

Five Dials



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Five Dials is brought to you with the help of DEBBIE HATFIELD, ANNA KELLY, NICK LOWNDES, JULIETTE MITCHELL, and SIMON PROSSER.

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UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICK DEWAR

Introducing *Five Dials*

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD of a place in London called Seven Dials. It's a junction located near Covent Garden where seven streets converge around a weathered sundial. The spot lends its name to an Agatha Christie mystery and, unsurprisingly, crops up in the writings of Dickens. These days you might meet there if you were going to see the musical *Chicago* at the Cambridge Theatre, which is located at one of the corners of the dial. It was once a dangerous, fascinating bit of London but now, unless you've misplaced your ticket to *Chicago* at 7:29pm and your date is staring at you with a look of disbelief and low-level annoyance, it's not a particularly dangerous or interesting spot. This is why our magazine is not named *Seven Dials*.

You probably have never heard of a place called Five Dials because, frankly, it's been wiped from the map of London. It never got to grow up and become respectable. It never got to house an award-winning musical. Five Dials was a den of iniquity, a haven for criminals, a slummy, ragged bit of the city cleaved away to make room for a broadening of Charing

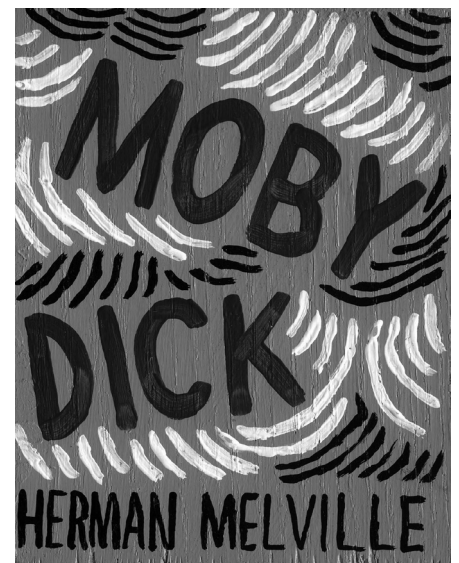
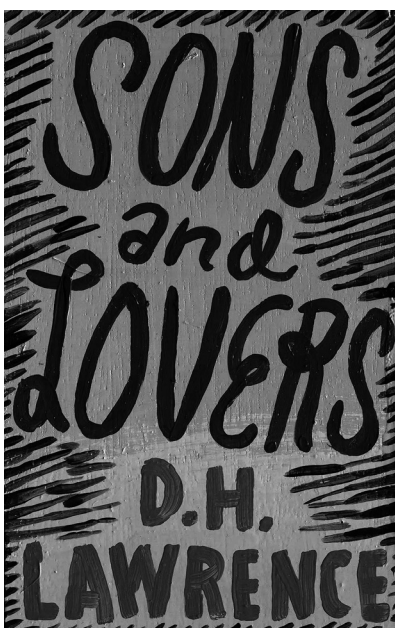
Cross Road. Even those who have studied the work of the philanthropists of the area have a hard time placing its exact locale. It was full of pickpockets. One street had 'the poorest, the dirtiest, and the lowest houses that this part of London can boast of.' There was gambling, cards, loose talk, and, best of all, the Dials was very close to where we sit now on the Strand. This is why we chose the name *Five Dials*.

The magazine doesn't have a real staff. We don't have a platoon of photographers; we don't have stationery. We do, however, have a large board we tack story ideas and illustrations to. *Five Dials* is the product of a few editors and writers who would like to push a small enterprise into the inboxes of anyone interested in good writing. It comes from Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin books, and though HH publishes writers like Dave Eggers, Zadie Smith, John Updike and Jonathan Safran Foer, the magazine will not only feature the work of HH-ers, nor will it feature only Penguins, nor will it feature only published writers. The magazine will come out monthly. It will be distributed as a free PDF and if

you're interested in reading it on the bus or during the intermission of the musical *Chicago* or anywhere else, you can print it up on any printer. If you're determined to make it into an object that resembles a real magazine, try putting a couple of staples along the spine. If you believe we do indeed live in a paperless society, or your emails end with an exhortation to 'THINK before you PRINT!', well, you can read it on the screen of your computer. Intentionally easy on the eyes, *Five Dials* has been put together by a text guru who likes the look of old books and contemplates good design in the wilds of rural France. There are no bells or whistles or hypertext or cyber-denouements or flash-animated advertizements for poker websites hidden inside. The most challenging sights readers will have to deal with are the illustrations, which are drawn from the best artists working in black and white.

We're hoping *Five Dials* will be a repository for the new, a chance to focus on ideas that might not work elsewhere, a place to witness writers testing new muscles, producing essays, extracts and unexplainables. It's easy to subscribe to *Five Dials* at hamishhamilton.co.uk and it's just as easy to unsubscribe if you're getting too sidetracked or if you're caught printing up hundreds of copies at work. Thank you for reading.

— CRAIG TAYLOR



Volumes mentioned in this issue

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEANNE SHAPTON

How Do You Expect Me To Read This?

DEAR EDITORS,
When this strange new magazine arrived in my inbox I couldn't help but notice you expected me to print it up myself and, if that was not asking too much, you mentioned I could use my own paper, as if either of those options were feasible in my village of Shepswick Crampton. I assume – in fact I always assume – these literary journals coming out of London only concern themselves with the affairs of young urbanites and the only time they make mention of the natural world is in lifestyle articles on which Ficus tree compliments a loftspace. Ha! Now I must add another grievance to my list. You assume all your readers have printers at the ready and, as you mentioned in the preceding editor's letter, a stapler as well. This is utterly ridiculous, another example of metropolitan snobbery and yet another reason why, from time to time, we country people must drive to London and march the streets, if only to say 'Yes, there is something out there beyond the M25. It's not just a forest of Ficus trees.' If any of you there at *Five Dials* had taken the time to visit Shepswick Crampton you would know that our sole printer is located in the IT hut down by Smalley's Creek. It's a thatched building and has suffered greatly from water damage these past years. Mr Smalley has been our IT expert ever since he brought the first Corona electric typewriter here decades ago. These days he's not a well man and on the colder rainy mornings you can see his shape, bent against the rain, as he takes

his shovel down to the water and hacks the sludge away, bringing up mud and mucky branches and old Tesco bags that keep the water from the upper pond from running freely. His wife could often be seen out there in the water, with a shovel of her own, scooping away, until the illness took her and he buried her out near the IT hut, just behind the shed where he keeps the extension cords and other cables. Bluebells grow there in the spring.

Once the water is flowing the waterwheel begins its mighty rotation. Mr Smalley pushes the scatter of chickens away from the door and wrings out his wet socks. With the help of his pulley system, he attempts to bring life to the IT hut for another day. Catch him on a bright morning when the water is flowing of its own accord and old Smalley will sit a while, silent and still, before commenting on what IT in the country-

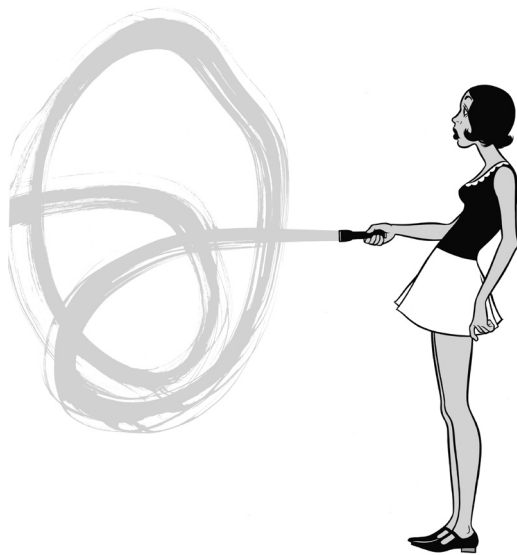
side used to be like, and his stories often evoke a time when a village didn't solely depend on a single hunched man desperate for retirement of one sort or the other, but had at its ready a collection of youthful men. I bring Smalley eggs some

mornings – we all try to look after him since his wife went – and once he told me of the loads those men would carry on their backs up the hill, stacks of paper, 300 gauge, so that the Corona's light would never flash that burnished red. The printer he has now is an old machine. Part of it was a Canon years ago but old Smalley tinkered with it and bashed it and finally added a lovely old wrought-

iron paper tray bunged into shape by the blacksmith who lives over towards Hesh. These days it's half a day's work to print and although Smalley says to everyone in Shepswick Crampton – says this to them after the church service – that all are welcome at the IT hut, that no printing job is too small, well, there's an unspoken rule in the village that no one should press Smalley towards his deathbed; no one should ask him to make the waterwheel turn and force him to muck down the greasy pistons that spark it to life, at least not just to print up an email that could be read onscreen. You'll read in countless newspaper articles that there is no longer a bond between those who live in villages but I disagree. We know that in order to print something in Shepswick Crampton it must be important and thus these printings turn into important events. Someone served Champion Grot at the last printing, which consisted of an annual report for Scottish and Southern Energy for the Greens at Old Red House, a set of recipes from allrecipes.com and a travel voucher for a relatively cheap Eurostar ticket to Lille. I'd gladly add *Five Dials* to one of our printing festivals but sirs, the request we must staple this magazine ourselves is a step too far. Of course there is a long-arm stapler in this village – we are not citizens of the Dark Ages – but the stapler was a labour of love Ethel Smalley crafted for her husband. Like the scrimshaws whalers made for their shore-stuck loves, Ethel carved scenes into the metal during her rare hours off and that stapler, our stapler, rests above the fireplace in Smalley's cottage. I could ask him to reach it and I'm sure he'd smile in an understanding way, bend his small figure out of the chair, take the teapot from the stool near the fire and somehow lift the stapler down. I'm sure he'd stand there quietly with his fingers hooked into his braces while I stapled the pages. He'd buff down the metal when I was finished to ensure those simple etchings of trees and robins weren't besmirched by my hands. This all is fine. But I ask you, London editors, is this what you honestly expect from your readership?

Yours truly,

Sybille Hemmings
Shepswick Crampton



Syria Calling

Robin Yassin-Kassab re-experiences the complexities of an ancient land

I'VE JUST GIVEN UP smoking, again, after a relapse in Syria. I mean, what can an ex-smoker do, returning to Sham? In Oman, where I live, very few people smoke. Abu Dhabi airport, where I spent an hour in transit, is of course smoke-free. But in Damascus airport the passport officials were smoking, and the police, and the baggage handlers, and the passengers. So it continued in the taxi, and in the house, and almost everywhere else. I'm not complaining.

I spent a too brief ten days re-experiencing Syria and Syrians: their pale eyes under dark brows and tall foreheads, the distinctive mixture of harsh and gentle in the people and in their environment. It looked to my pampered eye like chaos on the roads, but I didn't see any accidents. The city is hazed with diesel fumes – six million people (or is it more now?) burning mazote to keep warm. And it's ever more urban, close-packed stacks of flats in brown and grey – the colours of poverty. Buildings erupting like warts from the earth's dry skin, stained orange, exhausted yellow.

The airport road is being worked on in anticipation of Damascus's year as the Arab cultural capital. The taxi driver laments the death of Arabism, 'Before the invasion of Iraq we had it in name at least. Now it isn't even mentioned. Now it's all parties, tribes, sects, ethnic groups, regions.' I accept a cigarette. West of Damascus, what I remember as fields seems to have been transformed into mounds of rubble.

I visit the Old City. I hear the heart-jumping exhilaration of the azan called by the four muezzins of the Umawi Mosque, one from each minaret. I have a meal in the courtyard of Bait Jabri. Nearby there are streets full of new cafes and restaurants. The Old City now boasts two five-star hotels in restored Damascus houses. A garden and cafe have been built beside the citadel walls.

It's old news to say that everybody now has a mobile phone, and that there are far more cars on the roads since taxes have been eased. People worry about social divisions caused by the liberalizing

of the economy. More than once I'm told that it costs 600 lire for a cup of coffee in Waleed bin Talal's Four Seasons hotel. On the ramshackle outskirts of the city I notice a large supermarket, a furniture saleroom, a car showroom.

At Hijaz station the track has been ripped up and a deep hole dug. The plan was to build a new station underground, but the finance didn't come through so it remains just a hole, an absence. The cafe in a train carriage where a decade ago my wife and I used to drink coffee has gone.

I saw Larijani, previously Iran's nuclear negotiator, in the shrine of Sitt Ruqiyeh. He pulled away his hand when an Iranian pilgrim tried to kiss it, and then sat quietly contemplating, only one bodyguard crouching beside him. He doesn't need more security; Syrians express appreciation of Iran, even those Syrians who don't like Shia.

On my last day I visited Sitt Zainab, the shrine of Ali's daughter. The ten days of Ashura were not yet finished so the shrine and its surroundings were unusually crowded with Iranians, Lebanese, Pakistanis and, especially, Iraqis. Many of the refugees have returned to Iraq (and property prices are falling again), but there are still more than a million and a half Iraqis in Syria, and there are evident signs of their tragedy around Sitt Zainab. This is the only place in Syria where ragged, shoeless children beg for coins. There's a young man missing a leg. There's another with no legs. The atmosphere in the shrine is thick. People are kissing the door, the step, weeping and shuddering at the grille of the tomb, mourning the oppression of the Prophet's family, the failure of Muslims to realize Islam and the string of disasters permitted in the world by darkness, persecution and injustice.

In the Iraqi restaurant the cashier wears a green turban. A video of the al-azza walatm ritual plays on the screen suspended from the ceiling. Bare-chested men are red over the heart where they strike themselves in rhythm. The same ritual will start outside the shrine this evening, but I have to

go to the airport. Next door there's a cafe with a screen showing al-Furat TV, the channel of the Hakeem dynasty, and serving Iraqi men thin-waisted glasses of strong, Turkish-style tea. In the street, too much traffic, and stalls and hand-pushed carts selling the earth of Kerbala, prayer beads, and keyrings and badges and engravings of Ali and Hussain, of Sistani and Nasrallah, and plastic sandals and dolls and toy guns. Scarves illustrated with Ya Hussain! in letters of dripping blood, or with the Iraqi flag. Sweets and biscuits. Qur'anic verses. Women push through it, clutching their chadors closed at their noses, and others with hair in waves or tied in ponytails.

I heard Muhammad Habash, Member of Parliament, give a Friday sermon in Mezzeh. I liked his fine, quiet language, his comments on the Prophet's migration and his criticism of some of today's migrating Muslims, who give Islam a bad name in their adopted countries.

I spent a night in a village on the edges of the Golan. There are still some basalt buildings among the concrete, red soil and rubbish. Electric-white Jebel esh-Shaikh floats above the expanse. The Israelis are up there on the further peak. In 1973 their forces reached as far as this village. Now there are gypsies camped among the olive groves in patched white tents distinct from the more beautiful goat-hair black of the Beduin camps. They've come to sell trinkets and pull teeth.

The villagers I spend the night with don't like Shaikh Habash because of his liberal fatwas – for instance, that it is permissible for a woman to travel without a guardian – and because his is, according to them, the Islam of the Sultan. They don't much like the Shia either. Or the Sufis. They talk religion and politics and tell obscene jokes. Endless glasses of tea and coffee, and cigarettes. At dawn we pray in the village mosque where men wear kuffiyehs and wool-lined cloaks.

A character in Ahmad al-Aidi's (Egyptian) novel *Being Abbas el Abd* says:

You want us to progress??

So burn the history books and forget your precious dead civilization.

Stop trying to squeeze the juice from the past.

Destroy your pharaonic history . . .

Try to do without the traffic in the dead.

We will only succeed when we turn our museums into public lavatories.

I have some sympathy with this exaggerated point of view, although the idolized history in Syria is Islamic rather than pharaonic. At another gathering, in Midan, a series of self-validating, optimistic and absurd statements are made. Like: Arabic is the origin of all languages. Like: Europe will have a Muslim majority within twenty years. Like: nobody has ever converted from Islam to another religion. The uncles speak and everybody nods. It's not that the uncles are tyrants. In most cases they are the best of men, kind and well-meaning. You confirm their statements for social reasons, and their statements acquire truth status. Comfort and solidarity and identity are evoked and made tangible in this harsh environment. Many of these men have three jobs, and live in boxes. The same discourse that restricts thought makes life bearable, and more than bearable. Where else would you find such hospitality, such manly gentleness, such generosity and dignity?

A SINGLE BOOK

Fathers And Sons

Iain Sinclair checks his copy for fingerprints

ONE BOOK CHOSEN from so many. A house built of books: inherited, acquired through trade, retained for reasons of sentiment, superstition or future value. A pension plan that is also a floating library. Chosen then for its title? A book that I am only now, through having to describe it, starting to read.

'I'm thinking what a happy life my parents lead! At the age of sixty my father can still find plenty to do, talks about "palliative measures", treats patients, plays the beautiful lord of the manor with the peasants – has a gay time of it in fact...'

Do they think in that way of us, as well they might? Our own children. A gay time of it, taking off at weekends for the seaside. Did I think it? My father at about this age stepping back, retiring to locum work, a new house in a new town. And the society, he would encounter,

The problem with turning religion into repeated legends and tales of the ancestors, with unreflective and near-masturbatory veneration of the Prophet's companions and the rulers of old and the ulama, is that the universe is bigger than the Arab zone, time is longer than 1,400 years. Too much religion and too much certainty can domesticate the real and smother the spirit.

Syria reminds you of variations in electric current. The dimming of the lights. Waiting for the water to come.

And simple pleasures. Food, for instance. Not just the recipes but also the quality of the raw materials. I swear a Syrian chicken doesn't taste like the usual dry blandness; nor do Syrian eggs taste like any other eggs. The rich sweetness of a Syrian mandarin is unrivalled. (For all my British childhood it was a burdensome duty to chew fruit. I didn't understand how fruit should taste until I came to Syria). The traditional Syrian hammam – and I don't mean the traditional

hammam as-souq, wonderful though that is, but a normal bath at home, with mazote dripping into the fizzing stove, steam rising around you and hot water splashing in the plastic basin for you to scoop out in cupfuls and pour over your body.

We watch a Yasser al-Azmeh sketch about a blind man in a cafe complaining about the economy and the citizenry's hard life. A spy reports him to the mukhabarat, who arrive to make arrests. Such criticism is no longer taboo on Syrian TV. The trend continues, excruciatingly slowly, towards greater individual rights and freedom of expression.

People say that Syria will survive. Despite the refugees, the Israeli raids, the American threats, the sectarianism, the poverty; despite the smoke, Syria will survive. Did not the Prophet say that God has blessed the lands around al-Aqsa? Did he not pray 'Allah yubarik shamina,' God bless our Sham, our Syria? ◇

to trade from home. He'd made a find, so he reckoned, at the auction house across the road: tea-chests containing the books and papers of a local woman, Mrs Wood. Before marriage Mrs Wood had been Jessie Chambers. Nial knew what that meant: Jessie Chambers – the friend of Nottingham's most celebrated writer, David Herbert Lawrence. Jessie Chambers: the original of 'Miriam' in *Sons and Lovers*. The novel's title, I surmise, signalled Lawrence's admiration for Turgeniev.

I helped to manhandle the sharp-sided chests through the traffic. Nial's heart wasn't good. Generously, he picked out a book from the pile that he was beginning to sort. Dark blue cloth, lettered in gilt. *Fathers and Sons* by Ivan Turgenieff. Translated from the Russian, with the approval of the author, by Eugene Schuyler. Undated. Ward Lock and Co., London, New York and Melbourne. 248pp. Hinges starting. Some light foxing. A decent copy which had, very clearly, been read. And read again. There is an ownership signature on the front fixed endpaper: 'Jessie Chambers, May, 1910.'

Carrying my prize home, I rushed upstairs to check *D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* by E.T. (1935). The 'E.T.' credit

disguised the identity of the modest author, Jessie Chambers. The reference I was searching for was located on page 121. 'He liked Turgenev immensely, and gave me his copy of *Fathers and Sons*... When he sent me a book he would occasionally copy out a verse, or even a whole poem...'

A shabbily respectable volume with a secret history. An object I have borrowed against its future status, oblivion. That confident signature, underlined, and that date. I went through the book, page by page, looking for annotations. And found none. Faint fingerprints, the whorls clearly visible, on page 8. The top corner creased, turned down, on page 48. The end of a session, perhaps, one of Lawrence's private tutorials?

Jessie reports on her friend's conversation.

'Most authors,' Lawrence said, 'write out of their own personality. Wells does, of course. But I'm not sure that I've got a big enough personality to write out of.'

Fingerprints on pages 83 and 84. A possible mark alongside the dialogue on

page 102. 'This young girl,' he said to himself, 'plays well, and is not bad looking.' It might not mean anything, an off-print. More fingermarks, old brown sweat, but nothing else.

'Miriam talked books a little. That was her unfailing topic.'

In *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence makes Jessie's innocent ambition into a sort of hysterical prurience: they were hungry for such different things.

'Yes,' she said in a deep tone, almost of resignation. And she rose and got the books. And her rather red, nervous hands looked so pitiful, he was mad to comfort her and kiss her. But then he dared not – or could not. There was something prevented him. His kisses were wrong for her. They continued the reading until ten o'clock, when they went into the kitchen, and Paul was natural and jolly again with the father and mother. His eyes were dark and shining; there was a kind of fascination about him.

A novel of provincial life, *Fathers and Sons*. Bazarov the nihilist is 'a country doctor in the making, and a doctor's

son.' Does the erotic impulse, shifting from the young girl playing the piano – 'He was not bored in her company and she offered to play the Mozart sonata again' – to the experienced older woman, prefigure Lawrence's relationship with Jessie Chambers, his flight with the married woman, Frieda Weekley? Or the way *Sons and Lovers* pulls, so tortuously, between Miriam at the farm and Clara Dawes in Nottingham?

My book goes back on the shelf, into its place, a receptacle for dust, not especially attractive to the browser. Far more enticing to pick up the copy of Rachel Lichtenstein's first book. I thought about how Rachel, as fierce in her quest for knowledge as Jessie Chambers, reclaimed her family name by deed poll when she began her Whitechapel researches. Her uncles lived above that watchmakers' shop in New Road. But her father was born in the country, in Oxfordshire, where his mother had been evacuated when the neighbouring premises were destroyed in an air raid. As a young man he went into the trade: antiques, jewellery. The name he adopted, the one under which Rachel grew up in Southend, was Lawrence. ◊



Diamonds in the Dark

Rachel Lichtenstein on the hidden lives of Hatton Garden

If it is so that we go through the world shedding phantom semblance's of ourselves to hover about those places we have lived intensely, then Hatton Garden should surely be full of illustrious shadows.

– *The Romance of Hatton Garden* (by H. Marryat and James Cornish, 1930)

OVER THE YEARS my grandfather, uncles, parents and husband have all worked in Hatton Garden. My memories of the place go back to childhood, when I would accompany my father there on buying trips, searching for stock to sell at his antique stall in Portobello Market. I remember following him through narrow entrances near to the shop-fronts, up dark stairwells to tiny stuffy rooms on the floors above, to meet with one of the many dealers in second-hand goods who operated in the area. Security was tight. Entrance to these rooms was often via three separate steel doors, each of which had to be shut before the next could be opened. Once inside I would sit on a chair in the corner, often nervously eyeing a large sleeping dog under a desk, and wait whilst my father talked business before examining the items he'd come to see. There was ritual in this process. Heavy, black, velvet-lined cases would be ceremoniously lifted out of the cool depths of large green metal safes, before being placed on to a desk, lit by a bright overhead light. Then my father would slip his hand into the pocket of his sheepskin coat, and pull out his ten-power jeweller's loupe, which he would hold expertly against one eye by tightly screwing up one side of his face. Then, slowly, he would pick up each diamond ring, Victorian cameo brooch, ruby pendant or other piece of antique jewellery and inspect them at great length under the white light, sometimes tutting a little if he noticed an imperfection. After much haggling back and forth a price would be agreed upon and the deal sealed with a handshake before goods changed hands for cash. This is the way the flow

of business has been taking place in Hatton Garden for over a century. It is a secret, private, hidden world that operates under a strict set of unspoken internal laws: never screw a partner and once a deal is done it is a *mazen brucha* and it must be adhered to.

In the mid 1980s, when the antique business was no longer providing a viable income for my father, he began working full-time in Hatton Garden, managing the shop of a childhood friend from Essex. I spent my summer breaks from university helping out, working as a runner; collecting jobs for customers from the workshops dotted around the area. Whilst waiting for the finished item, I would stand and watch elderly craftsmen at work, hunched over wooden jewellery benches in quiet concentration; welding bands of platinum together with miniature tools, inserting tiny sparkling stones into clawed mounts, cutting deep blue sapphires into shape with diamond tipped saws. Most had developed their skills over decades, starting as fourteen-year-old apprentices sweeping up the shavings of gold left on the floor at night, before moving on to work at the jewellery benches. They described Hatton Garden before the war as 'a Dickensian-looking place with a patchwork of run-down houses. There would be a setter in one room, a polisher in another, an engraver in another and, if you opened a door, sometimes a rat would run out.' There were no retail shops in Hatton Garden then, the public were not encouraged to go there, it was primarily a place of manufacture and the centre of the world's diamond trade.

The men in the workshops told me stories about the master craftsmen, who once worked in great numbers in Hatton Garden. 'There was a Russian Jewish jeweller called Zebedas, who came to my workshop in the late 1930s,' said Stanley Isaacs, a diamond cutter. 'He was over eighty when he arrived to us from Paris, where he had been training since the 1900s. His workmanship was the best

I have ever seen. The most extraordinary piece I saw him make was a perfect daffodil, commissioned by a Russian princess, made in eighteen-carat gold, the tiny stamens encrusted with diamonds. It took him over three months to make.'

In those days every pearl, every precious stone, every diamond – rough or cut – came through Hatton Garden. All the big brokerage took place there and the area had the best international reputation for fine, hand-made jewellery. Today, only a small proportion of the jewellery sold in the street is made by hand, the majority is either cast, or imported. A few of the master craftsmen remain, but when they die, their knowledge will be lost. The tradition of passing on skills from one generation to the next in the garden has all but stopped.

Hatton Garden is no longer the centre of the world jewellery market, although it remains a major player, but it is the largest cluster of jewellery-based businesses in the UK, with over three hundred separate companies that support the trade in the immediate area, and over fifty retail shops in the street itself. From the Holborn end of the street towards Clerkenwell, rows of jewellery shops line the street on both sides. Another network of hidden spaces exist both above and below these shops: heavily guarded underground vaults filled with wholesale stores of gold and silver, workshops where specialist items are painstakingly made to order, small rooms where precious gem dealers operate and Hasidic diamond merchants sit examining glittering stones, held tightly between silver tweezers.

Hatton Garden is a self-contained place. Everything the business needs can be found within one square mile: from the diamond bourse, to the gold bullion dealers, to the suppliers of precious metals, stones, gems and jewels, to the shops that sell the finished products. The majority of people who work there, in all aspects of the business, are Jewish. Orthodox Jews trade happily with assimilated secular Jews like my father. There are Jewish people working in Hatton Garden today from Israel, Iran, America, Holland and many other countries, who have links to an international network of jewellery markets in Antwerp, Tel-Aviv, New York and the Far East, making Hatton Garden one of the most cosmopolitan

Jewish commercial centres in the world. Despite the global nature of the business, the street retains a distinct village atmosphere. Everyone knows one other, gossip is rife and, much like in the former Eastern European *shtetls*, there are plenty of *schlemiels*, *menschs* and other intriguing Jewish characters making up the community.

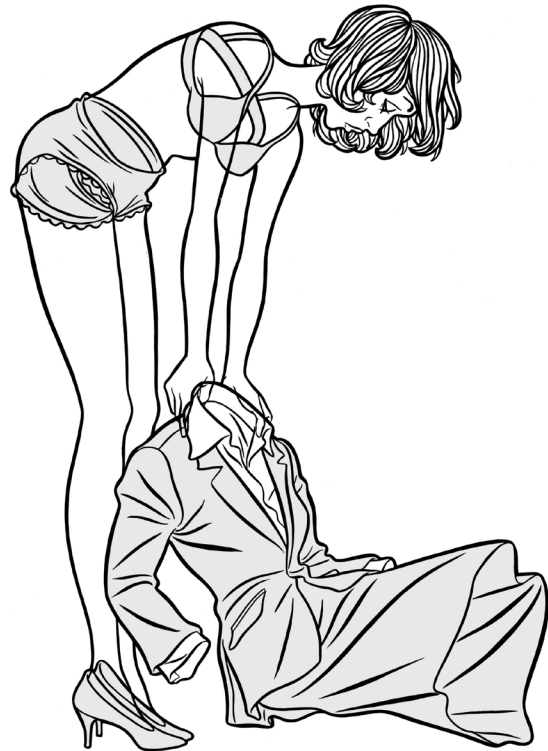
One of these was Eli Zukerman, known with affection to all as Zuki. For over half a century he regularly made weekly rounds to the shops and suppliers in the street, personally dropping off his much sought after 'specials': French court wedding rings, made by Zuki to order, by pulling lengths of gold thread through different sized holes on a drawplate with a large pair of tongs until he got the right measurements. Each time the threads were pulled through they had to be quenched and then reheated again. It was hard physical work and Zuki had tremendous strength in his upper body, although he was nearly lame in his right foot. He worked from a small attic room near to Holborn Circus and it seemed unlikely that his operation was commercially successful. The process involved in making these rings was lengthy and Zuki was scrupulously honest and never overcharged. He raised his prices by the bare minimum when the cost of gold and platinum went up and never added on a penny if the quality of the metal declined, causing his rings to crumble and break halfway through the making.

Zuki's life story was shrouded in mystery. He dressed like a tramp, always wearing old trousers tied up with string and a dirty old mac, but there were rumours he owned millions and lived with a young blonde wife in a large house in Essex. He'd come limping into the shops, energetically dragging one large flat foot behind the other and sit down with a sigh, wiping his bald head with a dirty handkerchief pulled from his pocket. Sometimes he would come into the back of the shop and have a cup of tea, telling stories about his time as a flight engineer during the war, assigned to Lancaster bombers. Once he told me how he acquired the legendary eighteenth-century drawplate, which he used to make his rings: 'I bought it in the 1930s from a second-hand wedding ring manufacturer who had gone bankrupt. They

had bought it from an antique shop years before. When I examined it I found a date on the back, 1789. This was the period when the French demanded smooth court wedding rings that felt like silk gloves.' The rings Zuki was making with this drawplate, over two hundred years after it was manufactured, had the same profile as eighteenth century rings once much in demand by French royalty.

Zuki was well liked and respected by everyone in the community. I often saw him around the area, chatting on the street corners with shop owners, or standing with Hasidic diamond dealers in a tight huddle on the pavement, heads down, magnifying glasses out, examining some tiny object, usually a rough diamond. He retired from the Garden some time ago and no one had seen him for a long while when I happened to bump into him by chance in 2004 in Brick Lane, arguing with a couple of homeless-looking men outside the Bagel Bakery. He didn't notice me at first. He had a salt beef sandwich in one hand and a coffee in the other. Hot, brown liquid was spilling from his polystyrene cup on to the pavement as his arms waved about in a

wild fashion. As I approached, I heard his shouts were in Yiddish. I called his name and he turned towards me, spraying coffee and scraps of salt beef all over his companions as he did so. He came over to where I was standing, shook my hand vigorously and we spent some time talking. I told him about the book I was writing at the time about Brick Lane and he smiled. 'I grew up here,' he said, in his lisping *Yiddisha* accent. 'Not far from where we are now standing.' He began to tell me stories from his childhood, covering me in a fine film of spittle as he did so. He told me about the hidden mikva behind the great mosque, his visits to the Russian Steam Baths and tales from Black Lion Yard: 'Those guys in the workshops there used to see the kids down in the street and throw pennies to them,' he said, chuckling and choking at the same time. 'But they'd heat them up first with the flames of the welding torches, then laugh when they tried to pick up the hot coins.' I asked him if he remembered Rodinsky (the intriguing local figure I had written about in another book). He thought he probably did. 'He was one of the Whitechapel cowboys I think,' he

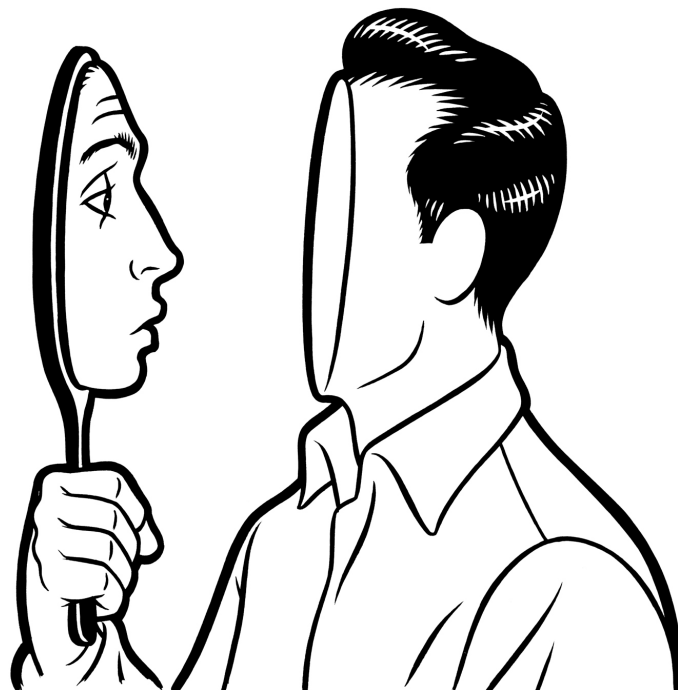


said. 'You know, the *frummers*, in their big hats and long black coats, that's what we used to call them, the Whitechapel Cowboys. Of course most of them have left here now, but there are still many working in Hatton Garden. Some of them I have known since they were kids.'

Moving on from tales of the East End, he began to talk about Hatton Garden, which he felt to be far more interesting. He knew the territory well, having begun his working life there in the late 1920s, as an apprentice in a large jewellery repair workshop. 'There were about twenty people working in my department then,' he said. 'Mainly older men, some of them had wooden legs, they were veterans from the First World War. There was one old guy called Jacob Verns there, he had a wicked sense of humour. If a new kid started with us he used to jam a chisel into his wooden leg and start screaming and hollering. Thought it was hilarious. We had a lot of laughs and we sang all the time whilst we worked. Those old boys

taught me all the music hall songs, and I still remember them.' With that Zuki burst into song on the spot, closing his eyes and swaying from side to side as he sang: 'Darling I am growing old, Silver threads among the gold, Shine upon my brow today, Life is fading fast away...' A fit of coughing stopped him mid-song. When he regained composure he seemed reluctant to reminisce further but was keen to tell me other stories, relating to the history of Hatton Garden, of which he had a growing interest. He spoke at great speed, his large eyes expanding widely as he talked. He told me that the entire area floats above a labyrinthine network of subterranean spaces: abandoned railway platforms buried deep underground, decommissioned government bunkers and forgotten rivers. 'It amazes me the entire place doesn't cave in,' he said. 'With the weight of gold and heavy metal above and all those ancient, watery passageways honeycombing the ground underneath.' He told me fragmented stories about chaingangs marching from

Hatton Garden to an underground river near Fleet Street, before travelling on to Australia. He spoke of the Diamond Club being used by medical students from Barts for dissecting dead bodies. He recounted stories of highwaymen and daring thefts where jewels were scattered over the pavement, and told tales of abandoned monasteries, extra-terrestrial sightings, hauntings and freak fairs. 'Did you know,' he said, whilst grabbing my arm tightly, 'that Hatton Garden was once the site of an elegant palace, surrounded by vast gardens, with fountains, vineyards and orchards?' Before he had a chance to tell me more, one of his friends shouted something to him in Yiddish and, with a stamp of his foot, he was back off into the throng, arms akimbo, passionately contributing to the heated debate. I never saw him again. Despite many attempts to find him, it has been impossible to do so. But he did spark my interest in the wider history of the area that day and, slowly over time, I began to find out more. ◇



The Actual Queen

Ma'am, I am imagining you
at your worst: watching
a wet-lipped girl
type-set your cutlery.
You're hating her neediness.
You think the girl is certainly
attractive, if not exactly
beautiful and you imagine an alternative
life for her where she is a waitress
in a checker-board pie shop,
jellied eels piled up like alien spines.
A dozen older men desire her.
Her apron is the item
they imagine removing.

But instead she is here, believing
this to be a great privilege,
laying down a fish fork
for the head of state
who has no ambition anymore.

Filters

My big sister rings to say she is riding around
on the back of Richard's motorbike
and would I like to meet for a drink.
Richard is a married man.
My sister is gay and I am always
dropping this in to conversation.

She has a helmet under her arm
and a lemonade with mint.
I sometimes ask my sister
if she has dismantled the patriarchal hegemony yet,
which is a joke. Her ex-girlfriend used to say
that every bar should have a women-only space,
just like you have non-smoking.

We're talking about marathon training.
The pub is beneath a brick railway bridge. The light
is greenish and you can feel the invisible trains.
Out front, they're selling oysters on a school desk.
My sister says, How about it?
When we were young, we used to fight.
She chipped my tooth with a door stop.
I will eat anything.

The oysters smell of tin foil.
They are still alive.

My sister thinks I should chew a few times;
Richard says I should swallow it whole.
The creature is in my mouth
and now I must decide.

Twenty-four lengths

A girl wearing a two-piece
and waterproof mascara
joins me in the slow lane:
we breaststroke clockwise.
During my seventh length,
she strokes my forearm
as she passes. At nine
lengths I touch her calf.
She has shaved well.
Underwater, she's magnified
with sharp hips I could
handstand on. Her toenails
are painted. At fourteen,
she frog-kicks me in the thigh
but keeps on swimming.
I stop at the shallow end,
there is a wisp of blood
trailing from my leg.
I use the locker key
round my wrist to worry
the nick until it seeps
like a put-out candle.
I swim and swim
and don't feel tired.

The Interns

Hari Kunzru

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, we, the interns, are united at last. We stand shoulder to shoulder, our poorly fitting new suits rubbing up against each other, causing static. But we don't care, because soon the power structure will start to crumble. The end of our struggle is in sight! Across the land, photocopiers have fallen silent. Dry cleaning lies uncollected, coffee is unmade. We the unpaid and unthanked, the once-willing slaves of gallerists, publishers, model agencies, production companies, law firms, newspapers, media networks, political lobbyists, non-governmental organizations – all the thousands of companies which exploit us – will no longer accept the conditions of our subjugation. No longer will we hide from our managers in stockrooms. No longer will we lock ourselves into disabled toilets to weep our bitter lonely tears. Never again will we commit small acts of workplace sabotage or steal stationery to compensate for our feelings of worthlessness. Our refusal to work is merely the beginning. From now on, we will resist!

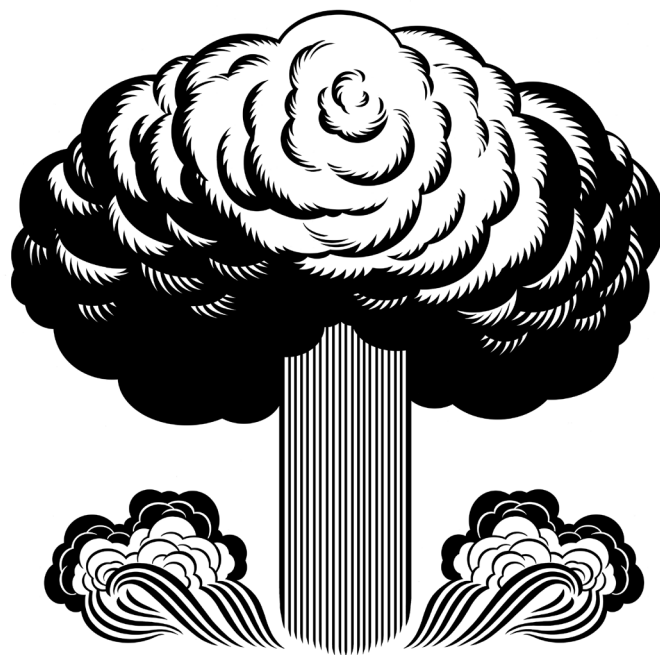
Month by month, year by year, we've been forced to work for longer periods of time before we're considered worthy

of a paid job. The so-called knowledge economy rests on our free labour. Without us, how many of you, our masters, would find yourselves performing tasks you consider menial or dull? How much glamour would rub off your culturally capitalized lives if you had to update your own mailing lists, address your party invitations yourselves? Our efforts are invisible, uncounted by economists, unappreciated by society. So we put you on notice. We're no longer content to grit our teeth and take out ever bigger bank loans, while we serve our time and wait for the chance to begin paying off our debts. We live under a mountain of debt, and you should not think we don't understand why. It's where you want us! Yes, we owe you. It seems we came into the world owing you. Remind us, how did that happen, exactly? Since the moment of our births, our debt has only grown. We used to be grateful. Oh, we were positively quivering with sapping, fawning, self-annihilating gratitude for our comfortable beginnings, our homes in the suburbs, all the consumer goods, the education. But not any more. Tennis racquets and maths tutors don't compen-

sate for a life of workplace slavery. Gratitude doesn't count for a thing in the new world order. Only power counts, and we have none of that.

Understand this, you jowly, smug, thick-waisted, computer-illiterate fools. We don't know if there will even *be* jobs in ten years time, but if there are and we're in them – which we think is likely and probably only just and righteous given what we've been through – certain things are going to change. Don't snort into your overpriced drinks, you bastards. Don't roll your eyes at one another as you chow dolled-up junk food in your private members' clubs. This is one call you can't put through to your assistants. From now on, we're going to ensure you'll never be too busy to notice us, the ones who proof your documents and reboot your PC and buy your wife the second-largest bouquet the day after you had us phone to say you were attending a non-existent corporate dinner.

We know you don't take us seriously. We're pampered children. We're *your* pampered children. Well, you shrug, we don't know how lucky we are, there are many others who'd gladly swap places with us, and so on and so forth. That's your trump card, isn't it? Supply and demand. All the millions crawling over one another to make it up towards the light. This is why we're calling upon our trust fund brothers and sisters – the ones who can afford to work for nothing, who keep





quiet about how they're living rent-free and think we don't notice their new shoes – to join with us in solidarity, to help us smash the system which makes it all but impossible for anyone but the children of the already-successful to gain entry to the elite. After all, you started this. Who was the first boss's son to spend his holidays at dad's office? Who was the first daughter to be allowed to help out on the picture desk? We say to you – reach out the hand of friendship! Put your contact lists and your credit cards at the disposal of the revolution! Join us, or be counted among the ranks of our class enemies. For too long we've fought to hide our envy and disgust as you talk at the water cooler about your snowboarding holidays. Join us, or get fed into the shredder of history!

Brothers and sisters, day by day we have abased ourselves further. Some of us are even paying for the opportunity to work for free. Oh, we desire our own repression, all right. We're begging the bastards for it. Of course you, our bosses, find this funny. You have no sympathy. After all, we're merely paying the price of admission. We pay now, so others can repay us later. You think that once we actually have the luxury of a real job, we'll just reproduce your bloated, iniquitous sys-

tem. But we say this: we will no longer live in the roles you've made for us. And we will never, *ever* become you.

In the working world of tomorrow, in the working world we create (if we bother to create one at all) there'll be no more snide remarks or messy passes, no casual bullying, no twisting of the knife by the lowest grades, the ones who have to manage us, who work out on us the resentment generated by their own all-too-recent internships. Those poor downtrodden bastards! They're still sucking up abuse from the layer of management above them, angling all the time to stick their snouts just a little deeper into the trough, hoping, always hoping, that one day they'll be free of their obligations. Those poor bastards! They fell for it, the Big Lie! They still believe that one day they'll finally buy the house and the car that will do what was promised, that will rid them of their agonizing resentment at the world, their unremitting psychic pain.

And so it goes on, the cycle of debt and credit, the cosmic pile of yearning bodies striving upwards until a lucky few are spat out at the top to discover that, even in the airless bell-jar of the corner booth and the boardroom and the VIP box with the minibar and the fabulous view, the piercing ache remains, the psychic

goutiness that you, the victors, must now recognize as the true state of your souls. Now the realization dawns! You know that nothing will make you free, not any more, not ever. You know that all you've been doing is wrapping your chains more tightly around yourselves and, in your anger, your all-consuming anger at the way you've been tricked, you vow to visit hell on the working world, the cheating, unproductive, feckless world that has robbed you of your youth and your family life, your health, your ability to relax without drugs or alcohol, your capacity to feel strongly about anything that's not a safely-summarizable banality. As you slide towards the vengeful idiocy of old age, the only action which can stimulate any kind of response in your deadened synapses is the infliction of pain, the reproduction of the whole cycle of domination which now operates for your nominal benefit. Then, what do you do? You kid yourselves it wasn't for you at all! Everything you ever did was for the good of others. You stand simpering on the stage at your charity balls and try to squeeze that last drop of feeling out of your shrivelled hearts, that *worthwhile* feeling. Oh, the glory! The pomp of you modern-day pharaohs! We could never, *ever* be like you. ◇

The Agony Uncle

Alain de Botton is here to help you

PROBLEM ONE: *I am a nervous public speaker and next month I have to address a meeting of top business managers. Do you have any advice on how I might keep calm on stage?*

The origins of your problem lie in a gross over-estimation of the people you are planning to talk to. After all, you talk confidently with your family and the greengrocer, largely because you accept that they are ordinary human beings. But in the case of these business managers, you ascribe them an other-worldly aura, which has a paralysing effect on your powers of speech. It is therefore essential that you bring them down to earth in your own mind. To help with the task, I recommend that you read (and perhaps repeat to yourself shortly before going on stage) a passage from the sixteenth century French philosopher Montaigne, taking care to substitute ‘top business managers’ for the words ‘kings’ and ‘philosophers’:

‘Upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our arses. Kings and philosophers shit: and so do ladies.’

‘Au plus eslevé throne du monde si ne sommes assis que sus nostre cul. Les Roys et les philosophes fientent, et les dames aussi.’

PROBLEM TWO: *My boyfriend (Tom) is a kind and loving man, but often when he pays me a compliment, I get upset, because of the way he does it. Last week he said he loved me and then added, almost immediately after, ‘because your bottom is so pert.’ It’s true that my bottom is pert (I go to the gym a lot), but I’m uncomfortable with such remarks. Another time, he said that what he really liked about me was my breasts (they are quite large!!!!). Am I being ungrateful or is there something to complain about?*

Your question raises a profound philosophical issue, namely, ‘What do we want to be loved for?’ Though we all want love, we also recognize that there are better and worse things to be loved for. To take an example, if our beloved says they love us because we are ‘so old-fashioned’, when in fact we’ve never noticed we are old-fashioned and actually pride ourselves on

being ‘modern’, we will feel perturbed, and perhaps more unhappy than if they’d never said anything in the first place. So we don’t just want any kind of love, we want to be loved for the person who we think we are. We want to see an accurate, albeit flattering, picture of ourselves emerging from within the comments of others. If a lover says they love us for our body or our car, our money or our cat, these elements may not constitute appropriate targets for love.

Women in particular are often disturbed by the idea of being loved for their bodies. They may spend a considerable amount of time thinking of their appearance (the gym etc), but when someone falls in love with them, they don’t wish these bodies to be the central focus of love. In fantasy, and it has nothing to do with prudishness, the body would be beside the point. They would be loved for the mysterious rest one is left with after it is discounted: the habits, moods, history, and temperament we tend to call ‘ourselves’.

Give a person enough beauty or success, someone will sooner or later fall in love with them. But love has as its idealized prototype what should be the unconditional love of a parent for their baby. Our earliest memory of love is of being cared for in a helpless and weak condition. Some babies are notably cute, but they are by definition unable to bargain with the world on account of extrinsic characteristics. In so far as they are loved and looked after, they are therefore loved simply for who they are – which tends to be rather a messy business. They are loved for, or in spite of, their dribbling, peeing, vomiting, howling and selfish characters.

Only as the baby grows up does affection become conditional on a number of achievements – saying thank you at table, fetching mummy her glasses, scrubbing dishes and later, looking attractive, acquiring status, houses etc. But though these things guarantee the interest of others, the true desire is not so much to impress through one’s assets as to recreate the contract made by the parent with

the child at infancy: a contract binding the parent to love and loyalty and fidelity, come what may. After all, if we are loved conditionally, what happens when the original conditions of love disappear – when the money goes and the body ages?

In short, we want to be loved for simply existing, not for doing a certain thing or looking a certain way. Then again, the desire is somewhat unrealistic and many people, philosophers among them, have at times judged it wise to continue visiting the gym.

PROBLEM THREE: *A friend of mine has recently been left by her boyfriend and is very upset. I’d like to cheer her up and thought of taking her out to dinner somewhere nice. I live in Grimsby and wondered if you had any nice ideas for restaurants in the town or the vicinity?*

I rarely dine out – but the greater question is whether you should be taking your friend out anywhere in the first place. Your intended goal is to make her feel better about the (unspecified) romantic disaster she has suffered. And if this is the goal, we must analyse what it is truly useful to say to someone who has been left in love. Part of the pain of a sad love affair comes from the preconception, which is fostered in a thousand Hollywood films and in the generally optimistic atmosphere of the modern media, that love is a happy business. This optimism makes us suffer doubly when love goes wrong for us: we suffer not only from the pain of the loss of love, but also from the pain of being in pain when we are supposed to be happy. In this situation, it is apparent that the most useful thing one can do with someone who has been abandoned is to provide them with evidence that life is not in fact a happy process, whatever the songs say. This will appease their feeling of persecution and place their own pain in context. Rather than a restaurant invitation, I therefore suggest that you send your friend a box containing: the *Pensees* of Pascal, the aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld, the collected works of Chamfort, Schopenhauer and Cioran, and selections from the work of Seneca. Your friend may particularly appreciate the Roman philosopher’s remark (you may even want to embroider this for her on a cushion or bedcover): ‘What need is there to weep over parts of life? The whole of it calls for tears.’ ◇

From Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet

One wretched master seeking guidance

Croisset, January 12 or 14, 1852 · I am hideously worried, mortally depressed. My accursed *Bovary* is harrying me and driving me mad. Last Sunday [friend and dramatist Louis] Bouilhet criticized one of my characters and the outline. I can do nothing about it: there is some truth in what he says, but I feel that the opposite is true also. Ah, I am tired and discouraged! You call me Master. What a wretched Master!

No – it is possible that the whole thing hasn't had enough spadework, for distinctions between thought and style are a sophism. Everything depends on the conception. So much the worse! I am going to continue, and as quickly as I can, in order to have a complete picture. There are moments when all this makes me wish I were dead. Ah! No one will be able to say that I haven't experienced the agonies of Art!

Croisset, January 16, 1852 · There are in me, literally speaking, two distinct persons: one who is infatuated with bombast, lyricism, eagle flights, sonorities of phrase and the high points of ideas; and another who digs and burrows into the truth as deeply as he can, who likes to treat a humble fact as respectfully as a big one, who would like to make you feel almost physically the things he reproduces; this latter person likes to laugh and enjoys the animal sides of man...

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support; a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible. The finest works are those that contain the least matter; the closer expression comes to thought, the closer language comes to coinciding and merging with it, the finer the result. I believe that the future of Art lies in this direction. I see it, as it has de-

veloped from its beginnings, growing progressively more ethereal, from the Egyptian pylons to Gothic lancets, from the 20,000 line Hindu poems to the effusions of Byron. Form, as it is mastered, becomes attenuated. It comes dissociated from any liturgy, rule, yardsitck; the epic is discard in favour of the novel, verse in favour of prose; there is no longer any orthodoxy, and form is as free as the will of its creator. This emancipation from matter can be observed everywhere: governments have gone through similar evolution, from the oriental despotisms to the socialisms of the future.

It is for this reason that there are no noble subjects or ignoble subjects; from the standpoint of pure Art one might almost establish the axiom that there is no such thing as subject, style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.

Croisset, February 1, 1852 · Bad week. Work didn't go; I had reached a point where I didn't know what to say. It was all shadings and refinements; I was completely in the dark: it is very difficult to clarify by means of words what is still obscure in your thoughts. I made outlines, spoiled a lot of paper, floundered and fumbled. Now I shall perhaps find my way again. Oh, what a rascally thing style is! I think you have no idea of what kind of a book I am writing. In my other books I was slovenly; in this one I am trying to be impeccable, and to follow a geometrically straight line. No lyricism, no comments, the author's personality absent. It will make sad reading; there will be atrociously wretched and sordid things. Bouilhet, who arrived last Sunday at three just after I had written you, thinks the tone is right and hopes the book will be good. May God grant it! But it promises to take up an enormous amount of time. I shall certainly not be through by the beginning of next winter. I am doing no more than five or six pages a week.

Croisset, March 3, 1852 · Thank you, thank you, my darling, for all the affection you

send me. It makes me proud that you should feel happy about me; how I will embrace you next week!

I have just reread several children's books for my novel. I am half crazy tonight, after all the things I looked at today – from old keepsakes to tales of shipwrecks and buccaneers. I came up on old engravings that I had coloured when I was seven or eight and that I hadn't seen since. There are rocks painted blue and trees painted green. At the sight of some of them (for instance a scene showing people stranded on ice floes) I re-experienced feelings of terror that I had as a child. I should like something that would put it out of my mind; I am almost afraid to go to bed. There is a story of Dutch sailors in ice-bound waters, with bears attacking them in their hut (this picture used to keep me awake), and one about Chinese pirates sacking a temple full of golden idols. My travels and my childhood memories, colour off from each other, fuse, whirl dazzlingly before my eyes and rise up in a spiral...

For two days now I have been trying to live the dreams of young girls, and for this purpose I have been navigating in milky oceans of books about castles and troubadours in white-plumed velvet caps. Remind me to speak to you about this. You can give me exact details that I need.

Croisset, March 20–21, 1852 · The entire value of my book, if it has any, will consist of my having known how to walk straight ahead on a hair, balanced above the two abysses of lyricism and vulgarity (which I seek to fuse in analytical narrative). When I think of what it can be I am dazzled. But then, when I reflect that so much beauty has been entrusted to me, I am so terrified that I am seized with cramps and long to rush off and hide – anywhere. I have been working like a mule for fifteen long years. All my life I have lived with maniacal stubbornness, keeping all my other passions locked up in cages and visiting them only now and then for diversion. Oh, if ever I produce a good book I'll have worked for it! Would to God that Buffon's blasphemous words were true. [*Le genie est une longue patience.*] I should certainly be among the foremost.

– *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, 1954

I Leap Over The Wall

Looking Back to 1949

A niece of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Monica Baldwin became a nun just before World War One.

The walls of the monastery were thick and hardly a shred of news filtered in from the shell-shocked world. 'Now and again a nun would be sent for by Reverend Mother and told that some relation had been wounded or killed; but I can't remember reading a single newspaper during the whole four years.' One day, after the bells were rung in celebration, the Reverend Mother told them the war was over. They sang Te Deum. 'That, for me, represented World War Number One'.

Baldwin left her cloistered life on 26 October 1941, and couldn't have chosen a worse moment for a re-immersion into the outside world. Friends were shocked. 'What with clothes

coupons, food rationing, travelling restrictions and the appalling rise in the cost of living, how on earth – they asked – did I imagine I should ever be able to cope?' Food rations made sense, but there were more intricate modern issues to be explained. In her only book, published in November 1949, Baldwin grappled with the problems posed to an ex-nun. Most frightening was what lay beneath.

THE CRESCENDO of shocks which awaited me began abruptly with my first introduction to up-to-date underwear. Frankly, I was appalled.

The garments to which I was accustomed had been contrived by thoroughgoing ascetics in the fourteenth century, who considered that a nice, thick, long-

sleeved 'shift' of rough, scratchy serge was the right thing to wear next to your skin. My shifts, when new, had reached almost to my ankles. However, hard washing and much indiscriminate patching soon stiffened and shrank them until they all but stood up by themselves. Stays, shoulder-strapped and severely boned, concealed one's outline; over them, two long serge petticoats were lashed securely round one's waist. Last came the ample habit-coat of heavy cloth, topped by a linen rochet and a stiffly starched *barbette* of cambric, folded into a score of tiny tucks and pleats at the neck.

So, when my sister handed me a wisp of gossamer, about the size and substance of a spider's web, I was startled.

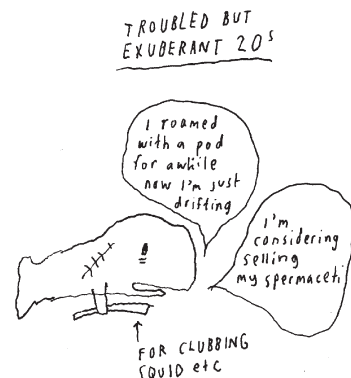
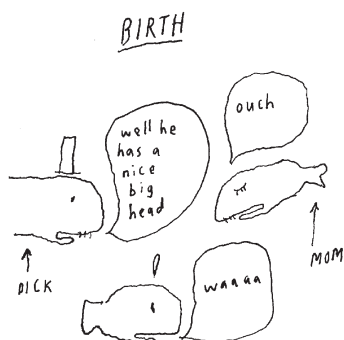
She said, 'Here's your foundation garment. Actually, most people only wear pants and a *brassiere*, but it's cold to-day so I thought we'd better start you with a vest.'

I examined the object, remembering 1914. In those days, a 'nice' girl 'started'

Character Arc

Wherein we get to know a character whose FULL STORY HAS been sidelined by the classic tale...

The Whale (Moby Dick)



with long, woolly combinations, neck-high and elbow-sleeved, decorated with a row of neat pearl buttons down the front...

Next came the modern version of the corset. It was the merest strip of elastic brocade from which suspenders, in a surprising number, dangled. I thought it a great improvement on the fourteenth-century idea. The only drawback was that you had to insert your person into it serpent-fashion, as it had no fastenings.

What bothered me most were the stockings. The kind I was used to were enormous things, far thicker than those men wear for tramping the moors and shrunk by repeated boiling to the shape and consistency of a Wellington boot. The pair with which Freda had provided me were of silk, skin-coloured and so transparent that I wondered why anyone bothered to wear the things at all.

I said firmly, 'Freda, I can't possibly go out in these. They make my legs look naked.'

She smiled patiently. 'Nonsense,' she said. 'Everyone wears them. If you went about in anything else you'd collect a crowd.'

One further shock awaited me.

An object was handed to me which I can only describe as a very realistically modelled bust-bodice. That its purpose was to emphasize contours which, in my girlhood, were always decorously concealed was but too evident.

'This,' said my sister cheerfully, 'is a brassiere. And it's no use looking so horrified, because fashions to-day go out of their way to stress that part of one's anatomy. These things are supposed to fix one's chest at the classic angle. Like this -' she adjusted the object with expert fingers. 'There - you see the idea?'

Now we were on the threshold.

As I crossed it, two thoughts occurred to me. One was that the door, which at that instant was being locked behind me,

was not a door but a guillotine. And it had just chopped off from me, utterly and irrevocably, every single thing which, for twenty-eight years, had made up my life. Henceforward I was a being without a background. And no one who has not actually experienced that sensation can know how grim it is.

The other thought flashed in upon me with the urgency of a commandment:

Thou shalt not look back!

And I knew instinctively that, if I wanted to keep my balance on the tight-rope stretched before me, I must slam the door behind me and keep on looking straight ahead. Otherwise I should have to pay the penalty.

I crossed the courtyard and went out into the pale October sunshine.

For good or ill, I had leapt over the wall.

- *I Leap Over The Wall: A Return To The World After Twenty-Eight Years In A Convent*
by Monica Baldwin

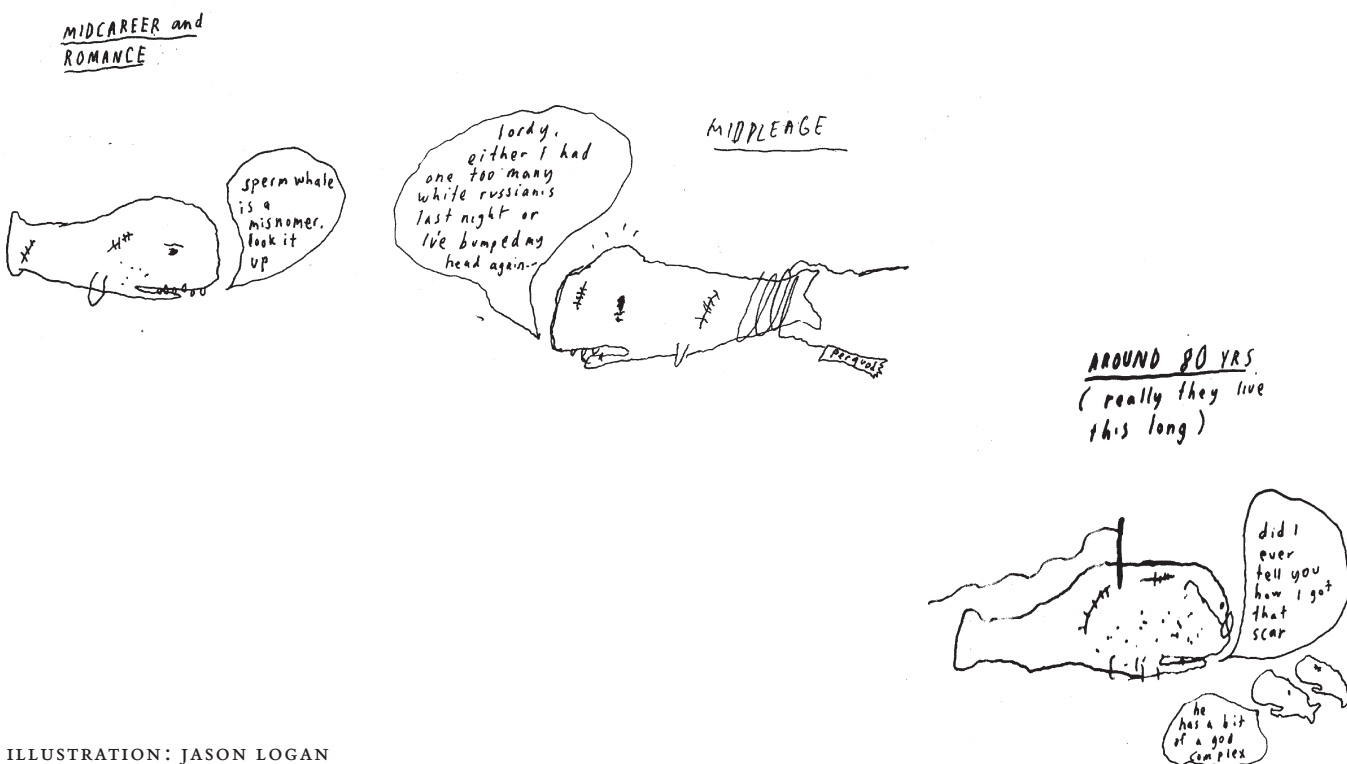


ILLUSTRATION: JASON LOGAN



The Best Bit

David R., Bristol, age 37, on Tess of the d'Urbervilles

ALL SHE WANTS is to go to a place where no ghost of the past can reach her. She says that, you know – or words to that effect. That's all Tess wants. I think it's moving to hear a sentiment like that, don't you? I mean, I moved to Oldham once because I wanted to get away from Bristol, but it wasn't the same. I was mostly just sick of the pubs. Tess has got more of a reason to want to forget the past. For me, this bit of the book comes down to a simple lesson: you know at heart you're a good person, yeah? You know things have happened in your past. They shouldn't matter. You

know they shouldn't. But they do matter, at least to some. You're not proud of them. It's just, you know ... they're there. I'm glad he was able to write it like that. I like when Hardy does that sort of thing. He can really kick you in the goolies sometimes, that guy. Emotionally, I mean.

But the bit that gets me is when Tess writes her letter. She just spills out the truth about herself and the next day, after this horrible night, she's trying to figure out if Angel Clare has read the thing and if he'll still marry her. It's excruciating. But there he is in the morning, you

know? Standing right there, isn't he? He loves her just as much as he did the day before and she's thinking: yeah, this could be all right after all. I got away with this one. I just told the truth.

But then – and this just broke my bloody heart – Tess finds her letter. Angel Clare's not read it after all. She finds it tucked under the carpet – that bloody carpet, know what I mean? I literally looked at carpet differently after that. You know, you don't get carpet playing the role of a villain in a lot of books. And now it's too late for Tess, isn't it? She can't tell the truth. I swear, when I read that it was like my heart was put in the shredder, one of those massive paper shredders. You don't come away from that bit lightly. To this day I tell my friends, 'Check the carpet after your mail gets delivered. Every time.'