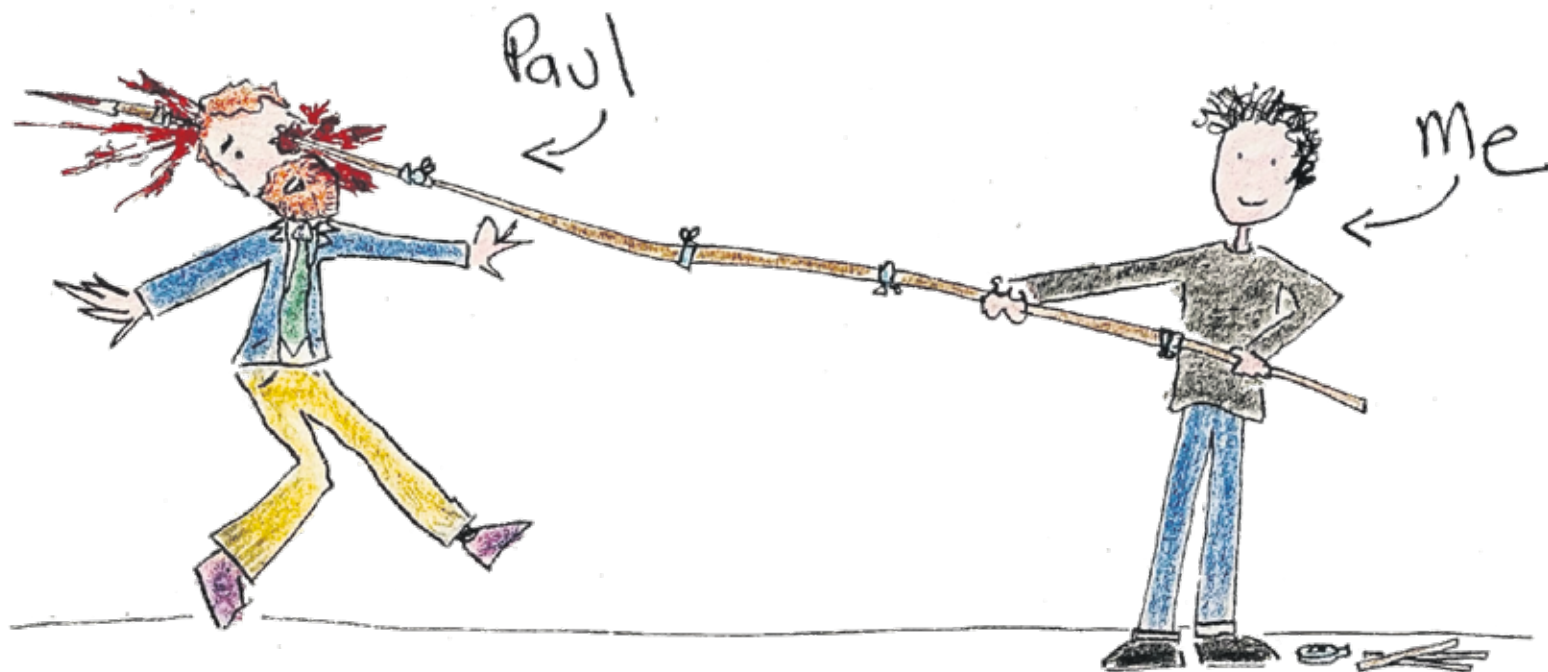
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The two girls paraded up and down the aeroplane isle with the T-shirt slogans;

"Nothing sacred..." (Front) "...about private property" (back).

"Don't get drunk..."(Front) "...on rhetoric, alone" (back)







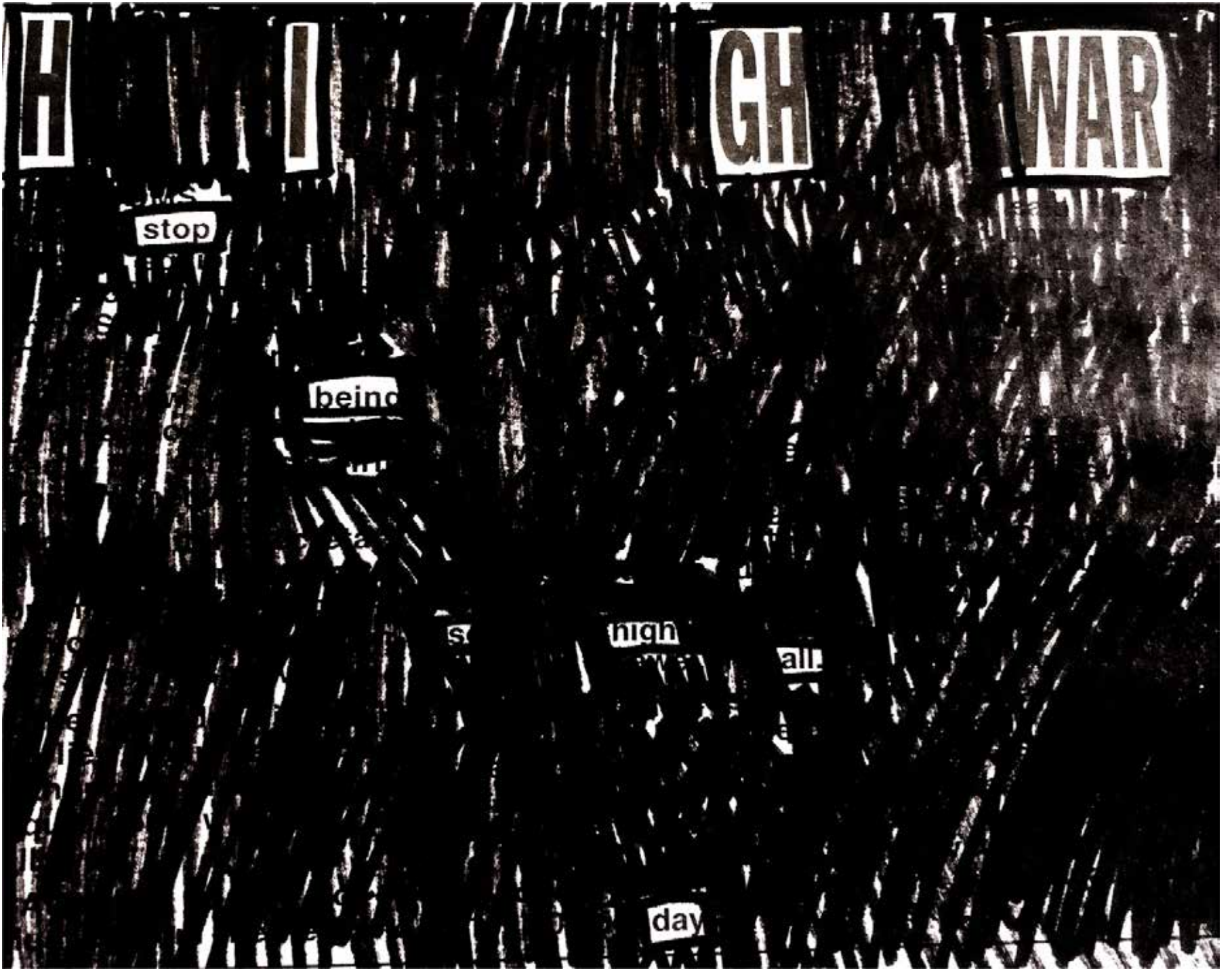
# MILLER

BY WESLEY COOKE

while she discoursed about the miserable failure of our lives her feet were dancing and her eyes were getting brighter and brighter her eyes glowed like coals like the eyes of a Bedouin woman she is a bright sage a dancing seer who with the sweep of a brush removes the ugly scaffold to which the body of woman is chained she is on top of the world with no roof and not even a crack or a hole under her feet to fall through and say it's a lie she is the personification of the whole human race shaking hands with a thousand human hands cackling with a thousand different human tongues cursing applauding whistling crooning soliloquizing orating gesticulating urinating fecundating wheedling cajoling whimpering bartering pimping caterwauling and so on and so forth she it is if any woman today possesses the gift who knows where to dissolve the human figure the whole negative impulse of humanity coiling up into a monstrous inert mass to create the human integer the figure one and indivisible who has the courage to sacrifice an harmonious line in order to detect the rhythm and murmur of the blood behind the chaos the mockery of life with her snake-like tongue which struck like lightning with fingers moving nervously as though wandering over an imaginary spinet – all this flurry and din all these kaleidoscopic prestidigitations of hers were only a sort of obeah which she employed but to break the spell required a power equal to her own





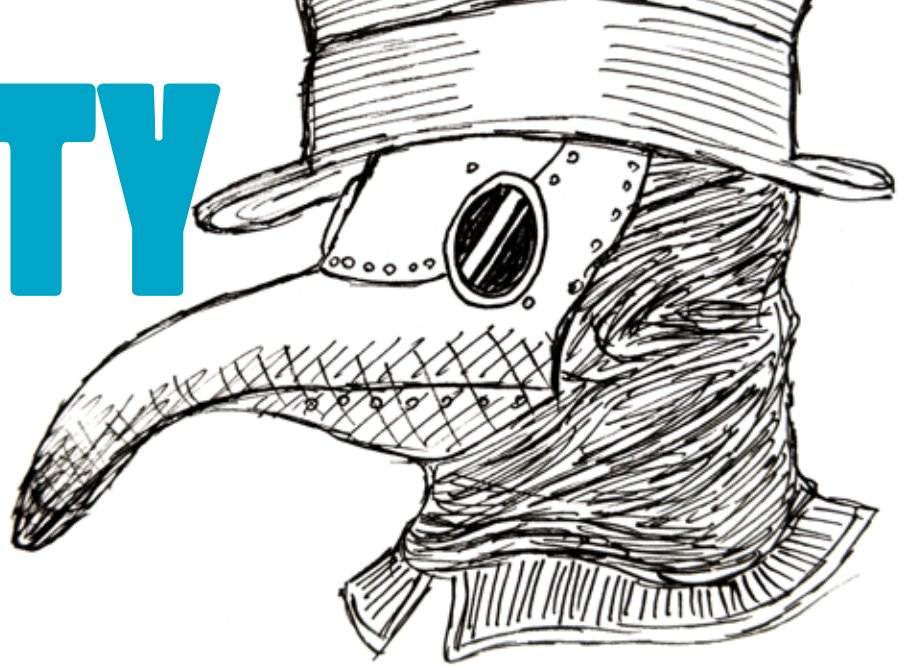


**BY QUEEN SHARMIN RASHED**

Taken from newspaper clippings on 01 December, 2020, the last day of the second lockdown

# PITY PARTY

BY GARY WHARTLEY



"So how many trees exactly did you envisage with nooses?"

Process. This is it, right in the midst of it.

"OK, an approximation. More or less than 50 percent? It's an important distinction and could really help in us selecting the right treatment option for you."

There had been forms. There had been calls. There had been the same forms and the same calls. Fake it 'til you make it to treatment, cure, the top of the class, proximity to the warm air vent behind the bins, whatever.

When you don't know what you need it's hard to know what you want, the necessary stunts to pull. Fake too hard and you can't help thinking there's some possibility of a straitjacket try-on in the near future; fake not enough and you might not even get another form to fill in. Back to what remains of the icy tundra in springtime.

They say things get worse before they better. A convenient get-out if ever there was one. Drugs are on offer from the get-go, obviously. The aim there is achieving and maintaining a state of never worse, never better. Induced radical acceptance of a reality that isn't quite yours. Just fill in the form and answer the questions strategically honestly.

Discharge can mean a number of things: release on the back of success as defined by the professionals, release due to unforeseen circumstances as defined by the professionals, release because you missed the letter reminding you about the first letter which referenced an earlier call. 2 and 3 far more likely than 1. The door is always open, but there was never a door.

You should quit the job which augments the base level issues or may in fact be the issue itself but which you definitely need to avoid the absolutely certain deterioration that comes with not having coin. Bad train of thought, cheapest Hornby set, one circle and one carriage.

Post-its doubled down with Sellotape to forehead provide a reminder that no matter how bad the them is, it's always you, not them. More of that undiluted Zen Buddhist teaching, or something. Might get a good quality mic and try and make a percentage of a penny per click from this; got enough of an annoying voice to turn this inquiring permafrown into something befitting internet guru status.

Vote Pity Party. You're sure they should exist, posting flyers to PO boxes listed on the dark web and buying up ad slots next to illegal streaming services, between Hot Russian Girls That Want to Date You, Become a Bitcoin Billionaire and Hot Asian Girls That Want to Date You. Maybe this is the singularity of focus required not to think of the trees, nooses etc. Make it happen - be the politics this sad, going on self-immolating, nation deserves.

Climbing the stairs of an office building with no concierge, receptionist, floors or offices. Everyone is working from home because they can and have to. A good tranche is at home with no work, masturbation and pictures of other people's pets. The architecture is coded convincingly to inspire that vast emptiness that holds hands with awe. The email went into junk, but you dragged it out kicking and screaming and filled in the damn attached questionnaire that was the same as the last few barring a set of questions about loss of appetite. Immediately very hungry.

No trial, no metamorphosis. Do one, Franz, everyone is a bureaucrat these days. Everyone is a cockroach fighting to make a living from scraps. It's difficult to be too judgemental.

"Your ability to complete day-to-day tasks. Where would that sit from one to five?"

You wonder if answering the call puts you as an automatic 3. If you go in too low, they'll have you down as one of those that attends the sessions but doesn't do the homework, useless. Poor investment of public funds.

"Suicidal thoughts. Every day, two or three times a week, once a week, or less?"

Every day is the truth but the last time you said that they judged you were actually too suicidal for the support available under the constrained budgets and imaginations inherent in the piece.

Vote Pity Party if your attempts to receive any other service than process-begetting-process have been knocked back after several attempts to tailor your key messages according to the unknown criteria.

A will to live is hard to find. Probably harder than a good man or a good heart and definitely the latter within the former. This is probably another one of those learning experiences that everyone is convinced they're having. At some point, no warning, they're going to start a thirty second countdown and at the end you'll have to state what exactly it is you've learned, or else. They will send another form before the next call.





# UP-AND-DOWNSHIP

**BY CAROLINE WIGGINTON**

I hate those people who treat everything as a competition. If you tell them you're hungry they'll go on about how they haven't eat all day. They'll trump your hunger. If you tell them you drank too much over the weekend, they'll tell you how they ended up in hospital and had their stomach pumped.

These are their victories. If that's what makes them happy, I suppose we should let them have them. But this morning, I wasn't in the mood to concede defeat.

"I'm really tired this morning," I said.

"You think you're tired. I was up all night. My son's teething and my daughter refuses to sleep in her own bed. I'm shattered."

"Why is everything a competition with you? And what makes you think I can't be more tired than you? You don't know what happened to me last night, do you?"

Before she could answer my questions, she had fallen asleep.

# TEA-SOAKED NOTHINGS

*BY GARY WHARTLEY*

All the small towns of England.

All the short walks into fields sown with seeds of doubt, primed to sprout.

All the bodies buried amidst mossy soil and roots of trees engraved with the names of lovers not so much star-crossed as crossed by stone-clad proximity.

All the murders of crows and real-life stuff, Crimewatch with no-one watching.

Old Jimmy says he didn't do it but get him drunk enough and he might just change his tune.

His fourth wife says she saw nothing, the third says otherwise.

All the whiter-than-white weddings, high-stakes banter and bludgeoning.

All the vehicles parked in unlikely places and impotent anglers philosophising analogue zeroes into ripples.

The ghost of a ghost of a high street does its weekly shop in the ghost of a market town's market.

All yesterday's one hit wonders playing out to today's ears clogged with loam and fog.

Rotting cupboards of rotting things, pig swill and hogwash.

All the church fêtes and falconry demonstrations and kicks to the head with long-term damage.

He's a good lad, she's a good girl.

Folk football and cheese rolling and the putrid farts of cows.

Renowned local curtain twitchers all agree: he's a wrong 'un, they know by the way he only rarely puts out the bins on Tuesdays.

All the parody and violently-gripped vague prejudice, converted outhouses and ideas of masculinity tied up in the back of pick-ups.

All the immaculate conceptions and aborted imaginations.

All the invertebrates taking advantage wherever advantage can be found.

The land loves poetry, the people not at all.

All the hard livers with hard livers, the codgers and coffin dodgers, that woolly eared pack down the Woolpack pulling the wool over their own eyes downing pint after pint.

All the mulch and fungus, gangrene, pus and fingers in many pies.

They say Terry was born lucky and that Sheila was born with the evil eye spying through binoculars on the scene plus black cats unbalancing milk bottles on the doorstep.

All the local artists' mediocre watercolours, folk football and beat the shit out the donkey.

Sheila wrote letters to the local rag about the local hospital, but it shut down anyway, taking the library with it.

All the inevitable.

All the ailing campaigners for real warm ale with scabs in it who don't want any of that continental rubbish.

All the declined cards and schoolchildren fucking perilously in canal side shrubbery.

Every last skull and crossbones in every copse and every bullied animal.

Sentimental artefacts hung on necks, ashes next to television sets.

All the fatherless kids and kidless fathers smoking rollups hunched against a cold that is there even as spring meets summer.

Jenny and Dave ran off to the big city and were never heard from again, Sue and Graham sucked dirt early doors, bike totalled on a blind corner by the emaciated phantoms of boy racers.

All the tea and cake and domestic abuse and local lads gone good as well as bad, very bad.

All the puddles used as mirrors and underwhelming headlines about local businesses while fear-scented carnage rumbles all around.

Karaoke and witch trials every Friday night.

All the charity shops and callous disregard and agricultural subsidy.

All the distant car alarms, potholes passionately cared about and graves left untended.

All the horror within beauty and beauty within horror.

All the small towns of England.





# HACKNEY WOMAN WFH

BY QUEEN SHARMIN RASHED









# THE HUMAN FARM

**BY VINCE RYAN**

Waking with a stretch, another day in paradise began. I rolled out of bed, and changed into my swimming trunks. This morning, I decided, would be nice and relaxed. I took my time enjoying my personal infinity pool with gorgeous views over the Alastran Mountains. There was even time to pop into the sauna before making my way down to the family breakfast room.

It was a bustle of activity, with my Herptopian family laughing and chatting away as they ate all sorts of delicious smelling breakfast treats. My owner, Lana, saw me as soon as I entered the room, and she sat next to me on my sofa. She didn't eat the same food as the rest of the family, and when I had asked about this in the past she just said she liked different things. I never found out any more.

Lana had looked after me since infancy and was the closest thing I had to a mother. It hadn't been difficult for her to learn English and continue teaching it to me as I grew up. She was, after all, a multi-dimensional being with an intellect far beyond anything any human could ever comprehend. It was just the way it was, that since conquering earth and enslaving the human race, Herptopians had always kept some humans to be domesticated. Those lucky few lived a privileged life. I didn't know much about Earth apart from that the humans who'd lived there centuries ago had destroyed its environment.

'It's a big day for you today, you know Eggbert?' Lana said as I tucked into my delicious breakfast of fruit, yoghurt and honey. I knew we were going to the Humanarian for me to get the snip. 'But you have nothing to worry about,' she continued. 'You'll be sound asleep, and you won't know any difference.'

I was slightly concerned about the procedure, but I wanted to look brave. It was my 12th birthday next week, and if I didn't get the operation done, I knew I would turn into one of those ogres with beards and deep voices whom I sometimes saw on my entertainment station. The family loved to hear me sing in my beautiful, high voice, so I wouldn't want to lose that ability and let them down...

I had some free time because the operation was in the afternoon so I caught up with a few other domesticated human friends on a holograph group call and told them what was happening. Seb, who'd had the op 18 months ago, reassured me, saying it was nothing to worry about. He'd been a bit tender for a week or so after, but he said the pain relief tablets they gave you were really strong. It wasn't like I had faced a great deal of hardship in my life. I felt loved by my Herptopian family, and my loyalty to Lana meant I would do anything she said. That included getting castrated.

When the time came, a reminder alarm beeped from the corner of my room. Lana would come to meet me, as she would have been at school all morning. Humans and Herptopians couldn't travel together anyway, as Herptopians had the ability to transport through time and space in such a way as to seemingly disappear and reappear to any human watching. But I had my own teleportation pod that was almost as good.

I arrived in the Humanarian surgery half an hour early. Lana wasn't there yet. The waiting room was full of other domesticated humans. The owners of the humans flitted in and out of view in that slightly disconcerting Herptopian way. I sat on a chair next to a much older human who looked like he'd never been castrated. In fact, he didn't look like he was very well cared for at all. His hair and beard were long and scraggly, and his clothes were slightly odd - like his owner had just picked items at random rather than getting a stylist!

'Hi kid, I'm Todd. Here for the snip, are you?' he said. His breath smelled the same as my urine did after I'd eaten asparagus. I wondered where Todd's owner was. Did he even have an owner? Despite feeling uncomfortable, and hoping that Lana would turn up soon, I answered him. 'Yes, I'm having the operation. But you've never had it, have you? I thought owners were obliged to have it done to stop humans breeding in an uncontrolled fashion.'

'Let's just say my owner's a bit unconventional. He's an activist, you see. Believes in human rights.'

'Oh right. That sounds interesting. But why does he care about us? I would have thought a Herptopian would have more important matters to attend to.'

'Well it's not really for us domestics. We've got it pretty good haven't we? No, it's the farmed humans he's most interested in.' Todd saw my expression of surprise. 'Why, I bet you didn't even know that earth is just one big human farm these days, did you?'

'What? Humans being farmed? What for? I know all that stuff about how when humans lived on earth, they used to keep farm animals. But now all our meat is grown in the lab.'

'Very sheltered little life you're living, aren't you? Yes, human feed is grown in the lab. But it's generally well accepted among Herptopians that lab grown meat doesn't taste as good as real-life animal meat. And the animal that Herptopians like to eat most is humans. Of course, growing up in a cocoon, you never found that out, did you?'

I felt confused. I didn't know if this funny looking human was pulling my leg or not. 'I'm sure I would have heard something about it before if there was a human farm on Earth. I think you must be mistaken!'

Todd rolled his eyes as if he was dealing with an imbecile. 'Well of course the Herptopians hide it from us! But do you really want to know the truth? Do you want to see what's happening on Earth right now?'

'Yes, as a matter of fact, I would like us both to see that you've made an embarrassing mistake.'





‘Show me your wrist.’ Todd was of course referring to where my chip was. I hesitantly held out my arm, not really sure how this was relevant. Todd quickly held his own wrist near mine. ‘That’s it,’ he said. ‘Your video restrictions have been lifted from your chip so you’ll be able to see what’s really happening. Just a health warning, kid: it is pretty horrific!’

I was about to ask more questions when Lana appeared, sliding into view as if from nowhere. ‘Hello darling,’ she said warmly. She patted me on the head and smiled at me.

‘Eggbert Hixson’ called the tannoy. It was for the benefit of the humans, as the Herptopians intuitively knew where and when they needed to go. Lana was standing up before my name was even called, and I held her hand as she led me to the operating theatre.

The procedure went smoothly. I was back home later the same afternoon. Unfortunately, I wasn’t allowed to go swimming for a whole week. I had the same strong pain-relieving tablets that Seb had mentioned. As soon as Lana left me to do her schoolwork, I went straight to my entertainment station. Usually I might spend half an hour on cute kitten videos before getting on to a bit of hardcore gaming. But today I searched ‘Earth right now’ and was amazed by what came back

Previously whenever I’d looked for anything similar, all I had found was videos of humans living in primitive conditions. The environment had looked to be on the barren side, but everyone was generally happy. This time, I saw something completely different. With my restrictions lifted from my chip, I was able to see what was really happening on Earth. As Todd had warned, it was horrific.

I spent the next few hours seeing all the different practices on the human farm that was Earth. There were the dairy-women, who lived

a miserable life of being forcibly impregnated, having their infants removed and then being pumped for milk for a few years, before they too were slaughtered. This was where the Herptopian’s milk, yoghurt, cheese and ice cream all came from. I realised guiltily that I had even tasted some when it had been offered to me previously. I couldn’t believe that I had been a part of this awful suffering.

The human meat production was worse still. Human infants were frequently killed because this is when their meat was most tender. Factory farmed humans were crammed together in squalid conditions. Other humans were brought up on ‘free range’ and ‘organic’ farms where their lives were marginally less miserable. Of course, then they would be given an untimely death at some point in their teenage years. Not much older than me in fact. The worst were the farms where feeding tubes were inserted and the poor humans were force-fed to fatten up their livers – a delicacy that I was sure Lana’s dad was particularly partial to.

Now I knew why Lana ate different food from the rest of family. She avoided eating human products because she believed it was wrong! But how could she just stand by and watch the rest of them devouring creatures that were just the same as me. The whole family loved me – I truly believed this. But their behaviour was just so incongruous.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. I kept having nightmares of the sights I’d seen of gore and death on Earth. The screams of the dairy-women filled my ears and when I covered them, the screams became even louder. At one point, I was certain that the floor was covered with human blood, and I felt like throwing up. The thought entered my head that I should just take all my pain medication at once and be done with it. Screw my family of hypocrites. Screw Lana who had tolerated this deplorable



situation. I was deeply hurt that she had covered it up from me. If I hadn't met Todd, I would still be completely in the dark.

Awake and distressed at 3:30am, I sent a holographic message to Todd:

*Thank you, Todd, for opening my eyes to the atrocities that are occurring on Earth, even right now at this very moment. We live here in luxury and completely unknown to most of us, there are billions of our kind going through incredible pain and suffering, ending up on the plates of the owners that we love and adore. I feel completely powerless to help. I don't know what I can do to stop this torrent of death and feel that, by my inaction, I am partially responsible for it. Please tell me, what can I do?*

Part way through the message my voice wavered, and by the end I was crying. Big fat tears rolling down my face. I continued to weep for some time. Then suddenly, Lana was there beside me.

'Eggbert, what's wrong? Are you in pain from the surgery?

I shook my head.

'Tell me what's wrong.'

The sincere worry in her voice was too much and I couldn't hide what had happened from her. I told Lana how I had met Todd and what he had revealed to me.

'Oh, Eggbert. So you know everything? I'm sorry I've hidden this from you. Domestic humans aren't meant to know about the farms, but more and more Herptopians are telling them in recent times. I consider myself a human-lover, and yet for years I ate human meat and human products myself. I became, I suppose you'd call it vegan soon after getting you. I was very young, and had only just been made aware of what was going on Earth.'

I couldn't believe what I was hearing, or how she could have eaten what was once someone like me, with hopes and desires. And love.

She continued, 'I suppose you'll have learnt about the space-time distortion that occurs each day from all this transportation of human products from Earth to our planet. It is causing a gradual multi-dimensional collapse process. If ever there was a good reason to stop eating humans, at least on a more selfish level, that should be it. Sadly, not enough Herptopians feel the same way as me. I fear that our own species will face the same demise as yours.'

I couldn't comprehend why Herptopians who were infinitely more intelligent than humans and capable of such immense kindness would do something so destructive and cruel.

'I'm sorry I kept this from you, Eggbert. I felt so powerless, and I wanted to protect you from the pain of this reality,' Lana said. 'When we arrived on planet Earth, it was a barren place. All non-human life was extinct, and humans were headed that way. I really think that we should learn something from the story of human folly and do everything we can to avert disaster. Not to mention the fact that if another race more intelligent than us comes along and decides that we're delicious, it would be good to have some moral high ground in that situation. At the moment, we have none.'

I thought for a moment then turned towards Lana, and said, 'Thank you for not eating humans.'

As I said it, I winced from the pain in my groin. Lana smiled sympathetically and produced two of my tablets in the palm of one hand and a glass of water in the other.

'It's the least that I can do,' she sighed.



José Guadalupe Posada (Mexican, 1851–1913)



# THIRST

**BY ANN PACKER**

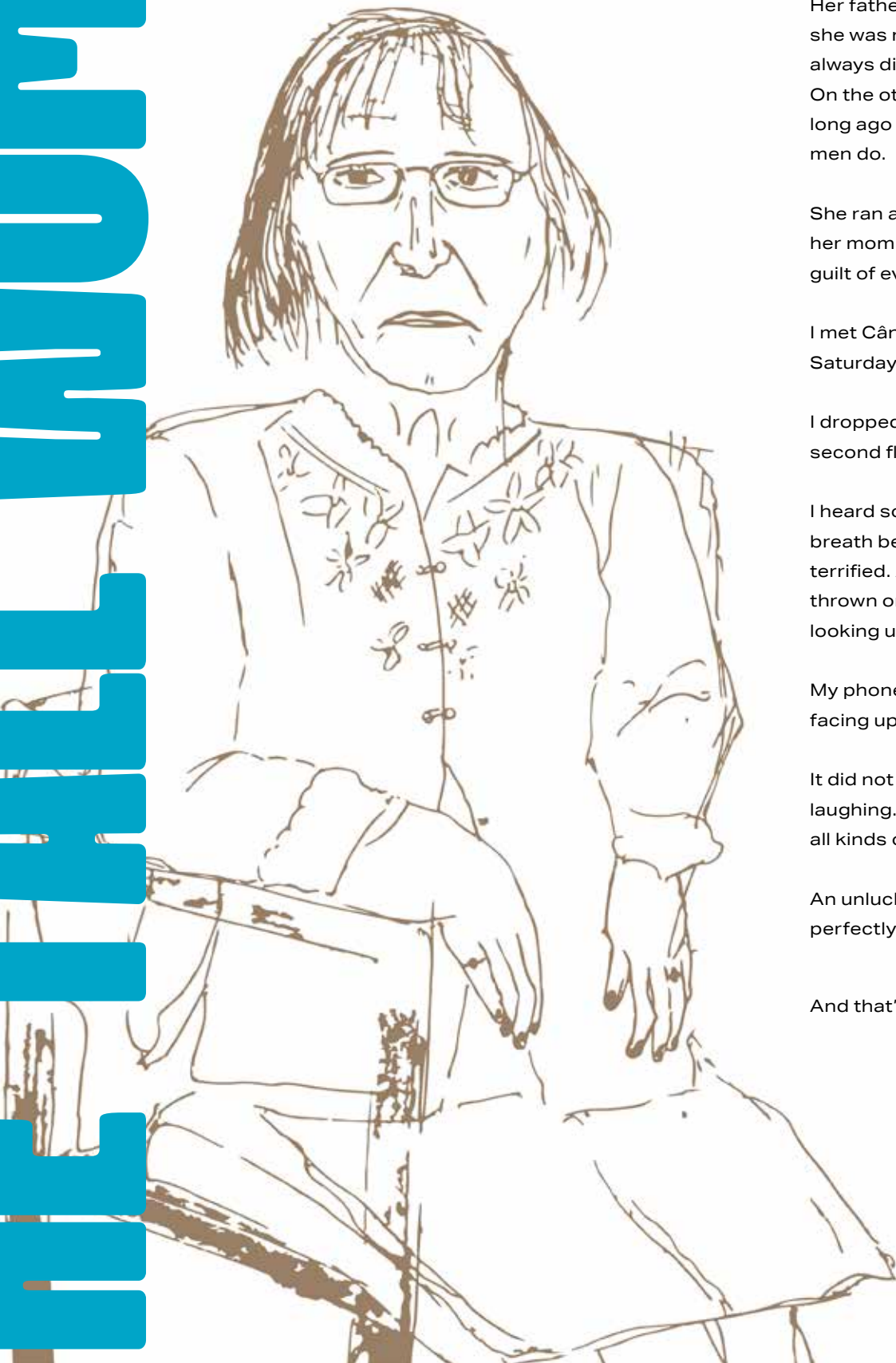
Stranded and gasping for breath,  
you told me, "I think I'm going to die."

I could taste your despair, but  
refusing to swallow it, I offered a  
desperate lie. "I'll find you water."

You pierced my skin with doubt.

Bleeding from your disbelief, I filled  
an empty leather canteen with tears,  
handed it to you, and walked the  
sands alone.

# THE TALL WOMAN



**BY CLÁUDIA ANDRADE**

Cândida is a tall woman, with big feet and thin legs.

From her chauvinist father she learned not to trust men, and from her submissive mother she received little love and guidance.

Her father despised her mother because she was not a virgin when they married, and always disapproved of Cândida dating men. On the other hand, her two older brothers long ago left home and started a family, as men do.

She ran away from home at 45 years old, after her mom died, finally unshackled from the guilt of even contemplating abandoning her.

I met Cândida on a sunny, warm Saturday morning.

I dropped my brand new mobile phone from a second floor balcony, hitting her on her head.

I heard someone screaming, took a deep breath before looking down to the street, terrified. And there she was - shopping bags thrown on the floor, holding a bleeding head, looking up at the sky, confused.

My phone had landed on the floor, screen facing up, without a scratch.

It did not take her long to calm down and start laughing. She said she has no luck in life, that all kinds of things happen to her.

An unlucky incident turned lucky, two perfectly distraught women, united.

And that's how we found each other.



# THE LOWERS\*

BY WESLEY COOKE



[It's practically **standing still** now. They've dropped ropes out of the nose of the ship, and they've **been** taken a hold of down on the field by a **number** of men.] It's starting to rain again; it's—the rain has slacked up a little bit. The back motors of the ship are **just holding** it just, just enough to keep it from—It burst into flames! It burst into **flames**, and it's falling, it's crashing! Watch it, watch it! Get out of the way! Get this, Charlie! Get this, Charlie! It's fire and it's crashing! It's crashing terrible! Oh, my, get out of the way, **please! It's burning** and bursting into flames, and the—and **it's falling** on the mooring-mast and all the folks agree that this is terrible, **this is** one of the worst catastrophes in the world. [Indecipherable word(s)] It's—it's—**it's** the flames, [indecipherable, possibly the word "climbing"] **oh**, four-or-five-hundred feet into **the sky** and it ... **it's** a **terrific** crash, ladies **and gentlemen**. It's smoke, and it's flames now ... and the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring-mast. **Oh**, the humanity and all **the passengers screaming** around here. I told you, I can't even talk to **people** whose friends are on there. Ah! It's—it's—it's—it's ... o-ohhh! I-I can't talk, ladies and gentlemen. Honest, it's **just laying there**, a mass of smoking wreckage. Ah! And everybody can hardly breathe **and talk**, and the screaming. Lady, I-**I'm sorry**. Honest: I-I can hardly breathe. I-I'm going to step inside where **I cannot** see it. Charlie, that's terrible. Ah, ah-I can't. I, **listen**, folks, I-I'm gonna have **to** stop for a minute because I've lost **my voice**. **This is** the worst thing I've ever **witnessed**—

\*The text you have just read is the transcript from radio reporter Herbert Morrison's eyewitness account of the ill-fated flight of LZ 129 Hindenburg otherwise known as the Hindenburg Disaster.





PHOTOGRAPH: TOM FERRIE





# NOURISHMENT

*BY KIARA BROWN*

Words were  
falling in leaf form  
In camouflage  
you can't  
recognize.  
I don't trust my  
memory.

From the subway  
speakers, her  
voice is  
smoke in the air.

The streets lose  
their signs and  
direction.  
Hearts full of  
blood, not love.  
Again the children  
fail us.

Cracked doors.  
A doomed  
butterfly.

My walk is  
crooked for  
reasons.

The difference  
between a  
grimace and a  
frown was not  
always clear.

I have to believe  
that something  
nourished you.  
If this is an  
illusion, it is  
nonetheless  
attractive.



# A FILIPINO MARRIAGE BUREAU IN 1978

BY CHEZ DHALIN

It's been over 15 hours since leaving Manila and now the pilot is announcing more delays. I'm already so tired and wished I used the time in the plane to sleep. It wouldn't look good arriving looking tired, not when I needed him to think I'm pretty. It's just that this is the first time I have been on a plane and I don't want to miss anything.

I thought I might be sad leaving, but it's my first time on the plane and I am just excited. I am enthralled seeing the city I was born in getting smaller and smaller as we fly into the clouds. I'm scared of sleeping in case I miss anything, especially when the air stewardesses give out the free snacks and drinks.

I don't feel homesick yet. It's too soon to be missing my old life. I know I am taking a big step - heading towards the next stage of my life. In the airport I bought a bridal magazine and flick through the pages of fluffy white wedding dresses. I'm going to be a bride and I can imagine myself in one of those dresses. I still have to keep reminding myself how lucky I am .... maybe my new husband will buy me one of these dresses.

I look around me, checking out the other passengers in the plane - they're mostly white. I'm guessing they are probably English as that is the final destination. They all look so confident travelling. Then again why shouldn't they? I was hoping another Filipino would sit next to me. I could have struck up a conversation and, perhaps, if they were going to England, they might have some useful advice. Instead, the two seats next to me are occupied by a tall icy blonde woman and her little boy. She only spoke to ask if I would swap seats with her child so he could look out of the window. I was too scared to say no so I pretended I didn't understand what she was asking. I know she thinks I am being rude. I bet she is surprised as that's not how we are portrayed to the foreigners.

It was the marriage bureau who booked my flight, so I specifically asked for a window seat. They said this could be arranged as the men always cover any extras. So, I don't allow myself to feel guilty about not swapping seats.

My brother says there's no future for ordinary Filipinos. Our country is so eager to please the foreigners. Since he found out I was leaving he seems angry a lot .... complaining more and more about the lack of opportunities. Sometimes, I remind him there are even fewer choices for the women here... look at Mama's face when Father's had a bad day.

My brother wants to leave so badly. If he could get a job on the cruise ships there might be a chance for him to improve his life, but our family can't afford the bribes. Maybe when I get to the West, I can help him.

We all dream of life in America or Europe. My schoolteacher said our love of the West comes from our island's history with these countries. Personally, I think that we dream about the West because we hate it here - the men end up drinking too much and the women are pregnant all the time. There is nothing much to look forward to. My brother says that for every step forward it's two steps back. I did well at school, so was told I was lucky to get a job cleaning the tourist hotels with Mama. I suppose the job is better paid than other work. And there is a chance, if we're lucky, we can afford the bribes to the employment agencies so my brother can

get a job on one of the smaller cruise ships.

My Mama says we should never give up hope that life will get better. She often speaks of miracles, like my cousin who got away from this island. My cousin ended up in Australia. She approached a marriage bureau who set her up with a foreigner. Apparently, she says, there are foreign men who want to find love with women like us. She sends pictures of her fat husband and their house with a pool in Perth.

In the beginning, I wanted to find a marriage bureau where I could meet Australian men. However, I could only find a bureau that dealt with the English. The woman who interviewed me at the marriage bureau told me it had been set up by an English man who had married a Filipino, and now they wanted to help lonely compatriots of the founder. She pointed to the numerous framed letters from satisfied customers on her desk. She told me this bureau had many girls, including girls who were educated. She proudly showed me the catalogue of pale-skinned girls waiting to find English men.

I asked about the fees and wondered how much I would have to bribe her. Her voice became firm when she told me this bureau operated under English guidelines ...no fees, no bribes. She stressed that the bureau only dealt with genuine men that wanted good girls not the girls from the go-go bars or women who already had children.

She led me to a room with a background wall depicting painted palm trees swaying in the sunset and started taking Polaroid photos of me. She told me it was important to have some nice pictures so that it would be easier for the men to select. She said, alongside my picture, my profile would describe me as someone with modest and shy, with excellent English who would like to meet someone kind. As I had never had a boyfriend, could she also add that I still had my cherry? She reminded me again that there were no fees to pay. I think that I said that would be okay.

At first, I didn't think any men would pick me. ... my skin's too dark and I'm too skinny. So, I was shocked to receive letters from three different men almost straight away. I had to ask the woman from the marriage bureau to help me pick. She chose a man with a moustache called Colin. She said he paid for the 'gold service' which meant that he was extra keen. She added that when men paid a little extra, they tended to be more generous. She was confident that he would buy me lots of presents. My third letter from Colin included a present - a blouse from Marks and Spencer's.

It was a good thing my cousin had already warned me that it seemed only the old men used marriage bureau services. She said it was because they could afford the fees and that the English women were fussy about who they dated.

Colin said he liked my pictures; he said he liked a shy girl. He was very approving I did not drink or smoke. He asked for more photos, especially pictures of me on the beach. He wrote that he had been to the Philippines once before - he went on a specialised tour for men. He sent me pictures of himself, but they were always from a distance showing him walking his dog or in his car.



VAL

In the plane, I take out the last picture he sent me of himself. I hope that I recognise him when I see him...I am not sure I like his moustache.

I feel as if I have been on this plane for ever. The woman sitting next to me is now gently snoring with her child sleeping on her lap. In their sleep they have spread into my space pushing me tighter into the window. She doesn't seem to care about being considerate, perhaps she's still angry that I did not swap seats with her child.

In the early letters, Colin wrote about how disillusioned men were with the women in his country. He told me about his greedy ex-wives and ungrateful children. I wrote back that in my country we were always grateful and respectful. We take what we are given and smile nicely. He agreed that these were good traits and said that he liked it when women were amenable.

I wish I was more like the other passengers around me - like the woman sitting next to me. She's not shy, constantly asking the air stewardess for extra snacks and more blankets. I was just grateful for the free drink even though I was given the wrong one.

In Colin's letters he describes his house, his car and his job. He thinks that I would be happy not to go out to work. It would be his job to look after me. I wrote back and said that hard work did not scare me. He said there was no time to get bored .... there's the housework and his dog to look after. His mother would come over and she would be happy to teach me how to cook English food.

My family doesn't have a telephone and so he would call me at the marriage bureau office. When we talked intimately it became easier to ask for presents and other things I needed. I told him how grateful I was for the money he sent when Mama was sick and Father was in between work. After a while, he started to call me his little island princess. So, it was easy to say yes when he asked me to marry him.

At first, he said he would come to Manila and we would travel back to his English town as a married couple. Then he wrote and said it would be easier if I came to him. He explained that work was busy and there was nobody to look after the dog. Anyway, even though he liked the Philippines, the hot weather and foreign food did not really agree with him.

The marriage bureau told me not to worry — he would pay them to sort everything out. I would get a generous travelling allowance which I shared with my family. The woman at the marriage bureau gave me a pamphlet entitled *Tips for Filipino Wives in England*. It included a recipe for roast dinner and pointers about what to wear in the cold weather.

In the plane I am reading *Tips for Filipino Wives in England* when the pilot announces we will be landing soon. He says we were lucky as the weather conditions were good so there were no delays. Some passengers started cheering and the mood in the plane brightens. So, I muster up the courage to ask the blonde woman sitting next to me to let me pass so I can use the toilet as I had been holding my pee in for ages. The mirror in the toilet did not reflect back a flattering image of me... I knew I should have slept.



The marriage bureau told me I would be travelling on a fiancé visa and I would have to live with him whilst we waited to get married. The visa would not allow me to work, so I would have to depend on him to look after me. The woman at the bureau could see I looked scared when she told me that. She reassured me that most of their girls who travel on a fiancée visa marry within the first few months. She tightly grabs hold of my hands and said it was too late to back out. She adds that, in the worst-case scenario, if things don't work out then I would meet other foreigners that might be interested in me.

My mama took the visa and my plane ticket to the priest for blessings. She cupped my face, like when I was a little girl, and told me never to forget how much she loves me. She worries about me because I am so shy and that I might miss an opportunity that gets me out of here. She tells me to be brave and show him how sweet I am even when he is asking me to do things I'm not sure about. Mama tells me if things don't work out she would never be ashamed of me so don't be afraid to take risks. The letter from my cousin from Australia wishes me good luck and her postscript advises me to get pregnant quickly if he has not married me yet.

When I return from the toilet the seatbelt lights are already flashing. The blonde woman next to me suddenly smiles and asks whether it is my first time to the UK. For a minute I am thrown by her friendliness. I smile back and tell her that I have never been in a plane before.

She says that she guessed it was my first time flying .... I looked nervous to her. She passes me a boiled sweet and advises me to suck on it to avoid my ears hurting when the cabin air pressure changes, and then asks whether family and friends are meeting me at the airport.

As I unwrap the sweet, I start shaking. I know that I won't be able to stop myself telling her why I am here. I speak quickly and tell her that I am getting married and meeting my future husband for the first time in the airport. When I pause speaking, she congratulates me hesitantly. So, I start up again, even more rapidly, explaining that we had been corresponding, and that he loves me, and how much I need a chance for a better life.

Then I stop because my ears start to hurt as the air pressure changes. When she starts speaking I can't hear her. My ears are buzzing as I watch her mouth move. She realises I can't hear and offers me another sweet before turning toward her son.

Is she annoyed with me? I should not have said anything. I suddenly really want to cry. She is now comforting her child and stroking his ears gently. I want someone to comfort me like that. I want my Mama and even my angry brother. I am not sure if this feeling is homesickness

The plane has a bumpy landing, so the pilot reminds passengers to remain seated. My ears suddenly pop as the air pressure normalises and then I am glad I didn't cry. Crying would just make me look ugly.

People are now standing up, getting their bags from the overhead cabins. The woman next to me advises me to stay put as nobody can go anywhere until they open the plane doors. She is flicking little looks at me as she writes in her notebook. I try to cover up my embarrassment about my disclosures by double-checking my documents .... passport, visa, his letter with instructions. I try not to look at her, I think I felt more comfortable when I thought she was being rude to me.

I close my eyes as I wait for the plane doors to open. I take a deep breath to calm myself. I tell myself that I am ready for this, I can handle what's ahead of me. I am not going to cry; it will make me look ugly. He's not going to see his island princess with a puffy face from crying.

The woman next to me taps my arm. She says that she wants to say goodbye before she leaves the plane. She hopes that everything works out. But just in case ..... she shoves a piece of paper into my hand. She apologises if she has offended me. Would I please take her note, she's sure I won't need it, but just in case ...? She is now the one that looks embarrassed. She knows she has overstepped the mark with a stranger, so she rushes her child to join the now moving line of passengers.

I look at the note. It looks like it's a list of telephone numbers. She has written the telephone numbers of places that help foreign women in trouble. She has underlined heavily a couple of the telephone numbers like Refuge and Women's Advice Centre.

The plane is emptying quickly so I don't tarry. I grab my bag and flight documents and push her note in the pocket of the new coat he bought me for the English winter weather. I am confused about why she has given me this note.

I have been clutching his last letter which has instructions of what I need to do after disembarking. The letter ends with him saying how eager he is to see his island princess.

In the plane, time moved slowly so no wonder I got anxious. Now everything is moving much quicker, so I have no time for anxious thoughts. I am surprised about how confident I feel as I move from passport control and immigration. I even laugh when the immigration officer makes a joke

about me making someone a happy man as he checks my fiancée visa. However, as he hands me back my passport, he reminds me again that I am not allowed to work in this country.

Waiting for my luggage to arrive at the carousel gives me a chance to spray the perfume he bought me. I think that lipstick has made me look less tired and I fluff up my long hair.

I push my luggage trolley with my heavy cheap suitcases that holds everything that I own towards the exit from Arrivals into the general area of the airport. I remember Mama telling me not to be shy so I know that I must be prepared to greet him warmly. I suck on one of the free mints I swiped from the plane in case he kisses me on the mouth. Mama told me first impressions are important so don't be shy.

I walk out of the Arrivals' exit door alongside other passengers pushing trolleys and carrying bags of duty free. As I walk out into the main airport everything gets louder, with bursts of greetings being shouted out as the arrivals reunite with loved ones. I see the blonde woman and her child being embraced and kissed by a black man. It's obvious they are a family.

I start to feel confused and so tempted to turn back into Arrivals as I begin to merge into the general airport. I am straining to hear if anybody is calling my name. The crowds of white people around me all look the same so I can't recognise his face from his photos. No one is calling my name so I feel for the note in my pocket.

Then I hear a voice calling, 'Nita, here. Nita .... Princess. It's me. Colin.'

#### Notes:

This will be part of a bigger story that includes some of the characters in this piece, and spans from the 1970s to present day.

In the Philippines, marriage bureaux were set up around the 1970s and 80s to facilitate marriages between Western men and Asian women. The political conditions under the deposed President Marcos encouraged marriage bureaux, free trade zones that provided non-unionised labour and the export of labour to countries all over the world. The presence of American air bases and growth in tourism encouraged the sex industry. Some of these marriage bureaux were genuine businesses promoting marriages for a large fee. Some of those marriages survived, some ended badly and some tragically. However, there were many bureaux that were just fronts for trafficking women into slavery and the sex industry.

It is important to remember that the key factor that allowed marriage bureaux to operate is linked to the historical, economic and political exploitation of the Philippines from First World countries. The Philippines had a long history of colonisation that it has never really shaken off - even the country's name is a legacy to its colonisation by Spain. During the time of Marcos, foreign investors and multi nationals continued to rip off the country's natural resources and enforced cheap labour continues. Consequently, the women and children became commodities for Western consumption. After he was deposed, the new presidency imposed tighter restrictions on how marriage bureaux operated.



# TWO POINTS THAT DON'T MATTER ANYMORE (BUT STILL DO)

*BY CLAIRE HOLLEY*

1. I didn't mind staying at yours, but you started work a lot later than me and it was a lot easier for you to get to work from mine than it was for me to get to work from yours.

2. I didn't know I made a face when I walked through your hallway, past your housemate's rabbit, but it wouldn't surprise me if I did because that rabbit is fucking ugly and smells like shit.





# REVIEWS

## Euthanasia

A very straightforward procedure and something of a relief.

Quite attractive nurses. The preparatory part was done well, post care very poor.

Would recommend this service provider over others as they had free hot drinks at the front desk



Clive, Stockport, Dead

## Badgers

Overrated. Only ever see them when they're dead.



@Dolittle247

## My Second Child

A quite literally ill-conceived sequel which falls painfully short of the original in almost all aspects. Draining on time, money and emotional strength, the affects on wellbeing can be classed as, at best, disappointing and, at worst, fucking disastrous.

Sometimes shits on carpet. Overall, very very poor.



Lucy, 34, Chichester

## Wasps

Cunts.



@Dolittle247

## Jürgen Klopp

Endearingly charming with a bright, straight smile, he transcends sport and has become something of a life-affirming spirit for these dark times. An impeccable record added to his just-hipster-enough eyewear makes for a powerful combination.

I'd fuck him.



Tom, 26, Cardiff

## The Internet, by Tim Berners-Lee

With a real mix of quality, subject matter, and a frankly confused narrative, this read is lengthy but rewarding in places.

At times it shrieks of over ambition: a hodgepodge of tenses, perspectives, pronouns and characters, a melting pot of topics and threads. Its sheer scale is impressive but structurally very poor.

Generously we might say that this is both original and, in parts, truly enjoyable. However, entire sections are messy, confused and inaccessible. An unnecessarily large portion is devoted to the most base human desires: criminality, porn and sharing photos of dinner. The primary protagonist appears to be Piers Morgan.

Would recommend the author organises alphabetically in future editions, or provides a contents page.

And a final word of caution, the hardback edition is inconveniently large, would recommend waiting for the paperback.



Beerandbookspage82

## Rectal Destroyer Phantom (2020 Edition)

I was lucky enough to test ride a Rectal Destroyer Phantom 2020 model this year and I have to say I was not disappointed. In a market that has become somewhat saturated in recent years, I still find if you are looking for reliability then mainstay brand Rectal Destroyer always deliver and the new Phantom is no exception. OK, ergonomically it is no match for a Chasmfiller 6.0 or any of RearGear's recent Pugil models, but for a ride that is comfortable yet exciting, the Phantom is on point. The transition through speeds is smooth, subtle, almost courteous, but if like me, you prefer to go straight for the fast lane, the Punish mode has more than enough oomph at a spine-tremoring 12.0 reps per second. RD have done a great job increasing the portability of the Phantom, the 2020's new sleeker design, carry case and larger battery mean you can take it anywhere and not suffer the range of anxiety that owners suffered with its predecessors. Be warned though, in Punish mode the recoil can be considerable and while the 7" damper springs do a lot to reduce noise and prevent dizziness, I strongly recommend mounting your Phantom on a surface with a good amount of give - a comfortable chair, carpeted room etc are fine, tiled surfaces or tarmac however could risk injury. That asides, the Phantom 2020 basic model has all the features you'd expect of a premium leisure seat - leather handles, bluetooth, cup holders as standard, but the deluxe model gets you the wifi hotspot, free servicing and a nicer range of colours making it well worth the extra £60. Whilst I haven't tried it myself, I understand from my Grandchildren that the Junior model is also excellent. All-in-all a great product and will be top of my Christmas list this year.



Elaine, 62, Surrey

## Bees

Private-school wasps. Arrogant twats.



@Dolittle247

## Ebola

Rubbish Pandemic. Still had to go to the office.



Gavin, 41, Essex

## Tigers

Just big wingless bees. Two fewer legs and don't even make honey. Cunts.



@Dolittle247

## Black Mirror: Season 6

A masterful return to form. A bitter-sweet, almost romantic take on a dire near-future for the world. It starts with a nation ripping itself from its closest allies and driving irrevocable division among its people, sees the leader of the free world replaced with an inept and obese moron, and builds to an appalling crescendo with a world wide pandemic, culling hundred of thousands across the planet. Moving the franchise from Netflix to real life was inspired, smashing the fourth wall and giving fans a truly immersive experience.



@Brookerthelooker



# THE GUY WHO CAN'T LISTEN

I left Nic to sort out dinner and we got cold soggy pizza. I've said it a million times that pizzas loaded with soggy veg are not my bag - yet he managed to order two large pizzas with about a kilo of aubergine and courgette on them



21:16

I love a pizza - but pretending they are a viable way of consuming any of your five is a travesty.

21:18



21:18 ✓✓

Epic fail Nic

21:18 ✓✓

Just get a 4 cheese and one with anchovies

21:19 ✓✓

Minimal veg. Or actually no veg

21:



Maybe a jalapeño

21:19 ✓✓

I know.

21:19

Seriously.

21:19

I've told him a million times.

21:20

So disappointed.

21:20

And I bet he was disappointed that you were disappointed and you ended up having to console him for his very preventable failure

21:20 ✓✓

We're having a bit of a stand off - he's stormed off the bedroom

21:23

Yes! Hold your ground. He needs to own his bad decisions



21:24 ✓✓

I'm going to the spare room. This will go down as pizza gate.

21:29

I really don't think it's a surprise that I don't like soggy vegetables - I'm very open about this aversion.

21:30



He obviously doesn't listen.











Guided landscape series #1

**BY SEVAN GARO NIGOGOSIAN**



**WHY DO YOU NEVER WANT TO GET STUCK  
WITH DAVID GRAY AT A PARTY?  
HE TENDS TO BABYLON.**

*KARRIM JALALI*

**MY FRIEND TOLD ME TO CUT OUT SINGLE USE  
PLASTIC. I SAID,  
“THAT’S THE FINAL STRAW.”**

*MARK PAGE*

**WHAT’S MADE OF BRASS AND SOUNDS LIKE  
TOM JONES?  
TROMBONES.**

*ANDREW STYLES*

**WHAT’S THE MOST APPROACHABLE SPICE?  
CUMIN.**

*MARK PAGE*

**WHY ARE BABIES NEVER BORN HUNGRY?  
BECAUSE THEY GESTATE.**

*SAMUEL FITZGERALD*

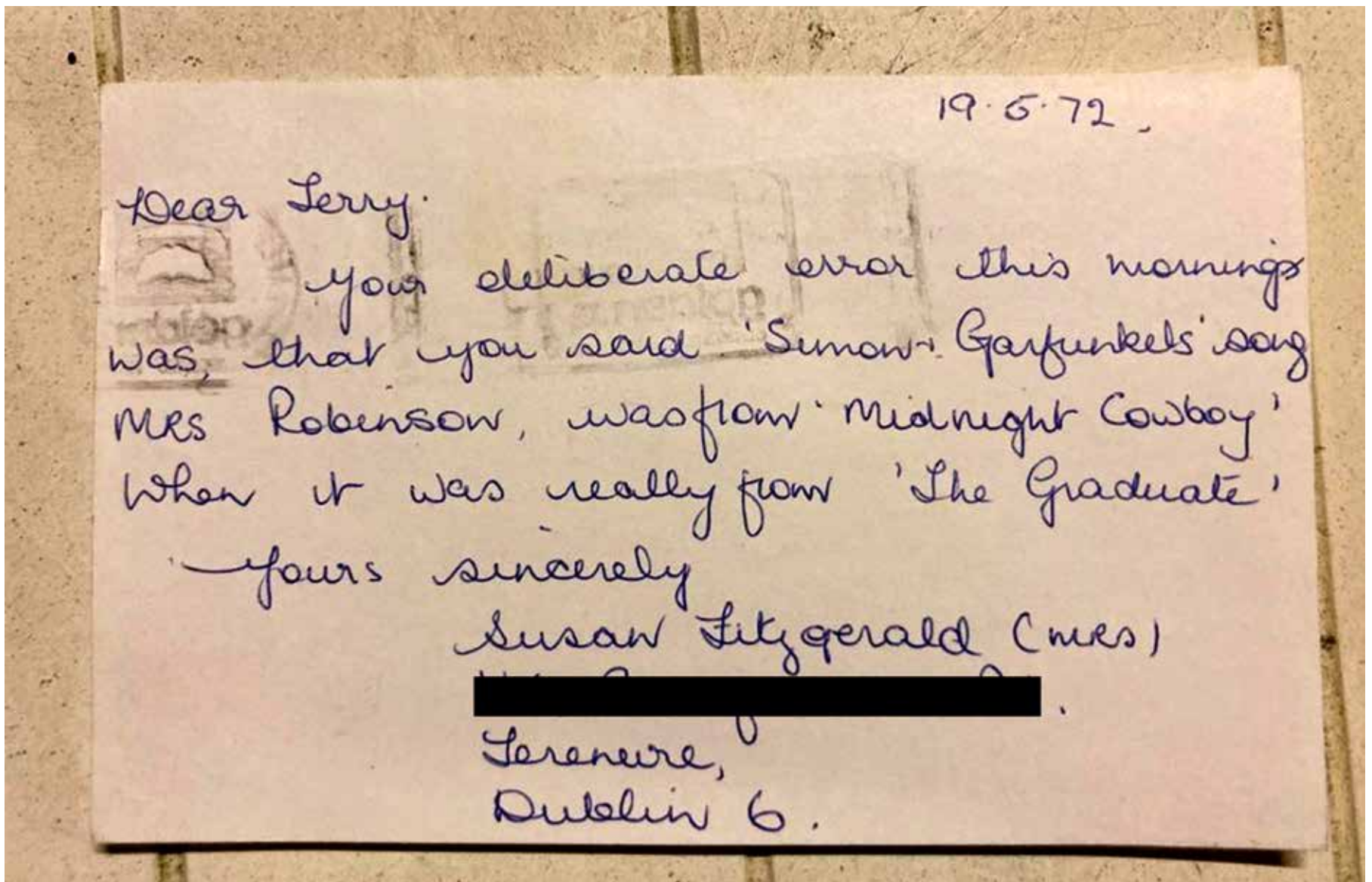


# SOUTH CROSS IS

BY WESLEY COOKE

she's got the screaming me me again  
sound of a cuntload of milk bottles smashing  
inside her one too many swan jokes playground spite  
somewhere a donkey brays then dies on the spot  
lone bird stops mid flight drops from the sky  
so what  
our world is a theme park in the middle of an ashtray  
well the drunkard hunkers down  
wet fag butts  
she's wet herself again chatting a litany of wrongs past  
for the last time but lo  
the click click under the red night sky

clever phones  
tragedy vulture's eyes  
clever phones  
click click  
angel kisses the drunkard  
killing the screaming me me  
click click  
under the red night sky reflected  
upside down cross tattoo angel  
sees everything fluorescent  
blue fin sharp as a confiscated blade  
dipped in sinless white emulsion  
dry brick stretcher bond surround  
doomed together









# CINEMA

BY ROBERT BORWICK



Top-half, I wore a white t-shirt featuring a multitude of Marvel comic book characters. Over that, I had a woollen Adidas jacket on, with black and white dog-tooth check. It was winter, so over that, I was also wearing the thick, black Hugo Boss coat which my father gave me just over a year earlier, and a black scarf with tasselled ends occasionally separated by the odd silver/white line running through it.

Bottom-half, I had orange boxer shorts with a weird print of various hands, legs and letters. For trousers, I was wearing stonewashed blue Levi Jeans which have a hole in the groin area and back pocket (meaning the pocket serves no functional purpose, and I need to make sure my legs are closed whenever I sit down). For shoes, I wore black slip-on Vans with skulls. Underneath the shoes: plain black cotton socks.

My girlfriend wore a long baggy-sleeved 70's style flowery dress, with blue denim shorts, black tights and black leather boots. She had a black vest underneath her dress, and a black cardigan over her dress. She also wore a grey black winter coat, and had a grey scarf on.

We met for Dim Sum in China Town. I said I would arrive at quarter past two, but I ended up arriving at 2:30pm. I could remember what I ate if I knew what it was when I ate it, but I tend to just eat what looks nice without even knowing what it consists of. If I paid more attention to my finances, I would also remember to the nearest pound how much it came to in the end, but it was definitely under £30.

We walked to Piccadilly Circus, discussed the statue at Piccadilly Circus which I said wasn't Cupid even though many people make that mistake. (It is actually Eros, although I've subsequently learnt that Eros is more of a nickname, and the proper name is Anteros). I discussed Time Square in New York and how Piccadilly Circus was comparably quite rubbish, then we discussed New York in general as my girlfriend had heard that there wasn't much to do in New York, except shopping, which I assured her was not the case. We then deliberated over whether to go to a museum or gallery, or to the cinema. We couldn't decide so we used a coin toss to assist us. Cinema it was, so we made our way to Wood Green via the Piccadilly Line.

I was originally sat towards the opposite door of the tube I entered in on. She sat opposite me on the seat nearest to the door we had entered. After about one or two stops, there was an available seat next to hers, so I switched seats.

While we were on the train, a dishevelled homeless bloke walked through and asked for us to place money in a see-through plastic cup which had a very small handful of silver coins already in there. I told him I didn't have any change on me, which was a lie. I felt guilty about lying, but not enough to give him some money. He had scratch marks on the right-hand side of this face, and he went from our carriage to the next one, struggling to close our carriage door before finally slamming it shut successfully after several attempts.

We eventually arrived at Wood Green station and walked for about five minutes towards the cinema, passing a Nando's with a queue leading all the way outside the door and onto the street. We arrived at the cinema and purchased tickets about thirty minutes in advance of the 5:10pm showing on Screen 8. We had a bit of time to kill before the film started so we had a little walk about the shopping centre where the cinema was

based. We bought two milkshakes with yoghurt, milk, bananas and blueberry in them. I'm almost definite it came to £4.90 as I originally tried to pay with a twenty-pound note, but the clerk asked if I had anything less and I double-checked with him how much it came to.

My girlfriend went to Primark, taking her milkshake with her, to have a quick look around before it closed while I sat on a cheap wonky stool with white-plastic seat drinking my milkshake. I finished off my milkshake while I waited, staring off into space. She then returned and we had a brief walk about the shopping centre together, popping into Game to look at computer games for consoles I don't even own. As we made our way back towards the cinema, she asked me if I wanted to finish her milkshake because she didn't want anymore and was going to, otherwise, throw it in the bin. I said that I didn't want to finish her milkshake, and, then, when she threw it in the bin, I pretended for a second or so that I did actually want it, which wasn't very funny (but is the sort of stupid thing that I do). I had hoped the milkshakes we drank would be more thirst quenching.

At the cinema, the screen still wasn't ready because we were about ten minutes early. so we waited about until a staff member gave us the all clear. I was actually slightly disappointed to find we were only the second and third people to arrive (perhaps this has to do with being overly competitive) but we, nonetheless, had practically the entire cinema to find seats so I sat two seats in on the right hand side as you face the screen, about five rows from the top row. I took my coat, jacket and scarf off, and put them on the back of my seat. She sat to my right, and placed her cardigan underneath her seat, and her coat and scarf on the back.

After the film finished, we both remarked that we enjoyed it, threw our used tickets in the cinema bin, left the shopping centre and got the No. 29 bus back to Manor House. On the bus back, there was a guy falling violently in and out of sleep. I remarked that I didn't think I had ever seen anyone look so tired. We got off at the stop closest to my house and arrived at mine at about 8pm, just after discussing whether I had sparkling water at my place and deliberating over whether I should buy a chocolate bar because I had, just a few minutes earlier, mentioned I was still a bit peckish.

We entered my home, greeted my housemates, and discussed the film we had just watched before heading to my bedroom. My girlfriend then realised she had left her cardigan underneath her seat at the cinema. I called the operator for the cinema chain and asked them to email the local cinema to check on the cardigan and call her if they have it.

We then listened to music including artists such as Joseph Arthur, Radiohead, Justin Nozuka, Otis Redding and Ben Harper. I also tried to put on The Jerk on DVD, but for some reason it didn't work on the external CD/DVD drive connected to my computer. We ended up watching the first episode of Phoneshop on my computer. It wasn't as funny as I thought it would be, and we both fell asleep midway through the second episode (which had automatically started after the first). I woke up for just about long enough - and with just enough energy - to turn off my computer and set my alarm clock for 7am the next day.

I suppose what I'm trying to say is I can remember a hell of a lot about yesterday - probably far more than I've described - but I cannot for the life of me remember what film I saw.







