

***WiTH* 6**

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FOREWORD

Everything I have ever done professionally has involved the written word and the writer. They have been there arguing with me, cajoling me, thanking me, collaborating with me, disowning me. The product of this writing has varied over the years—screenplays, soap operas, presenter’s pieces to camera, documentary voice-overs and more recently (forgive me) course outlines and strategic plans. Regardless of the end form, the process has always been a rejuvenating one.

Within these pages you will find examples of the energetic writing being pursued by our undergraduates on the ‘With’ courses—BA (Hons) English with Creative Writing and BA (Hons) English with Media Studies. There is nothing thematic about the content, no easy signposts for you to navigate the offerings, just the writings, side-by-side, inviting you in to read and think.

In the early 1980s I had the pleasure to meet that great American writer (and depressive), Kurt Vonnegut, whilst he was very reluctantly promoting his latest novel. What transpired from our conversation was that a huge dark cloud that regularly blighted his life had once more descended on him. There was nothing to write home about from our encounter. So, I’ll go to his writing for a piece of advice for all would-be writers. ‘Here is a lesson in creative writing. First rule: Do not use semicolons. They are transvestite hermaphrodites representing absolutely nothing. All they do is show you’ve been to college.’

So it goes.

Paul Inman
Director of Media
University College Falmouth

INTRODUCTION

At University College Falmouth, we believe all good writing is creative and that it underpins and informs all the subject areas on offer to our students, just as literary and media theory underpin and inform creative writing. So whether studying topics such as Creative Writing and Cultural Criticism, Science and Literature, The Gothic and Grotesque, Creative Non-Fiction, or genre-based units such as Writing Fiction, Writing for Radio or Poetry & Form, our students' work is rooted in writing and reading, discussion and debate, close reading, contextualisation and creative response.

WiTH magazine came out of a growing excitement among our students body about what they had written, and a desire to share and showcase it with others in the university. In the last two years five issues of the magazine have been produced, but this paperback volume is our formal launch issue and includes some highlights of previous issues along with much previously unpublished work.

I'd like to congratulate the students whose work is included here, as well as all those who have contributed to previous issues, and helped put issues 1 to 5 together. I'd also like to dedicate this issue to Alan House, who is sorely missed by students and staff alike: may you make a full and painless recovery. And finally, I hope that you, the reader, will enjoy this miscellany of new writing.

Rupert Loydell
Lecturer in English with Creative Writing

DAD

He was the best dad you could find, or hope to find. He loved my mum, with all his money.

He brought her cars, and holidays away. He knew what he wanted and got it. He had the best suits. The best cars. He took me to the park and played with me on the swings, his big hands caught me when I jumped off them. And his face was never without a smile, filled with white teeth. And we laughed together. He brought me ice-cream in summer and red lollipops in winter, staining my lips red, he said he liked it when they went red. He would carry me around on his back all day long. His voice was deep, it always reminded me of a big bear, just with a little less hair. He took me shopping for clothes and picked me out the best nightdresses. He combed my hair with attention and care. He concentrated so hard when he did it. He made sure I was never bored. And when I cut myself, he would take off his shirt, he always wore a shirt. He would show me the scar he got, climbing trees when he was my age. He even showed me the scar he got when he was stabbed, and promised me not to tell mum, which I did. I would have done anything for him. He told me he had a past. I didn't at that point quite understand what that was suppose to mean, but he told me that when I was older he would explain. He promised to take me on holiday too, 'just you and me kid' he would chuckle while he stroked my hair. Mum loved it. Her other boyfriends were horrible to me, they only wanted to spend time with her, they never looked after me. She called him her 'special one' and he would call me his 'special little one' he was never too busy to play with me. Mum was always busy off at conferences, and she was glad he was so happy to look after me. He told me to call him dad, and I was glad because I wanted to, he was the best dad you could find, or hope to find. It was when mum was off at conferences that he would cook my dinners, we played a game, he explained that him and mum did it all the time, playing grown-ups, he said I was

almost a grown up, and I said I was because I was nearly 11. And so we played the game, where we eat dinner with candles and flowers. Like grown-ups do. He told me to put my best clothes on, he even said I could put mum's red lipstick on, because he liked my lips red. I liked to play with mum's make-up. And after that he undressed me and put me in the bath, and washed me down. Like he always loved to do. And he asked if he could dry my hair, so he could comb it. He said he liked my hair, he said it was soft, and called me his 'special little one'. He would tuck me into bed and kiss my forehead and tell me good-night and sweet dreams, and smile at me a big smile, full of white teeth. And I would pretend to sleep because I knew he was coming back. He always did. I would pretend for hours. And then he did come back, I couldn't see him because it was so dark, but I could hear him breathing. Fast and shallow. He came over to my bed and whispered 'my special little one, are you awake?' I would giggle. And he took off his shirt, he always wore a shirt. And then his belt and trousers. He explained I was 'special' his 'special one' and told me again about how grown up I was, and how glad he was to have me. And his breathing got faster and faster. I rubbed my eyes, pretending I had just woke up. I could see his teeth in the dark. And he would take off my night dress and leave it on the floor, and told me how 'special' I was.

He was the best dad you could find, or hope to find. He loved my mum, with all his money. But he always told me he loved me more.

US FIRE KILLS IRAQI BUS PASSENGERS



Up to four Iraqi civilians are reported to have died in Baghdad when US troops fired at a minibus taking them to work.

There was nothing remarkable about this morning. Father had gone off to work and Mother was washing the sheets. My morning was spent outside; kicking the ball about with Majid, inside his house, next door to ours, his sister Faiza was preparing some lunch. Even the weather was typical for November. Clear sky, but cold and windy. There had been a bit of a sandstorm early and the metal shutters of the windows were lined with sand; creating little sand pits for the flies, who were swarming around the dropped persimmons lying on the ledge. Persimmons are the sweetest fruits I've ever tasted. When we were small, Mother would often find the three of us lying under the trees to shade ourselves from some of the hottest temperatures on this earth, clutching our bellies—full of the sweet orange pulp!

Oh back in those days, not so very long ago—when we were just children and the war had not started. They were the times when Majid and I would catch baby turtles, and race them outside. Faiza would watch us silently from the doorway. Her pretty eyes sparkling under her black hijab. They were the days when we'd pretend to be aeroplanes and swoop off the walls in the scrub lands behind our houses. They were the days when Faiza once lifted up her abayah and dress and showed me her little bosoms. Sweet and brown; like over-ripe persimmons.

Not that Faiza notices me anymore. Her eyes, once sparkling like the river in Mi'ar, were filled with a dark sadness since her Shi'ite activist boyfriend was forced to hide in neighbouring Iran. We don't know if he is still alive, Kahlil. But she sits by the window awaiting his letters every morning. Hoping. Wishing.

Praying to receive his words.

Here in Sha'ab, we are used to the sounds of shots being fired; they are the soundtrack to our lives since the war started. It's not always US fire, but it's the US I have an intense hatred for. I sometimes think about the families of these troops and wonder: Are you proud? Do you look at the portrait above the fireplace as you sit and eat your cherry pie and smile a proud smile, for your little boy, blowing up the Iraqis? I've seen the pictures on tv. I am pro God, I am pro life, I am pro humanity, I am pro truth, and when the American government chooses to be against all that, then damn it: I am Anti-American government.

My father makes a living as a minibus driver. He sometimes comes out and plays a bit of soccer with Majid and I when he has the time. He's pretty traditional, but he's Shi'ite and married a Sunni, so not a sectarian or anything like that. Mostly the Sunni and Shi'ite can live harmoniously—they have been since forever. He's in pretty good health mostly, apart from slightly dodgy hearing and a tendency to get nervous, but who doesn't these days?

During our game this morning, at about 9.55 a.m., I heard a low moan exude from within my house. It was rather an eerie sound, like the cats used to make when they gave birth, or the wind whistling through the empty date palms on a particularly windy day.

Majid and I stopped and exchanged glances. He grimaced at me, and shrugged his shoulders. I ran up the steps and tore through the front door, shouting for my mother. I followed the howling and yelping sound and found her collapsed on the wooden floor, cradling the telephone.

It is almost every day that we await this type of call. It's impossible to forget this danger being present. Majid and I are still not

even attending school at the moment, as his Mother and mine are too frightened to let us go. So I just knew. She didn't have to say a word.

The bus had been shot at by those bastards. Father's 'safe' job of driving the bank people to work in the mornings had failed him. Failed us. He'd taken a turning down a different road. One intended just for passenger cars. They fired a warning shot; I guess he didn't hear . . . He kept on driving. So they shot again, but this time with a M-240B machine gun, bullet speed averages 895 miles per second. Three of the women from the bank were dead. And one man. One man whom I had loved. Who had sat me on his knee and taught me how to whistle. Kicked a football with my best friend and me.

Are you proud? Do you look at the portrait above the fireplace as you sit and eat your cherry pie, and smile a proud smile for your little boy? Blowing up the Iraqis? I've seen the pictures on tv. I am pro-God, I am pro-life, I am pro-humanity, I am pro-truth, and when the American government chooses to be against all that, then damn it: I am Anti-American government.

RELEASE

A few weeks ago I could be found worshipping at a cistern. It was in one of those really posh restrooms with the reflective pink marble surfaces and a bloke in red handing out towels. The building was that of a rival company, well, former rival company, at the time a prospective partner for the one I work for, the one I was, in fact, representing at this, a key merger meeting. The meeting took place in a boardroom, you understand, not the restroom.

Not really sure how much of this is relevant; your guess is as good as mine. I'm just trying to sort it out in my head. The key thing is around 3:25pm, while we were taking a short recess I entered the restroom and did not emerge until 4:10pm on account of all the praying. I went in there to wash my hands of the thin layer of clamminess afflicting them, then must have hedged for a good two minutes as I decided whether or not it'd be a good idea, whether it'd be prudent at this crucial juncture in the proceedings to go and have a wee-wee.

Didn't absolutely need one, didn't particularly feel like it, but there was some definite . . . pressure, y'know? A weight. I'd hate for my game to be thrown off during the second half of the meeting by an urge. Hnn. I don't know if we're gonna make it all the way through this . . . anyway I'm digressing. I made for the stand-up urinals, like a big boy should, but those bloody things, I never felt right around them. I was unable to coax a stream, or even a trickle.

Turning from the urinal, I glanced into the cubicle directly behind me and that's where I saw it. The Most Pristine and Immaculate Toilet I Had Ever Seen.

I. Was. Transfixed.

Pure and simple.

Such purity it was that it inspired the most profound sense of divinity I have yet encountered in my life, and I spent the first eighteen years of my life as a wafer guzzler. Barely mindful of my still-open fly (the bathroom, mercifully, was empty but for me and the towel boy, who was reading the paper with his back to me), I turned and shambled into the cubicle like a lame hound and had just sense left enough to shut and lock the door before debasing myself.

It was like being in the grip of a fit; uncontrollable weeping, fat tears falling over my cheek like an avalanche on a steppe, face contorted, this guttural howling choke sounding in the back of my throat over and over. I must've stuffed my knuckles half-way down my gob, muffling that noise, kneeling there, rocking baaaack and foorth, baaaack and foorth. There was a little pool of water underneath my right knee; the suit trousers were ruined.

When I finally felt subdued enough to take my hands from my mouth, words started forming on my tongue and tripping out over my lips into the world, whispered and derelict and staggering on the air. Things past I spoke of, randomly, stuff I'd forgotten that terrified me with their potency, the death of the family dog when I was 9 (Crumble, Labrador, older than I was at the time), the initial onset of puberty where I'd groped Sita Kumar from behind in the lunch queue (first week of secondary, it was so worth it), that fraught and frightening summer spent at my Grandmother's house where I spent every waking minute thinking I was gonna throw up (Mom and Dad got back together in the end, but I don't think she's ever completely forgiven him). Funny what your mind throws out when you're in the bog.

My colleagues, as you can guess, were incensed by my absence. Fortunately I'd gone straight from that restroom floor and with

grim efficiency I'd organised an alibi involving a distress call from a fictional sister and a rather too hasty journey up a flight of stairs to alert the conference to my absence; I went and got those six stitches too, 'cause that was where my head was at that afternoon. They didn't like it, but there wasn't a lot they could do about it.

I tried not to think on it overmuch. Of course I tried. If you're misled by the mildness of my tone, don't be; I'm just a little spaced out about the whole thing. I mean, these are not the words of a man for whom this qualifies as normal behaviour. These are not dispatches from madman, or from some other world where this sort of thing is 'okay'. You are talking to a man who knows what it is he has done, acutely so, and before you stands the man who knelt in supplicant confession before (let's not mince words) a shitter. The Loo That Listened.

Fear for my sanity, these days, has me pissing in the sink and burying my shit in the garden under cover of darkness. A mortal fear of toilets; do they have a word for that in Latin? I've never gone back to that particular cistern, or any since. I tell myself it's because I fear a relapse. But I'm seeing now, that it's deeper than that; what I'm really afraid of, is that I'll go back there, that I'll confront it, and that I'll feel . . . nothing. That that perverse feeling of . . . of release that I felt, will never repeat itself, lost to me forever.

And I suppose we've reached the heart of the matter now, haven't we? Me. You. A listening ear, that's maybe what this is all about. Imaginary or not, sympathetic or . . .

I'll say this much. You take these things where you can find them.

3BY3BY3 POEMS

ATTEMPTING TO DEFY

A convocation of blind sparrows
crouch in the main gallery like giant
Epstein sculptures, reminding you

how boring England is by comparison.
Several rooms far above, some designed
by artists: light, materials, the odour of youth.

This is not one of the best places to take
children, but there is nobody to tell us to
get lost except us, and we don't count.

NOTHING OF ANYTHING

On an afternoon almost wholly without incident,
an elderly man is entering a lions' enclosure with
a whip and a chair; he has been told there are no

hospital beds available. The veteran becomes worried
and suspects he is ill-equipped to prevent a mauling.
He is pleased with his makeshift defence, but for all the

gutsy endeavour the lions have the better of things.
In the evening, a nurse agrees that the man looks much
worse than before. He is moved to a cubicle with a door.

DEFAULT FAMILY COLLECTIVE

Hope was optimistic and naïve, but confident on the future: his Press Secretary told the nation he was focused on the next generation's difficulties.

Despair refused to meet with the delegation at his own annual event: his first foray into the politics business was far from favourable.

The flippancy of Despair served as a diplomatic wrecking ball to the crucial issue of collective action: our petition of eight signatures was insubstantial.

HOW THE WEST WAS WON

Peter Pan thrown inward, outward
hails of friendly fire plague the fallen.
In their end we will find our beginning.

They snubbed the royal revellers
sniped Victoria and forgot our hero.
Our chosen side?

Shimmering forests of plastic and lights
follow and lead us blind through our TV sets.
Showered then slipped down the latrine.

Iconic and questioning laws and rules and light.
We float tiny insignificance in their sights.
To mend bend and under their rule of thumb.

They fill our landscape with acid lemon M's.
Devour the hand that feeds us,
waging war on teenage rations.

Sparkling electric libertine in view.
Yet placid and engrossed we gorge on their fast feasts,
fuel the fire of spectacle.

In their end we will find our beginning.

JOURNEY TO HELLVELLYN

Now you've done it, you know.
Fallen traverse of the ridge.
The road runs south to life after this.

Fiery, sheer, quarrying inside.
A scramble up rough grass that cuts,
a rocky castle towering through peppered ash.

Crisped air will push you through utopic undergrowth.
Dark long dirty slope to the orange gorse.
It will consume you till night plateaus untrue.

You stand now one foot on the nethermost pike
shaky little tongue trying to lie but he knows it.
You reach the summit of your convictions only to fall.

Can you hear her?
Can you see it?
You will for eternity in the valley of repentance.

Purgatory is lost to you now.

RED PILL, BLUE PILL

Your hands uncurl to reveal a red pill, a blue pill. Step down the rabbit hole.

Tell me your name.

Is it wrong to say that the light is fading? And I wish I had taken the blue pill instead.

But where is the life in not following the white rabbit?

Through to a forest, a garden, the cottage. In a rocking chair I spy, with my little eye, a hunched up figure with a shawl and a cap. Come closer my dear, says the hunched up figure, I walk a little closer, step over creaking floorboards, a rat the size of a cat catches my eye in a doorway. Step a little closer, says the hunched up figure, I put out my hand and touch warm bone and flesh.

The figure turns to reveal a man with four fingers (oh, hideous of nightmares) with a cigar and five cards.

Poker? he says

Texas Hold'em? I say

Why not, he says, You are playing for your life.

Maybe the blue pill is for solitaire instead, a game for you alone, all cards, all in.

I sit facing death, one card at a time, the court at my bidding spinning red, gold, white. Death passes me a cigar, why not? Its Cuban. Maybe a little rum? Now I feel like a pirate. Pass me an eye patch, my disguise is not yet made. What are we playing for? My life, or vain pleasure?

Maybe both, he says, Now deal.

I AM WINTER

I am winter and I am forever. She crackles down the radio to the listeners at home. At ten past three, I'll shiver from the ceiling, freeze into an icicle and splinter on the floor. I'll make my own Siberia, mangled and alone. In one, two, three; you shatter and I melt.

In a car, the listener waits. He spies the side of a mountain ivy crawling round his ankles, he is pulled towards the voice. What if he had changed channels? From 109 to 102. It wasn't always winter are his last thoughts in the chill. Wandering into a palace, the bright light in the distance, his place is set and empty, she turns and she is beautiful, tempting blue and metal.

Change places with the jester, he'll sing you into a temper. Sit next to the sorry snowmen, they have scarves of cashmere and silk, their noses are for the taking, trade them for lollies, or candy cane sugar. Only take care of the melting, it sticks to your powder fine skin.

Try the ice cream, it's delicious. A marble pattern of strawberries and cream. Later there'll be Opera, on a gaudy lit up stage. Rigoletto? Maybe Carmen. Sing a song for the waiting queen. In the car the radio crackles. He sinks and shatters on the floor.

3 BY 3 BY 3

RED LIGHT RISES

Tiny copper moon,
Shines hopeful, and refracts,
Your brightly staged future.

A light lifted higher,
Through storms and defects,
Casts shadows broad, and stepped.

In this irresistible eclipse,
Self, fear and flight
Are viewed front and centre.

BEST TASTE INVENTED

The muse, ponders,
Launching playful
With truth.

'It should be used
With great care,
Like Tabasco sauce.'

A carefully devised soubriquet
Bottles,
In small, fiery vials.

YOU EXPLORE WONDER

I think I saw you last night,
Skipping down the road,
During a lunar eclipse.

A pretty vivid mystery,
Of play transportation,
And bright orange light.

Gradually lost,
Crumbled like sand,
Wet, and struck.

GRASPING FOR MEANING

The rain pelts down, hitting her plastic umbrella in a rat-a-tat of machine gun fire. The bus comes around the corner like it does every morning, vivid red against dull grey. Red like the fire engine that wakes her. It screeches down the road, blazing sirens, responding to a nuisance call; there's no fire, only smoke. They try to start a fire on the moor. She puts rocks down, not wanting it to catch and spread. It doesn't even matter. In the end, there's no fire.

There's no passion in his eyes anymore, nothing smouldering when he looks at her. He touches her because they both expect it, like it's his right. She doesn't even want another baby. It won't stop crying. She hasn't had more than six hours sleep in two days, and as she holds it to her breast she feels . . . nothing. She just wishes it would stop crying. There are eleven candles on the cake. She's so proud of herself when she blows them all out in one breath. 'Make a wish, honey.'

It's like an electric shock, bringing tears to her eyes. She's brave as daddy pulls the barb out, holding still like a good girl. After they sting, they crawl off and die. They find Milo behind the shed weeks after he went missing. The maggots make him look alive, his skin boiling and writhing. They assume he'd been hit by a car, but they never find out for sure.

The first thing that hits her is the scent. She takes a moment to sit, the wheel smooth under her hands, breathing in that new car smell. Then she starts the engine, driving away for the very first time. The birth is beautiful, bloody and amazing. He takes his first breath, crying out lustily for the whole world to hear as he's passed into his grandmother's arms. She holds him, and she never wants him to stop.

Cartoons are on the television, bright splashes of colour and sound spilling over the living room. She munches down grandma's cookies with delight, savouring every taste. Her legs dangle over the edge of the couch and she swings them slowly as she washes down her treat with milk. She's flying, higher and higher and she reaches out to touch the sky . . . she hits the ground with a thud, scraping her knees against the playground gravel.

They take it in turns, pointing up into the night, naming constellations. 'I love you.' They're cuddled together for warmth and when she turns at his words, he kisses her. It's short, sweet, and a total surprise. It's everything a first kiss should be. The heart monitor beeps incessantly beside her as her father sleeps. She's sat by the bed, salt tears bright in her eyes. She never gets the chance to tell him that she loves him one last time; he never wakes up.

The sea is shockingly cold as she goes under, a particularly strong wave taking her unawares. She swallows a mouthful of rank seawater. She's glaring as she surfaces, her parents curled in useless fits of laughter on the beach. It doesn't take long before she's laughing with them. The antique shop is dusty and old, but filled with wonders she could never have dreamed existed. She crouches, turning an hourglass, watching the sand trickle down. When she leaves, it's still going, like it could go on forever.

She knew it was coming. It still hurts like she didn't. He leaves her the house and the kids like a peace offering, going off to his new lover and his new life. She stands at the door, watching the rain plaster his clothes to his skin. He turns, looking at her, his eyes sad and spiteful. 'There's no such thing as forever.'

It's raining, and she's watching the bus roll carefully down the street, and she thinks that there might be such thing as forever after all.

Chatter

molino

ablak

quasselstrippe

lingualacca

racaire

slobber




rokrengüero

saliáris

chachalacha

Scherzo No. 2

A Minor Problem

problem occurred today
& all I could do is 
in that  I heard the [silence].
It was then that the  began.

AGITATION FOR SOLITARY PERFORMER

< - to inhale

> - to exhale

o - to pause

√ - to 'cluck' tongue against roof of mouth

Ewoo ta-cowa ta-key-woo

ara ara ooosh

<<<<< *√* >>>>>

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

√

ara < ara < ooosh

ta ta < *√*-uh

√ *o* *√*

ta ta *√*-uh

Ooh, ta-cowa,

√ ta cowa, *√* ta cowa ooosh

o

(purr)

(wheeze

pant)

inhale ***BREATHE*** *exhale*

(whisper

murmur)

(gasp)

C

Was it you that killed all the roses this winter,
so I wouldn't know where to look?

Was it you that sent the bee in my direction, making me scream?
A grey lady arranging flowers rushes over,
gripping the tarnished cross around her neck.
'What did you see? Who did you see? Was it Bill?'

No, it was just a bee.

She walks away from me chuffing on a cigarette
as if her life depends on it,
smiles and waves, 'One day I'll join him!'

In the car park, sun shines through rising steam.

I drive home without a seatbelt.

FIXATE

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| FIXATE OR | FIXATE OR | FIXATE OR |
| b EAT eat | b EAT eat | Fix b EAT eat X if ATE eat |
| Fix | Fix | FIXATE |
| X if | X if | X if |
| ATE eat | ATE eat | ATE eat |
| FIXATE | FIXATE | FIXATE |
| b AT | b AT | AT beat |
| A | A | EAT A |
| E | E | EAT |
| e E | e E | OR beat EAT OR FIX E WITH E |
| AT beat | AT beat | AT beat |
| EAT | EAT | EAT |
| OR | OR | OR beat |
| a FIX | a FIX | FIX FIX FIX |
| EAT | EAT | EAT OR FIX BEAT |
| OR beat | OR beat | OR beat |
| FIX | FIX | FIX |
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MEMOIRS OF ISRAEL

They are the white horses hidden in the waves; they are carried on the tide, pulled towards the magnetic moon and then released, returned to the bays and watched from cliff tops and coastal paths. Some memories drift from us of their own accord, their ocean life has far more to offer than the pink cushion of our minds.

Others cling to us more tightly, engrained into our subconscious. They leave us with their imprints, recorded in photo albums and journals, the reminiscence of thought or feeling: the wrinkle lines of a foreign smile, the warm smell of spice, the lacy mist around a mountain top. They are worth more than our fleeting memories for they are the experiences that form and shape who we are. For my grandparents it is years spent at war, the screaming of the air raid sirens and the blurry eyed goodbyes. For me it will always be Israel

★

The locals claimed it was the hottest summer in twenty years. We were living in Cyprus at the time; home was a rented chalet on a military base, half a mile from the coast on the Akrotiri Peninsular. Like the others along the street, our chalet had been painted white to reflect the heat. The rooms were airy with big windows, borrowed beds and tables pushed against the white washed walls. Awkward rusted fans circled the ceilings and startled geckos hid behind the picture frames. The Cypriot sun had turned everything brown and the burnt grass felt prickly under my feet like little spider legs, I crushed them as I walked home over the bondu, leaving indented footprints behind me. I had been at the beach all afternoon with some school friends and had fallen asleep in the sun; my back now felt sore and burnt as the material of my t-shirt rubbed against it. My father had left straight after breakfast that morning to fetch my grandparents

from the airport, it was a long drive and he had insisted that my mother and I wait for them at home. As I turned the corner, I could see his old car parked in the driveway and I began to run, the cracked tarmac disappearing under my feet as I crossed the road in front of the house. I opened the door and flung my beach bag down in the hallway. I could see my family through the open patio doors at the end of the corridor, the scene was perfectly framed. Wicker chairs and half emptied glasses, a gathering in the dappled shade of an overhanging willow tree.

‘Here she is, fresh out of the sea no doubt’ announced my father as I joined them on the patio. I felt like a fish, my scales glinting in the sunlight.

The chatter lingered in the air while I was quickly wrapped in my grandmother’s arms and held close. After a moment, she gently released me and placed her hands on my shoulders.

‘Darling Eloise, how you’ve grown. And you look so healthy, oh it’s so lovely to see you’ she said, before kissing me on the forehead.

‘Grandpa and I have missed you so much’.

It had only been a year since we left England but as I looked back into my grandmother’s face, for the first time I was aware that she had altered, the passing of time had made her seem more delicate, fragile even. Her wrinkled, paper-thin skin seemed so pale against my own, which had changed colour in the summer sun like the grass.

Two weeks into my grandparent’s visit, between the main meal and dessert, my father made a suggestion.

‘Do you think this could be a good time to visit Israel, Harry?’

‘Oh Michael, that’s just like you’, interrupted my grandmother, ‘we’ve only just arrived and you are already wanting to rush off somewhere.’

‘You’ve been here for two weeks, Iris. Anyway, it’s you that

keeps saying Liz and I should take Ellie while it's safe enough to visit. We may as well all go while you're here; I want you two to show us around.'

She paused for a moment and then replied, 'Yes . . . and I suppose it's a lot closer to Cyprus than England. I have to admit, I'd love to go again and it would be a fabulous adventure. What do you think Harry?'

'Who am I to get in the way of your adventurous spirit dear?' my grandfather replied, smiling wisely.

'Fantastic, everyone agrees. I'll get on the phone tomorrow and sort something out.'

My father leaned back in his chair, took a sip of his wine and the deal was done.

★

I awoke just as the sun was rising. The small cabin window revealed a brilliant glow of orange and reds; the colours leaked from the sky and into the sea below until the two were almost inseparable. My mouth felt bone dry as it always did on long flights.

'We will be landing at Haifa Airport in approximately twenty five minutes', announced the pilot.

I pulled my old travel journal from my rucksack and looked over the entries I had made the last time I had visited Israel. The pages had almost disintegrated and the child's scrawl that lay scattered across them seemed so distant, but it was precisely this, the spelling mistakes and scribbles I had made as a ten year old that revealed the purity of an innocence I knew I would never regain. The words were precious to me for that reason, but this trip was not about returning to a lost innocence for I knew that would be impossible, it was about accepting change. I had grown up, become tainted by life and Israel bore the scars of yet further years of conflict, but some moment in time had

bound us together and I had to confront the space between my memories and the reality of the present day.

★

I decided to enter the old part of the city through the Damascus Gate; this would enable me to pass through Muslim quarter on my way to visit the Wailing Wall. The partitioning of Jerusalem into Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Armenian quarters has provided for a peaceful co-existence between the religions in the previously war torn city, but as I walked down El Wad street the atmosphere was anything but peaceful. There were vibrant market stalls on either side, squashed up against each other and overflowing with shiny brass trinkets, Palestinian pottery and odd looking antiques. Brightly coloured food stands lay nestled in between them, offering honey soaked baklava and spicy nuts. There was only the narrowest of walkways between the stalls and the large pieces of leather and carpet that hung over them darkened the narrow street and compacted the air down into a sticky mist. Keen traders darted in front of me from every angle, shouting prices for their wares and tugging at my clothes. Their wrinkled, sun hardened faces seemed age worn in the dim light and their long, dark cloaks disguised the shape of their bodies. As I continued along the street I became increasingly aware that my English complexion and western clothing stood out starkly against the richness of the background, yet the difference of the culture excited me. I felt as if it was the first day of my life.

I had been down El Wad Street before but my experience of it as a child had been completely different, instead of excitement I had been filled with nothing but blind panic and desperation. After being carried away from my family by a torrent of people rushing through Damascus gate, I had run down the nearest street in search of them. The strange voices and the humidity of the market seemed to close in around me and I truly believed that I would be lost forever. A beautiful olive-skinned women

in a blue headdress found me huddled in a door way and gave me a handkerchief to wipe away my tears. She took me by the hand and knowing only a few words of English, she told me her name was Rivka and explained that she would take me to find my parents.

The wide plaza that separated me from the wall was filled with life. There were groups of men, old and young, gathered in circles. Some were deep in conversation and others were singing traditional songs and dancing, their arms rested on each other's shoulders as they bobbed up and down. They were dressed in long black coats, their heads crowned with the same wide brimmed hats, wispy hair falling in ringlets beside their ears. The stone floor beneath my feet danced with their reflections, the light glinting between the shadows of their moving bodies. As I made my way between them I wondered what they would make of English reserve, and how sad it was that dancing in the streets would be judged as madness in London.

As I walked towards the wall I was filled with the same awe I had experienced as a child. Considered by the Jews to be the most sacred place on Earth, the Wailing Wall was originally part of the first Temple built by King Solomon upon the foundation stone; the stone that is believed to mark the centre of all creation. The Temple was later destroyed by the Babylonians and then again by the Romans. The wall that stands today is a magnificent fifty foot reconstruction, with the different layers of stone literally representing years of history. The Jews pray in front of it to mourn the loss of their sacred Temple, hence its name.

Beams of electric light flooded the wall, revealing the intricate carving work of each stone mason involved in its creation. I could not help but be humbled by the sheer history and majesty of its existence. I joined the women's side of the barrier that intersected the wall and was surprised to see how many had gathered so late to pray. Their colourful headdresses and long skirts

seemed so cheerful against the black suited men on the opposite side of the barrier. One woman was standing face to face with the wall, her head bowed against it, praying. Another was standing slightly further back with a copy of the Torah lying open in her hands. Older women were sitting on chairs, mournfully rocking their bodies back and forth. As a child, Rivka had led me towards a small table that had been placed in front of the wall, upon it lay hundreds of pieces of scrap paper. She found me a pencil and as she placed it in my hand, she told me to write a prayer, asking God to bring my family to me. I remembered the delicate way she had folded the piece of paper and placed it into a crack between the stones, saying something beautiful, very quietly, in a language that I didn't understand. I wondered if my prayer still remained, among the hundreds of pieces of paper that lay nestled between the ancient stones.

My parents did eventually find me that day and I truly believed that it was God that had led them to me. The Jews believe that the presence of the Divine never leaves the wall, and there was certainly something spiritual about the atmosphere. It was one of silent reflection, of redemption and forgiveness, yet I knew in my soul that I lacked whatever it was that the women around me had, for I had forgotten how to pray.

★

I could see billows of dust rising almost to window height as the old bus jolted along the road through Bethlehem. The surrounding buildings looked dirty and downtrodden compared with those in Jerusalem, with scribbled graffiti marking almost every available wall. Due to the tension between the Palestinian Muslims and Christians, the government had insisted upon an official police escort to accompany every tour of Bethlehem and ours was standing very uncomfortably at the front the bus, rifle in hand and alert. After a few moments had passed, the driver turned a corner and pulled into Manger Square. This is the area

in front of the Church of the Nativity that has now been turned into a car park, bounded by cheap and tacky souvenir shops. The joyful tourist chatter that accompanied the off-loading process seemed to be at complete odds with the dismal atmosphere and I found it hard to believe that Jesus could ever have been born in such a place.

The church itself was a solid fortress-like structure, comprised of neatly shaped stones and small slit windows, crisscrossed with iron bars. I remembered approaching it as a child, surprised by its majesty having only expected to see a simple stable to mark the place of Jesus' birth. It is thought to be one of the oldest churches in the world and was first built by Emperor Constantine in AD325 to commemorate the holy birth. The original grand doorway was bricked up during the Catholic crusades to prevent the Muslim enemy from destroying the sacred space. The entrance that remains today is so low and narrow that I had to bend almost in double to get through. Surprisingly (judging from the size of the door at least) the church was very spacious inside, although there was very little light, save from the candle lit lamps and incense burners that hung like golden orbs from the high ceiling. The wooden floor opened up in some places to reveal the remains of a beautifully crafted mosaic floor and scattered groups of people had gathered around them, bending and pointing.

The Greek Orthodox section of the church was filled with dark wooden screens, embellished with gold carvings that glinted in the candle light. Lining the stone walls were rich colourful paintings of mournful looking saints, their heads ringed in golden leaf paint. I remembered something of its grandiosity from when I had visited as a child; I had found it hard to believe that such a place was a church. It seemed more like an Aladdin's cave to me then. There were worshippers kissing the paintings as they prayed over them and a somber priest dressed in a long white robe, walking very slowly and silently, swaying an incense

orb from a chain. The scented mist that rose around him as he went gave him the air of something almost supernatural, a ghost or spirit of some kind. The Armenian and Franciscan sections of the church appeared stark and cold in comparison, yet it was easier to envisage the Jesus of Bethlehem there, rather than amongst the finery and ceremony of the Orthodox Church.

After a while the tour guide summoned us towards the back of the church and motioned towards a very dingy stairwell with a heavy velvet curtain at the bottom. One by one we walked through, into the Grotto of the Nativity. This is thought to be the cave in which Jesus was born. It was very crowded and humid inside, with people of all nationalities pushing and shoving each other out of the way to see the Silver Star, the marker of the holy birth. As a child I had been completely mesmerised by it, I had squeezed in between the pushing adults just to get a closer glimpse. I convinced myself that it must have fallen straight from the sky the night Jesus was born, I believed that I was looking at the evidence of a miracle. I longed to feel the same breathless excitement again, yet I was far too concerned with the dingy smell inside the cave and the people around me to really take notice of the star. I found the space quite oppressive and I was eager to get out into the fresh air.

As I waited alone outside for the others in my party to join me, I felt almost guilty for not feeling more in awe. True I had found the church fascinating, but also slightly disappointing; I felt that my expectations, whatever they were, had not quite been fulfilled. Perhaps it was the lack of authenticity, the souvenir shops and tourist companies cashing in on experience. Yet I knew I was one of them, I had paid the money and flown all this way for some kind of experience, whether that was about confronting change as I had first intended, or something more spiritual. I wondered if I had made the sacred pilgrimage that so many British Jews long to make when they promise 'next year in Jerusalem', the city that is to so many the heart of their identity,

the place that thousands of people over the years have laid their lives down for. Perhaps that is what I lacked, a place to identify with, some kind of spiritual home. Or perhaps with all the rationality and cynicism that comes with adulthood, I had simply lost the ability to believe.

SENTINEL

I move clumsily, but space is beautiful, silent and perfect. I understand
Almost nothing but I share the blue, the yellow and the wind

—Eduardo Chillida

At twilight, that liminal period
as I casually round into the park
on the cusp of day and night
the same disbelief, as if
this massive weight of steel
had quite simply landed into view
out of nowhere.

But this Yorkshire landscape knows it: a huge section
of metal folding sideways, as if shaped
with a certain combination of softness and certainty
to respect the gravitational pull.

Squat it sits on the ground, but not so wide:
as if the horizon had shaken itself free
before being compressed into
a wrapping of girders which now
blocks and reveals the last strains
of November's receding light.

I know the place where these oxidised shafts
encircle a Basque coastal city: I long
to see from an adjacent cliff;
these giant pincers prising a gap
in that space inside the outside
where there just might be

40 / *Peter Gillies*

a silent, perfect beauty
in the limitlessness of stars.

LAND: OCHRE (I)

As the indigo deepened, her light went on
beneath the skylight. She would never say
“yes” to just moonlight
for the silent moments
were a time to press on:

to overpaint the yellow with red
but not just any, it had to be
deep rose red
 sometimes brushed gently,
 as one would take time
 to caress the softness of skin.

She tried some faster strokes—
more yellow, chrome, I think;
now this colour-drenched, miraculous
summer field of *Land: Ochre*
was at long last
finally, in her words

LAND: OCHRE (II)

Earth, the paint
runs
in streams of liquid, umber tide
washing into white weave, ochre dabs
previously placed
erased. Thrown
out by background
patterns of brown-grey weather, colour
in regular bars, stacked like plates
is contained
boxlike. All around
daubs of punctuated
paint. Like the raw
sienna of southern soil
smeared up
and down
a wasteland wall, these double visions of rust
have been pondered over,
then consecrated, so as
to keep us out.
Even with such curiosity,
we are still strangers
to be put out
of harm's way.

NOTHING MORE

Her skin felt warm and tight as the water evaporated into the air to leave white, chalky, snail-trails of salt mapping out her legs. Like veins but on the outside. She did not like the way the drying-out made her skin look old and flaky, so she sat up to dip her legs in the water again, and slipped off the lilo by accident. The contrast in temperature was a bit too sudden after the steady warmth of the sun, and she was annoyed that her hair was wet. Sea water always made it sticky and painful to brush the knots out of later on.

Sliding her body back onto the lilo, irritated, she was aware of how clumsy she must look to the tanned, topless sunbathers on the beach, as her stomach squeaked loudly with friction against the ribbed, turquoise plastic. This time, she lay on her front, peeping through the clear plastic window at the top, her toes tingling in the water at the bottom. It was Linus' lilo. He was her four-year-old brother and a lot smaller than her, but had been grown up enough to let her borrow his birthday present. She loved Linus. They were on the same wavelength. That morning she had been explaining how gravity works, and he had actually understood the idea of an invisible force and why we don't fall off the Earth.

Her back was dry now, and although the water was clear there was nothing but the sandy sea bed to see through the plastic window. Besides, her nose and forehead had grown moist with perspiration. She turned around to expose her front to the sun. She closed her eyes against the glare and enjoyed the motion of the waves. They moved like rolling pins under the cushion of the lilo, gently rippling her relaxed body from head to toe. She felt suspended in time, as if this pleasant afternoon would continue for as long as she wanted, until all her worries had been resolved, and she could return to reality at ease.

A couple of larger waves than the others smacked into the side of the lilo, making a slapping sound and splashing her with water. The heat was not so intense now. She had better go back to the apartment to get a shower before going out for dinner. They ate at about seven o'clock. Any later and the boys would be grouchy. They were only little and were used to going to bed at that time at home. It was so nice though. She didn't want it to end yet. She continued to look up at the pale blue sky, but the thought of paella made her realise that she was getting hungry. And she had better get back to help mum with the boys. She felt guilty for going off on her own for so long.

She lifted her head and pressed her chin on her chest to look beyond her feet. She couldn't see the beach. She looked to her right and there it was . . . tiny. Her heart boomed once in panic like a bass drum that someone had stamped on the pedal of really hard. How did that happen? She leant herself up sideways on one arm, and thought shit. She knew how it had happened, silly, dappy idiot. She felt a lump of panic rise in her throat, a cry about to make its way out, but she forced it back down again, and breathed in sharply through her nostrils.

She had no idea how far away she was from the land, but at least she could see it. A short, muted, desperate cry came from inside her chest. Things always look closer than they really are in the sea. She turned carefully onto her front, not wanting to fall in again, and began to paddle violently with her arms, knowing but not admitting that it was pointless. It might not be. It couldn't be.

The rolling-pin motion of the waves had been a conveyor belt carrying her away from the land all that time. How could she be so stupid? It would be so embarrassing when the lifeboat would have to come and rescue her. She would never live it down. Normally so sensible. She wondered whether her mum would be worried yet. Her mum. She wanted her more than anything

now. And she would see her soon, so long as she carried on paddling and didn't give up. Why should she give up? Her mum always told her that even when it looks so bad that you think you'll never get through it, things always work out, and then the impossible is in the past, behind you. You just have to get through it. She just had to keep paddling, keep her head together and not panic. She would be on the front of the newspaper tomorrow, next to a Spanish coastguard hero, with a towel wrapped around her grateful body.

She was not making any progress. Or if she was then it was such a small amount that it wasn't worth the effort. But then she might drift further out to sea! She started sobbing hysterically, like when she used to have nightmares as a small child and her dad would come to her bed and comfort her. That harsh noise sounded stupid in the middle of the ocean. Out of place. No one could hear her, it was pointless. She was alone and exposed. Suddenly the great expanse of continuous blue on every side of her made her stop paddling. She was scared. How deep was the ocean here? What was in it? She was frozen with the fear of what might be lurking in the depths beneath and around her, of how deep the water was. She suddenly had vertigo and was terrified of falling off the lilo. She could no longer even put her arms in the water to paddle. She knew that when the sun went down and the heat went out of the day, that the lilo would begin to deflate as the air molecules would lose thermal and kinetic energy, slow down and take up less and less space. She longed for the time when GCSEs were all she had to worry about. You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

Now that she had stopped being active, she realised that she was thirsty. Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink! *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The only line she could remember from it, or at least she thought that was it. How true! How long can you survive without water? Maybe she should drink it just to speed the process along. Except that she might . . . could well

be rescued. She had to think rationally and remember all those other stories of other people being rescued from drifting out too far.

She hoped that the sky would become cloudy soon, to keep some of the sun's heat in the air. She had been stupid again and burnt her skin. In the fading light it glowed red and she knew that now she would feel the difference in temperature so much more acutely. Idiot! All she could do was sit and wait for help. Too scared to even put her hands in the water. Pathetic! Selfish too. How would her family feel when, if, she didn't make it back? Killed by her own stupidity, aided by her little brother's birthday present. He would never get over it. None of them would. She felt dramatic, indulgent, but she wasn't being. It was really happening, no dream. She started to pull at her knotty hair in frustration and pulled harder as a punishment to herself, screaming through clenched teeth. She used to do this a lot when she was younger. Now she was aware that it was childish and felt ashamed. Water, water everywhere. Soon it might be in her lungs. No, please no. Her throat was dry and sore, partly from panic and crying.

She couldn't see a moon. There were clouds though, a few of them. That was good at least. No! Nothing was good. Especially not her. She was a crappy big sister, an horrendous daughter. Her mum had had her at the age of twenty. Given her over fifteen years of love, nearly half her life. How could she abandon her now? Throw it all away? She needed to survive. For everyone, not just herself. Otherwise what was the point in it all? What had she done? Was she being punished? What for? Who was punishing her? Don't succumb to that line of thought. Life was random. She was unlucky.

Water, water everywhere. Dry water, remember that. With no moon and the clouds shielding the star light, the water was rapidly becoming an inky black colour. Like squid ink. Water, water

everywhere. She remembered the colossal volume of water underneath her. She imagined languid, searching tentacles reaching out for her and shrank further away from the edges of the lilo.

But what was she doing worrying about sea monsters when she had something real to really lose her mind over? Maybe that was it, maybe it was a distraction. She let herself follow the imaginary fear, but it was gone, she knew it was a fake. Water, water everywhere. Now she was beginning to feel sick with thirst. Or with worry. She was worrying about leaving everyone behind. It wasn't right, it wasn't her time to go. She still had to love them all, to see them growing up, growing old. She had to grow old. She saw all of their faces in the darkness. It was like she had her eyes closed, so dark. Bleak. It broke her heart to see them, so familiar, so far away. She was not ready to say goodbye.

She didn't want to think, but she didn't want to not think either. In case all she had left was thinking . . . memories. She might never see again. Except for inside her head, her mind's eye. She wanted to remember everyone before it was all gone, even though it was the most painful thing. Even more painful than her toes in the bitter night's chill. Exposed, sticking up out of the water.

She remembered the time when they went camping, before the little boys were born. It was just her and William then, and mum and dad. They were camping in Somerset, in a campsite on a farm. She and William had been told by their parents not to go into the sheep field. They did not know why, except that the farmer might see them and be angry. It was spring time and the sheep were all grazing lazily with their lambs, chewing mindlessly on sweet green grass, staring into space. They couldn't resist going in to get closer to the animals, not now the idea had been made to seem a whole lot more exciting by a warning against it. Egged on by each other, they had climbed over

the wooden gate and ventured into the field full of sheep with impossibly soft looking coats of creamy-coloured, curly wool. The baby ones looked the softest, so brother and sister made their way boldly to the other side of the field where most of the lambs were sitting. Just before they reached their destination, all of the sheep in the field looked one another in the eyes. Brother and sister looked each other in the eyes, and realised that the sheep were planning something. Then, surprisingly, every single sheep in the field got up and ran full pelt towards the two bemused children. Running for their lives, they made it over the fence just in time, petrified, and astonished at the speed of those four-legged bundles of wool. Why was she remembering this now? Maybe because she yearned for the smell of freshly cut grass, of land. Maybe it was because she had been happiest in her childhood, camping in the summertime. Or maybe it meant nothing at all. It was just what the chemicals in her brain had linked up to at that moment. Meaningless except that it kept her from thinking about losing everything.

It was so lonely out there. All this water, everywhere, and nothing else. Except for salt. Saline. Everywhere. She had watched a King Arthur film years back, that her dad had worked on. *First Knight*, it was called. When King Arthur died, his body was put on a straw-covered raft, adorned with summer flowers and candles. He was on his back with his arms folded over his chest, one on top of the other. He was pushed out to sea, floating. Then the first knight of his round table took a blazing arrow, and fired it in a beautiful arc, which ended at King Arthur's raft. He sailed towards the sunset, burning gallantly, and she turned to her mum and told her that she wanted a funeral like that. Her mum replied that she was telling the wrong person, as she intended to be long gone when any of her children died. It was her worst fear to outlive any of them.

It was so cold. She wrapped her arms around her body . . . partly to keep warm, partly for comfort. She imagined she was in her

mother's arms. She imagined her soft body, and feeling safe. She felt hard goosebumps under her fingers which let her know she was alive. She gripped hold of herself harder, squeezing, shaking. Soon this life would be gone. Her blood would stop flowing, her lungs stop breathing. She would stop thinking. Then what would happen? Nothing would. That would be the end. We are only on this earth to reproduce and perpetuate life. When we die, we are gone. We are made up of chemical reactions, electrical impulses, compositions of elements. Nothing more. When we die, our bodies disintegrate, giving back our energy to the universe. Energy is neither created nor does it disappear or get used up. It is recycled. And nothing more

YOU'RE WRONG IN THE FACE

Julius Caesar, hiding in
Cleopatra's bold armpit hair

a generation of scousers all
called John, take up Morris Dancing

free violin lessons for
all manic-depressives

and a lollipop if you
can break this bear.

SUNLIGHT THROUGH THE TREES

sunlight through the trees,
hits the epileptic armrests

the houses and the fields
and the proud and distant forests

poultry and computers
and the smell of franchise coffee

and the children and the luggage
all conspire to feeling cosy,

a steady dull vibration fills
the carriage full of distant

looking people all enjoying
their rare chance to drink in nature

like a movie on repeat
providing subtle variation

screens comprised of blue-green-grey
now the tannoy, here's my station

COLONIAL CONQUEST

Uncomfortable in my egg blue shell,
I stand loud and proud for everything;
Past and present.

No one escapes,
No refuge taken.

I am the breathing receipt of atrocity,
Deep-throating my hypocrisy.
I am a rapist, a murderer, a thief.

For I am me.

The regression, ancestral procession,
Political correction,
Linguistic dissection.

I am ashamed.

Burdened at my very conception,
Shame divides and multiplies.
Hiding dormant in my nucleotides,
It waits for self inquest investigation.

Conscience acned with guilt.
I haunt myself.

OTHER PEOPLE'S DIRT

Against the grain, I rub you. Ruffled feathers
Sickly textures; friction between thumbs,
Cotton wool's crawling presence.

Sink scum sidetracks, tolerance contracts;
We stub toes, playing homes.

Your face changes, how your silent beauty drains.
You change, morph, rearrange.
Fragile as a card game, we build houses.

Hot tones knock me down.
Smearred love, like squatted fly,
Undignified I lie.

You can see my insides.

WE FLY LOW

we fly low.

i no longer feel emotion; the excitement has long since faded away into the smoke of the early days, and anyway, the regret never really hit me until we lay on our bunks afterwards, reflecting back on the day's work. screams and explosions, drowned by the gentle crackle of my radio and the muffled roar of the engines. a day's work.

we fly low—i used to see faces, now i look at the buttons. the faces might still be there, they might not: i see circles and squares, and i see buttons.

once there was a boy, twelve years old or so, and i caught his eye seconds before he fell lifeless to the ground, staring in awe at my soaring steel bird of prey. i felt sorrow, but i dismissed it: we push buttons, we do not kill. actions have consequences, but buttons do not kill. he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, poor guy, my sympathies to his family, nothing that could be done.

we fly low, and we fly fast. it's us or them. we have speed, agility, hi-tech weapons and buttons to push. but they are a threat to us, and it's us or them. for the greater good.

we fly low. every direct hit is a job well done, but it's what we do best, it's our job, and there is no rejoicing. we take ourselves seriously. those that don't lie in the dust amidst twisted metal claws and bullets. bullets kill people, buttons do not. we fly low, and we fly well, and we do our job, we fly low, and we hit the targets, and we push the buttons, and we fly low.



and why am I writing this? Is it so that I don't forget what has happened, so no one ever forgets. As we forget the sun setting, the sky turning to fire as the darkness spreads over enveloping us; what we can't see is forgotten, we live to see many sunsets but does this really mean we are remembering, or just that there is nothing worth noticing anymore?

I once watched the sea at night, the sky was no longer darkness, but illuminated, there is so much light in darkness, a million candles glow, dim and die, every night, what's there to be afraid of? The sea is indigo, the waves pitch black, the depth is unknown, the moon casts pointless shadows but the sea is never lit up at night however hard it tries. I sat between the bubbles of foam; light escaping, a mound of sand and stone created by the sea but the power can't touch me. It breathes harder, the waves are faster but they still do not overpower me.

There has always been patriarchy, in some sense, well in this life anyway. Is it natural, in the animal kingdom does the male dominate? The female left behind, left out of the excitement of the kill, left behind to tend to the pack. If this is the case can years of inequality be due to the fact that we are mere animals building our multi-complex, cardboard kingdom, whilst we stay primitive and instinctual. Or is it religion? The power craze of the last 2000 years, Christianity. Ever since the birth of our saviour, have we used this to suppress women? Even now in our

crime ridden society, Eve ate the apple, Eve was the first sexual female, and well the men were scared, so scared, they had to cure her seduction with our greatest fear sin.

I didn't think about any of this until I met her, my vagina motherfucker.

Who was it that said *romance is dead*?

Take a step backwards.

'Romance is dead' she purred. Well this was true, it was easy to believe. She had written those words on the wall, ruby red, matching her lips, forming those words. There were no roses, no hearts or card clichés, just a angry red scrawl in a toilet cubicle covering the obscenities and some long lost declarations. That night she showed me love, it was her way of an explanation.

This wasn't how I met her. That was long ago. *I don't do romance*. One day I saw her but it was only a glimpse into some other life. A flash of a black dress, the rush of her hair as she left the room, following her to some bar, asking if I could buy her a drink, she answered 'I'll buy my own thanks', but still she let me follow her upstairs to show me love, the feel of that silk dress against me. 'People really don't seem to understand me' she says pulling off her clothes 'It scares them, the idea of really feeling something, not being afraid'. She seemed to have cast off society at the same time. She never tried to explain but to make you understand. 'You don't need to buy me flowers, take me for dinner, for me to love you. I love you at this moment and that's enough'. She kissed me gently and left.

The New Romantics that was who we were. We made love happen. When she lay next to me I could hold her smell her skin on mine, 'They oppress emotion, you aren't free to experience love anymore, only pretend perfection, a suburban home and a family of four.' she murmured quietly. She was always there

in the back of my mind, the idea of wanting someone, having them, no feeling that all this was wrong, that we should suppress our selves for other people. Millions of women had been oppressed this way, never felt what it was to make love, told they were wrong, unclean, dirty, she taught me not to be one of them.

I am a woman in love. This is not a secret. The secrets are between us, what I keep close to me, hidden in my heart. However this is not a love story, there is no happily ever after, no marriage, no children, no long-lost lover returning. This is just a story of love. I sit at the sea with her hands held in mine, watching as the wind catches her hair, like a rush of fire in the darkness, I kiss her and like the sea hitting the shore, there is nothing as powerful as my love for her.



Product spaghetti code

Date 24/01/08 Use By _____

By Rabbit



012545 7

OPS\$AMY01
06-16-98 10:58:02
GD-98-009734





```
ADMINlogin//Tue Jan 20 12:23:49 2008 216.155.175.58//
Scanning for users...
```

```
<ADMIN;says> = <input type="text" name="first_name"
value="#first_name#"/>(member "is" "what is your
name" :test #'equal)
```

```
INPUT = <Visitor>
```

```
<ADMIN;says> = <cfquery name=<Visitor>'getDepts' datasource='ds'>
<script><scanning>
<cfoutput>document.fomrs[0].first_name.value = '#first_name#';
</cfoutput></script> <cfif session.user IS NOT
"Admin"><script>
alert("You are not authorized.");history.option(y/n);
```

```
INPUT = Sorry about that - Perhaps I should have
clarified more.<COMAND>//<a href="incHelpFileDisplayMe.
cfm"><y><cfif #user_name# eq #data.axd# and #user_id#
```

```
<ADMIN;says> = ;;;SECTION 2.1.2 ;; reducing to lowest
terms in selectors;; (uses gcd from 1.2.5 -- see
ch2support.scm)(define) <awaiting response>.
```

```
INPUT = What would you like to know about your author/
speaker/narrator?
```

```
<ADMIN;says>(define (analyze exp author/speaker/narrator)
  (cond ((self-evaluating? exp)
        (analyze-self-evaluating exp))
        ((quoted? exp) (analyze-quoted exp))
        ((variable? exp) (analyze-variable exp))
        ((assignment? exp) (analyze-assignment exp))
        ((definition? exp) (analyze-definition exp))
        ((if? exp) (analyze-if exp))
        ((lambda? exp) (analyze-lambda exp))
        ((begin? exp) (analyze-sequence (begin-actions
exp))))
  ((cond? exp) (analyze (cond->if exp)))
```

```
((application? exp) (analyze-application exp))
(else)(NP)) <awaiting response>.
```

```
<define> <(defun generate-and-compile (x)> =
```

```
INPUT = language designer/"sloppy", violating,
criminal-like remorselessness.<end>
Request input> short summary of my impression:
```

```
<ADMIN;says> =Request granted>//
<map 'list(lambda (x y)(funcall (generate-and-compile
x) y))=
```

```
INPUT- He wants to write
He feels that in principle code
ought to be better than English
prose for this task.
He has an extreme focus on
achieving brevity of syntax
and an
unusual level of expressiveness,
but filled with ideas that are picked up,
by later designers who exploit them,
within more conservative language
frameworks. One would suppose,
that it can be bound. Like a function.
```

```
<ADMIN>r: 'ANALYZING-METACIRCULAR-EVALUATOR-LOADED>
CLASSIFICATION.PF//SEQUENCE/intitate.="// anObject :=
<Error> No CONTEXT found. <Error> No CONTEXT found.
<Error> No CONTEXT found. <Error> No CONTEXT found.
<Error> No CONTEXT found. <Error> No CONTEXT found.
[OK]
exit, jump, iterate, goto...spaghetti, spaghetti;end
it. Temporary Permission Granted. EndSUBscript>T-
00.02.33hrs/min/sec//your code(???)// ENTER...
```



...> **visitor rules**

we kindly ask that
all patrons follow
our code of conduct
while visiting



- //Tue Jan 20 12:23:49 2008 216.155.175.58//No context found.
---[excerpt begins]---

I am.
I was
an English speaker.
My head.
A jumble of language-
a mighty tower of babble that's
slowly falling apart,
re-factoring,
re-capturing itself.

I am.
I was a squishy meat-bag,
slowly clicking "refresh",
waiting for user input.

It is hard,
to go back
once you've had a taste
of painting with a hyper
brush. It's lava flow of anti-pattern
spaghetti code, a sea of messy
blobs and string.

I am.
I was saddled to the big, ugly system.
The rules of good prose.
Constantly exposed to the litmus
test of readability,
resigned to a turgid pace,
hiding in a foxhole,
making two line-per-day repairs.

I object. I pollute
the classroom with a haphazardly
structured, sloppy
spaghetti verse. Absolute,
fresh out of school inexperience.

I speak like the
organ grinder, not his monkey,
who can do nothing but dance to a tune.

FEEDING¹ BACK²

There³ is⁴ some⁵ confusion⁶ here⁷
Rabbit,⁸ theoretical⁹ material¹⁰ is¹¹ clearly¹²
linked¹³ to¹⁴ the¹⁵ primary¹⁶ text¹⁷, however¹⁸
it¹⁹ is²⁰ somewhat²¹ unclear²².
Rabbit's²³ style²⁴ is²⁵ very²⁶ erratic²⁷.

¹ To satisfy; minister to; gratify

² the rear part of the human body

³ at that point in an action.

⁴ To exist or live,

⁵ certain persons, individuals, instances

⁶ are defeated, overthrow, or ruined.

⁷ this world; this life; the present; life or existence.

⁸ Flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁹ exists only in theory; hypothetically

¹⁰ the articles or apparatus need to make or do something

¹¹ to exist or live

¹² without equivocation;

¹³ A causal, parallel, or reciprocal relationship; a correlation

¹⁴ used for expressing motion or direction toward a point, person, place, approached and reached,

¹⁵ used with or as part of a title

¹⁶ that is highest in rank of importance.

¹⁷ Original words of an author or speaker

¹⁸ nevertheless; yet; on the other hand; in spite of that

¹⁹ an inanimate thing understood, previously mentioned, about to be mentioned, or present in the immediate context.

²⁰ To exist or live

²¹ in some measure or degree; to some extent

²² is not clear to the mind

²³ and flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food.

²⁴ The mode of expressing thought in writing or speaking by selecting and arranging words

²⁵ to exist or live

²⁶ in a high degree; extremely; exceedingly

²⁷ deviating from the usual or proper course in conduct or opinion.

Rabbit²⁸ has²⁹ to³⁰ many³¹ sentence's³² that³³ are³⁴ poorly³⁵ constructed³⁶. Rabbit³⁷, there³⁸ is³⁹ some⁴⁰ confusion⁴¹ here⁴². Rabbit⁴³ does⁴⁴ not⁴⁵ give⁴⁶ a⁴⁷ coherent⁴⁸ and⁴⁹ precise⁵⁰ definition⁵¹. Rabbit⁵² does⁵³ not⁵⁴ use⁵⁵ the⁵⁶ footnote⁵⁷ function⁵⁸.

²⁸ Flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

²⁹ possess; own; hold for use

³⁰ for expressing motion or direction toward a point, person, place, or thing approached and reached

³¹ a large or considerable number of persons or things

³² or a grammatical unit that is syntactically independent

³³ indicating a person, thing, idea, state, event, time, remark

³⁴ to continue or remain as before

³⁵ in poor health; somewhat ill

³⁶ formed by assembling or combining parts

³⁷ of flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

³⁸ at that point in an action

³⁹ to exist or live

⁴⁰ of a certain unspecified number, amount, degree

⁴¹ disorder; upheaval; tumult; chaos

⁴² at this point; at this juncture.

⁴³ Flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁴⁴ to execute

⁴⁵ In no way; to no degree. Used to express negation, denial, refusal

⁴⁶ to present voluntarily and without expecting compensation

⁴⁷ a certain; a particular

⁴⁸ logically connected; consistent

⁴⁹ added to

⁵⁰ being exactly that and neither more nor less

⁵¹ the condition of being definite, distinct, or clearly outlined

⁵² flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁵³ to execute

⁵⁴ denying, forbidding, refusing, or expressing the opposite of something

⁵⁵ In no way; to no degree

⁵⁶ to indicate uniqueness.

⁵⁷ A minor or tangential comment or event added or subordinated to a main statement or more important event

⁵⁸ or action or activity proper to a person, thing, or institution.

Rabbit⁵⁹ needs⁶⁰ to⁶¹ explain⁶² when⁶³ and⁶⁴ where⁶⁵ it⁶⁶ is⁶⁷ developed⁶⁸.

Rabbit⁶⁹, many⁷⁰ of⁷¹ the⁷² details⁷³ have⁷⁴ been⁷⁵ omitted⁷⁶ and⁷⁷ italicize⁷⁸

function⁷⁹ is⁸⁰ incorrectly⁸¹ applied⁸². Rabbit⁸³ wanders⁸⁴ off⁸⁵

⁵⁹ Flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁶⁰ a requirement, necessary duty, or obligation

⁶¹ expressing motion or direction toward a point, person, place

⁶² to assign a meaning to; interpret

⁶³ upon or after which; and then

⁶⁴ also, at the same time

⁶⁵ to what place, point, or end? whither?

⁶⁶ An inanimate thing understood, previously mentioned, about to be mentioned, or present in the immediate context

⁶⁷ to exist or live.

⁶⁸ To bring from latency or toward fulfillment

⁶⁹ of flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁷⁰ person or things

⁷¹ cause, motive, occasion, or reason

⁷² to emphasize one of a group or type as the most outstanding or prominent

⁷³ minor or inconsequential item or aspect

⁷⁴ to possess; own; hold for use; contain

⁷⁵ to exist or live

⁷⁶ to leave out; fail to include or mention

⁷⁷ at the same time

⁷⁸ to print in italic type

⁷⁹ action or activity proper to a person, thing, or institution

⁸⁰ to exist or live

⁸¹ correct as to fact; inaccurate; wrong

⁸² in having a practical purpose or use

⁸³ for flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁸⁴ To move about without a definite destination or purpose

⁸⁵ so as to be no longer supported or attached

the⁸⁶ point⁸⁷ at⁸⁸ times.⁸⁹ Rabbit⁹⁰ left⁹¹ the⁹² work⁹³ plain⁹⁴ and⁹⁵ disappointing⁹⁶.

At⁹⁷ least⁹⁸ Rabbit⁹⁹ tried¹⁰⁰, god¹⁰¹ dammit¹⁰², at¹⁰³ least¹⁰⁴ he¹⁰⁵ did¹⁰⁶ that.

⁸⁶ in or by so much

⁸⁷ as a sharp or tapered end

⁸⁸ a point or place occupied in space

⁸⁹ a limited period or interval, as between two successive events

⁹⁰ Flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

⁹¹ turned towards the west

⁹² with a specifying or particularizing effect

⁹³ something on which exertion or labor is expended

⁹⁴ not beautiful; physically unattractive or undistinguished

⁹⁵ added to

⁹⁶ failing to fulfill one's hopes or expectations

⁹⁷ a point or place occupied in space

⁹⁸ lowest in consideration, position, or importance

⁹⁹ —the flesh of any of various rabbits or hares (wild or domesticated) eaten as food

¹⁰⁰ subjected to hardship, worry, trouble, or like

¹⁰¹ being conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe,

¹⁰² to condemn as a failure

¹⁰³ a point or place occupied in space

¹⁰⁴ lowest in consideration, position, or importance

¹⁰⁵ the male person or animal being discussed or last mentioned

¹⁰⁶ to execute

THE 08.55 TO PENZANCE

Some journeys are made in pursuit of adventure, others, in escape of what it is that we leave behind. Most, if you are to be entirely honest with yourself, befall a combination of the two. From these far flung climes we write letters to those we love; compile journals lugging out our every thought; record each footstep, and what we find beneath it, as if it was deserving of such fastidious documentation—often merely for the fact of it all being so far away from home. Perhaps we are afraid of forgetting, of looking back in years to come and refusing to believe that it was actually us who trailed through the Belizean jungle? Whether we seem to remember them or not, these are the sorts of voyages we nevertheless consider to be character building.

Although a mere possum's handful of adventures are truly, in a sense, life affirming, they are not always so for the reasons proclaimed in words which spider-finger their way across page upon page of decadent diaries. Despite common protest to the contrary, these expeditions are often but a dabble with the role of the intrepid explorer that all those who possess soles which itch, for reasons other than athlete's foot, feel it necessary to scatter through the earth and our years upon it. That said, the exploration of all that our tiny planet affords is still inarguably necessary to some minds. After all, the best sort of thoughts always arise from our toes by way of walking, as if they need to be bashed out through the necks of woolly socks before they might reach our heads. Ergo, the further you walk, the better your reflections upon whithersoever you have traipsed shall become.

Yet then there are excursions which offer no such inspiring possibilities; which are nothing but an encumbrance to living. When we have somehow found that our course is, despite every effort to the contrary, stuttering its way about the country between home and office, university and mother's fridge, elderly relatives

and escape, carving lines that eventually form a vast tangle of reluctant roving betwixt Land's End and the outer Hebrides.

These outings, although necessary, do not often present much opportunity for fun, and nor do they usually allow for any real personal interpretation upon how one ought to go about them. You would, for instance, be thought ridiculous for concealing your sandwiches beneath a pith helmet from Eastcote to Elephant and Castle, and considered mad for wading and spluttering through the sludge of the Thames, rather than join the droves bundling around South Bank. Even regarded as in the throes of a dangerous lunacy were you to shovel your jeans into your boots for fear of leeches slinking up through London sewers, and quite beyond hope when found bathing your nether regions, along with several goats, in the murky midst of a local reservoir. This is not to say that such things should not be attempted. The most interesting sorts of people are often judged as perfectly ridiculous, and to be perfect at anything, even if it is absurdity, remains far beyond the reaches of most men.

What I propose is this: that we discard the iPods and gratuitous scrutinising of the Beckhams' family life, and, in place of these time-honoured activities, lend our attentions to whatever it is that we happen upon and muddle through. It may well be only the backside of Staines that addresses you beyond the window, yet who's to say that there isn't some beauteous spot still lurking, undiscovered, in the depths of darkest Ashford? Doubtful as it may seem no one is really looking and, were you to come across it, you would certainly be ordained the greatest explorer of the week.

My own monthly migration rumbles its well-worn way via First Great Western railway, from the grand iron arches of Paddington station, all the way down to the gentle clunking of sail boats falling up and off the waves of Cornish harbours. Anyone that has ever circumnavigated the wheezing pits of the London un-

derground, to emerge upon the magnificence of Paddington as Tuesday morning sunshine peers inquisitively in through the fretted rooftop onto the platforms below knows there is something to be admired in its cathedral-esque architecture. Centuries of trains farting beneath the lofty beams have coated them in layers of black dust nobody can reach to disturb, and the glass on this winter's day is misted by the soggy warmth of thousands of passengers squeaking about the concourse and waiting patiently below tutting arrivals boards, plonked atop their rucksacks. It's a storage shed for the sort of antique smut which would give any individual worldly credibility.

A pigeon huffles its way past my toes, its feathers busheled out about where its ears might be to fend off the frost. I tip the last drop of sugary coffee from where it had gathered in a small moat around its plastic lid and the tannoy declares, with an authoritative crackle, that I ought to make my way toward platform nine. I obediently remove my posterior from the nest it has dug for itself in the midst of my holdall, and trundle after the swarm already marching off toward the waiting train. I pace down the platform, past the beckoning leg space of first class as the train hums its increasingly impatient electric whir beside me, and doors eagerly slam along its length. A pink-faced woman has caught the strap of her handbag, which I note is the precise shape and texture of a Mongolian sheep's bladder, in her carriage door, and flings it open across my path. Almost thumping me into an approaching luggage trolley. She glares at me as if I ought to have sensed that she was about to launch a fuzzy turquoise berried attack out of that particular exit. I hop into her carriage, thanking her for opening the door for me. She glowers, and, swinging the sheep's bladder triumphantly over her shoulder (narrowly missing my left ear) turns to thunder down the carriage and take up a seat directly opposite my reserved spot.

Settling down into my seat I pull out my sketchbook, lining two newly-sharpened 2Bs up alongside in the hope that I might feel

inclined to doodle anything which particularly takes my fancy. I was just admiring the roughly carved ridges I'd chipped away from their tips with my mother's bread knife that morning, when Mrs. Sheepsbladder shunts her wide-screened laptop over the slender table, plundering a corner of the sketchbook quite forcefully into my bosom. I took the foreboding hint and relocate to a seat with a flip down tray, rather than the luxury a table affords, right at the other end of the train. She was bound to be a crisp rustler.

Running the ridges of foil, designed to hold a long-ago-ingested rubber on the tip of my pencil, across my teeth; I wonder where it is best to begin. For beginnings don't often happen from the start and, given that there is nothing terribly spectacular about the shunting progress from London on to Reading, it seems a silly place to do so. Especially because I know what lies beyond it. At this sluggish point of the journey I often find myself employing the insect-encrusted window as though it were a form of giant periscope in order to inspect those seated around me. It's a wise investigation to make of your fellow passengers, lest you be stuck alongside someone that appears to be suffering from bubonic plague or a host of raucous children, or worse: a host of raucous children with bubonic plague. Where it might seem brazen to hover over a seat until you have discerned whether or not you approve of those that shall be sharing your breathing space were you to choose it; it is far less obtrusive an activity to pass these judgements through the grubby reflections of the glass.

There are admittedly those inevitable occasions when I find I am not alone in my underhandedness. I catch the mirrored guilt of someone else's eyes beneath spectacles which are, at that precise moment, poring over me for fear that I might also be demonstrating the leading symptoms of Ebola. I soon find some consolation for my undoing though, because I can now, depending upon what sort of character I inadvertently discover myself in cahoots with, exchange knowing glances with my

comrade, or challenge them to a staring match out across the indefinite breadth of the green belt. This affords some worthy entertainment whilst waiting for the, in the main, uglier parts of ratty old Greater London to be left far behind.

My incognito pleasures are soon denied when the moment of ticket inspection arrives however. Despite the actuality that I have, on the majority of occasions, been entirely innocent to all charges of or relating to my being on the wrong train, or indeed of possessing nothing more than an oyster card, clenched between sweaty palms; I still always feel something of a criminal when asked to present my ticket. This sense of my own encroaching guilt is exacerbated by having to fumble about between pens, 'to do' lists, an ambiguous selection of keys, the odd plastic hen (expelled from its miniature farm by my niece into the cavernous folds of my handbag) before managing to unearth my purse. I present my ticket triumphantly to the inspector.

'Young Person's Railcard?' he asks.

Six geese, half a lip salve, forty-eight tuppence pieces, one glove (three fingers), and something which looks curiously like a water buffalo later, I find the requested railcard. By which time the inspector has deserted the carriage anyway.

An express service roars past the window, winding our more sedate locomotive as it hurtles alongside. It buffets our flanks so ferociously that we feel as though we are leaning off the tracks as our train desperately tries to avoid its pummelling by tipping into the fields we are chugging through. I replace the menagerie of plastic animals in my handbag, and watch as the monstrous engine careers past, hauling its unwieldy carriages behind it. A copse of feathery trees has scattered back in its wake, skittering up the slopes of a hill far too steep to hold all their roots indefinitely. A young deer and its mother, in the soft loll of a canter,

make their way through a patch of nettles and Timothy grass growing courageously in shadows cast by the huddling trees.

I was contemplating the fact that I would be absolutely happy to disembark upon the idyllic spot I had just left behind, when it was announced that we were now approaching Exeter St. David's. Lumbering into the station, the enormous man opposite passed his most satisfied wind of the hour, probably in appreciation of the fact that a good third of our, unfortunately shared, journey was now over. I force myself to once again fix my gaze upon the Devonshire scenery.

I always experience a stir of excitement after departing from the regrettable surroundings of backwater Plymouth. It begins in my fingertips and shimmies up my shoulders, through to the nape of my neck. Growing ever stronger as we approach the Tamar and Isambard Kingdom Brunel's famous bridge. I can never be certain whether this is because I have such an inner fondness for Cornish shores, which runs so deep as to begin ebbing around my expectant arteries before the first wheels have even rumbled onto this awe-inspiring magnum opus. Or whether my trepidation is simply due to the fact that I know quite how old dear Issy's creation really is. I admit that I continue to catch my breath whenever rattling over its wrought iron skeleton, and distrustfully watch the sail boats bob beneath us, far far below, on a river that is becoming speckled with the round wet globules of west-country rain. All rain is wet of course. It is just that rain which falls over Devon and beyond has a particular quality of dampness about it. Ripples sway out from where its droplets burrow into the surface of the Tamar, and the last set of wheels give a thankful murmur as they grumble onto solid earth again. Age, even a rather grand one, is no evidence that things are in the least bit likely to fall down.

Rolling onward we reach the mudflats left exposed by retreating waters, where terns get their toes stuck pushing reedy beaks

into the river bed in search of worms and grubs and other such avian delights. A boat that foundered many years ago sticks up from the woven ridges of sand, black ribs coated in curly green slithers of seaweed and sleeping barnacles, back bone bent by the weight of the waterlogged remains of a woodworm-ridden hull. I often wonder whether anyone misses her much, half in, half out of the earth. A cormorant has today adopted the skeleton of this forlorn little vessel as a lookout point. Balanced on the knobbed joints of one slender leg, his head tucked into the soft down of his back, as a gustily breeze blows billiards up his bottom.

Red cliffs soon appear, and begin to splinter around the track ahead so that we might pass, promising our first glimpse of the sea. As a child we would hold competitions, my brothers and I, over who would be the first to spy the ocean on our way down to Dartmouth for the annual family holiday. It seems a daft sort of a race to have now. Surely the great expanse of the English Channel has never been infinitely difficult to spot. Nonetheless, my siblings did always attempt to cheat by claiming that distant lakes and stagnating ponds, normally pointed out somewhere near Swindon, were in actual fact the first outlying swells of the Atlantic. Seeing it peer over the brow of a hill, or, as it does now, unexpectedly lapping at the carriage window-all brownish-green and slipshod- no longer moves me to such boundless exhilaration. I sometimes wish that it did.

Its frothy undulations instead call to mind a sense of familiarity, of homeliness. Following the irksomely meandering route train tracks make through the west country to pick up two people in this direction, and drop off one man and his dog four hundred miles in that, we reach Truro. The epicentre of Cornwall. I have been waiting beside the exit for the past ten minutes, the now malodorous interior of my own carriage having gotten a little too much. I ram down the window and put my face out far enough that I might feel the rush of air whip past me, but also

far enough inside that I might also avoid losing my nose in a horrendous collision with a birch tree. My fingers cling lightly to the cold metal along the top of the glass; fresh south westerly wind sweeps its elegant curve around my neck and the tasselled ends of my scarf flit noiselessly against my cheeks, as the train slows steadily into the station. Perhaps this is, in the end, the sort of journey we really ought to be afraid of forgetting, or of even failing to remember in the first place?

HABITS

'At night I'd go through the ashtrays. There's never enough to last the day, and you always need the one, just one, that'll see you off. It's strange, how there's never enough for food, but always for the fags.'

Slim fingers reach for the packet that lies on the small table next to the sofa. I observe the bitten-down nails, the weary lines, and the tremble of that hand when it reaches for the lighter that lies next to the water glass.

'The kids don't mind so much. They used to call me up on it, bless 'em; what with all the reports on the telly and that. But there's more to worry about nowadays, and kids being kids they can sense that what I need is just those five minutes to myself. In between housework and seein' to them, I ain't got much time for relaxing. It's just a little bit of relief, and I think they're glad for it as well. They're old enough to know the score.'

It wasn't always like this you know.'

A short, sardonic laugh, smothered by a rasping cough. The hand reaching for the chest, bruised lips parting in pain.

'I bet that's what they all say, eh? You should know, you must've seen it all in 'ere. You don't realise what you're in for 'til it's too late. There's warning signs, of course there are, but it'll never happen to you, oh no. Anyone but you.'

The eyes swim . . . they float, lost.

'I'm sorry, I really am. It's not like I wanted to end up here, a fuckin' wreck . . . useless on all counts, fit for nothing.'

It's the wanting. The pull of needing someone else, that makes you think it'll never happen. I can remember the day we got married, clear as anything. The sharpness of the air when I stepped out the door. Me, dressed in all me best, gasping on the

step like a fish out of water. The ceremony was short and sweet . . . the pairing bein' an affront to both sides. Hardly anybody turned up, just a couple of mates to bear witness. I remember walking up the aisle. How strange, that memory never fades . . . not really . . . it's there all the time, waitin' for you to be ready. I got the whole service burned into me brain, and just as I sit here I can hear the vicar recitin' the words. For better or worse, eh?

We were a respectable family. From the outside anyway. I've always worked; me dad always said to me when I was little, there's nothing so degrading as not havin' your own wage comin' in. I've never gone on the dole, always worked to keep meself and me family. I went to College and did art, but there's not a lot you can do wi' that so I've always just done my best with what's goin'. I'm not a snob, I'll work a factory job if I have to, and a lot of the time it's come to that. Me dad always said I were a bit thick, but thick doesn't mean lazy. Thick doesn't mean not knowing right from wrong. There's something inside you, I think, that you can count on for that.

I remember, I was workin'. I came home. That's when the change happens, it's the step from here to there and the air's different. I don't mean, with fags and the smell of kids and that. When we were first married we used to leave all the windows open, there'd be a gale roarin' through the whole house and everything smelled like the wind. There was change in it, and newness, everything bright and clean. It's like there's a spotlight in my mind through the first year or so, with everything white and shining, and the sun spilling through the blinds all day long, even in winter. When the atmosphere started to turn, it's like there was a hand on this dimmer switch in my mind, slowly turning down the lights on all my thoughts and memory. When I think back now, everything's dark. The step then, took you from a wide-open world into a hole. I

saw a film once, David Bowie wearin' tights and monsters and goblins all singin' and dancin'. In this maze, the Labyrinth, there was a place to put people, if you wanted to forget about them. What was that?

There's a pause, a searching, and I offer a word.

'That's right, an *oubliette*. God, the kids loved that one. We all sat down and watched it together and then when it was done I put 'em to bed and went and stood on the back step with myself. Just the two of us, eh? Talkin' about stuff, the way I do when I'm tryin' to work somethin' through. It wasn't long before, actually. And I remember, I had a cold, and I was annoyed at myself because I'd caught my hand on the door and whacked it something nasty.'

With a small movement, the cigarette butt is stubbed out, the yellow-stained fingers grinding away the small plume of smoke and, with one final twist, abandoning it to the ash. The other arm is tight across the chest in a sling. Bruised and crooked fingers emerge from a plaster cast, stained the same colour as the hand that now drums nervously on the arm of the sofa. I'm waiting for the question and it isn't far off.

'Do you mind if I have another, love? I wouldn't smoke 'em like this usually, but it's been a long day. I can't smoke 'em back on the ward, and they're not too keen on me smokin' out here either. What do they know? There's pleasure in it, not any that they can see, but pleasure all the same. Like me and Eddie. There was pleasure in it, you know? Tight in our . . . *oubliette*, forgetting about everything else. Until the kids came, we barely opened our door, except to work and get the shoppin' in. That was my job as well, to stock our little ship and make sure we'd last the journey. Everything was done by routine. There were set times,

set patterns. God help us if we lost ourselves, but Eddie was the only one with any class of map. The kids were scared witless half the time, and out the door as soon as they knew how.

It's hard. You get so used to relying on each other. I never wanted to leave, not really. Even after that one time . . . the fryin' pan caught my jaw and I was in the hospital for a couple of days. I didn't want to be there, I wanted to be at home. They all knew what was goin' on, in this place they know me so well . . . but you can't admit it to yourself, let alone anyone else.

It's embarrassing.

I was embarrassed.

Things you cling on to.

Your pride.

Each other.

Every time I was whacked down, and picked back up again.

It becomes natural, as natural as this fag is to my lungs . . . a dependency you pick up and can't let go. It sticks to you, and after a while you stop tryin' to shake it off and start carryin' it around with you, like a child. You nurture it, in the hope that it'll grow into somethin' beautiful.

It's a habit.'

The lips purse for one final drag on the cigarette, and then slowly exhale smoke towards the ceiling. I've long ago abandoned my notebook. There are no notes to be made, there is only this moment; a speaker telling a story, and without a witness all is meaningless. This story should have been told a long time ago. I can't help but observe my companion closely, trying to make

some sense of it. A slight frame, swathed in hospital white. Brown eyes that gaze out of a sea of bruises, the angry, mottled colours in stark contrast to their warmth. Hair that seems so fine . . . I long to reach out and take it between my fingers. The turn of my shoulders conveys impassivity, but I can feel the empathy in my eyes.

The one good hand raises slowly and scratches a day old growth of beard.

The brown eyes smile.

'I know chick, I need a shave. I need to get out of this fuckin' hospital and get back to the kids. God knows where Eddie is now, she ran when the neighbours came in through the back. I didn't call them, they heard the kids yellin'. Shoulda been in bed, but you know what kids are like.

I'm glad you're here in a way. It's nice to get this stuff off my chest, to be able to talk to someone. You spend so long thinkin' no-one will listen, so you just kinda stop talkin'. Would you believe it, I used to be a right chatterbox, me. Old habits die hard.'

THE SPHERICAL UNIVERSE AS AN HEXAGONAL LIBRARY

To speak is to fall into tautology.
—The Library of Babel

Words are
n't experience.
Can't forget they
're referents.

If the universe was a library how would it

write itself / represent itself
[Delete As Applicable]

even through a chaos of glossalalia?
It would lose itself chaosalia and
at that moment the text can only
fail or fall, it will
fall, t will
 fal it 'll
fal t will
 fal
 t will
 f

MOONLIGHT

is al la gl im me r.
The see e e e a a a a a a a

FROM SELF HELP

9.58am

Stuart Daw 'A Good Salesman'

'Most people envy a good salesman. He looks great, dresses well, smiles easily, drives a snappy car. He's glib, a wonderful raconteur full of new jokes, a great networker. Some people say he's not very deep, but could that possibly be because they're a bit jealous? He does seem rather thick-skinned though, for nothing appears to stop him from pursuing the sale.'

Conscience. He had none. Walking in, as though he were about to take sweets from a small child—too easy, he would say: 'Hello, my name is Mr. Sunshine and I'm about to take every fucking thing you own.' He was a charmer, full of one-liners and he knew that in this business first impressions were everything. Before each job, he would explain to Danny Walton the fundamentals of being a successful salesman:

'Number One: Believe in yourself and your product.

Number Two: A sense of humour always helps.

Third, finally, and most importantly: There is no such thing as no.

You see what we do Danny is not so much wrong as it is right. I mean at the end of the day, who is to say what is wrong and what is right? Tell me that. To me, there is a very fine line between the two. A very fine line.' Danny Walton winced at the thought that one day he would end up like his father.

Mrs. Walton had left Danny and his father ten years previously.

Mrs. Leaf's apartment was crammed with worthless antiques. Where you would have expected to see pictures or paintings, there were reproduction plates and fake silver trinkets. The two men presumed that the old man in the photograph above the mantel was her husband. 'The deceased I presume,' said Mr.

Walton as he swirled the remnants of his cold, black coffee. ‘Yes, I had a wife once, dead of course. It’s a funny thing death, don’t you think? You know, here today, gone tomorrow and all that. Speaking of which, perhaps we should get down to business.’ His voice grew louder as he lowered his head and spoke into her ear. ‘Now, you know why we’re here don’t you Margaret? Of course you do, you’re not that senile—yet!’ He poked her side as he laughed heinously. ‘We just need to run through the policy, discuss some figures and then sign a few things. Right, on my notes here it says that you’ve opted for the “LoveLife 70+” package this guarantees at no additional cost to pay 15% of your funeral expenses. A good option for you, because we all know how expensive death can be.’ As he said the word death, he pointed at the photograph of Mr. Leaf with his biro.

Mr. Walton excused himself and Danny so they could get some fresh air out on the balcony. They had been in Mrs. Leaf’s apartment since 8.00 a.m. and Mr. Walton had a tendency to sweat uncontrollably when he was excited about a sale.

‘Right, now that you’ve had a chance to look that over, let’s start number crunching.’ Mr. Walton took an oversized calculator from his battered leather briefcase and began punching numbers. ‘This is my favourite part, do you know why that is Margaret? I’ll tell you why, because now it’s time for me to give you the best deal possible. You’ve caught me on a good day, because I’m going to give you the saving of a lifetime. That’s right, this kind of thing doesn’t come along very often.’ Danny’s father removed a handkerchief from his top pocket and wiped the sweat dripping from his brow. Thankfully, Mrs Leaf could not see the back of his pale yellow shirt turning translucent underneath his brown suit. ‘So let me see you got your 500s, minus your 250s, plus additional fees and costs, less 5%—because I like you Margaret.’ He paused so he could wink at the 75-year-old woman. ‘In total we are looking at a price of £200 per month. Not forgetting the £1000 cash we spoke of on the phone. Now isn’t that a great saving? So why don’t you run along and get that cash. You’ve got the cash haven’t you

Margaret? You're not going to let me down because let me tell you something, you do believe in God, don't you Margaret? Because I do and God told me last night, no word of a lie here, that I was to make sure that the next client I see gets the best deal possible, you don't want me to go against the word of God now do you Margaret?

Mrs. Leaf got up from the armchair she was sitting in and went to collect the £1000 downpayment for the "LoveLife 70+" insurance policy from underneath her mattress. Mr. Walton gave out a scornful laugh as he picked up two of the reproduction plates, this is the reason why I am incapable of remorse. That old bag is sitting on a small fortune here and she doesn't even know it. He stacked them along with some of the silver trinkets inside his brief case.

'Looks like were all done here Margaret, the money seems to be in check nine sixty, nine seventy, nine eighty, nine ninety, and that's a thousand. I'll leave my card here on the coffee table, we'll be in touch in the next few weeks or so.'

Mr. Walton playfully slapped Danny Walton with the £1000 cash, as they closed the door on Mrs Leaf's apartment at 47 Leaver Street. 'You see that Danny. I bet your mother wishes she hadn't walked out on us now!'

Stuart Daw 'A Good Salesman'

'I have seen many salesmen who made the mistake of viewing the close as some kind of moral as well as financial victory. A close can be a great feeling, but it's even better when the salesman realizes that his success has been in answer to another man's following his own star. In short, view it not as your victory in a zero-sum game, but a mutual victory where everyone wins.'

ONE LUMP OR TWO?

Identical twin old men take turns at being alive.

'Your turn today Reg'.

'I'm going to see your lady friend',

Wilbur chuckles and turns back to sit on the stone step.

Reg sips tea on a table propped outside the cafe,

'You look well today dear,' Elspeth smiles across to him,
dropping a lump of sugar into her cup.

POWER

Power is an aphrodisiac.

Once I climbed a mountain

And met a dizzy Yak.

