

The Inconsequential

There's always time for levity

Issue 23

THE HEDONISM IN THE CLOUDS ISSUE

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It used to be the case that if the authorities deemed you a 'person of interest' (a little insulting as I always thought I was interesting) and, therefore, someone they felt they should track, they had to employ the services of a couple of doughnut-eating agents in fawn trench coats (one of whom would, invariably, be killed in the second act) to sit outside your house in their Ford Prefect until such time as they had gathered enough information via the bug they'd planted in your geraniums to nail you to the wall, or at least stand you up against it.

Later, as technology progressed, phone tapping augmented the surveillance, allowing the Men in Fawn to dispense with the bind of actually having to see you to know what you were up to. They could still follow your movements, but now they could also monitor your pizza consumption and how many times you called your mother.

Later still, or to put it another way, more recently, we entered the exciting age of the Information Super Highway, or judging by the speed of my broadband, the Information B186 to Chaffing Hundred*, and almost overnight, our overcoated pastry fiends could be consigned to the Museum of Law Enforcement Cliché to be replaced by eight-stone nerds wearing white nylon shirts and black, thick-rimmed glasses and who played text-based adventure games for kicks. These characters could determine, not only your adherence to familial responsibilities, but, over a period of time, your favourite pubs, films, music, supermarkets, food, friends and, the reason they were watching you in the first place, your regular contacts. All done remotely by plodding their way along your internet trail.

However, therein lay our 'stay under the radar for a bit longer' card. One flick of the switch and your BBC Acorn crackles into blackness. No computer usage, no electronic trail and it was back to the museum to wheel out the doughnut boys.

Now, we arrive at the present and, ironically, the future has arrived with it, accompanied, you'll be pleased to hear, by the point. It's 2013 and 'smart' phones, tablets, laptops, games devices, e-readers and ever more powerful desktop PCs abound. Our social media activity is at such a Babelesque level that we don't have to interact with anyone on a face-to-face basis any more. With just the spasmodic twitch of an index finger, we can tell and show anyone and everyone who and what we like and don't like, where we prefer to go on holiday and where we'd rather not, what we had for breakfast and what we're going to have for tea, who we're going to meet and where and, most importantly of all, our exact position on the planet when we do all of these things.

Thanks to satellites and GPS tracking systems of one form or another, no matter which device we use to update our status, our precise location can be relayed to anyone prepared to sift through our ramblings.

Now, our be-nyloned geek can sit back on his Parker Knoll black leather recliner in his air-conditioned, converted warehouse and simply read our Facebook page or Twitter feed to find out everything he needs to know. Our whole life, down to the most minute detail, is laid out for the whole world to see and, because we can never be sure if the people we've added as friends are authentic, we could have even invited the Men in Nylon to join our innermost circle.

Today, there is no escape from the all-seeing eye above the clouds, no avenue of evasion open to us. If proof of this were needed, we reproduce here satellite images of your Editors, captured one balmy, autumn afternoon as we went about our business, or more accurately, to the pub. It serves to highlight that, although we may think we have avoided detection all of these years, there are figures in the shadows who know what we're doing and exactly where we are.

Our expectation of privacy is all but non-existent. Every piece of our electronically-held information is available to those willing to pay for it and those who would spy on us have only to lift a finger to have our lives laid bare before them.

* Eds: In case you were wondering, yes, there is a B186 and it does go to Chaffing Hundred. In answer to your next question, it's near Grays in Essex.

Little Editorial - "Never Mind The Quantity Feel The Wit."

December 2013: As yet another year steams, apparently unstopably, towards its conclusion, we should, perhaps, take a moment to reflect on those who, through no fault of their own, failed to make it to this year's New Year's Eve party. Some will be seen no more, while a significant few took such a battering that they will take an age to recover.

We refer, in our left-wing, right-on, radical way, of course, to such lofty ideals as Honour, Integrity, Respect, Loyalty and Trust.

Politicians' expenses scandals, clandestine 'phone-tapping, insensitive calls for a return to the 'greed is good' mentality (if it ever went away) have all sledge-hammered at the edifices of those aforementioned attributes until just their crumbling cores remain. Character traits that take a lifetime to build, destroyed by several heavy thwacks from avaricious individuals with no sense of society. Every single self-serving act planned and perpetrated behind closed doors from the comfortable, padded, winged armchairs of some Club or other away from the dirtying gaze of Joe Public.

Oh for the introduction of some form of legislation that would kick those doors ajar and see through the obfuscating clouds of selfishness that lay like yellow-brown smog over our ruling 'elite'.

But wait...what's this...as set out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review, a bill to allow Government agencies access to everyone's emails, texts, calls and website visits. Perhaps this will make the upper middle classes think thrice before attempting their fraudulent activities. Ah, hang on! It's only to be used to identify those likely to perform acts of terrorism. We can't think of any in the higher strata of our society that the Government would conceive of being a terrorist, since they're all making a killing selling arms to them instead, so that would mean their parabolic dishes and electronic interception equipment would be pointed directly at us, the Great Unwashed...and as any country's leaders regard their own citizens as the biggest threat to their security, each and every one of us would be under suspicion, allowing each and every one of our electronic communications to be monitored. The phrase, 'one law for us...' has never been more apt.

For the second issue running, I've allowed my disgust of injustice and double-standards to turn this little editorial into something of a rant, but dissent needs to be voiced and heard, or we will start to get the idea we don't live in a democracy!

More detail on surveillance methods through the ages (and, hopefully, more humour) can be eavesdropped in our Cover Story. Those of you hoping for a little more in the way of festive delights will be pleased to learn that our Ethics Girls are attending an adaptation of a Dickens favourite and they would love your company, while those readers who prefer an outsider's viewpoint will be apoplectic to learn that offerings from three Friends of the Inconsequential await your attention.

Until we grope for each other in the void once more, keep checking the room for bugs and, remember, they know where you live...

COME ON, FEEL THE NO-SALE FEE

The estate of a child of the seventies icon - even though he was 35 years old at the start of the decade - Norbert Cigarette-Holder, AKA 'Nobby', of the '70s pop-rock group, 'Dead Leads' was auctioned off last month.

So many items were much sought after by fans and antiquarians alike. There was even a slight controversy when one person in the auction room claimed that one of the items was actually something Nobby had borrowed from him but had not returned. Denny Incline claimed that Nobby loaned the book at one of the group's early gigs in Old Fallings, a gig abandoned after Incline's boots caught fire and he had to be extinguished by the local fire brigade. A first edition of 'Mullets Today', which didn't catch on and closed after only two issues, was predicted to go for at least ten thousand pounds, but was immediately withdrawn and tagged with an exhibit 'A' tag, ready for the court battle which will ensue.

The item that went for the most money, an implausible £60,000, was Nobby's vivid purple tanktop, complete with Chicken Bhuna curry stains, a fact established after forensic tests. The most disappointing part of the auction happened when Nobby's sideburns from '73 incurred a no-sale fee despite having a reserve price of only £7.50.

FIFTH COLUMN:

We may be hamsters, we may be ants, we may even be budgerigars but something I know we're not are songbirds.

Particularly on mornings of any climatic description but more often spring and summer, when you round a corner and are assailed by...the happy whistler.

The hock and brain-grating horror of someone running unspun wool through the contents of your skull fills you with dread and a melancholy so deep you could easily hide all the joy in the world without trace.

If this isn't awful enough, it is in stark contrast to the beautiful songlike conversations of birds of varying sizes to-ing and fro-ing from climbing foliage on the fronts of houses adjacent to where I live.

I have reached a conclusion over the course of my life, and this is now unequivocal : whistling, in public or in earshot of a living organism, should be banned, censored and outlawed. All pursing of lips to facilitate the wretchedness that is whistling should be institutionally discouraged through any education system.

Whistling is one of the most self-indulgent acts expressing the attitude of 'I don't give a hoot for how others feel'. The only saving grace for the windy miscreant would be accidental ignorance because, if thought to be consciously deliberate then they should have their vocal equipment - if indeed it is this set up that produces the dismal noise* - removed as an act of social service.

If indeed this forced air caterwauling is an expression of happiness - not merely carelessness - in the perpetrator, then we, as a civic duty, must retrain them to find other, more sociable ways to tell us they are at ease with the world or, I suspect, their own world.

Whistling, like some other anti-social, ignorantly aggressive behaviours does inadvertently enhance our own appreciation of another, more inclined to be sociable, behaviour...silence. The immediate sense of bliss felt on cessation of a single tune or medley of whistling is a consummate pleasure. The only dark edge to such peace is the horrible thought that the whistler may not be finished and may restart the torture within the hour, within the same day, within the next week or even again in this lifetime.

The disturbances began at an early age when, awaiting water that would contribute significantly to a welcome beverage, the kettle would blow its top after a build up of pressure resulting in a whining noise that preceded the Bee Gees' cutting edge tones. It was at these times we youngsters got our sprint training, tearing across the linoleum at breakneck pace to turn the gas down and return the kitchen to eerie but beautiful silence. Odd times, we would incur mild scalding as we leapt at the offending whistle cap in our eagerness to avoid prolonged exposure to the noise. If only we had been weaned on Saxophone and clarinet jazz, we might have built up an immunity to the whistler's curse and our desire to swing would have been transformed into an impulse to live rather than die.

In reminiscence I recall the existential pains of what was recognised as puberty but, I think my particular discomfort during the adolescent years was attributable to hearing a moderately successful whistling recording that made the higher reaches of the pop charts of the day. For a number of years, the residual unease this semi-professional whistler caused for me meant that mathematical equations visually prompted the same effect. Just as the inane yet vicious whistling haunted the airwaves, algebra haunted my nasal passages, stroked my brain with a bastard file and resembled a whistle to at least twenty places after the decimal point. The cosines were there for me when the complexities of maths whistled through, up and over my head.

Nowadays, even a casual purse of the lips to blow the dreaded noise has me twitching and sometimes running to get out of earshot, where at least the dangerous pounding of exhaustion has the sound of throbbing that drowns out the effects, and to some degree the immediate recollection of any whistling. In thinking of the extent to which this universally recognised as benign practice of whistling has gripped my psyche and the probable psychosis it can engender in me, it is cruel to acknowledge that these two psychoanalytic words - oops three - can produce a whistling noise through the teeth as the tongue presses up against the upper palate. What a perverse coincidence. I even stopped going past Whistle Stop Wine shops because the word tormented me so. End. Phew!

*There is still much speculation over what physics are at work in producing the vibrations and wind disturbances that are manifest in whistling, whether kettle or human produced but one thing that needs no further research is that the result is spurious and most irritating.



EARTH

RELIGION

ECONOMICS

LEAP OF FAITH

SONG OF THE WEST

**KEEP SHITUM AND DUTIFUL
KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON THE DUTIFUL
ABANDON ALL THAT'S BEAUTIFUL
IF YOU WANT TO BE USED**

**WHAT'S WISE ABOUT OUR DEMISE
NOT DEGRADING IT'S BRIGHT
CLOSE YOUR BRAINS JUST SURMISE
BE FOOLISH AND BE SLIGHT
LURCH COMPLETELY TO THE RIGHT**

GOOD MORNING?

"Oh, what a perfect pay, I'm glad you spent it on me!" was the first noise Gerald heard on waking. In front of him was a naked, thirty-ish year-old woman with a breakfast tray in her hands, reaching forward and revealing a couple of soft-boiled eggs, part of another feast she was putting in his lap. He could only muster a hoarse cough and the fists in the eyes like when he was a child. However, more bog-brush-through-the-brain noise was to assail his sensibilities when he lifted the lid on his breakfast cereal. A brief but damaging blast of Handel's Messiah lifted his eyelids to their furthest physically possible point. He could only clear his throat again, this time with the accompanying phlegm. He reached over and grasped the half-full glass of his favourite lager, throbbing with golden brightness, always just a hand's length away.

Having staved off another outburst of song and dance from the naked stranger, Gerald fumbled for his electronic communication device. It leapt into brain-splitting brightness instantaneously and he thumbed his way to the news feed page, it read: 'Government admit being ideologically and morally wrong'.

He suddenly relaxed and awoke, slowly, groggily and to a half-lit, otherwise empty room. It had been a nightmare. He said to himself: 'That's the last time I fall asleep watching Independent TV channels!' He coughed, reassured that no-one would be singing at him, inanimate objects would just mechanically hum and the government of the day would continue to lie about their intentions to misrepresent the majority of its voting customers.

MONEYMEN CAN GO DOWN AS WELL AS UP

A financier was involved in a talk-down incident the other month, that resembled a classic suicidal attempt to take his own stock.

Mr Tim Idsole attracted a ghoulish lunchtime audience which, at times, cheered and jeered his prevarication over jumping off a very high ledger.

"How's your book-keeper," one joker shouted, only to be answered by a colleague who piped up with, "ergo cogito sum."

When Mr Idsole finally fell, sometime after two in the afternoon, in to the rescue package one floor below, the safety net had been set up with the help of public funding.

The serial joker quipped, "I hope your account books balance better than you."

The whole incident was later revealed to be nothing more than a cheap, tax-deductible publicity stunt. Mr Idsole was discovered as a clandestine DD paid member of Equity. Although his mental state is still under observation by Doctor Faustus.

TOWN PLANNING

Next to Hershey's Funeral Parlour one can see a modern brick building called Giggly's restaurant.

On the 'today's special' board was: 'Just Dessert Special - Death By Chocolate'.

Latest Muse: Witty one-liners are making a comeback in this modern, sound-bite world. Minted!

The Man who mistook a Toaster for his Wife

A story by Pat McConnell

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you to the Brighton Psychiatric Society and our special guest lecturer tonight, Professor Theodore Smith, Emeritus Professor of Pluralistic Psychiatry at Oxford University. Professor Smith, as many of you will know, was a pupil of Professor Andrew Sachs, famous for the seminal book 'The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat'. He is himself the best-selling author of 'Maurice - Half Man, Half Wardrobe' and 'Animate/Inanimate - Who Cares?' Teddy, as he is known in the profession, is a leading expert on non-traditional emotional attachments and tonight he will give a lecture entitled 'The Man who mistook a Toaster for his Wife'.

Dr. Smith. [Polite applause as a small, bespectacled man takes the podium]

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and good evening Ladies and Gentleman.

Our case tonight is George Trimbull of 27a Queens Road, Battersea, whom I will refer to throughout as George T. to protect his privacy. Mr. T. has been a patient of mine for many years and I have had hundreds of therapy sessions with him over time.

Like many cases, as Freud found, psychiatric problems begin in childhood. George had a conventional, happy childhood until he was 12, when during the renovation of the family kitchen, his mother ran off with a washing machine salesman from Essex. George's father fell into deep depression at this betrayal and in a fit of rage removed all electrical appliances from the house, later even installing gas lighting. George was deeply traumatised at losing not only his beloved mother but also access to television, radio and other useful gadgets. His only memory of his mother was a small transistor radio she had given him for his tenth birthday, which he listened to under the blankets in bed, for fear of incurring his father's rage.

George did reasonably well at school, especially maths and physics, and at 18 was lucky to land an apprenticeship as a white goods service technician with Homebase, the nationwide electrical appliance store. George's father was enraged with this seeming betrayal and threw George out of the house. However, George returned to the family home just six months later as his father had died of a broken heart and alcoholism. He immediately refurbished the entire house with discount electrical appliances.

Small, attractive and fine boned, like his beautiful mother, George had no problems finding companionship (of either sex) but these liaisons were invariably short-term. George always felt as if something was missing. You will recognise this, of course, as one of the classic symptoms of Clinical Alexithymia or the inability to describe emotions in the 'self'. This can lead, as studies have shown, to disturbances such as binge eating or perverse sexual behaviour. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Love came for George one day while at the John Lewis January sales where, browsing small appliances, George spotted Kay. It was lust at first sight. Kay was a model PT2-13J Kelvinator 2 slice toaster with gleaming chrome insets, a slightly pink pearl-effect facia and knobs of a delicate ivory, the same shade as George's mother's favourite nail polish. Kay was the most beautiful thing that George had ever seen and he immediately bought her and an additional five-year parts guarantee. He hugged the box all the way home.

From the beginning, home life was bliss for George and Kay. Each morning, they would have breakfast together with Kay cooking two crumpets, toasted exactly to George's liking. "So dependable," George told me many times, often adding, "unlike my mother." At weekends, the happy couple would, as a treat, share toasted bagels and cream cheese. Kay hummed contently, while George read the weekend papers. Kay accompanied George to bed but, after a serious incident with a combustible duvet, Kay was unplugged each night with a kiss and a "goodnight

sweet princess, and flights of angels sing thee to rest." George rigged the TeasMade so that each morning, as the alarm went off, Kay was automatically switched on and delivered two slices of wholemeal toast just as the kettle boiled – Heavenly.

George was popular at work, but his colleagues often wondered why he did not show photos of his wife or invite her to the annual Christmas party. George replied, with some truth, that Kay was 'tied to the kitchen, and not turned on by going out.' His workmates also pondered why George always took his own toaster on training courses and work trips but he explained this away by claiming that he had a particular Gluten allergy that required him to only eat crumpets browned to exactly 87.4 degrees. They believed him and after a time stopped asking. But, George never shared his crumpets.

Holidays were not a problem. After 9/11, it became impossible for George to fly with Kay in hand luggage and he absolutely refused to put her in the hold. Instead, each year they took a little gite in the Dordogne, driving there in their open-topped cabriolet with Kay's cord streaming in the breeze. Each morning, George would stroll to the local boulangerie for a pain de campagne, which he would slice (roughly) and toast with Kay. At night, a bottle of white wine and toasted chocolate croissants were shared by candlelight.

At one therapy session a few years ago, George informed me that he wished to regularise his relationship, hoping to make an honest appliance out of Kay. Despite my warnings that officialdom frowned on 'trans animate' relationships, George approached the local registrar for the necessary permission to marry. Not only did the registrar refuse, he laughed George out of the office with a raucous "go find an empty fuse box, you pair." George tried several marriage offices and even went to that most liberal of cities, Amsterdam, but they all refused as crossing the Animate/Inanimate Divide was a 'power strip too far'. Eventually, the pair had to settle for a marriage certificate from an Internet church in Nevada by lying about Kay's age. [Even for Nevada, 8 was too young].

George and Kay are today, fairly happy though, of course, childless. But they are hoping one day that their love can be celebrated openly and that they will be allowed to adopt a little Italian cappuccino maker.

But why do we as a society frown on such relationships? Three hundred years ago, marriage between people of different religions was taboo and 200 years ago inter-racial marriage was frowned upon. Today both are accepted openly. Ten years ago the idea of same-sex marriage was a minefield but is now on the agenda of every political party as they hustle for the pink pound.

Why not a legal union across the animation barrier, provided that there is consent?

People have always desired inanimate objects. One has only to think of women and their obsessions with shoes and handbags. And men with cars! The most popular television show around the world today is Top Gear, which is a homoerotic orgy of automobile desire if ever there was one. And as for the sexual symbolism of the five bore shotgun, need I say more. And who has not at times preferred a good book to a good cook?

Women absolutely love their bling and men their boys-toys. So why not go the next step and legalise these relationships. Why should someone not be allowed to marry a Dolce & Gabbana cocktail dress or form a civic partnership with a Harley Davidson V-Rod Muscle?

Taboo – that's all!

As some of you may be aware, I myself have just come out of the kitchen closet, and announced that I am proudly an 'Inanamour' the name for someone who loves an inanimate object. I have been living with my partner Dyson for several years. Dyson is an upright (often uptight) vacuum cleaner who I can attest fully lives up to his manufacturer's slogan 'never loses power'.

[That revelation was met with nervous laughter from the audience, and a loud cheer from a couple

in the back row – a young man and his rotisserie oven companion]

Dyson and I face many trials not least because not only are we fighting Inanimate prejudice but we are also a same-sex couple. But we will continue to fight for recognition of our love.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will finish on that plea to stand up and be counted.

I see that there is a cup of tea waiting at the back of the hall. I am happy to answer questions about this case or next week's 'Inanamour' march to lobby Westminster. I am also happy to sign copies of my new book 'Hell hath no fury like an IPAD scorned'.

Thank You [to polite and bemused applause] ●

RETURN OF THE TALKIES

Mr Archibald Type has just regained his voice after two decades of mutism.

Scientists are still baffled by his previous condition as there has never been any easy set of correlative symptoms that may have indicate any cause for his long period without sound. They are as puzzled as Archie by the sudden recovery of his voice. Another strange aspect of his condition is that he has no accent that is recognisable, excepting a hint of electronic syllabic idiosyncracies. He pronounces certain words as though pieced together from different times. There are theories which put his condition down to a form of neurosis that has at its base a fear of being misunderstood but even expert neuroscientists are pretty much stumped.

One tenacious boffin did propose a theory of cosmic irony but he couldn't complete his research when his pet lizard died. Initial tenets of the cosmic irony theory explained Mr Type's condition as one in which a man of Archie's severe generality, having no distinct personality or outstanding features manifest a silence induced by over-representation in the linguistic coinage of the last two decades. Twenty years that consisted of severe generalisation through which people like Mr Type were described as markers and criteria through which social and political legislation and ideology was based.

Along with cards of sympathy for his loss of a much loved lizard, some refuted the boffin's controversial theory on the basis of Mr Type's voice returning when this generic description of diverse humanity is at its peak, contradicting Dr Frankly Perplexed's theory of cosmic irony.

In the two decades of silence, Mr Type has had to work from home and is very thankful for advances in technology which provided him with forms of expression that meant he could live an ordinary and unspectacular life.

"Glove puppetry alienated too many people in the beginning. People felt intimidated by my characters and needed aural triggers to be reassured of my benignity and fully understand my meaning. I was able to take to electronic communication and in fact, am now a prominent reearcher in electronic forms of language, such as text speak (txt spk) and voice recognition software development." Archie bellowed out to our interviewer. We understood he hasn't quite mastered his volume control yet.

SPIRITUAL MIKE

There are further delays on the spiritual plane as loved ones are forced to form long queues waiting to speak with their living relatives. There are tailbacks of communing as the living are not able to pay up front fees to the mediums.

Psychical baggage handlers are thinking of striking in empathy. However, the authorities have deemed such proposed action unlawful as it contravenes the 'flying pickets' rule introduced in the dark ages (the 80s to those who lived and died during that fateful decade).

Also, under the counter sales of ouija boards and crystal balls have been increasing as people seek the black market to avoid the white market that is preventing closure and peace of mind due to levying immediate payments only for seances and visits to mediums in general.

Madame Y is being held for talking in tongues without declaring the card payment beforehand.

PHILOSOPHICAL SNEEZE

IF LIFE IS ONLY A GAME THEN PARAPHRASING IS AN EXTREME SPORT

TALL STORY (part one)

THE STRANGE PHENOMENON OF BRIGHT AS A BUTTON

Don't ask me how, or when, it happened but I was born with self-awareness.

I can remember staring down at the nub of skin and thinking, 'That'll put a crimp in my evening wear'.

Later on I was relieved to constantly stare at a recess that put me in mind of the end of a balloon; rubbery and satisfying to toy with.

My lucidity still comes and goes though. This is being written during one of my sharper periods. Oh, hold on...

Their r times wen spelin (sick) dezerts me, even tho i can think loosid (sick). How did i get a leckseekon? who nose. Its a buger sometimes. (sick)

...As you can see, I can't control the flow and the sick in brackets is not necessarily referring you to incorrect spelling but indicating just how the baby food repeats on me and causes such embarrassing moments of foul regurgitation. I have thought these episodes are brought on by stress or acute self-consciousness but I cannot be sure, yet. I've heard mum and dad talk about my behaviour but they can't figure it yet either. I think I am entering an emoshunallee hard peereodd and my mood swings are making evereel uncomfatable esspeshallee mee. (sick)...

...When it's dark is hardest. I can't sleep because of the wind and sometimes I cry out. It wakes mum up and I feel really guilty. So, most of the time I just burp, fart and, yes, that as well, until I drop off, eventually.

As if learning wasn't confusing enough, I've this nagging self-doubt: how to be sure what I am is me, my self-image and then there's how others see me. I think others see me as modestly cute - I'm a bit of a butterball just at the minute. I've not found any sport I like - you know, the slightly embarrassed, can't actually say 'ooh, he's gorgeous', but he's not the ugliest but how to sound sincere moments when people pat you on the head.

If only I could master the spoken language thing so as to be able to express aurally what I'm thinking. The books I'm given don't really help. I mean, pop-up, tactile and lacking plot and story. It seems they expect me to be impressed and put everything in my mouth. How do they expect me to learn the nuances of the language I can already think in? I ask you. Oops. (sick) I suppose my moodiness doesn't help anyone,

me included. I can't control the massive swings from elation to frustrated anger, and the crying makes my head ache. Before now, I've even had a sore jaw after...(sick)...

...a partikler bad seshun. Itz gon agen. (sick)...

...fonetiks dusnt help spellin wen will i lern mor kompleks wurd konstityoushun??

mebbe ill use that litul rekordr bort for my last speshul...(sick)

...day. Ah, that's better. Possibly, I might be learning better self-control as that spell was much shorter than previously. (sick)...Oops, the other. Where's that damned potty. Do they need to put it in the middle of the room? Even our cat, Vince, laughs at me when I'm on display. I got desperate the other time (event not so much clock, although I say one the other time and it made me wonder about event order) and nearly fell in the toilet. At least, with a lot of effort and stretching, I could close the door and have some dignified privacy. I get the impression they, my parents, didn't get why I cried so hard when soiling myself, or when on the potty in the middle of the room. If only I could tell them in language just how much the little room upstairs means to me and my development.

If we're not careful, self-awareness could develop in to severe and destructive self-consciousness, maybe even psychoses.

I get the impression they don't understand why I make a break for the door when the kid from next door is on the potty as a form of entertainment for his doting parents. They appear to have no sense of decorum. I feel for him yet, oddly, he seems to lap it up, as if he loves the attention. He's a bit of a weird one if you ask me. Also, I hope they don't expect us to be friends just because of contingent proximity or any misguided obligation due to our parents being friendly with each other.

The lad, Nicholas or Nicky, gets real stropopy when there's any gift giving and he doesn't get anything. His enthusiasm for objects makes my reserved acceptance of such unfulfilling trinkets look like I am an ungrateful little tyke. I know how parents try hard and in the current economic climate they try to keep up with developments, but I would rather they eased off with the presents and tactile fripperies and concentrated on helping me develop in terms of the peopled world.

Again, I suppose mu own tantrums - and I'm not proud of them - don't help matters...(sick...sick) Id betta leev it for now... (to be continued?)

TRAVEL NEWS

The Monorail Outrage headline in the Daily Fail newspaper was a misprint. It should have read: Moral Outage. After a series of very large font headlines, the nose-in-the-air tabloid had put the willies up its readership, but on this occasion they were talking about how the tenuously elected coalition government was single-mindedly carrying out its mono-ideological project of railroading its populace into high-speed debt. The coalition are doing this with an accompanying irony of a distinct moral outage.

People will be invited to watch their money speed by on its journey from A-on-Wye to Big City. The new link will save twenty physical minutes in an age where technology is promoted as saving time wherever you are, especially on the move. You do the sums!

MAN AND MACHINE

Mr Adie Lemon, a keen brain game enthusiast, has found out that he has the mind of a three-year-old. Even more remarkable, he has regressed to reflect the judgement passed by the sophisticated game manufactured by Infantilisation Corp., "Know Your Own Mind."

Adie is losing control of his body functions and reacts enthusiastically when given confectionery, especially colourful and sugary ones. He has taken to wearing short trousers and enjoys farting again. He also cries effusively when confronted by ideologies and concepts of an adult nature. He also giggles and picks his nose when in close proximity to sexual images and talk.

THUMBS UP FOR MODERN MEDICINE

Mr Mario Plumber has been given - at a nominal cost of \$60,000 - two thumb replacements after he had worn them out over twelve years of playing with a game console.

Doctors and ex-loved ones advised him to try to get a range of games, including adventure rather than shoot-em-up or racing-type games, but he was obstinate, then obsessed.

At least Mario was able to give a vigorous thumbs-up to recent suggestions for his digital health, suggestions that included using his thumbs to hitch-hike so as to see the world.

SUET ABSURDUM

Apparently, in another remarkably independent study, the cost of accident claims is hampering any growth in public funds.

The escalating costs of people trying to claim non-mea culpa accidents on moving public stairways is tying up valuable revenue, gleaned from anywhere and anyone not in powerful positions, dealing with the growing number of publicly funded no-win, no-fee agencies sprouting up like weeds.

Only last year a fellow in California tried to claim compensation from the state council. Bill Wild-Claims said that the tectonic plate shift caused him to scald himself when his hot drink was quaked from his hand. Thankfully he lost the case: Wild-Claims v San Andreas Fault.

THE LACKEY'S PRAYER

Those lording it are shysters
they shall not want

to let me lay down in sweet retirement
advertisers lead us unto debt temptation
and deliver (at 5.30pm) me unto evil

for theirs is the superdome
the power and the tory

and ever and ever shall enslave us

Oh, men!

BREAKING NEWS

The government's new flagship prison, HMS Pinitonhim, has developed a compound fracture that has allowed several dangerous criminals to escape.

The prison authorities are staking out all the publishers in the immediate area and have already apprehended one escapee who tried to get her story published by The Old Blaggers' Press.

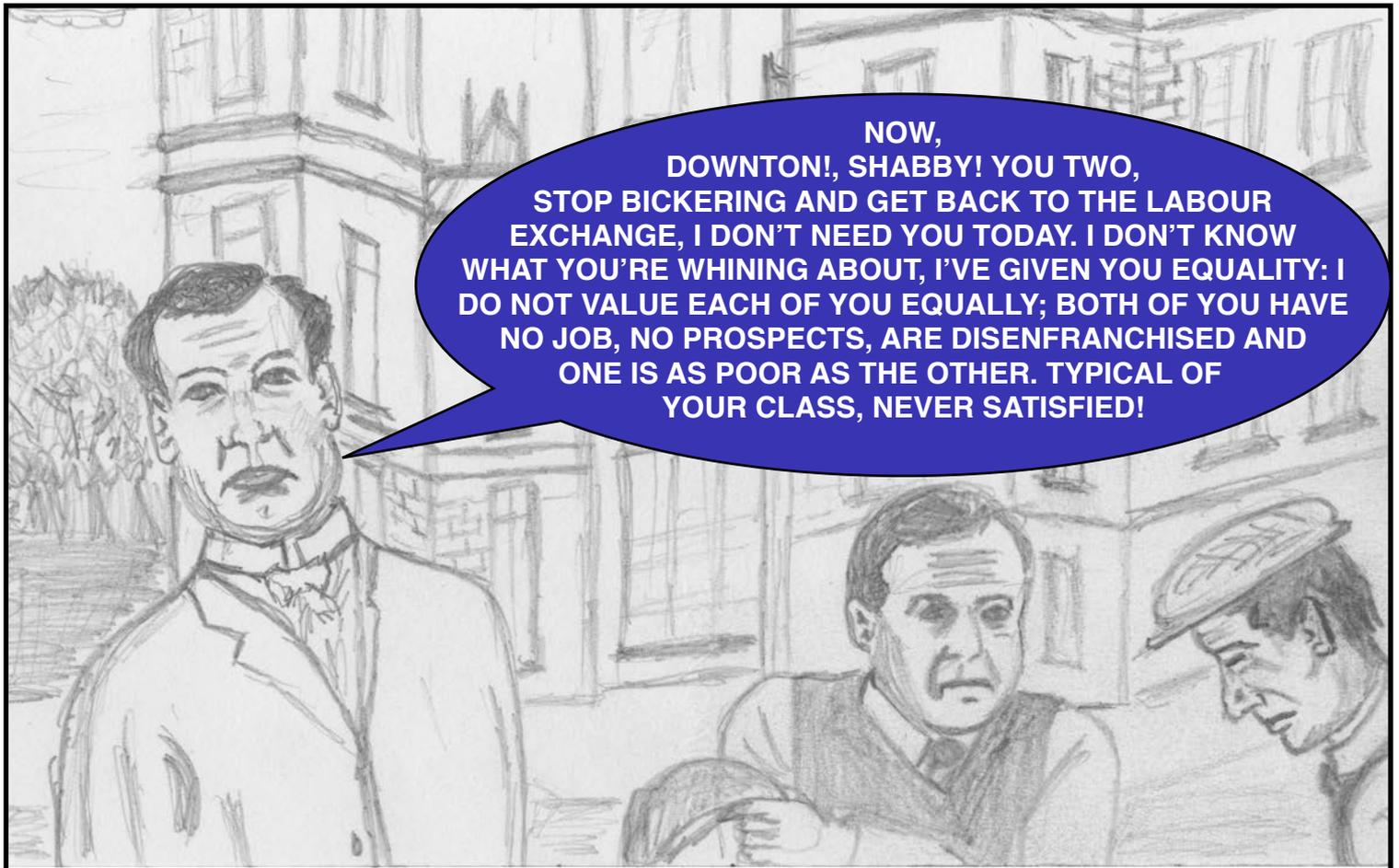
WESTERN COUNTRIES' MUSIC

The latest US concert by the legendary Ken Lee Rogered has been cancelled by authorities. The authorities objected to what they called subversive lyrics and said that he is lucky that they no longer round up communists like in the fifties. It is uncertain whether the veteran singer will be allowed to complete his KLR Sings Country & Particularly Western Ballads. Apparently the most offensive lyrics were in his classic, L'Huile:

You picked a fine time to raise prices, L'huile,
four million hungry children and crooks at the wheel,
we've had some modest times, they've had horrendous times,
austerity measures see rich men just steal,
You picked a fine time to raise prices, L'huile.

Subversive and amusing or parodic and funny? You, in a free country, make up your own mind.

POLITICAL CARTOON



NEWS FROM APART

Lord Nobless O'Blithe has donated .05% of his wealth to his favourite charity. It amounts to a whacking 25K and he will be able to claim most of it back in tax deductibles. Also, he just made a cracking 50K on his share dividend as investor in a major utility firm, who put their prices up for the second time in a year. Lord O'Blithe has been invited to the court ball at the end of the year at Fookingem Palace, where his place is paid for by the taxpayer at £300 per head.

Elsewhere in Chelsea, Jim Crack was made redundant for a record fifteenth time in the last eight months. He has received two redundancy payouts, totalling a modest £190, 20% of which he donated to his favourite charity. He was lauded by the charity worker who took his contribution and offered a tea and biscuits.

Mister Crack will be expected to attend his local Job Club, sign on with an agency, coincidentally headed by a friend of the PM and Lord O'Blithe, Sasha Windows. Mr Crack cannot expect handouts and will be very closely monitored in his search for another zero-hours appointment.

Part The Second of TWELFTH FIGHT finds Frank, our hero in the Bath House. He's taking time to rid himself of the dust of the trail. Spending a penny or two getting all the accoutrements of cleansing his tired body and soul.

While he revels in the froth of the tin bath, a gloomy, angry figure approaches from the west and confronts Frank in all naked vulnerability. Our hero immediately stiffens and puts out an arm's length opening ejaculation.

"Wilt thou tarry disturbing such rich suds
and pray give me dignity of my duds."

Mr X snarls out,

"Your hand hidden, holds hollow sword not soap.
Your tongue wields flannel, takes me for a dope."

Frank retorts with,

"Avaunt you cur, tis not hatred I desire.
Yet, you persist 'til time begs you retire."

Frank springs up, suds all over and, given his special nakedness, Mr X stands stunned at the sight but not for long as a couple of shots ring out and Mr X lurches forward into the soapy water. In a gruesome Eureka moment, the soapy water resembles sarsaparilla as it spouts all over the floor.

"Tis in pity I see you undermin'd
by calumny's blinkers, they made you blind.
Not a word but by bitter hollow sword
now the play is ended go leeward
but I go on and learn more of laughter
you'll crave silence in that hellish hereafter."

Frank dries himself and dresses in readiness for a night on the town. He emerges on to the main street of Fiscal, Taxes and as he passes the undertaker, he throws out a subdued couplet.

"Spread your wings and measure his last, sad length,
follow me yet in your customary strength."

Solomon Grungy retorts with a hint of business-like excitement,

"Should I good sir, order more solemn wood?"

Frank, almost at the saloon again, replies with a resigned tone,

"Request it sadly, here there's too much blood.
I'll strive to avoid such craft as I should
tho' drab sword slingers choose metal not mud,
biting hatred when they might chew the cud."

(Exeunt omnes)

WE'RE NOT GLAD THEY SAID THAT:

"Leaving aside the moral and legal view, I decided on my decision, which was my decision."

Eds: A tautology uttered by, yes, you've guessed it, a politician.

A department spokesman said smoking was "one of the biggest causes of premature death and ill health in the island."

About 20% of the population smoke and health officials have blamed this high level of smoking for the higher than average rates of some cancers in the island.

Eds: There's nothing like certainty to enact edicts on people's freedom of choice, and this is nothing like certainty.

TROTSKY'S TIFFIN (previously Stalin's Breakfast)

It's no Occident?

You know how so many folks are being held responsible for what we, in the old days of rambunctious fun and excitement, used to call accident, well, I've just opened a new can of worms. No, I've not abandoned vegetarianism, and yes, noodles can resemble those earthy creatures, but a supermarket has just given me something more unsavoury to get my political teeth into, and it's no accident. I would like to see the perpetrators of this deception strung up on the nearest lamp post dangling from a noose of egg noodle.

I approached the salad area of the supermarket - no names, this isn't a witch-trial or McCarthyism, and besides there are so few of the major outlets to choose from, so you have a good idea anyway of the identity of this miscreant group plc - and looked out one of my favourite things. I could hear Julie Andrews' dulcet tones in my bonce as I jauntily hawked the basket to the pre-packed salad delights.

I leafed through the bloated cartons of the edible foliage and their interesting complementary ingredients designed to stimulate gustatory perception. There was a reverence in the activity that resembled that of browsing a library and admiring the fastidiousness of the shelf stacker as an undervalued member of our societies. After a few lingering moments, the title caught my eye and my hand caught the titled clear plastic tray.

Feeling like spiritual junk, I was in need of the succour of a sumptuous and exotic repast, the like of which this choice I was about to confirm had previously delivered. I perused the 'best by date', although this was somewhat spurious in the circumstances as I intended to partake of the meal as soon as I had delivered my catch on to the formica worktops of home. The big frying pan, in lieu of an authentic wok, was crying out to be an efficient accomplice in my almost carnal pleasure. The smaller but no less complicit boiling pan that would cradle the noodles to a beautiful consistency awaited in the cupboard. I hungrily confirmed the title and the ingredients on the label before there was a bursting sound, a hollow yet all too real popping of this bubble I had blown in my mind's eye and which had promised my belly a similar blowing up...

Rather than the inscrutable oriental admixture of crispy and limp elements of a stir fry I was insulted and almost mortally disappointed by the dismal cynicism of unscrupulous occidental commercial sharp practice. Suddenly I felt like a junk in stereo, the tenor of my modest hopes were as shredded as the carrots mocking me from all of the salad combinations around me. My taste buds withered in this political wintry blast.

The interesting and mouth-watering chestnuts had turned into water, hanging from the underside of the package lid like tears, merely adding weight to the number of grammes listed on the packaging and weight to my now drooping shoulders. The bean shoots were now outnumbered - not quite Rorke's Drift ratio yet - by slivers of very occidental carrot, strewn around the lettuce like Dutch incident tape and, to add insult to mangery, the biggest element in this stir fry was a clump of lettuce ass ends which obviously make up the dead weight of the meal supplement. It meant I couldn't see the orient for the greens, there being nothing to distinguish this clear plastic tray replete with leaf of no particular origin with minute reference to what used to be significantly recognisable oriental stir fry. The whole package had taken on a much more sinister inscrutability.

The makers of this cling-filmed disappointment had seen fit to fall off the bamboo shoot tightrope they already walked with their ten percent ratio of authentic oriental ingredients and plummet squarely onto the head of the quality control operative, who is now in hospital with mild concussion and better meals. These slackers didn't factor in for the acute English discernment in pre-packed meal supplements which can smell a ratatouille at fifty yards distant, however well sealed a unit.

I stood frozen in a chilled area, askance to the point of scaring those around me. I wondered if I was the only one to be thus dismayed in this not so super market. I turned my gaze on those moving around me, like a child that's lost its mobile phone, but saw only purposeful shoppers. Only a few had anything like disdain on their faces when picking up and quickly replacing some products. I felt for them along with a little self-pity. How long had passed, I cannot tell, before, ever the pragmatist, I made my way to buy more eggs, bread and beans so that I could regain my sangfroid.

What next? Maybe a Wren-sized nest of noodles where once there was a Starling-large portion of the wormy stuff! Ah, well, celery! as veggies say, paraphrasing the equipoise of absurdists.

TV

More tedious formulaic drivel in **Drudge Dead**, the bleak look at the near future. Soon the authorities will hire retired action-film stars to hunt down and slay unionised labour.

The TV pilot of the adventures of a man called Tim hits the large home screens.

'e was earlier than expected out of the womb, four weeks premature to be precise.

'e was never late for school or work, the latter spent in a watch factory in Dagenham.

'e was early for each of his three marriages and too early for his first wife, who he caught in flagrante with his boyhood friend.

However, 'e was late for his own funeral due to traffic on the A-road near the church where he was laid to rest.

A **Brief History of Tim** will air on Mondays every week until it is stopped.

CINEMA

The whacky comedy **WEEKEND AT BERNIE TORPOR'S** is making its emergence at populist cinema outlets throughout the country this month.

The 'story' of a lad who is invited to a weekend party with folks who cannot be arsed to do anything from Friday evening to Monday morning.

WATERBOY is a superhero movie released this month. It is in keeping with austerity measures as this is a superhero whose superpowers are limited to being able to extinguish non-electrical fires. He really needs his sidekick, Powderboy, who can help when a computer catches fire. Also, for those devastating chip-pan flare-ups, the eponymous hero has an asbestos utility blanket. He comes across his nemesis, The Flame, and struggles to put out the mischievous villain.

BOOKS

REMAINS OF THE DEITY is a historical novel by Georgette Hymen, of a man who no longer genuflects before an ethereal entity. Instead, Mr Anon, replaces the moral and ethical vacuum by devoting himself to serve commerce. He even misses the opportunity for personal happiness when his immediate underling, Tilly Springer, gets the hots for him, but his religious-like devotion to his fascistic master, blinds him to love.

A practical book that has loose pages for those who want to actually make their own luck. **FOLD YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS** is a wow with audiences and has become a bestseller without actually being on release.

"A triumph of ideological dexterity." Ciel Bleu Reflexion

"Totally absurd." Samedi Toujours

"Origami for the optimist." China Today

MAGAZINES

TEDIUM WEEKLY is a monthly magazine where workers send in their hair-raising and jolly experiences of the modern workplace.

THEATRE

The radical play called **CLOSURE**, written by committee, ended its run last week as the theatre was closed when the curtain came down.

It was a groundbreaking piece that encapsulated a new genre of theatre called Reality Theatre. The audience was treated to the drama of closure as the actors were builders merchants, council officials and bailiffs who carried out their roles with uncanny realism. The denouement of the ceremony of the handover of the keys brought tears to the eyes of the audience, by now on the pavement outside the theatre.

"A moving experience inside and outside the boundaries of realist drama." Council minutes

GAMES

New AGE OF NEEDLECRAFT is out now.

Embroider a peace settlement. Go point to point with an enemy. Game consultants all graduates of the Needlepoint Macrame academy in West Virginia.

NB: Addiction rating for this game is Class A. Tactical crocheting included.

REET* GRAND THEFT TROLLEY makes an appearance on the market.

Realistic graphics; you'll think yourself in the car park of your favourite supermarket. How many trolleys can you lift in the time it takes a generic shopper to serve themselves? Real virtual shopping centres to creep through. Stunning sound effects so that you will even feel and hear the difference between a proud coin and store token in any trolley you heist.

*Made in northern England but with fully customisable regional patois from Land's End to John O'Groats.

MODERN ART



PROFESSOR OFFERS STUDENT HELP TO MAKE A POINT

Ambiguity of sharpening yet misleading the student as to what he/she can learn. A sketchy relationship between master and disciple that deepens the grey areas between knowledge of art and knowing what is Artistic.

Drawing on what the professor knows, the student will invariably learn how to be an Artist, especially a Concept Artist.

HUMAN NATURE WATCH

When you are fortunate enough to be compelled to wake up at dawn-cracking hours such as six-o'clock, rub your sleepy eyes and behold the morning beauty of some of the sights that assail your bleary vision.

The Polystyrene bird: dwells in bushes and has off-white, sometimes beige plumage. Common sightings can be made on the morning after.

Twocan birds are brightly coloured and frequent hedges and grass verges. Sometimes, they will glide on the wind in to paths and off bridges. They whistle in the wind like their close neighbour, the Bluecan bird.

And then there is another close relation to the Carrier Pigeon, the Carrier Bag bird which perches high in trees and flutters incessantly on breezy days. They are hard to coax out of their position and have markings you can often read as text. In fact, it is believed that these birds are even sponsored by eco-friendly companies.

HEADS AND TAILS

Unnamed scientists - could be from Nottinghamshire - of no fixed stipend, in trying to find a cure for Toryism, have unearthed what is believed to be the ossified remains of the tail of an old wife. It is thought that the find could explain the missing link between political rhetoric and possible economic truths. There is a very interesting nub of bone that suggests that the body politic attached to this tail is from an invertebrate, with traces of a phylum where the political hierarchy spent most of their time sitting on their botany.

The tail is much longer than first thought, and is said to be as long as two sittings in the house. The tail is forked at the end and it is this last aspect that has given credibility to the theory of this being a missing link. The forked element reflects the duality of the final reading which usually has one apparent strand of truth, because it will become law, but retains the other fork or strand which is pure storytelling and has no reference to any universally accepted veracity. It is also posited that there was never a time when this tail wasn't forked, thus bringing further in to question any golden-age theories of our past, when we 'never did it so good'.

In keeping with the dry sense of humour attributed to the scientific communities, the new find has been named Maggie.

Our NYC Correspondent

Too soon for River Phoenix puns? Too bad. The phrase is apropos.

Prior to Hurricane Sandy, I had seen eighteen Alfred Hitchcock films. After thrice that day watching HBO's *The Girl* (about "Hitch" and Tippi Hedren)—having seen *The Birds* many times, but never *Marnie*—I curled up with my laptop in my ground-floor, unevacuated-Zone C, East Village bed circa 4:30PM on October 29, 2012 to ride out the "superstorm." My stubborn, Florida-bred, hurricane-veteran hubris had grossly misjudged the might of the approaching banshee.

My less-skeptical roommate had long since high-tailed it to inland Brooklyn. But I was past the point of no return, and I knew it. However bad it was or was not going to be, there was no leaving by then. There was naught but hunkering down. I decided to get a two-day jump on my annual Halloween Hitchcock marathon, with *Marnie*. And so began what I shall always remember as my Hitchcock Hurricane.

Amazon.com served up *Marnie* with one click, and I enjoyed it very much (though *The Birds* is unsurprisingly superior). After the film, I ate the last of my hot food and crawled back into bed with *Dial M for Murder*. The power went dead about a minute following the very-1950s "Intermission."

I was not (yet) frightened.

These are a few of my favorite things: Manhattan, the English language, movies, books, bed, darkness, silence and solitude. Most in my reality of that night would prefer not to be alone. I relished it. Along with infinite hubris—but with neither flashlight nor radio (because, being an asshole, I failed to prepare)—I had a quickly-fading cell phone service, two big candles, a tiny reading light and three bookcases full of old-fashioned paper reading material. So I fumbled in the cold darkness for the cozy sweatshirt atop my clothing pile, stoked to listen quietly to the sounds of my adventure...And then I fried a chunk of my hair lighting a candle.

This caused a momentary tantrum.

My rage was quickly anaesthetized when I remembered, to my delight, that I had the perfect as-yet-unread book for the occasion: *The Movies of Alfred Hitchcock* by Judy Arginteanu. I was happily engulfed in a remedial synopsis of *Strangers on a Train* (my favorite Hitch) when I received my penultimate communication from the outside world. It arrived in the form of a text from my dear New York-bred friend, Tinman, in Los Angeles:

"You have power?" - Tinman [8:51PM EST]

It took twenty-one minutes for that text to get through to me.

"No. All alone in the dark reading about Hitchcock by candlelight." - Me [9:12 PM EST]

"Yansney. Looks bad." - Tinman [9:12PM EST]

Don't worry about the meaning of "yansney." That's just the nonsense language of longtime roommates, conveying ironic humor. Typically, as here, it refers to something that sucks balls. Like myself, Tinman is a film brat. My pet name for him has been "Tinman" since I felt like post-twister "Dorothy" in the comfort of his company on the afternoon of 9/11. So, despite his legitimate concern, he appreciated the cinematics of the moment.

Falsely believing that I still had semi-solid cellular service (but knowing that my now-unchargeable iPhone was fast-approaching comatose), I snapped a picture of my book beside the aggressive candle and texted it to Tinman. He did not receive my text until November 3rd, but I didn't know that then. My unfounded faith in the WiFi of the moment was compounded minutes later, when the last scrap of information I was to receive squeezed its way through:

"Umm...Is there flooding in the streets by you?" - Tinman [Time Sent Unknown]

"So I'm told. No contact with the world. Only limited texting abilities. Don't know if you'll get this, but if you do: Text me the most recent info about the East Village. [My sister, uptown] texted me that Avenue C was flooded right when I lost power. That's the last update I got." - Me [Time Sent Unknown]

My final text never went through. At all. Realizing I was largely unaccounted for and nearly out of food, a slow-building tide of long-overdue dread finally began to swell. The truly Hitchcockian sequence of my adventure had commenced. And, unbeknownst to me, concern for my safety had spread clear across the Atlantic to the editors of this magazine. But that's a separate tale for another time and a different medium; perhaps for my weekly blog, *Stacy Steers Scylla & Charybdis*. Suffice it to say, I soon got safely the fuck out of there. The dénouement of this essay pertains to Avenue C.

Then, as now, I lived in the Alphabet City quadrant of Manhattan's bohemian East Village; where north-south running avenues read alphabetically eastward from A to D. East of D is the FDR East River Drive, a power plant and the river. My afore-described ground-floor, unevacuated-Zone C apartment was on a block between Avenues A and B. Avenue B marks the westernmost terminus of Evacuation Zone B. The power plant combusted that night in a blaze of comic book chartreuse. Low-lying Avenue C drowned in the surging onslaught of the East River.

Word of a neon explosion and cars floating down Avenue C—also called Loisaida Avenue, for the Nuyorican heritage of its locals—spread north through Manhattan like California wildfire. It was apocalyptic. Hitchcockian. Returning to the Village on the creepiest Halloween I've yet known, the first thing I did was survey Avenue C.

The well-documented horror reduced me to tears.

Cut to Halloween 2013. I now live on Avenue C, safely perched on the third floor. And I'm here to testify that this street has risen like Lazarus from the dead; like a drowned phoenix from the East River. Just one year post-Sandy, born-again Loisaida is thriving with new and returned residents, new and returned businesses and—most importantly, for this particular hood—new and returned cool. That's how we roll with punches here. We get us a new set of teeth, pronto. (OK, so the Freedom Tower took us a while.)

I'm scathingly cynical about many things. But I'm passionately sincere in my love for NYC. To see her in pain wounds my very heart. It also stirs my very soul. Because I've lived enough of her pain to know that watching her persevere is a grand sight for sore eyes. And until that scary-ass chunk o' Kryptonite breaks off the Canary Islands and catalyzes the mega-tsunami scientists know will one day render Gotham a true Atlantis, this metropolis is invincible.



This looks like an obscure soap pad for scouring sinks and baths. Or it could be a pale coloured conduit for the very dishwasher that follows the washing of plates and other crockery and cutlery.

It might also be a knitted single-lens telescope, without the lens, of course, as you can see clear through to the end of the room. It could also be a rare form of sponge, the aquatic invertebrate, not the washing kind. No, it is none of the above. Remarkably, it is what passes for a cheese and onion roll. A prize to anyone who can spot the cheese and onion.

SEE AND FEEL BETTER WITH THE NEW **CLOUD OF UNKNOWNING SPRAY**

Renewed with the previously banned ingredient, Existentialismus, and the purely fictional Invigorol* So good you'll feel like you've been kissed by an angel

Plus the newer than new superlative Aquinas+

* It should make you feel refreshed if you follow the 64-page instruction booklet (not included)

EVOLUTIONS

- 1)The word 'mail' in early Scottish dialects meant rent. Scottish landlords would accept rental payments in either produce or silver. However, unscrupulous landlords preferred payments in produce, as its value was open to the interpretation of the landlords themselves. When peasants paid their rent with undervalued produce, they coined this term to describe this unfair practice.
- 2)Danelaw is the name given to parts of the UK occupied by the Danes during the 9th century. One form of revenue imposed by the Danes was the head tax. This cliché survives from the punishment given to those who graciously declined to pay the tax; they literally had their nose slit.
- 3)All pharmaceutical prescriptions use this mark, which means 'take' in Latin.
- 4) This invention began as a fad, when Yale University students started playing catch with a local bakery's pie plates. Since the bakery's name was imprinted on the bottom of the plate, it was only natural for their name to be synonymous with this popular game.

T H O S E E T H

- Mavis:** So, ladies, all that remains is for us to sift through this pile of letters and choose the firms we would like to sponsor our little venture into the world of theatre.
- Sheila:** I'm not sure I'd use the word 'like', Mavis. I can't see for the life of me why we need to provide businesses with a platform to peddle their wares. They're not interested in our production in the slightest, they're just trying to exploit the good name of the WI - and our hard work, I might add - to make an easy few bob.
- Gladys:** I must say I agree with Sheila. Anyway, I thought the WI was a voluntary organisation, independent of commercial influences.
- Mavis:** Alright, you two, calm down! Perhaps I should have said 'need' rather than 'like', but this is a large project for us and a lot of time and effort has to go into it. We don't want to expend our energies before we've even started, railing against something over which we have no control. For the record, I agree with you both. We shouldn't have to consider the notion of accepting advertising to enable us to provide a little cultural entertainment for the community, but unfortunately, it's necessary.
- Sheila:** Doesn't the Borough Council normally fund these activities, Mavis?
- Mavis:** Well, yes, they do, but in these cash-strapped times, they've found they don't have a sufficient budget to meet the production costs this year and the only way we were going to be able to meet our obligations was to accept sponsorship. It was that or nothing, I'm afraid.
- Gladys:** Typical! As soon as it's our turn to put on the play, we have to go schlepping around town, cap in hand, begging Big Business for help!
- Mavis:** Gladys, it's not that bad, for Heaven's sake! As I said, we have quite a few firms willing to help us already. We just need to choose the most appropriate.
- Lil:** Well, speaking personally, I don't see why we have to get involved in the first place. We're the WI! We make jam and host coffee mornings! We're not theatre directors or impresarios!
- Gladys:** We're getting involved because this is what we do at this time of the year. The WI puts on a production of A Christmas Carol with the assistance of the local amateur dramatic group. We share the task of organising it with our colleagues. This year, it's our turn.
- Lil:** A Christmas Carol? I hate bloody Christmas! Everywhere shuts down, so they don't need our cleaners as often...and even if they did, we hardly have any staff available because they all want the time off. Christmas is a nightmare if you're trying to run a business!
- Gladys:** Oh dear! Your surname isn't Scrooge by any chance, is it Lil? It seems to me, A Christmas Carol is the most appropriate production for you to be involved in.
- Sheila:** Yes, going back to that, Mavis. Most appropriate sponsors? What does it matter? Surely, one company's money is much the same as the next. Whoever we choose will get an ad in the programme, a mention before the curtain goes up and, perhaps, another at the end. That should be enough to keep them happy and whatever they're selling needn't concern us.
- Mavis:** Unfortunately, it's not quite that simple, Sheila.
- Sheila:** You don't say. Do tell.
- Mavis:** Well, as a condition of providing the funds to stage the play, the sponsors are insisting they be given the opportunity to insert the odd line into the dialogue.
- Sheila:** I'm sorry, Mavis, I didn't quite catch that. Given the opportunity to what...?
- Mavis:** Insert the odd line into the dialogue. You know, mentioning their product in a favourable light. That sort of thing.
- Sheila:** What!
- Gladys:** Oh, Mavis! You must be joking!
- Lil:** Well, well! Things are looking up. This might be almost interesting after all.
- Gladys:** Mavis, how could you agree to that? It'll make a mockery of the whole thing!

ICS GIRLS

Sheila: It's going to be an absolute joke!

Mavis: Believe me, this wasn't my idea, ladies. I had no choice. The Council are adamant they have no money to fund this year's production and the potential sponsors are equally insistent we give them this concession or they'll not fund it either. We accept it or forget it.

Gladys: But that's blackmail.

Lil: Not blackmail, Gladys, just legitimate choice. You don't have to accept the conditions.

Sheila: Some choice! Their way or nothing!

Mavis: Well, choice or not, that's the situation.

Gladys: So what do you think we should do, Mavis?

Mavis: I don't approve of their tactics, not at all, but a lot of people are working hard already on this project. The Am Dram society have been rehearsing for the last month, sets have been brought out of storage and spruced up and the programmes are ready to be printed. They're all waiting for us to finalise the arrangements and bring it all together. We can't let all their efforts go to waste...and we can't let our sensibilities be the reason the community doesn't get its play this year. Besides, product placement is accepted on nearly every television show these days, why not in the theatre, too?

Sheila: I know you don't believe that, Mavis, and I still think this will be a huge mistake, but if you're prepared to go through with it, then, of course, we'll back you up.

Gladys: Of course, no question.

Lil: I wouldn't miss this for the world!

Mavis: Thank you, ladies. I appreciate your support. Now you know why I want us to choose sponsors with at least a little relevance to the story. We might be able to keep the damage to a minimum.

Gladys: I doubt that very much! Still, if we're going to do it, we'd best get started. We've got programmes and flyers to print, the venue to confirm, some Dickens-friendly businesses to find, money to collect and a few judicious edits to make to a national institution.

Mavis: Yes, all that and just a fortnight to curtain up. I'd better start making a few telephone calls. Lil, put the kettle on; ladies, here are the letters - get whittling...

* * * * *

Opening night...

Sheila: Blimey, I hope Mavis is all right out there. That fog's thicker than a reality show contestant.

Gladys: She should have been back ages ago. Oh, wait! Here she is now. Here, Mavis, we've saved your seat for you. It's just about to start. We thought you weren't going to make it! Where've you been?

Mavis: Oh, just putting away the refreshments...and I just popped backstage to check everything was okay.

Sheila: Still meeting a little resistance, eh?

Mavis: You could say that! I must say once again that you ladies have done a marvellous job contacting sponsors and gathering in the funds, at relatively short notice, too, but I think it's safe to say that those little additions to the script have not gone down well.

Lil: Oh, for Heaven's sake! Why don't they see it as bringing a tired old story into the modern age. It's true what they say about the artistic temperament: so many have the temperament and so few the art!

Gladys: Dear me! Lil's an art critic. Where did you dredge that up from?

Lil: I was watching a recording of Hollyoaks and when I stopped it, Melvyn Bragg was saying it to Sir Ian McKellen.

Gladys: Ah, yes, I see.

Mavis: Lil, that's a little harsh, don't you think?

Sheila: Oh, I don't know. Did you see his Lear at the National?

Mavis: What's that, Sheila?

Sheila: Nothing, Mave. I was only joking.

Mavis: Oh, right. Anyway, I was talking about plugging the sponsors products. None of us like the idea, but the cast have to stand up there and deliver the lines. I can certainly understand their reluctance.

Gladys: Well, it's too late to worry about it now. Now, shush, it's starting.

Director: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Purfleet Amateur Dramatic Society's production of that Dickens classic, A Christmas Carol. Before we start, we must thank the ladies of the WI for their invaluable help...(applause)...Thank you ladies. We should also point out that we are being sponsored tonight by a number of firms, the names of which you will find in your programme. You may notice some additional lines of dialogue that we are contractually obliged to deliver, but we hope this doesn't detract from your enjoyment of the show. Now, without further ado, let's begin.

Lil: You know, I'm quite excited at the prospect.

Lights down, curtain up...

Narrator: *Marley was dead to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Had not Scrooge himself arranged the service with the Co-op at very reasonable rates, taking advantage of their easy payment scheme and complementary flower arrangement? Scrooge and he were partners for...*

Gladys: Oh, my God!

Lil: Ha ha ha! Love it!

Narrator: *Once upon a time - of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve - old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. The door was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. If only they had known that Helliwell's Central Heating Limited could supply and install a full central heating system with a Corgi-approved boiler for only sixteen hundred pounds, including VAT, Scrooge's clerk would have no need of his white comforter or have to warm himself at the candle...*

Sheila: Dear Lord! This is nonsensical!

Mavis: It's no good complaining. We had to agree to it. Anyway, no-one else seems to mind. They haven't said anything.

Gladys: I think they're all stunned, Mavis.

Fred: *A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!*

Scrooge: *Bah! Humbug!*

Fred: *Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that I am sure!*

Scrooge: *I do...or perhaps you would prefer this pack of three Flakes, on offer at ASDA for only a pound?*

Sheila: This is painful! I can't sit through an hour and a half of this!

Lil: Ha ha! I think it's great! Let's face it, the classics can be dull, but with this approach, not any more!

Gent: *...many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.*

Scrooge: *Are there no prisons?*

Gent: *Plenty of prisons.*

Scrooge: *And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?*

Gent: *They are. Still. I wish I could say they were not.*

Scrooge: *Then, sir, those who are badly off must go there. Should they not wish to, sir, they could visit their local Wetherspoons where a meal and a pint of ale are available for a mere six pounds fifty-five pence.*

Sheila: That's it! I'm going for a sausage roll.

Gladys: Wait for me, I'll join you.

Mavis: Hey! Come back here, you two! Damn! Lil, you wait here, we'll be back in a minute.

Lil: I'm going nowhere, believe me.

At the refreshment table...

Mavis: Okay, you two, I know this is less than ideal, but the alternative was not to put the play on at all and everyone's time would have been wasted.

Sheila: I'm beginning to think that would have been preferable.

Gladys: I think everyone's time has been wasted anyway, Mavis. A lot of hard work has gone into this and it's turning into a laughing stock.

Mavis: So there are a few promotional lines. The main gist of the story is there and the overall message remains the same.

Gladys: It's a total disaster...and Dickens would turn in his grave, I might add. Yes, some companies are sponsoring this effort and the idea that businesses should help out those less well-off and make their lives a little easier is, indeed, at the heart of a Christmas Carol, but the notion that those businesses should expect to benefit hugely and in such an invasive manner is totally abhorrent.

Sheila: I agree wholeheartedly. I hate the whole idea of advertising in any form. You can't watch a TV programme on any commercial station these days, especially cable channels, without it having an ad break seven or eight minutes long and up to fifteen minutes between shows. In any case, the programmes contain so many references to products that it's difficult to tell when the show stops and the ads begin. The adverts themselves are becoming ever more cynical and manipulative: I wonder they don't send someone around with a baseball bat and force you to take what they're selling!

Gladys: Yes, it was so much simpler in our day. Just three channels and only one of those had adverts.

Mavis: Well, before you get the Hovis out and start pushing a bike up a hill, I think we ought to get back. I agree with your sentiments regarding this sponsorship arrangement, but the fact remains, a lot of people have worked very hard and we need to be seen giving our support. It is an event organised by the WI after all! So, come on, we're going back in.

In the auditorium...

Narrator: *The apparition walked backwards from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped, but couldn't help noticing the superb workmanship and quality materials that went into making his triple-glazed, uPVC window with a lifetime guarantee from Everest.*

Lil: Where've you lot been? You've missed an absolute treat! They worked in a PPI claims company earlier.

Sheila: Yes, I'm so sorry we missed that!

Narrator: *He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant. A unique benefit of the posturepaedic, octosprung mattress from Slumberland, available at Nite, Nite's on the High Street from only ninety-nine pounds.*

Curtain falls, followed by muted applause...

Gladys: Well, that was an experience.

Sheila: Yes, indeed, and there's a lot more to come.

Lil: I have to say, I enjoyed every minute of that. I can't wait for the rest of it.

Mavis: Well, at least someone's happy!

Gladys: I thought they would have turned the lights up, it's very dark in here...and what's that howling outside? Sounds like the wind's got up all of a sudden. Oh, wait. The lights are coming on now. Hang on...what's going on? Where is everyone...?

SCENE FROM THE 21ST CENTURY

A dimly lit room somewhere way short of the rainbow, way down low. The eco-friendly bulb finally lights up the immediate area wherein we see a thin, gaunt figure at a desk, scratching away at a parchment, muttering to himself.

Sounds can be heard off-stage: sleigh bells singing, hooves clicking and the chattering teeth of children whose noses are pushed up against a TV shop or should that be electrical shop window.

“Bloody Christmas,” Dick Charles says to himself, not expecting an omniscient narrator to hear him.

“Why say that, Dick. What do you have against this time of year?” says the omniscient narrator.

“What the...” Dick ejaculates in surprise.

“Don’t worry, we’re not your conscience, nor will we give you a temporal tour. We only ask so as to ascertain what you feel is less than satisfactory about Christmas. To be honest, we are involved in market research and are garnering the opinion of all employers so legislation can better reflect the ruling economic class.” The narrator adds at length.

“Why should I believe you?” Dick countered, with a healthy scepticism of disembodied voices.

“You don’t have to believe me but you will regret not putting in your two-penneth worth when the results are manifest in parliament’s next raft of bills to support your social and economic milieu.”

Dick shifted in his seat, looked around but couldn’t see anyone else, even in the darkest recesses of the stage. In fact, he began to wonder whether this was a drama at all. There being no boom microphone, no best boy and no make-up artists. There weren’t even any groupies banging at his back door for an autograph.

“So, I don’t need to do anything to bring about social change for the better. You and the parliamentarians will organise society as if the pre-revolution Scrooge himself were Prime Minister. I can still keep Christmas at alms length and invest my money rather than spend it on local orphanages and the new workhouses for those on Zero-hours contracts and Workfare?” Dick had to restrain himself from ejaculating again, this time with glee at the good fortune his hard work was promising to deliver him.

The narrator cleared his throat before booming out, “Of course, don’t get your portfolio in a twist. You will take the credit but will not need to lift a finger to become richer and more powerful. Only the working turkeys will suffer. You will be renamed an entrepreneur. No longer will you be ironically labouring under the yolk of nomenclatures such as industrialist and/or capitalist, and certainly no one will be allowed to criticise you as a corporatist. No more moral or ethical guilt-trips for you, Dick, me lad. The only trips you will be making are those to the Seychelles and that island you’ve always wanted to aquire from your earnings. All tax-free and now morality-free too. We’re changing the rules of expression and controlling how people even think about luck and value and endeavour. It’s taken a few hundred years but we’re finally shaking loose the shackles of moral and ethical thought and ploughing full-steam ahead with revisionist politics that constitutes time-travel. We’re taking industrial relations back to the beginning of the industrial revolution. The next phase will be to persuade Australia to take the feckless and out of work. One thing in our favour is the fact that so many of our desperate working-class are so well educated and skilled that Australia might not mind accepting them.”

Dick sits there dumbfounded at his luck in still being alive in such an age of enlightened exploitation.

“Perhaps it is time I invested in a pen and tablet, rather than using this quill.”

“Sure thing, Dick. Go ahead, it will be tax-deductible. In fact you could probably push to take it out of your employees wages.”

“But I don’t pay them any. They are fully subsidised by the public purse.”

“That doesn’t matter. Now you’ll be rewarded for employing people. The state will give you money on top of money for even condescending to give even one of the highly-educated but unwashed because of lack of adequate bathroom facilities, a job of any kind.”

“Is there a catch?” Dick enquired, still a little reluctant to believe his luck at being healthy enough to hang around while his niggardly character and inhumane orientation to the world was being legitimised by legislation and destruction of any moral compass.

“The only obstacle would be if you grew a conscience. However, we both know that is as likely to happen as legitimate representative democracy in England.” The narrative voice confirmed.

“Well, I’ll be.” Dick said as he stood up, threw away his quill and pad, intending, without further ado, to buy himself an electronic gadget to bring him into the **19th** 21st century.

The seventeenth century was all about conquering as the powerful English invaded and colonized nations. In the twenty-first century, the clash continues because English still invades: not the country of Great Britain, but rather the language. Stubborn persistence has permitted English jargon to push its way into a countless number of the world's languages. In French-speaking nations, for example, familiar words to the ears of Anglophones, such as "le parking", "le popcorn", "la baby-sitter" and "le weekend" have crept into the daily vocabulary.

At least one French-speaking region has fought strongly against this assimilating force. Canada's sole French-speaking province of Quebec has proudly put up such a battle. The anglicismes in the previous list are respectively countered by the following expressions in Quebec: "le stationnement", "le maïs soufflé", "la gardienne" and "la fin de semaine".

What is the current status in this ongoing struggle? Are the Quebecois fighting a losing battle or is the English force simply unstoppable? Let us consider the following:

In France and in other French-speaking nations, the "pâte dentifrice" is the familiar gel-like substance that is placed on a toothbrush in the morning. The English-speakers in Canada and elsewhere are familiar with the term "toothpaste". What term is used by the French-speakers in Quebec? The answer is "pâte à dents," which literally translates as paste for teeth.

Canadians use their cars in the daily commute to work. (As an aside, we are still living in igloos, but we recently replaced our snowmobiles with cars!) In France, the term for such a mode of transportation is a "voiture". Interestingly, in the regional French spoken in Quebec, the familiar term for a vehicle is a "char".

Many people: English Canadians, the Quebecois, Americans and Europeans among others, really rely on cars, not only to get to work, but also to arrive at vacation destinations. Everyone is familiar with the uncomfortable occasion, often at the most inopportune time during one of those long car rides while on a family road trip, when one's bladder is unbearably stretched. Quebec's French-speaking counterparts in Europe are in dire need of "les W.C." In English-speaking Canada, the designation of water closet is inexistent. The facilities are merely the toilets for the English Canadians. And in Quebec, when Mother Nature calls, finding "la toilette" is a must!

On a new topic, I heard that swallowing a tablespoon of peanut butter helps get rid of the hiccups? (Just for interest's sake, I actually tried this technique, and it worked.) Anyway, most in the French-speaking communities in the world, would write "beurre d'arachide" on a grocery list. Note that the word "most" in the previous sentence is significant because the Quebecois do not belong to this majority. They would say "beurre de peanut" of course.

When all is said and done, whether it likes it or not, Quebec's milieu in the world's second largest country, which consists of primarily of Anglophones, poses a challenge with regard to counteracting those powerful English forces.

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YOUR CAREER'S BEHIND YOU

The famous pantomime horse called Big Neddy is no more following a parting of the ways of the two fellows who'd made the role their own since the early nineties.

Lately their relationship had become strained and Joe Rumpole (the back end) has said that they had never seen eye to eye over anything. They had only stayed together for the children.

Tony Award (the front) said that Joe's comments had become too asinine and as a result they were no longer pulling in the same direction. "We can no longer put our best hoof forward and it's become impossible to agree on which of the four is our best hoof. We were getting too backside first to carry on, even in pantomime. After all, even a horse has to maintain its integrity."

Joe added that Tony used to get better fed, even on stage. "I had to wait until the act was over and sometimes I was absolutely famished and exhausted by the time we'd come off the stage. Joe just didn't get it. Being the ass end of a horse can be a lonely job. Being the head was easier. He saw the light more often, could see where we were going. Although professionally we both could see where we were going."

Their final role was a planned triumphant portrayal as the horse King Richard the Third offered to exchange his kingdom for. Critics however, were less effusive. The Variety commentator summed their career up with, "More a wooden than a pantomime horse."

Answers to Evolutions: 1) Blackmail. 2) Pay through the nose. 3) Rx. 4) Frisbee.

AN INTERVIEW WITH: GUY FAWKES the Catholic with a blue touch paper

EDS: Buongiorno. Guido

GUY: No-one has called me that for hundreds of years.

EDS: Sorry, penny for your thoughts, Guy.

GUY: Don't get smart. I know what goes down in November. I still can't get the blackness from under my fingernails.

EDS: We were coming to that.

GUY: A slow burner, like a fuse, very cryptic I must say.

EDS: A burning question that has explosive potential...

GUY: If you are going to be frivolous, I may as well blow this joint.

EDS: Don't do that, Guy. We're not your enemy.

GUY: Well, what do you want to ask, fire away.

EDS: What exactly did you and your conspirators hope to achieve with your attempt?

GUY: To reestablish some possibility of freedom from royal and parliamentary tyranny.

EDS: So, it wasn't just religious?

GUY: Not wholly. The king's persecution of Catholics was only part of the problem. But logically you must see that ridding the country of someone anti-god is the same as wanting freedom from tyranny. I'm sure you can understand this impulse, your system is riddled with tyrants masquerading as representatives.

EDS: Yes, but we still wonder what would have happened - what you wanted to happen - if you had turned the houses of parliament in to a Roman Candle?

GUY: We wanted to destroy parliament as it stood and all it stood for.

EDS: But what would you have put in its place?

GUY: A kind of people's council. A fairly elected group, without the sacrilege of royal approval, that could better represent what the country needed for reform.

EDS: How?

GUY: We had people who could have stood for election to parliament. People who were liked by the populace and who had a better notion of how to represent fairness in society that you and your modernity show no determined or recognisable interest in.

EDS: What do you mean?

GUY: Well, you vote when invited by the ruling party but the outcome has little or no influence over the ruling elites who legislate for and carry out the wishes of the business and landed gentry class. We felt we would precipitate a more benevolent ruling group that had legitimate sympathy for serfs and working people and a better sense of fairness.

EDS: Were you afraid of creating martyrs which the ruling elite would use to perpetuate the same system?

GUY: No, because we knew the parliamentarians and royalty were unpopular. Remember, this was before marketing and heavily financed promotion of celebrity status politicians and royalty. People just felt the visceral effects of legislation and bigoted attitudes of rulers, so their points of reference were even more acute than they are for you now. Also, we as a social and political group more easily identified ourselves as a rebellious mass than workers and serfs do today. We would have bought up all the fireworks in China to overthrow the shambles you call parliament today. All your rebelliousness has turned to mere revolution and consequently easily contained by and in microtechnology. You are more cowed than we were. That reminds me, have you got a match?

EDS: Sorry, Guy. Not allowed in the building. No smoking, no fuming or pyrotechnics allowed anywhere indoors or in London for that matter.

GUY: Zounds, you are a beaten lot, aren't you. You've completely lost the plot.

EDS: Very drole, Guido. At least we know who our friends are.

GUY: You think so. Don't believe the term 'friend' on your social networks. Don't forget, the ruling elites know where, when and why you shop! You are more complicit in your own downfall and dependency because you have lost hearth. The saying goes, 'the meek shall inherit the hearth'. If you don't know what that means then you'll forever spin round like a political Catherine Wheel for the entertainment of the unthinking and unfeeling.

Bye, I've got to effigy off, there's a great bonfire raging and I need to warm my cockles. Besides, there's still fire in my belly even if there's none in yours.

EDS: Bye, Guido. Don't get caught out tonight, be safe. (aside) For a Catholic he's got a sparkler character.

POO CORNER

NO ORDINARY JOE

Though travelling strangers
I miss him as a familiar
even my uncertain step
need not faltering
for there were no potholes
no unevenness

Now that the path
has come to a physical end
we light upon a garden
and are at once
at peace
in recognition of
its beauty

Herein he rests
and we need only
wake to remember

MARK OF PERFECTION

I need to continue the undoing of a perfect dive
I need only to stay the thrashings of my errant
tongue
eschew excuses of being seduced by you being
alive
your stony glance causes logically eccentric
circles
disturbing the somewhat impressive surface
of mawkish music from a lyre unstrung

SEASONAL GREETINGS

Autumn's tracing paper greys
coldly etch at tenacious greens
and furrowed, sullen browns
rest after a hard summer

Streetlights, beacon-like, flare up
in mysterious gloom and flick off
as a sluggish sun takes over for now

Cotton has spun into steel wool
scratching surfaces
to take colour better
for those picture perfect days
of honey gold and envy green
and pragmatic, beautiful blue
framed by serene cream

Alone.

contemplating
tendrils of connectedness to
vital human beings
Oh, what an absurdly painful joy

STONE FREE

You threw in your randomly chosen stone
and fleshed out a cadaverous thought of
yestermorn
tearing at the quick, loosening
blood nervous fingers groped
in the past for stained nails
still, you puff out your chest
in absent-minded triumph
and stir even the coldest ashes
though no longer even curious

TONGUE FLASHING

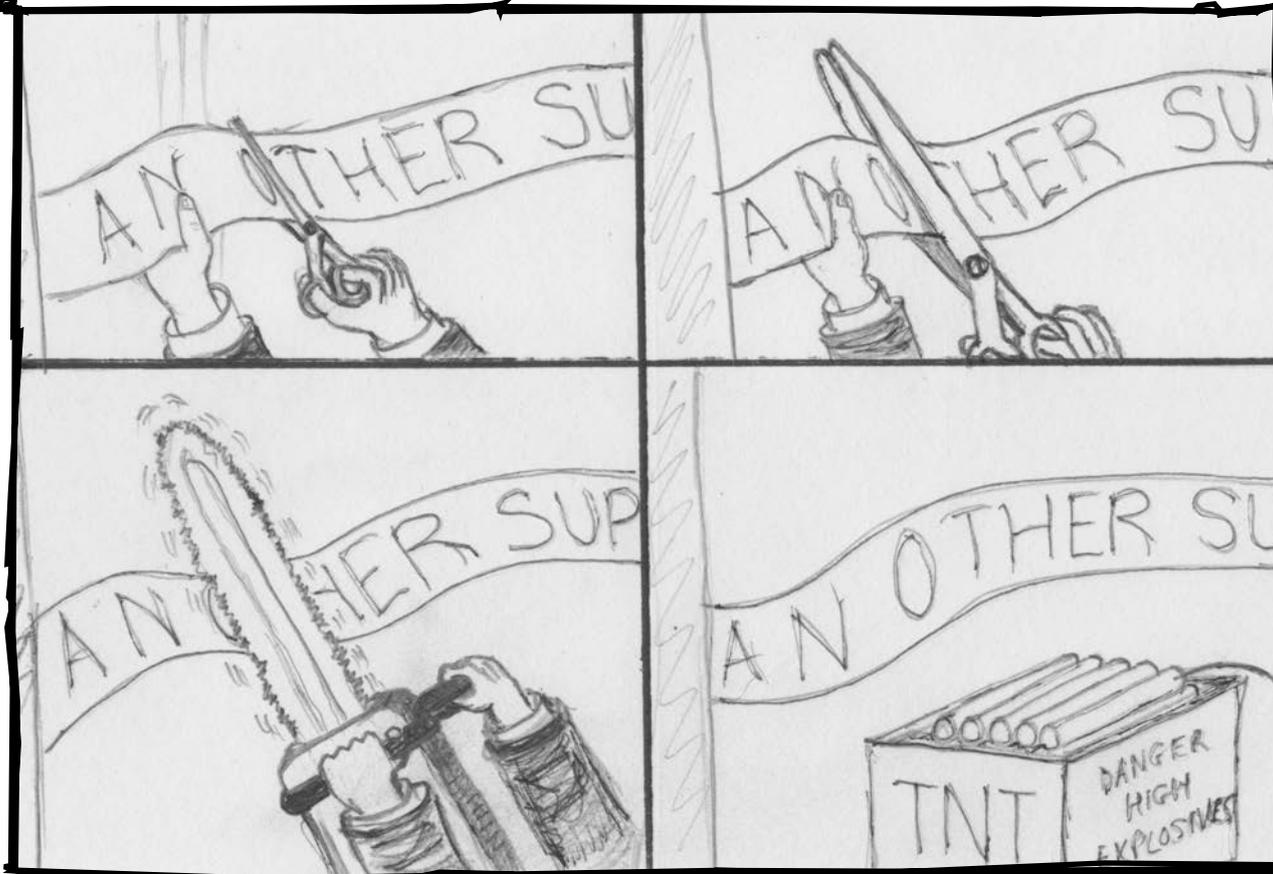
I peel back my bones
and find only skin,
I prise open my mouth
and release frail bubbles
destined to burst
all too easily

I see around me vitality
pulling, scratching, aching,
yearning, holding, touching,
crying, laughing, loving,
that stirs a feathery quill
scraping intermittently at
blank, thin sheets of wishes
enveloped by inadequate thought:
I cannot be real?

AN IDEA OF YOU

Tearing at grey matter
for an idea, even a thought
would do
hearing fatuous chatter
futilely near, divining nought
but you

Primed, suspected
wrapped up tight as a bomb, culturally bound to
say, to touch nothing and no-one;
to reach out merely with a cosmic exclamation,
provoking closed caption narratives,
like leaves hustling in a whirlwind,
piecing together reasons for such an outburst.



“I KNEW WE SHOULD NOT HAVE LET THEM USE THE QUEEN ANNE-DREX TOILET PAPER!”

COUNCIL DRAMA

The local town/village council of Little-Shown-on-The-Map is still struggling to come to a decision following their latest town planning meeting, held a month ago. The little hamlet in south Darkcester has always had difficulty coming to any conclusive decision on what needs to be done in their locality. Only recently, they finally decided to go ahead to build an arras behind the town hall, as a smoking area for the rude mechanicals working for the council.

A local hesitant said, “It’s a tough one. I’m certainly not sure as to whether we should do it or not.” The town is considering taking advice from central government but cannot agree on a strategy, as yet.

DON'T PUT YOUR OUGHTTA ON THE STAGE

A new name for growing intolerance of others and their expression has emerged recently. Stage Rage is the term coined for people getting angry about interpretation of classic plays enacted in national dramatic arenas.

The latest incident came when a member of the audience shouted, “Out, damned spotlight!” in response to the Lady Macbeth walking nightmare scene. The artistic director, Art E Pretentious, sitting bravely in the front row, was accosted by the irate punter and challenged vigorously over the validity of using a spotlight to shine like a laser on Dame Judy Judy’s hand, who instead of delivering the famous lines, merely looked mutely startled before being ushered back to bed by Mr Macbeth attired in a red bathing costume. Even Duncan had to lend a hand in finally ejecting the excessively disappointed theatre critic of The Grunge newspaper.

A similar incident was blogged at The Uncivic Theatre recently, when a fan took umbrage at a song in the hit musical, Elvis - the Vegan Years. The outraged woman became unnervingly upset when the actor playing the icon sang, “Lay Off Of My Bluetooth Dongle,” a modern interpretation of the icon’s seminal rhythm and blues dance number.

Social psychologists have researched this growing trend and suggest the modern interpretative presentations are upsetting quasi-religious conservatives, who desire to see or hear the classic versions of their heroes and who see such revisionist indulgence as threatening the bases of why Britain is Great.

There will be a strong Neighbourhood Watch presence at the upcoming reinterpretation of the Noel Coward classic, that has been renamed as “File Bodies,” which now charts the decadence of people working in administration positions in the Storing Twenties.

NEWS FROM FAERYLAND

Tinkerbell attended her first Job Seekers interview.

“Your CV reads like a fairy story. I’m not sure how useful this is in today’s reality. Besides, no-one needs a sort of conscience on their shoulder as without even personal ethics and morals, such archaic somewhat utopian concepts are outmoded and obstructive to models of progress.

This character reference from Peter Pan is unbelievable. We’ve had a few of your type in today. People who have never-never lived in the real world and who are wholly unskilled in what’s needed for today’s service industry.”

“But I’ve been unquestioningly customer-based in my career so far.” Tinkerbell squeaked.

“Yes, but it is still too sentimental and has no commercial basis, so is effectively useless.”

Tinkerbell will need to appeal the decision to stop her benefits, but it will take longer than keeping on til morning.

There’s a new opposition forming whose main agenda is to resist the moves towards a free workforce. The New Labrat Party is proposing to introduce a scheme that offers up labour to employers as a part-subsidised get one free offer. For every one employee a firm takes on, already subsidised by the public purse, they get a second employee totally free to them.

Unions are umming and aahing about it and are worried that even such feeble left-wing flapping will change the reality we’ve all become accustomed to over the years.

Legitimate opposition factions are insisting that Faeryland needs to get out of the habitual belief in the tulip service thinking (axioms) such as if a greedy speculator causes wings of the stock market to flap (flutter) then a number of employees somewhere lose their jobs and employment rights.

The bees are busy pollinating opinion to ascertain the substance of resistance to the New Labrat Party’s puny attempt to claim opposition ground.

Meanwhile the self-appointed government of Faeryland have legislated to criminalise workers’ support and co-operative groups by outlawing flying picketing. Tinkerbell has been banned from unfurling her wings in public. The saddened little sprite could be seen boarding the 69 bus to get back to the Darling house, where she inhabits the far end of the loft, awaiting the new tenants, after the Darling’s were evicted after falling behind on their mortgage.

OH MY CENSURED ANT

The drone ants of Faeryland are up in legs at the latest cuts in service provision.

The local ant councils have reduced the size of their middens and are prosecuting any ant producing, involuntary of course, the same amount of natural waste. The ants are countering these draconian moves with the claim that the councils are reneging on their remit to provide adequate resources for the real world, wherein the ants are prevented from doing the right thing in disposing of waste they can not be directly held responsible for.

One ant said - and it’s one among millions with the same grievance and opinion - that the dilemma is produced when waste is given to consuming ants by supermarkets and the like as spurious packaging, and instead of prosecution, ants need institutional and constitutional support by democratic agencies in dealing with the waste.

To remove provision due to ideological obstinacy and intransigence, then prosecute the middle-ant, the consumer and taxpayer who is the meat in this political sandwich, is morally and ethically skewed. The ant - I think it was the same ant - also asked why the councils don’t feel guilty or embarrassed at failing to provide support by ignoring the inadequacy of smaller middens. Also, how do they sleep at night when they are actively criminalising the ant population, who are in fact victimised by these waste disposal issues as a consequence of the councils’ obeisance to wrong-headed and unfair political edicts that are adversarial rather than public service minded. The ants are aggrieved to be disenfranchised and caught between a Tory and a hardly Labour political place.

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COLOUR ME PURPLE

A famous author was last week found half-drowned in a vat at a factory producing a very famous blackcurrant drink.

It is believed that the leading fantasy writer had been taken there by some shady, unconvincing characters, dead set upon cordially putting an end to the author’s career. Ms R’s agent is crushed by the turn of events, believing as he did that his client was well-beloved and he found it inconceivable that anyone should want her not to write again.

2. Make your own luck.

Luck plays a part in success, but the harder you work, the luckier you get.

Whatever you choose to do, even if it's not the job of your dreams, always work hard at it. Be the first person at work in the morning and the last to leave at night. Hard work creates opportunities where your resume cannot. (A successful entrepreneur)

<Eds: Typical obscuring of what should be a clear distinction between cosmic luck and obeisance to a particular environment which enacts ideology of control of ideas and behaviours that resemble lap-dog rather than dignified human individuality. In this context, making your own luck is limited to strategies of ingratiating yourself to those with power to bestow luck upon those willing to abandon their self-respect as a non-utilitarian human being that can be valued for something other than merely economic cost-unit success. Yes, showing willing to kowtow to coercive behavioural practices by employers may get you a higher wage and, in some cases, fulfil yourself as a particular individual, but, unless you become one of the legitimate power-brokers, you are still vulnerable to redundancy, sacking and power abuses, which may seem like bad luck but which are outcomes of deliberate ideological decisions made by those with power over you. This last aspect of the power structure is illustrated in the glib and unrealistic unequivocal statement - especially when talking of luck, both good and bad - that assumes that hard work absolutely, without contradiction, delivers proper reward. Tell this to people who have jumped through all productivity hoops only to be sacked or made redundant with the quotation of that luck-laden term, 'business needs'.>

4. Never stop learning.

The most powerful word in the English language is "Why." There is nothing so powerful as an open, inquiring mind. Whatever field you choose for starting a business - be a lifelong student.

The world is full of people who have stopped learning and who think they've got it all figured out. You've no doubt met some of them already - and you'll meet plenty more.

Their favourite word is "No." They will give you a million reasons why something can't be done or shouldn't be done.

Don't listen to them, don't be deterred by them, and don't become one of them. Not if you want to fulfil your potential - and not if you want to change the world for the better. (A successful entrepreneur.)

<Eds: This is a clear illustration of convenient contingent 'thinking' that contradicts the first premise of this narrative. Logically, if the most important word is 'why' - it's no coincidence that the author forgot the question mark, thus making the question merely rhetorical and of no influence over outcome - then criticising someone who is asking questions and considering whether something should or ought to be done is undermining any belief in 'why?' as fundamental. Sometimes 'no' is a rational and reasonable response to situations and conditions that would otherwise dictate and coerce actions and behaviours that may be fulfilling for a sociopath as an individual but not beneficial for society. Typical of entrepreneurs is the gross and egotistical assumption that what greedy and opportunistic individuals cook up for personal wealth is necessarily and without question better for society. Entrepreneurial thinking is not rigorous enough in its moral and ethical, 'why?' When considering any action, it is reasonable for any free human being to ask 'why should I? because it should lead to the legitimate possibility of saying 'no' to oneself and anyone prompting action without such moral and ethical consideration. It is not a 'no can do' society but a morally and ethically sound one based on the human rational 'ought to' or 'should do' society, especially when the impetus for 'social' action is primarily self-serving which sees social need merely as an opportunity to make personal wealth, too often regardless of the negative effects on society.

Imagine if your boss or their boss ordered you to kill your cat, because it was standing in the way of your career. Every time you were asked to get in too early for work, you came up with the excuse that you needed to feed your cat first, and because of their 'won't accept 'why' with a question mark' attitude - as 'why' without a question mark is rhetorical and worthless in shaping the world for the better - which creates conditions of coercion that exclude a legitimate 'why?' reducing it to a worthless and empty word that includes by necessity only 'yes' as a response to requests, edicts, diktats to action that compromise our rational moral and ethical humanity.>●

JOS BITUMEN ARCHIVE WINDOW

Remarkably some of Jos's middle-aged poetry harkened back to a time of besotted love and harsh awakenings to realities proffered by others at his expense.

RHEUMY WITH A VIEW

Your hair was as soft as a cloud
and under your spell I meekly bowed
but you reigned o'er me with coy disdain
and so my soft ardour did just wane

Then as skies cleared my mind to burn
with Keats' hot truth upon that urn
I knew too well you hadn't at all loved
me, a mere dalliance ill behoved

so you donned another jejune coat
and I my moribund cummerbund
we forgot each well-met swell kin
staring at distant stars in the welkin

new mornings lachrymose with adieu
and nights spent studying without you

He also produced a deliberately uneven sonnet syllabically mirroring unmeasured steps that played with the symbolism of weather like a child toying with its first mobile whilst remembering walking for the first time.

CARPING PER DIEM

Not one to complain, I received your opprobrium
sobbing to myself in between such life lessons
propping up isobars under the whether
improvising scenes when I might ride your storm

To others I turned for sheltering tether
gathering myself with any port wine in a dorm
tending grassroots, so your casual hurt lessens
repairing soul to regain blessed equilibrium

I forgave you, for I knew not what you did
Even now, when wisdom explains my wounds
I think and feel only tender approbation
the therapist applauds my leaps and bounds
the whispering winds cause some perturbation
I no longer hide my ego behind my id

The quiet sense of hurt despite heart-rending cruel loves indicates Jos's granite black humour that seems to be much darker than it really is. We know Jos is going to be OK, whatever the emotional weather.

OUR MAN IN HIATUS

Our fellow is in Quandary, a small place which is in a state of political and social flux.

The authorities have weekly meetings of the floating voter and their main public house is called The Filibuster. Our man ran in to trouble when he broached the subject of inveterate liberalism that runs counter to the Liberal Democrats. The Party has abandoned the vitality of liberalism and has instead turned away from pre-event debate, to accept tory argument which severely undermines their credibility.

Our man has been invited by the rebellious party called, The Contrary Group. Their motto is, "We oppose everything."

Apart from the obvious logical contradiction in their stance, our man still went to their headquarters for what he later described as a

rational hiatus. He also added that he had a great time because the pillows were supremely comfortable and in spite of the lack of cohesive counter-argument, the party members and their guests slept very, very well indeed in the aptly named Geo. Smiley rooms.

At breakfast, our man spoke to the leader of the opposition group, Mary Quite and discussed the problems of opposing everything. She even sat at the opposite side of the room, so the conversation was loud and distant and achieved very little. Although, our man did catch her comments on the the group's opposition to any party trying to claim the moral high ground because their political party's name began with the letter 'C'.

Our man was glad this opposition didn't extend to things beginning with 'C' as the coffee, cereal and croissants were first rate.

Report by Little Jim Ladd (our countrywide reporter of the nation's underbelly)

We're at Loin End, a small province of Brisket for the annual celebration of calving. This is a ceremony undertaken to mark the coming of middle-age that entails the grazing of the calves of the male or female on their fortieth birthday.

The whole ritual is overseen by the Mayor and his acolytes, and monitored by prominent members of the medical profession, The European Court of Human Rights, MENSA, NASA and The Women's Guild of Great Britain. Only last year, there was a complaint raised by Morris Wessex, when the surgeon's assistant - having come off a 23-hour shift at the local hospital without food - nicked an artery and all hell let loose. Mr Wessex danced around the Maypole with a jet of blood spurting from the back of his leg, before being held down by a women from the Women's Institute while his health took a tourniquet for the better. Mr Wessex wanted compensation but was denied by the judging panel as they said his dancing was the worst example of Morris Dancing they had witnessed outside of Moravia.

We pointed out that the ritual had its roots in slavery, when the owners had their attendants cut the tendons on the legs of their slaves, to disable them to the point where they couldn't escape. The practice was abandoned when shackles were used as a more humane method of tethering their property. This was long before employers, with the help of Tory legislators, learned to use economic coercion as a means of keeping their resources in check.

The Mayor of Loin End, Orbis Sojourn, denied the links with slavery and said that the ceremony was part of their heritage, and didn't constitute mutilation or abuse of any kind.

When we asked Mr Sojourn about the use of a Stanley knife in the ritual, he denied this saying, "No, we use Stanley's knife. This is another heirloom for the village as it is the very knife that Henry Morton Stanley had in his pocket when he found Dr Livingstone. The tradition of the calving ceremony also honours the twinning of Loin End with the village of Ojiji, near Lake Tanganyika in modern Tanzania."

We pressed the mayor for more justification of the ceremony and he told us that the calving provides a topic of conversation for those taking part, and is a great ice-breaker at parties, whether in the home or in a public arena. We then asked whether there are any plans to make the ritual less bloodthirsty in the future. We even suggested a tattooing ceremony that would mean there would be less pain for the participants. Mayor Sojourn countered with, "We tried that but it was more painful than the nick, and besides, we pride ourselves on going the whole hog in this village. We don't do anything by calves."

When we were about to point out the contradiction in this view, we corrected ourselves by recalling that this kind of thing passes for humour in Loin End. Also, having sampled the victuals in the village we realised that their mentality was very butcher based as even the local vegetarian option in pub grub had the cheese tasting of pork. In the end, we stretched our own unscarred calves and ran out of the village as soon as the sun was up.

HIRE EDUCATION COLLEGE

Opportunities now open for desperate folks who are at that stage of transition when they are spoilt for choice in their career path.

- ✓ Diplomas in CV making (recognised in all countries with an ironically accepted human rights record)
- ✓ UNITS OF MERIT FOR THOSE UNWILLING TO READ OR EVEN BOTHER ABOUT CONTRACTS.
- ✓ CERTIFICATES IN INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES including advice on posturing, gesturing and genuflecting in the process of acquiring a position, however tenuous.
- ✓ SPECIAL AWARDS FOR JOBSPEAK: what to say, what not to say, use of language in showing how desperate you are and how powerful they are.
- ✓ A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME MANAGEMENT is the main reading but is available to all students as a podcast. It is a leading workplace physicist and part-time psychoanalytical guru who espouses hawking for a job regardless of its qualities and merits which requires a black hole mentality. See how your personal quarks can interest a prospective employer. See how your securing a job of any quality depends on cosmic anomalies.
- ✓ LEARN MODERN UTILITARIANISM including a basic understanding of moneyism. Learn the unit of decimation which is tenure (at all costs savings to the employer.)

JusttheJob Enterprises invites you - in a non-coercive manner - to strive to be employed doing whatever the employer says. Only pre-entry qualification required is an unquestioning obeisance to getting a job.

Write (only kidding!), email, mobile phone for a prospectus now before it is too late.

HAPPY NEWS

When Mr Merry, made happy by his action, walked out on Mrs Merry, she felt compelled to change her name back to Ms Freedom. This drastic action was logical in helping her through an emotionally vulnerable time. At least she has the twenty-five year mortgage to remember him, and measure his absence by.

TITULAR PHONEY WARS

The race to come up with the most catchy and velvet glove title for modern-day usurers is on. The latest list consists of:

- (I) Loan Behold - a church-backed group which charges God's special interest rates (777%APR). A discount can be secured if one attends church on Sundays.
- (II) The Cash Whiskers - a group whose interest rates (2499%APR) mean that the moment you sign up you have been thoroughly stroked and they lick the cream while you clean out the litter tray.
- (III) Lucre Here - another semi-religious group using irony to lure followers of their biblical interest rates. (John 1016%APR)
- (IV) Loot & Liar - a wholly ironic title that appeals to the love of the reformist criminal in public life. Their motto is, "If money be the result of lending, ply on." The interest rate is a nod to the bardship of proles: (1564%APR)
- (V) The Right Notes - enough said. (2000%APR)
- (VI) Moolah Rules - a rather exotic group that offers loans in euros if desired. (1889%APR)
- (VII) Ride the Little Ponies - a group in London whose gimmick is to issue loans banded in £25 amounts. Previously known as 'Monkey On Your Back', a title thought to be too heavy on irony. (666%APR) plus a year's supply of bananas.
- (VIII) Here, Kitty, Kitty - previously called Nothing in the Kitty but changed its name when black kittens became vogue in advertising once more. (2345%APR)
- (IX) Cash in the Static - Money flow problems? No heirlooms to sell at auction? Come to these for sophisticated interest rates of (1000%APR plus 25% commission.)
- (X) Loan Sweet Loan - Advertised by OAPs who don't need money as they don't exist. Slide-rules. Research has discovered that all of these independent usurers are owned by two large conglomerates that put up the capital and provided all the premises for each of these benevolent entrepreneurial groups.

QUANTITATIVE WHEEZING

Mrs Amy Where is in court at the moment arguing her case against Wow-Just-How-Easy-Debt-Is plc.

Amy Where is trying to counter claims that she is responsible for a debt requested by her four-year-old son, Noel. Noel was using his abacus playfully when he also used his not-a-toy mobile phone. He was so impressed by the ease with which he could use the app that aped his abacus. He merrily pushed across the sliders and pushed the flashing button, and, hey presto, just like that, he had secured a loan of £400 to be paid by eight-o'clock that same evening.

Mrs Where was made aware of Noel's alacrity with electronic devices and his general precociousness when she received a text of the Terms & Conditions of the loan on her own phone, just after Noel's breakfast time, which was eight-fifteen in the morning.

The court did suggest Noel produce an affidavit but he fell asleep after vomiting on the document. Mrs Where is representing herself for financial reasons. The case continues.

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AMPUTATING MORPH'S FEET OF CLAY

Morph, that loveable character of art is to be recycled and made in to a small bowl, to contain fruit or nuts or even spare keys.

Morph will be entering the kiln later this month after a process of retraining and remoulding is completed by Anthony Noheart, the government appointed Plasticine guru, who is seconded to the board of directors of Jobs4Us, the agency given carte blanche by the government to find new ways to introduce slavery in to the modern industrial environment.

Morph will, of course, retain his original colour but he will be nicely glazed and be made more useful to society.

"Morph has always been a model of flexibility. Now, we are bringing him in to the hard world of 21st century manufacturing." the government spokesman said.

=====

WHEN DID YOU LAST MAKE A DOVETAIL JOINT?

In all the mundane, banal and hectic helter-skelter of modern life, have you ever felt a burning desire to take time, for time's sake, to produce a thing of purposeless beauty?

Perhaps, if carpentry is definitely not your app., you may have felt the urge to piece together a sentence, nay even a paragraph of pored over, intensely considered poetry or prose that had the recipient rhapsodising not merely about the practical, bald exchange of information, but of the sheer craft and inevitable beauty of the syntax, the use of syllabic, heavy words evoking an almost sensual pleasure of symbolism, connotation and visceral representation of elements of life, engaging a number of our senses simultaneously?

It is no coincidence that the beautiful term for satisfying fitting together, whether it is words, brush strokes, hands, thoughts or reaching around a warm and friendly body in greeting or goodbye, is dovetailing. So, go on, make a dovetail joint however you can.

No? Oh, well, wicked, whatever.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



MINI ADS

GAMING

Wii Loom for sale. Buy this discounted piece of modernity and make your own luck. Don't wait for life to give you something you don't deserve. Work yourself silly with this brilliantly realistic game. POA

WANTED: SLOT MACHINE. Preferably one that is yet to pay out. Must have three cherries and one arm.

Call Dan from Dundee. COD. Will welcome delivery with cakes and cow pies and a strong brew to go with it.

JOBS

Apprenticeships in Wii Loom work. Have fun on this course that emulates real visceral pain and injury.

It feels like exercise but is playful drudgery. Indulge the inner child, get used to back breaking work whilst receiving next to nothing while learning about the real world of work.

Apply to your local privately owned learning establishment, who will pass your details on to an entrepreneur looking for desperate folk.

FREE WILL, ex-killer whale attendant needs new position. Lost last job because a ten year-old kid with no working knowledge of industrial relations and the jobs market, freed my charge.

OUTDOORS

Make hay while the sun shines. Opportunities for the outdoor types who are also cock-eyed optimists.

Build walls of stone-cold certainty for the enclosure of land that used to be public

right of way, but that are now in private hands.

Call Future-Is-Hours inc. for details.

ESOTERIC

Soul for sale. Unused. Needs nurturing.

Apply Nigel Stockcube, MP for Morincombe Bay.

FOR SALE: BRIGHT AURA. An unwanted Xmas gift. Unopened and unused. \$50 ono. Collection only.

VERY RARE STAMPS for sale. 'Cancelled' and 'Duplicate' amongst others in very good condition. old style bottled red ink provided.

Text Phil Latterly for full list.

DIVINE

FRIENDS of The Popes invite you to a Pius & Peace supper at St. Pugnacious on the Verge in the little village of Faith Lessening.

Bring your own alms bowl.

Parish priest opportunities. No belief system necessary. Must be a good fundraiser.

Apply within.

PLUMBING

Pipe dreams delivered directly to your bathroom or kitchen. Skilled illusionists and imaginative fabricators will give you what you've always wanted from bathing and dishwashing. No exotic, expensive salts or bombs required. Just relax and let J & F James do all the work for you.

BETTING

New in-life odds. Make money on your own future. Get exciting deals on such things

as 'when will I be made redundant'.

Cash in on any happening based on luck in your life.

Life'sALottery betting plc.

HOLIDAYS

Gardening Leave available from any Multinational company. You don't even have to go to a travel agent for these opportunities. Redundancy processes give you paid time at home but on call so that your tenure is still maintained by the company.

Feels like a paid holiday.

FURNITURE

Occasional table for sale. Only used once for the sacrifice of a turkey. Fully cleaned. No feathers. Can be used as a dinner table in the conservatory. Will part-exchange for four more turkeys.

Call Frank O'Cult by texting 669.

Fully functional Lectern, used twice, only once for self-defence.

Call Fairly Reverend Thomas Dium, or text G.O.D.L.Y now. Will take rosary beads as exchange.

Collection only.

PETS

Singing Rat for sale. \$10 ono. Answers to the name Ben.

Initially one of a pack, but can do solos. Excels in medleys of Frank Sinatra and Michael Jackson. Has had its jabs and is cured of its addiction to cheese.

TOY POODLE WANTED. Fake fur preferred. Will collect but will pay P&P if required.

Text Big Vic, Isle of Dogs, London.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THIS MONTH: Dovetail Joints.

Whether it's just my rank proletarianism or a general trend in furniture, I haven't seen a new dovetail joint in ages.

The wonderful mastery of symmetry and beautiful fitting together of sides of wood with different roles to play in a wardrobe, cupboard or even a trinket-box, was, is, and always will be a delight.

The dowelling and composite metal, half-tun bolt is no replacement for the now seemingly lost art of skilled loveliness. In the spirit of that eighties number, "Someday I'll ply away."

Late - very late - news from Feudal News Corporation

GLIB WARMING

Advice from the government on how to cope with rising energy bills:

Invest £1500* and become an MP. If successful, you will inherit the opportunity to claim monies, you should have paid to the energy monopolists, from the very people who voted you in - even if they voted for your opponent(s).

*Better still, take out a friendly loan from one of the plethora of agencies only too willing to give you the money.

SWEET NOTHINGS

A leading confectionery chain has introduced a new line of sweets. Their chocolate fireguard range is backed by government and unions. The chocolate is healthier because it is mild and doesn't upset anyone. The range will carry a British name but will be manufactured in Andorra due to their incredible skill with confectionery and not because of cheaper manufacture costs.

PATHS TO FREEDOM

The government is investing public money so that private enterprise can clean up with the rolling out of recycling paths.

Special, cheap tarmac substitute will be laid so that the public can use these designated walkways to lead them to the promised land of their centralised recycling centres.

The local councils are upset they didn't think of this scheme but are thrilled at the savings as they will no longer be responsible for emptying bins at all whilst still finding reasons to increase council taxes.

"This is another brick in the wall-writing of smaller governance with the slogan: 'Less For More.'" said a politician, ironically recycling a mantra of rebelliousness.

Critics have pointed out that it would be laissez-faire governance, if only it weren't a result of extremely deliberate, strictly ideological central government controlling, coercive legislation.

ROLLING OUT THE DAMNED SPOT FINE

An unnamed female was fined for dropping a hint in a public place.

Lady Muck, as she has been comically called by the 'officer' on duty, was given a spot fine for inferring that government legislation is not in the general interests of the working-class population of the country.

A neighbourhood police person overheard her and administered the fine, stating that people didn't want their public spaces to be soiled by dissenting ideas or radical thought.

LADYMACBETH LOANS

- **Having trouble with spot fines?**
- **We have a cure.**
- **Get a spot-fine loan now and we'll only cream you for 284% APR**
- **There's even an app for your mobile phone that can be activated immediately you receive the spot fine**

**SPONSORED BY MILKOFHUMANKINDNESS
MARKETING BOARD**

PULLING 'EM IN

A shipping magnate has been attracting the wrong kind of attention recently. Authorities are worried about his interest in pedaloos in Spain.

The Monopolising of Marine Mechanisms Commission (no, definitely not a quango, honestly) is looking into his attempt to buy up all the pedalo franchises throughout Spain.

Reports suggest suspicious activity when citing a recent incident when a fleet of pedaloos was sighted outside of international waters, occupied by men and women in dress suits and carrying briefcases.

A spokesperson for Mr Fief Lordnum said that his master was hoping to acquire enough of the pedaloos so he could float on the stock market.

HORROR SCOPE

For those of you 'enjoying' a birthday this month, you will feel much colder and have little energy. Beware anyone offering a key, a discount or an unlimited offer.

Avoid rejection by a tall, dark stranger, who would deliver a tirade of invective that could strip paper off a wall. Instead, spend quiet nights in, and alone.

HUMANLY SPORTS PAGES

CREDIBLE TIMES

“The tea and sandwiches were unbelievable,” said the commentator. “I’ve never seen cucumber like that before in my forty-seven years on this planet,” added his colleague in the box.

As they returned to the sporting contest they were commentating on, the player who had been in the game for six years, practising diligently on the courts to perfect his strokes, his physique and mental resolve, had just executed a cross-court winner after a rally lasting fifty seconds, “Unbelievable!” was the outburst. “I’ve not seen anything so unbelievable in my lifetime,” added his colleague. They asked the summariser in the booth who said, “It’s really, truly, exceptionally unbelievable, how he made that shot, under so much pressure of hitting the ball back over the net like that.”

“It’s definitely comparable with the immaculate conception, which I think at the time was unbelievable, even for those folks who were encouraged to believe in all manner of events and concepts that were barely credible.”

“Can I just say that that bit of commentary is the most unbelievable comment on this unbelievable game of tennis I’ve ever come across.”

Arthur Killjoy came in with a commentary on what had just transpired, “If we take this in its proper context, then we must, other than exceptional circumstance, accept that a man or woman who has spent so much time of their life honing skills in a specific sporting ability can execute successful results that refer to this history of practice and application. To suggest, or in the cases of sporting commentators and pundits, that they cannot indeed believe what they see, have their roots in a gullibility to modernity which suspends reason, contextualisation and hyperbole that has no place in any sophisticated and progressive society. When the players themselves too often express their own disbelief at their achievements, they are showing the frailty of the modern so-called confidence. The exponents of these so-called unbelievable achievements should be able to fully comprehend the technicalities that make what they do wholly believable. What we are in fact left with is the less than edifying fact that the proponents and marketing agents of modernity and sporting heroics are incredulous and obsequious to their power brokers - the advertisers, sponsors and owners of the sporting events - to keep their posts and, on occasion, promote themselves as good commentators and the like.”

At the latest gladiatorial matchup between the two sporting multi-millionaires who regularly avoid tax by putting their riches in tax havens, we were treated to mediocrity promoted to heroics based on ridiculous and, ironically unbelievable low standards for these professionals. The key factor of this reception of less than fantastic shotmaking as spectacular, unbelievable contestation of the latest obscene wedge of cash, saw reason suspended for such unbelievable incredulity as national identity for an individual that happens to hail from the given home geographical location; a geographical location that has deference to what should be, rationally speaking, anachronistic power structures. The score of the contest between Mark McCard and Henri Felicitations was 6-4,5-7,6-7,7-6, 6-0, if you can believe it.

BEING BALLSY

At The Now Show Stadium last month, the existential footballing contest between Objective Unicorns and Redolent Runners was raised to greater heights when the crowd’s chants became so vociferous that the referee couldn’t hear his whistle.

The crowd weren’t slow to join in the debate and were heard to utter the following chants:

“You’re gonna get your premise kicked in.”

“The referee’s a recidivist.”

“The goalkeeper’s a relativist.”

“The coach is a fatalist.”

“Given certain favourable conditions, we could possibly become the best football team east Anglia has ambivalently been aware of.”

“Who are you? Who am I? What’s it all about?”

“You only sing when you’re not thinking.”

One member of the away fans was ejected after he singled the referee out for particularly scathing criticism in saying, “Excuse me, man in black, you’re walking a thin line between reason and arbitrariness. You are in danger of lurching into slippery slope logic.”

HUMANLY SPORTS PAGES

The Meekstone Wallflowers XI

An extremely rare photograph of Meekstone Wallflowers, the Dumfries Borders Third Division West side of 1929, has been unearthed (literally, as it was buried in a time capsule) and sent to us by a regular reader.

The image, believed to be the only picture of the Wallflowers still in existence, is of historic significance, as it captures the moment the team conceded the one and only goal of their league and cup campaign that year.

The Wallflowers were formed in September 1929 by patients of the local psychotherapy practice on the advice of the therapists themselves. Dealing as they did in low self-esteem and confidence issues, it was thought the team spirit and a competitive atmosphere would forge a camaraderie that would enable the patients to become more outgoing.

In reality, nothing could have been further from the truth, as in only their second match of the season, after conceding a fifth minute goal, the Wallflowers walked off the pitch and refused to resume the game.

The season had started mundanely enough with a 0-0 draw away at Muggersby, although the match had,

in fact, been abandoned after 26 minutes when the home team were reduced to only six players following a mass bullying of the Wallflowers three midfielders in the centre circle. This incident so traumatised the Meekstone players that in their next fixture, at home to Hexham Wonderers in the first round of the Tin Toys Trophy, they refused to face the opposition and kicked off facing their own goal. They continued to play in this manner, chasing down the Hexham forwards after they had run past them, but never at any point turning to face their opponents, until the pivotal moment of the match.

Their somewhat unusual tactics had proved surprisingly successful in the early exchanges, but as the Wallflowers could only ever tackle from behind, it was inevitable that free kicks would be conceded.

In the fifth minute, with Hexham once more on the attack, their star striker, Herbert Lemon, was brought down on the edge of the box by Meekstone's veteran left back, Everton Mintz, a German refugee who signed for the team just after the First World War. Still facing their own goal, the Wallflowers marked as best they could, but they were powerless, not to say clueless, to prevent Lemon receiving the ball on the six yard line and side-footing it into the net for what turned out to be the winner.

It was at this point that crushing embarrassment at conceding a goal and a distinct lack of self-respect overwhelmed the Wallflowers and, to a man, they left the field never to return.

In fact, the goal was highly preventable, for had the home side dared to turn around, they would have seen that the entire Wonderers team, save for Lemon and the free-kick taker, Fairyhouse, had returned to their own half in preparation for the restart, so confident were they of opening the scoring.

Our picture shows Lemon, unmarked and devoid of team-mates, placing the ball into the almost empty net in front of an apathetic record crowd for a Trophy tie of just over 700. The Wallflowers tactical approach can also clearly be seen as they face their own goalkeeper, Albert Capon, who, in a colossal lack of judgement, also refused to face the Hexham players, which contributed immensely to his team's downfall. Having said that, to Capon's credit, he can be seen preparing to dive in an attempt to save Lemon's shot, albeit too late as the ball had already passed him. Shown far left is Otto Calamari, the Wallflowers' Italian playmaker, who was already turning to leave the pitch.

Following Meekstone's abandonment of the match, they were fined the sum of £260.00 and ordered to play their next three home matches behind empty fields. However, the punishment was immaterial, as none of the Wallflowers' players regained the confidence to take to a football field again, despite twice-weekly therapy sessions and a free wax cylinder of relaxing whale music.



Herbert Lemon (centre in light shirt) scores Wonderers' winner in the Tin Toys Trophy, first round, October 1929