

# Adolf Hitler and the Chinese Pig Farm

by Alistair Green



About fifteen years ago I had a job working at Madame Tussauds. Like most service sector jobs it was pretty mindless stuff; processing entry tickets, directing people to lost property, stuff like that. As it was an international tourist attraction the daily tasks would occasionally rise above the mundane; explaining to a Japanese tourist who Timmy Mallet was for example, or stopping a party of school children from touching Jimmy Saville (oh, the irony).

There were only two working positions: inside or outside; and your position would determine whether you were going to have a shit day or a good day. Inside was worse because it involved interacting with the visitors which was a pain in the arse. On top of that it also had the dirtier jobs. I can remember quite clearly coming into work one morning and being asked if I wouldn't mind cleaning the spit off Hitler's glass case before opening. He used to be out in the open like the other statues but over the years visitors had gobbled at him so much that the curators were forced to construct a specially made cabinet to house him in. I haven't checked but I assume they've had to do the same for Chris Moyles.

The outside position was a breeze compared to that. Most days you could just wander up and down Baker Street smoking and chatting to your mates and no-one would check up on you. It was on one of those days I met Thomas, a Hungarian graduate about the same age as me. He had a job holding one of those golf signs right on the corner where Baker Street meets Marylebone Road. I was on my lunch break, leaning against a railing and watching the mid-morning traffic, when Thomas came up to me and asked me for a light. We got chatting and it turned out that dead end jobs and Marlboro Lights weren't the only thing Thomas and I had in common. I was living above an off license in Romford at the time but Thomas managed to trump me by admitting to squatting in the basement of a shoe shop in Shadwell. I was delighted because it meant that along with tramps and entombed corpses he was one of the few people who lived in a more depressing place than me. We were both art graduates too (obviously, look at our jobs) and by the time I had to go back we'd already decided to meet for lunch again the next day. The following day I made sure I was standing outside at the agreed time but Thomas wasn't there. He wasn't there the day after either. Or the day after that. Eventually I realised he probably wasn't going to come back and I felt slightly annoyed with myself for not getting his number while I had the chance. About ninety per cent of the people I've met in my life have been abso-



# The Private Museum of Peter Gandalf

by David Bryant

The main advice I would choose to give anybody wishing to be left alone is to not declare their intentions. If I had to pinpoint the one major mistake I made when going about my plans, that would be it. It's very easy for a single, middle-aged man with far flung relatives to disappear off the radar by accident – all it takes are a couple of unanswered phone calls from the four or five people who still telephone him on a seasonal basis, and eventually they'll forget about him entirely. For a man to trumpet his intentions to all and sundry in a fit of pique, though – that's a colossal error.

It all began with my mother's death. I will admit it was a shock to me. She was my sole surviving parent, and despite her age seemed completely indestructible. If I wept, however, it was only for the missed opportunities we both had in life to perhaps get on with each other. My father had died of cancer a mere two years after I was born, and she spent most of my childhood complaining to me about what a curse her life was, having to bring a child up by herself. It didn't take me long to draw the conclusion that I was in the way.

I had always assumed that my father dying was also the reason behind us living in relative poverty, but when I was at the reading of her will I received my second shock. I may never have received any presents from her but it was, as they say, as if all my Christmases had come at once. I am tempted to advise any parents who

may be reading this to starve their children of gifts in a similar way – the elation in later life almost makes up for it.

I arrived at work the next day and immediately announced my intention to quit. The windfall I had received would be enough to pay the mortgage off on my small terraced house, and leave plenty of funds besides for wise investment. Not only did I tell them I was due to quit, I also spelt out to my colleagues there my intentions in full:

1. That they were to never contact me again for any reason.
2. That I would consider anybody turning up to my house to be a form of harassment, and that I would pursue the matter with the police.
3. That I had always hated them anyway, just in case they were in any way concerned about my wellbeing or my motives behind clauses one and two.

With that, I put a hastily scribbled resignation letter down on my boss's desk (who was enjoyably speechless for once) and left the office, never to return.

I sent similar messages to my friends, who were by now distant from me either in location or in attitude anyway, and sat down and waited for the silence I genuinely hoped would descend upon my life. Of course, society refuses to make such moves so simple. No friend ever got back

in touch, but somehow my behaviour registered with somebody somewhere in house. The conversations I had with the pony-tailed prick who came to visit were among the dullest and bleakest I have ever had in my life. Perhaps it was meant as payback in some way.

"Was your mother's death a shock to you?" he asked, more than once.

"Of course it was a fucking shock", I replied. "Why are you even asking me that?"

At this, he would nod sagely, as if he had hit upon the root of the problem. On

the other occasion he came round, he probed me deeper to consider the effect of my actions upon society at large.

"I want to be left alone", I replied. "For the longest time in my life I have wanted this, and now I finally have the means to achieve my ambition."

"Why do you want to be left alone?" he asked. "To avoid conversations like this one", I said.

"No, really", he said, smiling and touching my arm. "I meant what I said", I told him.

Next came the children in the school holidays. I awoke late one morning to hear stones striking the window of my bedroom, and looked out on to the street outside to hear children yelling "Oi, Gandalf! Gandalf, you fucking prick!"

Quick as a flash I opened the window and bellowed at them to "Fuck off", at which point they fell around laughing. One immediately began singing "Oi, Gandalf you prick, where's your fucking wand?", and was rapidly followed by his sidekicks, singing and running along the street.

They were back the next day. And the day after that. And the day after that. It was stupid of me to swear at them. Foul language is one thing, but giving troubled children the attention they crave is a much bigger social faux pas. I started to go to the rear of the house as soon as they came to bother me in future, and once the holidays were over it seemed to

be forgotten about. Before time I stopped being a local figure of curiosity and began to get the silence I had craved for so long.

Of course, my life wasn't empty, and I had pursuits to occupy my time. I hadn't been completely idle since my mother's death, and had in fact begun to build chess sets from scratch. There was never any purpose to this, since I had no need to sell them to anyone and had no desire to invite anybody around for a game, but I had always admired the different styles the pieces came in, and the craftsmanship that went into a good, solid board. Once I had made thirty different sets, however, my options began to get limited, so I began to invent boards of my own – smaller boards hidden inside cube-shaped large boards, boards incorporating mirrors and glass, sets consisting entirely of pawns in the shapes of celebrities with the King and Queen as Jesus and Mary, boards with pendulums attached with bishops hanging by their necks from the swinging cord, boards which folded out into a space as large as the floor of my front room with factory workers, peasants, bankers, and vicars alongside the knights and rooks.

I invented logic systems for them all, rules for games which were never going to be played or even explained to anyone else. If anybody were to burst into my house tomorrow and accuse me of being lazy, I think they would be quite shocked at just how much I've achieved.

When you're living alone and only going outside for constitutional strolls or visits to the hardware store or supermarket, it's surprising how meaningless time becomes. Nonetheless, I would estimate that I had achieved five years of relatively uninterrupted bliss before I encountered my next disturbance. It happened on a September afternoon. I was sanding down a wooden chess piece in my bedroom when I became aware of voices outside. I looked out of the window to see two young women sat on the wall of my front

**ILLUSTRATION:** BRIAN WAS NEVER QUITE THE SAME AFTER HIS YEAR FLOATING AIMLESSLY THROUGH SPACE | Richard Rose



# Tyson/Dog

by David Hartley

I am Tyson forward-slash Dog. My primary program equals dog. My secondary program equals human. I have no secondary program.

I am Boxer cross Rottweiler cross Bulldog cross Staffordshire Bull Terrier. I am none of the above. I am Pitbull Terrier. I am cross.

I was created by a dog called Tyson. He was exactly the same as me in every way except he was not a robot. The following is a memory implanted by Tyson the not-robot dog before he went away. Filename ARRIVAL:

I am taken from my mother straight away and given to humans. When I am old enough they name me Tyson. 'Am I expected to box?' I ask. They laugh at me because they don't understand my language. 'Do you want me to fight?' I ask. They say 'good doggie.' I start my training with a squeaky toy shaped like Santa.

I am Tyson forward-slash Dog. I have a routine, I have functions, I have commands. I have seven commands. My commands are 1. Sit, 2. Walk, 3. Roll over, 4. No, 5. Stupid fucking dog, 6. Fetch, 7. Go away.

I have seventeen thousand, four hundred and eighty one functions. They are 1. Yawn, 2. Bark, 3. Bite, 4. Joke. That was a joke. Ha ha. I have seventeen thousand, four hundred and eighty one functions. My tail goes wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag.

I am Tyson. I am named after a boxer. A human boxer not a dog boxer. Ha ha. I am not a Boxer. I am a Pitbull. I am not a Pitbull. I am a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. I am not a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. I am a dog. I am not a dog. I am a robot. Ha ha.

I am a robot cross cyborg cross android cross replicant cross Tamagotchi cross AI cross dog with a boxer's name. I am Tyson forward-slash dog. My tail goes wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag, wag.

The following is a memory implanted by Tyson the not-robot dog before he went away. Filename LOST:

I slip off my lead in the park and run for the trees. I have smelt another dog that has been here before. The smell tells me many things. This other dog is of great importance to our species. He must be found and questioned, imprisoned if necessary. I will become a hero among dogs, so I hunt to my best ability. I can hear my owners shouting my name over and over and over again, but this quest is too important. Soon they stop shouting and almost at the same time I lose the scent and give up the chase.

When I emerge from the trees my owners are gone and I do not know where I am anymore. Some people find me and take me home. I get a kick off my owners and have to sleep in the yard. This must be my punishment for failing. I use the time to train.

I am Tyson forward-slash Dog. I was made to serve. I am a family appliance. Some-

# Poem

by Dorian Geisler

The police-  
man looked  
at the man in  
custody over  
the interrogation  
table.

‘Self . . . self . . .  
self . . .’

The man was mak-  
ing a small gesture  
with his right wrist,  
as if miming the  
movements (in mini-  
ature) of whipping  
himself.

‘Flagellation,’ the police-  
man said.

‘Yes, self-flagellation,’ the  
man behind the table said.

‘Thank you. Sometime I have  
trouble with words.’

## How Superman's X-ray Vision Destroyed the World

by Fran Lock

In this version of the story Superman is played by Oliver Reed, directed- in a series of moodily up-lit black and white tight-focus shots- by Ken Russell. Now read on:

It was in his third year among the tall buildings that Metropolis became symptomatic. First it was a certain loss of appetite. Then the birth defects: pallid novelties with flippers for hands. Visitors said that the water had a funny taste, and the sky around the limits greened like tainted meat. A rancid Paris! Overnight, it seemed, the parks became virulent and rare. Specialists were flown in from the Atomic Commission and The World Health Organization. Geiger-counters chirped like horny cicadas.

He knew what was coming, of course. Or he could have guessed. Luthor lost his hair for reason. Tried to warn the rest. About Him. Him and his aristocracy of body-parts: a cryptic, invincible Genet watching us all from a Telstar's privileged station, human kind evolving below with the sluggish mirth of a doped hysteric. From that far away the city seemed theoretical, significant only from the point of view of pattern recognition. Perhaps that's why.

Or perhaps it was desperation. Him howling like a White Russian after the Old Country, looking for her, American girl with the fan-belt smile, the only thing that gave his immigrant's existence meaning. Yes, perhaps he didn't mean it after all, and only wanted her, so he let his gaze fall like a Van Gogh midnight, an inquisition of light; a teeming lambency: irradiating homes, shops, crematoria, car-parks, busses, playgrounds, veteran's day parades. This Chernobyl-Romeo, locking his lantern jaw and puppy-loving after Lois.

Either or. It could only end one way. The populace cannot survive being scanned by septic cupid bolts of x-ray vision. And in his third year, the cancers appeared. Dogs would howl all night like car alarms, and other pack animals would scuttle in plague-huddles into the subway. They fitted a three minute warning, of course, but by then the damage was done.

Nobody wanted to know him after that. He drank Vermouth and listened to Leonard Cohen records, neither to any particular effect. He sucked the last rays of the yellow sun like a drunk doing whiskey chasers, all through a happy hour six millennia long. Lois wouldn't touch him, not after her ovaries calcified to useless nodes of stone, and so he was alone. Metropolis went into entropic decline. Soon enough there would be no one to collect the garbage and only freaks and mutants eking out corrosive twilights in their basements. He still stands on the roof of The Daily Planet sometimes, watching the fertile carnage unfold. The pleasure lake, a solid silver lump of waste, looks just like a lead apron.

# The Victim Complex

by Fran Lock

The Victim Complex is a retail park on a south circular road. It smells of cats, dossers and foxes, cracked gaskets and stale detergent. It *is* abandoned rather than deserted. Somebody intended this. Somebody did this on purpose.

At around noon, every single day, sunlight is scheduled to sputter into suites of rooms as still and silent as shipwrecks. This light will waver like a nausea, and then depart. Each evening, at seven, the flood lamps will find religion and cover the disabled parking bays with their baleful divinity. These two things are the main events.

The Victim Complex: the walls are that special kind of white, like a tissue that has been through the wash. There is black mould lining the oblong interiors of carpet warehouses, shops selling car parts have become lagoons of dusty resonance; a forage of staples, till-receipts and pigeon-remnants cover the cracked linoleum with all the dour potency of oriental hexagrams. At night the shelves groan, the hinges creak like thumb-screws and the raw-plugs twist in their bore- holes. Each object fastens on to sleep, humourlessly and with a grim persistence. They must sleep. Or they will see *the Hunger Artist*.

*The Hunger Artist* climbs out of a nearby skip, shakes himself like a wet dog and begins to crawl across the warped tarmac. He is a Jack Frost, brings a cold so cold it freezes the snot in your nose; so cold that when your mouth waters you eat a sharp grind of ice. He wants to get his hands on you. On me. He wants to breathe down your neck. My neck. He wants to shake his belly like a British Legion collecting can so you can hear his grains of rice and baby-teeth rattle. He draws his dirty nails down his chalk-board chest and does militant skiffle on his ribs.

*The Hunger Artist* is making for the squatted depot, turning over trolleys like rat-traps as he goes. It is not a howl that is rising in his throat with such mournful languor. It is the sound of a whistle intended to announce an industrial accident. He threads himself, through eyelets left by storm damage, and goes along polishing the floors with his belly. His hipbones clack like false teeth.

He is here. He is all shinbones and three-minute warnings. He is bearing his teeth. They stalactite from under-use, drip like minerals, gore his dark, brown beard and the petrol-smelling gravity of night. He is a puncture, a tool adapted for punching holes in metal. His hands are wingspans. I am afraid. *Denn die todten reiten schnell...* I heard this once, I think.

## SCENIC ROUTE

The road ends. No point in turning back;  
there's not enough gas for anywhere.  
All stations are playing that Rwandan hit,  
"The Graves Are Not Yet Full."

No cars for days; those that passed,  
held together by spit, ran on fumes  
the pithecanthropi behind their wheels  
call God. What's ahead

are all sorts of trash, trash trees,  
toxic thorns, rusty fence. But the signs  
that say "No Trespassing" are absent  
at last, which must count as invitation.

Without supplies I press forward.

Every scratch is a wound, exhaustion courage,  
and loneliness affirms a social nature.

If I sink low enough  
by the end I can call it an adventure.

Meanwhile, somewhere to the right,  
never entirely out  
of mind, lies the highway.

With its giant fins, multiple headlights  
and tones, tops down, tops off, motels  
in sequins and velvet around every bend.  
Perhaps by now one rides on air, not wheels.

It's been that long since the road  
that became that road branched off –  
with no visible difference or sign –  
in a desert outside Tucson.

According to Mother, I watched it out of sight  
and became extremely upset.

BY  
FREDERIC POLLACK

# The Siamese Python

by Joseph P. O'Brien

The Siamese Python, if you haven't already guessed, is a two-headed snake. It's not actually from Siam, or even Thailand. The Siamese Python is a cold-blooded creature of the U.S.A.

As to where exactly in the U.S.A. it originated, few people can agree. Among the 200 or so living souls who have encountered The Siamese Python, there are approximately 112 different opinions on where it came from. Some folks say it emerged from the sewers of Manhattan. Others claim it jumped right outta the Rio Grande. A couple swear it couldn't have taken its first slithers anywhere else but the bayous of New Orleans. One man, Gunther Flendricks of Tergen, Ohio, swears The Siamese Python hails from Tergen, Ohio.

One of The Siamese Python's heads could kill you with its venomous bite. The venom lies dormant in the human bloodstream between 2 and 24 hours before initiating an excruciating death, which lasts about an hour but supposedly feels like 6 to 8 weeks.

The other head's bite contains the one and only antidote to this venom. However, the antidote only works after one has already been infected. If you're bitten by the antidote but aren't bitten by the venom first, the antidote would be wasted. If the venomous head bit you later on, nothing could save you. No one knows the exact science of it all, but there's definitely a science to it.

One particularly amusing complication of The Siamese Python is that there's no consensus on which head has the venom and which has the antidote. Some suggest the heads take turns, to keep things more interesting.

You may wonder why 200 or so living souls would get involved with such a dangerous animal in the first place. Truth is, most of these people simply stumble into the realm of The Siamese Python unknowingly and then try to escape as soon as possible. Alas, these people eventually realize that even if you try very hard not to get involved with The Siamese Python, The Siamese Python will try very hard to get involved with you.

Yolanda Ronaldo of Madera, California thought she had escaped the quicksand-like pull of The Siamese Python when she ran away to start a new life as Martina Cruz of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then one morning she

was making coffee and found the python coiled in the Crockpot that was soaking in her kitchen sink. Two hours later she called her brother-in-law from a pay phone near Carthage, Missouri, saying she'd call again once she got to Illinois, but that was the last anyone heard from her.

Some people do, in fact, purposely get involved with The Siamese Python, even after they understand the risks, because- so the legend goes- the python can grant you something more than mere death. Rumor has it that if you're bitten by the venomous head and then get cured by the antidote head, the antidote will also make you immune to any other toxin or malady known to humankind, including old age. You could still die by violence, but essentially, you'd stand as close to immortality as anyone has ever stood. Or so the legend goes.

They say in 1923, Parnell Jessup of Mippleton, Colorado made a big deal about receiving immortality from The Siamese Python. Before too long, he was strolling around in broad daylight when someone from a passing automobile shot him to death. The assassin was never caught, so no one ever knew the motive. Perhaps it was jealousy, or a desire to extinguish Jessup's imprudent pride. Whatever the reason, no one has publicly claimed to have been immortalized by The Siamese Python since Jessup's murder.

Before I go, I should clarify that I'm not trying to imply, as many others do, that the quest for immortality is foolish, or downright antithetical to what it means to be human. As if anyone could possibly know whether that's true yet. If anything, I just want to advise against seeking immortality through The Siamese Python. Even if your true love's dying of a terrible disease, and tells you she knows a guy who knows how to find the fabled serpent, don't try to be a hero. These blisters have been burning my flesh for less than a minute now and already I wish, with every atom of my being, that I never met my beloved Veronica Stone of Dearborn, Michigan.

# Flatmate

by Joshua Seigal

I'm staying in the flat  
of my sister's friend.  
To forestall stilted conversation  
on the trip to the bathroom  
I clean my teeth in my room,  
spitting white gobs of toothpaste  
into an empty pint glass  
and leaving it on the desk.  
I forget about it, until  
my sister's friend walks in.  
My stomach leaps into my mouth  
at the thought that she may  
have seen the cup.  
I rush to assure her  
that it isn't  
what she thinks it is.  
This doesn't make it  
any less awkward.



# Greensong

by  
Judith Mesch

Two peas in a pod  
Were asked about god.  
Is he small, round and greenish?  
Is he able to feenish  
The creations he starts  
Does he make them spare parts  
Are they found at Walmarts  
Are his interests Marine-ish  
Is he kindly or meanish  
Is he messy or cleanish  
Hath he preference for speenich  
Does he pile the pop tarts  
in his grocery cart  
Soon a picture emerged  
as they bobbed and they surged,  
Of a verdant round power, More than peas, pod and Flower  
In their luminous bower  
Could describe in one hour:  
Of a perfectly globular remote but Hob-nobular  
Orbicular, flopulant, Rotund and recombinant,  
Magnificent,  
Permanent  
Quintessence of germanent:  
Omnipotent, exterminant  
With qualities  
Clerical, viridian, and Spherical,  
Exquisite, numerical...  
And all the while in Simmering pots  
Steamed silent and  
Leguminous tots  
They of a grassy, or an Emerald tint, reflecting Gentle shades of  
mint  
Which leaves us still to Ponder, Ruminous:  
Who lit and yet relights the flame?  
The peas consider it all a game  
And as each one gets softly done,  
They're squished and squashed til one by one, they're gone.

# Gifted Children

by Lauren Gore

The phone pierces my solitude and it's Jaime's voice on the other end of the line and she is yammering on about how she needs to see me right away, that she needs to talk to me about something serious and that I need to please not freak out. These were the worst damn phone calls, and asking someone to please not freak out is just about the worst way to preface any sort of serious discussion. Jaime could never just cut to the fucking chase; she was all smoke and mirrors all the time and I wish she'd just come right out and say whatever it was she needed to say right here over the phone because goddammit I'm busy and I don't have time for this today. But she says telling it over the phone would cheapen it and so I tell her alright I'll come over.

My temples are throbbing and hot with annoyance and down goes the last swill of warm beer and I put the empty can in the recycling bin and delete my internet history and reposition the coffee table books and look around to make sure the apartment is in decent enough shape just in case I die in a car accident and my belongings have to do the talking for me. Maybe better to leave the Rene Magritte book out than the Andy Warhol book my mom gave me when I graduated from art school. I despise most Andy Warhol fans and I would hate for anyone to have it in their heads that I was one of them based on my choice of coffee table books. I see me in my casket and my mother has put that cheap Andy Warhol book in there because she doesn't know

me at all and everyone's got it all wrong and I'm in my dead head shouting no no, no, no, you've misunderstood me and now my whole life has been in vain you stupid assholes. I put the Andy Warhol book in the garbage can where it belongs. My mother has never understood me and she has always trivialized all of my tastes and concerns but it's only because she has none of her own because, when given the choice at sixteen years old, she chose a shiny new Mustang over a college education. She gets emotional sometimes and says Jack look at all I have sacrificed so that you could have a nice education and your life is going straight down the gutter, why don't you get off the couch and get your willy out of that ape girlfriend of yours and do something useful and goddammit I wish she would just shut up. I hope to god I manage to outlive her so that she doesn't get to do the explaining in my absence, but I just know that some cruel twist of fate will defy that hope. My mother and the rest of the world, they are always laughing at me but it's only because they don't understand and they don't know what I know because they're all idiots, blind deaf dumb idiots. This miserable planet is filled to the brim with idiots and if I had the money I'd have myself cryogenically frozen until the day that hell boils over just so I could thaw out in time to watch the whole world burn.

I'm so on edge I can't seem to jab the keys in the ignition but finally they're in and I'm on my way. My brain is flipping

But has this hat  
made me happy?  
... Of course it  
has.

# Goldfish

by  
Mary McCluskey

The thing about living with a guy who's just out, who's done his time and just hasn't settled back in yet, he jumps and twitches and doesn't sleep, and his eyes dart left and right and he's always turning in the street, looking behind him. The thing about living with this guy is that even when his voice is soft, a whisper, the razor blade edge of it seeps through. When he's saying oh, you're so hot, you're special you are, there's something else.

I hear it, this thing in his voice, but I think - he'd never hurt me. He just wouldn't.

We're watching TV late on Friday afternoon when he kicks the wall and says - let's go out. I jump up and we walk fast, him five yards ahead of me, and right there in town there's a charity fair. Stalls with hand-made sweaters and jams and pickles and booths with goofy games. He laughs at the old ladies and he has a go at the shooting range, just for the hell of it, and moves the gun a bit to the right trying to whip it around as if he wants to wave it all over the place but the guy looks at him hard, and it's chained anyway, so he can't budge it. He wins two goldfish. One boy, one girl. Well, that's what the old gal said. I name them after him and me - Ted and Jackie, because Jackie has this streaky bit on top, like my hair.

I buy a proper bowl for them. He says it's waste of money. He says they'll be dead before you get home. Turns out he's right. Half right. Jackie dies the next day. All her colours just vanish. She's fine at first, then there she is, floating on top of the water, her gold bleached out. The boy fish doesn't seem to notice. Keeps swimming round her.

In the pub when I tell Ted that his fish is still swimming but mine is dead, he gives me a look, picks up his pint and drains it, his eyes all funny and contorted through the bottom of the glass.

At home, I wait until I hear the TV go on, then I pull Jackie out of the bin, flatten her out on the kitchen counter, looking for some deliberate injury. I know he killed her. Then he's there behind me and I scramble about hiding Jackie's body in kitchen towel, throwing her in the rubbish bin and he wants to fuck now, and he says - you're different, nobody gets me like you do. And when he says that, as if I'm the only one in the world who does, I go damp down there, I can't help it. In bed, afterwards, when he seems calm, I ask him, I say - tell me what happened with that girl. Not what you told the jury. The truth.

I expect him to yell at me, say shut the fuck up but no, he wants to tell me.

Saw her in the club, he says. She was hot. Really hot. And gagging for it. I was just fooling around. I push her up against the car and she yells something and then she's got this thing in her hand, some kind of spike and I grab it, and push it towards her neck, just to shut her up but she moves and - he stops then, turns away from me. Stupid bitch, he says.

It's when I think of her there, all her colours bleeding out, that something goes click in my head. My body cools, I don't want him touching me. He doesn't notice, he's limp now, relaxed. I want to get up and run. Run away, like she should have done.

And the next night, when he's gone to the pub, I pack my bag so fast and I think - that goldfish saved my life. I don't know how, but she did.

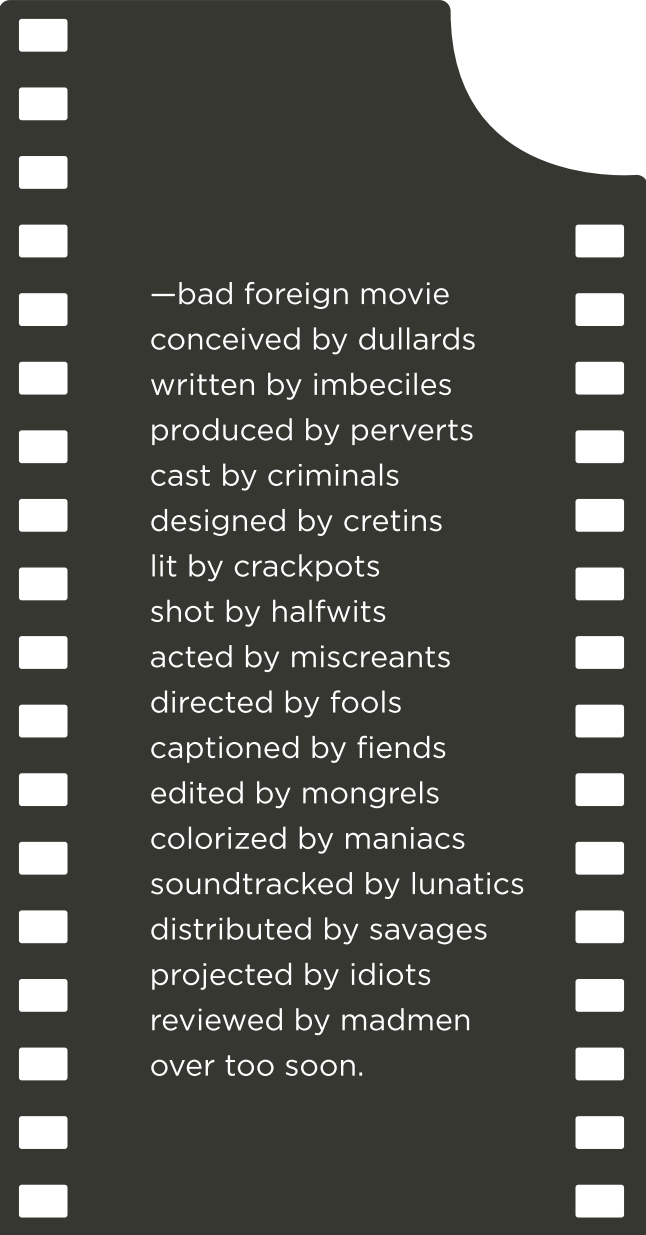
END

## Mm, Mm, Good

BY  
Matt Dennison

Everything's better with  
especially one of  
he remembered his  
as he ladled the glop  
wedding photos, pictures  
the house, the kids—so  
creamy goodness. Mm,  
as he turned up

a can of soup mixed in,  
the cream varieties,  
grandmother saying  
over his marriage license,  
of the honeymoon,  
much better now, so much  
mm, good, he thought  
the gas and stirred.



—bad foreign movie  
conceived by dullards  
written by imbeciles  
produced by perverts  
cast by criminals  
designed by cretins  
lit by crackpots  
shot by halfwits  
acted by miscreants  
directed by fools  
captioned by fiends  
edited by mongrels  
colorized by maniacs  
soundtracked by lunatics  
distributed by savages  
projected by idiots  
reviewed by madmen  
over too soon.

## Life

by  
Matt Dennison

## Spider poem

People are like spiders  
they're as scared of you  
as you are of them  
the odd one comes at you  
but when all is said  
everyone is running  
in random directions

## Sad smile

I picked up my magnifying glass  
held it above your hand  
and very slowly adjusting its angle  
in relation to the sun  
I burned the shape  
of a smiley face  
into your skin

You had asked me  
to make you smile  
and cause you pain  
simultaneously

this was the first thing  
that came to mind

by  
Matthew  
Witt

# A Day in the Life

by Nick Sun

21/11/12

It was 3:33am in the morning last Wednesday and I was walking home, musing over the night's activities and writing a short play in my head based on a telepathic conversation that took place between me and a fish in a Chinese restaurant aquarium earlier in the night that went roughly like this.

FISH: (sighs heavily, lights a cigarette underwater and takes a reflective drag) I tell ya boy, one minute you're in the ocean, the next you're stuck in some tiny glass prison waiting to be eaten by some ugly human and his fat family. (Laughing with equal parts resignation and derision) I don't know if there is a god, but if there is, he/she/it is definitely a sociopath, I mean the distribution of suffering seems totally arbitrary...

NICK: uh huh duh duh...duh?

FISH: ...If the selection process was at least a bit more ordered... I could understand it if I was here as punishment for some crime I committed in the ocean...

NICK: uh uh huh duh duh?

FISH: Are you even listening to me? Do you realise how difficult it is for me to sustain this line of reasoning with a three second memory? I'm having constant déjà vu, dizzy spells... This present moment right now feels like I'm remembering a future memory that I'll soon forget. I know fish is good for the brain, but I think my brain is riddled with Alzheimer's so I'm definitely not eating me.

NICK: duh huh huh duh?

FISH: (drags on cigarette, adjusts top hat to a more rakish angle) This is surely the dumbest play written in the history of man/anthropomorphic fish...

(There's a loud humming/rumbling noise. The pavement between them warps, beginning to dip, forming an inverse parabola. A growing sinkhole of bright light appears at the centre.)

FISH: What the hell is that?

NICK: duh huh duh?

(Nick, FISH and everything surrounding them begins to be pulled in towards the light)

FISH: Jesus Christ! This isn't supposed to happen in my play! This is

actually happening!

NICK: Uh huh duh duh.

FISH: Wait a minute if I'm the fish, who's me right now?

(NICK removes NICK mask to reveal a trout head staring blankly back)

FISH: Auugh!

I was so deeply immersed in my stupid fantasy world, I failed to realise there was actually a large sinkhole of light in the pavement before me pulling me towards it. I tried in vain to break its hold but the force was too strong and with a series of loud smacking sounds- much like an obese man chewing Peking duck through a megaphone- I fell through.

After what felt like somewhere roughly between a moment and eternity, I found myself at the centre of a crowded night club. Ironic dance music played at an irritating pitch. Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch, CDB, Girlfriend, One Direction, Ricky Martin, S club 7, Aqua all played simultaneously, relentlessly. I was surrounded by teeming bodies, all dressed in ironic piecemeal fashion. Ironic ethnic costumes, ironic 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's styled wear, ironic Hawaiian shirts, ironic hairdos, ironic goatees and moustaches, dead ironic expressions on their dead ironic hipster faces like Mr/Mrs Potato Head features. But the potatoes were rotten. Everything was rotten. And the faces wouldn't stop falling off the heads.

I felt ill. Everyone was executing ironic dance moves. The opening bars of Louis Bega's Mambo number five could be heard through the cacophony. A muted ironic cheer rose up from the dance floor as everyone began an ironic conga line. A Large drag queen dressed like Jackie Onassis with a tiny JFK doll penetrating her forehead did a stilted version of the Macarena out of time, oblivious.

She turned to me, 'I don't care what happens to me.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Everything hurts.' She laughed hysterically.

'Don't worry, it will be alright.' I lied, adjusting my fish to a more rakish angle and smiling I hope, genuinely. I felt sick and disorientated. My heart was so full of dread it was on the verge of bursting. 'Am I in hell?' I wondered. 'Or is this heaven and were my expectations too high?'

I moved through the sea of sweaty bodies. Unattached hands snaked out of nowhere and grabbed at my flesh trying to pull me back into the swarm. A hand groped awkwardly at my inner thigh, before forming into a mouth with its fingers as the top jaw and thumb as the lower.

'Would you like to feign human intimacy through meaningless sex in the club toilets, where we both imagine each other as far more attractive people to kill this lonely aching inside of us?' it said.

'I have no idea what you are talking about.' I replied, slapping it away.

I got to the edges and spied what I thought was the exit. I felt a tug and turned to see Jackie Onassis pulling on my arm.

'Where are you going? Don't you wanna be my JFK tonight?'

# Triumph from disaster

by Owen Booth

One thing that you never hear discussed in any debate on our 'right to die' is whether we should have the right to die in the manner of our own choosing. Or, you know, the manner of our spouse's choosing. Which is basically the same thing.

When my husband Brian developed 'locked-in' syndrome a few months ago, he couldn't wait to die. I could see it in his completely unresponsive eyes. I phoned Dignitas right away and, thank God, they had a spot available that very weekend.

That night I slept a troubled sleep. I mean - death was obviously the right choice for Brian, given the circumstances. The doctor said that even if he were to recover, he'd probably never play badminton again. Problem was I just couldn't picture Brian dying in a cold hospital room by lethal injection, or a smiling doctor suffocating him with a pillow. Whatever it is they do there. He'd always been such an adventurous sort in life, I was adamant that his dying moments should be lived in the same spirit.

The search for an appropriate mode of death for Brian became my new project. I'd been looking for something to do since my quilt-making class had finished. It was all very exciting!

It was a couple of days later that it came to me. We were watching the News at Ten, and there was yet another story about a suicide bombing in Afghanistan. I looked at the screen - the weeping Muslims, the ethnic minority newsreader.

I worried that Brian might be upset, so I quickly turned the channel over and, as fate would have it, landed on the Olympic closing ceremony. Fireworks lit up the sky. Smiling faces glowed in the pinky light. I looked at Brian, and saw a single tear fall from his eyes. It was beautiful... Until I realized he'd shat himself and was crying with shame.

As I slept that night I was assailed by visions. People blowing themselves up... fireworks in the sky... crowds laughing - applauding with delight. I woke with a start. It seemed so obvious! Why hadn't I thought of it before?

Over lunch the next day I pitched my idea to Brian: he would be the world's first non-terrorist suicide bomber! I'd enquired with Dignitas and they were happy to let us use their 'tranquillity garden' for the event. We'd have fireworks, and party games! The kids could go on an Easter egg hunt for his internal organs once he'd exploded. It would be a grand day out! I'd run it by family and friends already, and all concerned thought it a delightful idea! Brian's response was slow in coming, but eventually I saw that he had wet himself, and I took that as a 'yes'.

The event of Brian's death was the most life-affirming thing I have

ever witnessed. There was my husband, pride of place in the Dignitas garden, strapped to a giant Catherine wheel.

He'd never looked happier... without actually smiling. Gathered before him were family, friends, ex-colleagues, and a few curious Dignitas patients, perhaps wanting to see one last big show before they too bowed out.

As the wheel started to turn, there were the usual 'stand back' warnings you'd hear at any fireworks display. But this was no ordinary display! I quickly lit sparklers for the children, and made sure everyone had a bin bag to hand for the clean up afterwards.

Jets of golden flame began spurting crazily from the wheel, which was now spinning quite fast. The children could barely contain their excitement! As the 10-second countdown began, pink rockets and streamers roared into the sky, exploding overhead. They were so beautiful that it was actually quite an effort to keep an eye on Brian, who was now spinning so quickly as to be nothing more than a vegetative blur.

At the 5 second mark we began chanting in unison - '5!...4!...3!... 2!... 1!' At the last second I could have sworn I heard Brian's voice yelling 'STOP!', but it must have been a trick of the mind. Then - 'Zero!' Mustafa, Brian's line manager at the office, let out a cheeky 'Allah-hu-Akbar!' which we all found very droll, and then it happened...A huge bang, and my husband's body, head and limbs soared majestically through the night sky in a hundred different directions!

The crowd gasped with delight as a fine red mist began to fall. The applause was long and heartfelt. Oddly enough, the next thing I felt was Brian's heart, which fell whistling from the sky like a cricket ball and straight into my loving hands.

I cradled it to my chest, warming myself against the night as the clean-up began around me... It was then that my mobile phone rang. It was Brian's doctor in London. He said he hoped he wasn't too late. He'd looked into Brian's case and was sure that Brian could be brought out of his locked-in state and make a full recovery. What he needed was a shocking, traumatic experience, something he'd find deeply upsetting and disturbing.

I smiled wistfully as I explained the night's events to Brian's doctor. Brian was gone, for better or worse. We must all just be thankful that the way he went was anything but traumatic. In fact, I'm certain that it was such a thrill that even had he known he could recover, he would have chosen to explode himself anyway. The doctor protested, so I hung up. Nothing would spoil that moment for me, clutching Brian's heart to my bosom as his blood rained down from a neutral Swiss sky.

Even now, months later, I'm sure that if they ever do find his head, it will be grinning from ear to ear.

# Good grief

by Richard Purnell

I've got my black armband on, I've had it on for years  
I'd never be without it because I always like  
To be one of the first to pay my respects  
When a person who is famous has ended up dead

I do, on occasion, grieve half-heartedly  
For friends, family or people I've met  
But I find it much more meaningful  
When I mourn dead famous people instead

I cried for days at the death of Princess Di and Dodi Fayed  
And was inconsolable with the untimely passing  
Of Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson,  
Ol' Dirty Bastard, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman

I took a week off work to weep for Amy  
Who, if she had lived, I believe would one day  
Have given up the singing and debauchery  
To become a happy commuter just like me

Recently, I was riding to work on the X68  
When I saw in my newspaper a terrible  
Tragedy on the front page. "Oh no, not again"  
I said, when I saw that Vidal Sassoon had passed away

Vidal Sassoon  
Vidal Sassoon  
Oh, why did you have to leave us  
So soon?

As I read about his Bauhaus-inspired design aesthetic  
and love of geometric shapes which led him  
to his revolutionary wedge-bob haircut  
I burst, understandably, into tears

A lady commuter put an arm around me and asked if I was okay.  
"No...look," I said, and showed her the picture  
of the former hairdressing great cutting  
Mia Farrow's hair into his signature shape

"Did you know him?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"Did you ever meet him?"

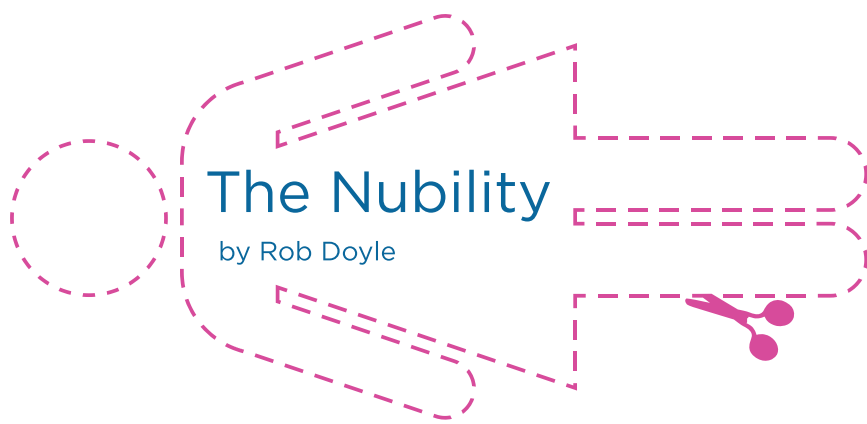
"No, I never did."

"Did you know anyone who ever went to one of his salons  
or bought his popular styling products?"

"I don't think so."

"Then, why are you so upset?"

I didn't have time to answer the question,  
because I was too busy earnestly emoting  
across a range of social media platforms



**18**

She comes to London, wide-eyed and carefree. Lives in a shared house with other young, creative types. Studies contemporary dance at King's College. Is lusted after by her instructor, but does not notice. Falls in love with an older, Portuguese visual artist (29). Discovers sex (so to speak). Blossoming social life, etc.

**23**

Has her heart broken for the first time. Collaborates on a well-received dance piece with an acclaimed percussionist. Tours Italy, etc.

**27**

Still in London. Wide circle of interesting, mostly beautiful friends. Has been in and out of love, and something other than love, several times. Dances for a living; teaches it, performs. Men swarm to her; she is extremely attractive and extremely fucking sexy. Life abounds with pleasure, lightness, laughter, ease. No serious thoughts of children - not yet at least. Too much going on.

**32**

Still very beautiful. In many ways, at the peak of her capacities. Financially independent, confident etc.

- 'Do you think you'll ever have children?' asks a new lover (27), innocently enough, after their third night together.

- 'Well, I don't particularly want to, at least not yet - there's still so much out there for me. But if it did happen, well... at this stage, I think I'd just go with it.'

**33 | 34 | 35**

It doesn't happen.

**36**

Going out now with a younger man (24), which is exhilarating. He is very sensitive and very handsome. She feels 27. Is still dancing, though it's somewhat harder now to get consistent work. Her knees ache a little after sessions. She tires more easily. Still relishes lovemaking.

**38**

He (the younger man) still loves her, but certain tensions are beginning to show. He is 26 and feels himself to be in his prime. She can see into his sleep: he dreams of

younger women, girls his own age, tender flesh, pertness, voluptuousness - above all, smoothness. She can find little work these days. She 'does not want to hold him back' (yes she does).

**39**

They're fighting more and more. She knows the end is coming but resists this knowledge (who wouldn't?). He is sullen, restive, irritable. She discovers that he has been watching a great deal of pornography - the girls are all much younger than her. You can repeat as often as you like that porn-stars are damaged and exploited, but she knows that beauty is its own confidence. Youth, taut flesh, nubility - these are power itself. They fight miserably and constantly. She wants a child (she does not). She wants a child (she does not, she does). He is unhappy in the relationship. He dreams of a cunt with jaws, with gnashing bloodied jaws...

**40**

She is alone.

**42**

Alone.

**45**

Alone alone alone.

**46**

She is alone. She has not aged well (some women do). At the opening of a friend's exhibition she runs into her ex (the younger man, 34). He is happy, thriving, successful, etc. His latest girlfriend is 25 (the perfect age? If only we could freeze them like that!) She leaves the opening that night in a state of melancholy verging on despair. Men scarcely lust after her anymore; her capacity to arouse passion is dwindling. She meets a man (44). They make love often enough; occasionally the pleasure blots out her awareness that their pantings and writhings, their noises and contortions are, primarily, attempts to prove to themselves (not even, really, to one another) that they are still capable of passion, that they are still valid sexual beings. Beyond that - the void. Both of them know that the best of life - that life itself, by modern standards - is behind them. Ahead is this: gradual organic deterioration; intensifying solitude, bitterness and dementia; then death, which offers no hope or grandeur any more, only the blunt consolation of oblivion. That is their fate, and they will not escape it.

(And...

**24**



was when I met her (I was 23). She let me into her bed, not once, but four times. Enough, that is, for me to fall in love with her. There was no fifth time. I can't say I ever got over the way she did it, the what-happened-next; I can't say I've forgiven her. That was three years ago. At this precise moment, life is still in summertime for her. But the rest of her story has already been written - more or less; I have an eye for the types, the patterns - and there is a certain comfort in that.)

even though he had this massive pin stuck through him. So I think he wasn't dead after all. I went down to get Dad and he was making breakfast and after my omelette he came upstairs to check and Mr. Beetle had got up and walked away with the big pin. My room was a mess so I went through a long search to find him. After 5 minutes I gave up. Dad said best not to say anything to Mum but later on luckily Mum found him. She went to put on her shoes to have lunch with Aunt Debbie and there he was on his back with his legs waving in the air and the big pin sticking out his body, inside her shoe. My sister Amy said Mum made a massive screamy noise and Buffy went tearing out the room. Then Mum left too in a big huff and hasn't come back tonight. After Mr. Beetle finally died he got dried out and had to be relaxed before pinning and Dad said how come Mum was exactly the same way.

**Insect: Mayfly**

**Order: Ephemeroptera**

**Location: Basin of Grandma's angel sculpture beneath the dead tree in her garden**

**Date: 7/20/11**

This is a Mayfly we got when Mum decided to take me and Amy to Grandma's for a vacation we didn't expect. It looks all messed up because Mum had trouble pinning it and it got wet and she tried to dry it out with her hairdryer which is how come two of its legs and one wing fell off. This is how come bits of it are joined to the thorax by sellotape and it looks to have seven legs (I think also there might have been two Mayflies in the jar) but it is definitely a real Mayfly jigsawed together. Mum says it's the Frankenstein Mayfly.

**Insect: Moth**

**Order: Lepidoptera**

**Location: Light Screen Trap**

**Date: 7/17**

Dad hung a clothesline between two trees in our backyard and put a white sheet over it with a big torch behind it. I set my alarm for 5.00 and went downstairs to get Dad (he's sleeping in the family room because Mum says he snores and the other night he woke himself up and thought a mosquito was in his ear because he's having nightmares about insects all the time like me) and we went out and caught lots of cool white moths. This one is the best. It's like the one Sister Norah showed us. Next day Mum got all annoyed we'd used the sheet and that was the day Dad went to live in his new house. I miss doing things with Dad.

**Insect: Cockroach**

**Order: Blattaria**

**Location: Daddy's New Kitchen**

**Date: 8/1**

Dad collected Mr. Cockroach in his new kitchen behind a pot. He died of natural causes Dad said. Maybe he had a heart attack. Dad boiled him to preserve him which is why he looks so good. Dad says he doesn't

mind having insects in his kitchen anymore and he laughed not in the funny way. This is mainly how come I was able to turn in my project early for extra credit.

**Insect: Praying Mantis**

**Order: Mantidae**

**Location: Wildlife Conservation Center**

**Date 8/30**

This is my favorite. I caught it at the Wildlife Conversation Center when Mum and I went there with Amy and Grandma and Mum's friend Sherrill, which is a man's name. She was on a funny looking yellow plant (the Mantis) and I didn't even see her. Like the sheet says, 'a landscaped facility such as a park, arboretum or zoo will have a variety of plants that attract different insects.' She is the coolest thing I found besides the stick insect and grasshopper. Mum told me how mantises bite off their mate's heads which is gross and said it's a good thing we don't do that or I'd never want a girlfriend. I said I didn't ever want a girlfriend anyway. Mrs. Mantis was in perfect condition but isn't now because Mum got her wet by crying while she was helping me put her on the board here. Mum says she has allergies to things too just like me with bees. I think you'll agree that she looks good pinned like this as if she's alive and like she's praying for something to come and save her.



# Delores

by Thomas Pitre

As she drove by  
I could smell her lipstick.  
Her voice  
a husky rasp  
cultivated on barstools  
in Covina.

Two, symmetrical rows of plastic gums  
square,  
grey teeth  
too small for her long, narrow face.  
A tattoo of an automatic pistol  
above her tiny breasts.

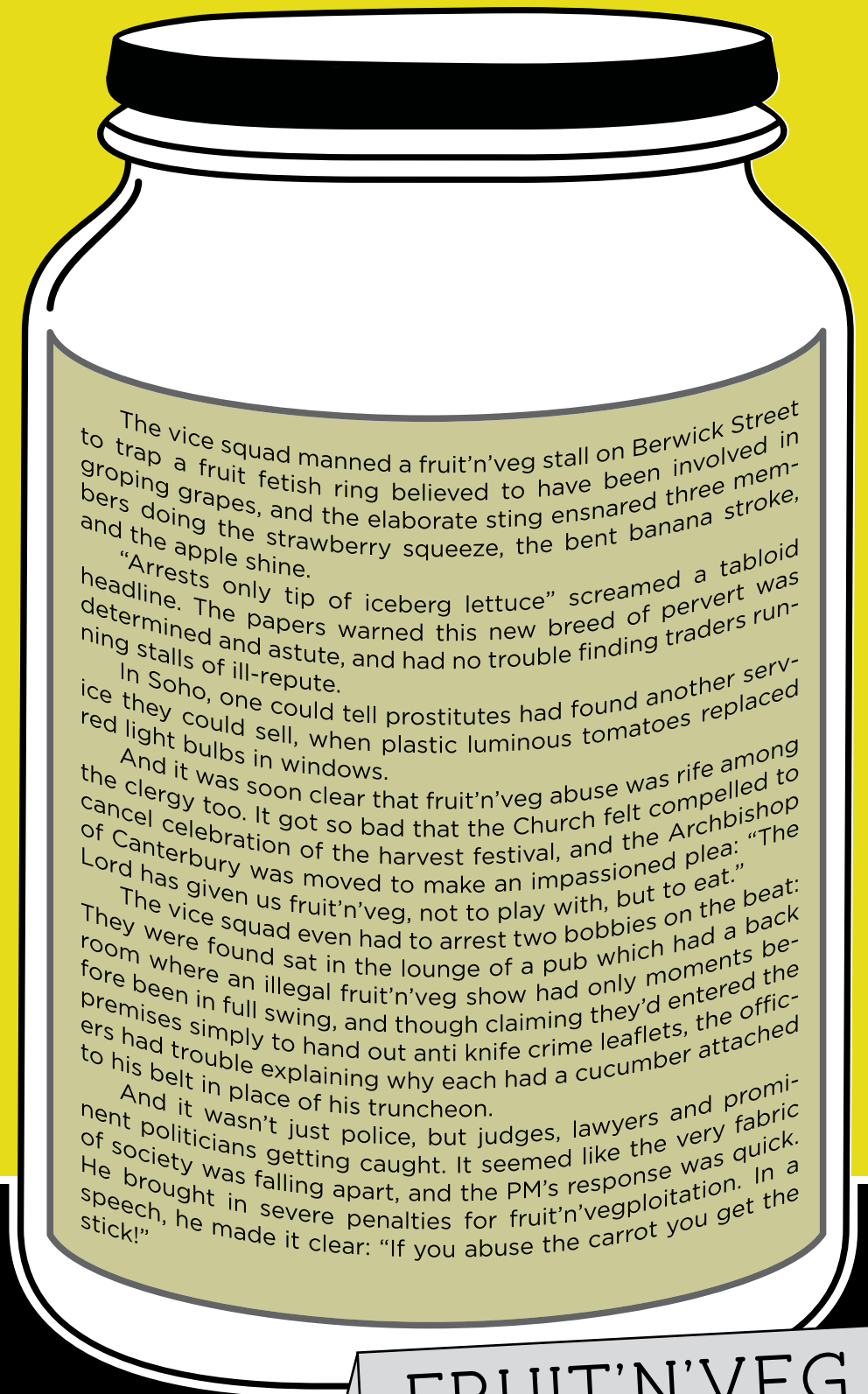
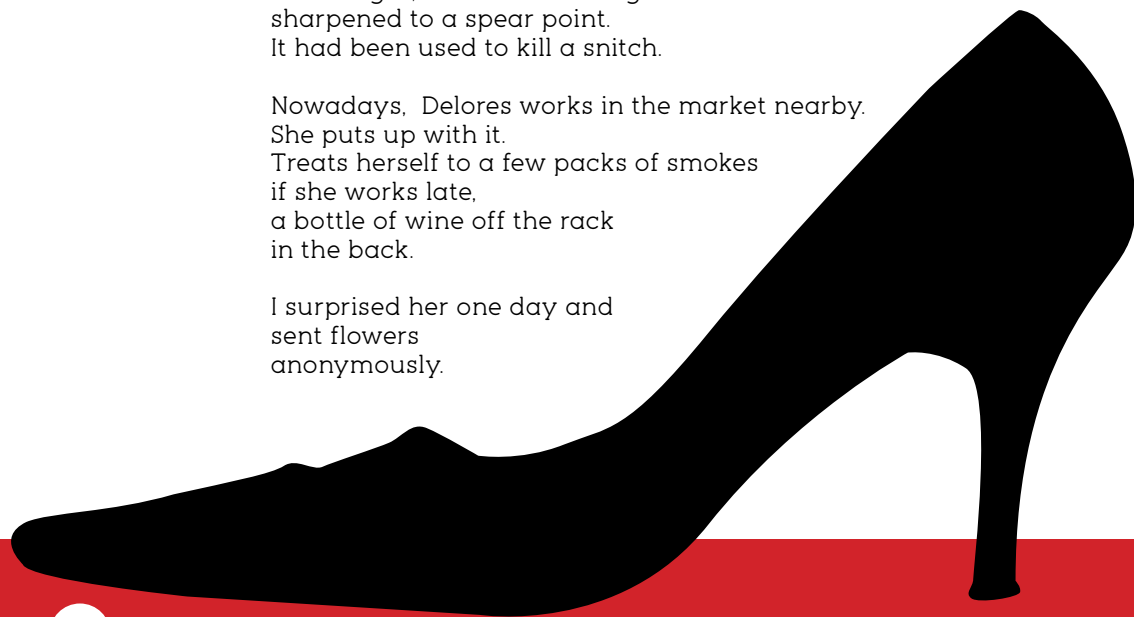
She had stories to tell about her days  
as a prison guard.  
She was assigned the "shit watch".  
A person suspected  
of carrying drugs  
in his anus  
was placed on shit watch.

She collected shanks and fifis.  
Fifis  
- homemade vaginas,  
fashioned from a towel and a disposable glove.

One of the weapons was a roll of newspaper.  
Rolled tight, soaked in white glue  
sharpened to a spear point.  
It had been used to kill a snitch.

Nowadays, Delores works in the market nearby.  
She puts up with it.  
Treats herself to a few packs of smokes  
if she works late,  
a bottle of wine off the rack  
in the back.

I surprised her one day and  
sent flowers  
anonymously.



FRUIT'N'VEG  
by Thomas McColl



# the blue & the green

by Wesley Cooke

A match made in Devon.

An hour had passed, around them & between them.

For him, it was time ample to divine she was perfect. A Fury in fishnets, a 21st Century Tisiphone - some kind of punk pin-up.

For her, the jury was still out on her self-appointed tour guide as he fired at her a magazine of local facts peppered with personal appraisals, hopping around her like Pepe Le Pew on Prozac. Although, he was wearing matching odd trainers: Stan Smiths. Her left - blue, his left - green.

He took her to the shore. She showed him her rape alarm.

They sat side by side, in silence. Blinking rapidly like a spastic camera he scanned the horizon, every shutter action of his eyes a snapshot of the surf. He heard himself say aloud but to himself "Looks just like Minster glass" - the words came out lemming-like & waving little white flags, crumbling to dust at his feet. A sideways glance sold him the dishonest image of a yawn on her open mouth. His hopes going the way of the setting sun.

She wondered if he was the one to show her the side of Torquay she wanted to see, if it existed at all. She was past caring & for the time being she was happy to pass the time with him, when all she really wanted to do at that moment in time was pass water. She conjured up a mind's eye moving image of herself stomping down to the water's edge in her ox-blood Dr Martens, hitching up her skirt & easing down her froufrou knickers & fishnets as she waded out waist-high.

Cold coincidence or some kind of twisted telepathy had him leap to his feet, letting out a jack russell roar that bewildered the both of them. As he bounded his way down towards the busy brine, he slipped - the unmistakable dry crack of bone tempting an invol-

untary trickle from her distended bladder. A Coast-guard Rescue scenario flashed before her eyes, a dramarama she had no intention of playing any part in. His cries for help growing smaller with every step.

Cary Parade was crammed & abustle with the pink & blue rinse brigade, slowing the beat signature of her stomp down to a marrow-churning staccato. Above the buzz of chattering biddies & the cough, hiss & splutter of traffic bumper to bumper she could hear the mechanical bird call of a car alarm close by. Above the heads of holidayers & locals alike the obsessive-branding-disordering shop signs screamed silently for her attention - as subtle as a house brick wrapped tightly in tartan wallpaper.

She saw an armada of battleship grey clouds sailing overhead; the rain-pregnant towering cumulus. To her another harbinger of yet more holiday misery to come. She stopped & stood behind a tiny startled budgie of a biddy at a Pelican crossing & inspected her speckled egg of a head as she waited for the beep. In muted marvel she scanned the seemingly paper-thin, liver-spotted septuagenarian skin. She was tempted to blow at a candy floss wisp of hair & in her mind's eye the translucent membrane easily begging-in under questing breath.

Cold coincidence or some kind of twisted telepathy had the woman buckle & flop into road & path of a crawling 5B bus; its cough, hiss & splutter followed by the pop of speckled egg - its little old yoke caking only few of the throng. She licked a teardrop of oily grey Thalamus from her top lip, pushing it to the roof of her mouth. She closed her eyes in search of flavour notes. A gasp broke the spell & had her eyes meet a moon-faced woman with wide-eyed stare, she saw a jowly mouth clamber for words & a finger point from floor to her. A Police Custody scenario flashed before her eyes, a dramarama she had no intention of playing any part in. The cries for help growing smaller with every step.

up with a start, and when George's bodyguard chimed in, also calling him a boaster, well, frankly that did it. If there was one thing that icked Gary, it was to be called a boaster, and he stomped out of the Butter and Toast room, down the hallway and into the Wallcone and Pinetable room.

Why it is called the Wallcone and Pinetable room isn't known, at least by this generation of house residents, for it had neither Wallcones nor Pinetables. It could more appropriately be called the Wooden Bench and Cacti Room, but no one had been concerned enough to go through the paperwork to officially change the name. We all piled in this room and found seats on the benches between beautiful, decorative cacti while Gary stepped into the center and took off his chain mail. He sat cross legged on the floor, took a few deep breaths and then, without any sort of introduction or opening act, put one hand on his chin and the other on back of his head and slowly began to turn.

Gasps came from the wooden benches as Gary's head twisted past the normal point of flexibility, but these soon changed to oos, and aaahs as he faced completely backwards. Next a couple of laughs bordering on hysteria could be heard, then a scoff of disbelief and finally, as Gary battled through the last quarter of the turn so his head was facing its original direction, one enthusiastic 'olé!' We applauded his success and George stepped forward with his hand held out for an apologetic shake, but Gary took no heed. Instead he continued twisting his head in the same direction, counter-clockwise, and began going around the circle once again. His hands moved only a half-inch at a time, but they kept turning steadily and when he completed the circle a second time there was some polite applause, some oohs and a nervous chuckle. During the third rotation, the gasping came back, followed by a prolonged and shocked silence which was only broken by another enthusiastic 'olé' when he finished the fourth.

Then the whispering began. 'Do we stop Gary?' could be heard in hushed tones, 'Isn't counterclockwise the way to unscrew something? Is Gary's head going to pop off?' Most of us agreed that this wouldn't be a good thing, to have Gary's body wandering around and bumping into furniture while his head would sit somewhere, grumbling and waiting to be fed or get his teeth brushed. But Gary wasn't listening. He just kept turning.

Soon we had lost count of the number of rotations. Some people had gotten bored and wandered back to the pickle competition, or the weekly talk on Frisbee rights, but a good number of us stayed to see what would happen. Plus, although in these odd circumstances, it wasn't every day that we got to spend so much time with Gary. It was good to have him around.

But it ended before we knew it. Little Cherie, with her grease-stained, crumbly dress, appeared in the center of the ring. We had forgotten her in the other room and she had probably finished all that buttered toast and came to see where everyone was. She walked right up to Gary and asked, in her timid little voice, "Gary, what's... what's it look like?"

Gary paused. His head was nearly backwards with his eyes pointed up towards the top of the great saguaro that was the centerpiece of the room's collection. It was the first time he had stopped turning in a few

hours, and what he said next is still a fiercely debated topic in this house. Some heard the choked words "street muffins" come out of his mouth, and others heard the phrase "peat love-ins," with staunch supporters for both versions and many variations in between. What is known is that when Gary said those words he let go of his head and his skull started spinning around, slowly at first, but soon speeding up like a feverish top connected to his shoulders. Luckily Nedway pulled little Cherie a few steps back, deftly avoiding a nearby spiky succulent, and we watched poor Gary's head spin out of control, faster and faster, until his face became a blur and he fell onto the floor. But this didn't stop him; his head kept turning with his face slapping the floorboards in a meaty, rhythmic pattern. Some covered their eyes, some watched in fascination, others began clapping along to the beat and someone, once again, shouted 'olé,' but this time it is agreed was in poor taste. There was nothing we could do but watch, and it only took a few minutes until Gary's head stopped and he sat up, a bit dazed, with a big red splotch of bruise forming on his cheek.

We picked him up and walked him up to his bed where he slept for three days straight. When he woke up he was as hungry as a very hungry horse and we brought plate after plate of food to his bed. When questioned, he knew nothing of street muffins nor peat love-ins, and claimed that he couldn't remember anything after the first 'olé.' We all learned something from this incident, and it was nearly a fortnight before anyone called Gary a liar again.



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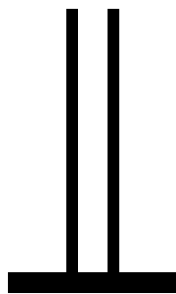
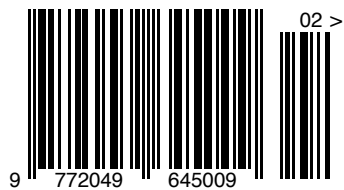
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