PENINSULA

ALEX GARLAND, ROBERT MACFARLANE,
JAY GRIFFITHS, ROY WILKINSON, TOBY BARLOW,
KATHLEEN JAMIE & JAMES ROBERTSON

VISITATION

2012

PENINSULA 2012

VISITATION

It's 2012 – Olympic Year. As crowds, competition and corporate branding descend on East London, it seems apt that this, the third annual edition of *Peninsula*, should reflect the transformation of the capital and the summer's influx of visitors. Hopefully, however, what we have created will retain continued relevance long after the Olympic village has been left behind by the world's athletes.

Overseeing the project, Craig Taylor was forced to fight the pull of the capital and attend early-morning meetings deep in Cornwall after sleepless nights spent flying west along the Cornish Main Line. Over machine-stale coffee, plans were conceived, lists were drawn up and within a couple of hours Craig would leave us and climb tiredly back on the train to the city, no doubt rueing his commitment to these Cornish visitations.

With no budget to speak of, we began approaching writers with nothing more to offer than our admiration and the promise of Cornish confectionery (hidden in the depths of the *Peninsula* hard drive, there lurks a spreadsheet entitled 'The Fudge List' that will ensure we keep our promises). Some writers couldn't spare the time to contribute (and who could blame them), but gradually emails from agents and publicists began trickling back to us, bearing positive tidings.

In the end we managed to secure contributions from an immense and varied collection of writers. Booker nominees, *New York Times* bestsellers, Royal Society of Literature Fellows and the recipients of a whole host of other plaudits sent us great writing, the writing that now fills these pages.

It wasn't all fudge and business, however. We sought the opinions of the clergy, the police and the family behind one of London's most unusual tourist attractions. As if that wasn't enough, things then got strange in the bowels of Bodmin Jail, where what should have been a straightforward interview escalated into a paranormal commune with the deceased, distant relatives of the editorial team.

At this point it is tempting to include a dictionary definition, so as to demonstrate the possibilities held by the theme, but were we to do so with 'visitation', this entire editorial would be consumed by nine definitions and countless sub-definitions of the word. Put simply, the only way we can demonstrate the scope offered is to point you in the direction of the contributions contained in the pages beyond.

Happy reading,

The Editors – **Paul Tucker, Emma Easy, Rachel Santuccio and Helen Orphin**.

CONTRIBUTORS

TOBY BARLOW

Toby Barlow is the author of *Sharp Teeth*, the Alex Award-winning epic poem about wolves in Los Angeles. He is a contributor to *n+1* and *The New York Times*. He lives in Detroit. His next novel is scheduled to be released by FSG in early 2013.

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Caroline Carver is a Hawthornden Fellow and has published four collections, the latest being Tikki Tikki Man, published by Ward Wood.

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Melanie Challenger is the author of *On Extinction*. She was a Fellow of the AHRC Centre for the Evolution of Cultural Diversity at University College London from 2007–2010 and International Fellow at the British Antarctic Survey for International Polar Year 2007–2008. She is currently researching endangered music from around the world, in association with the World Oral Literature Programme at Cambridge University.

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Emma Easy mainly writes non-fiction, and is interested in the natural world and the evocation of place. She also writes songs.

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ALEX GARLAND

Alex Garland was born in London in 1970. He is the author of the bestselling novels *The Beach*, *The Tesseract* and *The Coma*. He also wrote the screenplays for *28 Days Later* and *Never Let Me Go* (based on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro).

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DAVID LAWRENCE

David Lawrence is a design historian specialising in architecture, culture and design where people and movement meet. He studies human migration at the scale of the room and the city, is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and holds a doctorate on the topic of motorway service stations. He lives and works in London, teaching architecture at Kingston University.

ROBERT MACFARLANE

Robert Macfarlane is the author of *Mountains of the Mind* (2003), *The Wild Places* (2007) and *The Old Ways* (2012). He has also just finished a short book called *Holloway*, in collaboration with the Radiohead artist Stanley Donwood.

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Jeremy Mynott has had a life-long interest in wildlife and the natural world. He has explored the variety of human responses to birds from the ancient world to the present day in *Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience*, now available in paperback.

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Matthew Oates is a naturalist and follower of the poetic approach, who writes purely to escape into the real world.

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Helen Orphin is an aspiring travel writer with a love of festivals, especially Glastonbury.

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James Robertson is a poet and writer of fiction, who writes in Scots and English for adults and children. He has won the Scottish Arts Council (2003) and Saltire Society (2003, 2010) Book of the Year Awards. *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. His next novel, *The Professor of Truth*, will be published in 2013. He lives in rural Angus, not far from Dundee.

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Rachel Santuccio is an aspiring fiction writer, amongst many other things.

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Penelope Shuttle has lived in Cornwall since 1970. *Redgrove's Wife* (Bloodaxe Books) was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Single Collection, and for the T. S. Eliot Award. *Sandgrain* and *Hourglass* (Bloodaxe Books 2010) was a recommendation of The Poetry Book Society. *New and Selected Poems* will be released by Bloodaxe Books in October 2012.

IAIN SINCLAIR

Iain Sinclair is a prolific writer of fiction, poetry and non-fiction. His books include *London Orbital*, *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire* and *Ghost Milk*.

CRAIG TAYLOR

Craig Taylor is the author of three books, most recently *Londoners: The Days and Nights of London Now – As Told by Those Who Love It, Hate It, Live It, Left It and Long for It*. He is the editor of the literary magazine *Five Dials*.

PAUL TUCKER

Paul Tucker is a music journalist and writer of narrative non-fiction. He has an irrational love of The Mars Volta and writes for *The Quietus*.

ROY WILKINSON

Roy Wilkinson is a writer and sometime rock manager. His first book, *Do It For Your Mum*, was published in 2011 by Rough Trade Books – a non-fiction tale of family life and rock music set against a backdrop of Nick Cave, Ronnie Corbett and the English Lake District.

VISITATION

CONTENTS

FICTION

R.S.S.

BY ALEX GARLAND

GABRIEL AND I CALLED THEM THE PROFESSOR AND THE ARCHITECT. THE PROFESSOR, BECAUSE HE HAD EARNED A DOCTORATE IN EGYPT. AND THE ARCHITECT, BECAUSE HE SUPERVISED MUCH OF THE LOCAL REBUILDING WORK.

Their absence was unusual. We were used to seeing them regularly around the grounds of the school. Many years ago, they had been students here, and since their return to Rumbek, they were often found wandering around the empty classrooms, discussing how those classrooms might be returned to their former state.

As, one day, Gabriel and I hoped to be students at the school ourselves, we valued any time spent in their company. They would tell us stories about how things used to be, which suggested how things might be again.

So their unusual absence concerned me. The Professor and the Architect were old; it had been nearly half a century since they were students. I began to worry that one of them had fallen sick, or both of them had fallen sick. I even began to worry that they might be dead.

The sense of death grew stronger as the days passed. Often I found myself in the teak plantation. I would lie in the scrub, in the dust, on my back, troubled by the heat but too tired and lost in thoughts to move. And from the many conversations I'd had with the Professor and the Architect, two kept coming back to me.

The Professor saying: 'In general, women are weaker than men. If a baby is shot in front of a woman, she weeps. But a man does not.'

And the Architect describing the day he returned to Rumbek Secondary School after the town had been retaken from the Northerners: 'The first place I visited was my old classroom. I walked directly to it. And when I saw it, I almost wept.'

Between these two statements, I felt they were describing how I should react to their deaths. I would feel sad, perhaps close to tears, but I would retain my self-control.

This, I think, is reasonable. I am between fifteen and sixteen years of age and I would expect to behave more like a man than a woman or child. After all, there are soldiers who are younger than me. And if one of those young soldiers were killing you and you closed your eyes, you could not distinguish their actions from those of an adult.

In their case, it is a matter of self-preservation. In my case, it is a matter of self-education. I would hope that, from my speech, you could not distinguish me from an adult. Perhaps if you close your eyes now, you will hear an adult talking.

Many years ago, the British decided that southern Sudan needed a secondary school, as a complement to the missionary schools whose only real purpose was the propagation of faith.

A competition to site the school was launched between the various governors of the regions. They were required to argue why their district would be preferable to all others. In Rumbek's application, the governor gave practical considerations, such as the town's accessible location and its supply of resources and livestock. But he also detailed the town's unique quality of tranquility, which would be ideal for the function of study and education.

Rumbek's was the winning application. The school was built on the outskirts of town. It lies off the main road, at the end of a path which is lined with mango trees: a collection of long, low buildings.

It was here, standing at the head of the mango tree avenue, with yellow dust coating my feet and ankles, that I spotted the Architect after his absence of several days.

The distance was too great to make out his face, but I could not mistake his slim silhouette. He was standing at the far end of the avenue, his head tilted upwards, looking at the faded lettering above the school's entrance arch. This posture was familiar to me. On the school premises, the Architect spent much of his time examining the buildings. Sometimes this was to assess their damage, to see if there was any hope of repair. But more often, he was simply remembering the way the buildings had once been, in the years he had been a student here.

Surprised to see that my fears were unfounded, pleased that my sense of death was misplaced, I set off immediately towards him. But I had only taken a few steps when he set off himself, heading through the short passageway to the front courtyard, then turning right to disappear around the corner. Rather than call out, which would have been impolite considering the difference in our years and status, I picked up my pace.

When I reached the courtyard, I saw the table from which the headmaster had once conducted open-air assemblies. And I saw the abandoned truck that sat stripped behind the headmaster's table, and the armoured personnel carrier with deflated tyres and open hatches.

But I didn't see the Architect. I had not moved quickly enough. He had already disappeared into one of the several buildings and passageways that provide exits from the courtyard.

It was impossible to guess into which of these buildings or passageways the Architect had vanished.

Rumbek School is vast and maze-like, with not simply the one courtyard I have already described, but several, which interlock around classrooms and dormitories that once accommodated a thousand pupils. And the maze extends further, because a school of such scale required supporting architecture. The teachers and auxiliary staff and vice headmaster and headmaster all needed to be housed. Showers and toilet facilities were necessary, as were kitchen and eating areas. Space was set aside for recreational activity. Two churches were provided, one Catholic and the other Protestant.

With so many directions in which I might try to follow the Architect, but with no clue as to which to take, I chose to walk straight ahead. From the bright sunshine of one courtyard to the dark shadow of a passageway, then into the bright sunshine of another courtyard – the largest in the complex.

Apart from its size, this courtyard was notable for three things.

First, the number of empty bullet casings that lay scattered on the ground.

Secondly, a wall, which had been built by Northerners around the yard's central fruit tree. Nobody knows why. It is too low to deter a fruit thief. Perhaps it was built to create an area in which senior army ranks could have a shaded place to take tea.

Thirdly, another Northern construction: a small, red-brick mosque.

The Professor stood a few metres from the mosque; compact, dark, shimmering in the heat that rose from the ground. I was surprised to see him, in the same way I had been surprised to see the Architect beneath the entrance arch.

Beside him, only a short distance away, was Gabriel. Gabriel was always recognisable at a distance because of his long T-shirt, which hung so low over his small body that it entirely covered his shorts.

They weren't talking to each other. The Professor was looking toward some point behind the mosque, with his back to me, but Gabriel was facing in my direction.

Having seen and then lost the Architect, I wanted to run toward the Professor, to ensure that the same thing didn't happen again. But I hesitated. Halfway over the distance between us there was an open well, uncovered, wide enough to swallow a vehicle and deep enough to lose it forever.

I was wary of running in the vicinity of this dangerous pit. If I were to fall inside, there would be no hope of recovering me. Others have died in this way. During the battle to recapture the town and the school, many wells became contaminated by corpses.

So instead of running, I waved to Gabriel. I thought that if he waved back, the Professor might turn and see me, then wait for my approach. He might even be pleased to see me, just as I was pleased to see him. An idea had occurred to me. Perhaps, from the Professor's point of view, I was the one who had been missing for the past few days.

But Gabriel did not wave back. Not only that, but a moment after my wave, the Professor set off walking, just as the Architect had done, and seconds later he had passed behind the mosque and was out of sight.

I crossed the courtyard until I was close enough to Gabriel to speak without raising my voice.

'Gabriel,' I said. 'Why didn't you wave back? Didn't you see me wave?'

Gabriel shrugged. 'I thought you were waving hello. I could see you walking over, so I waited here.'

'Yes, but…' I frowned, looking past the mosque to see where the Professor might have gone. Gabriel narrowed his eyes. 'I don't know why you're angry,' he said.

'I haven't seen the Professor for several days, and I wanted to talk to him.'

'I thought you were waving because you wanted to talk to me.'

'If I hadn't seen you for several days, of course I would want to talk to you. But I've seen you every day. We've spent all the past days in each other's company. And now I've missed both the Professor and the Architect.'

Gabriel shrugged again. 'If it's the Architect you want, I just saw him heading towards the dining room.'

We walked together, Gabriel accompanying me because he had nothing better to do.

I wasn't really expecting to find the Architect at the dining room. As I have said, the Architect's chief work was the renovation of buildings, but the dining room was beyond repair. The structure had no roof, and the walls were badly damaged. And, even if the Architect had been feeling nostalgic, it was not a pleasant place to stroll around. Local children had chosen the concrete floor as their toilet. It was impossible to walk unless your eyes were directed at the ground, and the smell was fierce.

Sure enough, when we reached the dining room it was empty. The only figures to be seen were sketched on the walls – karate-kicking figures between lines of graffiti, drawn in charcoal by bored soldiers.

'Are you sure you saw the Architect heading this way?' I asked Gabriel.

Gabriel shook his head. He didn't answer because he was using the bend of his elbow to cover his nose and mouth.

'You aren't sure you saw him,' I repeated, hardly bothering to hide my frustration.

'No,' he replied, muffled. 'I saw someone. But now, thinking back, I'm not sure it was the Architect. It may have been someone else.'

'I see.'

'In fact, yes, I'm sure it was someone else.'

I might have spoken irritably to Gabriel again, but at the moment he admitted he had not seen the Architect, I saw the Professor. First out of the corner of my eye, as a stocky shape glimpsed through one of the dining-room windows. Then, as my head turned, seen clearly, framed by the rectangle of stonework, striding quickly toward one of the dormitory halls.

This time, I was taking no chances. I ran toward the exit in a series of leaps, landing neatly between the scattered clumps of faeces. Then I ran around the outside wall of the dining-room area.

But turning the corner, I saw that again I had been too slow. No one stood where the Professor had been. The yard was empty.

For a moment, I was disappointed. Then, across the yard, a shadow seemed to slip inside one of the dormitory doorways.

The doorway led to a room that is pockmarked with a thousand bullet holes. There are bullet holes everywhere. The bullets casings lie in the dust, and the holes are in the exterior walls.

But in this room, the holes are on the interior walls. The concentration is so heavy that in many places whole areas of plaster have broken away.

I have found that if you stare at the holes, patterns emerge. You identify a stitch of bullets from a single burst. The stitch shows how the recoil of the weapon has pulled upwards, slanting from left to right. You can see how, as a person was shot, the gunner struggled with his aim.

The only surprise would have been if the Professor or the Architect were inside this room. But they were not inside. And my mind had returned to its original fears: that the Professor and the Architect were dead.

I wondered if perhaps I had been following only their ghosts.

Standing motionless, my feet warmed by the concrete floor, I began to think back. I remembered that although Gabriel claimed to have seen the Architect, he later said he had been mistaken. I remembered that he had not seemed aware of the older man's presence. I remembered that the Professor had shimmered from the heat rising from the courtyard ground, but Gabriel had not. And I considered the elusiveness of the two men. That repeatedly, just as I was about to catch them, they would slip away.

The idea that I had been following ghosts disturbed me. I became lost in thought, as I had been while I lay in the teak plantation.

I have little idea how long I had been standing in the room before Gabriel appeared, or how long he had been with me before I noticed him. But I suspect it was quite some time, because when my eyes focused on Gabriel, he seemed as preoccupied as me.

Eventually, he said, 'I found them for you.'

In Rumbek School there is beauty, with its tranquil atmosphere, and many courtyards and mango trees. There is also horror, with its contaminated wells and abandoned tanks and execution cells. These two things, the beauty and the horror, are usually in conflict with each other. But not always.

A few minutes' walk from here, there is another room where bullets have left marks on the interior. But these are not on the walls. They are on the ceiling.

Here, a group of Northerners were trapped as the rebels mounted their final attack. And when the rebels clambered on to the roof, the Northerners fired up at them, punching hundreds of holes in the corrugated asbestos. Through these holes, the light of the sun fires back.

The room is otherwise lit only by its doorway, and that doorway opens only to a short covered passage. So aside from the bullet holes, there is almost perfect darkness in the room – and perfect darkness if you have just stepped in from the bright outside.

Walk from outside to inside, and look upwards, and you will believe you are looking up at the spread of stars in a night sky. Then look downwards, or to the walls on your left and right, and you will see that the constellation continues. Because where the sun comes through the bullet holes, it burns a precise light spot where it falls. And now you can find that you are not so much looking up at a constellation, but standing inside one.

As Gabriel had said, the Professor and the Architect were inside the constellation chamber. And – now I regain my capacity to be surprised – they were talking about me.

As I had previously considered, they were under the impression that I had been the missing person over the past few days. In their walk around the school, they had been attempting to search me out.

My pleasure was twofold. First, to see them before me so fit and well, and secondly that I could introduce myself and put their concerns to rest.

I walked toward them, and when they did not break off their conversation, I coughed.

This did not provoke a response, so I spoke. I said, 'This is strange. To think that you were looking for me, when all this time I have been looking for you.'

They ignored me. So I spoke again. This time I said, 'Here I am.'

Then, when they continued to ignore me, and left to search around the defence trench that circled the school, I followed them, and stood directly in their path several times, announcing my presence even more loudly than before.

And finally, when they began to talk about checking in the old teak plantation, and also to voice mounting fears about the location of Gabriel, I stopped and allowed them to walk on ahead.

Much later that day, close to sunset, but not so close that the mosquitoes would be swarming, I sat with Gabriel a short distance from the Professor's house. Outside the house, the Professor and the Architect were discussing measures that would need to be taken. The teak plantation, they agreed, would need to be marked in some way. The only question was how, given the size of the area.

'Mines,' the Architect said more than once, 'are a terrible problem.'

The Professor did not need reminding. Only last December, a boy was blown up and killed on a clearing in the centre of Rumbek Town. And now it had transpired that the teak plantation was one of the most heavily mined areas in the vicinity, given that it offered protection to any forces closing in on the school. Which, at the time, was being used as a barracks.

It made me sad to hear their conversation. One of my most treasured stories from the Professor and the Architect had been a description of how, in earlier years, the teak plantation had been a favourite haunt of the school's students; a place where they could relax and escape into the quietness, and study beneath the shade of the trees. The description had entirely captured my imagination and had made me keen to seek out these qualities for myself.

You will remember that I asked you to close your eyes, and I explained that if you did so, you would hear an adult speaking, not a boy. Now, if you open them, you will be reminded that I am, after all, between fifteen and sixteen years old. Not an adult at all. My voice is an illusion of my education.

It is unfortunate that illusions only stretch so far. An anti-personnel mine, of the sort that might be found in the teak plantation, would destroy the leg of an adult. But a boy could easily be killed, as the blast reaches beyond the knee or thigh, and into the stomach. And if another boy, seeing his friend's injury, attempted to help, he might be injured too. Even if he took care to follow the path, tread where someone else has been, his foot could stray in the panic and anxiety of the moment.

A smaller boy, shorter than me, could be killed outright by such an explosion. In this way, the shorter boy would be saved from a further ordeal that might last several days.

As the evening drew in, the Architect returned home to take his shower and eat dinner. But even after his companion had excused himself, the Professor remained outside. He turned his chair so that it faced the direction of the school's old tennis courts and rested his hand on his lap and, despite the mosquitoes, barely moved for the next hour.

It was strange to see him sit so still. I imagine he was remembering a match that had once been played on the courts, perhaps in the early morning of a Sunday, when many of the students would have travelled home for the weekend, and the temperature was cool.

INTERVIEW

"PEOPLE HAVE NEVER CEASED TO FEEL A NEED FOR WILDNESS"

EMMA EASY TALKS WITH **JAY GRIFFITHS**

In 2007, Jay Griffiths published Wild*, a book seven years in the making. Tracing a path through Earth, Ice, Water, Fire, Air and Mind, it documented her exploration of wildness, as she spent time with indigenous populations across the world and reached searchingly for a collective wild consciousness. The result was a work that exposed the perils of a disconnect with wildness, both on an individual level and a global scale. The work has been championed by names as diverse as Radiohead, Gary Snyder, John Berger and KT Tunstall, and acclaim is escalating.*

Wild ***is nearly six years old now. Has your relationship with wildness evolved at all, since then?***

I think I feel more and more interested in the psyche's wildness, and in the necessity for the mind to have dwelling in nature, which isn't the same as literally being in a rural environment. I'm also more and more aware of how wildness edges on to the divine: that there is something ferociously sacred in the life of life.

What was it like, being a guest in such different cultures to our own for such long periods of time?

Well, it is probably the same for everyone all over the world: I was always curious but sometimes concerned that my curiosity might be ignorant. I was always excited to be in different places and sometimes exhausted by the overload of sense-impressions. I was always keen to listen and always, but always, sorry not to be fluent in all the languages I met.

"THERE IS SOMETHING FEROCIOUSLY SACRED IN THE LIFE OF LIFE."

How was your role as a writer regarded by the different tribes you stayed with?

My role as a writer was usually considered fairly straightforwardly. In the Arctic, I sometimes felt that people were a little tired of being written about, which is very understandable. There's a joke that the typical Inuit family consists of a mother, a father, a grandmother, two children and an anthropologist, and sometimes it seemed that people were humouring and tolerating the presence of a writer. But a couple of times people came to talk to me when they felt that a particular anger they had was not more widely understood, for example that Inuit people still smart with an understandable irritation about being told by the West that they should not hunt whales, when it is massive industrial whaling that has caused such drastic loss of whale-life in the whale-ways (as the oceans were called in Anglo-Saxon literature).

In West Papua, my role was enormously, heartbreakingly welcome, as so few writers go there. From Britain, you could probably count on the fingers of one hand the writers who have gone there, many others embarrassingly and falsely claiming they can't go because Indonesia 'forbids' them. It does, and it doesn't matter: you just buy a ticket. It's that difficult. West Papua is a land of beauty. It is a land of laughter, where, if someone knows they are going to fall over laughing, they lie down first. It is a land of song, everyone is a singer. And Indonesia is annihilating a nation of singers. It is strangling the laughter. Why? Because they invaded West Papua, and have mounted a genocide, with the connivance of the international community because international corporations are making enormous profits. Writers do not report on it. The media does not cover it. And that is why it continues.

As you take us from element to element in the book, and from culture to culture, similar themes crop up: not taking more from the land than you need; having an intimate, sensual knowledge of your surroundings; how wildness deteriorates into wasteland if connection is lost. Do you think that the Western world is waking up to these messages and starting to reconnect with the wild?

I think that people have never ceased to feel a need for wildness. I think the thirst which people feel for their pets and gardens is evidence. One window box in a first-floor flat in London might be all you have (it was all I had when I lived in London), but the need for it is not related to acreage but to the fact of its vitality.

More and more of us in the West are travelling – gap years, voluntary projects, honeymoons, business trips. It appears that it can either be an individual blessing – for yourself, for example – or a global curse. What are your thoughts?

Any travel can be either a curse or a traverse of understandings. If the latter (and one would hope it is always the latter), then it centres on the idea of the gift, that one must always give as much as receive, when one is travelling. It can be hard, I know, to work out what to take, how one's trip is made to be useful to someone else, but it is a necessary part of planning. And there are certain situations where it is always a curse: the tribal safari holidays which are not managed by indigenous people but which use them like creatures in a zoo are odious. Visiting so-called 'lost tribes' is something which can be literally murderous, and should be illegal.

From time to time, you reveal glimpses of your note-taking process, writing things down whilst scaling a mountain, or at risk of frostbite in Arctic conditions. Can you tell us a little more about your note-taking process – and were any notebooks lost on your travels?

Notebooks, well, I took loads with me everywhere, I use pencil and keep a penknife with me to sharpen them. I never use gear, no recording devices, nothing except paper and pencils because they don't leak and you can use them in different temperatures. At home, too, when I write, I write in pencil, sometimes biro, but never on the keyboard, except right now, typing emails. I find thoughts and language are more flexible, and words yield themselves more, like soft damp clay, if you write by hand. No notebooks were lost, no, though I did once give my notebooks to a man in the Amazon when we were crossing a very difficult river, as I thought he was much less likely than I was to fall.

"ANY TRAVEL CAN BE EITHER A CURSE OR A TRAVERSE OF UNDERSTANDINGS."

What's your next project?

I've just finished a short truanting novel called *A Love Letter From a Stray Moon*, which will be published as an e-book by Penguin, then as an actual book by Go Together Press. It is partly 'about' Frida Kahlo, much to do with the rebellion of poetry, the necessary fire at the heart of art. I'm also finishing a long non-fiction book about childhood.

JOURNEY

TRACK

IN HIS NEW BOOK, 'THE OLD WAYS', ROBERT MACFARLANE LEAVES HIS DESK TO FOLLOW ANCIENT PATHS

ALL THINGS ARE ENGAGED IN WRITING THEIR HISTORY... NOT A FOOT STEPS INTO THE SNOW, OR ALONG THE GROUND, BUT PRINTS IN CHARACTERS MORE OR LESS LASTING, A MAP OF ITS MARCH. THE GROUND IS ALL MEMORANDA AND SIGNATURES; AND EVERY OBJECT COVERED OVER WITH HINTS. IN NATURE, THIS SELF-REGISTRATION IS INCESSANT, AND THE NARRATIVE IS THE PRINT OF THE SEAL.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1850)

Two days short of the winter solstice; the turn of the year's tide. All that cold day, the city and the countryside around felt halted, paused. Five degrees below freezing and the earth battened down. Clouds held snow that would not fall. Out in the suburbs the schools were closed, people homebound, the pavements rinky and the roads black-iced. The sun ran a shallow arc across the sky. Then just before dusk the snow came – dropping straight for five hours and settling at a steady inch an hour.

I was at my desk that evening, trying to work but distracted by the weather. I kept stopping, standing, looking out of the window. The snow was sinking through the orange cone cast by a street light, the fat flakes showing like furnace sparks.

Around eight o'clock the snow ceased. An hour later I went out for a walk with a flask of whisky to keep me warm. I walked for half a mile along dark back roads where the snow lay clean and unmarked. The houses began to thin out. A few undrawn curtains: family evenings underway, the flicker and burble of television sets. The cold like a wire in the nose. A slew of stars, the moon flooding everything with silver.

At the southerly fringe of the suburb, a last lamp post stands by a hawthorn hedge, and next to it is a hole in the hedge which leads down to a modest field path. I followed the field path east-south-east towards a long chalk hilltop, visible as a whaleback in the darkness. Northwards was the glow of the city, and the red blip of aircraft warning lights from towers and cranes. Dry snow squeaked underfoot. A fox crossed the field to my west at a trot. The moonlight was so bright that everything cast a crisp moon-shadow: black on white, stark as woodcut. Wands of dogwood made zebra-hide of the path; hawthorn threw a lattice. The trees were frilled with snow, which lay to the depth of an inch or more on branches and twigs. The snow caused everything to exceed itself and the moonlight caused everything to double itself.

This is the path I've probably walked more often than any other in my life. It's a young way; maybe fifty years old, no more. Its easterly hedge is mostly hawthorn and around eight feet high; its westerly hedge is a younger mix of blackthorn, hawthorn, hazel and dogwood. It is not normally a beautiful place, but there's a feeling of secrecy to it that I appreciate, hedged in as it is on both sides, and running discreetly as it does between field and road. In summer I've seen small rolling clouds of goldfinches rising from teasel-heads and then curling ahead to settle again, retreating in the measure that I approach them.

That evening the path was a grey snow alley, and I followed it uphill to the hanger of beech trees that tops the whaleback hill, passing off the clay and on to the chalk proper. At the back brink of the beech wood I ducked through an ivy-trailed gap, and was into the forty-acre field that lies beyond.

At first sight the field seemed flawless; floe country. Then I set out across it and started to see the signs. The snow was densely printed with the tracks of birds and animals – archives of the hundreds of journeys made since the snow had stopped. There were neat deer slots, partridge prints like arrowheads pointing the way, and the pads of rabbits. Lines of tracks curved away from me across the field, disappearing into shadow or hedge. The moonlight, falling at a slant, deepened the dark in the nearer tracks so that they appeared full as inkwells. To all these marks I added my own.

The snow was overwhelmingly legible. Each print-trail seemed like a plot that could be read backwards in time; a series of allusions to events since ended. I found a line of fox pugs, which here and there had been swept across by the fox's brush, as if it had been trying to erase evidence of its own passage. I discovered what I supposed were the traces of a pheasant taking off: trenched footprints where it had pushed up, then spaced feather-presses either side of the tracks, becoming progressively lighter and then vanishing altogether.

I chose a deer's trail to follow, which angled tightly across a corner of the field. The slots led through a blackthorn hedge: I snagged my way after them, and emerged into a surreal landscape. To my north, the land swooped smoothly away downhill for 300 yards or so. South and uphill of where I stood, big white humps surrounded what appeared to be a small neat lake with a flagstick in its centre. There were copses of beech and stands of pine, sudden drops and draws in the land, rounded hills and swathed valleys.

I walked over to the lake, stepped out on to its surface, and by its flagstick I sat down and took a drink of whisky. Edited of its golfers by the darkness, transformed by snowfall and moonlight, the county's most exclusive golf course had become a strange realm of open country. Murmuring insincere apologies to the club's members, I left the first green and set off to explore the course. I walked straight down the middle of fairway after fairway, my shadow falling undistorted by my side. In the bunkers snow lay calf-deep and sifted. On the fifth green I lay on my back and watched the stars' slow wheel.

Most of the animal tracks on the course had been left by rabbits. If you've seen rabbit prints in snow, you will know they resemble a Halloween ghost mask, or the face of Edvard Munch's screamer: the two rear feet are placed laterally to make elongated eyes, and between and behind them fall the forefeet in a slightly offset paired line, forming nose and oval mouth. Thousands of these faces peered at me from the snow. Occasionally the headlights of cars on the road to the west showed as long yellow tunnels of light. On the twelfth fairway something large and dark ran from tree to scrub cover: it looked like a wolf,

but must have been a deer or fox, and set needles of silly fear pricking in the backs of my hands.

At the far end of the course, I followed rabbit tracks through another blackthorn hedge and on to the Roman road that runs for miles over low chalk hills. The road looked magnificent in the snow – the white line of its route leading the eye far in either direction – and I followed it south-east. Vast fields were visible through the hedges to either side, throwing the moonlight back up in hard pale sheets. A bird moving in a tall ash tree sent snow dropping across the path ahead of me, falling like speckles on early film.

Distance stretched oddly, or perhaps time compressed, for it seemed that I had been moving for many miles or hours before I reached the point where the Roman road passed the end of a wide avenue of beeches that I recognised. I walked up the avenue, skirted the earthworks of a large Iron Age ring-fort, crossed a road and then entered a wide meadow that rises to the top of a chalk down, whose summit floats 250 feet above sea level. Charcoal trees, a taste of pewter in the mouth.

At the down's top, under the moon, near the outline of a Bronze Age burial barrow, I sat in the snow and drank whisky again. I looked back along the line of my own tracks leading up to the hilltop. Away to the north-west were dozens of other print-trails, spreading far and then further downhill. I picked a trail and set out along it, following those tracks to see where they might lead.

'Track' is an excerpt from *The Old Ways*, published in 2012 by Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin books.

POEM

THE WOOD

BY KATHLEEN JAMIE

She comes to me
as a jay's shriek,
as ragged branches shading
deerways I find myself
lost among for days,
weeks, till the crisis passes.

When I weep
she strokes my hair and
calls me 'babe',
coaxing me to fall
once more for her
scarlet-berry promises –

This time, she says, *I'll keep you;*
you'll never have to face them all again.

Taken from the forthcoming collection *The Overhaul*, to be published by Picador in October 2012.

"THE CITY REVIVES"

LONDONERS AUTHOR **CRAIG TAYLOR** TALKS WITH **IAIN SINCLAIR** ABOUT GHOST MILK, SWANDOWN AND LIFE AFTER LONDON 2012

One warm spring evening not so long ago, I was able to sit down with the writer Iain Sinclair for a conversation. Sinclair had strayed from his beloved Hackney all the way across North London to leafy Hampstead, to Keats House, where we spoke in front of an audience of around one hundred. Already, early in 2012, it felt as though the London Olympics were bearing down on all of us and Sinclair, after telling the gathered a few anecdotes about NW3, was eager to discuss the folly of such grand projects, the effect this mass visitation of commerce, athleticism and tourism would have on East London, and also the mysterious substance at the heart of his latest book, Ghost Milk.

I remember the day when this manuscript came in to Simon [Prosser, of* Ghost Milk*'s publisher Hamish Hamilton]. We looked at the title and thought, 'Only Iain Sinclair could take these two words and force them together in this way.' 'Ghost Milk', what does it mean?

I don't want the book simply to be some kind of polemic against the Olympics or against great projects. It's a much more mysterious thing than that and I feel that at the moment in the world there is a substance hovering almost like ectoplasm between the virtual and the actual.

We're being overwhelmed by computer-generated imagery, I saw it when the lower Lee Valley was enclosed in blue fences – suddenly these images of something that doesn't exist came into being. They were pin sharp and they included a vision of London that people were persuaded to believe, that was totally contradicted by the toxic reality that was going on underfoot. Between the two there has to be a kind of buffer substance and I think we had to invent something that became that.

"THERE IS A NEW KIND OF LONDON EMERGING. WE HAVE TO HAVE A MEDIUM BETWEEN THE TWO, THROUGH WHICH WE SINK OR SWIM, AND THAT'S OUR CHALLENGE I THINK, AS WRITERS"

This quote from the book I found particularly lovely: 'CGI smears on the blue fence. Real juice from a virtual host. Embalming fluid. A soup of photographic negatives. Soul food for the dead. The universal element in which we sink and swim.'

That's the most important I think, this 'universal element in which we sink and swim'. Because now, London is – and the media reinforces this so strongly – such an atomised, fragmented city.

There is a new kind of London emerging. We have to have a medium between the two, through which we sink or swim, and that's our challenge, I think, as writers. And you've done it [in *Londoners*] with a very nice solution. Almost like [Henry] Mayhew, you analyse London by wandering and talking to people, just to voice it for themselves. So it becomes a sort of *choral* history.

In [*Ghost Milk*] especially there's a lot to do with lost, forgotten space – space that's changed. In one part you talk about what this land was: football pitches, a cycle track, a river shared by oarsmen and narrow-boat dwellers...

It was all there, and not only that, everything that's being promised to be brought was already there and was allowed to decay. You had the little running track that someone built in Hackney Wick in the back of his pub in the Victorian period, enormously successful, at his own expense. There were the Manor Garden Allotments and the sporting facilities that were brought in and provided by patrons and then allowed to decay because they wouldn't put any money into them. And all the little neighbourhood swimming pools, like where I taught my children to swim, round the corner from me. All of that has gone, to go into the big, grand showy thing.

You talk at one point about 'wanderers who were not filmed, not challenged by security, trusted to make their own mistakes', which I thought was a good phrase. And that's something that perhaps is less tangible than a disappearing sports field.

They created, in Victoria Park, the first non-Royal people's park, and the Lee Valley served as a wonderful safety valve; walkers, fishers, people who wanted to follow the bird life on the marshes, as well as all forms of industry, all went into this same landscape. It was a release, it was a break. It was so important to have that liminal land,

that edge-land accessible for people to walk to within twenty minutes or half an hour. And once that's enclosed, then there's a deeply disturbing psychological effect that takes place.

One of the interesting elements of the book for me was light. When I was doing my project a street photographer spoke about the way these big projects changed – actually changed – the light of London. In his case he did a lot of street photography in the City of London and spoke about this light that came off the Gherkin and how it illuminated parts of London in a way that had not been done before. And you talked, when it comes to Westfield again, you talked about manufactured light and imported light – 'quotation light' is what you called it.

In the Shepherd's Bush Westfield, what you get is an entirely enclosed environment, a space station. And it has this great play of artificial light, so it's a sort of film set that gives you a bizarre experience of the world, because it has restaurants that are genetically attached to France, Italy, Mexico, wherever – Vietnam. All of them around a single, central court, so that you could sit down and eat and experience, in a sense, all of the places in the world in a kind of Disneyland version, without having to go anywhere.

There's the other light that you mentioned, the kind of bonus light, reflections off the glass buildings. But, then, there's also the darkness that's cast by the enormously tall buildings. That certain places that were in a light are now in deep shadow. And the rules and regulations concerning how close you can build have been torn up.

"CERTAIN PLACES THAT WERE IN A LIGHT ARE NOW IN DEEP SHADOW."

There is some wonderfully imaginative ammunition about the Olympics [in* Ghost Milk*]. It takes, in your own very particular way, a very funny view in parts, but tragic too. You say at one point it's unstoppable and all we can do is bear witness.

There are other things we can do as well, there must be benefits. The quality of the opposition has provoked people to actually respond, to think 'What is society? What is local? Do we allow the qualities of the locality and the details of the locality to be set aside for global, corporate entities? Do you realise that the only water that you can get in there is Coca-Cola, the only food you can get is McDonald's?' You know, 'What are you giving up for that?'

So, the positive thing is it brings about these sort of gestures?

Yeah. And it has stimulated that, you know – it's stimulated a mass of other activity. Because you're challenged – do you let this thing roll over, or do you invent, create, record? And that's what I'm trying to do.

There's a lot [in* Ghost Milk*] about these CGI, imagined environments you see on the hoardings of new buildings. I wanted to talk to you about this, because I felt – being someone, a writer, who rents a room – I get seduced by this 'ghost milk'. It's out there and I feel its pressing force, these bright shiny faces on hoardings.

I feel like this is an age thing, you know [laughs]. I talked to several groups of students and they just said 'I don't believe you, we've seen the footage, we've seen –' , and what they'd seen were these computer-generated images where the water's blue and everything's gleaming. And they really would prefer to believe that to any kind of written text. And pushing further, you discover that they actually don't read books at all. So it is another world. I'm still in a world that asks that you do this very difficult thing of following the architecture of a book, and I think it is a process that is slowly disappearing from the world.

And that [process] helps when you encounter these things in the real world?

Yeah, exactly. Because otherwise you get into a very fast-twitch way of reading the world. Your attention span is short and you want something exciting and you want it here. I remember when the [images of the Olympic athletes'] flats first went up, it was beautifully cheated that you were in Hackney and you saw this and there was no Hackney. It was the canal and suddenly you were down to the Gherkin and the Shard and whatever else, this fabulous landscape. But the real thing in between was just eliminated, it was gone. They very subtly often combine a real horizon with a computer-generated foreground. And so the middle ground, which is an interesting place, just disappears.

Ghost Milk ***is a book of righteous anger, there's some sadness in it. Do you still wander through London and feel wonder?***

Absolutely. It's an embattled wondering through the particular territory I describe there, but then why not wonder in a different direction, come through places that you haven't seen for a long time. It doesn't go – it shifts. London has always been a series of tectonic plates where the particular values move and drift. And the things that were in Hackney when I moved there in 1960 are now out in Loughton or Essex. The city revives. And wonderful new communities have grown up. It's the most multicultural spot on the face of the earth. I move down the canal and I'm hearing Russian, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Polish – all the languages of the world. And very little English.

This is an abridged version of Craig Taylor's conversation with Iain Sinclair. Read the absorbing full-length interview on our website: www.peninsulamag.wordpress.com

DUO PART 1

THE MANNIE

THE FIRST OF TWO STORIES FROM JAMES ROBERTSON

DINNA BE FEART, SHE TELLT HERSEL. HE CANNA HELP BEIN WHIT HE IS. LOOK AT HIM. SAE SHE LOOKED AT HIM, AND HE LOOKED BACK OOT O GREY, SEARCHIN EEN. AS IF HE WIS WANTIN TAE TELL HER SOMETHIN. HE WIS AULD, WI SILLER BRISTLES ON HIS CHAFTS AND THIN PATCHES O WHITE HAIR ON HIS HEID, LIKE DOON ON A BROON SPRECKELT EGG.

A guid-lookin man, a wee bit boolie-backit but he had been tall yince, she could see that. He had on auld grey warkin claes but nae bitts, jist grey socks on his feet. *He'll hae taen them aff at the back door*, she thocht, *oot o habit*. The kindness in his face mindit her o her faither. But this wisna her faither – he wis lang deid. This wis a mannie she'd never seen afore, staunin in the kitchen as if it wis his ain.

The nixt second he wis awa. This shocked Elspeth mair than him haein been there in the first place. She went tae the back door, jist tae check, but o coorse there were nae bitts there, and when she cam back it wis as if she'd no seen the mannie either. But she had. She wunnered whit it wis he'd been wantin tae tell her.

The ghaist hadna fleggit her muckle, but the fermer's wife chappin at the windae made her lowp. Oh aye, she kent yon mannie wis a ghaist. The wey he stood, no speakin, and no solid but transparent, like gauze – like the difference atween a richt plump o rain and a licht smirr. If she'd raxed oot tae touch him there'd hae been naethin there, she'd kent it athoot tryin. Sae she hadna tried.

'I brocht ye some eggs,' Agnes Fraser said, breengin intae the kitchen and pittin the box on the table. 'Fresh-laid the-day. Are ye settlin in fine?'

'Aye, thanks,' Elspeth said. 'It's a braw wee cottage.'

'Weel, we spent a bit on it, wi the central heatin and the new bathroom and that,' Agnes said. She had a harsh, raucle wey o speakin that wisna unfreenly, but Elspeth didna think she'd thole ony nonsense aboot ghaists. Jist as she widna unnerstaun aboot her paintin and the sootherin effect it had on her: hoo she could lose hersel for oors warkin frae the upstairs windae, watchin the hills and the fields and the widds and the fermhooses, jist paintin, paintin, tryin tae catch – no the details but the colours, the shaddaes o the cloods and the aye-chyngin licht. Shade and licht, that wis whit she wis efter, and she scansed the land and the sky till she couldna see a tree or a hoose or a clood, she jist saw shade and licht, and that wis whit she paintit.

'Och aye, it's cosy enough, this place,' Agnes said. 'Noo, dinna you be blate aboot askin for onythin. If somethin's no richt, jist let us ken.'

'That's awfie kind,' Elspeth said, 'but I'm fine, really. Will ye let me pey ye for the eggs?'

Agnes snorted. 'I will *nut*.'

'Weel, dae ye hae time for a cup o tea?'

'I'll no say no,' said Agnes.

In the late efternoon, when Elspeth cam back doon tae the kitchen tae mak hersel mair tea, there wis the mannie again. He wis sittin in the same chair that Agnes had sat in. Elspeth said, 'Weel, mannie, ye seem richt at hame here. Wid you like a cup o tea?' Daft, but whit else wis she tae say tae him? She bylt the kettle and made a pot and poored oot the twa mugs, and he never moved, jist kept watchin her. She kent he wisna gonnae tell her hoo he took his tea sae he got it black wi nae sugar, the wey her faither had taen it. She pushed the mug ower tae him. No that she thocht he wid touch it.

'Ye dinna bother me,' she tellt him. 'I'm fey, ye ken. I've aye been fey. Real folk bother me mair than the likes o you.' And she wis on the pynt o sayin somethin aboot when she wis mairrit, whit it had been like afore she walked oot, no inger whit mood her man wis gonnae be in, his drinkin, her fear, the scunner and shame o it – she wis aboot tae speak aboot aw that, but she stapped hersel. Yon wis aw by wi. She didna want tae bring it intae the cottage.

'Whit is it ye want tae tell me?' she said. 'Did ye bide here yince? Does it fash ye, me bein here?'

She watched, but there wis nae movement, nae shake or nod o his heid. He looked at her wi a kind o yearnin. She felt a need tae step ootby, intae the sunshine for a meenit. Ower the fields she saw the fermer in his tractor, Agnes's man, back and fore, back and fore, wi a lang plume o gulls oot ahint him risin and fawin like papers blawin in the wind.

When she cam back in the mannie wisna there. She liftit his mug, fou as it wis, tae skail it in the sink, and it wis cauld. No jist cauld, it wis freezin. She pit her fingir in and it wis icy.

'Och, ye puir thing,' she said. But she didna really ken whit she meant by it.

'So whit's she like, oor new tenant?' Bob Fraser asked, pittin the last o the plates intae the dishwasher while Agnes wis giein the table a dicht.

'Och, she's nice enough,' she said. 'She grew up doon at Muirtoun, did I tell ye that? She's been awa for years, she says. She's quiet, like. There's somethin aboot her.'

'Whit is it she does again?'

'She's a teacher. Oh, and an artist. Or mibbe she's an artist first. Onywey, when the schuils are back she's gonnae be gaun roon teachin aw the bairns hoo tae paint. Whit's the word? Peripatetic, that's whit she's gonnae be. A peripatetic teacher. But jist noo she's paintin for hersel. She says she could paint the view frae the bedroom windae forever.'

'No bad if ye hae the time, eh?' Bob said. 'Whit dae ye mean, there's somethin aboot her?'

'I'm no jist shair,' Agnes said. 'She's run awa frae a man, I doot, but there's somethin mair. A secret.'

'As lang as she peys the rent and disna pit paint on the carpet, she can hae aw the secrets she likes,' Bob said.

There wis jist a week left afore the schuils went back and Elspeth didna want tae lose ony time. Efter her breakfast o bylt eggs and toast she niver stopped aw day. It seemed tae her that she wis teeterin on

the edge o somethin. The sky turnt grey, blue, blae, black. The tractor cut across her view, a reid spot on broon. Sheep and kye grazed the green parks. She couldna wark fast enough tae capture it aw. By the time she wis done ye wid haurdly ken tractor or beasts had ever been in the paintin. They were mere traces o themsels, the faintest echoes on the canvas. And if whit she'd paintit wis a landscape it wisna real, it wis mair like a place that dreams micht venture intae, a floatin, eerie space athoot form or feature.

The ither bedroom across the landin wis whaur she slept. She aye had the windae open at nicht. The mune keeked in at her through the cloods. There were lichts in the faurawa hooses and syne they went oot and it wis jist her and the mune. She fell intae a deep sleep.

But as the dawn wis risin she woke tae a creak on the stair. She sat up. The door swung open, even though there wis nae breeze. 'Is that you?' she cried. But naebody cam in.

She got oot o her bed, liftin the poker that she'd brocht up frae the sittin-room. She went tae the door. Naethin. She went tae the ither room. The greyness crept in at the windae and touched the canvases set against the opposite wa. They seemed tae be alive in the shilpit licht, like strange, unkent craiturs.

Back in her bed she cooried doon like a bairn. The uncanniness o the paintins didna mak her feart. It calmed her that they were there, alive or deid. Somethin had happened, but she didna ken whit. She felt a new assurance, that nae hairm wid come tae her in this place.

She never saw the mannie again, no in the cottage. She looked for him, but that wis nae use. If ye looked for ghaists they never shawed themsels. But on the first mornin o the new schuil term, as she wis loadin her car, she suddenly got a glisk o him at the road-end. He wis lookin oot ower the fields tae the sea, but when she shut the boot it wis as if he heard it, for he turnt tae the soond, and it seemed tae her that his haun went up in a kind o greetin. She raised her haun back, and he flickered and fadit awa.

Mibbe it wisna a greetin, she thocht, as she slowed the car at the spot whaur he'd been. Mibbe it wis a fareweel: *I've seen ye richt, lass, and noo I'm on ma wey*. Jist for a second a knot wis in her thrapple. Syne she pulled oot ontae the main road, and drove aff tae teach the bairns hoo tae paint.

'*The Mannie*' was commissioned by BBC Radio Scotland and was first broadcast on 31st December 2010. This is its first appearance in print.

ON THE ROAD

SAN SEBASTIÁN, MOVING ON.

PAUL TUCKER EMBARKS ON A SEVENTY-SEVEN HOUR, FIFTEEN HUNDRED MILE ESCAPE TO SAN SEBASTIÁN, ACCOMPANIED BY HIS FRIEND SAM, AN ILL-USED SURF BOARD AND ONE VERY NEATLY PRESSED GREY BLAZER.

‘GET A GOOD ONE OF ME AND THE VAN.’ SAM STANDS FACING THE CAMERA AND RAISES HIS RIGHT ARM,

RESTING HIS PALM JUST ABOVE THE PASSENGER WINDOW, IN THE SAME CASUAL WAY THAT RICH PEOPLE SHOW OFF PRESTIGE SPORTS CARS: *YES, THIS IS MY PORSCHE. BUT YOU SHOULD SEE MY LAMBORGHINI.*

He wears stonewashed Levi’s and a white shirt / grey blazer combination that has hung neatly in the back of the van for the past two days, surrounded by mess, awaiting this moment at the roadside in the suburbs of San Sebastián. Sam sets himself, eyes softly narrowing and just the hint of a smile emerging at the corner of his mouth, the kind of hidden-depths gaze that had earned him a lot of money in the Vivienne Westwood days.

Months earlier, I had driven Sam to the back yard of a bakery in Teignmouth to pick up the van. It was no Porsche. For four hundred pounds, Sam had bought a 1994 Nissan Vanette, boxy and scuffed. The rust looked terminal and between the smashed rear lights a crooked ridge ran downward to a void where the bumper should have been. Inside, the van smelt of dust and cigarettes. Stuck to a strip of white painted plywood running down one side were stickers commemorating trips the van itself could never have made: ‘New York. BIG SHOT. The Empire State’; ‘Great Ocean Road’; ‘Bondoon Boots, Fremantle’.

For weeks, Sam worked to shape the Vanette to fit his image for it, probably with that San Sebastián photograph in mind. Agonising over the type and colour of paint, he spent day after day sanding the tired white paintwork down and filling gaps formed by knocks and rust. Often I went round to help. On these occasions, Sam would explain the sanding process with the same exacting level of detail he had shown me how to polish the bar on my first night working at the restaurant. He would break away from work occasionally to make bacon sandwiches and cups of tea or to stand by nervously – ‘Careful, mate’ – as the roof dipped slightly in reaction to my heavy knees.

We rolled off the ferry at the Breton port of Roscoff on a chilly April morning, with the Basque metropolis of San Sebastián in our sights, and seventy-seven hours in which to get there and back before our return ferry departed for Plymouth. With the creases smoothed down and covered in a thick matt coating of duck-egg blue paint, the van looked immaculate. On the road, people would honk their approval as we passed them on our journey southward through France.

After the cosmopolitan flux of his catwalk years, Sam had lived in Shoreditch, doing the sort of hip things that people in Shoreditch do: frequenting bars, attending parties and playing in a band, blowing his modelling cash in the meantime. Cornwall was supposed to provide a respite from booze, drugs and a shattered sleep cycle. In reality, long nights serving tourists as a waiter for the celebrity chef Rick Stein, coupled with the presence of a late-night bar on the walk home, had sabotaged that plan.

A group of seven or eight of us had quickly become willing accomplices in the pub most nights after work. Amid the excitement of newly developing friendships, Sam would drop celebrity encounters and anecdotes from his time in the city into the conversation – seemingly at any possible opportunity. A mention of Edinburgh drew memories of a family stroll with Billy Connolly; the night before one of our friends left for Sydney, he received Sam’s dubious advice: ‘If you’ve been on Bondi all day and you wanna get in a club, turn your flip-flops over so the bouncers think they’re shoes.’

I knew he’d modelled for big names and you could still see it in his chin-up, shoulders-back posture and deliberate strut – like Mick Jagger onstage, but with less flounce and more urgency. If anything, though, Sam was slightly coy about his modelling. I’d known him for over two years before he eventually relented and showed us his portfolio, late one New Year’s Eve. He had done so as a kind of offering, as if to say, ‘This is what I did, and I know it’s quite ridiculous, but I want you all to see it.’ I wasn’t sure he ever really missed modelling. But the other stuff – Billy Connolly, flipped flip-flops and so on – had been a major part of his life. The rest of us might have found it just as ridiculous as stalking the catwalks of Paris and Milan, but if we said so Sam’s face would slip into a look of bafflement: *what’s funny?*

Coming from anyone else, the tales Sam told would have seemed embellished, but it was obvious that the catwalk had been a natural calling. His physique – surfer, with the long reach and big hands of a goalkeeper (as if a modelling career wasn’t enough, Sam had also been on Brighton & Hove Albion’s books as a teenager) – was supplemented by always-tanned skin and a rugged combination of high cheekbones and angular jawline. That first summer in the restaurant, we’d all been thrust into an environment where high pressure and attractive young waitresses could have led to ego clashes and macho posturing, an eventuality we for the most part avoided. With Sam’s presence behind the restaurant’s takeaway counter, we joked, there really was no point.

Standing on the crest of the low dunes overlooking the beach at La Torche – a sweeping stretch of west Breton shoreline and our first stop after two hours on the road – Sam had pointed at the waves and suddenly yelped, ‘Shack Attack!’, twice, a third time. He bristled and bounced on his feet, like a dog waiting for a ball to be thrown. ‘It means big waves, like a shack’s falling on you,’ he had later told me, miming the collapse of a roof’s inverted ‘V’ with his hands. At the time, I had laughed uncertainly, and Sam had bolted off into the water.

While Sam was out to sea – ‘getting shacked’ – I paddled with what strength I could muster, but was constantly beaten back by the barrage of breaking swell travelling in the opposite direction. When I did get far enough out and the waves did come, I tumbled back into the sea before I could

get off my knees. This was normal. Some days, other surfers would check on me as they paddled out: 'Are you all right?'

'Yeah!' I would reply, my overly enthusiastic response and ridiculous thumbs-up baffling them. Afterwards, Sam would always make a point of moaning about the conditions as a consolation for my ineptness.

'Strong rip out there, mate – I only caught a few waves myself.'

It was always something like that – strange currents, waves that didn't break properly – some tidal anomaly that struck every time I entered the water. It was fine though; far better that he leave me to take what enjoyment I could from my struggles in the icy sea than waste his time trying to teach me the good technique that had eluded me in a year of surfing.

After La Torche, we spent the day on the road, struggling with vehicles overtaking suddenly on our left side (the wrong side), and, as the sky darkened, with the full-beam glare of blazing lorry headlights in the van's mirrors. Increasingly we struggled to contain road-worn nerves and mounting exhaustion. At one point I swerved wildly as a man standing on the verge leant into the road, inexplicably flashing a torch at oncoming traffic.

We arrived in the World Tour surf resort town of Hossegor after midnight. We drove past timber cabins housing extreme sports boutiques and bars – a purpose-built and overly immaculate combination of urban and rustic. It was Val d'Isère without the snow and – in the off-season torpor of early April – without the tanned and moneyed young tourists. We drank in a bar patronised only by a group of mid-teen French kids who reminded me of the art students in Falmouth, making the town's pubs their own throughout the winter, until hordes of rowdy holiday visitors arrived from up-country and took the gloss off the whole experience. They didn't seem particularly impressed by our arrival that night.

My surf at Hossegor the following morning was disastrous. Having paddled some distance, I found myself struggling against a current forcing me shoreward, where a grey-haired figure was shouting in indecipherable French. As I drifted closer, I saw a fishing rod planted diagonally in the sand, the translucent arc of its line looping into the water ahead of me.

After a desperate scramble, accompanied by the fisherman's yells – 'Les courants! Les courants!' – I scrambled ashore, panting apologies and then cod-French small talk – 'Quelles poissons, monsieur? . . . C'est votre chien, ici?' (a dog was barking at us from a nearby spot on the beach) – in an attempt to placate the exasperated fisherman. 'NON!' he replied, eventually planting his rod diagonally in the sand a few yards further along the shoreline, away from me.

The dog was a few feet away. A drooling Labrador, fat and gleeful, barking relentlessly, its entire hindquarters wagging with its tail. Eventually I relented and threw the dribble-soaked section of branch that the Labrador had placed at my feet. Just a short throw, a token effort. This proved to be a mistake, one that I was forced to repeat over and over, the only way to stifle the dog's sharp, repetitive yelps.

In the background I spotted Sam coming ashore.

'How did you do, buddy?'

WOOF!

I couldn't even begin to explain.

'Yeah, not bad. Thought I'd get out. This sun's great.'

WOOF!

Unsure what was going on, Sam consoled me in the usual way.

'Weird rip out there, mate.'

The ten-tonners and tailgating French motorists of the previous day had exhausted us, so we left the motorway behind us for that afternoon's short drive to San Sebastián. I drove and Sam navigated, a terrible combination that pitted Sam's uncertain map-reading against my impatience. We made it across the hills and across the border, stopping at a lay-by overlooking sunny pastures and thickly wooded valleys for a van-warm beer and cigarette before our descent into the city. This brief stop was my idea, fuelled by the sweltering heat inside the poorly ventilated Vanette, but was encouraged by Sam, who seemed delighted by the idea of making a point of marking our successful border-crossing.

Sam's enthusiasm was driven, I think, partly by a fascination for milestones that emerged from his need to do things right, to act properly. 'That's it, I've got a van now,' Sam had said to me, having driven the Vanette back from Devon that first day. For Sam, despite the fact that he had already been surfing for years, taking possession of a van had served to confirm his place among the most dedicated of surfers, lifers whose choice of vehicle was even dictated by their passion for waves. 'Ideology' was the word Sam frequently used, although he saw it as something to embrace, a term devoid of the negative connotations bestowed on it by his university's English professors.

That was what showing us his portfolio had been about that New Year's Eve. In Sam's mind, we had reached a milestone as friends – we were a group who had stuck together for two years and that he was now sure would stick together for evermore. The portfolio had temporarily become a contract of Sam's trust in the rest of us, a 'proper' group of friends.

Having negotiated San Sebastián's complicated one-way system, we eventually left the van in an underground car park. While Sam headed to the beach for his second surf of the day, I thought better of following him and set off to explore the city's streets in the afternoon sun. It was a city that blended past and present, coastal and urban. Tasteful modern apartment buildings sat inconspicuously alongside turn-of-the-century townhouses; in the spacious, scrubbed slate plazas, marble and granite statues stood majestic in the sunlight.

Two hundred years earlier, in 1813, summer was drawing to a close. British and Portuguese forces led by the Duke of Wellington had taken control of the city after a long struggle against the occupying French army. It was a key point in the Napoleonic Wars; within weeks, the French were being forced back over those same Pyrenean foothills that Sam and I crossed as we drove into Spain.

The assault on the city had been tough. Repeated attacks had been unsuccessful, many of Wellington's men had died, and the rest were injured or exhausted, angry that the final assault had seen cannon fire raining down near where injured comrades still lay. Fuelled by alcohol looted from the shops and houses of the city, the Allied soldiers rampaged, killing or assaulting many of the locals. After a week of riots, most of the city had burned to the ground. Of roughly 4,000 casualties of the assault on San Sebastián, as many as a quarter of them were residents of the city, killed after the French had surrendered.

Where my mother lives, in the Hampshire garrison town of Aldershot, a thirty-foot statue of Wellington astride his horse Copenhagen stands on a hilltop as a tribute to one of the great figures of British military history. It says nothing about his refusal to grant the payment of starvation wages to the surviving residents of San Sebastián. The dynamism of the place was no accident: San Sebastián would have been nothing – literally – had it not embraced its own rebirth.

The unity of the city's contrasting influences was encapsulated by the Kursaal Centre, a sprawling neomodernist fusion of sharp angles and expansive surfaces where symphony orchestras featured alongside sports apparel branding conventions, and rolling Atlantic waves crashed on to the sand immediately below the complex's northern elevation. At one point I was standing at a zebra crossing, with men in business suits carrying briefcases on one side of me and men in wetsuits carrying surfboards on the other. How, I wondered, had such a vibrant city come to be twinned with Plymouth?

These were the kind of moments that had drawn me to embark on our journey. I was clearly no surfer, I lacked the drive. For me, the childish exhilaration I took from repeatedly crashing face-first into the sea was enough. I was happy to plunge and drift, and watch the seagulls floating overhead. This had drawn me to Falmouth three years earlier and had now led to my temporary escape to Spain.

For a while, I had naively seen Cornwall as an idyll, an escape from pressures of life elsewhere, but nowhere is that uncomplicated. The Cornish anthem 'Trelawny' tells the story of Cornishmen stood on the banks of the Thames in 1688, demanding the release of a Cornish bishop imprisoned by King James II. 'Come forth! Ye cowards all,' it goes, 'Here's men as good as you.' That it was still well known in Cornwall said a

lot about the scattered, simmering resentment of outsiders I had begun to tire of. In San Sebastián I was able to wander the streets at random, observing the people who lived there, seeing what they saw without fighting the hidden currents that affected their day-to-day lives.

Meeting back up after Sam's surf (he was 'Amped!' and it was 'Epic!'), we returned to the van and retreated from the city to the hilltop suburb of Aiete. It was here that Sam would change into shirt and blazer for that carefully posed photograph next to the van, capturing model and outfit at their freshest, before we strolled back into the centre for the evening. Near the City Hall (an elaborate central dome and twin sandstone towers testament to its opulent past as the Grand Casino), sedate groups sipped wine on the sea wall as the last of the light faded behind Monte Igueldo, leaving behind its warmth.

Strolling through the Parte Vieja, we emerged into Plaza De La Constitución. Pastel-tinged baroque arches and columns rose on all sides, the most emphatic adorning the former City Hall at the square's eastern end. In previous centuries, hundreds of people had roared from balconies as tormented bulls charged across the square at waiting toreros. As we sat at the Plaza's edge, this brutal past was hard to imagine. The crowd's roar was now replaced by busy chatter, spilt blood superseded by delicately poised glasses of red wine and small, skewered stacks of olives, hake and anchovies.

Back on the old town's narrow cobbled streets, the party had livened up. We wandered between bars, stopping to nibble pintxos and drink red wine that was sometimes chilled. 'I don't know about that,' Sam had repeated as he gave each sip a fresh chance. Our night in San Sebastián went on much as our nights out normally did: lots of drink fuelling lots of big ideas, a stumbling walk home, and the exaggerated sense that we had achieved something monumental. We hadn't – of course – and the hardest part of the trip was still to come. Retracing our steps the following day took us fourteen hours and we tetchily bickered about trivialities: what music to listen to and how fast to drive. 'Keep it at 55, mate,' Sam would say as I accelerated slightly. Sam had decided that 55 mph was the van's peak speed, the ideal balance between forward movement and fuel economy; 55 mph, I thought, was agonisingly slow.

But none of that really mattered. It was just our literal and metaphorical San Sebastián hangover taking hold as the hours dragged on. In a day or two it would pass and we would be left with the positives. That was the point of the photo-op moment under the street lights in San Sebastián's suburbs. Never mind the awkwardness I felt, capturing Sam's practised expression on my camera-phone as puzzled locals passed us by. Never mind the 750-mile drive, the two days largely confined to the van, or the fact that the only showers we'd had were on the beach that afternoon. We needed to remember that we'd done all of that, and had still managed to stand unruffled at the roadside – that was what really mattered.

A year later, I am ready to leave Cornwall. Falmouth has just played host to the International Sea Shanty Festival, celebrating the songs sung by mariners to make an arduous life at sea more bearable. The headliners were Fisherman's Friends, a group of ten Cornish fishermen, coastguards and lifeboatmen with an album deal on Universal Records and an opening slot at Glastonbury under their belts.

That Sunday in Falmouth, Fisherman's Friends' breakout success seemed justified enough. Their songs were in turn joyous, sombre and beautiful, their between-song banter a blend of Cornish wit and suave stagemanship that reflected two years of touring pedigree. But accompanying all of that were flashes of wistfulness, of rancour even. 'People ask me how I can sell my house to a banker from London for five hundred thousand pounds and still maintain a sense of bitterness,' one of the group said onstage to laughter and applause.

The festival ended with singers from across Europe taking the stage for an ensemble performance of 'Trelawny'. The performance brought smiles from the majority-Cornish crowd, but it seemed to me that finishing with a song railing against the actions of a seventeenth-century English king didn't do this inspirational – and international – tradition much justice. I suppose it might have been my latent English pride finally stirring, but I sensed that the group of elderly Norwegian singers, standing mute and baffled-looking onstage, would be saying something similar as they travelled back home the following day.

It made me think of San Sebastián. On the 31st of August each year, residents of the city unite in a candle-lit vigil to remember those killed by the British and Portuguese. But as important as the city's commemoration of past tragedy, I had learned, was its inspirational embrace of progress, because in September 1813, the future was all San Sebastián had.

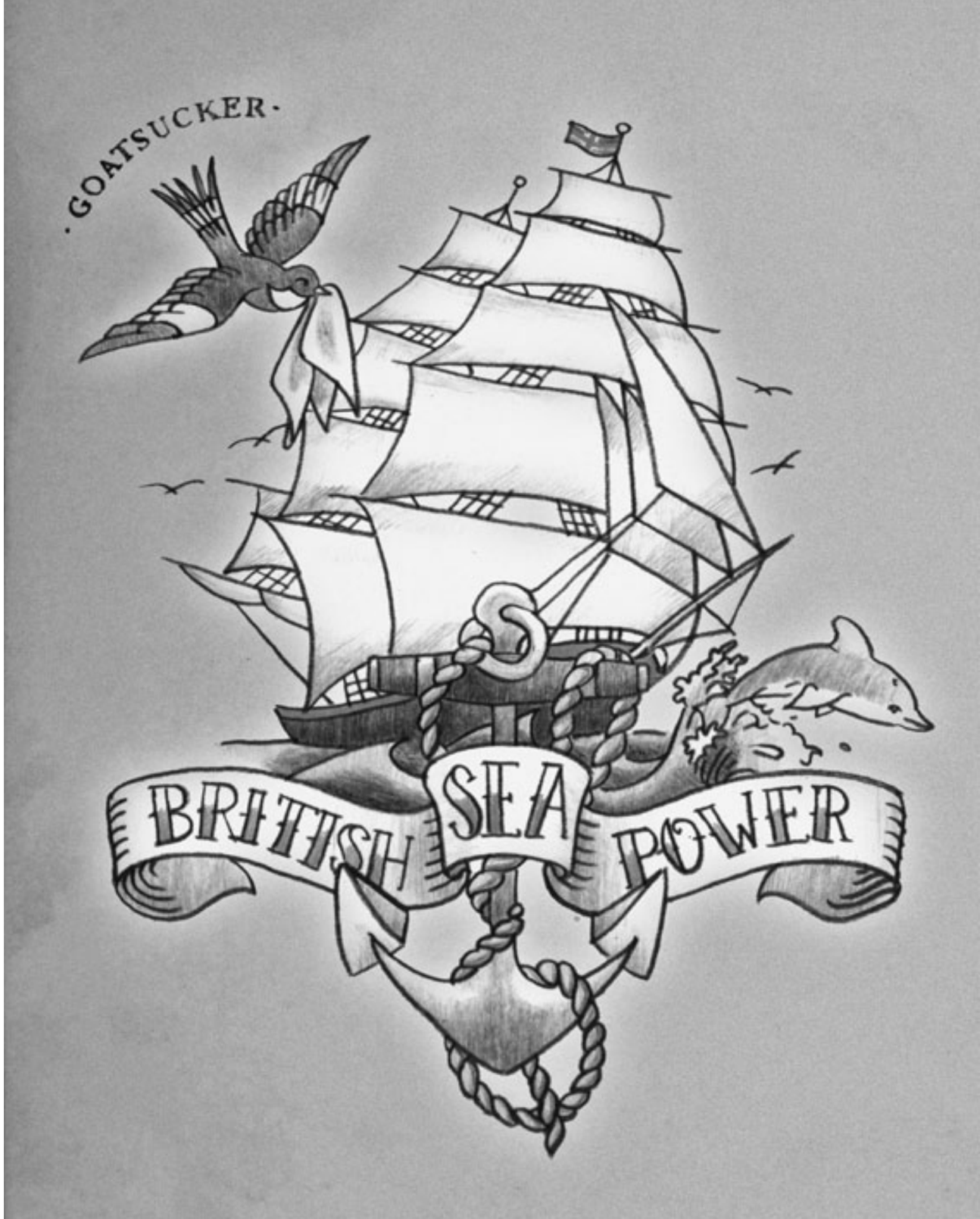
Sam is concentrating on his next project, a pizza oven. At the moment he operates in a corner of patio outside the same bar where we all spent long nights in that first summer. Dusted in smoke and flour, he plucks cheese, peppers and chorizo from small tubs and tosses them across rough circles of dough. With the same careful determination as always, he thrusts pizza after pizza into 500 degrees of heat. The next step, Sam says, is to buy a trailer and take the pizza business on the road.

He's starting locally, at the beaches. It's hard work, but he wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't.

HAIL TO PULP! HAIL TO THE GOATSUCKER!

ROY WILKINSON SEEKS OUT THE NIGHT JAR WITH ROCK'S FOREMOST NATURE LOVERS – AND HIS YOUNGER SIBLINGS - **BRITISH SEA POWER**

British Sea Power are intermittently successful suppliers of 'high-church amplified rock music' – Top Ten albums, a Mercury Prize nomination, the admiration of both David Bowie and the National Maritime Museum. The band are also an odd and unwieldy family firm, fronted by two brothers. Neil Hamilton Wilkinson, singer and bassist, is often mystically mute and likes to walk home after gigs – sixty miles across country. Yan Scott Wilkinson, singer and guitarist, is self-possessed, remote and, like Stalin, given to composing odes to icebergs. The band are also the all-consuming passion of the BSP brethren's father, Ronald Wilkinson – World War Two veteran and self-instructed expert on alternative rock from The Smiths to the Butthole Surfers. Reborn as octogenarian teenage acolyte, he's ready to stop strangers in the street and ask them if they've bought the album they need – the album by British Sea Power. To complicate things further, the band is managed by third Wilkinson brother, Roy – who is also the author of Do It For Your Mum, a family / rock / forestry memoir recently published by Rough Trade in a limited run of 2,011 copies, from which the following extract is taken.



As 2002 wound around the summer solstice, we were on tour. We were in the woods with two strangely alluring creatures. There was Jarvis Cocker and there was the European nightjar. Happily, we would encounter auld Cocker on other occasions in the future. But concert itineraries might never again take us so close to the nightjar – that enigmatic bird of the twilight hours, a creature also known as churn-owl, gabble ratch and goatsucker. In the fullness of time the now-defunct magazine *The Face* would ask British Sea Power to select a 'top ten'. Lemmy chose his ten favourite bass players: 1. John Entwistle, 2. Paul McCartney . . . 8. Corey Parks of Nashville Pussy. At British Sea Power we chose our ten favourite colloquial names of British birds. The nightjar only got to number eight. Imagine the other contenders.

1. Cuckoo – Welsh ambassador
2. Great crested grebe – arsefoot
3. Blackcap – nettle monger
4. Fulmar – flying milkbottle
5. Peregrine falcon – tiercel gentle
6. Snipe – galloping horseman of Lapland
7. Swift – devil squealer
8. Nightjar – goatsucker
9. Wren – two fingers
10. Redstart – arrogant cat of the east

This was the stuff – being given the leeway to lever a little avian wonder into the pop press, alongside the club news and underwear by Roberto Cavalli. If we'd called it a day right there, future archaeologists might have found tiny traces of a mission accomplished, a kind of victory. But if pissing about and combining rock with non-rock was the mission, there was more work to be done. The summer of 2002 brought great opportunity on this front – supporting Pulp on a tour of Forestry Commission woodlands.

BSP had signed to Rough Trade in 2001. But it was in 2002 that we began to really grapple with that great entertainment staple – on-the-road-live-on-tour-in-concert. In 2002 the band played Glastonbury Festival and made their overseas debut, but the best of it was the sylvan safari with the man in the synthetic-fibre safari suit. The forest dates with Jarvis and Pulp would take us from the Scottish Highlands to the brecks and pines of East Anglia. If new rock contexts were sought, then these were good places to visit. Out in the woods there were no standard-issue rock-venue notices warning you not to try to sneak in booze, drugs and recording devices. Instead the trees were pinned with grave announcements – 'NO FIRES. NO GAZEBOS.'

As we got to grips with touring, many things were as they'd always been. A fractional distillation of petroleum in the tank. Endlessly different towns with the endlessly similar nightshift sullenness of bouncers and venue staff. Who could blame them? At the rock coalface, things often slogged on deadeningly. Carling lager was on sale. The dressing rooms were coated in grime and lumpen graffiti. These places sometimes amounted to a latterday manifestation of the world of Victorian child chimney-sweeps. In both cases the workers were locked away from the sun – and surrounded by powders and residues injurious to health and vitality.

As basic as our touring regime could be, we were a long, long way from the worst of it. The historical iniquities were legend. As when Duke Ellington was forbidden to stay at the same hotels he'd played in, subject to the colour bars of 1930s America. Or when the pale, ghostly frame of Hank Williams was jammed into the back of a car on endless drives across the American interior. The prescription drugs and bootleg white lightning failed to block out the pain from his spina bifida. He was dead at twenty-nine after one injection too many of morphine and vitamin B12. Even in 1960s Britain an apparently successful middle-class band like Pink Floyd could experience the kind of touring vicissitudes we would never have to face. As they reached the UK Top Ten with their 'See Emily Play' single, the gradually unravelling Syd Barrett and the rest of the band were relentlessly rolled out on package tours. There were engagements at the Gwent Constabulary Dance in Abergavenny. Pink Floyd took their place on a package tour that also featured Jimi Hendrix and Amen Corner. Sometimes Pink Floyd were given eight minutes on stage – this for a band whose composition 'Interstellar Overdrive' could quite happily fill twenty minutes. At one date they came off stage to be confronted with a stern promoter: 'You were thirty seconds over. Do that again and you're off the tour.'

With BSP signed to Rough Trade and the band now traversing the land, Dad's interest in the band began to accelerate. His indie-rock enthusiasms were growing more involved, ever more surprising. As we joined the Pulp tour in 2002, Dad was turning seventy-eight. Our first date with Pulp was a long drive from the band's Sussex base – up near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. We broke the long journey north with a stopover in Cumbria. Some of the tour party, including myself and my two BSP brothers, stayed with our parents at the family home in the little village of Natland, just outside Kendal. It was lovely to see Mum and Dad and the old familiar fields of South Lakeland. But the surrounding greenery was overshadowed by Dad's growing indie-rock monomania. As we arrived he pointed out a selection of vinyl albums and twelve-inch singles he'd been listening to. There was an album by The Associates, the great Dundee glam-romantics who sang of Belgian wharfs and 'Breathless Beauxillous griffin'. There was also an album by the US rasta-punkers of Bad Brains and a record by Swans. The latter's blasts of loud Nietzschean post-punk grind included songs such as 'Raping a Slave' and 'The Great Annihilator'.

As background research for our current tour, Dad had also dug out an ancient early Pulp EP from 1985, an artefact from the group's long pre-success years. The tracks included 'Little Girl (with Blue Eyes)' and 'Will to Power'. Dad was surely demonstrating will to power on British Sea Power's behalf. As he ushered us inside from the tour van, Dad told us how he'd written a letter to U2 asking for support slots. 'I got an address for their record company from Kendal library,' he explained. 'U2 are charlatans, everyone knows that. But it'll be good exposure.' As Dad buttered some teacakes, his conversation turned to Nick Cave. 'He used to go shooting rabbits as a kid in Australia,' Dad related matter-of-factly. 'His father was a teacher.'

As my brothers expended their young lives in service of the contemporary rock experience, it all contrasted sharply with our father's youth. Dad was born in 1924. As he approached his teenage years, Hitler's Condor Legion was bombing Guernica. Germany was forming alliances with Japan and Italy. As soon as Dad was old enough, on his eighteenth birthday in 1942, he signed up for World War Two. He joined the RAF Regiment, ready to defend British airfields. He'd initially volunteered to be RAF aircrew, but had been turned down because of imperfect eyesight. Dad had gone to enlist with his friend Lucas, who was accepted by the RAF. Lucas was later killed on a training flight in Wales.

During the war, by degrees, Dad was sent to the Isle of Man, Kent, Calcutta and the warm, wave-washed islands of the Dutch East Indies. He wouldn't be demobbed until 1947. Dad's memories of the voyage to India are few but vivid. Flying fish. The endless water disappearing astern. Mugs of ship's cocoa (apparently a brew of unreproducible loveliness). He once walked into the ship's galley to find the walls moving in a hallucinogenic shiver. They were covered in pulsating insect life. Dad would recall his years in the Far East with a mixture of detachment and melancholy. But before that he manned anti-aircraft guns at airfields in Hampshire.

One morning Dad was somewhere he shouldn't really have been. He was pushing a bicycle around the airfield perimeter, lost in his thoughts, reading a letter from home. A moment later he was removed from both his bike and his thoughts. Or at least his conscious thoughts. A Spitfire had come taxiing up behind him. Too late, the pilot spotted the inattentive intruder. The pilot swerved his aircraft away. A wing swung round, connecting with Dad's skull. The aircraft careened on, its rudder swinging, its tyres churning up the turf. Then it smashed to a halt, crashing into some brickwork. Dad woke up in hospital three days later. An RAF officer descended waving paperwork. The pilot hadn't suffered any serious injury, but the Spitfire was a write-off. They were asking Dad to sign a document, admitting responsibility for this aviation disaster. Dad realised his signature wouldn't help anyone, least of all himself. He denied any memory of the incident.

Dad had enrolled in a branch of the services

formed to protect the RAF and its aircraft. Instead he had brought about the destruction of the thing most emblematic of Britain's war effort. Imagine the unknown factory workers diverting their wages to buy-a-Spitfire campaigns. Picture the endless colanders donated to Lord Beaverbrook's 'Saucepans To Spitfires' programme. An illusory campaign, but that wasn't the point . . . In an instant, Dad had become some antimatter inverse to all this collective effort. Dad had meant well. But he hadn't done well. I would sometimes muse on Dad's war. Was his service life some strange prototype for the life and times of British Sea Power? Were his half-awake mishaps precursors to my own managerial misadventure?

Our first date with Pulp was at Roseisle Forest, a sandy sweep of pines sat between the Cairngorm mountains and the sea. The show was to take place close to the southern shore of the Moray Firth, thirty miles to the east of Inverness. As we put up our tents, the setting sun lit an idyllic spot. Warmth suffused the June air. Bottle-nosed dolphins arced in and out of the sea. Whitethroats sang in the bushes. Just off-shore sat an easily accessible rocky outcrop. The band waded out to sit on the rocks. Invoking the eternal poetry of the road, they created a new name for this Caledonian atoll. They called it Spliff Island. We went to sleep, tired and content.

Pulp were paying us £400 a show, for three nights. Given BSP's obscurity at the time, they didn't need to pay us anything. Anything we could make from T-shirt sales would provide a few quid on top. The show with Pulp at Roseisle Forest went well. We sold twenty-seven T-shirts, thirty CD singles and ten BSP embroidered patches. At the time these seemed unimaginable figures. The patches were a rucksack-compatible take on the kind of thing that normally commemorates visits to Snowdonia and Dartmoor. Who could blame tonight's simple forest folk for having flocked to the BSP merchandise quadrant? Our T-shirt stall would offer increasing temptation: 'Sign up for email news and the chance to win the Mir space station.' And investors' alert! The embroidered badges sold for two quid a piece. Since then, they've gone on eBay for up to £37. An increase of 1,850 per cent. And they say the recording industry is no longer a place for financial return.

There was also music at Roseisle. The BSP set ended with another display of safety-oblivious rampage. Martin climbed up high into the stage rigging. Such onstage ascents were to become a regular feature. As a child, Martin's parents had given him the nickname Hillary, after the New Zealand mountaineer Edmund Hillary. Once up amid Pulp's stage wires, Martin became tangled and twisted. Like a badger twitching in a snare he pawed and bashed at his guitar. Neil somersaulted across the stage, his bass hanging in his wake and clanging across the floor. As we drove away from the site a muntjac, exotic immigrant dwarf deer of the Far East, flitted past. A woodcock zipped overhead, patrolling up and down a forest clearing. How wonderful. Bonfire Night, every night.

The woodland dates with Pulp concluded at Thetford Forest Park in Suffolk. Pulp seemed a near-perfect lesson in how best to navigate the showbusiness slalom. They'd gracefully relocated themselves away from the frenzy of the Britpop years – a time of big hits, increasing drug consumption, a night in the cells at Kensington Police Station. The incarceration had come after Jarvis's stage invasion during Michael Jackson's performance at the 1996 BRIT Awards. On the forest tour Jarvis seemed to be taking things at his own pace, but he was still clearly held in great esteem by a lot of people. Out in the woods Pulp's backstage tent HQ was full of requests. 'Dear Jarvis,' began a letter from the National Canine Defence League, 'I read your interview in the *Telegraph Weekend* magazine where you mentioned you might like a dog. You would be very welcome to visit any of our Rehoming Centres . . . If you need any doggy advice just call us!'

Pulp had given us a lot. What could we give them in return? As dusk gathered in the forest, BSP's Martin and I were about to head into the woods and look for nightjars. Surely Jarvis would like to come along. On Pulp's 2001 album *We Love Life*, Jarvis's muse had directed him towards commonplace wildlife – particularly on the track 'The Birds In Your Garden'. Surely he would be amazed by rarer creatures, creatures like the nightjar.

A twilight hunter of insects, the nightjar is an eerie, fluttering thing – like a strip of bark that's learned to fly. It's brilliantly camouflaged, best detected by its call. This churring pulse thrums out into the dark. Apparent changes of pitch and tempo make it nature's equivalent of a sequenced synthesiser percolating away in the recording studio at 4.00 a.m. The nightjar's weird intrigue is mirrored by its various alternative names: flying toad, puckeridge, goatsucker. This goat-sucking reputation stems from a rural myth. The story goes that nightjars will suck on a goat's udder, rendering the animal milk-less and blind.

It's difficult to recall why or when it started, but Martin and I had gradually decided it would be a good idea to work a little birdlife into British Sea Power. The parallels were irresistible. Of course, birds and musicians both deal in melody and rhythm. But there was much else besides. Consider the shag, cormorant species of our rockier shorelines. With its quiff and lustrous black plumage, the shag is very rock 'n' roll. It looks like Gene Vincent about to drag his leather-clad limbs across the stage at Plymouth Majestic in 1963. Both 'shag' and 'rock 'n' roll' are, of course, slang for sex. Who could have failed to notice the similarities between the Slavonian grebe and David Bowie? Look at the grebe's eldritch red eyes and electric-mustard ear tufts and you have an amazing prototype for Bowie's Ziggy Stardust get-up. Martin was to later excel himself in one interview with the NME, pointing out the strong visual resemblance between the great crested grebe and the former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler.

In time we learned BSP were far from the only musicians with an interest in birdlife. Elbow's Guy Garvey, the Doves' Jimi Goodwin and, unsurprisingly, The Guillemots' Fyfe Dangerfield all emerged as keen bird men. Who could blame them for swapping the neurotic Twitter of our era for another older kind of twittering? Billy Fury, Edwyn Collins and The KLF's Bill Drummond have all also talked about a fascination for birdlife. In the post-war period, French composer Olivier Messiaen drew heavily on birdsong in his work. To Martin and me, it seemed our duty to induct Jarvis into this growing band of musical bird enthusiasts. We grabbed him amid the post-gig bonhomie and began to explain our mission.

One trick that's said to help you see a nightjar is waving a white handkerchief at dusk. The male nightjar has white patches on its wings, which seem to be displayed in courtship flights or during territorial display. People waving hankies in the dark, however, might be open to misinterpretation. Among our gay communities hankies become codes for various sexual predilections. A black handkerchief hanging from a back pocket signals a fondness for S&M. Red-and-white gingham, apparently, signals an interest in 'park sex'. Birds, boys, feathers, gingham – the sexual impulse found many outlets. In the backstage area Jarvis practised waving his hanky, making ready to accompany Martin and me out into the woods. Geoff Travis – Pulp's co-manager as well as BSP's label boss – wandered over. High on juice and the possibility of nightjars, Martin and I attempted to enlist Geoff into our birdspotting party:

'We're going to look for nightjars! . . . You've got to come! . . . They're amazing! Like a giant moth and one of its toes is like a big comb . . .'

Geoff was unconvinced: 'Hmm, I think I'll stay here if you don't mind.'

Possibly de-incentivised by his trusted manager's scepticism, Jarvis also abandoned our safari party. We'd lost the chance to introduce a pop national treasure to one of our nation's natural delights. Martin and I made our way off into the trees and the gathering dark. In a little while we saw it, without even having to wave a hanky. A nightjar came fluttering out over the ferns. Its white wing patches seemed to glow, as if illuminated from within. Flickering and fluttering around us, it was no disappointment. It was a strange, ghostly presence, a mixture of biology and a child's toy. As with a lot of the best things it just didn't seem to quite fit where it was. As with a perfect rock resolution – a sublime chord change shifting over a fug of distortion and feedback – this bird brought an immense sense of calm and resolve. Hail to Pulp, hail to the goatsucker.

FICTION

TWINS

BY TOBY BARLOW

OF COURSE THE HEADACHES ARE KILLING ME. DR ROTHSTEIN HAD UPPED MY DOSAGE BY 200 MGS AND THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR APPROVED IT, SO NOW I'M AT 1400 MGS WHICH MAKES MY STOMACH NAUSEOUS, SPINS ME INTO DIZZY SPELLS AND KEEPS MAKING ME LOSE MY FOCUS.

Everyone in the room senses it's affecting the scenarios so Rothstein will undoubtedly have to pull the dosage back down again. But the migraines are scary too, they get me crawling to the closet for the solace of darkness and the perfect, still quiet. Rothstein told me to start writing my feelings down, because anxiety might be at the root of the pain. He says I may be too obsessed with the game. He could be right. All the dead ends are making the tensions pile up. If Hannah were here that would help. She could softly rub my shoulders, tell me everything is going to be all right and I could pretend to believe her. That would be a nice reboot. But we're in lockdown now, security won't let visitors in for a 'hi, how are you' and a cup of coffee, let alone conjugal visits. The work is too important they say. Level 4 people are the only ones to be trusted, but then who decides who gets to be Level 4? I could really fucking use a conjugal visit.

They say trust is the issue. For instance, there's a possibility Dr Rothstein is an identical and he's drugging me, slowly poisoning me with these pills, or making my mind work in whatever ways suit their certain purpose. There is always that chance. The other night Ned, the kid they pulled in from MIT, ran some stats and discovered that, on a per capita basis, accidental overdoses of prescription drugs have increased 31 per cent in the past five years across the continent. How does that happen? Nobody knows, but now my team is looking to see if there's a connection. It's our job to game it out. Perhaps people were getting pills they shouldn't have, doctors purposely writing the wrong sorts of prescriptions and knocking folks off one by one? Or maybe the identicals are actually in the pill factories? That would be simpler. After all, I open my triple-sealed bottles and wash down what I trust is a 200 mg dosage, but I don't know, do I? It's not like I can count the milligrams out by hand. Also, we know the hospitals can be hacked. We learned that the hard way.

How bad is the situation? There are 11 million identical twins in the world. Identical twins who have separated from one another, who are integrated into our lives, and who all want us dead. From one angle, 11 million is not a lot. Technically, it's only about twice the size of Philadelphia and, on a planetary scale, that's nothing. But when 11 million people are actively trying to kill you and you can't spot them, when they're untrackable, untraceable and impossible to ID, well, how do you fight that? But, wait, I haven't gotten to the best part of what they can do.

Originally, we came up with a few theories about the roots of their power. I'm thinking it was some combination of the three most likely ones, strands of chemicals and timing wound together into mutation. But when I say that, they look at me like I'm crazy. The higher-ups don't like complex explanations. These are people who believe in God, not science. They want to keep it simple. But I take them through it. The strongest postulate is that it was the unintended side effect of a fertility drug. It could also be the influence of some external factor, the invisible energy of a solar flair or the tail of a comet, some force that took the low-grade unconscious connectivity we all share and turned it up on high. The third possibility is that the identicals have merely evolved, taking a giant leap forward in the same way some people are now born without wisdom teeth. Nobody likes to think that is the explanation, that the twins are superior creatures, but from a certain perspective that is the only explanation.

I'm walking a razor's edge here, weighing Rothstein's potential to be one of the identicals while simultaneously following his advice. He is a chatty fellow, talks about his kid rowing crew for Georgetown and, all in all, acts pretty normal, but that is easy to fake in these corridors. Ain't a whole lot of other normal to compare it to. The mood around here is like Berlin in 1945.

They treat me like a loner, but on the outside I actually have lots of friends. But the rest of the Level 4 folk aren't my sorts. They're a nasty variety of geek raised on competition or government kids who hate to share information and won't relax and talk because they're too worried they'll disclose some secret. So I lie in my bunk and use visions of sun-freckled Hannah in a red bikini to beat back the ultraviolet phantasms of paranoia, but it is tricky. Every step feels like we're tripping another wire. This secret record might even be a trap, though I can't logic out how. Recording the truth, isn't that a basic human instinct?

So, yes, Rothstein is correct about one thing: the anxiety is profound, and why the fuck wouldn't it be? So far, every situation I have gamed we have lost, each time the identicals wipe us all out. Same with the work Ned's done, same with Collins and his team. We're all playing to every dead end here. Worse, there are signs that the games are already coming to life in the real world, and every time a big event occurs that matches one of our games – a destabilized oil sector, a bad grain report, an unexpected drop of the S&P – we look at one another wondering if one of the scenario strings is being plucked or if it's simply a coincidence. The worst possibility is that they're only toying with us, tugging at threads they'll never play, making us overreact. We know we can overreact. We've learned that the hard way.

It's hard to keep up with all the possibilities. But the worst part of it is, if Taco was right, it's not even going to be one scenario, it's going to be all of them.

The only reason we learned about it at all was thanks to one dogged security guard in a Laughlin casino. He had his security cameras all locked

on a suspect blackjack dealer because one of the dealer's players kept taking home pretty healthy pots. The security guard started watching them closely. The player, named Taco, was two hundred pounds heavier than the dealer, with dyed black hair, a full beard and cheesy rose-tinted glasses, but even with all those layers of difference, the security guard sensed some connection. Picked up for questioning, the two wouldn't reveal their trick. But looking at them seated next to each other, the guard finally caught on to their similarities, despite the serious effort they had obviously gone through to disguise them.

The casino was owned by some old-school guys, heavies, and while the dealer never cracked, it only took about an hour of serious beating before Taco started talking all about the ESP. His story was quite a story. By the time he was done, the casino thugs were shitting their pants with fear. Someone smart found a phone and called Washington. That's when all this went into serious play.

Before anyone could arrange to move them, both the identicals – the dealer and Taco – were dead in their cells; each of their hearts had stopped. All six of the jail guards were questioned but since the superiors had no way to tell who the poison pill was, the six were all detained and brought to Washington for questioning. They're still in lock-up now. I felt bad for them when I heard about it but now I see they were kinda the lucky ones, rounded up and taken out of the way before things got really weird. They're so far back at the beginning of this thing, I don't even think General Phillips remembers we have those six. Which is lucky for them.

We've all been interrogated about our past. I was an only child, I know that for a fact. I didn't have some dead twin like Elvis Presley did. My parents only wanted one and that was me.

My aunt Beth, my mother's older sister, didn't try having babies until late. After *in vitro* she wound up having identical twins, Ash and Tyler. They lived on the west side of the state so I never saw them much except for the summer months when we would vacation together at our grandmother's cabin. Both of the twins irritated me. They acted as though they were superior, even back then. Each had been student council president, and they had been co-captains of their baseball teams. They were tall and handsome and arrogant. They included me, we all played together, but I always felt like they were looking down at me. I didn't have any photos but my mom had a box of old videos of us all running around at the summer place and so I took those and I fed them to the database. This was literally the day before we figured out the database was compromised.

An analyst brought us a picture he had found in the system of him and his identical. Only problem was, the analyst claimed he didn't have any brothers, only an older sister. His sister backed him up on this, we called her in Seattle. According to the analyst, the identicals must have photoshopped pictures to make singles look like identicals and then fed the imagery into the database, swamping us with false leads. Sounded like a good possibility. So much for the databases. Then we put the analyst and his sister into observed detention. I objected to that, I asked why the analyst would have ever brought us the picture if he really was an identical, why would he implicate himself? They said maybe the database wasn't actually compromised; maybe he was an identical sent to make us believe that it was. They said we have to be careful. Those two are still locked up. We're still trying to use the databases, although everyone knows they're useless.

Actually, computer networks have been their simplest weapons. For instance, they took care of the records. Up until twenty-five years ago, the nurse's hand or typewriter provided analog notes on every birth, joyful or tragic, in hospitals all over the world. Then, in our quest to modernize, all that was digitally converted and stored in server farms. The old paper files were boxed, then shredded. Over time, as hospitals and health-care systems were combined for efficiency, myriads of server farms were merged and consolidated then offshored, sent to the cloud, and then merged again until, in the end, all the birth records from the last fifty years sat on a half-dozen server farms. Six sitting ducks. Those crashes caused some major headaches and minor headlines but we didn't know what it was about or why until Taco explained it.

Taco called what's coming 'the culling'. I watched his interrogation tapes so many times I could recite them verbatim. I watched the way the whites of his eyes shifted when he was asked a question, I watched him eat countless plates of falafel and tabouli, I watched him nod off between sessions. The camera was never far. He said there are five plans to reduce the population to pure identical twins. Each plan could work on its own but that is not the plan. Like good programmers, they believe in the power of redundancy. They are nothing if not comprehensive. Once the plans have run their course, the population will be much smaller, 'sustainably smaller' is how he put it, and completely psychic. It will be a very different planet. Much quieter. No talk radio.

Taco was dead by the time I recognized that he might have been a plant. That was the insight that got me promoted. Before that I was just another Level 6 planner. Then I proved that Taco confessing the plan's existence was, in fact, one of the five plans. There was a pattern to his body language, easy to see once it was pointed out. It was the way he moved his coffee cup when he was listening to a question while preparing a lie. He was setting us up.

I ran the scenario and it all played out, demonstrating how a series of unavoidable circumstances combined with some very predictable human behavior would guide our defensive actions to the logical end. There was no real choice involved; we had to react, making us the self-aware participants in our own demise. We are the snake eating its tail. I predicted a phenomenon like General Phillips – not him specifically, you'd have to have a pretty dark imagination to predict a prick like Phillips, but we were drifting in that direction long before he showed up. That's about when I stopped sleeping. That was about when Rothstein starting pimping his cures.

Back when I was with Hannah, the only medication I needed was tea. We would drink it by the potful on long weekends. I didn't have to teach classes on Mondays or Fridays, so we would have a good long stretch to unwind. We had our two cats and music in the afternoon and I would work on my research or grade students' papers and she would work on her thesis or lie on the couch reading. The light would stream in through the windows and our toes would touch. That's how I remember her. That's exactly how we were sitting when the phone rang. *Get a cab to the financial district*, a voice said. *We have a helicopter at the South Street Seaport. We're taking you to Washington. Pack for a long stay*. I knew it was important, they said national security. I didn't think it was the end of the world. If I'd known it was the end of the world, I wouldn't have come. I would have stayed there on the couch with the cats and with Hannah.

Upstairs gets impatient, they want me to always be gaming it ahead, but I keep working backward too, mapping out the cultural history that got us here. The first big game changer was birth control: you didn't have to risk pregnancy every time you had sex, so people could actually plan for their offspring. Next shift, the oil shock of '72, that's when energy started costing money, inflation was staggering, families needed more money and that completely changed the domestic economic dynamic. Hungry for extra income, women delayed their child-bearing years and went off to work. Then, when that fundamental genetic predisposition kicked in and women needed help to fulfill their desperate desire for a kid, they ran into the natural difficulties of conceiving that late in life. So the market responded. It was, in every sense, a hysterical situation, with the desperate maternal instinct grabbing for every quasi-reliable fertility drug the overtaxed FDA could approve, causing an aberration in reproductive behavior and a dramatic increase in twins. Mutation is not such a surprising next step. Only this wasn't a small mutation, a gap tooth or a sixth finger, this was the great leap forward. Well, for the twins anyway. Not for us. We are the chimps left behind.

We can't identify identicals, unless there happen to be a pair of them in the same room at the same time. And, guess what, they're plenty smart enough to avoid that.

After I had watched the playback of the interrogation of Taco for the hundredth time, I flew out and visited that security guard down in Laughlin. At first I reckoned we could watch the video of Taco playing cards together, and the guard could show

me the tells he had noticed, the ones that hinted Taco was cheating. I thought this might show some external sign of telepathic conversation. I wanted his help because casino guards are the very best, they watch faces like nobody watches. But the guard didn't know, or at least he said he didn't know. It was halfway through my conversation with him that I realized I might be over-thinking things. With all the identicals' power, why was Taco fucking around with a poker game? Did they want to be caught? Was the guard in on it?

This is the hard part to admit. What happened next was my fault. First I turned the casino guard over for questioning. I didn't know what methods they, by which I mean 'we', had been using up until then but I knew an individual's civil rights were mere corn-cob nostalgia at this point. We already had those other guards from the Laughlin jail locked up, shoved so deep down in the system that not only had we forgotten about their rights, most of the bureaucracy had forgotten their existence. The bad part happened when I was debriefing the greater team about the casino guard. I happened to mention, off hand, it wasn't even a wholly formed thought, that what identicals share might not be limited merely to thought, maybe they shared feelings too.

That gave the team an idea, not one that I endorsed but one General Phillips took a shine to and then went and tested on the casino guard. The theory went that a psychic connection was a web that could possibly be disrupted by the introduction of extremes, i.e. pain. So Phillips's men made the casino guard suffer, first at high doses of pain, then higher, then unimaginably high. Again, it wasn't my idea. It's not the sort of thing I would ever condone. I should have objected more. I am a theorist, I game, play out scenarios, that is what I'm good at. In fact, if they had asked me before they tortured the guard, I could have given them the exact probability of what would happen next. But it turned out they were correct in their supposition, the web was disrupted by the pain; in fact, it was very disturbed.

They found a whole town poisoned out near Cantonville. Thirteen hundred people died. Someone had gotten to the reservoir. Whoever did it had taped a picture of the casino guard to the tower. Or maybe it was a picture of his brother. I took little solace in the fact that my suspicion was correct. We buried the story and blamed a local chemical refinery but the message we received was clear: they were happy to play dirty too.

Problem is, General Phillips took away a different lesson. He now thinks if we get enough identicals together and cause simultaneous pain, we'll be able to seriously disrupt them. He said the reaction at the reservoir was actually progress. He called it a signal response. He thinks we just need to send a bigger signal. He said forty twins in extreme pain at the same time would, according to his gamers, disrupt them enough so that we could spot them. I reminded him we had only caught three actual twins to date. He said yes, but we already had seventy-eight suspected ones in detention and we could get more. That is when the round-ups began in earnest.

You find yourself hoping that you have a twin out there who is going to start talking to you, reassuring you, instructing you. Honestly, you lie awake praying for voices in the dark. I pray that Hannah has a twin, that she was really a plant, that they sent her to watch me even then, but I doubt it. I was chosen for this assignment because, though I had done some security work, I was unassociated with any research that the twins might have noticed. I'm good at games, that's it. So's Hannah, but they didn't pull her in, just me. I think about having her brought in for informal questioning anyway, if only so that I could see her for a couple of hours. But that's too risky for any number of reasons.

Identicals have feelings, they laugh, they lust. They are of every race and religion; if you try and profile them you will discover they're as diverse as us, because they are just like us, only twice as good. We've been poring through personality tests, old Myers Briggs formulas, looking for some common root, some question we can ask that will imply a possibility. General Phillips says once we find the root we should just pull everyone in who fits into that category. He says, according to his own team of gamers, this would give him enough mass to disrupt their psychic web, maybe permanently warp it. Of course, a lot of them would be innocent. All of them might be innocent. One well-placed identical could hand us exactly the wrong question and then we would be rounding up only the wrong people for Phillips's experiment, and lots of them. Phillips could be an identical too, only that seems like too obvious an answer. Then again, the obvious answer generally is the right one.

I spend a lot of time trying to predict their behavior. I've read every book there is on the subject and hundreds of academic papers. I think back, remembering all the Julys and Augusts I spent with my cousins Ash and Tyler out there at the lake house. We would swim all morning and water ski every afternoon and by the end of the long season we were all tan but both of them looked like Greek gods, tall, bronzed and muscular. My father was Irish so I tended to burn. On the warm summer evenings we would drive their old Subaru wagon into town and hang out on the porch of the country store there beneath the 'no loitering' sign. There were a few other kids around, some assorted locals and some summer visitors like us, and there were always some cute young girls in cut-offs, tank tops and flip-flops who came to flirt with Ash and Tyler. There would always be a six pack or two, and at some point in the night the twins would take a couple of these sweet, tipsy girls by the hand and wander out to the field behind the fire station. After that, Ash and Tyler would make a game of it, and each night they would switch girls and not tell the group, so that their new girlfriends didn't even know they were being swapped. They did this every summer. It seemed unfair and wrong and I always wanted to tell the girls. But then I figured they actually probably did know, they were only playing along.

The biggest mystery to me is not about the future, it is about the past. How did the twins keep it quiet? I'm thinking about before the real conspiracy, when they had only first figured out how it worked. I imagine they were playing outside when one of the twins first heard that familiar yet new and nascent voice echoing inside his – or her – mind, saying, 'I can hear you,' and they looked up to see their twin smiling in wonder, their lips perfectly still. 'I can hear you too,' the other twin replied, clearly and silently. That moment haunts me. How old were they? How did they keep that on the down low? They didn't brag, they didn't show off, they stayed perfectly mum.

Somehow that awakening, that initial discovery, must have also come with some innate suspicion. The identicals knew, they instinctively understood, how essential secrecy was, how they had to keep their telepathy quiet. And then it spread. It wasn't long before they realized they could communicate with all the other identical twins. I wonder how long before the conversation turned a dark corner? It was a great historic moment but we have no idea what that first sentence was.

Was it really 'I can hear you'? One of the most beautiful moments in the history of living organisms, in the history of the universe, and we'll never know.

They tell me not to worry about it. Worry about the future, they say. But the future is pretty easy, I know what's coming. One of these days when it's almost all done, when we're done torturing and executing the wrong people, when society has chewed all the fat off its own bones and the infrastructure has collapsed and people are fighting in the streets over drops of poisoned water and scraps of stale bread, I'm going to be sitting here at this desk, within the bunker walls, way down in the warrens, locked in beyond all the high-level retina-scan security checkpoints and the metal detectors, and there will be a knock at my office door.

It will only be one of them, though at that point they will only be a few weeks away from that time when they can travel around in pairs again.

I know how it will go. It will definitely go this way. I do this for a living.

I will put down my pen and look him square in the eye and I will say, 'So, which one are you, Ash or Tyler?'

But he won't answer. He'll just smile. Then he'll arrest me and he'll hand me over to General Phillips.

FAMILY HOLIDAY

KAUAI

BY RACHEL SANTUCCIO

WE WENT TO KAUAI IN JANUARY. WE DROVE AN OPEN-AIR JEEP ON THE KAUMUALII HIGHWAY. THE AIR SMELLED LIKE PLUMERIA AND FRESH-CUT GRASS. FIELDS OF SUGAR CANE SWAYED IN THE BREEZE.

We stopped on the side of the road and looked at waterfalls, getting our sandals muddy and our toes wet. Roosters and chickens puttered around us, looking for food, clucking and bobbing their heads.

We canoed up the Wailua river. Overgrown brush curved to meet the water's edge and tall, spindly palm trees perforated the blue sky. I shifted uncomfortably as my life vest cut into my armpits. We slid ashore on a muddy bank strewn with kukui nuts and dead palm fronds. My wet shoes squished over rocks and roots until we reached a waterfall. My brother took off his shirt and waded in. He dipped below the surface and came up, obscured by mist, beneath the fall. I watched him as the water pelted off his back and broke in all directions.

We went to a farmers' market where a German expat with long hair and brown skin hacked open a coconut with a machete. He placed a straw in the opening for us to drink the milk. The tables were laden with fruits I had never seen before. Jackfruit. Atemoya. Starfruit. Apple bananas. We filled a bag and ate at a picnic table overlooking the water, staining our fingers and mouths with juice.

We drove from one side of the island to the other. We stopped at a small hut on the side of a road and got smoothies made with fresh pineapple. An orange cat with yellow eyes came out of the bamboo and sat at my feet. The sky turned dark. Laughing, Dad fitted the soft-top over the Jeep's bones as raindrops pinged off the hood.

We went on a boat to see the Napali Coast from the water. Dolphins swam alongside the bow, their grey-blue bodies blurry. A woman said she saw a humpback's tail flick above the water. The cliffs of the Napali Coast, cavernous and green, came into view. People held cameras to their faces. I went into the galley to get an orange soda from the ice chest and felt dizzy. I lay on my stomach on the warm deck and watched the others scuba dive, their hair slicked to their heads like newborns.

We went to a coffee plantation. Shrubs dotted with red berries grew in perfectly pruned hedgerows. Mom and Dad sampled coffees in shot glasses while we looked around the gift shop. My brother scratched his burnt-red shoulders. My sister got a tie-dye shirt as a souvenir.

We went to the beach. My brother bodysurfed until the sand caused red bumps to blossom on his stomach. Mom and Dad walked back and forth, the water washing up against their bare feet, cutting them off at the ankles. My sister wrote messages in the sand: *Hello. I love you. Goodbye.* I lay on a towel with my eyes closed, listening to the surf until it became fuzzy and far-off, like I was hearing it through a conch shell.

My sister and I walked to the nearest ABC store where I bought a tin of coconut macadamia cigars. We smoked them with our feet buried in the cool sand, the shrinking sun setting the red in my sister's hair aflame. An old man wearing a tank top jogged by. A woman breaststroked in the gentle waves.

We went home.

DUO PART 2

DAVID EDDLESTANE, DRUMKIRK, 1974

(FIRST-TIME CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE IN AN UNWINNABLE SEAT IN CENTRAL SCOTLAND)

THE SECOND OF TWO STORIES FROM JAMES ROBERTSON

ANDERSON SAID, 'DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT AND WALK?' DAVID LOOKED THROUGH THE WINDSCREEN AT THE MISERABLE STREET, THEN GLANCED AT ANDERSON TO SEE IF HE WAS SERIOUS.

'Stretch your legs. Soak up the atmosphere,' Anderson said. He had his window open a crack to let some of the smoke from his cigarette escape. Not much was getting out.

'Well, I don't know . . .' David said. A gallon or two of rain landed on the car roof. Mini-storms of plastic and paper rubbish swirled desolately in the road. Some of that broken glass he'd always associated with Glasgow was in the gutter. There weren't many people in evidence, but he felt them out there, waiting for him to open the door and step into their world.

Alan Anderson was a crony of John Cochrane, his election agent. Cochrane was back at the tiny office he'd rented for almost nothing from a neighbourhood solicitor, another crony. He intended to run the campaign from there and was busy phoning printers and marking up pages of the electoral roll with different coloured pens. He'd suggested David go for a spin round the constituency with Anderson as his guide. A recce. 'Familiarise yourself,' he'd said. 'Alan knows his way around. He'll show you the sights.' David had caught a kind of look passing between the other two men, as if there was a joke they weren't sharing with him. He suspected maybe he was the joke.

'Tell you what, son,' Anderson said, 'you hop out, go for a wander, and I'll meet you at the office in, say, an hour? Give you a chance to get a feel for the place. What do you say?'

'I'm not sure . . .' David said. He realised his hand was resting on the door handle. Anderson was taking the piss out of him, surely. But he didn't want to challenge him, offend him. His was the only remotely friendly face around.

'Get to know your public,' Anderson said. 'Meet them before they meet you.'

They were parked beside a muddy patch of grass covered in litter and dog shit. Across the street was a row of old red sandstone tenements, four storeys tall, with dark close entrances and filthy windows. There was a broken rone-pipe down one wall behind which a wide black stain spread across the stone. Further along the street was a modern high-rise block, already looking tired and grimy. There was graffiti sprayed on the lower walls, and many of the balconies were stacked with what looked like broken furniture, discarded cookers, old prams. Others were completely empty. David couldn't decide which ones he found more dispiriting. The tower seemed to be at the centre of a maze of streets going to nowhere, a mixture of run-down old buildings, patches of wasteland and isolated plantings of new housing, entirely devoid of beauty, charm or even the doubtful character of the old tenements. There was a phone box with most of its panes smashed, an up-ended concrete litter bin and, fifty yards away, a graffiti-covered bus shelter occupied by a group of teenagers smoking cigarettes and kicking a lemonade bottle around. Apart from Anderson's Cortina, which David thought rather too conspicuously red although Anderson didn't seem that bothered, there were hardly any cars parked on the streets and a couple of those looked as if they'd died against the kerb.

'An hour not long enough?' Anderson said. 'Take longer if you want.'

'I don't know if I could find my way out,' David said. 'Back, I mean.'

David thought he knew roughly which direction would lead him to the depressing row of shops they'd left twenty minutes before, behind which was the solicitor's office, but he couldn't be sure. Down on the main road where the shops were it wasn't too bad, there were crowds of women shopping, traffic, laughter, people going about their business, but up here he felt like Custer entering Indian territory. No, not Custer, he'd been confident, sure of himself, what they called *gallus* around here. Some Eastern greenhorn cut off from the wagon train, that's what he felt like. And the last thing he wanted to do was head in the wrong direction, deeper into the badlands of Granthill, on his own. Supposing he had to admit he was lost, ask for help? Who would he ask?

One of the boys at the bus shelter kicked the lemonade bottle against the foot of a lamp post and smashed it, to a round of jeers from his friends. Another boy jumped up and grabbed the edge of the roof. He hung there, bouncing his weight up and down. Another boy joined him. The whole shelter bounced with them.

'Who do you think they are, son?' Anderson said in a relaxed manner. 'The Granthill Toi or the Granthill Cumbie?'

'Sorry?' David said.

'Or maybe they're just a bunch of wee shites with nothing to do. Any ideas?'

This time David said nothing. There didn't seem any point.

'Actually, that's what they are. Wee shites. Their big brothers are in the gangs. I should feel sorry for them but I don't. I want to kick their arses.'

They watched the boys for half a minute.

'Which foot do you kick with, son?'

'I beg your pardon?' Was this related to the previous comment, David wondered.

'You're not a left-footer, are you? What school did you go to?'

Before David could answer there was a loud crack from over where the boys were. The two bouncers dropped to the ground. The shelter roof now sagged in the middle. The boys gave their handiwork a moment's glance, then began to walk away. They seemed untroubled by life, untouched by it, David thought. He was momentarily envious of them.

'Wee shites,' Anderson said. 'Where was I? Oh aye, what's your team? Are you a Celtic or Rangers man?'

'I don't really follow football,' David said.

Anderson shook his head in despair and pushed the end of his fag out of the window.

'No, I didn't think so. They've really landed you in it here, son, haven't they? From a great height.'

'Well, no. The local association selected me. I wasn't just foisted upon them.'

'Aye, right. Look, don't take this personally. I can see you're smart. I can see you'll make somebody a very good MP. But no here. You know it, I know it, we all know it. You've nae chance of winning this seat. Absolutely nae chance. But we have to go through the motions. I just think when they pushed you oot the hairyplane they might have given you a parachute.'

This extract from an early draft of *And the Land Lay Still* (Penguin, 2011) represents an episode absent from the final, published version of that novel. This is its first appearance in print. Another exclusive piece, also taken from early drafts of *And the Land Lay Still*, is featured on our website: www.peninsulamag.wordpress.com

STANDING STONES

TWO KEY VOICES FROM VERY DIFFERENT TOWNS DISCUSS A CHANGING CORNWALL

PART ONE: **SIMON CADE**

INTERVIEW BY **PAUL TUCKER**

The Reverend Simon Cade is the Church of England Team Rector for Redruth. During the nineteenth century, Redruth's fortunes echoed the boom and bust of the Cornish tin industry. Nowadays, Redruth – along with neighbouring Camborne and Pool – contains areas that are among the most deprived in Western Europe. The last tin mine closed in 1998. As Team Rector, Mr Cade oversees the running of five churches in and around the town. I sat down with Mr Cade in his study at home. Shelves lining the walls were filled with philosophical and theological texts; the work of Albert Camus sat alongside the Oxford Dictionary of World Religion. He spoke of his life and work in Redruth eloquently, with great passion and, at times, with a mischievous glint in his eyes betraying an independent streak that characterises his work for the Church. That evening he was due to attend a charity performance by one of the parish's youth groups. 'Tragically, it's at the Conservative club in Camborne,' he told me. 'Sometimes I find myself at some quite strange places!'

Most of the people I meet in the course of a day aren't part of the life of the Church, in the sense that they're not regularly there on a Sunday morning. If I'm doing a funeral, the chances are it won't be for somebody who's a member of the congregation, so it's a case of starting from scratch to try and do something meaningful for them. Likewise, most of the people who are getting baptised or married won't be part of the congregation. So, those people who I'm spending time with are just members of the community, they could be anybody.

The first parish that I worked in was in central London, in Chelsea, and we owned quite a lot of property. That takes quite a lot of running because of very demanding tenants and all the rest of it. My job was to look after buildings. I was a property agent, really. I restored a church and I renegotiated a lease, which took about a year, working with the lawyers. It was just hard-nosed business stuff. And that's always been the case, I think. It all seems very modern, that the Church should be involved in business and have trading companies and trustee charities and all that sort of stuff, but it's not at all. In a way, I'm doing less of that stuff now than I was twenty years ago.

"THE PEOPLE I COME INTO CONTACT WITH KNOW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT THE CHURCH AND HAVE EITHER NO EXPECTATIONS OR COMPLETELY WEIRD EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT THE CHURCH WILL OFFER THEM."

There are far fewer people in church now than there were twenty years ago – but even twenty or thirty or *forty* years ago, the Church was a fairly small proportion of the population. The Church of England marries, buries and baptises anybody. We're not a congregational Church – we're not [just] there for the congregation, we're there for everybody. There's a famous misquote – it's not true, but it's a good line. A previous Archbishop of Canterbury called Archbishop Temple is supposed to have said that the Church of England is the only organisation that exists for the benefit of those that are not its members, which is a brilliant quote, but (a) he didn't say it and (b) when you think about it, it's not true, because there are all sorts of organisations which exist for the benefit of others. But the Church of England *does*, and so a lot of time would always have been spent with people who weren't directly members of the Church.

The difference is that now the people I come into contact with know almost nothing about the Church and have either no expectations or completely weird expectations of what the Church will offer them, whereas twenty years ago they probably had a bit of knowledge. They were more likely to have gone to Sunday School or lapsed from Church than they are now. Now, I can talk to people and basically what they'll know about the Church they'll have got from the vicar on *EastEnders* or something like that.

But I'd rather the first thing they heard about the Church was what I tell them, rather than some dodgy thing they've half-remembered, so I don't mind that, actually. Also, if they have had experience of the Church, those experiences might have been quite negative. I'd much rather they'd had no experience of the Church whatsoever than a bad experience. But then again, I haven't got anything to live up to – if they've got very low expectations, they might like me!

The hardest thing is when somebody is absolutely sure that they know what's right about the Church, which tends to limit what they can do. If they come completely blank, then I can make something that's much more useful for them. There was a funeral last week. She loved Guns N' Roses and played Battle Pirates on Facebook. So the fact that they had no Christian Church baggage meant that we could have Guns N' Roses in church, coming in and going out [and] I could talk about Battle Pirates. I could make the funeral about her, rather than the baggage that they thought the funeral should be

about because 'this is what the Church is like'. So we didn't have to have 'The Lord is My Shepherd' and we didn't have to have the organist playing Vivaldi or something as she came in.

Before I was here, I was in Basingstoke. I was there seven years. It was a lovely job, I didn't have a huge amount of responsibility. The things they'd asked me to go there to do, I'd got done quite quickly, and the Bishop said to me, 'Look, you need to do something more challenging or you'll get bored and misbehave,' and that was probably right – he didn't put it quite like that, but that's what he meant.

So the diocese said, 'We want you to look at these [churches].' There was one parish where the previous vicar had kind of gone a bit mad and, although it was a small parish with one church, and again fairly quiet, there was a lot of dysfunction and brokenness within the Church community which had really fractured and fallen apart. I could see why he had gone mad and I would have gone mad as well. I always remember, it was a very Anglo-Catholic, almost Roman Catholic church. As soon as you went through the door, there was a big picture of a foetus and a thing about anti-abortion. I can't remember what it said, but it had something about 'praying for the children who've never had a chance for life', and I thought, 'God, imagine if you'd had an abortion and you walked through the door and you saw that!' It was just like 'piss off', 'no place for you here'. I saw that and thought, 'Yeah, I can't . . .'

When I came here I couldn't find the church at first, because you can't in Redruth – it's just impossible to find. I went in the newsagents. She had her wedding booked and she knew where it was, so she walked round the corner with me and pointed it out. On the door someone had painted 'FUCK OFF', right across the door, and then somebody else had come along and worked so hard at getting the paint off – but you could still see it, you could just see the imprint of it.

There were two things about it really: one was that it seemed like a genuine, edgy place where someone was so cross with the Church that they could do that and I thought, 'Well, you can do something with that sort of energy.' And the other thing was that somebody had worked so hard to get it off. You know, they hadn't just painted it over, they'd worked really hard to try and heal the door. I thought those two things together, that energy and anger in a broken community was really interesting and challenging – I suppose there's a kind of a Messiah complex going on there – but also that somebody loved the church, they obviously cared for it so much. And I thought, 'I can work with that as well.'

"VISITATION IS A FRIGHTENING THING. IT'S NOT WITHOUT AMBIGUITIES."

There's not a lot of hostility to the Church down here; there's a bit, not a lot. I tend to just go and sort of sit with it. The kids that used to sit outside the church drinking and smoking and swearing, getting moved on by the police, and then coming back again, I just used to go and sit with them, which is the best way to get rid of them. Because if they think you're going to go and talk about Jesus, they'll clear off. Shouting at them is no good, because then it just turns into a shouting match and ten teenagers can always shout louder than anybody else, so they'll win that. But if you go and sit with them then they don't know what to do. Mostly they just talked. I knew I had it when they offered me Special Brew. When you get included in that kind of thing, then you're there!

The most important thing I learned – ever, probably – as a priest, was that there's always much more than you can do in any day. And some of the things you can't do will be things that you really must do. So you have to work out a way of being able to cope, knowing that there's stuff that you can't do. And that's the most important lesson I think I've learned, because for me, I'd either be completely overwhelmed with guilt or I would be trying to work so hard, neurotically, that I would burn out and it would just be . . . I would just kill myself. Or, I think what some people do, what I might be in danger of doing, is you kind of push it away, you become hardened to it and you sort of become somehow less than human.

At a communion service, you break the bread and pour some wine into the chalice and then you share the bread and you share the wine. And in a sense what happens is that what has been broken, what has been poured out, becomes something else. It becomes food for a community and it becomes something that we share. What I bring to the table is much more than the bread and wine. I bring the brokenness of the week, I bring the people I've been with and the stuff that I've heard and the stuff I haven't done, that I didn't get to. And I lay it in front of God and I say, 'Right, I can't cope with this,' or, 'This is over to you.' I carry it and then put it down.

What the resurrection means to me isn't some guy 2,000 years ago and some angels flying down and going *bzzz!* and resuscitating him – that's almost irrelevant – what it means is that I can understand that broken, dead stuff. I can start understanding what God does to that. The Church believes that the dead bodies and the people that are rejected and the stuff that's just hopeless, none of it is completely irredeemable, none of it is completely lost. That can actually become – within a community particularly – the beginning of something new.

Redruth has got more of a sense of community than anywhere I've ever been before. It's got more of a sense of identity and that's partly just to do with the fact that it's a small, relatively insular community. In my last parish, if there were twenty people, the person who was from the parish would be the odd one out. Here, if there's twenty people, I'm the odd one out because I'm the one that's not from here. That, I think, can lead in some respects to a strong community.

The Cornish symbol is the ruined mine house. It's not a symbol of industry now, it's a self-defining thing of loss. The mining didn't leave anything. There are no great libraries or institutes or colleges – or anything that was endowed by the mining industry. The Camborne School of Mines was never paid for by the mining industry, it served them, and it's not even in Camborne now. So in a sense the mining was a real smash and grab industry, it took from Cornwall and gave very little. There was huge emigration from Cornwall, to South Africa and Australia and all sorts of places, so part of what they lost is people. They've got a sense of 'We're the people who got left behind.'

Theologically, you'd say that the mines closing was like Good Friday. In a way, I suppose you've had Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is the great celebration; they're waving the palms and they think it's a new king and they're all singing coronation songs and it's very exciting. And, in a way, that's the history of Redruth, when it's been grand and it's been exciting and popular, that's all in the past. Then you have Good Friday where there's still an energy about it and a death, and then you have Easter Saturday.

There's not normally a service on Easter Eve, because there's no liturgy for it, there are no words. Christ's in the grave – you can't pray to him there. He hasn't risen, there's nothing. And, in a way, that's where Redruth is. There's no energy, there's a sense of 'We were once great, but we're past that.' It's not Good Friday any more. And if that's true, that picture of Redruth being an Easter Eve place, then it's the Church's job to kind of say, 'Where's Easter? Where's the sun rising? Where's the new stuff?'

In the Bible the first person to see it is Mary Magdalene – she's just going to look after the corpse. Her response, in the tomb, you know, she's in tears. She doesn't recognise what's going on. Visitation is a frightening thing. It's not without ambiguities. The thing that people like me have to remember is that you have to respect the corpse, you have to respect the body. There's no point in just saying to people, 'Look, it's gone. Knock down the engine house, knock down the old stuff, we'll just build something new and shiny.' You've got to respect what's gone, what's lost.

STANDING STONES

TWO KEY VOICES FROM VERY DIFFERENT TOWNS DISCUSS A CHANGING CORNWALL

PART TWO: **ANDY HOCKING**

INTERVIEW BY **EMMA EASY**

Andy Hocking is well known in Falmouth: he has a trademark grin that splits his face into two segments, mischievous, twinkling dark eyes, and time for a joke with anyone. He is the town's Beat Manager, a role he talks about with passion. His job is to keep the community, in all its various sects, harmonious. His police force covers the towns of Falmouth, Penryn and a number of smaller villages and hamlets that stretch westwards and southwards, spreading the force's responsibility over a significant number of square miles. We sit in a small, windowless interview room with just two chairs and a table. A couple of framed pictures, their subjects indiscernible from a brief glance, are mounted on the walls, the artwork of local children. 'This is the nice room, you know. Here we've got the pretence of niceness on the walls.' Andy wears a black, base-layer police uniform, and talks with me for an hour, answering every question with ease and sincerity, his hands gesturing openness as he bares his palms and spreads his fingers wide, and occasionally twists a golden wedding ring when he pauses to think.

The lesson I learnt on my very first day is that sometimes you've got to hit somebody to stop them hurting you, and you've got to hit them hard. I did my probation at Redruth – I'd just met my tutor constable for the very first time. He said, 'Do you know Redruth?' I said, 'No, I've never really had a look around the area.' He said, 'You don't look around Redruth! Jump in the car, we'll have a drive around.' We got thirty yards away from the police station, and there's a pub called the Rose Cottage, and there's a huge fight with lots of gypsies – there's a big gypsy community in the Redruth–Camborne area. He said, 'Stay where you are. I'll get out.' He's trying to separate these men – on his own – and I think, 'Oh god, he's going to get his head kicked in. I'm going to get out and give him a hand.' I'd not got any kit issued at that point, nothing. I get out the car and BANG! My nose was just smashed to smithereens. The guy had been wearing a signet ring – a big gold, signet ring. And it split my head, split the bone just there, and ohhhhh, I've never had such a headache in all my life. I went over backwards and smashed my head on the back of a kerbstone, so I was unconscious from there. The tutor constable had managed to call backup, so the cavalry arrived, but it was too late by then, I was for the hospital. I had a couple of operations and my nose is now made of stuff that's not bone. You don't get a nose like this naturally! I went home, and my wife, she says, 'It's going to be like that every day, isn't it?' And I said, 'Don't know! Don't know, love!' It didn't put me off.

"I WALK OUT THE DOOR, AND THE DAY HAPPENS, IN FRONT OF ME."

I've now been a policeman for twenty years. I've worked at Camborne, Redruth, Truro. Worked in Helston for a bit, but always wanted to get back here, cos Falmouth's my hometown. I was a response car driver for nine years, and I was the kind of policeman that would have arrested my granny just to get another tick in the box. I was very keen on arresting people. I've got lots of awards for it.

There are three different streams of policing. You've got crime investigation, which is CID and CIT – the Criminal Investigation Department and the Criminal Investigation Team, so that's uniformed officers actually investigating crime alongside the CID. You've got a response stream – they're the guys who drive around with the blue lights flashing everywhere, and they respond to what we would refer to as prompts or immediates. They go, they take initial details, then if it's a crime they hand details over to the Criminal Investigation Team, who investigate. The third stream, which I work in now, is Community and Neighbourhood. We deal with long-term, problem-solving issues, stuff that just . . . doesn't go away, really. It's the real nitty-gritty of policing. And in my stream, the frustration of policing, but also the great joy of policing, is that you develop relationships with people. Sometimes where a person has been a pest, or a problem for ten years, and they're never going to stop being a pest, you can develop a relationship with them where you can manage them.

As far as a typical day goes, there's no such thing. I can turn up at 7 o'clock in the morning for work, and the day is literally a blank canvas. We try to be proactive, but in the main we are reactive to what's actually happened, in the previous week, the previous day, even in the previous hour. I walk out of the door, and the day happens, in front of me. It could be wonderful, it could be horrifying, it could be depressing. Over the years, I've actually grown used to not knowing what's going to happen, and being able to react. Sometimes, you're thinking,

'Good god – what am I going to do? I've never encountered this before, what do I do?' And you make it up as you go along – within the confines of law, legislation, what actually feels right . . . you make it up.

Last year, I was on the Prince of Wales pier, and one of the operators approached me and said, 'One of my skippers on my boat, I believe, is drunk' – and he's actually got passengers, forty something passengers, on the passenger boat. He's drunk! Driving it! And I'm thinking, 'Have I got the power to arrest the man when he comes back in?' I've never dealt with legislation dealing with boats. It turned out that yes, I did have power of arrest. He's come back alongside the quay, and he's said to me, 'Can I go and get my bag?' So I said, 'Yes, go back to the boat, but come immediately back.' And he's gone back to the ferry and taken it away again! As he's driving away – this thing's huge – I think he thought better of it, and he turned and put it back on the moorings, then came back in and said, 'Am I in trouble?' 'Well,' I said, 'you were in trouble before, but you certainly are now.'

I do police visits daily. The term is such a broad brush for what goes on. You can go in and put someone's door through, with a piece of paper called a warrant, saying, 'I've come to visit you!' Or you could go and drink tea with Mrs Smith down the road and ask her how she's been since her husband died last week, because she's worried about security within the house. Probably the worst visit that you would ever have to go and perform is to tell somebody that a loved one has passed away. I dread having to do it. There's no training that can actually make that easy for you, or easy for them. I've seen it done well, and I've seen it done badly. You try and pull the best bits from what you've seen through working with others. But paying visits in general – to enter over somebody else's threshold, to suddenly become a part of their life – how rarely do people actually engage with the police? Isn't it better, if they have one or two engagements with the police during their whole life, that they're pleasant or memorable, for a good reason?

The ultimate in dealing with somebody, who you've been dealing with all day, in a cell block, interviewing, asking them questions about things that they're gonna regret for the rest of their lives, terrible, terrible things . . . you're asking them to sign their bail papers, they're walking away . . . and they turn round and say, 'Thank you. Thank you for the way that . . .' And you know, then, that you've dealt with them fairly. Or to deal with somebody's wife, the wife of someone who's passed away: those people are absolutely traumatised because a loved one has died, and they've some bloody ugly policeman coming into their house to fill out paperwork. You're sat there, asking them questions, and they're grieving, but you've got to fill out this paperwork, to send on to the coroner, to the mortician, over at the hospital. And so for them to be able to send you a card, a couple of weeks later, to say, 'Thank you, for the way . . .' and you just think, 'You poor soul – you don't have to send me a card!' It's quite moving, really. I got one a couple of weeks ago, it's up on my desk now, and I looked at it again yesterday and I had a little tear in me eye. And I thought, 'Oh, poor dear! You don't have to say thank you!'

The beat that I actually have at present is the 'sharp' bit of Falmouth. If you imagine drawing a line between the Prince of Wales pier, Swanpool beach, and then drawing a big triangle going up to Pendennis Point, everything within that triangle is mine, is my beat. I would argue that my beat is probably the most diverse in the whole Force area. I've got a town centre; I've got a dockyard; I've got a student quarter up in the terrace areas; I've got high quality, million-pound housing out on the seafront; hotels, beaches, part of a university complex . . . to have all those things, within one beat, is unheard of, really. You need to have the public working with you to manage it. You can't do it on your own.

There are 35,000 people in Falmouth and Penryn combined. It goes up a bit in the summer, but then you get your student population moving away, so it levels quite nicely. You don't get those peaks and troughs that you would get at Newquay. Falmouth's a very stable sort of town. The visitors can't believe we've got policemen walking around the town centre. They find that hugely reassuring – and the number of times people say, *'Don't get you where I come from!'* And you say, 'Where are you from?' It could be Norfolk, it could be Staffordshire... they just don't see policemen walking around their town centres. And I think it's really good that they feel that they can come up and say that to us.

Falmouth is incredibly diverse. It's got a thin veneer of middle-class respectability, it's got some very nice parts, but it's got a lovely underbelly of reality. And it's a *real town*. It's a great, undiscovered secret – you get policemen who are posted here, who didn't want to be posted here, and after a couple of months they've said, 'It's really quite nice here, actually.' And Penryn has changed dramatically in recent years because of the uni. It used to be very insular. Do you know where the little yellow house – the craft shop – was? That used to be a fruit and veg shop, called the Orange Pip, all those years ago. I used to go in there for a cup of tea, every day. The lady who owned it came up to me one day, and she was talking about going shopping, and I said to her, 'Where else do you go?' She said, 'What do you mean, "go"'? I said, 'Where else do you go, in the week?' She said, 'I don't go anywhere.' 'Well,' I said, 'ever?' She went, 'I've never been outside of Cornwall, ever.' She'd never left Cornwall in her life. And she was an elderly lady. It makes you realise how parochial Cornwall was. Yes, the uni has had a huge impact on Falmouth and Penryn. Huge. Falmouth's always been a little bit more cosmopolitan, but Penryn wasn't. It was very inward-looking.

The student population are just fantastic in the main. I don't even mind about the drinking late-night culture, as long as they're safe – it actually adds to the economy of the town. Every year I meet with certain student groups, and the international students that have come, and I just think how brave they are, to come from other parts of the world, to come here . . . I couldn't do it! I couldn't step on to a plane in Mumbai, or somewhere like that, and go to a university here . . . I'd just be so scared! But they come from the world over, don't they? The students have changed the town, mind you. Marlborough Road is a lovely road – used to be aspirational. People aspired to live there. Now you've got people wanting to escape. That's what's happening to Marlborough Road, it's what's happening to Budock Terrace, Norfolk Road, Trelawney Road . . . all the terraced areas, at the back, that the students have moved into. I've actually heard it on more than one occasion from students: 'It's our area, why would people complain about student parties and noise when it's ours?' In other words, 'Why are those people, residents who've lived there for thirty, forty years, complaining about our behaviour when it's our area, anyway?'

The only thing that really annoys me is the student graffiti. That's the one bad thing about the students coming. The other day – it really gets to me because at the time I didn't have my warrant card with me, which was the problem – I was walking through the town, and a member of the public, who's recognised me without my uniform on, has said, 'Those bloody lads! They're doing graffiti in Hull's Lane!' So I walk to Hull's Lane, and true enough, there were two lads doing graffiti, and *filming* it; so they're obviously on a course, they had a tripod stood up and, oh, it was some political sort of thing. I said, 'Look, come on, lads, you're going to have to wipe that off.' 'Yeah, we'll be back later on to wipe it off,' they say and I said, 'Well, I'm going to have to trust you to do it.' I can't demand their names and addresses or anything cos I haven't got my warrant card with me, and I've got an assurance from them that they'd come back and wipe it off. They didn't. Didn't do it. And the stuff along Jacob's Ladder that's been in the papers the last couple of weeks – it's student-type graffiti. It's not local graffiti. It's too artistic for that. You can tell. The local kids will tag. It's sort of... it's akin to peeing in somebody's doorway or peeing in their letter box – why do people feel that they can do that? *I went to Art College myself!* I studied Fine Art!

I don't paint now, but I still go to all the exhibitions. All the summer shows, you can guarantee I'll be there. Wherever we go, the first place we visit is the gallery, any kind of gallery. I go anywhere with a bit of colour. Paris is just wonderful, isn't it? Musée d'Orsay and the Louvre . . . went to Barcelona recently. That was fantastic. I want to go to St Petersburg, to the Hermitage. It's an ex-royal palace, but it's a gallery now. I would just love to go there.

It's a shame, because I don't paint anything at all. But I miss it. I've still got an eye for it, look at everything.

POETRY

CAROLINE CARVER

ELIJAH HERE
SHE COMES

I thought it'd be like Elijah a whirlwind raising her to heaven
before moths and thieves broke into our special world

didn't see how life was really going even when nightmare
drove me into her room

and I heard the click of a trigger half-pulled back
thought I was headed for the departure lounge

but it was my mother who flew that night
up to the magpie bridge and the Milky Way

WHEN THE
ROOKS COME

My angel's moulting her feathers lie on the ground like used up snow
without them she's shrunk to the size of a pin.
Where are the bees of summer I ask this shrunken creature
where are their little striped bodies hiding?
Are they dreaming the day away dancing the polka foxtrot
maybe even the pavane
kicking their legs in front of them in a sprightly way?
Did you know they sleep on their backs?

Dear friends are you also sleepdreaming? remembering your ancestors
running through woods with their spears held in front of them?
or are you listening to your daughter buzzing in textspeak twitterspeak lovespeak
grumbling like snowdrops forcing their way up through rain-sodden ground?

She's becoming a bee and you must too or she'll displace you
as her suitors sing songs of the world hive.

No one should have to answer these or any other questions
there's too much angst in the air. When the rooks come home to roost
in those green-spark moments before evening
their language is the language of stars that have had a hard day

mygawdtoomuchgoingontoomanywordsouttheretwittering
facebookingu-tubing complainingtogoogle

(First published in *Orbis* magazine, no. 156.)

TWITCHING 2

ONE OF MY CHARISMATIC BIRDS

JEREMY MYNOTT SEARCHES FOR A RARE VISITATION IN THE FLANNAN ISLES

LEACH'S PETREL IS ONE OF MY 'CHARISMATIC' BIRDS. IT IS IN TRUTH A RATHER DRAB LITTLE THING: IT'S ABOUT THE SIZE OF A SWALLOW AND A SORT OF SOOTY BROWN IN COLOUR, THE ONLY MARKINGS BEING A PALE BAND ON THE UPPER WING AND A NARROW WHITE RUMP. YOU WOULDN'T RUSH TO SEE ONE JUST FOR ITS PLUMAGE. ITS ATTRACTION AND MYSTIQUE HAVE QUITE ANOTHER SOURCE.

There are only four sites in the British Isles where Leach's petrels regularly breed, all of them isolated, remote and uninhabited islands in the North Atlantic, beyond even the Outer Hebrides: St Kilda, the Flannan Isles, North Rona and Sula Sgeir. The species is actually quite numerous, with many thousand birds in the St Kilda colony, but it remains very hard to encounter (and so is effectively 'rare'), partly because of the extreme inaccessibility of these wild places and partly because of its elusive nocturnal habits.

The Leach's is a truly pelagic species and uses the islands only for breeding purposes. Even then it feeds way out in the open ocean all day, up to one hundred miles from its nesting site, returning only late at night; and just to make things more difficult, the nesting burrows are usually on the side of precipitous rocky slopes. So even if you brave the long and uncomfortable journey by small boat to one of these remote locations you still won't see a Leach's unless you venture out in the wee hours on to just the right cliff ledge and cling there hopefully in the dark in whatever weather conditions happen to obtain (the odds being heavily in favour of strong winds and rain).

But then your reward may be great. If you are lucky, the returning birds will mill around you on all sides, exchanging an extraordinary range of weird cries with their mates in the nest burrows to guide them home in the dark to just the right hole. The general effect is a hysterical banshee wailing. I had only ever heard these island spirits on tape but they sounded quite 'other', even in the reassuring surroundings of my own living room. I wanted to hear the real thing, and at the right time and place.

I had already tried once before in St Kilda, but the weather was just too stormy to let us stay overnight; so back we sailed again through mountainous seas, leaving somewhere in our wake about fifteen thousand Leach's petrels, unseen and unheard. The next year I determined to try the Flannan Isles instead, where I could be put off for the night in my tent and be right on hand for the 2.00 a.m. performance, if there was one.

The Flannans are just as remote as St Kilda but much less visited and I would hope to have the islands to myself. Moreover, there was an intriguing unsolved mystery there. The Flannans have never been properly inhabited in human memory but there was a manned light there once. In December 1900, after a violent storm, it was noticed by a passing vessel that the Flannan light was dark. A relief boat was duly dispatched to investigate but on arrival the crew could find no sign of the three keepers. A meal was still on the table, the last logbook entry had been neatly completed, and everything seemed to be in working order; but no trace of the men was ever found, then or later.

This Marie Celeste-type story provoked much speculation at the time and one long narrative poem, which ended with the portentous lines:

We seemed to stand for an endless while,
Though still no word was said,
Three men alive on Flannan Isle
Who thought on three men dead.

(Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, 'Flannan Isle', 1910)

So even if I miss out on the Leach's again, there are perhaps other spirits to look for. I am duly landed (and abandoned, since the skipper of our small boat has decided to retreat to the safety of the Isle of Harris). It's raining hard and I set up my small tent to wait and to listen. It stays light until nearly midnight this far north and west and there is a surprising amount to hear: the resident raven croaks, a deep thudding bass; two whimbrel go past, wittering in flight; then in the dusk a cuckoo calls close by – goodness, Wordsworth was right when he spoke of 'the cuckoo-bird / Breaking the silence of the seas / Among the farthest Hebrides'.

Even after dark the noise from birds goes on: the oystercatchers break into a nervy piping every so often; there are occasional grunts from puffins and harsh cries from the gull roosts; and once I hear the clear whistling calls of some golden plovers, migrants forced down by the sheeting rain no doubt. Presumably the birds are all disturbing one another since there is no one else to disturb them (is there?). In the background is the continuous roar of surf and in the foreground squalls of rain rattle against my tent. All very atmospheric.

At 1.45 a.m. I put on my boots and rainwear and unzip the tent flap. Immediately I hear a strange, muffled call nearby, something between a chuckle and a gurgle. Can it possibly be . . . ? As soon as I get outside I hear it again more clearly, and then several more, and then a longer sequence of calls in a wild, chattering rhythm, and then the whole devil's chorus.

I walk in what seems to be the direction of these screaming spirits, just the other side of the lighthouse; and suddenly there they all are, whirling around me in their bat-veering, butterfly-floating flight, even brushing me with their wings, several hundred birds, shrieking like Gaelic goblins on acid, as someone put it – the full Leach's experience. Each time the beam from the great light comes round I see them briefly illuminated in the air, as if blown in like leaves, and pitching down right by my feet to enter their nesting-holes.

Magic. I stay with them for an hour or so and decide against going to look for the related species, storm petrels, which are also nocturnal and are likely to be nesting in the tumbledown walls of the old cleits at the other end of the island. Storm petrels have class but not charisma, and I don't want an anticlimax. By about 3.30 a.m. the

colony is falling silent. I return to my tent, with light already appearing in the east, and I suddenly realise how wet I've got in the rain. I sleep.

In the morning light they are gone, leaving me wondering if it was all just a marvellous dream. As another and better poet put it (Shakespeare in *The Tempest*):

> *Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,*
> *Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.*
> *Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments*
> *Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices*
> *That if I then had waked after a long sleep*
> *Will make me sleep again*

I had seen Leach's a few times before, storm-tossed birds flicking and gliding low over the waves off the East Anglian coast, rare and displaced vagrants driven close inshore by rough weather. But to encounter the Leach's on the Flannans at two in the morning was to feel as though I was experiencing them very much in *their* place and at *their* time. They define these wild landscapes and are in turn defined by them. The Leach's is the genius loci here.

The above is an excerpt from *Birdscapes: birds in our imagination and experience* (Princeton University Press, 2009, now in paperback)

JOURNEY

GOING BACK

EMMA EASY SEARCHES FOR GROUNDING IN SUBURBIA

WHEN I DECIDED TO MOVE TO CORNWALL, I PLANNED TO MOVE FOR GOOD. THERE WOULD BE AN END TO THE ANNUAL DRIFT FROM ONE FLAT-SHARE TO ANOTHER, AN END TO THE STRESSFUL OFFICE JOB, AND THE CEASELESSNESS OF THE COMMUTE. I MADE MY DECISION, AND THEN I QUIETLY UNLEASHED MYSELF FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.

I finished my job in mid-September 2011. But before leaving London for good, there was a trip I needed to take. I headed west on a Central line tube train, towards the small, north-westerly piece of the London borough jigsaw known as South Ruislip. In South Ruislip, a mock Tudor, semi-detached house with a black-and-white striped door stood on a suburban street. I'd last seen it twenty years ago, the day my parents followed a removal van out of London and into Hertfordshire.

But now I was hurtling towards it again. The tube cleared Zone 1, exhaled out into the open air at White City. An overcast sky, heavy and high, allowed the sun to break free for a few moments to beam promise onto bricks and billboards. At East Acton, blossom grew on spindly trees near the tube platform, while blue warehouses hunkered down behind them, branded with a postcode, NW10. Trees started to thicken a little around Hanger Lane: the first indication that we were making an escape, following a route that thousands of Londoners took seventy-five years ago in search of a place called Metroland.

Metroland was 'a country with elastic borders that each visitor [could] draw for himself'. This quotation comes from the official Metroland booklet, published annually in the years leading up to the Second World War. Metroland held the promise of an accessible rural space, which city workers and their families could access via the Metropolitan railway (now known as the Metropolitan line, the line with the most disruptions, the most delays). Soon after the war, Metroland became, as John Betjeman wrote, the land of 'ripening fields, ripe for development': one residential area after another rose up in London's north-west, houses for the new middle class.

At Perivale, a hill, a golf course and a Royal Mail depot zipped by. The tube approached Greenford, seen from where I was sitting as a sprawl of roofs, houses barely discernible underneath their caps of uniform brown. Metroland grew houses and streets on its fields and meadows; it also raised my parents. Greenford was where my father was born and lived out his youth, while my mother grew up in Watford, Metroland's north-western tip. They met, married and settled in South Ruislip until 1990, when they tried to escape. Mum and Dad hovered in Hertfordshire for fifteen years, their getaway overridden by the spreading suburban wave that engulfed the Home Counties. By 2005, they felt as if they were back where they had started. So they moved to Cornwall.

South Ruislip finally came into view; the clouds parted once again, making the platform and its TfL-branded signs gleam with a clean brilliance, as if blue protective film had been peeled from its surfaces only hours before. When I exited the station and turned back, I saw a modernist, metallic rotunda, a space-age portal that clashed with the uniform brick of the high street flanking it. It seemed a common theme for so many fringe tube stations – Arnos Grove, Southgate, Canada Water – to make the tube station an inviting place through which to escape.

The high street stretched a little to the left of the station, but mainly to its right: Chinese medicine stores, newsagents, florists, carpet shops. I tried to imagine how this street might have looked in the 1950s, when the promise of the countryside was still valid to the flocks of Londoners moving in. I saw it only in the stretch of uninterrupted sky, whose very presence denoted the absence of high-rises and skyscrapers.

Along the road, beyond the railway bridge (under which traffic dawdled and the strain of car radios was deepened by the acoustics, and where I breathed with a familiar and odd comfort the fume of exhausts), I walked mapless, following a taut thread of intuition, trusting it would lead to a memory.

(When I first started making regular weekend trips to Cornwall, I'd get on the sleeper at Paddington and step off at Truro. I'd take the clean air so deep into my lungs, I fancied I could feel the colour of the blood in my brain brighten with the oxygen. And when I finally reached Falmouth on the branch line, I breathed deeper still.)

I kept moving, kept inhaling the city air for support: a small flutter of anxiety had started in the base of my throat. I walked to the end of the high street, reaching a junction. Two-storey flats stared out over the crossing roads, their murky brown bricks complementing tarmac and grey sky. Across one of the roads was a Sainsbury's supermarket, fronted by fascias of deep brown and the warm neon of orange-red lettering.

(In May and June, wild flowers in Cornwall hold the entire colour spectrum in their petals and grass-heads: they spread themselves over its moors and cliffs, in roadside verges and gardens. In the evenings, when the weather is right, the flowers converse with the teal-milk blue of the sea.)

There was a road across the junction called The Fairway. A bell rang in my memory: the house had to be off that road somewhere. I crossed at the pelican crossing, walking with the growl of car engines and the distant hum of heavy machinery that was moving Metroland earth and stone somewhere nearby. That hum had always been around me, reassuring me that others were close to, carrying on with their own lives and their own plans.

The Fairway was a wide road. Luxuriously wide. Cars parked at its sides without chafing hubcaps against the kerb; traffic moved along it smoothly. I walked past people tending front gardens, unexpected squares of green, yellow and

pink. A woman hosed a Vauxhall Astra. I heard a lawnmower, somewhere a few roads away. Not quite the 'patterned roar of motor mowers, accelerating, braking, turning, accelerating, braking, turning' that Julian Barnes wrote of in his novel *Metroland*, but still, it was there. Spaces of grass still remained in Metroland, and were cared for.

I seemed to remember this road: observations were beginning to slide over and correlate with the outlines of old memories. The road swung, a lazy snake, in a similar way to a road I remember when I was very young; I passed a modern-looking church with an open courtyard, which chimed with me. In its courtyard, an effigy of Jesus hung from planks of mahogany-coloured wood, sawn and nailed in the shape of a kite. Out of a deep archive arose a memory of a dark diamond: the shape fitted.

I'd always thought I'd conjured up these images with a child's fantastical imagination, these memories of houses with enough space around them to breathe. Suburbia to me had always been about road after road of identical builds, car-crammed pavements and the occasional fabricated green space. But here was a road in suburbia with few cars, with cultivated gardens, and with established houses, settled upon their foundations.

I stood for a few minutes, looking again at the fresh, modern church. In a few weeks' time, I thought, I would be living in a part of the country where cemeteries held gravestones hundreds of years old, lichen crusting over their names, where the weather slowly smoothed away the identity of the dead.

The air had become a little too tense, a little too still. I started to walk again, reducing the length of The Fairway with each of my steps. I was slowly approaching a street sign, Queen's Walk. The road where I was born.

No laboured searches for the house: I found it immediately. I stood across from it on the other side of the road, my camera swinging from my wrist, knocking my knee. It was just as I remembered it: a front garden with two small wrought-iron gates, separated by a strip of rectangular hedge. A silver car sat behind one of the gates while the other hung open, left that way, perhaps, by the postman that morning. A crazy-paved path led to the black-and-white door. Something out of *Beetlejuice*.

And with a look at that door, the journey ended. I couldn't enter the space beyond, where some of my core childhood memories nested. I couldn't rush past the stairs and swing right at the kitchen into the house's living room, where the only memory of my grandmother was held, its detail worn away through repeated visualisation so that it was now faint as pencil. I couldn't scramble up the black slats of the tiny spiral staircase that led to the attic, and I couldn't scramble down them again to crouch on the landing, suffused in a pink light that I supposed – I jumped into the scene, scouring it for detail – was produced by the sun shining through my bedroom curtains.

This was what I came for, to recharge memories now so old that nearly all the detail had left them. I knew that for each detail that was lost, I provided an imaginative embellishment, a prop so that the memory could still stand upright. The memory of my Nanna probably came from a photograph. Maybe the staircase was never slatted, perhaps the light had never been pink.

In Cornwall now, I can recall the smack of rain hitting a window in November (like a bucket of water hurled at the glass); the whisk of a spoon in an empty cereal bowl in April (the cry of a herring gull); and the efflorescence in the sea at midnight in May (glitter passing through my hands, glitter on the seafront as I turn to look at the lights of Falmouth town). Memories are sticking, down here. My senses reel them in with a pole and a line.

I walked back to the tube station a little faster than I had come. I had not taken a photograph. This chapter had closed the day we moved away; I could barely read it, let alone rewrite it. I had come for grounding, for identity, for a set of starting blocks against which I could push my feet when the gun went off. I left with simply the sensation of the city's air tugging at my frame. I waded through it with each stride.

“TOM SELLECK WAS NOT ALLOWED TO TAKE THE TOUR”

BETWEEN 1979 AND 1999, DENNIS SEVERS TRANSFORMED HIS SPITALFIELDS HOME, DESIGNING EACH ROOM TO DEPICT THE TWO HUNDRED YEAR HISTORY OF A FICTIONAL FAMILY. **RACHEL SANTUCCIO** TALKS TO **M. STACEY SHAFFER** ABOUT HER 1980 STAY AT HER UNCLE’S UNIQUE RESIDENCE.

When M. Stacey Shaffer was a teenager in the 1980s, she travelled from San Francisco to London to stay with her uncle, Dennis Severs, at his home at 18 Folgate Street in Spitalfields. The house was host to regular public tours, as Severs had outfitted each room in the five-storey home in a different historic style, from early Georgian to late Victorian. The house was also host to an imagined French-Huguenot family named Jervis. The tour was constructed to make visitors feel as if they had stepped back in time, and were walking through a house still occupied by the Jervis family. I caught up with Shaffer as she reminisced about what it took to make visitors believe they were trespassing in another century.

My uncle’s focus was creating these atmospheres, and the illusion was so important. For me what was fun were the tricks behind it, but I know there are certain tricks that he wouldn’t want me to reveal, because that was part of the mystique.

LIVING THEATRE

The thing that a lot of people don’t get, and it’s sort of the key to my memories of the house, was the tour that Dennis did – he called it a tour, but there never was a good word for it. It really was more like a theatre experience, and all of the effects and smells and sounds that were done as you wandered around the house were specifically geared towards ‘living theatre’. You know how modern theatre actors will perform on stage with just their bodies, and they won’t have any props or sets or costumes, and they have to create it all with just themselves onstage? Well, this was the exact opposite of that. It was theatre with everything the actor, or the people in the house, had just left behind them, including half-drunk glasses and food with bites taken out, and they’ve just left the room, and they’ve left pieces of clothing, and their stuff. And you would hear them as you travelled through the house during the tour. You would hear them in the next room, it was like you were chasing them, but you never quite caught up. The things they left behind would tell their story for them. That was the atmosphere he was going for.

His technique was to overwhelm you for three hours. Sights, smells, sounds and endless talking, and it was to so overwhelm your senses that you finally gave up, and your mind let go and your emotions took over, and you had a sense of not just sitting in a house of antiques by fire and candlelight, but that you actually time-travelled.

“HIS TECHNIQUE WAS TO OVERWHELM YOU FOR THREE HOURS [...] TO SO OVERWHELM YOUR SENSES THAT YOU FINALLY GAVE UP, AND YOUR MIND LET GO AND YOUR EMOTIONS TOOK OVER.”

PREPARING THE HOUSE FOR A TOUR

He spent the afternoons preparing the house, but it was like it never really stopped, it was just constant. It was real important the house be just the right level of clean – it couldn’t look like a museum, but it also couldn’t look like Miss Havisham’s. Because there was food on the table and half-drunk glasses, it couldn’t be mouldy and covered in cobwebs, so that constantly had to be changed and fresh fruit had to be put in all of the still lives and then there were all of the fresh flowers. All the candles had to be replaced. I added it up recently – typically each room had eight to twelve burning candles during the tour, and some of the landings had the chandeliers, and those were dozens. In the olden days the owners would start with the tall fresh candles, while the servants would get the candle ends after they had burned down and these would be taken to the upstairs poverty rooms. So we were constantly refreshing the candles but also swapping them around to make sure the right rooms had fresh tall candles and certain rooms had the half-used candles. And all the fireplaces had to have fires laid, ready to light. That took a lot of work. All the silver had to be polished. Everything had to be dusted. The carpets had to be swept, and in the drawing room, all around the edges of the room, was lavender and that would get swept over the carpets to absorb the odours and then get swept back into the corners.

And each room had its own special smell. And a lot of the smells were enhanced just before the rooms were entered for the tour. The kitchen already had plenty of smells because it was a working kitchen, but just before the people came in he would take a sugar cookie and waft it through a candle for that fresh-baked smell – a little bit of

burnt sugar, just enough. It was very subtle. It took skill. In the dining room – and this was hard on me as I was in my vegetarian phase – we took a couple of pieces of beef fat and held that in a little metal sieve over a candle, and it would sizzle and fill the room with a roasty, beefy smell. And the smoking room was tobacco leaf, but there's two tobacco smells, there's tobacco after it's been smoked and there's the fresh leaf, the cured leaf, which is the better smell, so that was that room. And the drawing room had the lavender. The worst one was the poverty room. Dennis had a covered pot that he would uncover just before that was filled with rotting cabbage. Really, *really* foul.

It was like living on a film set rather than in a museum, because you had to learn when you reached for food to make sure that it was edible.

Dennis's attention to detail was so incredible that everything had to be clean, but you had to know how to clean it just right. He would go through just before the tour and put fingerprints on all the glasses to show that they had just been used. He was constantly moving things a half an inch there, and a little to the right. It all had to have the human energy put into it. One of the last things he would do in the kitchen is he would take a piece of carrot and he would put his teeth marks in the carrot because little Sophie Jervis was teething. He would make sure there were little bits of carrot sprinkled around. It was all crucial.

THE SOUNDS

The other key to the atmosphere was the sounds. This was the 80s and 90s, so they were all on cassette tapes. Each room had hidden speakers in the floors, and as you were on the tour you would hear voices and chatter and sounds of parties and talking from other rooms but never the room you were in. He had this wonderful effect of moving horses *clip-clip-clip-clop* in front of the house. They always sounded like they were outside the window, and they would move left to right and right to left. He used all of his neighbours; he brought them over and they were the ones who recorded the party sounds. The tapes had to be all prepped and cued up to the right places.

A GHOST IN THE DRAWING ROOM

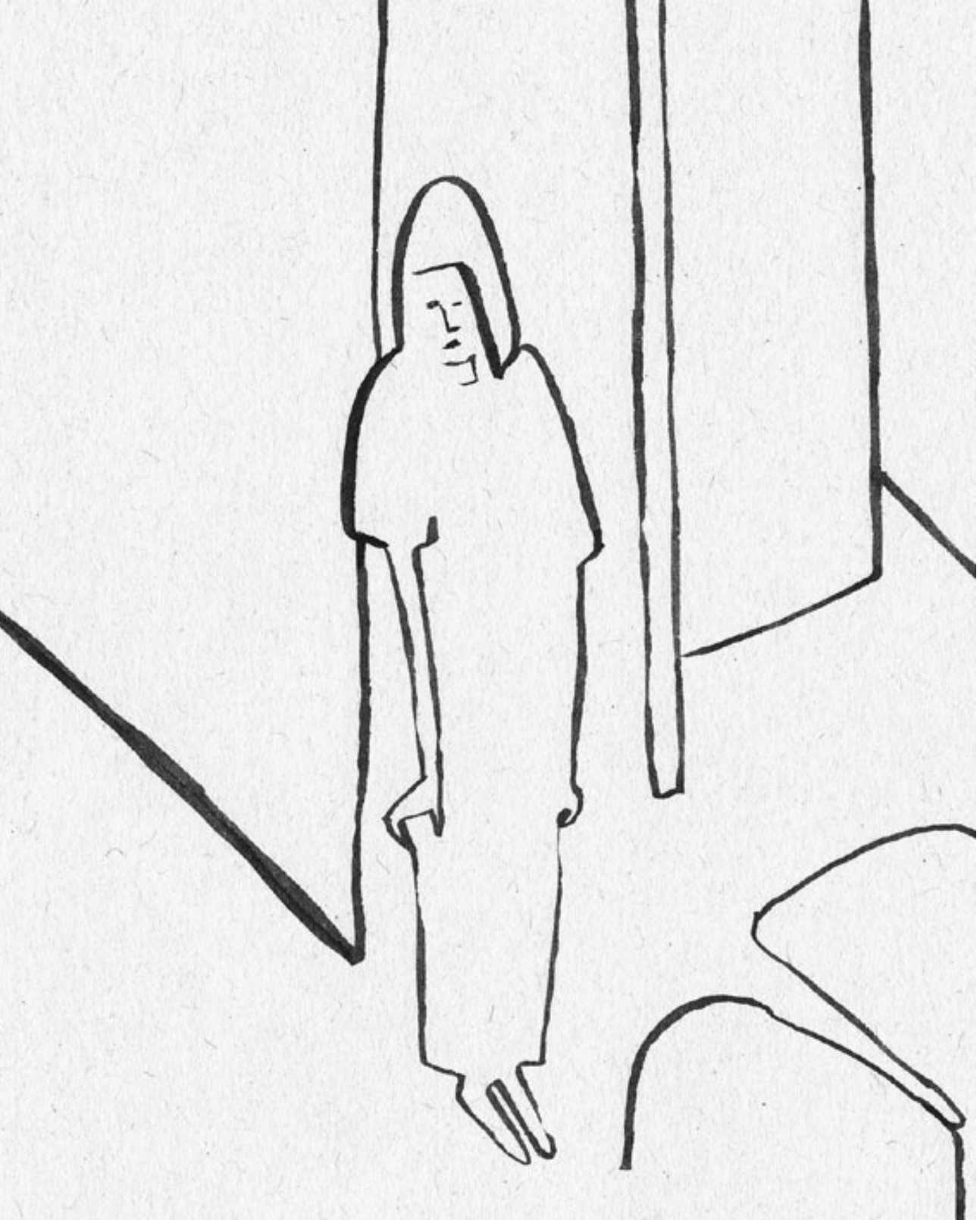
There were a couple of special effects that he had, mostly in the drawing room, to give the illusion of a ghost. He had a fishing line tied to a fan on the chair in the drawing room, and it ran down along the carpet through a hole in the wall into the smoking room, and at just the right point in the tour when he said a certain phrase, if you were helping him, you would pull the string so the fan would leap off the chair. The rooms were dark enough so that you couldn't see the clear fishing line, of course. Then you had to grab the doorknob and open it at just the right moment, so the people on the inside of the room would see the door open by itself. If you didn't do it right, it just looked wet, and I never did it quite right. And I never pulled the fan cord quite right either. It wouldn't leap, it would just sort of topple off.

CELEBRITY GUESTS

Famous people would want to come on the public tour, but if they were too recognisable and too famous, he would refuse them because they would distract people and become the focus. So Tom Selleck was not allowed to take the tour. 'Tom Selleck, oh please, I want to meet Tom Selleck!' 'No. Besides, he's too tall.' People were much shorter in the eighteenth century, so tall people bumped their heads on the low doorways. He did have private visits for a lot of people, but the actual tour experience was restricted to just the right kind of group. He was totally unimpressed with celebrity anyway though.

'THE CUPBOARD OF NO RETURN'

The kitchen cupboard was nicknamed 'The Cupboard of No Return', and it was notorious. 'God forbid, don't show anybody The Cupboard of No Return!' It was where we stuck everything that visitors shouldn't see. There was an old radio, because you had to have music, all sorts of strange postcards, packaged modern food, recent magazines, a tin of fruit cake with Buckingham Palace on it from ten years before, things like that – the stuff that spoiled the illusion. I loved 'The Cupboard of No Return'.



POEM

HOUSE ARREST

BY PENELOPE SHUTTLE

No one tells me how to grieve
when the doctors
give their thumbs-down,

loosen the guy ropes
holding you to life,
withdraw your feeding tube,
stop the useless antibiotics.

No one explains about grief,
or warns me that one tear
will put me under house arrest for years.

Look. The ward nurse
bends her mild head to her paperwork.

ESSAY

SNOW

MELANIE CHALLENGER WATCHES THE ICE MELT IN ANTARCTICA

THERE ARE OVER FIFTY OF US LIVING HERE IN THIS SMALL COLLECTION OF BUILDINGS IN ANTARCTICA; SCIENTISTS, CARPENTERS, ELECTRICIANS, PILOTS, MOUNTAINEERS, SURVIVAL EXPERTS, TWO CHEFS AND A WRITER – AND YET EVERY HOUR THE SNOW ERASES OUR PRESENCE AND OURS ARE THE FIRST FOOTSTEPS AGAIN.

Snow is our timekeeper. Every hour in Antarctica reflects the snow. The endless daylight releases us from the habits of sleep and we trail into the dining room with yesterday's shadows at our heels. The Dash 7 and Twin Otter aircraft, defying the snow with bright orange paint, fly to the remoter parts of the continent at any time of day or night, distributing fuel, equipment, staff.

The reality of living hard by this element is one of insulation from its power. Sheltered, shockproofed, most people's experience in this glittering landscape becomes functional or else a kind of betrayal that asserts itself in adventure. We trudge across it in mukluk boots, balaclava, fleece, fictile, covering the communing organs of skin, hair, tongue, iris, so that we never truly touch the snow.

The term 'white space' in advertising refers to the broad, empty borders of a page or poster, the clear expanses that emphasise an individual's connection to an object they might desire (not need, for there is never cause to advertise a necessity) – it is a space into which the observer expands their vision and mind to bring themselves into the picture alongside that being sold: the white space of desire.

Antarctica is all whiteness. All white space. Its whiteness is so hostile that we cannot fully master it or succeed in translating it to our terms. We are here, nations stake their claims, yet people and societies cannot fully see a place for themselves or for their wants – not yet. Antarctica's endless snow and ice, for as long as they dominate, suggest both an imagination of ceaseless power and a nothingness, a void into which we cannot quite embed ourselves. We walk. Then another fall comes to bury our mark.

I spent time in Antarctica during International Polar Year, a global, concerted effort to gather as much information as possible from the continent and its environs. The first of these international scientific efforts took place in 1882–3, followed by another in the 1930s. But the complex of permanent scientific stations was not constructed on the continent until the International Geophysical Year of 1957–8. The two major objectives of the International Geophysical Year were explorations of space and of Antarctica. In 1947, the Russian military fired the first intercontinental rocket, technology which led to the more significant launch of the first satellite.

Shot into the atmosphere in 1957 at the peak of the Cold War, Sputnik 1 spooked the American government sufficiently for them to fund a continual vigil by military planes loaded with hydrogen bombs, weapons with a considerably greater destructive capacity than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. Sputnik 1 was the first man-made sound from space and anyone with a shortwave radio could eavesdrop on it. There is some evidence that President Eisenhower delayed the launch of an American satellite to allow for relations between the Soviet Union and the United States to settle down. Whatever the truth, Antarctica staged an important ideological accord when the United States invited the Soviet Union and the other countries participating in the International Geophysical Year to sign the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.

The treaty was a singular document, a diplomatic assertion of unity between nations that had only recently shaken free of war. The treaty prohibited military activity on the continent in perpetuity, including weapons testing, and instituted a series of agreements to safeguard the flora and fauna and the mineral resources of the region. The treaty was a charter of shared values and intentions from the century's terrible wars.

In Antarctica, rockets and satellites, and other inventions originating in the violent posturing of those years, were put to more humane use. Satellites enabled the growth of modern oceanography, phenomenally increasing our understanding of the Earth's climate and the expansion and retreat of the sea ice and the ice caps. In the 1960s, the Space Race and the lunar landing swivelled mankind's sights back towards the Earth, inspiring some of the environmental movements of the coming decades.

But snow is a cover-up, a natural spin doctor. It causes a kind of cataracting in all those that work amid it.

A few weeks before I left for Antarctica, I was given a tour of the British Antarctic Survey headquarters in Cambridge. After a cup of tea in the 'Icebreaker' cafeteria, I was taken to a chilly laboratory which stored cores of Antarctic ice. Inside these were bubbles of prehistoric air and traces of dust, captured in snowflakes that had fallen over thousands and millions of years. Research into ice cores began in the late 1940s with the work of Danish scientist Willi Dansgaard. In 1954, he proposed that through the frozen annals of ice scientists could establish climatic changes in the past. Engineers adapted technologies used in mining and oil exploration to the conditions of ice and snow, and one of the greatest means of understanding the ancient past became possible. Along with evaluating the composition of the bygone atmosphere, and estimating the global mean temperature from the oxygen isotope ratios, scientists could measure the presence of windborne dust in each layer of ice to distinguish phases of climatic cooling. I found it a provocative idea that the pristine polar ice cosseted past realities in this way.

In 1998, scientists detected pollutants blasted into the world in 1945 in ice cores drilled from the Agassiz ice cap in the Nunavut territory of the Canadian Arctic.

Towards the end of the war, one of the leading scientists working on the atomic bomb communicated to President Truman that they had succeeded in manufacturing 'a new explosive of almost unbelievable destructive power'. As a teenager, this single most horrifying innovation of the war years fascinated me. When I began researching extinction, I decided to go and listen to some testimonies of those who survived the atom bombs of 1945. One late summer day in 2007, not long before I left for Antarctica, I visited the archives at the British Library in London. Entering one of the small listening booths, I spent the day eavesdropping on the wretchedness of the past.

'The raindrops were big and black,' one woman said in a small, gritty voice. 'What I felt at this moment was that Hiroshima was entirely made up of just three colours – red, orange and brown. The fingertips of those dead bodies caught fire – and the fire gradually burned down. I was so shocked to realize that fingers and bodies could burn like that.'

American forces dropped the first atomic bomb on 6 August and the second on the city of Nagasaki a few days later. Many people died instantly but others inherited the damage from their exposure, from the poisoned atmosphere, through their mother's breast-milk or their father's genetic material; 100,000–150,000 people died by the end of the year. The sound that I heard on the archive recordings was like elastic sheeting being jerked in and out, the noise expanding and contracting in queer, rhythmic intervals. The invention that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki could obliterate life swiftly and even alter a person's cellular structure, the invisible qualities that made them human. On the tapes, one of the witnesses, Taeko Terumae, born on 19 July 1930, spoke about the days after she began to recover. 'I found a piece of mirror,' she said, 'I looked into it. I had scars just like a mountain range on a map, and my eye like a pomegranate. I almost wished I had died like my sisters. I was so surprised to look like a monster.'

The experiences of those who survived the first nuclear attack were of such incomprehensible proportions that they found it difficult to articulate what they had witnessed. One survivor, a photographer, said that the world became bright white as if he'd gone blind. He had his camera with him and, at first, he took a few pictures. But as he neared the centre of the city and saw the mounds of people dead and burned in the middle of their customary activities, his urge to document the reality was completely overwhelmed by his mind's refusal to accept or comprehend the horrors. 'I walked for two to three hours but I couldn't take a single photograph of the central area. Nobody took photos.' Few survivors effectively communicated their experiences of an event of such abnormal suddenness, but in ten thousand years, the polar ice will still speak of these mutant blasts, if melting hasn't hastened the world's amnesia.

Snow. White space. Blank space. It recalls the aspect of human nature that is most particular to us – our ability to return our minds to earlier experience and our knack for remembering the past, the better to re-imagine the future. But the pregnability of the snow, its gift for receiving the imprint of movement and intention, is also its downfall. When the great snows of the world melt, it will be a huge act of collective forgetting. The snows' records of our acts, our choices as individuals and societies, will soften and disperse, taken up by other elements that do not carry and preserve but endlessly wash over.

NON-FICTION

GLASTONBURY

HELEN ORPHIN WORKS AMONG THE GRIME AND QUEUES OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSIC FESTIVAL.

WE ARRIVED ON A DOUBLE-DECKER BUS FROM BRISTOL TEMPLE MEADS. OLD, CREAKY AND LACKING OPEN WINDOWS, THE BUS WAS PACKED TO BURSTING. IT WAS FILLED DOWNSTAIRS WITH LUGGAGE FOR FIFTY PEOPLE, WHILST UPSTAIRS ITS UNLUCKY OWNERS FANNED THEMSELVES AND BEMOANED THE ABSENCE OF THEIR WATER BOTTLES.

The windows intensified the sun so that many of the stewards were showing signs of heatstroke before we had even arrived at one of the hottest Glastonbury Festivals on record.

After the inevitable wait to unload the bus, we had to traipse, hot and already exhausted, to the campsite. We hunted around to find a good site for the tent: one that wasn't too far from the food van, water supply or Oxfam tent, but was as far upwind of the toilets as possible. It took longer than it should have done to put our tent up, since even the simplest tasks were complicated by our heat-induced irritability. Once it was done we collapsed, tangled amongst our bags.

Dora and I shared my tent the first year we went, struggling back up the hill together after an eight-hour shift or a night of partying to pass out. We were baked to a crisp by the sun and sharing a two-man tent without any shade often felt unbearable. It was a measure of our friendship that we weren't tearing each other's hair out by the end of the week.

Regardless of how many friends we met up with, Glastonbury was for us only, two best friends often mistaken for sisters. For Dora it was all about the music: she had unlimited time and an often overdrawn bank balance to spend on listening to bands. Her ambition was always to get into the music industry in any way, shape or form and her passion for music was contagious. She always had the best playlists and was once left heartbroken by her laptop's inability to share her love of vodka, which lost her several years of music collecting. For me it was more about the experience and the atmosphere. Unless I had a particular request we timed it to see the bands she loved and whose songs I knew off by heart anyway.

Stewarding could be monotonous, especially in the early hours of the morning when we were standing around doing nothing but pulling on more and more layers as the temperature dropped. At about three or four in the morning it was bitterly cold, especially when the tea van failed to arrive. It was typically only us and two security guards on the vehicle gate, so we soon came to appreciate the value of their quirky sense of humour in making our shifts entertaining.

Our first year we loitered around the South-East of the festival: Arcadia, The Unfairground, The Common, Block 9 and Shangri-La. Just prior to sunrise, festivalgoers stumbled out of the South-East Corner and headed to the Stone Circle. There we watched the sun come over the horizon, to the accompaniment of 'Hey Jude' and cheers echoing around the field. After the revellers left to get breakfast, the debris left behind included balloons and canisters, the butts of cigarettes and joints, plastic bottles with the remnants of alcohol and anyone who used all the above in copious quantities and passed out. Predictably, many of those later woke up with amusingly shaped sunburns.

Shangri-La is the strangest and most beautiful part of the festival. From the moment we came across it, unfinished, it captured our hearts. Dora's photo album is entitled 'Shangri-La Regional Kidney and Liver Hire', a call which echoed hauntingly around the alleyways, broadcast through tinny speakers. A club called the Snake Pit bore the legend 'No tattoo, no entry', whilst the skywalk was covered with a banner reading simply 'We wanted to be the sky'. It is a provocative, dystopian pleasure dome where anything is possible; where Fish and Tits is a bar with pole-dancing mermaids and a backroom straight out of the set of *Avatar*.

There's a place in The Unfairground that we found in our first year, the Reverend Sharky's Church of the Holyroller, but we knew it simply as the Church. Like everything in the South-East Corner, it had an otherworldly look, framed by brightly coloured racing cars and a replica of a bomb. It was the place we went after we'd temporarily exhausted the rest of the festival; we turned up at about three or four in the morning to an already packed dance floor. Inside, an enthusiastic crowd waited for the beat to drop, shouting ever louder in anticipation. In the second it dropped we were already close to the front of the crowd, dancing as best as possible with the mud encasing our boots, then the club filled with smoke. It was almost impossible to see, shifting and squinting to grin at Dora beside me when the strobes cut in: instant white blindness. I reached out to grab her hand and then lost myself completely to the music. It was liberating, unable to see or be seen; we forgot how we appeared to others. When our vision came back we glanced, sheepishly, at each other then carried on. Much later, we stumbled out into the precursors of dawn and found a wooden beam to sit on, panting and sweating but exhilarated. The only dancer left was a young woman, writhing to the music, contorting her body until it touched the floor.

NON-FICTION

THE LOST NETWORK

DAVID LAWRENCE CROSSES NIGHT-TIME LONDON VIA NEW ROUTES WITH THE AID OF A LITTLE-KNOWN BLUEPRINT

TO WALK IN THE AIR HAS BEEN A DREAM OF MAN SINCE HE ELEVATED HIS GODS TO THE SKIES.

FROM A FRIEND I HEARD ABOUT A SYSTEM OF LOST ELEVATED WALKWAYS ACROSS THE CITY OF LONDON, A CRUMBLING SKELETON OF DEVELOPMENT FROM THE 1960S.

Now and then I caught intriguing glimpses of the walkways from a double-decker bus or over a construction hoarding, but I wanted to discover this network in detail for myself.

I knew that the utopian architects of the early twentieth century believed that taking pedestrians up above the cars and their oily thoroughfares was to be healthy and modern. In the mid-1950s urban planners had surveyed the bombed London quarter between Finsbury in the north and the River Thames in the south, and from Petticoat Lane in the east to Farringdon in the west. They conjured a dream of creating a thirty-mile pedestrian circulation system over the buddleia-spotted barrows of a devastated quarter. There would be highways below, and footbridges above, with shops, gardens, cafes and office blocks. Then workers keyed into convenience and efficiency could go from tube station to high-rise desk, desk to dining room, and desk to theatre uninterrupted. These routes would take advantage of ancient ruins revealed by the bombing, so that while they added a layer above, they also revealed old city strata below.

A longing for empty space in the crowded capital kept the network in my mind but out of reach until serendipity intervened – I started these walks just before my daughter was born. Faced with the impending austerity of sleepless nights, the waiting period brought a windfall of nocturnal credit. I chose to spend it traversing the lost City of London network, from city market to river's edge and from mediaeval Tower to the margins of the West End.

There were good reasons for exploring this tangible combination of *The Fountainhead* and *Metropolis*. First, there was the journey itself. The project was to have inspired an urban citizenry as they moved around at high level. I wanted to be in the footsteps of this departed cohort of white-collar workers, to see what they saw and what they left behind. The simple fact of the walkway network's partial construction and disappearance in three decades was fascinating for its audacity and waste. With rapid clearance of several monumental structures which had harboured the walkways in the old banking district, it was imperative to me that a record be made of these spaces threaded wormlike through the three-dimensional grid of buildings.

Time in the archives equipped me with a stash of drawings showing alternative routes in red and blue. Piecing these A4 fragments of a master plan together, there grew a chart of traces and deletions, somewhere between the present and the irretrievable past. The ways and nodes of the walk conveyed historic activities concentrated into tight pockets, once places now passages: *Fur Trade*, *Sugar*, *Post Office*, *Fish*, *Wine Office*, *Goat*, *Mermaid*, *White Lion*, *Love*.

I took my trips most nights of an eight-week period, going from soot-crusted inner suburbs to the heart of the central zone, high ground to waterline. Joining the network always meant ascending an escalator or stairs, or stepping between two buildings into half-forgotten paths, melancholy chasms, moribund courts and secret gardens. The static emptiness resonated with a sense of holding and waiting, encompassing hope, desire, possibility, novelty. And there was a deliciously edgy feeling knowing that the last bus home had gone, that the convenient route home was being let go as I turned towards the dark with the cool joy of abandonment. Without tourists, without commuters, unseen, it felt like my network.

That's the history, so let's pause, and prepare for a walk. Music first. I'll think of filmic compositions, *Kraftwerk* or Barry Adamson or *Air*; sometimes the music transforms into remembered segments of dance-floor fugues, pulsing and flowing in company with my steps. Picturing music videos or underground clubs, my imagination washes the subdued palette of city night with shimmering harmonies of colour. With camera, notebook, snacks, I'm ready.

Walking now. Shuttered concrete shifts to bronze and glass, terracotta abuts Portland stone. The ground changes character too; velvet asphalt and textured brick and flow-anywhere cement. Without money to realise all its plans, the city administration had to manoeuvre the network through the obscure geometries of speculative building. This brought a clash of territories, so that here monumental concrete balcony overhangs a fragile Georgian churchyard, and there a cluster of generic blocks is penetrated by a Lilliputian underpass. Floors wrap up into walls, and walls to ceilings. Painted railings give way to stainless steel, so I can tell where I am in the city by the ring of my knuckles on the different metals. When the metal runs out, the lighter, rain-washed planes of concrete and the gilded church weathervanes allow a semi-marine navigation through town guided by the prevailing breeze.

To negotiate the route I pass under copses of scaffolding, from which emerge bright white blocks piercing the night. Lumens are compressed into a dense changing sequence: sodium orange turns to blackness, then office fluorescent white, blue LED and orange again, with the occasional distant ellipsis of a phasing traffic signal. Security cameras suck the light out from wetted stairwells; city cloister becomes *Clockwork Orange*. I glide over an empty six-lane highway. Perfunctory drag strip pointed at an occidental exit to the suburbs, it worked as an armature for the network, bridged several times to stitch back together the territory

it divided. Along the strip, a mini Manhattan, near identical blocks are in a perfect alignment of degrees, exactly as their model counterparts were placed on to a cardboard diorama of the nascent project. Each slab tower has its facade subdivided differently, so that a telescoped view along the road reveals a superhuman palimpsest of tabulation charts in metal and glass.

Left or right? Right. Angling around a lightless pub, its laughter gone in the slipstream of shifting tastes, I encounter two chairs, ghosts of conversation over a shared cigarette. There is the semblance of a lost hamlet here, a bank clad in green marble desiccated by the sun, empty boutiques and a tailor marooned between no-places. I have a movie of this in '68 with skinny men in nylon suits watching short-skirted girls, all taking their lunch break from processing insurance policies or petroleum marketing strategies. Their workplaces rose in multiple stories cast up aspirationally by anonymous speculators borrowing, building, selling and leasing back space in the sky. My network grew around the ankles of these blocks, and broke up as they were razed three decades later. One night, I wandered beyond the blinded shops, drawn by the smell of damp earth. A tiny break in the railings gave on to a stair flying down apparently towards a service road. Down behind dense scorched brickwork, I discovered a parterre of vines and rhododendrons. A suntrap by day, at night the pergola and box-hedge avenues were silent watchers over the walled precinct.

Switch to north. It's quieter away from the road, taking a serpentine passage through the 70s' version of a barbican, all in purple brick. This is the location from which the main network grid is derived, aligned on to two millennia of fortifications angled precisely eighteen degrees east of north, twenty degrees south of east. And over there, down narrow steps, is a tiny nameless triangle of grass with three modest trees huddled against a guild hall. Sit here for a moment, to inhale the fragrance from sweet topiary; pause longer and the night settles around you like a million motes of solitude until even the electricity seems to sleep. Beyond the garden, itself poised incongruously over service roads, truncated walkway links hint at the arts complex city within a city, whose fountains and car parks make their presence known aurally deep into the shadows. This is an inhabitation with a periphery and no centre. Its occupants, the first inward population here for one hundred years, look down on their plateau. They are sleeping now, so the formal lake, the tiers of balconies and the flecks of light across acres of fenestration are all mine. I meander westwards over ground carpeted with masonry, thinking about how the pool beside me follows the subterranean railway lines. With the hanging gardens nearby, paradise rises over technology.

Now I find a bridge, traverse once more, and wind down around an older building immovable to the planners. The steps kink and drift until they meet another patch of green in the nave of a ruined church. Shrubs edge the way here as it appropriates a short, verdant ambulatory a few steps above ground. Regaining the street, there is a quick transit before I can ascend again.

Eastwards in breaks and runs I gain ground on a silver monument to banking, opened just as its design was made redundant by microcomputers. Circuiting the tower is the only nexus on the system, a pedestrian roundabout and centrifuge for points south, east and west. South, passing the dim chrome figures of a stilled gym, and I'm looking over Italianate statuary and water. The chandeliers of the private club for which this was the back lawn, are tiny artificial suns to the close-cropped grass. Perfume of roses dissolves the courtyard edges. To the west is another point block, built with the glossy brochure promise of a retail centre for the servants of its automated enterprise. No one considered the meteorological discomforts of this windblown corner, and the shops never came.

Once I might have tripped across to another polished stone complex here. The high-level link now removed, I go by street until the line is regained, precipitously skirting facades designed to trap the noonday sun. With every yard travelled, it is evident that each building contemplates the next, but never quite touches it, as intimate and separate as the dreams of a sleeping couple. Each turn in the way is a waiting shelter for lovers, their ephemeral transactions leaving a flotsam of amour underfoot. Dodging south takes me to a dead-end river plaza, and the prospect of waters in sight of a nineteenth-century mariner's departure to the *Heart of Darkness*.

Retracing, re-crossing, I move west again. While this network has no destination and no purpose, it vibrates with the sensation of ancient tracks made by lost men and carrying lost meanings: not mysteries of arcane ritual but of obscure pre-computer bureaux and typing pools. Here, with a mythic channel just under me, the main roads of England once sprang from a single unnamed point, towards borders, cathedrals and coasts. I sense the massing pilgrims and their caravans, and the cattle drovers chaperoning their beasts towards sale and slaughter in the market basements over at the city's far edge. In living memory, the whole area was burst open by armaments to reveal broken mechanisms of urban transportation submerged in the clay. Excavations in the ground below reveal skeletons, jewels and other prizes for the museum. Will my network, far shorter-lived than the cultures of making and trading, be afforded a vitrine somewhere too? What artefact or sign will speak to the future of these fading vectors?

As I go ever further west, the itinerary has breached one lost bourne and now edges near a second buried tributary. Across a protracted shallow valley the descent extends to a built-up terrace and a spiral ramp beside a structure as much bridge as building. Crossing the road as it briefly emerges between tunnels, I notice the flavour of the breeze changed with proximity to the main channel. Accompanied by cormorants' cries and the soporific washing of an ebb tide, my walk ends on the shingle of an ancient dock. Archaeology and the future face each other amongst the riparian detritus, the animal bones and oyster shells of meals taken over ten centuries, turned over by the river under the broken tail of the network.

The developers are back in the city now, nibbling architecture into dusty ground plans. Looking for remnants of the network, online satellite views briefly maintain sunny vistas of now-deleted tracts. Real segments of route remain frozen in buildings until the leases expire, concrete fossils of idealistic urban journeys like the trajectories of long-dead stars.

POEM

WINTER ON ROUGH TOR

BY ALYSON HALLETT
(FOR MHAIRI AND LITTLEBIGNOSE2)

Thousands of stones, iced on their shadow-sides,
half-grey half-white, each one its own world,

hard water refracting light. The ice further down,
in the stream, is different, it curves over stones,

makes air-moons in its belly, takes colour from
black-water below. Sky re-cast with lapis lazuli.

In a private field a ruined house, roofless, almost
wall-less, two beech trees horizontalled by wind,

branches barnacled with moss, lichen as long as hair,
so pale it's hardly green. Ghosts are here, we think,

the hair catches their words, cards their anti-breath
into the breeze. Leave the house, leave ice-whitened

stones, leave land blasted by wintering sun. The next
morning a miscarried baby comes to mind. It echoes

the brief bloom of air in ice, lichen hair, and like
all lost things it is remarkable, fractional,

in search of its own small, vast, allotment of grief.

"IF YOU LISTEN TO THEM AND INTERACT WITH THEM, THE SPIRITS WILL TELL YOU THEIR STORIES."

HELEN ORPHIN MEETS ONE OF THE UK'S LEADING PARANORMALISTS TO DISCUSS GHOSTS, DUST-SPOTS AND THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF LONG NIGHTS SPENT IN THE CELLS OF A VICTORIAN PRISON.

It was a rainy night in late April when I made the drive to Bodmin Jail to meet with Mark Rablin, the jail's resident paranormalist. Filled with preconceptions from dodgy ghost films and a healthy dose of fear, I was ready to learn more about his world. The room was small and dingy, with whitewashed walls and plastic chairs laid out in rows. Our voices echoed around the room and we had to take a break midway through for the clattering in the hallway to die down. I wasn't entirely sure if the goosebumps I was feeling were down to the bone-chilling cold or whether it was a ghostly presence making itself known. Rablin, however, was relaxed; clearly accustomed to the cold and odd noises after almost six years at the jail. Refreshingly open-minded and eminently believable, it was easy to see why his ghost walks at Bodmin Jail are so popular. He sat back, hands folded in his lap, as we discussed the impact the paranormal has had on him and it soon became clear that the paranormal, for Rablin at least, is a way of life as much as a profession.

Let's start with the most obvious question, what is the paranormal? What does it mean to you?

My perspective is a world of energy: everything that I perceive in this world is energy resonating at a different frequency. Einstein said that energy cannot be destroyed, it will change form due to the frequency that it resonates at. Therefore these people that we have here, the spirits that passed over, their energy is absorbed back into the environment where they were. Basically, we're not dealing with anything nasty out there at all, we're dealing with the energetic imprint of a person from a moment in time and that's pretty much the way I work with things. That seems to work quite nicely; the guys in particular will come out and spend more time with you when you start talking about them as normal people.

So have you always been able to see spirits then?

I ended up driving an articulated lorry up and down the motorways doing night trucking, where I had a few experiences. One in particular was on the M4 at 4.00 a.m. I stuck all the brakes on because I thought I was going to hit a Mercedes in the middle of the motorway. The guy had the car jacked up and he was changing the nearside wheel. It was a white Mercedes 190. I just sailed straight through, there was nothing there, but I still see him clear as a bell even now when I think of him. The only thing I can't see is the registration number because the boot was up, but I see the warning triangle and matey sitting there looking at me as he's changing the wheel. That was an interesting experience and I thought, 'Somebody's obviously had a moment there in the past.'

Was that when you decided to become a paranormalist?

When I was forty there was a charity night here at the jail for Children in Need; I thought, 'Well, that sounds exciting, I'll come and have a look.' So I came for this charity night where I had a fantastic evening. I got pushed off the wall, had a misty manifestation go past me and a stone thrown at me. I thought, 'This is good,' so I went off and trained with the company that was here and eventually I took over. I've been here for nearly six years now hosting events.

Obviously those were very memorable events, what about since then? Are there any cases that stand out?

A good case is the one up in Essex where the gentleman's mother was roaming around the house at night after she'd passed over. The mother didn't like the gentleman's wife at all: she didn't keep the house tidy enough, she didn't cook for her son, she didn't do all the things that this woman did for her son. The mother was roaming around the house rattling pots and pans, she was classic poltergeist activity, but poltergeist is just German for a noisy ghost and that's what she was being. She was being very noisy because she didn't like this woman in the slightest.

"I GOT PUSHED OFF THE WALL, HAD A MISTY MANIFESTATION GO PAST ME AND A STONE THROWN AT ME."

You mentioned poltergeists – are there different kinds of paranormal activity then?

We have the classic ghosts, which are an imprint or recording. Scientists now call it the stone tape theory; the energy of the person gets recorded at a moment in time in the fabric of the building. If you come along and you're resonating at the same frequency as them you'll trigger it and turn it on like a video recorder. They walk out of the wall, down the corridor and disappear. They're just a

recording; they do the same thing over and over. The other ones we've got are the spiritual entities: they're the ones that are connected with people and they will interact with you. The kids will tug on your trousers and they'll throw stones.

What about evil spirits and that sort of thing?

In mythology you've got the demon, but though that conjures up all kinds of images, they're not particularly nasty in any way. The non-human entity then is a collection of energy in a certain location and it works as a repeater of people's emotions, so if you're quite bored, fed up or negative it will take that on board and throw it back at you. You become more bored, more fed up or negative until you start to get to the aggression stage. If you're one of these giggly nervous types it will take that and throw it back; the giggles turn into hysterical laughter, which turns into gasping for air, which turns into passing out. So once you know how these spirits work, you can work with the environment surrounding them.

"YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT THE PRISON SYSTEM WAS LIKE, THEN YOU START TO INTERACT WITH SPIRITS AND THEY GIVE YOU PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF WHAT THEY'VE EXPERIENCED."

So what about things like orbs and cold spots?

There's defining shapes for orbs. Basically, if it's spiritual then generally it's fragmented on the inside. It will have a pattern or sometimes it will have a face, a number or a letter, and their trajectory is different: they do straight lines and ninety-degree turns. If it's really icy cold, it's that classic 'somebody's just jumped on your grave' sensation that you hear about, all the hairs go up on the back of your neck. It means a spirit's just gone whizzing past you and brushed off your energy field. If you've gone really hot then generally one of your ancestors has just stepped into your energy field and is giving you a hug and protecting you.

Are there times when it's more likely for people to have a paranormal experience?

Not particularly. There's a heightened sense of awareness around October, especially with All Souls' Night and stuff like that. Basically, activity happens here during the day as much as it does at night, it's just that during the day you don't perceive it. I often hear tourists saying to their kids, 'No, don't be silly, they don't come out till night-time,' and I'm thinking, 'No, they're here all the time but you won't connect with it in the daylight because your eyes are grabbing the light and you're looking at the walls.' We've had a full manifestation up on the third floor; she manifests to very stressed-out women with children. Generally when it's been chucking it down with rain and they've been sitting on the motorway for four hours or so they'll come in here and she will appear to them as a fully formed Victorian lady.

How much do you know about the history of the jail?

I'm still exploring the jail, so I'm digging my way underneath the floor at the moment. I found a tunnel last Christmas and I've got no idea where it goes. We haven't got a lot of the plans for this place and the government won't release them because this was the prototype for the ones that followed. I've got a whole bit of the jail that's missing according to my reckoning. From this wall here all the way to the front door below us isn't replicated in the basement, so there are big bits of this jail which are yet to be found. This jail was operational from 1779 to 1929 and there's just so much we have yet to know.

Given the close ties between the paranormal and history, have the spirits been able to give you any information about their time here?

You think you know what the prison system was like, then you start to interact with spirits and they give you physical symptoms of what they've experienced. They give you a new perspective of the whole history of it, especially things like the way they used to treat the prisoners who were mentally ill. You'll get imprints of various things going on and if you listen to them and interact with them, the spirits will tell you their stories. We've also got children here: most of them were unfortunately victims of various diseases that came from the jail. In the old days of this jail the women would have the children with them, it wasn't the best environment for them and a lot of them didn't make it. Their energy is still occurring here and we play games with them and look after them, we have a great time really.

Speaking of children, how do the hours you work fit in around your commitments to family and friends?

Family-wise, they tend to have adapted over time. I'll be here on commercial nights from 10.00 p.m. until 7.00 a.m.; by the time breakfast has finished it's about eight, I tidy up and I'm at home in bed by nine. On Sundays I sleep most of the day then I get up, generally pretty grumpy, at about 4.00 p.m., potter around the house for a few hours and then go back to sleep. There is no pattern to it, it's waking or sleeping, you basically just adapt to it. In the case of today, I was here in the jail at 9.00 a.m. this morning and then we had a tour through the jail. I went home at 12.00, had two hours of kip and I was back here earlier to set things up. Friends, I don't tend to have a lot of, apart from the ones that are in my profession, because it just doesn't work. That's the way it goes, unfortunately, especially in this part of the world.

What do your family think of your job?

Oh, they think it's fantastic. It's nice that when I first started out my mum and dad were still with us and they were really quite supportive, so I thought, 'Okay, fine, I'll stick with it.' They all find it really interesting, some of them can't really understand it but then that's not a problem. We get round it; they all think I'm going to sort of conjure stuff up for them.

Your work is obviously fairly time-consuming but what do you do when you have some free time?

I tend to sort of live the life of the paranormal. I like to study as well: you never stop learning in this world so I study everything I can book-wise – the latest concepts, rules and regulations, everything really. Looking into some kind of legislation for the paranormal world would be good. I think we definitely need it. Now that there are so many paranormal groups turning up there's got to be some kind of rules. It's my entire world so even when I go on holiday I'll find the nearest chateau or castle and I'll be rooting around inside that. Normandy is a big draw for me. I've been down there two years now, especially to the invasion beaches: twenty thousand men in one day is a lot of trauma and a lot of energy.

POEM

A HAUNTING

ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY

BY VICTORIA FIELD

The high bracken is full of spirits – its prehistoric
scent takes me home to childhood in Kent,
blackberrying, beating back the sap-filled stems

to reach brambles no one else can be bothered with,
fearing, and longing to see, the deft flick of an adder.
The spirits of that village are here now,

clear as day in the island light that's half sky,
half water – Nanny, old Nunc, Mrs Noakes
and Mr Palmer, Mr and Mrs Monk, those girls –

Michelle and Maureen – none living now –
(not as the mainland understands living), but present
in these dense acres of green where I'm lost,

surrounded by sea, not knowing
where I'm going – nor quite where I've been.

(First published in Quadrant (Australia),
June 2010, www.quadrant.org.au)

ESSAY

VISITATIONS FROM PSYCHE

THE NATIONAL TRUST'S MATTHEW OATES CONSIDERS THE SPIRIT OF THE BUTTERFLY

IN ANCIENT GREECE THE SOUL WAS OFTEN IMAGINED AS A BUTTERFLY: THE TWO APPARENTLY DIVERSE CONCEPTS EVEN SHARED THE SAME WORD, PSYCHE (ΨΥΧΗ). THIS POWERFUL COMBINATION LIES AT THE BASE OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY.

In between times, during the late classical mythology period, Psyche was personified as the goddess of the soul, beloved by Eros (Cupid). She is often depicted as winged. So what do butterflies symbolise to us, as lovers of Nature[1], and within our culture generally? Answers seem surprisingly diverse and complex, and may beg the question of what actually flies within us.

People have, of course, long been fascinated by the wondrous transformation that is metamorphosis. The concept may speak volumes about human existence. (Perhaps we are merely caterpillars, for we periodically change skin; in which case death must be the pupal period; and then . . . No! That way madness lies.) To modern science, metamorphosis is rather old hat, but it is worth noting that a significant number of the world's leading conservation biologists study butterflies, and not merely because long-term studies of these weather-sensitive creatures can tell us much about climate change.

Away from science, butterflies are strong symbols of freedom, the freedom of the soul and of Nature's freedom, and they offer a strong link with happiness. Van Gogh's *Prisoners Exercising* shows a group of grey-clad prisoners, one of whom is Vincent himself, walking the line in a tiny prison yard; above them spiral two white butterflies, symbolising freedom and the soul, joy and beauty.

On another level, butterflies are quintessential elements of sunlit spring and summer days in gardens and countryside. They are spirits of the warmer months, providing a vital dimension that would be missed, at least subconsciously, if absent. In Britain, our scarcer butterflies, which are restricted to specific habitats, go a stage further: they take us deep into the heartlands of our most wondrous landscapes, when those places are at the zenith of their annual cycle of natural beauty.

Then there is the poetic approach, which sees butterflies as 'the souls of summer hours' (John Masefield, *King Cole*), 'winged flowers' (Robert Frost, 'Tuft of Flowers') and, best of all, as 'the first of insects to have earth / And sun together, and to know their worth' (Edward Thomas, 'The Brook'). Poor Keats was not on this earth long enough to write an ode to a butterfly, but his ode to 'winged Psyche' offers: 'Yes, I will be thy priest and build a fane [temple] / In some untrodden region of my mind.'

WE ARE A SUPERSTITIOUS LOT

In several European cultures there are sayings to the effect that if your first butterfly of the summer is golden, you will experience a happy summer; if it is white, you will have an average summertime – and heaven help you if it is any other colour! The odds for us in Britain are a trifle worrying, with everything depending on the Brimstone, the original *butter-coloured fly*. You are in trouble if your first butterfly of the year is a faded Peacock or Red Admiral – and it often is. It appears, then, that visitations by butterflies may have meaning.

Recently, the National Trust ran a competition among its supporters to find out what butterflies meant to them. Although not all 4 million of its members responded, a surprisingly large number of them did. The replies revealed a veritable Pandora's box (see 'Summer Souls' in *National Trust Magazine*, Summer 2011, pp. 48–51). Many contributors stated that their interest in these creatures was instigated by a remarkable encounter with an individual butterfly, often in childhood, sometimes as a genuine moment of epiphany. A third of respondents mentioned that they had formed strong emotional attachments towards individual butterfly species, viewing these as their own personal 'butterfly spirits' – perhaps even as their daemon, to use Philip Pullman's metaphor for the personified soul (*His Dark Materials* trilogy). Common and rare species featured equally in this sample.

The most remarkable of these incidental social-science findings is that people have profound experiences involving butterflies, often at times of bereavement. Several contributors wrote in to say how visitations by butterflies had helped them come to terms with loss of a loved one. They are not alone. My own diary for 13 April 2005 includes: 'a Holly Blue flew above Mother's coffin as it was being lifted from the hearse, then a male Brimstone joined in and the two accompanied her through the lychgate.' I was left pondering whether my mother and long-deceased father had in some way been reunited. One National Trust member went even further, writing: 'Butterflies have almost seemed to guard me, helping me through life.' Perhaps Psyche is no legend – or, as Christian thinking holds, the Holy Spirit does indeed move in mysterious ways.

THE WONDER OF THE MORNING

One morning at the end of the sublime June of 2009, I blundered into a new dimension. I had been probing its boundaries for some time, unwittingly; then, without warning, suddenly crossed over, for the colours and intensities were right, a hidden Turtle Dove was calling. The passion had deemed itself ripe.

It was my favourite forest that did it, for forests are steeped in deep magic from beyond the dawn of time. A heady mix of honeysuckle and dog rose scent breathed through living air, the forest rides danced in a mosaic of dappled light, within a stirring breeze, and a miasma of insect life pulsated under, amongst and within the myriad oaks. Sudden in a shaft of sunlight, even as the day's dust began to move, there before my waking eyes was a pristine specimen of the impossibly rare all-purple version of the Purple Emperor butterfly, aberration Iole no less. Once in a purple moon – which is considerably rarer

[1] Please join the campaign to restore Nature to the upper case...

than a blue moon – this most elusive and mystical of our butterflies discards its standard white markings and emerges clothed entirely in purple iridescence, a veritable Emperor in *purpuratum*. That experience fulfilled a personal dream of over forty years' gestation, one of those dreams that means all and everything to the dreamer without offering any hope of comprehension, and which naturally lacks meaning to anyone else. These dreams are of the uttermost importance, being the passion of the individual soul.

Such moments in our lives reveal the true inadequacies of prose, and guide us into poetics, the language of the soul, and of Psyche herself:

To Psyche, in her persona as a butterfly

Scatter me, these living ashes, here,
Within this forest, my cathedral,
For all I truly sought from life
Was Nature's glory, personified
Within the sanctus of a dream
That dreamt itself, and danced
A life along some woodland path,
Before becoming, sudden, real,
Within the calling of a summer day.
Spirit, on iridescent wings, in light
Descending, holding the words of life,
That all true dreams may be fulfilled.

(όλη)

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