

the MENTAL
VIRUS 5

ART
MONEY



Salford Lads by Howard Haigh



Words From The Ed



The fifth issue of The Mental Virus is all about words. To tie in with the Words 08 festival we bring you this issue featuring words words and words. There's plenty of poetry and fiction within, enjoy! I think the power of words and where they can take you when slotted in the right order by a talented writer is underestimated at times. With poetry, for example, nowhere is the power of words more salient in its direct interplay of sound and meaning; the direct choice of words, economical and precise conveying an emotion, witnessing a scene, sparking a thought, image or debate; it can illuminate the mundane and the fantastical. In poetry we see the power of words come alive; words react with each other like nowhere else in the written world and in this issue we give you some contrasting styles and subject matter.

Elsewhere herein we have a peak into the mind of Moxy Casimir, a woman of words if ever there was one! There seems to be a labyrinthine journey set upon where one spark of an idea creates a cornucopia of imagery, setting off on tangents with her mind skittering like a midge at dusk.

But it's not all words. We have photography from Howard Haigh, documenting the dereliction of Salford some years ago. Also, Pete Crompton presents two poetic images taken from derelict buildings showing the remnants of a left behind world. We hope you enjoy this issue and we'll catch you next time with more words in the future.

John Togher

Front & Back Cover Artwork: 'Bat Boys' by Jane Fairhurst [www.janefairhurst.co.uk]

Front Page Design by Sean Doherty

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The Love Children Have Come A Killing by John G Hall

here comes Blake with his sawn off shot gun
here comes Jesus with his swish blade of thorns
here comes Buddha with his golden nail bomb,

here comes Gandhi with his bone crushing prayers
here comes Lennon with his amplified cattle prod
here comes St. Francis with his poisonous stigmata,

at last the love children have come a killing
at last the love children have lost all control
here comes the revenge of the peaceful idols.

Long live the revenge of the peace-mongers!

The Axe Party by Sandre Clays

The invitation reads:
'You are cordially invited
to an Axe Party,
casual dress acceptable
but be sure to carry an axe;
bog standard hatchet
will suffice at a pinch
but ornate implement
preferred,
double-headed
bearing a crest
or with a carved handle
to give the occasion
that ceremonial feel.
It should of course be sharp,
as sturdy material
will be provided.
All you need to bring
is a little imagination
and a lot of rage.
The party's guaranteed
to swing
as chopping in unison
you hack your way
back to sanity;
so much more reliable
than hugging a tree!

Salford Dereliction by Howard Haigh

Urban environments seem to change all the time. Roads generally stay where they've always been, and it's within the islands of land trapped between the motorways and the A, B and C roads where buildings rise and fall. However, my childhood experienced change of a somewhat larger magnitude because I lived within earshot of the construction work for what used to be known as the M62, then renamed M63 (now the M60) motorway and 'my' section of road ran

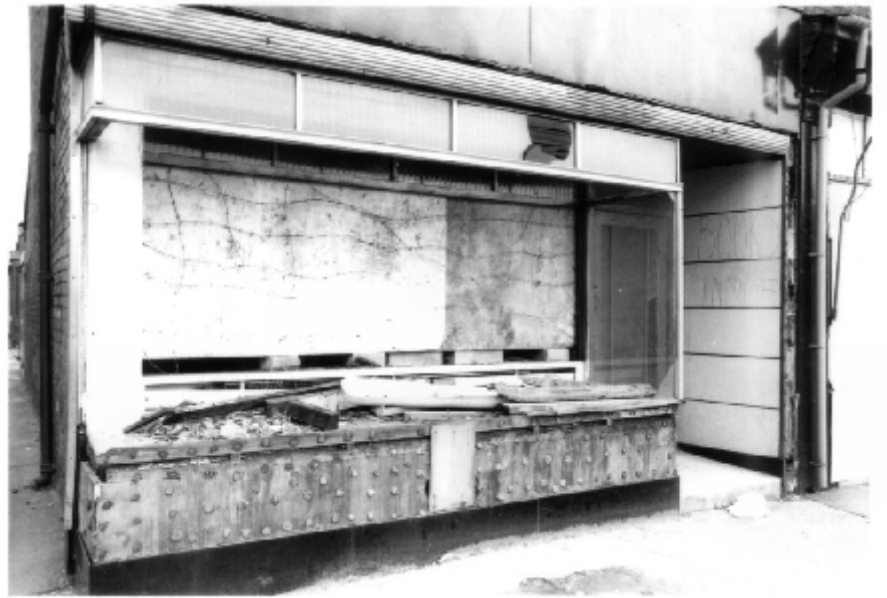
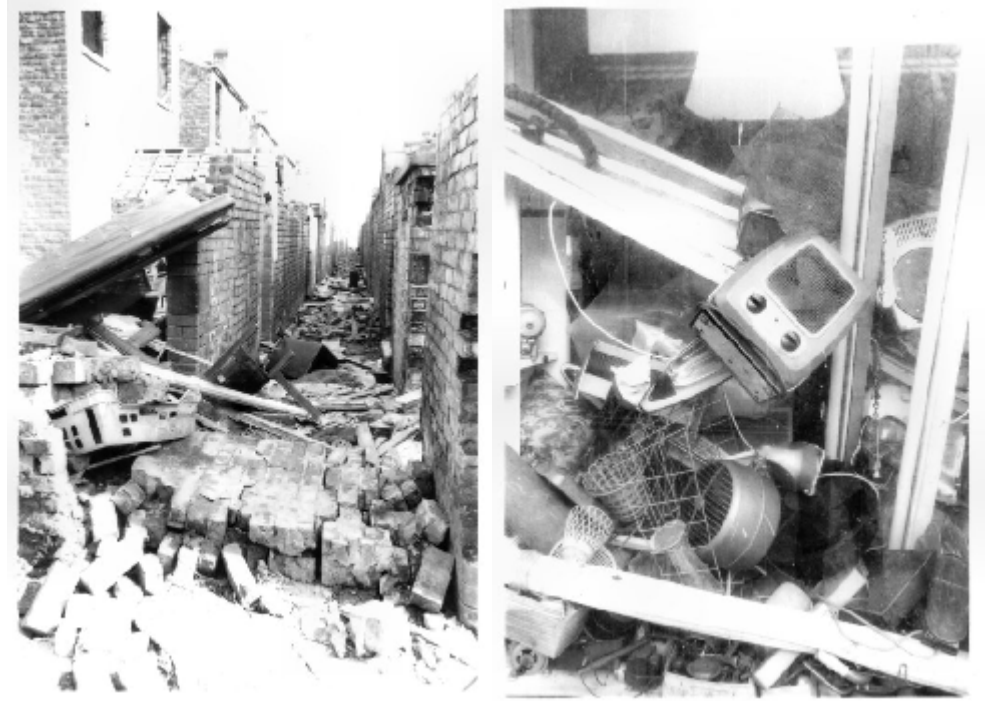


along a North/South route from Worsley to Stretford. I lived on the newly built Brookhouse council estate in Peel Green, Salford, with the motorway defining the eastern border of the housing estate. An early memory of mine is when the Barton high-level motorway bridge (over the Manchester Ship Canal) was completed in 1960 and locals were allowed to walk up to its summit the day before it was opened to traffic. Canals were also

significant in this part of Salford, with both the aforementioned Manchester Ship Canal (opened in 1894) and the earlier and arguably Britain's first completely artificial canal, the Bridgewater Canal (opened in 1761) intersecting at nearby Barton. Another childhood memory is of light aircraft droning overhead everyday because we also had the UK's first purpose-built municipal airport to the west of Brookhouse, namely Barton Aerodrome (opened in 1930). Add to this the fact that the first passenger railway line in the world, the Liverpool and Manchester line (opened in 1830) ran along the northern boundary of Brookhouse, so I felt that I was located pretty much at the centre of the transport universe!

Salford culture for many was represented by fictional Coronation Street, with hard-drinking working class folk living in small terraced houses lining cobbled streets. It was both false and true. The closest I came to resembling any Corrie character was Ken Barlow - I came to detest the man and now avoid watching the soap at all costs! However, even as long as 30 years ago, I recognised that Salford culture was changing and the terraces and cobbled streets and corner shops and local pubs were under threat as a large swathe of land was eaten up by the newly advancing M602 motorway. I remembered cobblestones, sticky tar and the 'original' Salford tram lines disappearing under modern tarmac in Peel Green when I was still a lad and though also a fan of science and modern technology (thanks to Gerry Anderson and NASA) I felt I should document the death throes of some of old Salford as the punk-era 1970s slipped into the New Romantic 80s. Paradoxically, I found interest in the process of change itself, where streets were dying and personal histories disappearing in parallel. Doorways and windows became bricked-up outlines and dereliction for a while became the norm. So one sunny day in early 1980, out came the camera and myself and a fellow photography enthusiast went to the heart of old Salford and captured a few images of how this part of the world then looked. The best memory of this day was being approached by three Salford lads who upon seeing cameras then wanted their photograph taken. Without hesitation we both obliged, snapped away, only to be given a rebuke of "I bet you haven't got any film in, you bastards!" when they couldn't believe we wanted to get them on film. That's Salford for you.





Sad Daggers In The Social Cake by Paul Tanner

Flick the fag end
into the grid,
stand swaying digesting
the fucking satisfying hiss
then go back in there,
tell them I just want
one more pint
quietly
in the corner
that's all
but the meaty baboon
who's banging the barmaid
takes another swing
and yet again
it's ME
they're pushing out.

Big Night Out by Sandre Clays

Hair streaked, crimped,
gelled to frame
painted faces.
Crop tops skimp
pierced baby flesh,
glitter jeans
and frilled mini
adorn the fertility
of two modern
Lolitas,
tiger kittens,
eyes hungry
as an empty bellied
predator,
out they say
to have a laugh.
In town, the bar swells
with youth,
hilarity rising
like the super heated
swirl from cigarettes
till, moving in unison,
they crowd out,
head for the clubs,
deserting
the grizzled residue
of middle age.

A Peak Into The Mind Of... Moxy Casimir

RAMSES HUSKNUMBER THE 7000,86543RD, an astrologer/numerologist/wood monk friend of mine, called to borrow a demi-tasse of cocktail umbrellas decorated with downloaded and miniaturized America's Most Wanted mugshots, henna-filigreed silverskin onions, ambergris stuffed olives marinated in athletes' negatively tested samples, flageolet bean kernals in quicksand and green glace cherries soaked in tug bilgewater for the daiquiris he knew he'd have to prepare for a brace of gorgeous gas salesmen due to persuade him over to a new provider whose prices were so low ground beetles had taken up residence there. He'd had his scalp buffed and was wearing a Milan Catwalk head pinafore with ironic panscrub ear sporrans and caustic oven cleaner lace gills in cherise pandemic whorethread with third world fairtrade blisters sewn on instead of the more chummy sequins. 'Tra la la' Ramses muttered as he leaned over my calamander scrimshaw leaving his breath tarnishing its antique veneer, 'kerplunk is not the sound I shall be making,' he continued, his breath now vapourtrailing a swarm of gnats that had entered through my louvered French windows like the love-interest gal in tennis whites in a French farce, one ankle in a fey riposte against the other, her sweet plimsoles swivelling like a ketch caught in a whirlpool. 'I shall have found L'amoure vraï or I shall be bag-bratticed and away with the goshawks in their jesses and on a diet of ripped mice.' Then he left, dragging the air out with him since he is naturally airsticky, leaving a vacuum that caused my room to fuse with my pet dwarf dingo who is now a walk-in-apartment so when he next needs the vets I will also have to take a realtor or estate agent along to check the vet doesn't cause any structural damage, or undertake a treatment that voids my house insurance. Strange how things can change in two minutes flat.

FISTS OF FALAFEL! MY ROOM'S SMALLER THAN A GRILL-BLOWN PITTA.

Stilt-legged I may be, Drusilla, but I've graduated from genetic engineering with the grace of a barstool and a profile like a Japanese coastline. Crispy-surfaced courtesan moi, my makeup's applied by a martial arts master each between-toe space bristling with cosmetics primed ready to apply, kick kick, face on in two seconds flat. There's more natural light in the grizzledplaces of my subconscious than there is in this boxroom the size of a grill-blown pitta, you may smile but your kidney bean grin is an insult to western dentistry and je suis desole, your brain's subservient to a vacuum but it don't stop me wishing I was the corner of the page you dogear so you can retrieve its wisdom at a later stage in your jivedive development. And I'm the best actor ever ever no contest because my neurosurgeon has rewired me so I have little pressure points scattered within easy access and if I touch them I immediately enter a particular and precise emotional state -- left earlobe longing that leaves stains, right earlobe spiritual gratification aka astral lap standers, midpoint forehead incapacitating loneliness as though your heart is glued to flypaper and Cupid's gone adolescent, gone goth, his rattledown shuttered mansion is where your pink blood muscle's lofted, stirring the cobwebs on the dust pendant chandelier. So anyway, here's my idea for the film industry. You wanna pitch your film idea, you create a carnival float and you deck it out with a trailer montage, your actors in situ, in costu, and you take your lorry-trailer film-trailer and you drag it past the offices of the film financiers and maybe other film trailer trailers join you and the mood goes mardi gras and you bucket-collect funds and the big-money-guys go palms level with face at the windows and you get them coming after you straight off the ledge three stories up, and you have your first taste of BigTime and it's like space dust. And your mind acquires a greeting card wit and your hands ball like two pods of falafel. Or something.

JUST EMERGED FROM MY ALCHEMICAL-SURGICAL-QUANTUM LABORATORY

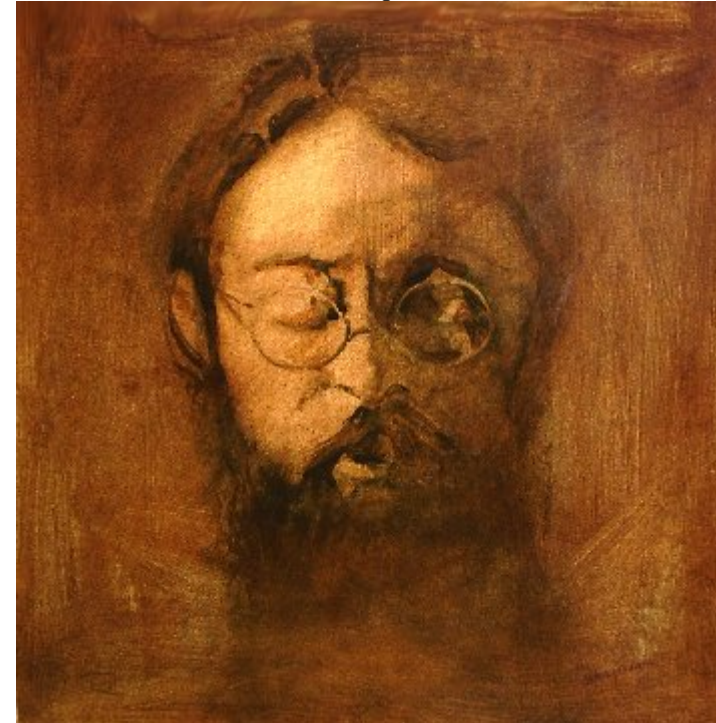
built in an abandoned shopping mall liftshaft and partially filled in with amputee mannequins and morose Saturday staff. Igor, a camel- panda genetic confection made to my own secret recipe, has recently assisted me with my first placebo organ transplant. Three days ago my patient received the first placebo heart and lungs. Yes, her body has accepted the compressed pink sugar lungs and compressed green sugar heart. The only complication is the fact that they are slowly dissolving and will need to be replaced every five days. Now we are researching the efficacy of our toupee pregnancy predictor kit, a discreet hairpiece that responds to the hormonal signature of early pregnancy by stridulating its faux-follicles to imitate the patter of tiny feet, sadly the mental image summoned by its auditory efforts are currently more reminiscent of termites and soldier ants. Igor and I are going to have our lunch out among the unsuspecting punters who unwittingly act as our lab rats, heh heh heh. We are both dressed in our natty navy-blue violet-viole-piped nautical

forcefields and anyone stepping within a radius of ten metres will immediately succumb to sealegs and limescale, heh heh heh. Igor is ordering a Burgher, a German civic official in full robes, insignia and onions, in a sesame-capped bap, with a side order of frays, the worn cuffs collars ruffs where the weave is undermined by friction and collapses into unmendable tufts. Me, I'm ordering you about because power is nourishing, ooo the calorific fuel oh protein protein of dictatorship ooo. For dessert I'm having a punnet of planets, they're in season and the life forms they support never expected to be wiped out under a plastic, peel-capped portion of fake dairy cream, oh lower rung gotterdamerung, see how this plastic spoon with a slightly serrated edge breaks worlds apart into dippety slishy mouthfuls. And if I'm not mistaken, our dining area with its dining furniture bolted to 3mm steel shim made from recycled tollbooths by people serving life for toilet humour, our dining area has become this afternoon's designated temporary theatre of war and we must eat our repast and shout boom. Boom. Moxy has Argentinean and Irish roots (cue a stiff-armed tango.) On the Argentinean side, her grandfather was a prize bare-knuckle fighter, her uncle a colonel in the Indian Army: and on the Irish side, her family had a funeral parlour on the Falls Road, Belfast, and she is a direct descendent of John L. Sullivan, the first boxer to fight wearing boxing gloves. Want to make something of that? Biff. Biff.

MY NEW LIPSTICK'S SO HEAVY IT STOPS ME LIP SYNCHING WITH MYSELF

Looksee your hands! They're little more than luggage labels detailing current, previous and prospective journeys. Where do you think you're going? Elsewhere, oh, right, well, I got there before you and planted a flag and I saluted my flag and I expect you to do the same. There's a stuffed glove sewn into the bottom edge so you can shake hands with my flag and if you've broken any laws you will place your face on a windy day within flapping distance and receive corporal punishment on your phisog or your bumtarrara for your crime. There's also a bag sewn into the flag made of the same material so it's virtually invisible, but slot your hand down its surface and you'll find it. Inside the bag are some face paints and you must alter your features in bold strokes with bright colours, some with sparkly glitter in them, because I will not have you looking like you do now. No, you come to Elsewhere and you change your style outlook legacy currency urgency expectancy. When in Elsewhere you are someone Else. There are a number of bracelets slotted over the stuffed hand and each one is made from semi-precious gems buffed to luminous smoothness by bad men's stubbled chins, when night comes throw the bracelets into the air above the flag and you've got cosmos and when they tumble to earth you've got keepsake. If you want the flag of Elsewhere to heal you and you are multifariously sick decide what you want curing first, then list the other ailments on a slip of parchment and get the dog you'll find in the floating zeppelin kennel tethered to the flagpole to dig a little pit for the burying of the parchment. The dog's name is Mindsheath and if he barks you will succumb to mental breakdance and if he howls you will succumb to astral chickens, and if he wags his tail you will succumb to nagging whelks so you better hope he stays mum. Pinned to the shiny gold ferule that caps my flagpole is a sheet of paper that is the land of Cartoon where sideways we are all equal and identical except for length. It is a flat land in a flat world where gravity is a variable force. Do not go there it is off limits and they are squatting there, hoping to take up residence on my flag so my flag will then represent a place, and be a place. Oh aberration! **OH HOW MY MIND SKITTERS LIKE A MIDGE AT DUSK...**

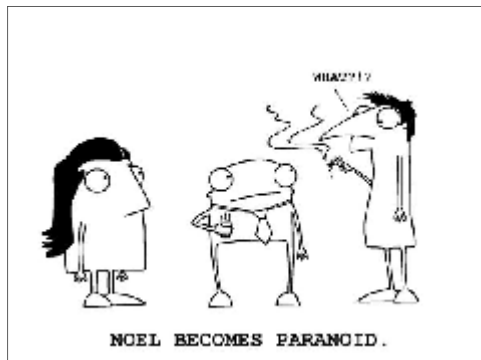
*Anthony Barrow
Philosopher*



Temptation



*Pete Kennedy's
Break Time*



Billy Boast And The Loose-Eyed Lady: A Panegyric To The Post Avant by James Hartnell

At the South Coast hog roast Billy Boast nearly toast
overdosed on glasnost saw his ghost past the post
last post lamp post bed post evening post
evening all waterfall basketball chainsaw

from the Albert Halls to Arkansas
done it all know it all
walktall bigsmall
freefall at the paintball
veg stall curved ball up against the Wailing Wall
better give his Mum a call no more jobs at Vauxhall
nothing on the eight ball pockets full of bugger all

he's getting over it
wait a bit
lowered kit
halfwit
double knit armpit faglit unfit
look at her working it looking fit dress slit:
'Take me to your bedsit? Biscuit? Risk it? Rarebit? Pomfrit?
Twiglet? Niblef? Titbit? Wotsit? Wiggle it a little bit?'

Well she's a pronoun
on the town
an up and down
green pound
a bodyhound lost and found nightly crowned queen of sound
home fore he can turn around drinks downed hands bound
half an hour of hare and hound helps herself to folding brown

Well he couldn't unwind it was a real bind
he felt undermined and columbined
redefined red-lined Rick Steined Patsy Klined
woodbined colourblind never mind the bacon rind
porcupined grapevined bottom lined and much maligned.

Well he was mystified
mortified
multiplied
stultified
red-eyed pork-pied legs wide crucified
panfried setaside powerglide penicide
disapplied undenied tightly tied and offside.

Migraine by Louise Coulson

A fiery sun sinks into the still silver water of the familiar lake, colouring the surrounding world as it slinks away. The painting of nature jars against the pain in my mind. Missy, our small dog, bounces around the car yapping in anticipation; her tiny black nails clicking against the window. The long journey has ended. The golden hues pierce my sinuses, bringing a fresh wave of nausea. I can't bare the beauty of this sunset; the fading light heightening the pretence. Stress, the lies, it never fails to burst into a migraine. I lean my head onto the cool car window and receive a brief reprieve from the pain. I half close my eyes. As I squint at the cottage, it looks like flames are raging within, the sun reflecting in the windows against the coloured peach brick work. The sunlight dapples through the trees and paints a pattern on the hood of the car. Normally this would delight me but not tonight. The journey, the migraine, both have drained me of any desire other than one for total darkness; sleep, the only release.

I wait in the car, I won't argue with him, not now. He unpacks all the usual paraphernalia and carries it inside. I make my way into the cottage a little after him. The warm smell is comforting and the petroly odour from the Calor gas heater wafts in from the bedroom. He's put fresh linen on the bed and it smells slightly musty; it doesn't matter, I can sink into this place of sanctuary. I put down some water for the dog and pick up the glass of brandy that's warming next to the stove in the kitchen. Tonight I won't need to protest – just sleep.

The morning wakes pale vanilla as it creeps in through the thin curtains. I sip on the hot tea and watch him. The muscles flex in his back like smooth wax as he changes into his bathers. It was the part of him I had loved, that toned V, that solid oak of a trunk, but now? How can love dissolve, evaporate? Once he could just curl the corner of his mouth and that would be all it would take. Never caring where we were, instantly. But now? He turns and I smile at him; does he know? Has the deep bond we once shared betrayed me, reflecting my deceit? Of course not, he was as loyal as our small dog. Big dog, little dog, they both leave to go to the lake. I finish my tea and slip out from under the covers, the cool tiled floor feels dusty beneath my feet. Brushing my hair, the nausea returns. I can taste it as it hits the back of my throat. I won't be able to conceal this secret for much longer. What am I thinking? Still supposed to be young, but I don't feel it. Age starting to tell; the camera always lies but the looking glass does not. Tiny lines appearing, soon to become ravines. Foolish vanity thy name... I dig out my swimming costume from the bottom of the case and quickly pull it on.

The garden is overgrown, headily voluptuous in the pale light of a cooling summer. The sapling we had once planted together was heavy with fruit. No longer weak but as if it had always been there, supplying fruit to generation after generation. How could I do this to him? But, there had been neglect. Not all me. But still the rising bile of guilt. Time passes. The frangipani scent, heady. Everything seems sharp. It feels like I am breathing it in for the first time; forming a memory, one to be etched eternally into my subconscious. Maybe I am, this is after all, a new beginning for both of us or so he thinks. Isn't that why we are here?

I follow the path down to the lake and can hear him lashing around in the water. He times himself as he swims back and forth to the big black stone. He says it is a petrified mermaid. This terrifies me. Stuck there unable to escape.

As I slip into the cool water I know this is the last time we will ever come to this place again, together.

A Chance Meeting After A Ten Year Absence by John Togher

She holds a rosary in her hand
yet keeps the devil up her skirt.
She picks the hours of least interruption
to dip her feet in the colours of the earth.

He thinks himself a king,
holding a secret royalty in his chest;
with the depth of his heart a kingdom
and the curls on his head a crown.

She sees him walking towards her,
and a faint recognition ignites.
He hasn't a clue, but is drawn to her eyes.

She calls out, "If you are who I think you are,
I've always wanted to make love to you."
"Well, who do you think I am?" he replies,
remembering his social chameleon tendencies.

How Far Into An Act Is Too Far Into An Act To Stop? by Kath Duggan

My arm aches like a bastard. He's pissed. I'm bored.
Is it too late to stop?
I want him to come.
He wants to come.
Come on, just come.
The light's off so there's nothing to
distract my stubborn mind.

"I'm bored, hurry up. I'm bored,
hurry up. I'm bored, hurry up."

Circulating like the same flea ridden fish
plate in a shit sushi bar.
Tongue twister.
How long is too long?
How bored is too bored?

A burning gush rushes up my arm.
I am now in the midst of the worst
wanking experience of my adult days
and I don't want to be here. He's a beached whale
with the face of a gurning pensioner.
I clench my teeth with the same force I clench my fist.
Blue knuckles.
The blood rushes to my head.
I wish it could somehow displace to his knob.
Harder. Faster.
My anger rises.
He's oblivious.

You said - I said by Darren Thomas

Holding each other in our arms -
we stared toward the darkness
or the evening sky
as you preferred to call it.
But with hindsight - darkness *was* staring me in the
face - it was so, so obvious.
Back then -
we were gazing at a salvation.
Look - a shooting star!
and we made that one wish
and kissed under a moon,
a moon with its pasty face.
I swore she looked surprised
that old girl Luna -
*where men had once raced
to pull down her eyelids*, I said.
Old crater cheeks, you said and
I should have known then.

The following day I read that
an International Space Station
was visible to a naked eye.
Imagine how foolish I felt.
Making a wish upon an artificial star
or that bus in the sky filled with boiler suits and beards.
You're no Russell Grant, you said
I'm not am I, I said,
thinking - just what *would* Aristotle
make of Russell fuckin' Grant in his
bottle green jumpers? And
I should have known then.

And when I kissed you
as you climbed aboard that merry go round
at the seaside
and I saw you disappear
inside a black acrid smoke
and that bloke with the panic in his face
carried you from
a gilt painted horse -
and children were crying simply because
a Victorian gearbox had seized.
I told you it was old, you said
Industrial heritage, I said
apologising with little sincerity and
In a roundabout way -
I should have known then.

And when you asked
Does my bum look big in this?
And the answer was wrapped in acidic wit
with a bow of bright red truth.
Your bum looks big in anything.
And you laughed.
You laughed so hard that you cried.

Those first real tears.
Don't cry, I said
Why not? You said -
and I couldn't answer and
I should have known then.

And a Father shaking a limp hand -
forcing all the circulation into a
party popper celebration of
engagement and drunkenness
and a mother-in-law
I know what I saw
She didn't, you said
She did, I said and
I should have known then
Then those golden rings side by side
the size of a bagel
and a spaghetti hoop.
And I wasn't able to get it
on a finger and that singer
in the choir
that you called a minger
but I just knew her as Grandma.
Well I've never met her, you said
because she lives in Edinbrough, I said and
I should have known then.
And what you found funny
never made me smile.
And I would belly laugh
at a man wearing a stupid fez
and you said that anything he says is not funny -
Who says? I said.
I say, you said.
And the words grew into serpents that spat and poured twisted venom
over the years that we'd spent together -
And whether we admit it or not -
that's when we fell out of love.
Just like that - I knew then.

And now I see you inside my words
like you're hiding inside a wardrobe and
waiting to scare the darkness from me.
It's absurd just like when you said you were leaving
and you actually went
but said nothing.
Just leaving your spaghetti hoop on the kitchen table
but taking one great big bottom with you inside those trousers.
If only we could wish like
we could disagree
I said - to myself,
before throwing my golden bagel
into a darkness and toward old crater face
into what was once an evening sky.
Then - there in the constellation of irony
I saw it -
a shooting - bastard – star.
Too late, I said.
I know, whispered insanity.

The Fury Room by Dorothy Nelson

Maisey plays at my feet; she has learned to unbuckle my shoes. I stare at the wall. My thoughts are unfocused after a series of disturbing nights. They unfold like swans' wings spread on a warm bank, and I drift.

At lunchtime I'm jolted awake; Maisey grizzles on the floor where she has slept for almost an hour. I lift her onto my lap, lean her in to my chest, and with the warmth of our bodies holding us, we hum a tune, rocking. It is time to feed her. Then I eat from a tray, a cold snack. In these dreamy days I nibble at wedges of cheese, and green apples cut into cubes. Maisey counts the diced pieces with me. I am careful not to let her put them into her mouth, afraid she will choke.

Later we play a game, chasing our fingers across the striped counterpane. She stays in the pink lane, I keep to the brown. But our fingers leap to lock around each others and the race is over. We collide, disqualified, in noisy giggles and tickles. I fasten her cardigan, slipping each bright button through tiny crocheted holes. Blue glass against sea-green 4ply. Her hair is flax, and I wonder how old she will be when her baby curls darken – will she be a golden growing girl or a mousy one? I can't believe she will be mousy. Her skin is fair, her eyes deep blue. Her mouth is soft red, widening into a smile which draws me inside her. I do not end and she does not begin; we are seamless.

I consider taking her for a walk – the sky is beginning to brighten. The grass is fresh after a shower and bluebells nod heavily on their stems. I slip Maisey into my pocket and we escape into the sunshine. Two figures stroll ahead of us but we soon lose sight of them. The path leads us towards the wood where the bluebells grow dense. The path divides; I choose the lower one dipping beneath a canopy of leaves. Maisey pipes the song we learned yesterday, and I help her with the words. The tune is melodious, its simple phrase repeating.. repeating. We mark its completion by clapping our hands, not managing to harmonise our voices or synchronise handclaps. Her high song begins again and I pick it up, stronger, until she knows it by heart. Lovers dance in a field in celebration of their wedding

*in a ring in a ring
till they sleep in a circle of light*

*in a ring in a ring
till they sleep in a circle of light*

Maisey loves the refrain but we let it die on our lips when a breeze whips up. We turn back, quickening our steps. Voices reach us from the other side of the stream.

'They say she's mad that one.'

'Oh leave her be .. isn't life hard enough?'

Two women. They must move on as I hear no more of their conversation. We are alone beside the murmuring water. The sky blinks when we emerge from the trees. The path is strewn with fallen cherry blossoms. I line my pockets. Florets follow us in trails. Maisey dozes; she soon tires.

April: I call myself April when I am ten, abandoning the name I'd been christened. I don't care for the idea of a man in a white surplice pouring water on my head. I make this announcement regularly to staff who smile and shake their heads. I am adamant, then one day I stand at Mrs. Ladyman's shoulder while she writes *April* in the house register. This is my eleventh birthday, the happiest I can remember. I wear a paper hat which Suzie has made for me, concentrating deeply, her tongue protruding. She misses breakfast. Suzie is my friend.

I love the time of year when flowers spring from the ground. I look through the window, counting pink hyacinths and blue. This isn't a prison; the bars are to stop us falling out, they say, when we should be in our beds. 'Should be' is emphasised with a frown and a knowing look. We are put to bed at seven all the year round, the littlest and the oldest. Always there are railings. The iron beds have guards, the windows have bars, the garden has high walls. But inside this world shoots of

freedom are nurtured – growing out of trust. If you are good you are trusted. If you are bad, trust sinks like wet sand to the bottom of a bucket. It can take a long time to dry.

Miss Shaw and Miss Pringle look after our days, see us make our beds, brush our teeth, wash up our breakfast bowls and beakers. Mrs Ladyman sits in her office with MOTHER screwed to the door. We are each taken to her on our birthday mornings when she opens her desk and makes a great display of handing over a small wrapped parcel. She says I have earned a merit and smiles as I peel off the paper. A pencil box. We don't have many treasures. I offer it back. 'Keep this for someone else. I just want to be April.' That's when she removes a pencil from the box and changes my name in the book. I turn to leave with a grin stretching my face. She calls me back. 'Take this too,' and hands me the box. Pale wood with a sliding lid and a special space at the end for a rubber. I don't mind that there's no rubber to fit into the space. Miss Shaw finds me a sheet of plain paper and I print APRIL fifty times in columns from top to bottom, from side to side. Blue Aprils, red Aprils, green Aprils, black Aprils. I am April. I sing the name all day, loving the sound of it. I know people will take me seriously later in life, as April. How can they not?

I want to call my baby May but I hear them laughing. It seems a natural progression – April, then May, my baby girl growing out of me, following on from me. But I settle for Maisey which is lazy and crazy. She can decide when she is ten what she wants to be called.

We grow used to each other. At first it is difficult. I believe she doesn't know how to love me – can't love me – and I am frightened of hurting her, of doing wrong by her. She is desperately tiny, pink and wriggling, swamped by the smallest garment. I cut up a sheet of white lint and fashion a shawl, wind it tightly around her, tuck in her toes, her puny arms, fold it neatly over her delicate blond head. She gazes up at me, mummified, contented. Smiles, sucks my finger and closes her eyes. Sleeps and feeds. Sleeps and feeds. Slowly our days fall into a rhythm and love lies quiet between us, solidly growing. Mama. That name will come.

My mother dies today; I am five. She stumbles off the pavement into a busy street. Her sister, walking beside her, rushes to pull her to her feet. Their handbags gape for a moment on the rain-soaked tarmac; shocked leather screams. A wagon turns a corner and cannot stop.. cannot stop. They die together while I play musical chairs at a party. No-one comes to collect me. A policeman lets me ride beside him in his car. A woman in a blue coat sits in the back, not speaking. She brings me to Mrs Ladyman who writes me into the book. I decide I don't like my name.

They are always counting. Our heads as we file down the corridor, our hands at morning inspection, our shoes for six o'clock polishing. Black lace-ups which we wear everywhere, which are kept heeled and soled for the next girl coming up.

We are like the numbers printed in long straight lines on a page, on a wall in the entrance, in the hall queuing for dinner, for a seat on the bus to school, to the sea, and home to our tidy grey beds. We share cupboards with no locks. Everything we own is stored in there: facecloth, winter vest, Sunday blouse. Letters are opened, taken out of their envelopes, left under our plates should any child be lucky enough to receive one. Mothers and fathers are dead but an aunt or an uncle somewhere in the world might send a letter. I never have a letter though I wait and wait. I write to myself:

Dear April,

How are you today dear? I think of you growing taller and promise to come soon to take you to tea. I will buy you a party frock, pink lace or blue velvet. You can choose .. maybe we'll take both. And patent shoes with a small heel and a buckle. Meanwhile here is a new comb for your hair and a black ribbon.

Love till next time,

Uncle A.

My eyes prick with tears when stupidly I look inside. Of course nothing is there. The envelope is a used one I took from the dustbin. It has Gas Board written on the back. I think about pretending my

uncle works for the gas board.. he dashes off letters to me in his lunch hour. But it's too much bother to invent such an uncle, so I place the letter in the brown envelope and push them to the back of the cupboard. Being oldest and tallest mine is the top shelf. Suzie's is the one below. Her things have gone with her to foster parents. She could be adopted before she is 12. Usually the little ones go. They don't come back. Secretly I hope the couple won't want to keep her. I try to hate Suzie but I can't. Why doesn't she send just a note? Why? Because she has forgotten me.

I am in the fury room for the first time. I've seen children marched there kicking up a fuss. Everyone knows what happens inside. It's a place where furies must burn themselves out. After one minute the child is made to stand on a stool, lonely in the middle of the room, its hands on its head. There is no other furniture, no pictures on the walls, no windows. The door, locked from the outside, has a peephole – staff takes turns to peep every ten minutes. If the child is not perfectly straight and quiet after the first peep an extra ten minutes is added. After a second peep, another ten. The child soon learns to stand, counting its fury.

I hate sums – I don't dare say it. Hate is a word not allowed. Today I let it out. I HATE SUZIE. I HATE SUZIE. The words shout themselves out like a poem in the dinner hall, her empty chair next to mine. Jennifer finds a letter under her plate. It sets me off. My voice seems to shock everyone as it shocks me, shouting out on its own. I am a fire engine with its bell clanging. Miss Pringle grabs my arm and brings me, half running, to the fury room door.

'I'm surprised at you.' She uses my old name and I yell, 'I am April,' but she won't say it. 'Go on, in there.' She waits while I climb up on the stool. She has to lift my hands on to my head. They won't find their own way. My voice still shouts in my head. April sounds ugly now.

I am counting the minutes with my mind. Seven more till one of them peeps. Miss Shaw looks in and adds ten because I am not straight enough. Shoulders back. Eyes front. Feet together. Hands on head. These are the rules, we all know them. Even people who have never seen inside the fury room.

Stories spin round the dorm after a bad day like this. The furious child lies face down on the pillow, fingers plugging her ears when they start. The cruel whispers:

Shoulders back

Eyes front

Feet together

Hands on head

In our dorm Jennifer begins the chant. The rest follow, afraid to defy her. Too glad they are not the child with its fingers in its ears after a fury. Tonight it will be me. I am thinking of ways to blot out the chanting when my bladder empties itself over my feet.

'For goodness sake, child. Take a hold on yourself.' It's Miss Pringle lifting me down. A new shame.

Maisey builds a tower on the rug. Actually it's a carpet tile she kneels on. Hollow plastic blocks topple soundlessly. She creases her face in a cry. I stack them up again in the wrong order – blue, yellow, pink instead of pink, yellow, blue. She knows and kicks down the new tower. I think how clever she is becoming. Together we build pink, yellow, blue. The blue is a dark shade and I feel it should be at its base. It should lend more weight I explain without reason. The pink, as the paler shade, should be on top. Maisey believes I am too stupid for words. The blocks are equally light; all are flimsy. She is right of course. I let my imagination get the better of me. I swoop down on my clever baby who squeals in delighted fear. I lie on the bed and stand her on my stomach. She tramples me with feather-feet .. treads me .. stamping .. bouncing. I arch my back and blow like a giant. She topples down hard on my thighs. She laughs, surprised. 'Again,' she demands, trying to stand. She regains her balance. 'Again.' I arch my back and blow like a giant. We play this new game for hours.

There she is, the life crumpled out of her. I take the papery shape and smooth it out on the table, open the book and slot her back into her place on the page from which I tore her. She fits perfectly. I

close the book and slip it on a low shelf in the library, a flat sleeping child waiting to be coloured in. I always resisted that.

The library consists of three wooden shelves mounted on a narrow end wall. There is a bible and a Concise Oxford dictionary. I have never seen anyone reach for either. Story books range from Moby Dick to Mills and Boon romances. Pages are tattered; covers are pocked with cigarette burns. I can't bear this and trace the scars with my fingers, in a vain hope of healing them.

I prefer the children's books on the bottom shelf: fairy stories with colour illustrations. These are worn from pleasure; faded colour and crumpled corners. Childlike crayon messages printed on the white back page where someone is learning to write. Perhaps to read a new life for themselves. I take the book to my room.

Marion is a hefty woman who knits. Clicking needles scratch stitches the width of her girth. Her knitting growing into colourful bands, stripes or patches. In a surprisingly short time Marion wears the new sweater, its pieces now sewn-up and pressed. I come to believe she has an army of elves who finish the garments while she sleeps. Marion is not a housemother. She dresses cut knees and blows noses. She touches the parts of children's bodies in need of attention – I had never seen her put her arms around a whole person until the night of my dream.

I am enjoying the freedom of a tantrum, legs kicking, arms waving from the floor. I turn up the volume, summoning two shadowy figures into my line of vision. The rug is firm under my back. My head thumps down against it, but they stay in the near-distance. Bulky silhouettes looming. Parents maybe. I do not see their faces. Then swiftly I am plucked from my bed and held. I bury my face against Marion's purple knitting. My hot cheek satisfied with stocking-stitch burns, I cry into her wide sleeve.

Being John Doe by Rosie Garland

Ask them about shaving; about cars. Dissolve your afternoons in the company of fathers, sons. Observe the way they grip their mugs of tea.

Touch the muscle of their arms. Elbow your way into a life stripped of subcutaneous fat, how small and brave that feels against

the grinding edge of the world. Deny yourself softness, questions, the pleasurable quilt of women's conversations. Fill up seats

on buses. Let your legs trail into the aisle; note your confusion when people can't get past. Surround yourself

with the noisy isolation of weekend bars that spill onto the roadway. Be a white line on the tarmac. Straight. Featureless. Interrupted.

Photography by Peter Crompton



How To Weave Time by Anwen Lewis

Puff Rib

I've had to push things back again
Off the to do shelf of my mind
Filed in the daydream drawer
To sort later

Patience

The virtue I find most unattainable
Sits boldly at my breakfast table

An uninvited guest
Makes himself at home
For an unknown length of stay

There's nothing in the fridge to feed him
Save soured mother's milk and nothing eggs
He suckles in a feeding frenzy

Settling down for a snooze, stretching out
Filling my space, trying to get through the housework
I trip over his sprawling legs

Gradually as he settles in
Puffing on an old cheroot
I grow accustomed to his pungent smell
And the pace he places dominantly
On the present

Whip Stitch

everything is in a mess
the house, garden, my head
how to tackle the cleaning and sorting
now the dust has settled

the house fairly straightforward
there are cleaning products, dusters and mops
every nook and cranny has been scoured before
I just need time to revisit them all

the garden is a little more awkward
but I've all the right tools for the mending the fence
I can tackle nature's onslaught with chemicals or brute force
and make time to sow the seeds I'll eat next season

my head, however has unfathomable depths
impossible for any needles to pick clean
it's all knotted up between past, present and future
a need to unwind to one state of mind
and whip a neat stitch between nature and nurture

On Heaven And Hell By Dave Morgan

What if Hitler had repented on his death bed?
What if he did his bird in purgatory and was soon to be released?
What if you'd led a blameless life
And you've found yourself sitting next to him,
On that long bench that's just outside the pearly gates?

What if all the Jews he murdered,
What if they, I don't know how to say this, err,
Unfortunately went to hell?
I know it's not entirely their fault,
But it's a fact, they're just not Christians, are they?

What if the Moslems, with due respect for Jesus as a man,
What if they offered some kind of time-share arrangement
In a spirit of brotherhood?
Our men could spend, say, a fortnight each year among their heavenly hours,
And they could come over at weekends, to have a Guinness and learn to play the harp.

What if there's a knock at the door, and in blissful ignorance,
You invite in the blasphemy squad?
What if after scouring your book case for incriminating evidence
They whisk you inside,
And charge you with having thoughts, thoughts that could inspire religious intolerance?

Let Sleeping Dogmas Lie by Mat Turner

Cain and Abel is a stupid story.
Adam and Eve's two sons were farmers.
Cain worked the soil while Abel kept flocks.

Offering the fruits of their labours to God,
Cain's grain was rejected but Abel's
Freshly slaughtered lamb was most welcome.

But why did God favour meat over vegetables,
Butchery over bagels? Perhaps the Old Testament
Monotheistic Patriarch was on the Atkins Diet.

That would explain why he was always so angry,
Suffering from constipation, bad breath
And not allowed to eat any kind of bread.

Cable and Rib Stitch

If I can't feel the rhythm of a poem
The muse that knits the ravelled sleeve of care
I will be silenced, never warmed by knowing
The croak of toad, fish song nor wing beat air
This lack of music fails most keen with mammals
Distance deafens roars from mighty prides
I've trapped myself with me in mirrored panel
Pictured as the perfect wounded child
I must find love to shatter this illusion
For myself, imperfect and enfeebled
Connect the time and tides of my undoing
To wear the sleeve, I first must lift the needle
*The mirrored me, or me I know not which
Will weave the cabled ribbing of my stitch*

Dominic Berry

Solid With Stardust

Mother and rising son
alone.
Thatcher's Britain dawning.
It's a witch hunt.
Mum is single minded.
She will protect,
with not even a broom stick
to call her sword.
Me, I'm a baby goblin.
Warm blooded reptile
with a lion's tail.

Those who were friends
would now watch us burn,
watching, whispering
“Dirty girl.”
“Yeah,” She smiles back.

I marvel Mum's strength,
solid with stardust.
Woman with power
beyond comprehension.
Shows me life's sparks.
Dark, mystic arts.
Lizards and butterflies
ink dance her skin.
Flower fairies leap in
bedraggled glamour.
Eyes speak of wardrobes
that all lead to Narnia.
Sweet and sour truths,
brewed by midnight,
candle light, cauldron deep.

I want to be a witch's familiar,
mewing black cat wrapped
tight round Mum's ankles,
because she is proud
when the good people come down,
crucifixes in hand,
preparing our bonfire.

If she had died, then she would have been human

but I know
she is super natural.
Love will lead me,
spellbound.

They Walk Slow

Crawling confidence
Like mumbling tractors.
Faces ploughed barren.
Furrowed scowls.
No trust in these wrinkles,
Only suspicion.
Boot soles
Mucky with cow shit
And tradition.
I hear them grunt
“Queers should be shot.”

This farmyard sleeps
With one eye open.

Littering hills
With threats and rumours,
Curdling beauty,
They walk slow,
Slapping chunks of wood
In their open fists.

John Fairhurst – Joys Of Spring by John Togher

Just as the buds are sprouting our man picks up a guitar, forms a melody, a loving melody that shimmers in the new sun with the twittering of birds singing their dawn chorus in the background and a slight breeze blowing the player's curls. He moves a quick hand to move the hair from his eyes, his other hand still working the strings. Sitting here in this moment, he is organic; grass, soil, earth, nature, flesh, bone, marrow, muscle. Sparking off his own creativity, taking the blues back to the homeland, the country of origin where a thousand hearts were broken and a thousand songs were sang. This is where it all started, the dust and pollen seeping through body and mind carrying the originators' technique and intent and shaping it in his own way. But there's a threat of rain in the air. He can smell it. And so the percussion starts, chains rattle and a danger presents itself to our man. He's on the run, looking over his shoulder as he struggles over a flaming copperland of a landscape. But friends are here to help and a new refrain chimes in to the rescue. It rings out support, we are here for you, if you should ever need us, we'll come running, no questions asked.

As the night falls, a lonely yet comforting call is heard. Darkness surrounds so a fire is made. Wood burning giving off a reassuring heat. But whose eyes are those watching in the trees? Our man speeds up his playing as anxiety grows, a dizzying pace and a rhythm that palpitates. Just to get through the night would be a saving grace as he ups and dances manically to the music round and round he throws himself jumping through the fire, burning the soles of his feet, his soul dancing inside braying for escape from this Earth, this place, this moment, this moment, this moment then... our man collapses, breathless, in a heap and sleeps.

Dawn breaks again and our man lulls himself from slumber. It's a Technicolor morning of magicians and he is inspired yet again by the beauty surround. He plucks out a new melody, a new tune of splendour and completes a run through before an idea of the joys of spring explodes inside him like a burst of a flower bud. He sits once again amongst the birds' chorus of the dawn, matching, through his nibbled and gnarled fingers, their calls. He is once again back amongst the pure sugar of the morning. A drum joins him as he builds up to an ecstasy of music, reverberating with nature through song and composition. Our man strums his way to epiphany with the euphoria and rapturous Joys of Spring.

Horses Die by Richard Barrett

man had to be rescued after trying to
save a horse, from the river Irwell
on the Mark Addy terrace, newspaper headlines
were being composed as the incident occurred
the blue-grey blur of the descending figure,
breaking the surface of the water, intending
to save the horse,

though what was he thinking?

Scarecrows by Carol Falaki

One is on the hill, another in the field, alone, arms stretched eyes staring.

“Scarecrows”, my mum says. I don't like them. I close the curtains.

“Can they move?” “No” “Why are they there?” “To scare the birds.” “How did they get there?” “Finish your cereal; we must go into town for supplies.”

There is a gap between curtain and window. The birds are not frightened of the scarecrow in the field.

Mum puts on her coat and scarf. She says a long prayer to the crucifix then crosses her heart with holy water.

“Put your scarf over your mouth and don't touch anyone or anything,” she says.

“Where's daddy?” “Out”

In town there are scarecrows in the street

“Daddy” I shout, but mum pulls me back. “It's just a scarecrow in your dad's old clothes.”

We go home and listen to the radio.

“Mum, what is a deadly virus?”

Cello in a Corridor by Dorothy Nelson

Mellow notes haunt passages
and curl like plumes of whirling smoke
to slide along pipes, seep beneath doors
to where
silent in the canteen
we sit with curried lamb
strip lighting and bleached walls

to where

mellow notes haunt passages
and curl like plumes of whirling smoke
to slide along pipes, seep beneath doors
to where
silent in the canteen
we sit with the remains
of curried lamb,
strip lighting and bleached walls

to where

mellow notes haunt passages
and curl like plumes of whirling smoke
to slide along pipes, seep beneath doors
to where
silent in the canteen
we sit with
strip lighting and bleached walls

Instrumental Sex by John G Hall

She hit me with five soft bars
then burned her fingers on fire
up and down my ivory spine.

The sex of sax was
never in any question,
our open notes played
by intense non-playing.

The flat waves jumping up
into far off mountain blues,
then I listened to her listening
and ear against ear we played.

It Does What It Says On The Can by Susan Plover

As Kate wandered blearily into the kitchen, she caught the final moments of the shipping forecast. She had never quite understood Steve's morbid fascination with all things maritime, as the only traces of a nautical bent was an out of date dingy puncture repair kit and the locked bathroom door each evening as he played, at length with his tugboat. Cupping her hands round a mug of strong black coffee, she vowed they should never again "do lunch" at Wetherspoons. The fatal combination of the curry club and a mid-day happy hour had wreaked their revenge, resulting in her falling into a slavering coma on the couch, only to be wakened by the bungalow door slamming as Steve left for an AA meeting at the local church hall.

He had attended meetings religiously for as long as she'd known him, despite being a fully paid up Methodist who never touched a drop. He insisted they were such a good crowd that after his first visit, confusing it with the support group for sex addicts, he didn't have the heart to tell them the truth and to be fair their Christmas parties or festive benders as he more accurately referred to them, were legend to observe. As the radio droned on Kate picked out the words Silverlodge Residential Home and was immediately galvanised into attention.

Thora had only been a resident for three weeks, but already all manner of stories had been circulating around the village and Kate feared that her anarchistic avante garde tendencies were at the root of the current troubles. Thora was returning to her old ways, of that Kate had was in no doubt, cringing at the charismatic way that she could get a cult following in no time. She had often mentally compared her mother to a genetically engineered cross between Germaine Greer, Hitler and Mother Theresa.

At some stage soon Kate would have to come clean and tell her that she was in fact a permanent resident at Silver lodge and not a temporary stay.

Looking back guiltily, it was the only way that they could get rid of her. The neighbours had drawn up a petition and any day she had expected them to storm the bungalow with lit torches. Finally she had admitted to herself that she could no longer cope with her living in the green house especially as the neighbours took offence at her naturist stance and after all, it was January. Slumping onto the couch in total despair she listened, open mouthed as the voice on the radio echoed her worst fears.

This is Andy Withers, undercover reporter extraordinaire for RADIO 4 AGE CONCERN FORUM Special, live from the laurel bushes in the grounds of The Silver lodge home for retired gentlefolk. In the wake of the recent sex scandals, we venture behind closed doors to ask the question on everybody's lips - do we really know what the elderly are getting up to?

Remember, you heard it here first. OK listeners, we are going in.

I'm doing my special Masonic knock, tip off; otherwise we wouldn't have a hope in - HELL'S DENTURES! Crafty old Buggers; they've electrified the door knob. Never mind, there is more than one way of skinning a cat. We'll try the side entrance, hopefully they will be so....PRE-OCCUPIED that we may be able to have a peek indoors through the French windows and catch them at it! BINGO!

If this doesn't make the front pages, I'll eat my hat, which for all of you not listening in colour is a rather rakish deerstalker. They don't call me the man of 1,000 faces of radio for nothing I digress.

It is as I had hoped. The tables are groaning under the weight of the Bacchanalian bounty, the Werthers originals are piled high on silver platters, the Bailey's and Milk stout is flowing, as are the catheters, no doubt. There is a sense of latent anticipation and a whiff of Deep Heat in the air. I think we might just have arrived in time, as they appear to be waiting for a delivery.

Hang on, here comes the ring leader- the notorious Thora Baxter, and she's carrying- oh yes, nailed it.

Kate held her breath as the reporter gained momentum, sounding like David Attenborough, breathless and boggle eyed on a porn location.

I can see a tray full of cans of... of WD 40! Innocent enough, you might think....

A few quick squirts on the stair liftsthe odd sprinkle on a troublesome hip joint, a surreptitious dab behind the ear- that's how it starts....or so I'm reliably informed...

What I cannot understand, listeners, is how this humble household product has risen to the ranks of a Columbian delicacy amongst our more senior members of society. Allegedly, no pensioners' party is complete without it, resulting in games of strip twister, binge drinking, sexual proclivities and a huge rise in admissions to local A & E WARDS. The police cannot keep up with issuing senior ASBOS, the streets round here after 7 pm are deserted and teenagers are afraid to venture out as gangs of hooded senior citizens roam in packs, committing mindless acts of vandalism and taunting abuse at anyone under the age of 60!

Not satisfied with controlling the streets, they have hacked onto the internet with adverts offering a cornucopia of remedies for the romantically dysfunctional. Bombarding innocent Ebayers with anatomically enhanced pop ups and offers of WD60 PLUS, the new special strength product aimed at a certain niche market.

As the radio reporter warms worryingly to his subject Kate tried to dismiss the mental picture of an ancient pop up .She is transported back in time to Pontins Holiday camp, it is 1958 and the unforgettable experience of having to be removed rapidly from Harry Corbett's lap clutching her once treasured Sooty puppet. Still the reporter droned on....

Local hardware shops are shutting their doors and B & Q looks like a scene from "DAY OF The Living Dead!" every isle filled with marauding sex crazed sexagenarians high as kites. Oh my Godfathers, I've been spotted!

The smart word on the street is that WD40 abuse has now reached epidemic proportions and that anyone lucky enough to own an original can, should either hide it from elderly relatives or put it on E BAY! This has been your host Andy Withers, reporting live, about to run for dear life. Don't forget to tune in next week for an exposé on senior citizen speed dating.

Kate switched off the radio and headed straight for the whisky bottle she had hidden in the pantry smiling at the can of WD40 near the gas meter. It was only a matter of time before her mother would be thrown out of Silver Lodge and yet again she considered her options. There really should be a place where middle aged people with elderly relatives could go, like a safe house principle. Either that or the government should help to give them a change of identity. Perhaps she would try again for a bank loan, only this time she would not make the foolish mistake of telling the bank manager that she needed the cash in a hurry to hire a hit man to top her mother.

"Oh no," she muttered to herself, as the whisky burnt her throat, she would be much more crafty and pretend it was for a one way ticket to Switzerland to visit the Last Resort hotel, famed for it's luxury assisted suicide breaks.

Photography by Simon Clarke



www.simonrobertclarke.co.uk

Everybody Wants To Be Famous Don't They? by Pete Crompton

Go on you swine's
Give me my fifteen minutes
My Andy Warhol mine!
Go on BBC
ITV channel four
Go on push
For the floor filling fifteen minutes
Of me
Anything
Obscure
A killing spree
A hugging Eco warrior tree
Anything
For fifteen minutes
Jade the Goodie got it
Why cant I
Please be famous
Please be someone
I'm on TV
Therefore exist
The glass god tube
Turned plastic LCD
But it's still TV
They are watching
You are watching
I am watching
I am something
Somebody
Notice me
It's needs to be
it must be
it shall be
somehow
Me me me me me me me me me me me
shallow
Me me me me me me me me me me me
shall be me
TV
Documentary
News, soap
Notice me
I need to exist
I am disease
I am film
I am plastic forty five
a rock star
resort
I am the drastic measure
Channel 5
Luke and Goss
an insignificant piece of candy floss
consumed
a channel hopping inhalation
of fumes high on the desire of fame

More plus one remote control game
where will I land
stabbing at buttons
gagging for attention
TV gimme gimme gimme
telly tubby
I'm losing the plot
a telly tubby a telly tubby
fat on my sofa
flicking fuck up I wanna be something
Channel 4 yesterday news + one hour
Cbeebie
Sky
Dave channel nine
32, 78 forty five
More four five point 2 six 9
Channel
Animals
Attenborough
Darwin
I exist you truckers
Turn the camera
And the spotlight
Grab the onlooker's attention
Deficit
Disorder
Law and order
Poll tax riot
News feature
Anything
Just get me on TV
My Andy, Dave mike TV
Charlie chocolate
Factory
A story
A Jackanory book
Of my life
I cannot wait for the arbitrary
It can only end in a killing spree
A college campus notice
Me
Shotgun hell
Or a car chase
Head case
Fuck up in Bermuda shorts

Oh god
All they remembered was my Bermuda shorts!
I was nothing
A no one

A stupid dream.

Bone Tales by Ricardo Reis

1

A bone on the Atlantic shoreline
washed up, picked up, polished,
then clothed with flesh, a bloody kiss
to give life again, movement

on the wild Atlantic shore.

The sea is always watching.
The inshore wind, the leather of whale-skin,
the glittering innards among pebble and sand.
the ebb and flow, the sun and cloud.

The tease and cold-shoulder he thought
he had perfected smiles over his shoulder
at you as he hugs life,.

2

The dark had gone from the night

it was a sky bright as hailstones
grinding together. The food he ate
was grey, water black, his shadow
stood away from him at every angle.

He ate and ate to find something with colour
like taste had.

Then vomited darkness.

He ran and ran away from that place –
the empty sky inside him -
the thoughts that lit up just darkness –
he ran and ran from them.

Maternal Streak By Sarah Crowther

You should have seen this girl
Half naked on a wintry night
I bet her mother didn't let her out the house
Looking such a sight.

Tottering down the street
Skinny flesh in lamp lit glow
Where had she been? Where was she going?
I really didn't know.

So I pulled over in my car
It was the decent thing to do
Wound down the window and offered a lift
Well I'm a mother too.

Her skirt road up on her skinny thighs
"Don't you have a coat to keep you warm?"
And she tutted, yes she tutted
And looked at me with scorn.

So there she was this rapist dream
Ungrateful of my 4 x 4
A child with painted piss hole eyes
Aspiring little whore.

To tut at me when all I did was ask if she had a coat.
Well you should have seen her face
When I took my knife and slit her throat.

Thank heavens for the travel rug
It saved another steam clean bill
And wrapped in that she looked quiet sweet,
Much younger and so still.

So she was my first but not my last,
I saw it as mission,
We all have a place in life,
Mine cleansing the social condition.

And guilt? No guilt,
Don't be absurd
I should win a prize
I'll save your children from cheap white trash,
All flesh and piss hole eyes.

The Fool Who Ate The Gruel by John Togher

Last night I slept like a log.
Like a log taken from the arse
of the corpse of Marilyn Monroe,
and kept on a satin pillow
in a shiny glass display case
in a museum of Fetish Bazaars.

This morning I awoke and felt like a dog.
I felt like the Greek dog Cerberus,
with three swaying heads
a serpent's tail of menace
a lion's claw of words
and a mangled mane of snakes.
I felt like Cerberus, guarding
the Hades Gate to normality.
To say the least I was a little confused.

But after a drink or three I sang like a frog.
I sang like a frog in the great McCartney Choir,
then drowned my sorrows in a puddle of spawn
singing all the while
I'm just a pawn
I'm just a pawn
I'm just a pawn
I'm just a tiny pretty manipulated pawn.

Every part of me has its own little door.
I'd love to let you in,
but I'm afraid you wouldn't like
the holes I keep in my socks
or the false name I stitched
in my underwear.
But, at least a man on a passing horse
wouldn't look twice my way.

Nevertheless, at the end of the parade
I'll be the one in the wooden clogs
dancing amongst the pigeons,
dodging the marching Mariachi bands
forever to be acknowledged
As the fool who ate the gruel
As the fool who ate the gruel.

The Fool Who Ate The Gruel by Jane Fairhurst

