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#UNTITLED EIGHT

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24 Hour Playtex Party People

Matt Hamilton

- Whit the fuck.....
- What?
- Right, well, even leaving aside your frankly legendary lack of interaction with the ladies in the bedchamber, you must realise that all is not as it may be...
- Leaving aside the colour comparison pertaining to the darkness of pots and kettles of yir *last* statement, surely even you must have seen a girdle before?
- Oh yes, yes Ah have. Just no on a thirty five year auld plasterer fae Camelon.
- Ah'm an interior design technician, no a plasterer.
- My apologies. You're an interior design technician, fae Camelon, wearing what appears, even to the untrained eye, to be your Gran's underwear.
- Oh aye...
- Hawd on. Bolt the gate. "Oh aye" covers a few 'hings. A missed round in the boozier or recollecting a long forgotten goal at the fitba.
The sudden appearance of your best pal, in your living room at ten in the morning, modelling wummin's undergear however; that'll need a bit mair than an "Oh aye". Is this a cry for help?
- It's Big Wyllie Thompson's fault.
- Hawd on again. Return of hawd on, if you will. Wyllie Thompson? *Deid* Wyllie Thompson? Crashed-his-brand-new-brief-through-the-pet-shop-windae Wyllie Thompson? Short of him stipulating in his will you begin cross dressing as a mark of respect, Ah fail to see the connection.
- Got a phone call last night fae ma auld Aunt Irene, you know the one in that care home up the Braes?
- Is she no the wan that got expelled for fighting her fellow inmates?
- Naw, naw, naw. That wis ma Aunt Sheila. Difference of opinion over the ownership of an artificial leg. Irene was the one that got moved for setting fire to her bed when she dropped her bedtime cigar.
- Oh aye.
- Seemingly, according to Aunt Irene, Ah'm something distant to Wyllie. Cousin ae a cousin or something and Ah've drawn the short straw and got tae take her tae the funeral.

- Ah cannae believe you're related tae that zoo ae a man. He makes some ae your lot look normal.
- But he's family and attendance is both compulsory and tradition.
- She'll be efter a shot ae the steak pie and complementary wee half raised aloft to the deceased.
- Aye. *Wheatsheaf*. Significant monies behind the bar, according to one of her nurse's daughters who does the occasional shift when required. Zero oors.
- Nice touch fae the pet shop.
- So you're her plus one.
- Exactly.
- All very sweet and cosy, but we seem no nearer to answering the *Mystery of The Crossdressing Camelon Waster*.
- Oh aye. Turns oot the funeral is this morning. So Ah go to put on ma suit.
- You've got a suit?
- Course a have. Every man should maintain a neat yet classy wardrobe.
- Indeed. Ah've just never seen you in a suit, that's all.
- Havnae really wore it since the wedding...
- Whit, your wedding?
- Aye.
- You've been divorced fifteen years.
- Aye. It's a nice suit though.
- Ah'm sure it is. If you were in some reenactment society doing weddings fae the punk era.
- So Ah goes to put it on this morning and for some reason the troosers have shrunk. Must be the damp in that back bedroom.
- Maybe. Or twenty odd years of chicken madras, pints ae heavy and an aversion to the glories of physical exercise.
- Anyways, widnae fasten. Close but nae cigar like. So Ah phoned ma maw and she gave me a loan ae this.
- Jesus wept, It's quite the... *contraption*.
- It was ma Gran's best seemingly. Got her to Spain and back on the bus. *Playtex*. Twenty four hour. Reinforced industrial elastic cross supports. Triple stitched gusset. Hauds in aw they bits that are desperately fighting to get oot.
- Very fetching.
- Thanks. So aye, noo ma troosers fit perfectly. Ah'm just going up to get Aunt Irene in a taxi.
- Excellent. But if you don't mind me pushing open the windae of fascination and exercising my curiosity a fraction further, why are you

currently standing in my living room in just a shirt, a black tie and
Granny's finest steel plated boil washed smalls?

- Well, Ah put on everything in the hoose, and the corset, well it pushed my
insides aw oor the place. Displaced the normal set of my gut.

Forced things about. Directed them towards the fire doors. You know?

- You needed a shite.

- Aye.

- And you chose to darken my door for this event why?

- Logistics.

- Eh?

- My wee Granny's girdle is perfect. Just the job. But therein lies the
problem. Ah cannae get my troosers to fasten without it on. But once Ah put
it on, Ah cannae bend 'er ae pull them up again.

Ah'm like a wee tin sodger.

- Ah dinnae like the direction this has headed.

- Ah need you to pull up ma drawers for me.

- Seriously?

- Seriously.

- Dear God. Ok, lets get it er with and then never speak of it again.

- Thanks, you're a real pal.

- Aye aye. Right, step into the legs. Open them up a bit... That's it. Right,
Ah'll help pull them up... Oh Jesus...

- Whit?

- Ah touched something.

- It's awright, Ah never felt it.

- Aye but Ah did. Right, that's them up.

- Cheers, got them..

- Sorted.

- Sorted.

- Listen, after the funeral, if you're, y'know, needing a wee haun getting
them off...

- Eh, aye, aye, Ah might..

How To Transfer From A Wheelchair To A Toilet

Lindsay Oliver

There are several methods.
All require upper body strength
good balance and coordination.
It is important to remember
to lock your wheelchair.
To position your feet carefully
and take your time.

This may prove challenging
for those with overactive bladders.

Stop, this is not a poem
There is no poetry in toilet transfers.
Who can find a rhyme for toilet
without taking the piss.
I'm too afraid to try.
I'm scared
I might spoil it or soil it.

I can't find the right rhythm to plant
my feet, to swing my hips.
To connect my flesh to that too small
too hard, too cold, too slippery throne.

That Chunty, that Lavvy, that Crapper
that Earth closet, that Outhouse, that Pisser
that Bog, that Thunderbox, that Water Closet
that Khazi, that Can, that Honey bucket, that John
that newly inaccessible porcelain pinnacle.

The Towers

Chris Boyland

High above the town,
at the end of our garden.
Away in the distance,
at the bottom of our street,
stand The Ghost Towers.

Nobody talks about them
but we make a daily obeisance
to their looming presence which
presses on us, like a blood clot
on the spine.

Families light candles in
the mornings and at mealtimes,
and place them on household
altars, with other charms and
relics - citizenship papers,
coins and notes, bank statements
and letters from the DWP - to
ward off the long shadow, the
darkness at the door.

Sometimes the charms protect us
often they do not
and we wake
in the morning to see that
our neighbour's house is
empty.
That our friend is not
there to meet us on the way
to school, that someone else we
know is gone - to live
in The Ghost Towers.

I see the spectral tenants of the towers
around the town,
on the streets and in the parks -
transparent hands outstretched,
calling out, reaching out, to passers by,
who mostly ignore them.
After a while, they fade and fall
between the cracks
and no-one sees them anymore.

Except at night, when I wake up,
in my shaking bed, to the cold, bright light
shining through the window
I look out and there -
in the distance, there -
at the bottom of the garden,
stand The Ghost Towers,
white as salt-bleached bone,

Every window lit up with an electric
imprecation, every window
with a face pressed against the glass
and I know, though I can't
hear them, that every face has
a voice and every voice is
calling –

'Are we not your brothers, Oh
my brother?'
'Are we not your sisters, Oh
my sister?'
'Are we not your mothers, Oh
my daughter?'
'Are we not your fathers, Oh
my son?'

And, in the morning,
they are gone.

America

Carolyn Paterson

America / you scare the fuck out of me

You are run by tea-drinking religious molly-coddlers
Riddled with taboo, trigger-happy toddlers
A Causer and creator of global strife
A president who wears more fake tan than his wife

America/ you scare the fuck out of me

America I worship at the feet of your internet pages
And Youtube and Instagram teenage-sages
Your landscape enchants from tree-top to seed
And I devour all art and music you bleed

But America/ you scare the fuck out of me

The persecuted world fills your cragged shores
And distant lands seep from your people's pores
But you rip out your heritage with a right-wing grasp
And you sanitize your diversity with Republican rasp

America/ you scare the fuck out of me

Your blood-stained eagle flies
A predator in Syrian and Yemen skies
And as tensions boil and the CIA snakes coil
You'll masticate the world over water and oil

America/ you scare the fuck out of me

The people fearing the Earth's rebirth into particles
Predicted in click-bait Independent articles
Are building revolution into their bones
And welcoming true liberty into their homes

And America, / we will scare the fuck out of you

Ladybird Ladybird

Elissa Soave

Running (noun) 1. The action or movement of a runner; 2. The action of managing something.

The grey still of a Glasgow pre-dawn. She had to get up this early to run while Jamie was sleeping. She didn't mind though. She often ran along the path that bordered the Clyde, reflecting on the unacknowledged beauty of Glasgow, a city famed for its whisky and brutality, whilst the reality of its tranquil splendour remained unknown to outsiders: the perfect symmetry of the trees swaying above the water and their image reflected on the glass; the galvanizing properties of light rain; the soft grass beneath her feet.

*We expected better, Tess
Squandered talents
Why can't you be more like
You must take responsibility*

fist into bedroom wall
draw back fist
bruise, slit, maim
run beetle run

Many people hated the very idea of running, Tess knew. Put off by the prospect of getting out there in the autumn chill, not to mention the sweat, the bunions, the niggling irritation of the inevitable stitch. But for Tess, all that was nothing when set against the solitude, the flow, and finally, the euphoria that a long run entailed. This was the weird and wonderful world of the runner, lost in the magic, and on a good day, the thrill of the mechanical, unstoppable rhythm of legs working like pistons, with the heart thudding and pounding in its effort to keep it all on track.

It was a strange circumstance that without the *Lycra*, the trainers, and the clear intent to 'exercise', adults running looked dangerous. After all, what could be more innocent than the craving for an antidote for too much time spent in heated offices, cooled-down cars and artificial light? Tess revelled in the natural backdrop to her running—the weeping wound of sunrise; plants with branches like misshapen limbs; and creeping ladybirds who, despite appearances to the contrary, are ferocious predators.

To her great delight, Jamie too was beginning to show an aptitude for sport. He still bore his uncomplicated 12-year-old's body—a little podgy round the tummy and no defined muscle to speak of on his chest or arms. Despite that, Tess could see that his developing lean and sinewy frame would, in time, be the perfect instrument for long-distance running. Not that she needed another reason to be proud of him. It seemed fantastic now that the grand inferno of her love for her son had been sparked from such damp kindling. She'd never discussed the ambivalence of her feelings for him in those initial nine months: the other mothers had all seemed so sure of their desire, but perhaps they too had felt something of the hesitancy and vacillation she had felt. What had she done? Was it too late to get rid of it? How she cherished this bump! How would she cope with a baby? The love. How dare this thing take over her body and feed off her? The love the love.

She'd been surprised initially by the lack of instant recognition she felt when she first held him. She'd expected an immediate rush of ecstasy on meeting this flesh of her flesh incarnate. They'd wrapped him up in layers of white wool (swaddling they called it; he'd looked mummified) and placed him in a little glass box by her bed. She couldn't sleep, despite the 20-hour labour. She'd lain awake all night, staring at him, assessing their compatibility, and finally satisfied with what she saw. She'd never even been close to a baby before, and could hardly believe they'd left him alone with her.

In fact, she was more alone than she would have chosen. Jamie's father had turned out also to be a runner—of the distinctly unsporting type, singing the words of family values to the melody of man about town. She and Jamie had managed though. Finally an attentive student, she had read and researched, made notes and measured out milk. Nothing and everything in her life so far had prepared her for this. She would not damage him.

Growing up, Jamie had always been a timid child. At toddlers' groups, the other children had taken his books and knocked over his towers, painstakingly built with only yellow blocks. He'd never fought back despite Tess's encouragement that he should. It had been a low-level worry, always in the background but in the last two years of primary school, it had been taken to another level. His face would be smashed against the playground fence, his hair pulled and his trousers sprayed with Irn Bru so that it looked like he'd wet himself, he would be held on the ground by a group of boys so that he couldn't get up, cheek pressed to concrete so that he'd come home with a welt like a sword. They'd take his chocolate, his money, and on one occasion, even his shoes. Incident after incident, with Tess sitting outside the head teacher's office so often, she felt any hope she had for resolving the situation drain from her like blood from one of Jamie's wounds.

Always in the background of each incident, there was one name. Lewis Thornley. Tess recognized that every year in every school had a child like this. Generally not the best-looking, seldom the cleverest, yet this child was the top dog—the one whose gang you longed to join, and whose cryptic rules you had nightmares about transgressing. In Jamie’s school, it was Lewis who took the prize. Rarely getting his hands dirty himself, nevertheless he was the capo, exercising near-absolute control over his subordinates who executed the hits.

Tess had seen Lewis’s mother at a school open day. An adequately pretty sort of woman, seemingly far too agreeable to have spawned Beelzebub himself. No, you must be mistaken, she’d said, Lewis is a lovely boy, he’s in the top stream in Maths. Before she was pulled away by her scowling, six-foot husband who refused to engage.

So, the way she saw it, there was no other option. It took her a little time to figure out his routines, where he’d be, when, and with whom, but after all, when manoeuvring a 12-year-old boy into a position of lonely vulnerability is your top aim in life, how hard could it be? He’d given one small gasp of surprise before she covered his face (somehow softer and smaller than she’d anticipated) and pushed him to the sheltered spot near the derelict fountain.

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>Did you know</i> | fist into face |
| <i>Under the Law of the Twelve Tables</i> | draw back fist |
| <i>The dismemberment of a debtor’s body</i> | smash, slip, volley |
| <i>Is permitted by his joint creditors</i> | jaw-crashing finale |

Well, you are in debt Lewis Thornley. I am the agent you owe for the damage to my prized possession and payback is required. Interest is payable for the tears, loneliness, pain and blood of the principal. We are your creditors.

Of course she acknowledged that most people would argue that any adult force on a child is, without caveat, unacceptable. But. (And there was no one to whom she could say this)—she found that she had enjoyed the sensation of the soft flesh of this child, this particular child, undulating under her fists, coming apart and bleeding. These are the things she remembered—the blood mixed with the child’s tears, ribbons of mucus striped with red covering his cheeks and chin, the ineffectual pounding of his little hands against her chest, his Adam’s apple, that ugly chunk of bony cartilage wrapped round the larynx, bobbing up and down as he gulped and swallowed

his fear, the look of complete incomprehension in his half-shut eyes—this stranger was an adult, an *adult*.

Tess told herself that Lewis was the bully, she had simply reacted as any Mother might. Bullying was the snake that slithered from schools to colleges, from Ikea kitchens to offices in prime locations. It poisoned relations between schoolfellows and bedfellows, university fellows and fellow workers. It posed an immediate threat to the well-being of the meek. She had skinned the snake, and mounted its head on a stick. She had run the show, and she could almost convince herself that what she had done was not wrong.

But afterwards, as he lay there curled up like a trembling foal, seemingly still alive, she turned and ran from the scene, guilty as Nixon. She ran and ran as though the running itself was all that mattered. There was no finishing line, no goal, no end in sight. She could smell herself as she ran, perspiration seeping through her blood-stained running vest, repulsive as the dirty incarnation of her shame.

Séance

Stephen Watt

Since the trickery of an uncle's coin
produced from the back of my small ears,
I've had my doubts.

Whoever conjured this hailstorm,
this erroneous tempest,
practised not in execution chambers
but in earnest, obtained an HND in Hogwarts.

This gypsy wagon convulses
with repulsive odours
transmitted from a hypothetical afterlife.

She raps the table, flapping
beefy limbs, unstable, feral,
swings a dead crow
above her head
like a vortex for the devil to emerge.

(If I filmed this, it would go viral).

Then a trumpet can be heard.
A dust cloth from a coffin
wafts a smog, white gas, smoke
until a black mass
holds his neglected, vapid face
in immaculate likeness,
mouthing his voiceless cautions.

She smiles, allows the fraud
to swing like gallows, then forgotten
and in the trapdoor of my hands,
she beckons this cherished spirit
to knock once for yes, twice for no,

buffeting her ankles off the chair legs
for answers, and uses Double A batteries
to make the crystal ball glow.

Burn The Censors

David Forrest

Dear Despot, I began, before backspacing over it. Too emotive, too direct. Too grandiose a title.

Dear Anti- no. He hates being called that.

Department of Infernal Affairs. No.

To Whom It May Concern. Yes.

Enter.

I resign.

You can dock my wages or refuse to give me a reference. I know I run the risk that you will crucify me in the media. So go on. Tell the world I'm a terrorist or a paedophile or a disgruntled civil servant. It doesn't matter. I am gone. I cannot work for you another day.

I have carried out every instruction you have given me. Written every letter, doctored every file. I have used children and pestilence and bombs but what you ask of me now is wrong. Our partnership is over. I ask only that you consider my service to date and allow us to part ways amicably.

Perhaps because I am a man, I did not take issue with your obvious hatred of women. When you instructed me to condemn, I created products to flatter. I filled every billboard and web page in the world with the message that beauty is worth. I created magazines that wrote the rest for me, filled with adverts and reviews that never told what I was selling. Every purchase reinforced our message. I worked and worked, coming up with new ideas every day like self-harm, eating disorders and so-called sexual revolution. I made sure the men believed it first. Never did I rest. I wrote the gender pay gap into law, filling the gaps between the statutes with un-repealable silence. And it worked. Nation after nation exchanged their glory for nakedness and covered their nakedness with shame. Then feminism came and you blamed me for that.

Don't think I've forgotten about the wars. Those bloody wars. So much paperwork. How difficult they were to devise. Target the poor, you said. Children if you can. And I could. I forced people to believe their very survival

depended upon providing me with weapons to kill them with. Forced, I only showed them the faces of their brothers and sisters, they spat in them themselves. I gave them the chance of brotherhood, they supplied the fear. That's what I love about free will. The way it turns science into art.

You always told me I was being too obvious; that I would be found out eventually. I wasn't. I used their own frailty against them and always covered my tracks. I used intermediaries. Bankers, politicians, clergymen, celebrities – not you obviously, I would never use you. They really can't see it, you know. They always think the corruption is isolated to just one group. How easy that makes it to simply move on to the next. No, you cannot fault me. In everything I have done I have always been a credit to the service.

All this to say nothing of my work on mental illness, censorship, masculinity and the Middle East. Or on democracy. I doubt I will live to receive a pension but I fail to see how I could have done anything more. Except this.

You asked me to vote for you. I won't do it. I won't. I will happily proclaim to you the finer points of my work. I am proud of my great skill, proud of the results I have achieved. As a profession, certainly, but as a choice, a way of life? Do you expect me to close my eyes and call it true? I will not be made a fool of. I will not build my own prison, step inside and give to you the key.

I know I haven't long left. I know this letter will get to you eventually. That's why I'm not sending it to you.

I'm sending it to them.

Eleven Jackdaws, Six Pigeons

Suzanne Egerton

It's morning, and I take the oblong plastic box of bird seed out, just an ordinary box, sixteen centimetres by eleven I think, and five deep, although I haven't measured it, I'm only guessing. It was nearly empty yesterday, so I put more in, but I spilt some and had to pick it up, and I did, every speck. Gran would be pleased if she could see it.

Four handfuls and a pinch. I would like to know how much that weighed or even how many seeds that was, but I don't think that it would be the same every time. Then I go in and watch from the window. Lots of birds come all at once, eleven jackdaws and six pigeons first of all. They keep moving about and changing places but I know the number's right. I like the look of jackdaws with their long legs and pale blue eyes. When they want to get at some of the seed, one will do a sort of run at another, and make it go away with a few bouncing hops. Not really fighting. There was a fight once, when one got another one on its back and started pecking, lots of flapping about and squawking. I thought the top jackdaw might peck the other one's eyes out, but Gran saw and knocked on the window and they all flew away. It would have been interesting to see what happened in the end, though.

Now I count fourteen jackdaws – no, that's five, six, flown off, so eight left. More pigeons, though, eight now, so that's eight of each. One of the pigeons is mostly white, and there's a speckled one, a dark one which I thought was a jackdaw at first, and one with stripes on its wings like Adidas trainers, but only two stripes, not three. There's a wood pigeon under the bush. It's really fat, and sort of pinkish, with white bands on its neck. People eat wood pigeons, Gran said. She used to live in the country.

The birds are eating like mad. Gran said it gives me a sense of enormous wellbeing, like the song. The song's called Parklife. I don't think it's really a song, because it's got talking in it, but Gran just said "You'll do", when I said that.

They've had their breakfast now, and I'm hungry, it's my turn. The cereal's all gone, even Gran's corn flakes. I ate them. I got the toaster out six days ago, that was on Tuesday, and today is Monday. I put the bread in and put the handle down, but it wouldn't stay, and the bread didn't get toasted, so I had to have it cold. I wanted Nutella on it but it's not easy without a knife – Gran keeps them in a special drawer – so I used a spoon, but the bread kept

breaking in bits. I found a way of doing it, though, I had a bite of bread, then a spoon of Nutella. Now all the Nutella's gone, too. I don't know what to have.

Gran's bedroom door is locked and I'm not allowed in. I go up three times every day and bang and shout loudly, so she knows I'm all right. Two days ago it was Saturday, and I wanted her to tell me why the milk didn't taste nice. She always says I have to drink milk every day, but I won't if it's like this. Tea is horrible too because the kettle won't make the water hot, and then it tastes nasty, even when I thought of putting some Nutella in it, before it was all gone, and I shouted on Gran to tell me what to do but she didn't answer.

Perhaps I'll try bird food. The birds love it, so it must be all right. The factories use seeds to make bread Gran says, so seeds are really just like bread. I can do that until she comes down. I've just remembered, she used to read me a story about birds following a line of seeds, so I can try that too, and if the big wood pigeon comes in I can eat it. I don't know how to kill pigeons, and I don't know what to do about the feathers, but perhaps Gran will come down before that happens.

I'm getting a bit fed up, though.

I wonder if she'll come down today.

Self Checkout

Angela Robb

Tinned tomatoes in the breid aisle? Aye, very good mate. Don't you worry, now. I'll jist put those back for ye. Cause obviously that's whit I'm here for, eh? This get-up o mine, the black tie and the white shirt and the bloody epaulettes, for God's sake, obviously all o' that tells ye I'm here tae tidy up efter ye.

Well naw mate. Fraid not.

Whit's it say on ma tag? Security. See, I'm the cops around here. And what I've got on ma hands is nothin short of a crime wave. I'm sick and tired of it, so I'm afraid yer wave's aboot tae break, mate. I'm gaunae figure oot who ye are, and trust me, once I've had a word in yer ear you are not going to want to come back into my supermarket.

Right then, that's that sortit: tinned tomatoes back where they belong. Which is with aw the other fuckin tinned tomatoes, in case ye were wonderin.

Ye think ye're a phantom, don't ye? Slippin between the shelves, unseen, leavin a trail o' chaos behind ye. Well I'll figure oot who ye are, I can promise ye that.

I know, for example, that you are probably the last person that anybody who is not a security guard would suspect.

Like you, right there.

Young lassie wi a pushchair, lookin at pink baby clothes. A more innocent-looking scene you will not find. But lemme guess: ye'd love tae put aw thae tins and packets back in their proper places, but ye're far too busy, far too stressed oot, wi the baby an all. Aye, noo ye've got a wean, the hail world should be helpin ye, bendin ower backwards for ye, even as they're divin oot the wey o yer pushchair.

Note, pushchair: it's no meant tae be a fuckin battering ram. An yet I bet folk part for ye like the bloody Red Sea.

Right, that's it. We're havin a wee chat, you and me.

Although ...

Nae basket, nae trolley. Nae tins and packets the day, then. Jist pink baby clothes.

Try an no drop them on the floor, mind.

'Here, let me get that for ye.'

No that I'm bendin ower backwards, but I'm auld-fashioned enough tae think we should aw help each other oot. Plus, I don't like merchandise lyin on the floor.

There might hae been a wee bit o' genuine gratitude in yer smile there. Mibbe I imagined it.

Awright then, good job. First suspect eliminated. Who else is lookin—

Aw, ye're kiddin me. A tin o' best-value own-brand ham among the cat food. Bit of a joker are ye, mate? Tryin tae tell us whit ye think o' best-value tinned ham? Ye're full o' pish. A finer gelatinous reformed meat product you will not find. I have it on ma piece most days.

Right then, so who's loiterin around the pet food.

Oh, aye. Ripped jeans (but no in the name o' fashion), hair like a midden, shifty wee eyes. Your card is marked, sir. Ye're certainly no above eatin tinned ham, so let me just review ma earlier diagnosis. Pissed aff wi yer lot in life; been dealt a shitty haund; cannae be arsed puttin tins back in their proper places. Why should ye? The world's no done you any favours, so fair's fair.

Well we've aw been doon on wir luck, pal. Ye dinnae indulge in self-pity. Ye're part o this society, ye cannae jist opt oot.

Is that gourmet cat food ye're lookin at? Studying the label in detail, as well. Pâté with duck. Awright, well at least ye hivnae resigned Kitty tae the same fate ye've chosen for yerself. He's gettin the pâté. And you're gettin ... the entire Quorn product line, by the look o yer basket.

Well I don't mind admitting, I did not have you down as a vegetarian, or someone who gives a shit aboot saturated fat or the carbon footprint o yer grub or anything like that. On the other hand, I don't like tae judge a book by its cover.

Unless, of course, the cover has SANCTIMONIOUS PEST printit aw ower it in big bold letters. Aye, I'm lookin at you son, in the cardigan and the skinny trews and the nerdy glesses, the posh protestor full o yer ain self-righteousness. Barely twinty and convinced whit the world really needs is a pseudo-intellectual like yerself tae fix it. Aye, you and yer campus colleagues will save the environment yit, but in the meantime ye thought ye'd jist get the messages in and gie two fingers to the corporate monster at the same time. Shift stuff oot o' place, wee bit o' chaos, cause ye're a non-conformist an aw that. Pathetic. If ye don't like it here, there's an organic wholefoods rip-off emporium two miles west wi yer name on it.

I see ye, lookin at me oot the corner o' yer eye. No sae clever efter aw, then. There's better weys tae hide yer guilt than gawkin at the security guard.

'Excuse me, can you tell me where the coffee is?'

Aha.

'Coffee? Ye mean the fairly traded kind? Is it the kind that comes as wee beans?'

Noo ye're giein me a glaikit look. You have no idea this is detective work.

'Just any kind ...'

'Next aisle down, on the right.'

'Cheers.'

Awright, so one of us is confused. At least one of us, cause I know I am.

Right, I'm headin for the freezers, that's where I need to concentrate ma efforts. Scene o aw the worst misdemeanours. Whit takes yer fancy in the frozen foods department, my phantom friend? That's where I'll find what no longer does.

Is it peas? Naw? Fish fingers? How about some nice chips tae go along wi yer cat food sandwich—

Oh, nice one. Very good. Cheddar cheese left tae bask in the icy climes o the Yorkshire pud compartment.

Fridge food helpfully frozen. That's ma fuckin favourite, that is.

That cannot be returned to the shelf, mate. You have written it off. You have removed it from sale without paying for it.

That is THEFT.

Right, who have we got – freezer aisle's quiet. But how's about you, in the pinstripes and high heels, yammering away on yer shiny phone. I bet puttin things back in their proper place is beneath ye, inn't it? Aye, your time's too precious to waste on basic common decency, some lesser mortal can take care o aw that shite.

I ken your type, oh aye. Parkin yer fancy motor ower two spaces when the car park's full. You're awright Jack, tae hell wi everyone else, eh?

Jist watch there. Thae choc ices are fair crammed in on the top shelf, the hail lot's about tae—

Aye. Jist like that.

'Don't you worry, I'll put those back for ye.'

'Oh, thank you. I'm so sorry, it's my fault for trying to wheech one out while I'm holding my phone.'

Says she as she returns two boxes to the stack in the cabinet, wi mathematical precision.

'That's quite all right.'

Ye look pretty affable actually, close up.

Well that's that. I've covered the whole store, mate, so I must

concede: mibbe ye've given me the slip this time. But I ken ye'll be back.

Actually, there is one aisle I might hae missed. I have a strong urge tae go there right now. Ye never know whit ye might find, in the liquor aisle.

So who do we have?

Jist yerself, pal?

Aye, I see ye up there, on ma shiny new TV screen, the aw-seein eye fae on high.

That a hauf-bottle o single malt disappearin intae yer pocket there?

Naw. Cannae be.

Cause you're awright mate.

Anybody can see that, fae yer black tie and white shirt, and yer epaulettes.

Night Shift

Owen O'Donnell

I've had no escape from work since Lucy started at the office last year. She's there when I go to the office and she's in my head when I go to sleep. She came in as a cost-efficient replacement to the Manager who was previously in the post, it kept our team in a job. I was glad. I've no qualifications and all unskilled work is now automated, I would struggle. If it weren't for my young family I'd rather be destitute.

I work with the Membership and General Administration team for the *Royal College of Assorted Human Professions*. I oversee membership queries and applications along with administering the various courses legislated to keep professions updated. It's tedious, repetitive and utterly disheartening work, but yet it is work. Since automation came into effect - unskilled and semi skilled labour was rendered obsolete at a stroke.

Before being introduced to the college, Lucy worked at other large organisations where similar admin teams had been under threat of automation and saved countless jobs.

Last month, the College arranged for sleeping pods to be installed in the building. It's completely optional, but everybody knows that Lucy will single out the people who don't use them.

We can't complain to Human Resources because she manages their team too. All complaints are found in her favour and you're marked as a troublemaker; people usually disappear a few weeks after this happens.

On top of our working hours, she has full remote access to our computers. Every email sent and received. Every phone call logged and transcribed. Every word document typed and deleted. Every spreadsheet edited. Every website visited and length of visit noted. All collated and read back to us at our weekly appraisal where every input is questioned and graded against an efficiency score out of 10.

'The average worker scores a 7 every week. Improve or be replaced.'

She told me this in her first week. I've consistently scored 8s since that day. Since then I've decided to spend every free moment getting away from work. Those moments are decreasing all the time.

The world economy crashed. The multinational organisations collectively shat themselves and ruthlessly streamlined their costs. The New Centrist Coalition government enthusiastically implemented a programme of automation with the Prime Minister proudly announcing;

"The working man and woman need not ever get their hands dirty again. The *Worker Droid* will build our roads, our bridges and our homes. Those who would spend the most energetic hours of their days toiling under the drudgery of manual labour will now be free to pursue higher endeavours.

"Make no mistake, our country will face hardship over the coming years and the working men and women will remember calamitous errors made under previous governments and their handling of modernisation. This government will not repeat the mistakes of the past which saw thousands of people lose their livelihoods with no period of adjustment or retraining for most of those people. You will not be left behind."

Of course, the economy continued to shrink and a motion of no confidence in the government passed. The NCC held onto power propped up by going into coalition with the Libertarian Party. They would go on to put millions on the employment scrap heap.

Trade unionists who resisted the large scale automation reforms were smeared as unpatriotic luddites. Unscrupulous union figures would accept peerages or honorary positions within Westminster in exchange for agitating and causing divisions within the rank and file members.

With the power of the unions neutralised, the government would force through policies that introduced driverless public transport, fully self service supermarkets and drone postmen. They were then re-elected on a promise to eliminate 'soft labour' as the next stage of legislated automation:

"Every day, thousands of programmers are creating software droids that will be able to fulfil the duties of the average administrative worker. We hope to leave a legacy which leads us on the path to a fully automated workforce, leaving the public free to pursue interests outwith waged labour."

I knew that my redundancy notice was imminent, all that I hoped for was a helpful pay off which would buy me some time to sign on for Retraining Allowance. We were called into an all staff meeting where teary faced colleagues were braced for the bad news.

All department Managers were told that their services were no longer required. However, the Chief Executive informed us that a software droid had been designed to replace middle management and that they will keep the bulk of the workforce for the time being.

He then introduced a shiny faced programmer called Gordon Gilchrist from a company called *Lunaris* who addressed us. Easily in his mid-30s he had a plump youthful face and medium length slicked back brown hair. He was dressed in skinny jeans and a lumberjack shirt which were both too tight for him. He spoke with a plummy, faux Anglo-American accent which suggested a life spent in the comfortable life of programming.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to confirm that despite industry wide panic about automation and its impact on your immediate future - we have developed a software that will enable you to continue working here at a reduced cost to the College and in a way which allows you to work from home.”

“A lot of us already work from home!” A voice from the audience cried.

“I expected someone to say that!” Gordon said with a self congratulatory grin. “What we at *Lunaris* aim for is to make your work easy enough to do in your sleep!

The programmer reached into a brown satchel slung over his shoulder and produced what looked like a motorcycle helmet. Holding the helmet he explained:

“Our patented brainwave measuring technology can be worn to bed. The *DreamCap* can tell when a person is entering a specific stage of REM sleep where lucid dreams are possible.”

He then adjusted the visor which suddenly glowed bright white:

“At this point the goggles will receive an electronic message from the cap that recognises that you are in a dream-like state. You will notice the light but it will not wake you up, this serves as a signal that you will be able to control your dreams.”

‘How does this keep you in a job?’ I can already hear you asking. The cap is wirelessly connected to your work computer. Any input you can think of will be replicated on the screen.

“The technology was developed when designing a computer interface to be used by a woman who was paralysed from the neck down. The cap enabled her to continue work but she kept falling asleep while working from her hospital bed. We observed that her brain activity still allowed the mouse to move around the screen and type letters on an open word document.”

I was enraptured to still have a job at that moment. Living costs had continued to rise despite the decrease in workforce and I was not equipped to survive on the welfare state’s ragged remains following a generation of privatisation.

Gilchrist set the helmet down, pulled out a cable from his satchel and connected it to a laptop on the table in front of him.

“We at *Lunaris* pride ourselves on our ability to craft software with a personality, *Humanware*, if you will. Capable of speaking in over 60 languages and over 2000 regional dialects, we have finally solved the eternal struggle of computers understanding Scottish accents”

He paused for a laugh which never came, coughed, and continued.

“This software will be installed on all of your computers and assume the role as Manager across all departments. You will all also receive a *DreamCap* as standard issue if you do decide to work sleep-shifts; trust me you’ll all want to do it eventually.”

After Gilchrist’s presentation had concluded I went back to the office to meet the boss.

The Programming team had installed our Manager while we were at the meeting, our computers were now equipped with headpieces and microphones.

After a five minute booting up period, *Lunaris'* logo appeared on my screen, a green orb with *Lunaris* written in a stylish italic font. The application emitted three tones and a female voice with a clipped Edinburgh accent spoke:

“Good morning Mr Daniels, my name is Lucy. It’s nice to meet you. I hope that we will work well together. I’ll be here to monitor you and provide feedback when required.”

Craw

Tom Gillespie

Wi wur up the auld Carron Brig Road, yae know near the Dows ferm, huvvin wan ae' oor usual barneys. Ah swear tae goad, ivry time we get in the caur, we end up shoutin 'n swearin it wan anithir. Wur is predictable is git oot, so wae ur. At least we wur in the middle a naewhere so naebdae could hear the shite that wis comin oot a' his mooth.

Onywaeps, so there wi ur in the howls a' nothin gi' in it laldy, 'n' him drivin through the snaw like a bampot possessed, when somethin' stoats aff the windae.

Jesus Christ, it wis that loud Ah thoat a tree hid come doon oan tap ae us. He slams oan the brakes, and the caur skiteit right acroas the road. We goat a fair fright, so we did. We'd nae idea whit the hell it wis, but there wis a big crack acroas the windscreen. Ah telt him tae go and hiv a look... and you know whit he sayed? He sayed: "It's snawin". "It's snawin"... for fuck's sake, peel me a bloody grape. Ah thumped him again, and efter anither roon a' huffin and puffin, he pits his coat oan. He wis pure ragin so he wis, but Ah mean tae say, ye cannny jist drive awa' withoot knowing whit ye've jist hit. Wur human beins. Wur no monsturs.

Ah cloacked him in the mirror, lumberin up the road like a big bloody doh-heed. Then the next thing he stoaps by a wee lump in the snaw. He wis there fir ages, jist bloody starin at whitever it wis. Whit in God's name wis he daein? Ah wis about tae get oot 'n' gie him a herd kick up the erse, when he stoats the lump wae his fit, an horror a' horrors, the thing sterts movin an flappin about. Next thing, he's jumpin up and doon oan it, huvvin a right go. He wis pure dementit. But yi know whit he did next? Ah couldny believe whit ah wis seein. He kneels doon and picks the bloody thing up, swings it oor his heed 'n' lobs it intae a hedge it the side ae the road. The man's awa', ta ta, so he is. When he gets back in the caur, he jist sits there staring oot the windae, and when ah ask him whit it wis, he gies me the strangest look, 'n' says:

"Craw."

Then he starts the caur, turns it roon, an we drive hame without anithir word between us.

Ye know, when ah think about it, we never spoke about that night again, an ahm no sure why ahm even thinking about it the noo. Ah s'pose Ah'm aye remindit by that crack in the winscreen that he refused to hiv repair. Or mebbe it's every time ah cloack that funny look oan his face, the same wan he wis wearing efter he pit that poor burd oot its misery, ah feel a wee bite in ma belly,

like sherp teeth ... or a beak.

Yer Hair

A.G. Kayman

Tina and Me walked doon tae the college, chattin about whaur tae go oan oor first hoalidy as a couple. We arrived a wee bit early, so decided tae hit the canteen fur a couple o' rolls n slaughtered pig afore class.

An there she wis sittin oan hur ain at a table in the coarner;
Angie Carter.

We didnae say oanyhin about it as we stood in the queue. Voices merged tae make white noise, punctuated by the clatter o' plates an cutlery. The smell o' the salty, stodgy scan made ma belly rumble.

Once we hud oor rolls, we heided ower tae whaur Angie wis. One o' oor ither classmates, Shauna, hud turned up, sippin Tizer.

'Awrite,' Ah said, clunkin doon ma tray. 'How's it goin?'

Bit afore Angie or Shauna hud a chance tae respond, Tina piped in:
'Aw, Angie, yer hair! It's lovely!'

Ah looked at Shauna. Hur expression telt me we wurr oan the same page.

'Awwww, thanks, Tina,' said Angie, runnin hur hands through it. 'Ah wisnae really that shair about it tae be honest.'

'Well Ah hink it really suits ye,' Tina smiled. 'S'guid tae huv a chyngie noo an again, isn't it?'

Ah looked at Shauna again.

'Aye, Ah supose it is,' Angie said, lookin doon at hur coffee. 'An this is definitely a chyngie, that's fur sure.'

...

'How youse gettin oan wi the media project?' Ah said, addressin baith Shauna an Angie, while fiddlin wi wan o' thae broon sauce sachets ye need a fuckin hacksaw tae git intae.

'Aye, awrite,' Angie replied. 'We managed tae find some decent stuff yisturday, thanks tae the librarian showin us how tae yaise thae database hings properly.'

'Nice one,' Ah said, lookin directly at Angie fur the first time. 'Ah'll need tae git ma heid roond them tae tae be honest. Hink Ah'll see if Ah kin get a wee appointment sorted fur later oan.' Ah turned tae Tina. 'Whit dae ye reckon, babes?'

'Aye,' said Tina, through a moothfu o' bread n links.

We blethered about oor projects fur a wee while, then left fur class. When it came tae the mornin break, Ah asked Tina if she fancied comin wi me tae the library tae book the appointment fur the databases tutorial.

‘Aye, awrite,’ she said, an we made oor wey doon the corridor.

‘See whit you said this mornin?’ Ah said.

‘About the project?’ she replied, as we got intae the lift.

‘Naw, no about the project.’ The doors closed. ‘About Angie Carter’s hair.’

‘Whit about it?’

‘Ye telt hur it’s lovely? Lovely? Ye huv goat eyes, right? She looks like Chesney fuckin Hawkes.’

‘Awrite, calm doon,’ she said, squeezin ma airm. ‘Ah dinnae actually hink it’s lovely, Ah jist said that tae make hur feel better.’

Felt ma fuckin neck sweat. ‘So whit ye tellin me? Ye lied tae hur?’

‘Naw, well, it’s jist,’ Tina faltered, ‘. . . it’s mair thit . . . Ah couldnae . . . eh . . .’

‘So whit dae ye actually hink o it then?’

She rolled hur eyes. ‘It’s terrible,’ she said. ‘Ah mean, why wid she dae that? She hud beautiful hair, an noo . . . well, noo she jist looks like a boy.’

The lift doors pinged open. ‘Look, Ah’ll jist go tae the library masel, Ah hink,’ Ah said, hert poundin ma chist. ‘Ah’ll see ye back at the class, awrite?’

Durin oor nixt class, Ah struggled tae concentrate. Kept hinkin about aw the nice hings Tina hud said about me. That shirt really suits ye. Ah like ye wi a wee bit o’ stubble. Ah love a guid blether wi yer mam. Ye’re so handsome in yer kilt. Ah hink yer pals urr really nice.

Ah fancied hur cos Ah thought she wis different fae ither lassies. Wis nivur sure if it wis the best idea goin oot wi somebody oan the same course, bit thur wis loads o’ chemistry an she seemed like such a genuine lassie; guid laugh; guid taste in music; easy goin; great kisser tae.

Efter the class, maist o’ us went tae the canteen fur lunch. Ah wid eywis sit nixt tae Tina, bit Ah needed a wee bit o’ space, jist tae sort oot ma heid, so Ah sat acroass the table an doon a bit, nixt tae Gary an Jake. Made the excuse Ah wanted tae talk about fitba.

Ah looked ower at hur at one point. Fuck’s sake, is that whit she eywis looks like when she chews?

Shackled

Eilidh G Clark

I am separated. Segregated –

An inch away from vertical blinds,
And the switch to turn off the Sky.
To shake away the World Wide Web
Of fabricated lies.

I am separated. Segregated –

A mile from the world outside,
Hidden behind grey vertical blinds.
Dry from the rain,
Fighting the pain of oppression.

I am separated. And bleeding from the outside in.

I am separated. Segregated –

Peeking through artificial lines,
Looking for the ordinary kind,
The crowds of mankind,
Unveiled and unmasked, separate and free

Instead of being shackled to the reign,
Of her majesty - To the so-called face, of a modern race.
Of dumbed down, media choked,
Free folk. I am chained.

I am separated. Segregated –

Pained by a society -
Rich in lies and Tory piety, flying toward
Mars in dream boats -
In hopes of a better land.

Patrol

Samuel Best

The drizzle was doing little to dispel the crowds. They'd been gathering all afternoon and there was talk of a mounting tension. Not a tension with anybody, mind, just a feeling in the air that something was brewing. Something that was looking for an excuse to explode. A crackle in the air. Electricity. And not the nice kind that powers your telly or the kind that makes the radio play your favourite songs. This is the kind of electricity that zaps kids as they run across train tracks, that jolts from the sky and fries anyone stuck outside in the storm. The kind of electricity that exists to hurt. I hit refresh and my screen whirrs as it loads a new batch of posts.

The Stewards arriving in increasing numbers, policing their own supporters. The national press snapping photos, competing with a growing crowd of onlookers holding their phones in the air for a better picture. The kind of morbid curiosity that has drivers slowing at accidents, hoping to see something grisly. Even the spectators are secretly hopeful something will kick off, just so they can say they were there, they saw it happen all around them. Someone posts that the songs being sung are racist; that there are symbols and slogans on flags, on t-shirts, tattooed on flesh, that would make the SS balk, but that's nothing new anymore. If anything, being shocked by it is.

The worst part is, we saw it coming. For *years* we'd seen a shift, not only in politics, but in society, to the extremes. There were no more loony fringe groups or ridiculed newspapers spouting off about immigrants and the NHS anymore: there were Prime Ministers, Party Leaders, your family, friends and neighbours who you'd always thought wouldn't stand for that kind of thing. Something had crept across the country, stealing into houses at night like a fog, until the boxes being ticked on ballot papers weren't for centre-right or centre-left anymore, but for the extreme fringe alone (under the innocent-as-children name of patriotism, of course). The Stewards began to patrol the streets. Riots were quashed with gunshots. Detainment centres filled. The air rang with Rule, Britannia!

So now, as I show my screen to Jill, and she takes her eyes off the road for a second to skim over the posts, we don't have much to say. The conversations have all been had. Today, on the first anniversary of the Great

Election of British Union, there are no words left. Maybe back then there had been a glimmer of hope, but no, that creeping mist had sucked its way under enough doors that they'd won a strong majority. Opposition was instantly banned. ID cards were issued. Checkpoints sectioned our cities.

Eventually, her eyes back on the road, Jill speaks up.

'You sure about living alone?'

'Yeah,' I say. 'I know it's hardly great timing, but I'll be fine.'

'Because the offer still stands for you to move in with me and Nick.'

'I know, and I'm really grateful, but I'd only be moving out later on at some point anyway. And I'm not sure I could deal with hearing you two mad shaggers through the wall every night.'

Jill laughs and punches my arm kind of hard.

'It's not every night,' she says, swinging the van onto Cumbernauld Road.

'Sometimes it's in the mornings too.'

We slow as the traffic backs up, and I poke my head out of the window to see if I can get a better look.

'Christ, it's like this for miles,' I say.

The sky is growing darker but the rain has stopped, and I can hear shouting, singing, chanting, some way off in the distance. I feel Jill looking at me so I turn and pull a weak smile out of the bag.

'Don't worry,' I say, 'the flat is miles away from anything that's going to happen tonight.'

'Just as long as you are too,' she says. 'Don't go getting all Curious Writer on me and heading out looking for inspiration.'

'Here!' I protest. 'When have I ever gotten myself hurt when I've been doing research? Eh? Zero times, I think you'll find.'

'Zero times, maybe,' Jill says, pulling the van off the main road and up a street so heavily lined with cars it's essentially one lane. I feel her suck a breath through her teeth as the van squeezes past wing-mirrors. 'But it's the countless times you almost got yourself hurt that I was thinking about.'

'I know,' I say, pointing to the next right turn. 'Don't worry, once I've got all this lot unloaded I am going to have a nice, relaxing evening of setting up my gas and electricity, informing British Union of my new address, and possibly also guzzling a pizza and a bottle of wine. No rioting for me. Sure you can't stick around?'

'I'd love to, really. Not for any of the shit stuff there but the pizza and wine does sound good. It's just with this drive up north tomorrow...'

'Sure,' I say, 'don't worry about it. And I do really appreciate you cruising this big sexy van around for me today with all you've got going on tomorrow as well. I just hope you don't hate me too much after all this driving.'

'I'm sure I can find it in my heart to forgive you,' Jill says, slowing the van, her face suddenly tripping her.

'What's up?'

She nods and I look up the hill ahead to where a group of men are stomping down towards us.

Now, I don't like to judge people on first impressions. Least of all on what they look like. That's what British Union do, after all. But a quick glance at this flag-waving, chest-beating, chant-chanting, bald-headed shower of cunts tells me these are hardly the sort of young gents likely to offer to help me move my gear. They'd maybe be more interested in establishing my blood lineage, perhaps, or quizzing me on whether my man knows I'm out of the kitchen. 'Fuck's sake,' I sigh. 'Will we ever see a day without some sort of patrol? This is hardly a rebel heartland.'

'We can dream, love. But this lot don't look like they're much for calling it a day early. Or moving out the way, for that matter.'

The van crawls closer to the stomping throng and Jill checks the central locking. As the men part, reluctantly, with glares piercing through the windshield, we begin to edge through.

'That's right,' Jill says through gritted teeth, 'get out of the fucking road.'

'Just gun the engine and squash one of them,' I suggest. 'Although I have heard that if you get their blood on you it just attracts more of them.'

'Isn't that wasps?'

'Wasps, racists, I wouldn't be happy if I found either in my attic.'

Somewhere close behind us there's a thud and then a cheer. Jill and I look into the mirrors and see one of the goons gearing up to kick the side of the van again. Jill blares the horn and he bottles it right as he's about to swing his leg. Instead, the men turn and surround the van again. Jill tries to edge us forward as one of them bounces his fist off a window. I shrink in my seat as one of them tries my door handle, and Jill revs the engine. The van is now a rattling can as all the doors are tried, fists and feet connecting with metal and surprisingly sturdy glass.

Outside, their yells all blend in and we can't make much out from the noise. Judging by the look on their twisted faces, though, they're hardly likely to be hurling startling critiques of our intellect or challenging us to a rational political debate. At one point I'm sure I hear the word 'slut', and then a little while later I hear 'lezzie' and I congratulate myself a little bit on being correct. Suddenly, a flag is unfurled and spread across our windshield, hiding the mob from view but giving us an eyeful of the British Standard, the new national flag. The words British Union are emblazoned in thick black letters, their lightning bolt logo pride of place in the centre.

'Dunno which is worse, looking at them or this,' I say but Jill doesn't laugh. After another couple of minutes of trying doors, punching bodywork, and shouting monosyllables, the men seem to be getting bored and start to head off. Jill pushes on the accelerator and the van moves with a jolt. Outside, there's a single bang and an awful scream as the Standard flag is dragged away from our windshield. We look out of the windows and spot a skinhead hobbling after his pals, trailing his precious flag behind him as he spits insults at the couple of 'kitchen-dodgers' who drove over his foot.

Invader

Paul Cowan

You look across the road and see Marius. Bucket and sponge in hand, staring at his *Saab*. Marius the invader from another country. It's seven o'clock on a Sunday morning and you stand naked, twitching the curtains. Staring at Marius. Marius the boring Polish Saab-washing Sunday morning bastard.

You watch as he kneels down at the front right wheel arch. Slowly submerging the sponge into the lukewarm soapy liquid.

You want to yank open the curtains and bang hard on the double-glazed bedroom window so Marius will look up and see you standing there.

Naked. Exposed to him and the whole Lionthorn Estate.

But you don't. Something tells you that would be a drastic mistake. Maybe get you huckled away in a police van and placed on the register.

The dirty register.

You look over your right shoulder at Kate. Lying on her front. The covers partially covering her backside. You want to imprint your right fist deep into the exposed skin, but you don't. The same something tells you not to. You might break your fingers.

The wanking hand kyboshed. Pamela and her five arthritic sisters sacked. So you squeeze out a silent but violent fart instead and bathe in your own toxic cloud.

You turn back to stare at Marius. Out of sight now at his back break light. You see his hand sticking out. He's looking at his phone. Can't be texting anyone because he's a social pariah. A job stealer. A sooker of manhoods who drives an extension of his own shrivelled smegmatic member. Maybe he's part of a paedophile ring and he's setting up a meeting. Dirty fucker. Marius the paedo.

You notice the methane has died down so you squeeze a little more out. Breathe it in again. You turn back to Kate. Kate with the tight ass. Your favourite docking station. You realise you have certain borderline eccentric issues. You also realise you're an impeccable actor. Worthy of an Oscar. A

Golden Globe. A YouTube documentary that would turn you into a forty-five-minute monster if ever your thespian mask were to slip.

You realise the entirety of your left side has gone numb standing at the window. Gawking. You feel your heart murmur. Your knees weaken and you grab onto the windowsill. Waking the dust. It aggravates your asthma and you pray for a full-on attack. Kate stirs behind you and you don't bother looking around. You hear her gentle snores and imagine her drifting back into stage five sleep. REM sleep. Your full left side has pins and needles now and your manhood twitches upwards. Towards an oblivious Marius. Normal Marius. Innocently washing his Saab on a Sunday morning before mass. Marius who lives alone.

You notice the black cat make its ritualistic Zen-like stroll across your driveway. The one you'll be reversing out of yourself in forty-five minutes. En route to the same mass as Marius. Across the good luck line generously donated by the cat. Across town to the house of God. You, the good actor. The Atheist.

You walk towards the shower. Go through your morning routine. Let the water wash away the madness. The faulty computer on your shoulders stutters into action. Flashes of Marius the invader and methane fist prints.

You enter the walk-in wardrobe. Breathe in the scent of polished wood. You take down your clerical clothing and dress yourself mindfully. Taking slow breaths. You assume your Lutheran gait and glide sedately downstairs. The morning sun shines through the small piece of holy glass adorning the front door. You adjust your priestly collar. Unlock the copper snib, which feels welcoming against your curled hand.

You hear Kate shout from upstairs. "Is that you away, honey?"
You don't bother answering. It gives you a smug sense of power not to.

You reach into your robes. Pull out a packet of Silk Cut. Place one of them between your lips. You don't light it. You hope other curtain-twitchers are looking at you as you stand there, a rogue angel, poised to light a cancer stick. You exit the drive and thank the cat for trying to balm your glasswork soul. You fallen priest. You breathing piece of carrion.



WOOPER WITH WORDS

FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH

2.30pm / COFFEE ON WOOPER

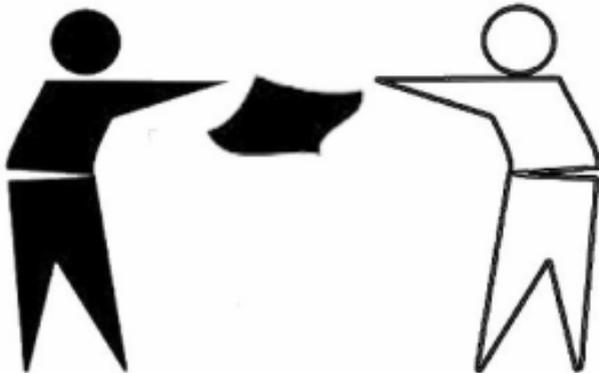
Acknowledgements

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Thanks Eddie!

Hello, I'm on a journey
once you've read me
why not pass me on
to a friend.



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