



THE NEW LUCIAD



edited by
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Miranda Solley
and **Robert Ward**

with acknowledgements to
the **Centre for New Writing**
at the **University of Leicester**

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Introduction

Hello and welcome to this, the inaugural edition of The New Luciad. Named for the University's very first student publication, a creative magazine called the Luciad which ran intermittently from 1923 to the 80's, this new publication is intended to be a showcase for the year's best literary work by Leicester students. We hope it may also prove to be a venue which gives talented writers much-needed exposure at the starts of their careers.

The response to this year's call for submissions came widely from students at all levels of study. It was also of a greater quantity, higher quality and broader variety than the editors could possibly have expected. Between G. A. Harrison's politically inflected poetry and prose, Miranda Solley's variegated first person narratives, Emma Gilbert's poetic interactions with language and history, Suzi Shimwell's reflective free verse, Richard Green's deeply modern stream-of-consciousness, Kelsi Delaney's romantic verse, and much more besides, it is impossible to summarise or even thematically order the work contained within these pages. I believe it is all, however, creative work being pursued seriously, intelligently and intensely - and work worth reading. I hope you enjoy it.

Thanks, of course, go to the University of Leicester's School of English, especially the staff at the Centre for New Writing. Thanks too to Thomas Morris and Aleksander Nitka for providing the artwork, and to those photographers whose work was offered but which we did not have space to include. Finally, gratitude goes most of all to the writers who have agreed to have their work printed in this volume, and to all those who boldly responded to the call for submissions.

- ROBERT WARD



EMMA GILBERT

PhD English

modor: wīf þe hæfþ geboren cild

This is it. This is the new world.

This is a door that swings home, backhanded,
the house collapsing behind it like a pack of cards;
but we have dream logic, here. We rebuild.

See the way it opens onto new lands, now, onto water.

Things shift. Years go by like imaginary numbers.

You look at the door, and see that it is your hand
that moves it, your feet that progress.

Remember 1990, and that flowered dress,

a bay window, and a little girl in it. The old century.

That was the old house, in which she learned to be daughter.

We built up a pyramid there, soft stones. Connections.

Mother, sister, daughter, wife, niece.

Amidst the algebra, the sums of these calculations were real.

Onward, we said. We lived on a hill that pulled at our calves
as we climbed it.

Climbed is a weak verb, misleading. The strong ones

are few, now, falling off with the years, but they are clean.

I grew, I saw, I became. See? The vowels shift,

but the stems remain the same. This is the way things are.

Mother is a root word too, Germanic, fundamental.
The sound has shifted in it, but a stem is always a stem.
Seed, stem, root, language has all of them, and yet
what are flowers? There are no flowers in grammar; no fruit.
Perhaps we are the flowers, uplifted by the stem towards the sun.

This is the new world. They have a sun here, too.
No sons. Two flowers from one stem lift their heads, and break
through.

Sea Coal

Between the Baltic and this scallop's edge
the sea births diamonds,
a carbon coastline glittering at
dawn. A sketch in graphite.

They reaped this bounty once
like summer strawberries, reiving
the morning beaches, sounding the shallows.
We combed one year for mussels and these
north coast black pearls, the flesh of stars.

Divine the source, you said. Unstone
the seam. On the Long Sands we took turns:
to dowse, to dream.

B Side

A year ago, I sat right here, and knew
that somewhere, in another county, you
were breathing: doing a crossword,
making tea; spreading the paper flat upon
your knee -- you liked to keep appraised
of world events. A year ago this very afternoon
You sat, perhaps, on the front step, in late June,
and smoked a surreptitious cigarette.
(We found them for long weeks after you died,
the empty boxes, secreted away, as if
some part of you still lingered yet.

Ridiculous, to smell the acorn-burn of a Superking Light
and think of you, and yet, I do. Several times a day.)

A year ago today, I bet you smoked
your furtive cigarettes in that old room,
altered with the decades of your breath.
Altered, too, by the stark fact of your death
still twisting like a knife behind my eyes.
We always said that everybody dies,
but in many ways, it felt as if a clause, some codicil
exempted you, the lack of you impossible, like
a sudden lack of air.

Six months, now, I have lived in a world without you in it,
the wrong side of the tape.

Amniosis

It starts with a long stretch and a short arm. I remember that much.
Brightness, then, like the dazzle of headlights on a country road,
my eyes broken open for it, my mouth, my lungs.
The water closes over my head like jaws.
The world goes hollow, muted by the weight of
panic, the chlorine burn at the back of my throat.
Above, the sun, like the twist of gold
at the eye of a marble. I'm full fathoms five,
my sharp edges bled into the noiseless suspension
of water, an amniotic siren.

I'm four. The liquid cage
is still less terrifying than the smooth bald head
of the stranger who rescues me, his face
a craggy blur as the surface world returns
in a rush of colour.

I never kicked. I remember that, too, the way
my limbs seemed safe in their aquatic cradle,
the sudden certainty that air could be done without.

I do not dream a bald-headed man to pull me out,
only the light strobing the tiled floor of the pool, the
calm blue eternity, and a needle-prick of doubt.

Saying It Wrong

The spelk began it. How I
came by it is unimportant –
as if I'd remember. The most
insignificant of slivers, it was,
but when I complained
of its presence, the office laughed
(larfed), saying, "Spelk? Spelk?"
Only from outside the bubble
can one see what lives solely
within it.

I took out a friend in my boat.
It had two syllables, which took her
by surprise. "You say
such funny things," she said, climbing in.
Nobody in these parts was whippet-quick
or looked a clip, or had bairns.

"Say it again," they said, half-delighted by
my funny Northern words. Without us,
she would be heo; English, shriek and skirt
and Beowulfless, but I was saying it wrong.

Being asked to dance that way was tiring.
I tried to swallow them down, the wrong words,
but it was like plodging through molasses and
I slipped. Pronouns stumbled over the muddy
flats of my vowels.

Mam said that'd learn us. Aelfric
said that too, the word retained, not wrong.
Our literature began with Caedmon's song
in Northumbria's kingdom, but I was
ashamed? Rubbish. Hadaway wi' ye.

Even in Oxfordshire, slivers in my fingers
are spelks. Now I name them as I pull them free.

CHARLES WHEELER
MA Modern Literature & Creative Writing

Kidnap

*"I have no name;
I am but two days old."
What shall I call thee?
"I happy am,
Joy is my name."
Sweet joy befall thee!*

Verse 1

What is growing up?

The correct answer is "hard to pin down". This is a problem you will face when you try to define something that everybody has to do, because if everybody has to do it, then everybody will have a different idea about it. There's not much you can do about it. Pick your own right answer.

To me, growing up is when you accept that you can't possibly know if everyone on the street is a good person. It's when you accept that there are infinite possible thoughts running through their heads, infinite possible atrocities in their past. Or their future. Or hey, maybe their present. Can't see under everyone's coat. That's a fact. When you come to terms with this fact, and everything it implies, you have grown up.

You deal with everything that could be wrong with everyone even when you can't see it. Accepting that anyone you see at any time could be the worst of humanity is the burden of the adult. Accepting that you at any one time could be being deceived by the most deviant minds to ever exist is something the adult human takes

in its stride. Accepting that you share the Earth with its scum is the quintessence of adulthood.

Or perhaps this is just what I want adulthood to be.

Maybe I choose this adulthood for myself. A means to an end; I treat others as I wish to be treated.

Maybe all I want is forgiveness, or just acceptance of my existence. Maybe I want people to be okay with the fact that I'm here. Maybe because, even though I've forgiven myself, I think they wouldn't do the same.

Why?

Because once, I kidnapped a child.

*Pretty joy!
Sweet joy, but two days old.
Sweet Joy I call thee:
Thou dost smile,
I sing the while;
Sweet joy befall thee!*

Verse 2

I don't even know how old he was, not now. Sometimes I think he was about twelve years old. Sometimes I think he must have been around six. And sometimes, he seems like he might have been on the brink of growing up himself.

And sometimes, I think that maybe he wasn't born at all.

However old he was, this child was not taken from a peaceful home. Oh, there were no problems with the parents. Loving to the end. The sibling, well, squabbles now and then, nothing out of the ordinary. Well, nothing out of the ordinary that made the squabbles, or anything else, any more significant. He was not scarred by anything that happened in his home. He was scarred to begin with, in

his way. But we all are. His scars are just different.

There was always war in this home. There was war between virtue and greed, between the bourgeois and the proletariat, between Holy God and the Devil himself. Wars of epic scale, wars that spanned every plane of existence. Including, on occasion, the physical.

There was peace in this home. Peace like a home should have, respite from the trials of the world. There was fairness. There was love. There was everything a child needed, if it comes to that.

But there was war. And there always would be. So I took him.

I did not rush it. This was no simple snatch. I took my time and I was careful. I gained his trust over years. His family knew me. They assumed I became acquainted with him via his school. They were not entirely incorrect.

I did not need to gain their trust. He gained it for me. He displayed to them all the benefits that knowing me brought him. They didn't like everything I taught him, but he didn't care and he showed it off anyway, all of it.

That, I suppose, is when I knew it was working.

I was careful. I did not rush. I took my time. And in time, I took him.

*My mother groan'd! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt.
Helpless, naked, piping loud;
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.*

Verse 3

His worldview became mine. Or mine his.

It is said often that children are impressionable. This is true, but not because they are empty vessels that will accept anything poured

into them. Rather, it's because they are prone to one emotion more than any other, and even more so than the adults that one sees revelling in it every day.

Vitriol. The dance of the self-righteous.

"I demand breast milk."

"That is my toy."

"I disagree with your notion of the fundamental structure of a meal."

"This television programme is entirely appropriate for my personal viewing, and your judgement of it is elitist and hints at a concealed sexual inadequacy."

And so on.

They will not accept everything. One thing they are likely to accept is a cause. I find emotionally loaded but strictly non-maudlin phrases and a vague anti-authoritarian stance help enormously. I find that an eventual goal is a very unnecessary complication. Make it not so much a clarion call, but more a vague summon to arms. Clarity isn't necessarily the enemy, but it is the hapless blabbermouth who compromises the best-laid plans.

Over years, I shaped him.

I pushed him down routes without knowing where they might end myself. This might appear to encourage escape, but I had trust in his trust of me. He may fight, but he would not run.

Inevitably, he developed aims that were unachievable. Not because of their ambitiousness, but because of their non-existence. They were not possible because they existed outside the real world. As a means of letting him learn this, I let him pursue them, and I let him get hurt by them. When they didn't deal him pain, I filled that in myself.

Over years, he became shaped.

He had bursts of the childish surge of vitriol, still. But everyone

does. His were different, of course. But he gradually began to direct them into life – ordinary, task-based, adult life. He organised bills. He cleaned. He reasoned with himself. There were flights of imagination, as there always will be. But they are controlled.

I took him. And over years, I shaped him. The wars ended, fizzling out into territorial scuffles, which in turn fizzled out into mere debates. He had, it would seem, stopped being a child.

*Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swaddling bands;
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.*

Verse 4

But in the end, I could not stop him.

Wherever I took him, he always found a way to come out. Enthusiasm. Adventure. Love. And, of course, vitriol. Wherever I took him, the child emerged.

On several occasions, it got to the point where I thought I had to kill him.

So I tried to.

I stabbed him through his heart a million times.

I sat at tables and tried to consume his corpse, a million times.

Each time, I could not penetrate.

Each time, I could not swallow.

And it crystallised the knowledge I had always had about him. All my vitriol was pointless, because he could not be killed. All my hard work was for nothing, because he could not be changed.

And the only reason I had taken him was to deny this to myself.

And so I accepted him. My child. Because he was mine. He belonged to me. Even more than he belonged to his parents. My

parents. My parents, the parents of my child.

We sit together, on the floor of the room. The floor of the universe that saw those terrible, awesome wars waged in its midst.

We sit together on the floor, and we pull out that plastic square, about 20 square inches, and we pull the ropes tight, and we slam little plastic men against each other in beautiful, crushing choreography. We go on for minutes longer than we should have. Hours. Years. Just like we used to. Just like we always should have.

And now he is accepted, is the world perfect?

As if it could ever be.

There are moments when it seems so. Resonant moments, where you touch on life, hit the notes, and you think you might have figured it out.

Then it all gets dashed, and you console yourself with being the blagger's blagger, forging a path through the world that's not so much strides and progress as it is kludges and temporary patchwork.

And below that is the rest of time, when you see the furthest and the clearest, and you know that nothing of what you present to the world is finished, or proper, or truly able. And these moments are dark. And they seem most like the truth.

And yet, it doesn't matter.

There will always be worries. But why worry, when we could play for a bit longer?

Poems: 'Infant Joy' and 'Infant Sorrow' by William Blake
from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

MIRANDA SOLLEY

BA English

Algebra

Carousel

I'm not sure quite how long I've been here. I gave the middle-aged man behind the ticket office a fifty-pound note and he just waved me through. I can see the world moving around me, or maybe I'm moving around the world. The tinny music of the carousel has been sound-tracking me for so long that I feel almost as if I don't know how my life works without it. It's like a montage. The horse I'm sitting on is cold and hard and I almost feel fused with it by now. Up and down and around. The lights are achingly bright but beyond my immediate vicinity it's dark and vast. I know it's loud out there but I can't hear it. With one hand clinging to the thick golden plaited pole that is nestled between my legs, I reach into my pocket and pull out a lighter. I lift the cigarette from behind my ear and put it lazily between my teeth as I light the end. Wisps of smoke drift off to the side and I close my eyes and imagine my surroundings in my head. It's beautiful. I'm beautiful. The world is beautiful. Smoke is beautiful. I feel a hand on my shoulder.

'You can't do that here, mate.'

I always love it when people use the word 'mate'. So passive-aggressive. I open my eyes and realise the carousel has come to a stop and the guy from behind the ticket office is standing before me glaring at the cigarette in my hand. Parents are pulling their children hurriedly from the unicorns and dolphins and carriages surrounding me, and glaring at me too. The children are looking at me with both awe and suspicion. I'm an adult, but not like their parents, and they

are probably wondering who that character is. The old person on the carousel with the cigarette.

‘Sorry. I’ll leave.’

I clamber down and wave my cigarette in the air like I’m a 60’s movie diva. I stagger off. I can’t tell if it’s because I’m drunk, or because I’ve been spinning around and around and around for I don’t even know how long and my body has forgotten what it feels like to not be moving circularly. The cigarette hand reaches out and grabs hold of the railing to steady me. My knees bend involuntarily and I pull my hand towards my lips to take another drag. I forget that this is the same hand that’s been holding me against the railing so I fall to the ground and feel embarrassed about the way that I must look to these strangers surrounding me. They’re probably telling their children of the dangers of strangers and alcohol and the unknown. The dangers of the unknown. I’m already down so I figure I might as well crawl out of the vicinity. Just shy of the barriers I feel a surge of strength and propel myself to my feet and run off into the darkness. I stand at the outskirts of the travelling circus and watch the orange glow of lights and excitement billowing off into the night sky. We’re in a field and I lay back, head cushioned on the grass, and stare into the sky. Gradually stars begin to appear, or at least I think they do. My spine shivers involuntarily and I pull at my cigarette only to discover that it’s burnt down to the butt and in my moment of animal shame I had let it burn out. I close my eyes and listen.

The grass is full of scratching sounds. I don’t know if it’s insects or just the earth moving against my ears, vibrations and movement creating noise from nothing. I lift my left arm up and bend it before my eyes and trace over the thin white lines tattooed across my forearm with my right index finger. My skin feels both smooth and raw at the same time. I feel quite at one with nature and wish that time would stand still and I could lie here on the ground in the night

sky forever. Darkness feels like forever sometimes.

Lying

I lie a lot. Some people say that lying is a symptom of insecurity. I don't think I'm insecure. It just happens. Sometimes I don't even know I'm lying until after the lie is said. Then I have to either pretend it's true, or I have to say

'Sorry. That was a lie.'

People don't like it when I say that though. They ask me

'Why did you lie?'

'I don't know. It just happened.'

'But why would you lie about that?'

'I don't know. It just happened.'

Some lies from when I was very young have become truths to me. One time I lied that I ate a whole candle. Sometimes I truly believe that I did eat a whole candle. I know there are people out there in the big wide world who think

'That girl ate a whole candle.'

Maybe they tell their friends

'Once I knew a girl who ate a whole candle.'

I didn't eat a whole candle. I might have taken a bite out of a candle once. Maybe.

When I was really young I had a dream that a flying elephant (not Dumbo) came to my house and I flew around the floors on its back and we had a lot of fun. I don't remember dreaming it. I really believed this happened to me. It just happened to me one day and ever since then I've remembered it. But I guess I know that it couldn't have really happened. I must have lied to myself really hard that day because I still kind of believe it might have happened to me.

The worst lies I do are the ones about other people. They're not bad lies or anything. They're just lies about me. I can't help myself.

Then I start to believe myself. I get confused about whether or not I'm lying.

'I like him. I think he likes me. That's why I like him.'

'Does he actually like you though?'

'Yeah. He sat next to me. Our legs touched.'

'That's ridiculous. That doesn't mean anything.'

'No. You weren't there. It meant something. I know it did.'

'Was there tension?'

'Yeah. There was a lot of tension.'

After that I began to believe my lie and then had an internal struggle about whether or not I was attracted to this person and when I sat and really thought about it I knew I wasn't. But it was fun to talk about it. It was fun to make it exciting. I think I was attracted to that.

Maybe that's why I lie. It makes my life a bit more exciting. People like my lies though; I know they do. My lies make their lives more exciting too. They get to talk about me. They get to believe things that are scandalous and outrageous even though they're totally ridiculous.

I wish I could stop lying though. It's been getting me into trouble lately.

Axolotl Eyes

You're looking down at me and your face is unmoving. Your eyes are smiling and the corners of your mouth are straining not to smile too, I can see this. I don't know what to do and I keep laughing and looking into your eyes. I think you're enjoying this. I have to tilt my head back to look at your face and I think you enjoy that too. You're waiting to see what happens even though we both know that nothing is going to happen.

I don't like standing still. I can't really do it. It's not that I think

about it, it's just that I am constantly moving around. I shuffle from one foot to the other and lean my head against the wall and then take steps forwards and backwards and stand on my tiptoes so that I'm a little bit taller and can see your face a little bit better without hurting my neck. I think I'm probably looking a little nervous and I guess I am because I don't know how to respond to you and you know that. I'm not moving because I'm nervous though, I'm moving because I can't stand still.

'Your eyes are like the axolotl.'

I think I've told you this before and now I wonder if I sound boring because I don't have anything new or interesting to say. They are like the axolotl though, I can't look away but I don't want to keep staring into them because a little part of me fears that I will get lost in them like the man did with the axolotl. I remember another time when you were looking at me like this, and he was parading around the room like a peacock and was a black hole of activity and movement and enthusiasm and I remember thinking then that, even though he was this caricature of a human being, you were more interesting with your eyes. I think that was the other time I told you that your eyes were like the axolotl.

I wonder what it must be like to look into my eyes; I wonder if my eyes are like the axolotl too. I wonder if you're worried that you're going to get lost in my eyes. I don't think you are though. I can see this. I am looking just at your eyes and I can't look away and they are pulling me into your thoughts of which there are so many. But I can see that you are looking at all of me. You can see all of my movements and my whole face from your vantage point way up high. Sometimes my eyes are so dark that you can't see where my pupil ends and my iris begins. But I know that there are flecks of green and gold because this is what I have been told. And I know that if you look really closely there is a dark ring around the edge of my iris so

that my eyes look almost as though they have been drawn in black and shaded in with brown. I think this might be why I can't look away from your eyes because they are the clear blue that you only see in shallow pools in video games. I feel that our eyes are the opposites of each other and this is why I can't stop looking.

I don't know why you are staring though.

Unknowing

I think I'm crazy sometimes. I can't relate my state of being and my actions to other people's actions and states of being. Things that I know are true suddenly don't seem true and I become paranoid.

Do I know they're true?

A lot of the time I think that someone is only being nice to me so that they can trick me into thinking they like me and it's all one big practical joke at my expense. I know this not to be true because that is sociopath behaviour. I know this because sometimes when someone has really annoyed me I am horrible to them but the effort of being horrible to them is too much and after not very long I have to stop. It would be too emotionally exhausting to be nice to me for a long time just to trick me. I think this.

A lot of the time I think in pauses. And I have multiple narratives existing at the same time as each other in my brain. One part of me is thinking one thing and the other part of me is thinking something totally different and another part of me is singing to music.

I am singing to music and reading 'The Waste Land' and wondering about going to the theatre and there's also a small part of me that's waiting for a noise.

A noise.

And there are different pauses at different times for all of these thoughts so my brain is a mass of noise.

And pause.

I can't write this down because words exist in a linear state on a page and you can't read it the way I think it. But imagine that this sentence is overlapping the previous one. And this one. And this one. All at once. It's exhausting.

I spend a lot of my time thinking that I only know that I exist. I think it's because I spend a lot of time alone. I don't know that everyone isn't a construct of my imagination. Especially because I very rarely meet people who I feel I am impacting upon or who are impacting upon me. When I do meet these people I feel a lot less alone because I feel that they experience life the way that I experience life and therefore I cannot be the only person alive making up everything in my head.

Like some sort of God.

But what if I was. What if everyone I met was a personal challenge. A game. That I have to win.

Or what?

I don't know.

Recently I got annoyed because some people think that they know me. But they don't. They know what they want me to be. And they don't want to know me. Because they don't want me to challenge them. That makes me sad.

But at least I exist.

Ideals

The brittle straw casings crack under the thin rubber soles of my shoes as I walk through the fields. Bales are piled high in totems unevenly spaced across the land and the orange August sun is beginning its slow dip behind the postcard-perfect trees in the distance. He reaches out for my hand and I feel the scratch of dry skin as his fingers touch mine. A wave of nausea ripples through my

intestines and my stomach involuntarily clenches. He runs away, racing me towards one of the straw towers but I don't realise it's a race until it's too late and, afraid of embarrassing myself by showing up hot and sweaty and out of breath, I slowly saunter towards him. I reach my arms out and he pulls me up to the top. We're so high and I can see across the fields and he's watching me watch the scene. He plucks a stick of straw from the bale and places it between his lips with affectation, before lying back. I rest my head on his stomach and he breathes deeply all the way in so that my head goes up and down with each inhalation and exhalation.

I look up at the sky and it's such a clear blue. The kind where you can see the curve of the earth, deep and thick at the top, pale and milky towards the edges. Telephone lines draw two black marks across my vision and a solitary nearby tree waves its branches. A single cloud is hovered just above it. I think how it looks like an escaped character from one of those Winnie the Pooh stories that I read when I was younger. My head is jolted to the side as he sits up and props himself onto his elbows. He looks me straight in the eyes. Neither of us says anything for a while.

'Stop falling in love with me.'

I don't know how to react and feel angry as my eyes begin to sting and prick and I really don't know why my body is reacting in this way because I'm not sad and I'm not in love with him. My chest feels sour and tender, like a soft fleshy bruise, and I can't explain this either. I must look hurt or surprised or something because he smirks and then leans forward and kisses me on the forehead which he knows I like. I want to hit him. My fingers clench into the straw and I want to push my nails into the palms of my hand so that they leave little red 'c's, and hit him right in his bony cheek. But I don't. Because when I tell people this story I'll talk about how beautiful the scenery was and how he looked me in the eyes with this look on his face like

he cared about me, and everyone will ‘aahhh’ at how cinematic the whole thing was. It’s too much of a lie if I hit him.

Bathing

I haven’t been outside for two days now. I’ve been having baths mostly. Having baths and lighting candles and making bubbles and listening to music and smoking and reading and wallowing, both physically in my own filth in the hot water, and metaphorically in my own sadness. I’m in the bath right now. Sweat is beading at the nape of my neck, and my hairline and armpits prickle from the heat. I slide the prescription paper between pages fifty-six and fifty-seven and commit the last words to memory, as I’m between chapters, so I don’t re-read the same paragraph when I next open the book.

““Sour and milky” the Boy said”.

I lean forwards and immerse myself in the hot water up to my shoulders, submerging my chin. I tilt my ears and listen to the crackling of the bubbles. The candles flicker in front of me and cast these hysteric shadows against the cold tiles, like miniature people dancing around a bonfire. I move my toes and stare for a while at the pastel cloud discolouring the water between my legs. I can’t stand this heat anymore. It’s not comfortable and it’s making me itch. I stand and drip into the water. The level drops and I can feel sweat, or water, or a salty, spicy, bubbly mixture of both, drop down my spine. Right down the middle across the little bones and cartilage holding it all together. It feels like someone’s dragging a piece of hair across my back. I step onto the white mat and stand there, dripping, and watch spots of red splash onto the soft towelling beneath my feet. Then I sit. Legs crossed. A towel half wrapped across my stomach and breasts. My scalp is wet and I can feel the damp at the roots of my hair where I know no water has been. Sweat. Cold. Wet. I want to get back into the hot water and keep on reading but my discomfort is still hanging

over me. I reach behind and dangle my fingers into the warm bath, still without that cold film that lingers over the top when it's been too long since the draw.

23:58. 23:59. 00:00.

It's a new day and nothing has changed and I observe how time keeps on moving and I have just sat here wasting three minutes of my life that I will never live again. I have aged three minutes and there's nothing I can do to un-age and even as I think this I grow older and older and the skin around my eyes is slackening and wrinkling. I try to imagine a world where we spend our whole lives sat still as stone being fed through a tube and all we do all day long is count. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. We count all the seconds of our lives inside our heads until the day we die. On that final day we can stop counting and we can go outside and we can see the world. What would we see? What would we understand? All we would have known until that point is tubes and numbers and time. The world would be such a strange place.

"O brave new world, that has such people in't."

I peel off the corner of a toenail and stand and face the bath, contemplating getting back in it or draining it. Eventually I plunge my right forearm deep into the bathwater and grip the edges of the plug. I have to fight against the pull of the water desperate to be sucked down. The plug slips from my nails a few times but eventually I pull it up and it makes that unique satisfying sucking gurgling noise as the last dregs of water disappear into the black hole that as humans we will never know but that spiders must fear, if spiders know how to fear. I blow out the candles from a great distance to see how far I can be from them before they extinguish themselves and watch the smoke flying away as I deeply inhale the unique smell of burned wick. I feel both clean and incredibly unclean at the same time.

Wanting

Today I feel sick because I don't know who I am or what I'm supposed to be doing. This happens every now and again and it makes me sad. Right now I'm sitting in a pair of knickers that used to be too tight but now they fit perfectly and I know they look good but there's no one here to see them. I'm not wearing any other clothes and the duvet is draped loosely across my lap. If I rock backwards or forwards, which I do several times as I reach across to check my phone or bring a pillow to sit behind my back, my nipples brush across the rough fabric and it kind of hurts. I hope that I'm not pregnant. I know I'm not. My skin feels alive right now. I can feel every single part and if I touch it my nerves light up.

I think that if I try really hard tonight then I can not sleep until tomorrow evening. If I try hard enough I will be able to stay awake for probably 36 hours. It's easy to stay awake when there are things to do, but right now I don't have things to be doing. I remember the yellow room, with it's fog of cigarette smoke that wasn't obvious until you left to go to the toilet and then came back and the air was so thick you could almost eat it. I remember listening to Daughter to calm the mood and write. I remember listening to Jason Derülo to get the energy going whilst we drank cans of cranberry Red Bull and ate peanut butter puffs. I remember the morning sun rising behind the mountains as we stood on our favourite bridge, surrounded by snow. I remember the river being that beautiful sea green that it was when it hadn't rained for a few days and it was low. It was easy to stay awake then because we stayed awake together and we danced 46-hours-with-no-sleep dances. We smoked and drank Red Bulls and sang and wrote and then when morning came we would go and buy bread rolls and cheese and prawns with garlic in oil and sushi and oranges and we would feast for breakfast.

I don't have any of these things right now and I'm not going to

have any of those things in the morning. They are all long gone by a year. A lot of things are long gone by a year. Now I am cold and I can see the goose bumps on my stomach lifting all the little hairs up into the air to try and capture it and heat it and make me warm again. I can feel my wet hair on my shoulders and I'm hoping that it dries in little beachy waves and curls like it used to when I was eighteen. The song I am listening to is really strange. If you listen to it properly it doesn't work. The lyrics and the beat and the melody are all out of sync. But if you do other things and let the back of your mind focus on it then it all comes together. I've never heard anything like it.

Love

We only met 5 hours ago but I want to tell you I love you. I know it's because I'm drunk. And you're a lot more drunk than I am. But you're saying the nicest things to me right now and I like the feel of your tongue on my lips and your hands on my waist and your breath in my ear. I'm thinking this in my head. I love you. It's a special kind of love. Very immediate and present and unsafe. You tell me that you want to stay here with me in your arms forever. You tell me that in the morning you are going to make me a cup of tea. I tell you you're not going to. You tell me you are. You tell me you fancy me. You tell me I am beautiful in the dark. I tell you that's not really a compliment. You tell me that I am beautiful in the light, but right now in the dark I am really beautiful. You tell me that you're really intelligent and you want me to know that. You tell me that you really do fancy me loads. You tell me that you want to give me your number. You tell me that you don't want me to leave. I love you. But I won't tell you this because it's a different kind of love that I'm sure you will understand if I explain it but I don't want to explain it right now. I just want to enjoy the feel of your tongue on my lips and your hands on my waist and your breath in my ear and your nice words.

But I do want to see you again.

Talking

I'm sitting on this green rug. It's so retro, it looks like it's from the seventies and I am stroking the fibres. I keep expecting them to be soft but they're not, they're kind of scratchy, like wool, but I like it and I keep on stroking in case the next time is soft. I'm looking her straight in the eyes and listening to her words but I'm not sure what she's saying. It doesn't matter. I know it's interesting. My hands feel kind of raw but in a good way, and warm. Like when you rub your palms together really fast and they get tingly and feel extra sensitive. I like this so I keep on doing it. The music is mellow but upbeat. I don't know the song but I like it and it's really complementing my mood right now. We've stopped talking. We're sitting at a forty-five degree angle to each other, almost perfect, facing the other two who are somewhat bizarrely elevated on chairs, inappropriate for the situation. They should be on the floor with their legs crossed, like us. She looks at me.

'I can feel it.'

As the words escape her mouth I feel it myself. We get each other right now. I'm pleased. The whole core of my body is rising and fizzing and vibrating and we resume talking. My shoulders are shifting back and forth and back and forth and my hands are moving in time with the music and I'm agreeing fervently with everything she's saying, because it's all so true and right. I look at the other two and they don't get it. I'm confident that they will so I just wait. Soon they'll get us.

I'm bubbling with stories, I feel like everything I have to say is really profound. I know that normally I wouldn't say them all because I don't want people to think negatively of me but I am embracing my narcissism, I know that they are good, I know that they have to be

told right now. I am veering between being enthused by everything that she's saying because I get her so much, I really get it, and wanting to tell her everything that's running through my mind right now because I know she'll get it. And she'll tell me if she doesn't and I can explain it. The other two are still sitting there, almost motionless. Their actions are really mundane and they are this unit. Like salt and pepper. Or butter and jacket potatoes. I begin to wonder if they can operate outside of this unit. She leaves and goes to do something important and therefore of no interest. He sits there and crosses his legs awkwardly. It's so funny, and I laugh to myself and he looks uncomfortable because I don't explain and he doesn't want to be laughed at.

I stop stroking the rug because it becomes apparent that the texture isn't going to change and I'm not really enjoying it as much as I was anymore. I remember the feel of Rizla crackling under the balls of my fingers, and smoothing it out so it's softer than water. I remember walls that are ridged and seemingly made of pure rough. Neither of these things are here right now so I give up remembering texture. She comes back in and says something really honest. I like her because she doesn't lie and she doesn't care and that is admirable. I would like to be like this. I tell her that I like her and that those are the reasons why I like her. I want to talk to her without him, I want to test them to see if they can be without each other, and start thinking that I should draw up an experiment, like we did that time in Psychology A-Level in school and I had to give children sweets to write down a list of words without talking. This isn't like that, but that was an experiment and this would be an experiment too. I'm feeling electric like a storm and I want everyone to dance in my rain.

Safety

You're rubbing your toes against my leg and massaging my knees with them. I know I'm repulsed but I feel quite distant from it at the same time. Anyway, I can't move right now so even if I wanted to escape I couldn't. I'm stroking a Rizla between my fingers and I feel as though I am melding with it, or it is giving me powers. I can't stop. I am trapped in this one position. I see you curled up on the rug and I want to be there too but there's no room and it looks too soft. I clamber onto the desk. It's really hard and I feel quite complacent there, with my left hand gripping the edge. I feel fused with the wood. I close my eyes and listen to the music. I open my eyes for a second and you're staring at the ceiling. I close them again. A while later I open them and your eyes are closed too. I close my eyes. I think we might have slept for a bit. Later we reflect that if someone had found us like that, they might possibly have called an ambulance. We find this amusing.

I'm curled up on my chair. I'm both intensely uncomfortable and completely relaxed at the same time. You're telling me about your life and you can't say it but it's okay. You might be able to. Then you don't. It's still okay. I understand this need to talk. Everyone thinks I don't understand what it's like but I do because I used to be like that too and I remember. I don't remember in the same way that people who live it now experience, but I remember the feelings, the atmosphere, the tension and the anger. I remember the arguments and the flying household objects and the dents in the wall that we had to fill in before the house could be sold. I remember the crying. Lots of it. I remember having to be in our rooms for long periods of time and be really quiet. I remember having a nanny even though my mother didn't work. I remember the blame. I know. I do know. All these people tell me I'm something but why should I tell them all the things I remember? I'm trying not to look at you because I don't like

seeing people's reactions, it's too personal, it's too close, but I'm talking about my sister and all that blame and for a second I look in your eyes and you look a little bit like your heart is breaking for this person you don't even know.

I feel very safe.

Drinking

I've been drinking for fifteen days straight and I think I'm dependent. d.e.p.e.n.d.e.n.t. How can I breathe with the fire of absence coursing through my brain? How can I love without my warm confidence drawing the girls towards me and kissing them on the lips, those salty sweet lips that taste like cosmopolitans and vomit? How can I wake up in the mornings without that dull cloud obscuring my eyes and saving me from the overweight shell that reflects back at me from the cracks in the mirror? The seven years bad luck haunting me day after day after day after day after day after day after day. I'm afraid you know? I'm afraid of who I am and I'm afraid of the sun. I'm afraid of the dogs that walk in the park and piss against the trees that have been around for a thousand years. Or maybe longer. Or maybe not. I've been drinking for fifteen days straight my friend but I couldn't tell you for sure because time has a way of slipping through my fingers and hitting the ground with the dull thud of an empty bottle and I know that sound. I know it. It's the sound of loss. You'd know it too if you'd known time like I know time. If you'd sat through a whole day in one single chair and hadn't moved not once not even to go and relieve yourself like a human being. You see my friend I'm an animal I'm a regression I'm the opposite of evolution I'm a shame a spot a mark and I'm disgusting. And yet I've been sitting here drinking for fifteen days straight and I've reached this point where I'm content because I don't know. I don't know what's happening to me. I don't even recognise myself today, day fifteen. Day sixteen. Day

three. I keep checking my post but no one sends me letters my friend, and the piles on the floor keep rising and rising but they're just pizzas and Chinese and Indian and bills and they're trying to take my money away, trying to take away me. You know tomorrow I'm going to stop. I'm going to clear away this maze, take some hedge cutters to it and slash away the way that one slashes away at a tree of broccoli to get perfect little bite size pieces and I'm going to eat that broccoli my friend. I'm going to eat it until I'm green like the trees covered in dog piss and the sun shines down on my face. Green like the sea washing over the planet. Green like the grass that I lay face down in with the butt of my cigarette clenched in my fist. You see this isn't me. This isn't who I am. This isn't who I want to be. And I don't have to, you see. I can sit here in my chair and I can dream the Alice in Wonderland dreams and my tears will carry me through a keyhole and I'll float away in a bottle my friend, do you see? I promise you that time will stop for me, and you'll crowd around and want to know the secret want to know my trick want to know my power but you can never know, not until you've seen the life I see. I'll have all the time in the world that day and do you know? Do you know what I'll do with all the time in the world? I'll sit here and I'll laugh because all the time in the world is but nothing to the time and space of the universe and the far reaches of our knowledge that is nothing but arrogance and ignorance and I'm laughing. I'm laughing so hard because I've figured it out. I've got the secret. I've got the key. I'm no one and you wish you could be me.

Sections of this story ('Lying', 'Axolotl Eyes', 'Unknowing', 'Wanting', 'Love', and 'Safety') won the 2013 John Coleman Creative Writing Prize.



Photograph by Aleksander Nitka
(BSc Psychology with Cognitive Neuroscience)

KELSI DELANEY

BA English

5 Strings

Are you awake right now?

Are you...thinking of me?

I see you sleeping soft sleeping deep

Some people curl up but I bet you extend

Pole to pole across your bed

Through your window

Through my window, through me

Pole to pole across the stars

And when you dream do you dream like I think you do?

Do you smile, speak, laugh in your sleep

And would you dream of me?

Would you let me calm you in the night

when you're curled up like a baby sobbing

because none of this is how you thought it would be?

I would, I would, I would rock you sweet

and tender in this endless sea

of bad reality, bad dreams, bad words, looks and people

I would wrap you in my skin to keep you just a little warmer in the
dark

Let me take you in

In to me.

SUZI SHIMWELL
PhD Creative Writing

A poem only about toothbrushes

In this poem there will be only toothbrushes.

There is just one in the glass,
molded in hard blue plastic with two thousand
tough nylon bristles;

there is another in the bin
under the sink.
It's pink.

"I can't put toothbrushes in a poem, I really can't!"
Sylvia Plath, Interview 30th October 1962

Mantra

This is not love.

But my eyes have fallen inconveniently
into
my body.

A body that is now magnetic,
that is
drawn on principles.

And I've tapped into the substratum
inadvertently
and am losing control.

It *feels* like love.

I start to shovel
some rationality
around the root of the problem.

But this growth feeds on
a humus that is hard to
think around.

I tell myself that this is
about as unreal as it gets
but I'm filling up on expectation.

For the first time in years
I'm tingling all over
with the plausibility of possibility.

I am not to blame.
This is basic principles.
This is out of my control.

But this is *not* love.

The City

The city is blue;
its people stretched out,
painted with shadows
on their pale faces.

When the city is pink,
you can buy it with your eyes,
from the shop windows,
as you lean in the long light
of the low rose moon.

If the city were yellow,
you would hear it
in the words,
as they ricocheted off the ochre walls
before floating
balloon slow
out of reach.

ALEXANDER FRENCH

BA English

New Dunwich

As his train pulled out of Birmingham, Nathan Dacre gazed out of the window and thought elatedly of his day ahead. He barely noticed the ticket inspector approaching, and once prompted he hurriedly fished out his ticket from beneath the rusty compass in his pocket. The inspector grunted indifferently and handed it back, oblivious to the excitement which awaited this passenger. In less than three hours, Nathan's train would arrive in the quaint market town of New Dunwich, where an annual work conference was to take place in the afternoon. For his colleagues, the long journey this entailed was an annoying inconvenience. But for Nathan, it was an excuse to return to his hometown at last.

Nathan had moved to Birmingham at the age of twenty-one when a position in marketing became available there. He had never wanted to leave New Dunwich, but after several years signing on he had to take any opportunity for work that presented itself. His parents, quietly relieved that their son had at last moved out, relocated to Bournemouth soon afterwards to enjoy their retirement. Nathan's plans to make regular visits back home were thwarted when he realised he no longer had anywhere to stay. Hotels were expensive, and there were only so many times he could take advantage of other peoples' sofas without feeling like a nuisance. And so over the course of his eight years in Birmingham, Nathan's trips to New Dunwich became fewer and further between.

Of all the things he loved about his hometown, he missed his friends the most. Every Thursday night until he moved to

Birmingham, Nathan would meet his old school friends in the town centre for a drink. It was invariably the highlight of his week. Various characters used to show their faces now and then, but there were three individuals who turned up without fail: Guy Jenkins, the long-haired, budding musician; Arthur Mattock, or Art, the serious intellectual; and Jimmy Gibbs, the clown of the group. Nathan had met the three of them in his first year at secondary school, and the four became a close-knit gang.

One summer when they were in their early teens, the boys went camping together at a campsite on the outskirts of New Dunwich. In the preceding weeks they had each saved up enough pocket money to buy matching compasses engraved with their initials - souvenirs for their adventure. These proved useless when the boys got lost in the woods and realised they didn't know if the way back was north or south.

"Oh, God. What are we going to do?" Arthur began to panic immediately.

"Relax, man," Guy replied, playing around with his compass. "It won't get dark for ages, and we'll find our way back before then."

"Perhaps we could follow the stars instead?" Nathan suggested, gazing up at the endless, towering trees.

"You're such an idiot."

Nathan was taken aback by what seemed like a harsh response, until he realised Arthur was in fact addressing the shirtless boy flailing around in the river.

"Come in, guys! It's warm!" Jimmy shouted in a state of euphoria. His hair was a messy mop over his face, partially concealing the wild look in his eyes.

"Yes, and it's also probably full of diseases," Arthur muttered, shaking his head.

"Yeah, you're going to smell like a hobo," Nathan concurred.

"You're all lame." Jimmy blew a raspberry and then reluctantly climbed back onto the riverbank.

"Oi, I think I've seen a footpath!"

Guy ran off into the distance and the others followed, Jimmy trailing behind as he attempted to dry himself with his muddy shirt. Eventually they came across a signpost, pointing to the campsite, and found their way back as the sun set. The boys spent the rest of the night sitting around a campfire, eating burned sausages and telling crude jokes. Nathan regarded the trip as one of the happiest memories of his teenage years.

As the train passed through the countryside, Nathan took from his pocket the compass marked 'N.D.' and held it in his palm. Its needle, having ceased to point northwards years ago, now spun around at random. Nathan smiled as he watched its movement and thought about his plans for the evening. Once the conference was over he was going to meet up with his old friends and they would have a great evening together, just like the good old days. He would have to go to work the following morning, but if he stayed up until the early hours and caught the first train to Birmingham, it would be doable.

Nathan had planned to complete some forms on the train, but as hard as he tried it was impossible to concentrate on work matters. His thoughts inevitably drifted back to planning out the reunion. He decided the group ought to meet at the White Hart, where their evenings traditionally began. That was Guy's favourite pub as it had a small stage on which his band, The Blokes, often performed. Guy played lead guitar, and always struck Nathan as incredibly gifted. Legend had it that the band was once offered a recording contract with Sony, but Guy's mother wouldn't let him sign it as she thought it would interfere with his studies. "As soon as I've moved out we'll send off our demo again. Then we'll get signed and tour the world,"

Guy always insisted.

After the White Hart, they could move on to the Fox and Hounds. This was the social hub of New Dunwich, where everybody Nathan knew would congregate. Typically, the four friends would turn up and talk for a couple of hours, after which Guy and Jimmy would start drunkenly chatting to their old classmates whilst Nathan and Arthur carried on their conversation in a more coherent manner. Nathan thought back to one such occasion during the summer after they left school.

“So, what are your plans for next year?” Arthur had enquired, sipping a whiskey. Nathan’s face blushed slightly.

“What? Oh, I can’t say I’ve given it much thought, really. How about you?”

“My Dad’s sorted out a job for me at his bank. I’m sure we’ve been through this?”

“We might’ve.”

The conversation was interrupted by a loud crash at the other side of the room. The pair turned around to see the remnants of a pyramid of beer glasses surrounded by fragments of broken glass. Guy stood with his head in his palm, his long hair concealing his embarrassed face, whilst Jimmy was in fits of laughter. Despite having played no part in this failed experiment in artistry, Arthur and Nathan instinctively stepped outside when the barman approached.

“Why do we put up with them?” Arthur pondered as they retreated to the smoking area, amused but half-serious.

“Ha. I know. So, we were saying...” Nathan’s thoughts were elsewhere.

“Yeah?”

“Art, once you’ve started working – we’ll still be able to hang out, won’t we?”

“Of course, pal!” Arthur gave Nathan a firm pat on the back as

the furious, booming voice of the barman resounded from indoors.

For the next couple of years, Arthur kept to his word. The four friends continued to meet up weekly, regardless of their varying states of employment. Guy carried on playing in his band, working at a supermarket by day in order to appease his parents. Nathan and Jimmy remained unemployed. Arthur often bragged that he was the only one earning a decent wage, but the others benefited from this by frequently demanding he should buy the drinks. Nathan still thought fondly of that period, despite having achieved very little at the time. He had friends to rely on, and that was what mattered.

*

With only a few stops left on the train journey, Nathan decided to contact the others in order to confirm where they would meet. It occurred to him that Arthur had not replied directly to his online invitation. This, of course, wasn't an issue - wherever Guy and Jimmy went, Arthur was bound to follow. Still, Nathan thought it would be best to make sure he knew what was happening, and took it upon himself to call him. The voice which answered sounded tired and irritated.

"...Hello?"

"Hey, Art! It's Nathan here. Did you get my email?"

"Oh, no. I haven't got round to reading it yet."

"Right. Well, I'll be back in Dunwich tonight and I thought we could get the gang back together! Are you up for a pint later?"

"You do realise it's five in the morning?"

"What? No it isn't."

"Yes, it is. I work in New York now. I've told you this."

"Really? Oh right. So I guess you won't be able to..."

"No. I'm sorry."

"Well, I hope you're okay. It'd be nice to catch up soon, if you'll

be in the country at some point?”

“Bye, Nathan.” The line went dead. Nathan stared at his phone for a few moments before putting it down, feeling confused and slightly offended.

Fortunately for Nathan, his other two friends were both still keen to meet up. Jimmy requested that they meet not at the White Hart but at the Orange Tree, a smaller pub nearer to his house. Nathan was secretly disappointed to be breaking tradition, but reluctantly agreed.

A voice on the intercom announced that the train would soon be arriving in New Dunwich. Before the train stopped moving Nathan rushed to the doors, and practically skipped off when they eventually opened. Exiting the station, he breathed in the fresh air, remembering how much cleaner it smelled compared to the polluted air in Birmingham. As he made his way into New Dunwich, he saw that it was just as he remembered. The long river, which ran through the town and eventually led to the forest where the boys camped, still flowed alongside the black and white Tudor houses. The marketplace, gradually getting busier as the morning progressed, was open for business as usual. He smiled as he saw the stall where he and his friends bought sweets before school. After taking in these sights he arrived at the conference centre and spent the proceeding hours on autopilot, quietly thinking about his evening plans.

Nathan was the first to arrive at the Orange Tree that night. The pub looked just as run-down as it always had, although he noticed that they had replaced some of the sofas. He bought a beer and sat down at a table, sipping his drink tentatively. Eventually a tall man with short brown hair and glasses sat opposite him. Nathan was about to tell him the seat was taken when the man spoke.

“All right, Nathan?” It was Guy. He looked bizarre without his proper haircut, Nathan thought. And why had he got rid of the beard

he was growing?

“Christ, I barely recognised you! How’s it going? Just got home from The Blokes’ world tour, I bet?”

“The Blokes? Haha, those were the days! Nope, I’ve just come out of a managerial meeting at Sainsbury’s. Rock and roll, eh?”

“Ha, yeah.” Nathan looked down at his drink, feeling disappointed.

“Hey, old Art’s doing pretty well for himself, isn’t he?”

“Yes, so I hear.”

“Banking in New York City. You’ve got to hand it to him... So, what is it you do again?”

An uninspiring conversation about life in the office followed. Nathan was glad to be chatting to his old friend, but Guy’s anecdotes weren’t quite of the calibre he had hoped for. He was pleased when the front door of the pub swung open and the familiar face of Jimmy Gibbs strode in. Now things were going to get interesting.

“£3.80 for a Foster’s. Rip off!” Jimmy complained as he took a seat next to Guy.

“Nice to see you too, mate!” Guy responded, and the three men laughed. Nathan looked up at Jimmy’s face. It was still recognisably his, but it had lost its youthful vigour; his hair was combed properly, and his eyes appeared calm and sedate.

“In all seriousness, it is nice to see you, Jim,” Nathan said earnestly. “When was the last time the three of us were all together?”

“I dunno, Nathan. Couldn’t say. I’ve lost track of time since I had the little one.”

“The... little one?”

“Corey. He’ll be eighteen months next week.”

“Oh right, wow. Congratulations.”

Guy smiled as he joined in. “Me and the Missus are thinking of trying for one ourselves, y’know.”

“Well, if you don’t mind nine months of aggro followed by two years without sleep, I say: go for it!” Jimmy and Guy laughed, and Nathan smiled awkwardly. His eyes began to wander as the two men discussed parenthood, work and other tedious subjects for what felt like an eternity. When he felt the conversation had reached a natural pause, he reached into his pocket, pulled out his compass and placed it on the table.

“What’s that?” Guy asked. Nathan felt strangely hurt that his friend didn’t recognise it.

“Don’t you remember? We all had one of these when we went camping that time.”

“Ah, oh yeah. Vaguely.”

“We got lost, remember? And it was you who found the way back!”

“Sounds like me.”

“And Jimmy, you swam in the river, you idiot! Do you still have your compass?”

“Er, it might be up in the loft somewhere. Not sure. We had a clear-out a while ago. Anyway, I need the Gents’.”

Nathan sighed at his failed attempt to inspire reminiscence. He and Guy sat silently for a few moments, until a tall, frowning woman cradling a baby approached the table and spoke to them.

“Are you two ‘ere with James?”

“No, we don’t know a James.” Nathan replied coldly. Guy apparently knew better.

“He’s just in the loo, Alice. He’ll be out in a sec’.”

“He’s meant ta be lookin’ after Corey tonight! Can’t believe he ‘ad the cheek to go down the pub...”

Jimmy walked back smiling until he noticed his girlfriend stood beside the table, at which point he looked down to the floor.

“Sorry, lads. I think I’d better be off,” he muttered forlornly.

Before Nathan could protest, Jimmy was gone. The remaining two men sat talking for a while longer, but it wasn't long before Guy put down his empty pint glass and started to put on his jacket.

"Right - I think it's time for me to call it a night, too," Guy announced. "I've got an early one tomorrow."

"What?! But what about our reunion? Our big night out together?"

"I've got work in the morning, mate. I'm sorry. See you around soon, hopefully." Nathan grunted in response as Guy got up and left. When he had finished his beer, he too made his way out of the pub.

As Nathan started back down the road he heard the town clock chime in the distance. Laughing bitterly as he realised it was only ten o'clock, he decided to take the long route back through town to the train station. All the bars were still open and the place was full of life. As he passed the White Hart, Nathan peered through the window. A band was performing on the stage, but he didn't recognise its members or know the song they were playing. He later reached the Fox and Hounds and decided to have a look in there, too. The room, as always, was packed full of young people, all drinking, laughing and chatting. But as he gazed around, he realised that these were not the faces of his old classmates. He didn't recognise anybody, and they failed to register his presence. The bar staff were different, too. The place itself looked exactly the same, and yet somehow it felt completely changed.

Nathan stepped outside and slowly made his way back alongside the river. The noise of the town centre gradually faded behind him until all he could hear was the trickling of water and the roar of distant trains. As he approached the train station he turned around and had one final look at New Dunwich, now just a collection of flickering lights on the horizon. Staring into the distance, he thought of the memories he had of the town. Of Guy, Jimmy and

Arthur, and the times they spent together. And then, impulsively, he pulled the compass out of his pocket and, with one aggressive motion, propelled it forwards. The useless object flew through the air and landed in the river with a splash, the reflection of the city lights shimmering with the impact. Before it had sunk to the bottom of the riverbed, Nathan had already entered the train station.

Nathan jumped aboard the train as it pulled out of New Dunwich. The leaves on the tracks floated in the air momentarily and then settled once more as the train headed northwards.



Photograph by Aleksander Nitka
(BSc Psychology with Cognitive Neuroscience)

LORNA THOMAS

BA English

(me)

Are you lightning
You
Terrifying Brilliance
Ecstasy rips dark skies
Forked

Jagged
Lighting me
With the Light of my own destruction
Icy flames
charge the core

(mine)

Heat drenched.

Grounded ----- paralysed ---

(me)

Doll, pinned
to
earth

Flashing transparency
Still blue veins
(mine)
Cold
fire

White silhouette
with dark night.

Eternal burning flash
Silent
floating

ash

ROBERT WARD
MA Modern Literature

HTCL

so we ordered mint juleps *he reads on thinking, this might not be so much an oblique criticism as a direct attack on me*, but, of course, only after looking up what a mint julep// Sugar, preferably dark, but simple syrup is fine; Mint leaves, muddled; Bourbon, not Rye or Scotch; Crushed ice. To be served in a pewter tankard. A good Julep will not just frost, but actively form icicles, and will taste like being punched in the mouth by a Colgate factory on a four day bender. The julep is traditionally drunk in// is, so we knew exactly what to expect and how to tell whether or not they were any good. Then we tasted them and they tasted like a punch in the mouth and we all agreed that they were good, though Nick thought they contained not enough mint and John thought the issue was too much sugar *it was actually the other way around, he thinks, and there's no need to actually name them anyway* - this, remember, from people who had never had a mint julep before, from people who only found out about Babar's on Trip Advisor and only got there by using GPS// stands for Global Positioning System. It is a network of satellites in geo-stationary orbit which// *yeah, as though you could have found it easily*. And this is what really makes me angry about people being always-connected. I admit *you admit something!* you could go either way in judging what I was talking about earlier: you might prefer to just know or to have someone just know what year Firefox// (1982) Clint Eastwood, directing himself, plays a retired pilot sent into Russia to steal a mind-controlled fighter jet which will only respond to people who think in Russian// was released in, or where Bogotá// is the capital, and largest city, of Colombia// is the capital of, or what the atomic number of Antinomy// Not to be confused with antimony, a chemical element//

is. You might like it when you discover that The Motherland Calls// also called Mother Motherland, Mother Motherland is Calling, or simply The Motherland// was the last non-religious statue to claim the title of World's Tallest// List of Statues by Height//, and so would I if I found out from a person, but coming from a mobile phone it just seems degraded, somehow. Less impressive, faked, boring, whatever, it's just not the same as actually knowing something *Jesus, we get it*. But anyway, I'm willing to admit *are you?* that there might be value in being able to just look things up, and if the fact that that means people don't actually know things any more doesn't bother you then that's fine. What really makes me angry about it all is the way that being able to just look things up and be always-connected affects peoples personalities and behaviour. Nick and John *so you'll keep naming them but not me* had never had this drink before, and the gimlet// Gin, or alternatively Vodka; Fresh lime juice; Rose's Lime Juice; Lime wedge to serve. This is one for a small martini glass. Some people will tell you to add simple syrup: those people should probably stick to Singapore Slings. A gimlet is a drink for people who// they had afterwards was their first too *the horror, the horror!*, and yet they were sat there critiquing like bloody John Torrode// YouTube: Broadcast Yourself! John Torrode disgusted face ten minutes// *ugh* decimating a middle class mother of two's strawberry pavlova// is a meringue-based dessert named after Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova//. Its not offensive and incensing like misogynistic humour// Posts tagged #blondejokes: What's the difference between a blonde girl and a set of keys?// *keep fighting the good fight*. It's more the kind of irritation that builds over time, years really, *about two and a half years, perhaps?* and that's the other reason I'm writing this blog post today. The first half was trying to suggest that everyone should really think or rethink about what the affect of// Inbox (2) noreply@jobshunter.co.uk ---Hi, this is your weekly roundup from

JobsHunter!// constantly flicking between things and constantly looking up things we don't know has on the way we think and our ability to remember. Any one who reads my blog regularly - thank you lovely people! *fuck you cringey person!* - will know about how passionate I have always been about philosophy and thinking logically *hah!* and as a Sociologist// Welcome to the School of Social Sciences at// *hah!* I think I have some grounds to talk about this matter. But what I'm talking about now is more of a personal announcement that I'm no longer willing to put up with people *because of course this is nothing personal about someone in particular* who treat the Internet as stuff they actually know about. I'm sick and tired *of being sick and tired?* of the constant distraction into looking at glowing screens// YouTube: Broadcast Yourself! TheFunniest.com presents Mobile Phone Sketch// *ugh* in the middle of every conversation, and more importantly I'm sick of the way that people are so triumphant about knowing things that they don't actually know *but the whole point was that I do know these things*. So what was it that built up my irritation to the point that I decided to write this// Hello everyone! So I've been thinking a lot recently about how the internet// *inserting a link to the same page is just dumb* today? Well, without getting too personal... we were walking, or at least following Nick who was following the map on his phone, from Babar's to The Lockup because someone said *that was me* that although it had a worse rating on Trip Advisor *not even true* one of the reviews said that it was cheap *I'd been there before, you idiot*. I was talking to someone *oh, just name me!* about a holiday to Paris we'd been on together a couple of years ago and he was complaining about how it had been so expensive and we hadn't done everything together that he'd wanted *this is a piece of fiction* - not that I forced him to go on the holiday or anything, but that's besides the point. Then we were still talking about it in The Lockup, drinking Bitburger// Bitburger

Brewery is a large German brewery// because it was well-reviewed on RateYourBeer *again, no, just, no*, and he happened to mention that Shakespeare & Co// is the name of two different Parisian bookstores. The first was founded in// wasn't the original shop it was in the twenties, but I thought it was. My friend Sally// Hello. My name is Sally and this is a blog I do which collects stuff that I find on the internet. It's mostly photographs, poetry and// has also been to Paris and agreed with me, not that it mattered much, but sure enough he pulled his phone out *how sinful of me* and sure enough the original shop was closed during the German occupation of Paris and never reopened. Anyway, from there it was all downhill, and this is exactly my problem. Looking something up and proving himself right for some people *good work keeping it non-personal* suddenly proves that they know more about everything, whether it's on the internet or not. I won't bore you with the whole story here *because you were too drunk to remember it*, but I'm not going to be lectured by an ex-boyfriend *oh, shit, never mind* about what really happened two years ago and have him think he's right just because he can prove that he knows more about an old bookshop. Basically, fuck people *fuck you* who think that the internet is there to let them think they are more cultured, more intelligent, more right than anyone else *even when they are right*. I, for one, won't put up with that kind of thing in the future *and nor will you have to*. So, rant over *thank christ*. Finally, I do realise that its a little New message from... bit ironic to write a blog post complaining about how New message from... mentally distracting the internet is and then fill it New message from... with links to other websites, but I suppose I'm just New message from... trying to prove something about what the effect of New message from... *what do you want now?* // Yesterday ---I've written a new post for my blog that you might find interesting, let me know what you think <http://is.gd/gXpA8N> Today ---so, what do you think?

Before I Die I'd Like To Go Insane

, or else

but no,

when that

happy

is that

that is

me when,

if if if,

fi fi fi fi

yes that

is me when I,

happily, when I,

I I I am, I am, I do,

I smile, I feel me smile,

I feel me rolling smiling grasping

the leg of the very big chair,

which is not me and is not mine,

your hair you, yes me and you,

and them but me, yes me and you,

you who are not me,

it's difficult when, sometimes, things don't come to me

the thing, the thing, the thing, the thing,

I know now that I know that I want something,

The fields stretch out everywhere I've played -

At night when I look up I feel afraid:
I used to when I didn't know myself,
When I was purely present-tense and health,
When fantasy could last past half a day,
But now I put aside my childish play
For I must think! about the trap in which
I find myself thrust, unasked, unasked,
Intolerably here with dick and bitch
I thought, until, at once, it seemed, unmasked
As all hormonal. Under every myth
There is a Fact. I understand the world
As something whole. I will do something with
My time in Truth. I feel it is unfurled
Before me as a map which opens out
The systems of the world in cloth and dye
And begs that I would read it with a shout -
And then, instead, I'm left with but a cry.
The fields stretch far past the place I played.
They stretch to places I can not explain.
When I look up at night I feel afraid.
Before I die I'd like to go insane.
I soothe myself with sounds: a clicking train.
The tick and tap of metal on the track.
Before I die I'd like to go insane.
The trick that taps the metal off the track.
Before I die I'd like to go insane.
When I look up at night the sound of rain.
Before I die I'd like a clicking train.
When I look up at night a far off plane.
Before before before before before
I die I die I die I die I die
I'd like I'd like I'd like I'd like I'd like
To go to go to go to go to go

ANNA LEWIS

PhD Archaeology and Ancient History

Roundabout in the Luxembourg Gardens

So there is the door. At its heart,
the bronze disc that your grandmother gripped
each day of her peace-time Paris life

to let herself in from the street
to the hallway, the tiles and the shade,
the blonde arc of courtyard beyond.

It must have been above head-height
for you on the step: I suppose
you lifted your arms and stretched,

as in the Gardens you stretched,
were lifted and set: the horses,
giraffes and the camels ambled around;

the rusty tune crept through its bars.
You seem always, in your stories,
to have been looking up:

at sky between blossom,
the ring of white queens on their plinths,
at the swords on your grandmother's wall

and the rising floors that faced her window.
She closed the shutters the moment
she turned on the light.

The swords shone bronze and gold.
You went to bed when you were told,
and galloped gravely:

watched not so much the leap and
fall of the trees, nor the lines of
waiting children in the dust

but the beams overhead, and the poles
as they climbed to hook onto the spokes,
the blurred circle about the core.

'Roundabout in the Luxembourg Gardens' won the 2013
G. S. Fraser Poetry Prize. Anna's first poetry collection
Other Harbours is available now from Parthian Books.

KERRIE BROADBENT

MA Modern Literature

Graham waited for Cathy

It is Friday 24th March, 8.06am. A lone man sits in a coffee shop. He has a latte cooling next to him. He is aged between twenty-eight and thirty-two, judging by the slight recession in his hairline and the thin grey hairs only occasionally visible in his overgrown black hair. On the table in front of him sits his coffee, a plastic menu card, a spare coaster and a worn leather notebook filled halfway. It is open on a blank page. His right hand toys with a yellow Bic biro. The lid is chewed at the tip. The ballpoint rests on the white paper. Words: six.

Graham waited for Cathy to arrive.

He is tall, perhaps six-foot-three but he is stooped over the table making it difficult to tell. He looks dishevelled and poorly maintained. His navy blue checked shirt is open at the collar showing protruding chest hairs. There is gentle stubble formed around his jaw. Words: twenty.

For about a week now they had been bumping into each other every day as they bought their morning coffees.

He wears scuffed black jeans and black pumps. Balancing against his chair leg is an over-the-shoulder

satchel bag in dark brown faux leather. It is closed but the buckles are not fastened. Words: twenty.

At first they had barely noticed each other, and he had knocked into her as he strode through the door.

He is fairly inconspicuous set against the coffee shop's décor of dark wooden tables with darker green tablecloths covering them. There are seven tables in total; all have matching wooden chairs surrounding them with dark green cushions. Only during lunchtime are they all ever filled. Words: forty.

As he looked down into her face to apologise, he was overcome by the blueness of her eyes. These weren't an ordinary blue but the shiny turquoise of tropical sea near the beach, glistening and framed by long, black eyelashes.

The shop is nineteen feet wide and has a large window to the left of its yellow door. Upon entering through the yellow door, you could mistake the shop for someone's living room. There are pictures in miscellaneous frames on every wall; all of places the owner has either been to or believes look authentic for a traditional Italian coffee shop. Words: twenty-one.

They blushed, as their eye contact lasted just for a second too long, then smiled and walked off in different directions.

The coffee shop is a small, independent business called Leoni's after the mother of its half Italian owner, Carl. He is a short man who used to take care of his figure. In the last few years he has neglected the gym and it shows around his stomach. Carl works twelve-hour days to fight off the corporate coffee chains. Leoni's is Carl's life. As competition grows, the prices decrease and the customers increase. Words: seventy-four.

As Graham ordered a regular coffee, he wondered if he would ever again witness such beauty. Her face was that of perfection, plump red lips set against flawless alabaster skin. Sometimes beauty such as hers you are only meant to see for a fleeting moment. Like a rose that flowers only for a month and then sheds its petals; though the next year there will be new roses, there will never be one identical.

Currently trade is going well; take-away coffees do the best. This is due to the stream of office workers who have a new 'cause' against corporate chains. They also like the lower prices and the homely décor. It is 8.17am. Carl is taking advantage of the few moments of peace. He is planning on treating his wife Lucy to a posh meal out tonight and is currently googling restaurants in the local area on his phone. He instinctively looks for discounts. Words: thirty-five.

But the next day she was there again. He could see her standing two people in front of him in the queue; her glossy black hair this time pinned up neatly with a yellow ribbon.

Carl and Lucy have been married fifteen years. Leoni's and two teenage children have taken their toll, though neither of them will admit it. Carl thinks of marriage as he thinks of his business. The lone man sits on a table nearest the door, he has his back to the window and checks his watch every couple of minutes. No other customers are in the shop. Words: fifty-four.

He watched as she ordered and reached in her bag for her purse. She moved with such grace, as though every movement were perfectly thought out and timed so that she would never clumsily drop things as he did. As Graham paid for his coffee, he heard the grumpy barista shout, 'Latte for Cathy.'

Sophie, a full time member of staff appears behind the counter, which stretches the width of the shop, and apologises to Carl for her lateness. Sophie is twenty-five and is currently Carl's longest serving member of staff. She has shoulder length blonde hair that she wears pinned messily on top of her head. Her peak of attractiveness occurred while at secondary school; although she is not ugly she is no longer referred to as stunning. She has been planning on leaving her job for two and a half years now. It is never quite the right time and her catalogue addiction means she needs the money. Words: twenty-nine.

What a beautiful name, he had thought. She had an innate wildness about her, as if she could love with an intensity that would scare away most other men.

Sophie's boyfriend of four years has recently discovered that she has been cheating on him with someone he counts as a friend. It has led to an exchange of angry, abusive and upsetting phone calls at all hours; meaning that Sophie has been late 'a few too many times this week.' Carl is lenient with good members of staff, but he is no a pushover. Time is money. Words: sixty-six.

As she walked past him with her coffee, a moment of recognition passed between them. 'I'll try not to bump into you today,' he murmured. Her lips rose into an arch and she exhaled through her nose, acknowledging their private joke. They paused, awkwardly looking at each other, wishing for the other to say what they really felt before she shyly said, 'Thanks' and walked away.

The lone man's coffee is empty; he appears not to notice and continues writing intently. He writes in illegible scribbles, with his pen rarely losing contact with the page. Sophie nods over to him and exchanges a laugh with Carl. Words: seventy-two.

He thought of nothing but her for the whole day. He went about his usual tasks, writing ideas in his notebook; wandering around the quiet town; heating up his dinner; but he saw her face everywhere. He imagined himself talking to her and what she would say, the beautiful words that would cascade from her inviting. The heated arguments they would have about things that mattered, always ending with them passionately kissing.

He pauses, looks up from his notebook and smiles. His eyes are glazed and looking into the middle distance. He has a thin oval face with small features. It is 8.26am. The bell above the door clangs as a customer walks in; then clangs again as the door shuts behind them. The man looks quickly at the customer then looks down again. Carl moves into the back through the door behind the counter. Words: thirty-six.

At the pub later, Graham tried to explain this to his friend Mark but his fits of laughter had illustrated how their love would never be understood. It was far too complex for Mark's basic comprehension.

The customer is a man of forty-five. He is wearing a long black coat over a pinstripe suit and a red tie. He has today's copy of The Times folded up under his arm and carries a briefcase. He is an office worker and appears to be in a rush. Nevertheless, he politely asks Sophie how she is and comments on the nice weather. He spends a total of four minutes in the shop and leaves with a black coffee. Words: forty-eight.

'But, let me get this right, you've not properly had a conversation with this girl?' 'That's not the point. You know when you look at someone and it's like there's no one else in the room; like with just a single glimpse you can perfectly know each other.'

The man looks in his empty coffee cup. He opens his wallet. It is dark brown and matches his satchel. He

stretches his arms above him, stands and makes his way to the counter where he asks Sophie if she can bring a latte over to his table. Sophie's mouth moves into the shape of a smile. Her eyes do not follow. He puts two pounds fifty-five pence exactly on the counter and returns immediately to his notebook. Words: forty-seven.

Graham knew that Mark would never be able to understand, he just didn't have that creative instinct in him, he didn't understand about romance. Mark's idea of romance was taking a girl to the local Italian and hoping for a quick shag afterwards. He didn't understand beauty.

Sophie has been serving this man coffee for a couple of months now. He always comes in before ten, sits writing for a while and then leaves as if on important business. She wonders if it is the stress of his job that makes him so rude. She takes him his coffee and then begins rolling napkins around cutlery behind the counter, singing under her breath along with the radio. Words: sixty-two.

'Look mate, I know it's been hard for you recently...'
'No, it's nothing to do with that; in fact it's so much more than that. We just connected, you know. Look I'm going to talk to her tomorrow anyway so you can shut up and buy me a pint.' Mark smiled and held his hands up, letting the issue go. *'Same again?'*

It is 8.34am. Lisa, another member of staff, has arrived and is talking to Carl in the back. There is a queue

beginning to form in front of the counter; a man and two women stand awkwardly looking at their phones. Sophie calls for Lisa as she takes their orders and makes their coffees, one by one. Part of the appeal of Leoni's is it's freshly made coffees; this involves the staff grinding the coffee and steaming the milk themselves. A minimum of two people is required. Words: fifty-four.

On Wednesday, Graham got to the coffee shop at 9.15am, quickly got into the queue and looked round to check that Cathy hadn't arrived yet, which she hadn't. 'Two lattes,' he said to the bored looking barista. After collecting the drinks, Graham waited at a table near the door and looked out for Cathy.

Only one of the three customers remains in the shop. She is a blonde thirty-something and occupies a table near the counter, furthest away from the lone man. She flicks through the local paper while sipping her espresso. Lisa is talking to Sophie about her plans for the weekend. Lisa is seventeen and is desperately trying to catch the eye of barman at The Red Lion, a twenty-four year old musician called Jake. Sophie wipes down the coffee machine. Words: seventy.

She came through the door at 9.27am, the sun shining through the doors behind her. Graham rose from his seat and approached her. 'I got you a coffee to apologise for bumping into you the other day,' he said and held out one of the lattes for her. Delight danced across her face. She had been waiting for him to make the first move and now they

were finally talking.

Lisa wears make up piled onto her face, resulting in her face appearing to be a shade darker than her neck. She is petite and wears her uniform white shirt tucked into a short black skirt, with her dark green apron tied tightly round her waist. Her fringe is pinned into a quiff and held in place by half a can of hairspray; the rest of her dyed ice blonde hair swings from the ponytail at the back of her head. Words: thirty-nine.

‘Oh you didn’t need to do that,’ she said smiling with joy and accepting the coffee. ‘Well it’s the least I could do. Would you like to sit down?’ He asked, pointing to a chair next to him.

It is 8.46am. A couple of local builders come in; their blue overalls not yet dirty with brick dust and cement. One a large, jolly man of thirty-five loudly asks how the girls are. His hands are dry and ingrained with dirt. He grabs one of Sophie’s hands over the counter and elaborately proposes to her. She laughs and slaps his arm. The pair perform this ritual at least once a week. Lisa begins making their regular order of three strong cups of tea. Words: eighty-seven.

Overjoyed she sat down, her charcoal skirt becoming tighter as she bent down to the chair, highlighting the perfect curve of her body. Now level with each other, she could see the round bulge of her breasts at the opening of her white blouse. Her white bra was slightly visible through her

blouse, cupping and holding her breasts together. They made a perfect crevice as they touched against each other. She played with the silver chain at her throat, nervous of the intensity that passed between them.

The other builder is nineteen. He is thin but with well-defined arm muscles, and wears his overalls tied round his waist with the arms. He stands tall, grinning, with his hands in his pockets. He watches Lisa as she works. The first builder clips the back of his head, calls him a 'soft lad' and winks at Sophie. Lisa blushes and hands over their teas. Words: eight-five.

She checked her watch, 'I'm so sorry but I'm late for work, I have to go.' He looked into her eyes and could see the disappointment welling within them. Her jaw clenched as though swallowing a bitter pill. He smiled at her reassuringly, 'Tomorrow?' She sighed with relief, 'Yes ok, same time tomorrow. Thank you for the coffee, I really must go.' Cathy got up from her chair reluctantly, and after taking one last long look at Graham, she quickly tore herself away and left.

It is 8.55am. As the builders reach the door, an old couple walk in. Keith holds the door open for them. They smile and thank him. After them a few more singular customers follow, filling up the shop. They wait impatiently as the old man asks for a pot of tea and a couple of teacakes. His wife takes a seat on the table next to the lone man near the window. As the bell clangs for each new arrival the man looks up and then looks at his

watch. He pauses from his writing and turns to look out of the window. The old man takes a seat opposite the old woman and they wait in comfortable silence for Lisa to bring their teacakes. Words: seventy-three.

Obstacles are always present on the path of true love. Cathy was restricted by her high power job in the City, although she was good at it, she felt it restrained her from living her life how she wanted to. She really wanted to be a painter, and her small flat was full of the paintings she made after her day job was over; great big canvas' filled with colour swooping over them.

Carl rings a bell in the back kitchen for service. He has thought about hiring a chef but is reluctant to hire more staff. The blonde woman folds up the paper she is reading, places a couple of pounds on the table and leaves. The lone man knots a small chunk of his hair, just above his temple, between his fingers. The hair sticks in position resembling a small horn. It is 9.01am. Words: sixty.

She just didn't have the confidence in her own ability to break free from her job and make it as an artist. Cathy had seen in Graham all the qualities that she had been looking for, together they would inspire each other to do great things; him writing at his typewriter while she painted, spending the day in creative bliss.

It is 9.03am. Two women in their early twenties enter Leoni's. One struggles with a pushchair while holding a gurgling toddler in the crook of her arm. Both

wear black leggings tucked into comfy, suede boots. Sophie rushes over to help with the pushchair and engages in conversation with the two women, leaving Lisa to serve the remaining customers. The old woman watches with a faint smile on her face, then goes back to spreading jam onto her teacake. Words: thirty.

Graham leant back in his chair, relishing the memory of Cathy sat next to him. He could still smell the flowery scent that her perfume had left around the table.

The young mum strokes her pink t-shirt, which proudly displays the curve of a bump, and holds her left hand out to Sophie. A large diamond ring sits on her third finger. Sophie squeals loudly as the mum looks on with a satisfied grin on her face. The shriek distracts the lone man who looks up and scowls. Words: sixty-one.

They would live together in a rooftop flat, with sun streaming in through the skylights warming their naked bodies. He imagined how she would look stretched out next to him, smooth skin tight over the curves of her body. He could feel her round firm breasts in his hands, her pert nipples between his teeth. Together their bodies would fit perfectly.

It is 9.07am. Sophie goes back behind the counter as more customers arrive. She tells Lisa of the engagement in a hushed voice, while intermittently telling the customers the price of their coffee and the amount of their change. Carl wanders through from the back and sits at the edge

of the counter with a large diary. Words: seventy-seven.

The next day Graham got to the coffee shop early and sat at their usual table, just near the door. He waited patiently for her arrival, when the planets would align and these random events would form together the perfect moment. They would finally be able to share their most intimate thoughts with each other and connect on a deeper level. The anticipation inside him felt like electric pulses that stretched all the way down his fingertips.

It is 9.09am. The lone man sits up straight and smooths down his hair. This catches the momentary glance of the old woman who is facing the window. He surveys the coffee shop while walking over to the counter and ordering two lattes. He looks at the door and not at Sophie as he does this. Sophie rolls her eyes at Lisa who laughs from behind the coffee machine. The man sits back down, glances round and then picks up his pen once again. Words: seventy-six.

Graham had not been able to eat or sleep since he had last seen Cathy. He wondered if she had felt the same, waiting for the day to be over so Friday would come. Graham walked around the supermarket that afternoon, grabbing things on autopilot while he thought about Cathy. He had never felt like this before, as if he would never be complete until she was with him and they could spend their lives together.

It is 9.13am. Leoni's is starting to get busy as more

customers fill the tables. The music from the radio is barely heard over the clinking of china, the bustle of animated voices and the whoosh of the milk steamer. Sophie and Lisa move quickly behind the counter, their faces are smiling with concentration. Carl walks around the tables collecting empty cups and moving chairs back under tables. Words: thirty-nine.

The coffee shop was a blur around him apart from the sharp call of the bell above the door. Each piercing clang sent shivers down his spine, as he looked up, hopeful that with it would bring Cathy's arrival.

It is 9.15am. A young woman walks in. She has long black hair and plump red lips. She wears a beige trench coat tied tightly around her waist. The lone man appears startled and knocks the table with his knee, causing the coffees on top to spill into their saucers. The woman does not notice. Sophie notices the woman, her face morphs with anger. She found out last night that it was this woman that informed her ex-boyfriend of her recent misdemeanours. Sophie stomps round to the other side of the counter and slaps the woman across the cheek. The music of the radio can be heard for a moment. Sophie starts yelling at the woman. The lone man, who has been watching the woman, stands up although he appears not to know why. Carl makes his way to Sophie and pulls her by her arm to the back of the shop. He will be sad to see her go. Drama is not good for business. The woman holds her cheek with tears in her eyes and leaves quickly. The lone man sits back down.



Photograph by Aleksander Nitka
(BSc Psychology with Cognitive Neuroscience)

JAMES D. WARD
BA English

Acme Aunt

I wish I could help you. I know how you feel.
For me love was like an old Looney Tune. Yes,
you're chasing the Road Runner, trying to steal
him away - for what reason? One only can guess.

Then all of a sudden you notice a change.
You're not quite sure what, so you stop and you think.
You remark it's unusual - yes, it's quite strange
that the ground has run out, isn't it? You blink.

You attempt to run back to the cliff's edge in vain,
it's already too late. Look to camera. And fall.
Lucky you, soon to meet an entire world of pain.
The difference between this and love? None at all.

I've been there and know how you feel, and although
I wish I could help you, the only advice
I can give you is fall with a partner. I know,
but do trust me on this. Falling solo's not nice.

G. A. HARRISON
BA English

For The Skin I'm In

Flippin' through a glossy magazine at work

||

Sorry love I don't have three hours

A day to sculpt myself so naturally.

Even as a baby my skin wasn't that

S m o o t h.

My body phoned yesterday

Said it's alright without the collagen.

Thanks.

Chuck it.

Roll tobacco, breath it in.

||

Apple, pear, hour-glass, bean pole.

We have issues with fruit.

With fruit?

My nose isn't button,

But it sits alright on my face.

Ain't no point in cutting it off now,

Is there?

1 in 3 girls:
(globally)
Denied an education.
What's happening today.

World pissed itself two years ago:
More brunettes won FHM than blondes.

1 in 3 girls:
(in the developing world)
Married by 18.
What's happening today.

Beauty's face is six-feet high
With bones that gnaw at polished skin.

1 in 4 women:
(in the UK)
Victims of domestic violence.
What's happening today.

And each time a taste's worth savouring.
Guilt.
Because you're a girl:
"A moment of the lips, forever on the hips."

2 women a week:
(in the UK)
Killed by a partner.
What's happening today?

I have hips, found them in puberty.
But CK says they should get lost.

30% of women:
(in Eastern DRC).
Raped as a weapon of war,
Being used today by the LRA.
Today,
What's happening today?

My eyes don't work,
Had glasses since I was 4.
But guys don't make passes at girls who wear glasses.
They're different from a hat or necklace.
They make you ugly.

23% of women:
(in the UK)
Experience sexual assault.
What's happening today?!

Look in the mirror,
You're not in a bodice.
Your feet aren't bound.

Women beware ~~women~~

Media

Fashion

Films

TV

Music

History

Surgical Knives

...

...

...

What's happening today?

Don't Worry We're Not Exclusive

He leans over the bar for two beers

The joint is packed and she barely hears.

Liquid sloshed in glasses: piss-water.

"What do you want babe?" craning shorter.

Smaller frame muzzles past the crowd:

"Diet coke please, this place is so loud!"

Smiles for the barmaid, frowns for the man,

His grin goes no deeper than his tan.

The bloke laughs at the barmaid: "proud one

This dolly", winks "I'll be free when she's gone".

Barmaid looks to dolly, their eyes roll

South African soldier digs a hole.

Dolly smiles, embarrassed, elusive:
Please don't worry, we're not exclusive,
I'm only here cos he's good in bed.
That's what dolly wishes could be said.

Flip the coin, back two years or so
Blue hair those days, body yet to grow.
Sits across from a girl, hair cut straight
Like Pulp Fiction; waitress acts as bait.
Goaded and snapped at, making her point:
"We're unacceptable in this joint",
Sweet disagrees, in her mind at least
Probs because you're acting like a beast.
Plays with her food, waitress called again
Looking right now like a half-plucked hen.
It ain't quite right, waitress looks baffled
Sweet wishes she wouldn't be hassled.
Leaving they won't pay for this service
Please don't worry, we're not exclusive,
I'm only here cos she's good in bed.
That's what sweetie wishes could be said.

Gold Stars Rising

I wasn't born to the streets, slums and muddy hills of Kampala. The grand lake was never mine. I knew clear, fresh water which we swam and splashed in openly as children, then secretly at night as adults. This lake was not like my lakes. It was brown, a giant stew with dead meat floating in. Not my lake. The bushes and trees weren't those of my childhood: they were simple, bright green and ready for human consumption; mine were dense, dark, inviting and mysterious. There's no fascinating heart of darkness here, everything's just for mankind's taking.

I hadn't wanted to go, hadn't wanted to leave the crops lining the road, the hills of ocean blue and green. I hadn't wanted to slowly forget how the scattered houses looked like the earth was smoking a tobacco pipe when they set up for dinner. But here I was, forgetting. Urban Kampala. Urbane Kampala. They speak different. They look different. They live different. It was full of money, not that I got much of a look in but there was enough to send home to ease the bones which ground at my family's skin, asking for a meal, asking for some more. I stayed with my uncle in a three-roomed flat, high above the ground with nowhere to run. I still can't understand why anyone would want to live in one of those high-up blocks of concrete. I don't know who would choose for people to live like that either – all in the name of 'getting people out of the slums'. I can't see the difference myself.

My Uncle got me a job in a shop with a man he knew, I was mostly moving boxes even though I showed my boss that I was well-educated. I could read and write, done all the grades at school, knew enough about science to know there was more than one and I'd read the Bible cover to cover. But it was a provincial education, a village school, so I was moving boxes.

And one day I came back to my Uncle's apartment, we ate beans and gravy and the night was just drawing in as we settled on the sofa to digest. It took us a time to register the thud of boots on the stairs and when three pairs of hand guns and a machine gun burst in we had not hid, our slow brains trying to catch up with real time. They hadn't even told us what they wanted when they shot my Uncle dead. His body fell down in slow-motion. They wanted money. Head bouncing on the ground. They wanted money. I try to catch him. They want money. The blood oozing out. They want money. The carpet sucking up his red, fleeing life. They want money. They're yelling as the butt of a gun smashes my face. Tasting blood, I drag out the little money we have. Not enough, where's the rest? They're staring, laughing, spitting, leaving. The gold stars pinned to their stone grey arms mount the stairs. I burn for justice still but the days were never ripe for it, and now it's just one of many forgotten crimes. Amin's boys sworn in to protect; they made a lot of money, for policemen.

RICHARD GREEN

MA Modern Literature & Creative Writing

Good Egg

‘I used to pretend that cucumber and Smarties were the body of Christ’ Harriet keeps saying, or maybe she’s said it just the once. Either way, I have a feeling that she’ll repeat it sporadically throughout the evening, or at least more than once, to really ram home just how funny this particular anecdote is. Also, I’m aware that she is aware that unorthodox statements of this ilk will see varying confused reactions and responses of ‘you’re amazing Harriet’ and ‘I love you Harriet’ from around the table, and we’re all aware that she thrives on them. There is a momentary silence after we’ve all told her that we love her, so to pass the time until Harriet says something else witty, I tilt my glass of wine to my lips in what I hope is a debonair, nonchalant (yet sophisticated) manner, and look over to Laura (who’s sitting opposite me) to see if she has noticed my nonchalant air of cool (I think I’m doing quite well), or perhaps more astutely, whether she has noticed me trying to notice whether she is noticing me. The table is still recovering from Harriet, so I stop to consider what it is I’m actually drinking. It’s a bit fruity – what is this wine called? I pick up the bottle, tilting it casually, and read ‘Beaujolais’ (would Laura be impressed if she thought I was the kind of guy who knew all about wines? Probably, although as we’re students, it’s more of a case of seeing which bottle looks the coolest measured against the cost, £5.99, top end. Beaujolais. Oh, I know something about Beaujolais! That Blur song Charmless Man goes ‘he knows his Claret from his Beaujolais’, and I know that it is probably a good thing that I am not a Charmless Man (in this context) because I know what neither Claret

nor Beaujolais are, except that I reckon they are sound like they're both red wines. But of course, Beaujolais must be a red wine because I am drinking it and I can see it's mauve colour in front of my eyes in the glass and now I'm worried that it is probably staining my teeth (it inevitably will) and I hope that nobody notices because, if I'm honest, I don't want to look like Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* in that famous bit where he rises up (in my head it looks like Dracula) after killing that guard with his teeth who was guarding his cell (or was it a policeman? I forget, even though I only saw it about 3 months ago, but 3 months is a long time, a lot can happen in 3 months, lots has happened in the last 3 months in my life and besides, I watched it in my old house and I probably left the DVD there so I'm not likely to be able to find out the answer anytime soon). 'You know in Silence...' I begin to say, but then Laura cuts across me, or maybe she started speaking first, either way I'll let it go and she says 'I used to do that too, but with squash and bourbon biscuits!' There is laughter from around the table and Bertie has snorted his wine over his shirt and the wonky table and his eyes are watering now and the direction of the laughter seamlessly blends from Laura speaking to Bertie's reaction. We call Bertie Bertie, not because it is short for Robert, which ironically (well, not really) is his name, but because his name is Robert Bertrand. We call him Bertie partly because it's short for his surname (although Nicky suggested we call him Russell, but that was so goddamn pretentious, I mean I know Bertie wants to be thought of as of go-getter intellectual but there's a line y'know?) but mostly because he hates it (I thought we could workshop something around the middle part of his full name, Bert-Bert, like, we could call him Be-be which would then segue into Béb , like the Portuguese football player, but then again, there is that guy who's nickname is Beppe who Bertie plays Dodgeball with (semi-ironically, Bertie's quite good at football but doesn't like football culture) and although Beppe

isn't really part of this particular demographic of our social sphere, it's too close and would cause confusion whenever Dodgeball is brought up, which is far too often for my liking) 'Oh you Catholic school girls' says Bertie, wiping the wine dribble from his mouth with his sleeve, with a smirk suggesting he is fully aware of the implications he has made, which I privately think that the two girls more than live up to as far as stereotypes go. 'Well', starts Harriet, 'at least all the years of growing up with communion means we can hold our wine now!' Laughter erupts again and I say 'Unlike you!' and slap Bertie on the shoulder to which there is a half-hearted continuation of the laughter. Goddammit. Why did I have to ruin what was already a pretty good joke by explaining it, even though I wasn't really explaining it, just clarifying the meaning of the joke? I hope people still think I'm funny. I'd like to be known as the funny one at this table, but Harriet is pretty funny because she is so quote unquote random in her observations, and it's pretty hard to tell whether she is deliberate in her humour or just sees the world in a beautifully candid and unusual way or just releases every single thought that comes into her head without checking it through any sort of internal filter. Bertie is funny because he does the whole self-aware faux-pretentious thing where he plays up his own middle-classiness by saying 'oh well I'd only eat granola for breakfast! None of your Rice Krispies! Chuckle chuckle' but then the irony is kind of undermined by the fact that he brought Beaujolais to dinner and I only know how to pronounce it because of, if I'm honest, a fairly terrible Blur track as far as Blur tracks go. Laura isn't really funny. Saying this, she did pronounce Beaujolais as Be-ow-jo-lace, but the laugh from the table was in a semi-pitying way. I'm very funny because I do the whole ironic, self-deprecating thing like pointing out my obvious flaws like 'oh I'm rubbish at talking to girls' and then doing a sad face for so long people laugh because I'm obviously great and keep ticking along.

‘The thing about Catholicism, I mean the main reason I don’t really believe in it anymore’ continues Harriet (although I think she says she believes in it - ‘it’ being Jesus, Mary and the like - to her Grandma and pretends that she is celibate to spare her Grandma the horror of a sexually active granddaughter, which although slightly dishonest, I guess if you think about it is quite a nice gesture.) ‘Wait, this is going to be good!’ interrupts Bertie, putting his hand into a fist and his elbow on the table and resting his chin on his fist and staring mock-fascinatedly into Harriet’s face with an inquisitive if self-aware smile to which Laura and I chuckle and then do the same. This is why I like Bertie, because I wish I was quick enough to do things like that, I really like it, and it is pretty funny. Why don’t I think about things quickly? I think it’s because I think too much and my head gets filled with pop culture references just like what happens to that middle-eastern guy from that Community College TV show... what’s he called? I can’t remember... Achmed, or something. I bet he has an internal dialogue that thinks about things in the way I do, although as its TV you’d probably be able to hear it in a voiceover or something, and if I’m honest I don’t think people would get me if they could hear into my head (because I tend to think in offbeat non-sequiturs and start talking about TV Shows with characters who are obsessed with pop culture like I’m doing now). Oh! I did come up with something pretty sharp pretty quickly the other day thinking about it, but I can’t remember what it was. I was texting Jack, wasn’t I? Yeah, I was texting Jack, about something that John said. I get my phone out at this point, and flick through the messages until I find ‘Jackhammer’ in my phone’s phonebook. We call Jack Jackhammer because his surname is Halmer and nicknames are so intrinsic to be a part of our friendship group, plus it sounds a little dirty, which is always hilarious. I’ve found the text.

Jackhammer

21st February 2013

I'm a big fan

John just said 'Jack has a lot of poo
stories. As far as poo stories go,
he's loaded'

Loaded!

Backed up with stories

Backed up with a back log of
backed up logs

Boom!

I was so proud of that last text

You should be! Get yourself a cake
or something as a reward!

Can you bake me one?

Next time I come round

Claimed. Holding you to that

Fuck.

19th February 2013

Did you borrow my copy of Shaun
of the Dead?

Yeah, Jamie gave it to me when I

...and there is laughter again. I look up, I've missed the joke completely because I was reading my messages. 'I totally just missed that' I say as I put my phone on the table, still on and face up, in case I get to show that I can be as quick-witted as Bertie later on in the conversation (I'm still proud of that 'backed up logs' bit...). Bertie and Laura are completely in hysterics. 'I... I... I... Harriet!' says Bertie, tears in his eyes from laughing. Laura is flushed, laughing too. Harriet is doing her sardonic face that should be captioned by a 'whaaaaat?!' Roy Lichtenstein cartoon-style speech-bubble if real life was a cartoon. That would be really cool actually. They'd make Harriet have a big mouth and Bertie's hair really big and spikey like Dennis the Menace and Laura would probably have a neck-scarf like Daphne from Scooby Doo, which would probably make me Shaggy. 'She said...' Laura begins before Harriet interrupts 'I said, isn't it a bit weird that nuns are all married to Jesus?' I stare at her because that's just not really funny, as jokes go. 'Did I tell you about that text I sent...' I begin, before Laura interrupts again. 'No, you said' (pant, laugh) 'isn't it a bit awkward for nuns? I mean they're married to Jesus... but they're all married to Jesus! I mean he can't bang them all!' I allow myself to laugh. That's relatively funny, but still not as clever or funny as my text I don't think. 'Check this out' I begin to say to Bertie, holding up my phone, but then Harriet says 'When nuns get to heaven, do you think Jesus is like hello ladies! And they all have an orgy'. The table explodes with laughter again, presumably at the bizarre nature of her observation, but I'll allow myself to enjoy it though, because it is pretty funny. I put my phone back in my pocket with a cool spinny push-slide thing that I like to do and remember that I got these jeans from Burton, which I don't think is a great brand name because it sounds like a gruff northern town and sells distinctly average clothing unless you like boring shoes which I don't, and to prove it I was wearing converse all-star high-tops earlier

and now I'm wearing winklepickers. Laura once said that shoes are the making of a man and she can tell exactly what a man is like from the shoes he wears, so I asked her what her favourite men's shoes were and she said winklepickers so I went out and bought some but Bertie's reaction to Laura's statement was to snort and rubbish it and to say personality counts far more than a good pair of shoes. But he was wearing old squash shoes and a hoodie, so I'm not sure; I guess I'll have to measure how nice and funny Bertie is against and how attractive and fashionable Laura is to decide who is right. I stare absentmindedly at Laura for a while to begin this qualification process and think about that time on the bridge where she said she liked my Smiths t-shirt and the sun caught her hair just behind her head and she looked lovely and oh fuck I just remembered that time with John and Jamie. Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck. Jamie was telling this story about their housemate Craig (who everybody calls Dora because he does geography and has a big map of the world on his wall and a facebook profile listing all seventeen countries he has been to) and Jamie was saying 'Dora had passed out and I was literally clearing girls out of our house. I put one in a taxi once, I was like "random skank, how may I help you"' and John laughed and I sweated and Laura walked past and smiled and waved as she climbed the stairs. John then said 'that girl, I would make her scream' and I asked why he would want to scare her and they laughed at me because I didn't realise it was a sexual thing, so I quietly said 'I kissed her once' and John and Jamie both yelled 'you boy!' (as apparently indicating my gender is a sign I have achieved greatness) or something along those lines and then they started saying 'Egg you smashed her!' and 'Egg poached a lass!' (my nickname is Egg because my surname is Ecclestone and I'm quote unquote a good egg and although nobody says phrases like 'good egg' anymore, we were in Tesco's and there was a marketing thing that had some sort of awful-

yet-good-so-worth-doing good eggs pun and I picked up some eggs because I wanted to make omelettes because they're easy to cook and cheap and go well with salad and Laura said (in her funniest ever moment, probably) look! Egglestone and his good eggs! You're such a good egg cooking omelettes for us all! I'm glad I got a nickname, even though it is more than a bit inane, it took two whole weeks into university, but then I finally felt at home in the group. It's almost like a survival thing). But if I'm honest, the kiss was in freshers' week last year and she was drunk and I don't think she remembered and I was too nervous to say anything afterwards. John and Jamie just kept caterwauling, then I thought of a really good pun but felt horrible for thinking it up but said it anyway because it was pretty funny so I said 'I guess you should ask me, what came first, the chick or the egg?' to which they howled with laughter, but then Laura came back downstairs right at that moment and I don't know whether she heard and oh fuck I'm sweating and I flinch. Harriet is saying 'men fall asleep after they come, that's why I don't believe in having sex during the day, it makes them unproductive' and Bertie and Laura are positively rocking back and forth in their chairs. Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck. She can't have known, can she? 'Egg mate, want some more wine? Maybe that'll loosen that old tongue of yours' says Bertie, pouring me a drink. This is something I like about him: he is charming and has a way with words that combines lots of different facets, like modern words mixed with older phrases making him sound educated but earthy. She can't have heard that can she? And she wouldn't have known it was about her anyway. We've been friends for two years now (well, twenty-one months, or is it twenty-two? I think it's twenty-two) so she would have said something by now, or treated me badly or not wanted to eat dinner with me and Bertie and Harriet tonight, and oh god, what if it's all a trick? What if this is just a ruse to announce that I'm an asshole in front of

everybody, in front of my closest friends tonight? I am an arsehole. 'Yeah, Bertie, that'd be grand.' Who the fuck says grand? Oh Egg, you are an arsehole. I polish off the glass quickly and excuse myself saying I need to go to the bathroom. I go to the bathroom and I look into the mirror and identify all the imperfections in my face, before dismissing them by saying 'you are a handsome devil' like I'm Morrissey and then I wink at myself, and I remember reading once that Morrissey said he deliberately used archaic language in *This Charming Man* to add a level of mystery and, to an extent, creepiness (or maybe I'm remembering that wrong and it is just how the song seems to me). 'I would go out tonight, but I haven't got a stitch to wear' I sing to myself as I leave the bathroom and then think, well I'm wearing my winklepickers so I could probably go out anyway and I wonder if Laura is going out, but then again she probably will never talk to me after tonight, because I'll boundless do something wrong or say something to upset her and oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck, why did I say that, what was I to gain? It was six months ago but a lot of things can happen in six months and she's probably just building up to explode at me and hate me and why am I such an arsehole? Fuck. I go downstairs and meet Laura putting on her coat and she looks at me and I look into her eyes wondering if she knows that I am an arsehole. 'You're a bit quiet this evening Pete', she says to me, 'is everything ok?' 'Yeah I've just been thinking things over' I say and she says 'you really are a good egg you know' and she smiles and then leaves. I wander back into the sitting room and think what it would be like to be in *The Smiths*. I'd probably want to be the drummer because I really like Johnny Marr and couldn't play guitar like him even if I had all the stomp boxes and Morrissey's voice is pretty good as voices go, and the drummer is good, but nobody knows his name and I'm sure he would be replaceable and it would be pretty sweet just to be involved. I sit down and Bertie pours me

another drink and I'm accepting my Brit award for lifetime contribution to music and then I'm then chatting to Elton John and Jonathan Ross afterwards, and Elton is saying how it was so nice of Morrissey to admit I write all the lyrics to all the songs after all these years and Jonathan says I must join him and Jane for a glass of his finest 1957 Glenfiddich afterwards to discuss the new album coming out next year before I apologise, saying 'sorry chaps, I've got to go on and play' and I pick up my chopsticks ready to drumroll into *How Soon Is Now* and then Harriet asks 'So, is Laura good at blowjobs?'. A good question, I'd like to know the answer but what the fuck and who is she asking, me? I look up, I'm back from the Brits and Harriet is smirking at Bertie. 'Ahh young Harriet, a gentleman never tells' Bertie says, but then winks and nods his head slyly, before looking at me and nudging my ribs with his elbow, 'keeping it casual, though, she's too zoned out for me'. 'I can imagine, she's acts trippy like she's on drugs half the time, we should do some drugs. What drugs have you done Egg?' says Harriet but I'm not listening anymore because Bertie is such a bag of fucking dicks. Actually, semantically, that should probably be 'Bertie is a fucking bag of dicks' but then again, grammatically, 'fucking' is technically a verb and doesn't really make grammatical sense, especially as how can a bag of dicks be fucking anything, and why are they unattached from the body and in a bag? Insults are odd, and Bertie would know how this came about, he's an English student after all, but I don't want to see him anymore because he is a bag of fucking dicks and I want to punch him because eugh I've flinched again. 'Ahh! Bertie! You've made Egg uncomfortable!' says Harriet and I'm looking into the table with such ferocity imagining how if Bertie was really small I could squish him with my spoon and then she continues 'Look Egg, I know you don't exactly get a lot of poon, but you could be such a man whore if you wanted, you've got great hair and you just need to get a bit of slap and tickle

under your belt. Pun intended' and Bertie snorts again. I could say something now, I could announce that Bertie is a bag of dicks and being raised a catholic school girl doesn't mean that Harriet has to conform to the stereotype so exactly, I mean, I get it, you were sheltered, but we are all sheltered in some way or other, I mean I grew up in a very conservative area too so I just drink again and these guys are my best friends so I don't want to say anything I'll regret later and I wonder where Laura is, probably waiting for Bertie to get home so she can give him a good blowjob, although it's a casual thing apparently so maybe I can get in the way but I don't want to upset Laura or Bertie by getting in the way and these guys mean far too much to me for me to hurt anybody and they gave me a nickname after all and I am a quote unquote good egg, so I'll just tell Laura she looks pretty in front of Bertie to undermine him but oh fuck I don't want her to know because she'll reject me and I'll be embarrassed and Harriet will take the piss and where is my drink oh I've drunk it.