

SAFE SEX MADE SIMPLE

a wet night whimsy

Shoot. He would shoot alright. And no blanks either. This was live ammunition. His figurative gun was cocked already. His finger itching.

Mr Big Shot.

Picking up the solitary condom (hygienically-wrapped, hermetically-sealed), he pressed it to his lips & kissed it for luck. Then he slipped it carefully into the left-hand pocket of his brandnew prepatched jeans (bought from D'n'A, cost him an arm & a leg). Tucked away, it nestled there against his antiquated half-hunter, creating the slightest of bulges. Perhaps tonight its day would come. Let's hope it hasn't passed the best-before date, perish the thought, he chortled to himself.

Wishful-thinking counselled Be Prepared. (He'd been a Boy Scout in pubescence, tracker's badge, First Aid, patrol leader no less, ah yes the days those were.) O for a Girl Guide now, to do some backwoods exploration with. One day get spliced & sire a pack of little cubs & brownies. But he was still too much a tenderfoot in the ways of the wild world, that wide game. He'd forgotten most of the knots. If one were tied in his spermatic cord, he wouldn't have needed this precaution against inflicting pregnancy.

Condom, key, watch, loose change, folded paper handkerchief, safe in his hip pockets. And stashed in the marsupial pouch of his fisherman's smock, baccy, skins & matches, together with his leather wallet. Had he got everything? Sufficient for a good night out. In vain, he checked his reflection in the mirror one last time. It was still there, that questionable face, no more handsome than before. Like it or not, it would have to do. Make-up considered too effeminate. Poofy warpaint. Go tell that to an Apache.

Friday night at last, hurray. Thank God it was the weekend. It had been a long week. Only the standard five working days but it seemed longer. Felt more like a hundred years of solitude. A prison stretch of grey evenings-in, in solitary, doing his celebrated impersonation of a celibate hermit. He'd had all the practice he needed at that. Should be perfect by now. And now, he wanted to go out, paint the town red. Not that he could afford a big tin of gloss. He'd have to be content with a few scarlet splashes. Anyway, mark the occasion in some bright way, colourful contrast to the monotonous monochrome of his usual lonely. Christ, how he bored himself sometimes. Step on it then, step on the gas...

Stepping into the evening street, orange sodium glow, he hesitated briefly wondering which way to turn. Left or right? His socialist proclivities inclined him in a sinister direction. He strode along the pavement, not quite sure where he was heading or how far he would get. He had no definite plan beyond a generalised yet intense desire to get drunk and get laid. He would gladly settle for only the latter but the former seemed necessary prologue. First he must track down a prospective partner, and where else could he find one but in the social setting of a pub or club?

None of this was considered in a slow or leisurely manner. He was in a hurry and there was reason for his haste.

It had begun to spit & we're not talking your sex pistol yob job here, this was expectoration on a more symphonic scale.

It was wet. Filthy weather, he thought. 'Gentle rain from heaven', no the precipitation showed no mercy. Hellishly brutal it was. Cats & dogs. They wouldn't be out on a night like this. Had he been prepared, he would have carried an umbrella. Should he stretch his condom over his head to make an improvised bobbed shower cap? (Doubtless there were a baker's dozen of practical uses to which this artificial integument could be put, apart from the one it was primarily intended for, viz. to prevent the proverbial bun in the oven.)

Quick then, get a move on, no time to tarry, foot it fleetly out of this weather. But whoa there. Figure approaching. Female attractive.

He saw her with his naked eye, but she was fully-dressed. Ho ho.

O how he wished they were in one of those corny films & they would run towards each other, fling their arms round one another, embrace & kiss & he would make love to her on that very spot, the soundtrack swelling to orgasmic crescendo.

It was not to be. The script-writer in his head had got carried away. The director shouted 'cut'. Evidently, this was serious cinema, black & white with subtitles. He liked movies with plenty of laughs & a happy ending. How come he always ended up unwanted footage on the cutting room floor?

Aloof, she passed by, on her way to another location & another leading man in another movie.

He opens the door of the first pub he comes to. Walks into a wall of noise, body-heat & cigarette smoke. People packed like sardines. He doesn't fancy trying to force entry into that impenetrable mass. Withdrawing quickly, he carries on.

Carry On Walking. What a film that would make. Hilarious possibilities. He could do a silly walk. But that's been done.

A little further along, a smart wine bar loomed. 'SNOBS', the name said it all. He peered through the rain-bleared window at the warm interior. Zoomed in on the predictable. Among the suave crowd, standing by the bar alluring siren with cocktail on the rocks. Another world from the one he inhabited. He touched the cold pane. That's as close as he would come to her that night, he reflected resignedly. He couldn't go in. Too posh for the likes of him. Style-fascism rules. He wasn't dressed right. No admittance for drowned rats. He was getting wetter by the minute. Just as well there were plenty of others to choose from in this neck of the woods.

Davy King

Third time lucky perhaps. This one more down-market. Resembled a station waiting room. Not too crowded for a Friday night. Next train can't be due for some time, he joked to himself. Well, at least he would get a table & seat. He preferred that to standing, being elbowed & jostled. Purgatory that could be. He ordered a drink. Half of Murphy's, in memory of Beckett's unfortunate anti-hero. He liked to live by literary allusions. Who was he tonight? Not Prufrock, he hoped. No, he would Dare, as soon as he'd got some dutch-courage inside him to stouten his heart.

Hand in pocket, he fingered his precious packet nervously for reassurance. Were all the men carrying condoms, the women too? Everyone must have seen the warning adverts. They chilled him to the bone. Nowadays casual sexual encounters could have dire consequences. You never knew. Who you were having it with. How many partners she had had. Or he might be a carrier himself.

Better condomed than condemned! To equate Sex & Death was an old conceit, but suddenly it was in deadly earnest. Literally Lieberstod. It was funny how there seemed to be a human need to make a joke out of a calamity. Gallows humour. A bit like whistling in the dark.

In his limited experience, the supposed Permissive Society had been one of those myths like the Golden Age. But now the odds against a spontaneous erotic adventure had lengthened extremely. Besides, the ratio of female to male here was not in his favour. Must have been easier for Adam, no competition.

He picked up the beer mat, absentmindedly reading both sides. Some people would read anything if they were bored...

But then he saw her.

WOW!!!

She's a bleached-blond Monroe in body-hugging black. Perched on a barstool. Pedestal. Lipstick vermilion her mouth. That imprint he would fain receive.

'Hi, there, honey shall we osculate?' Superego's sense of etiquette forbids such cheek to a stranger. It would not be proper in polite society. He kisses that fond fantasy goodbye.

He couldn't compete in the macho stakes. But perhaps there was hope for him. Screen-goddess Marilyn had married a playwright with glasses, & one called Arthur to boot. Diminutive, bespectacled Woody Allen had winning ways with women. It must be the one-liners. Was his vanity then misplaced, as he squinted through myopic eyes & saw the world in an impressionistic blur?

What was she thinking? Was she bored? Waiting for someone? There were at least twenty questions he wanted to ask her. As soon as he'd finished his drink. He'd get a chance to speak when he went to the bar again. What would he say? How could he woo her? Perhaps a smile. And if she smiled back, he would venture 'hello'. He must rehearse his chat-up line. What could he possibly say to express his ardent longing for love? For love it was he was really seeking, though sex would do for starters or an acceptable second-best. What bait could he dangle that she would swallow, hook line & sinker?

Too late. Someone else had beaten him to it.

Anyway, how did you address a lady? 'Excuse me, darling, I have a condom in my pocket, shall we use it? It's extra-sensitive.' Surely a more subtle approach was called for. An approach beyond reproach. But most of his approaches were usually so subtle as to be more of a retreat. And retreat he did as soon as he had downed the last dregs. It was more of a rout really, and the black velvety stout had not drowned his sorrows.

Still pouring. The roll-up he was smoking went limp & flopped from his lips. He threw it, smouldering, into the gushing gutter, where it was rapidly extinguished.

Could be worse. Eternal optimist. The rain could be acid or radioactive. Equipped with neither litmus paper nor Geiger counter, he had no way of telling for sure it wasn't. However, there were more pressing concerns on his plate than the state or fate of the world, even though, he would be the first to admit, his welfare was intimately connected with the environment at large. What did matter to him most at the moment was finding a safe place of

Davy King

refuge, shelter from the storm. A congenial hostelry where he could comfort body & mind, &, not forgetting his quest, continue his search for a female companion.

Here was a tavern. There were no shortage of those. The Dolphin. That would do.

Pint o'piss, s'il vous plaît, mein host, that one with the Teutonic name. Il faut être toujours ivre, monsieur. Never let it be said he was not a good European. He was quite cosmopolitan really. A little Latin & less Geek. A soupçon of Français, one or two words of Deutsche. He fancied the barmaid, Rhine-Maiden, Wine-Maiden, but then wouldn't all men?

He panned round the bar to survey the scene, trawling the cast for his desideratum, panning for gold. O brave new. Among the bevy of belles out for a bevvvy, there had to be one, a potential Belovèd. Et là voilà, oo la la, jeune fille, svelte, gamine, beret, chic. Mademoiselle, Cherie. Je t'aime, ma amie. She has a certain je ne sais quoi. 'Scuse the French. What about her?

Or her with the fur? Stole it from the mink. Ideologically-unsound but pretty foxy. And her laughing, her arm round that lucky blighter. Her in red, her with the long black hair. And her and her and her and her. What a lot of lovely women. But then there were all the Jims and Sams, not to mention Toms, Dicks, Harrys, Willys, men, if not lovely to his prejudiced eyes, men for all that, every man Jack of them. May the best man win. He was the bested.

The girls without men were lesbians, probably, good for them. The rest in hetero couples. He felt like a voyeur, watching them relating easily, smiling, laughing, touching. Pair-bonding. The wandering Albatross, was it, displays for up to eighteen years before choosing a partner for life. Here he was like Baudelaire's poet, exiled on earth, grotesque & ungainly, who would soar like a king of the blue sky, if there were but one to believe in him. Listen to the drink talk.

Somewhere a magic wand is waved.

Enter one helluva heavenly apparition, resplendent in clothes spun from rainbows, face bright as the sun, in her eyes & hair the dark mystery of a starlit night. She's so beautiful, it hurts. He daren't look at her for fear of dying of unrequited love. He knows her type: femme fatale or belle dame sans merci. He could waste a lifetime (well at least a week) in hopeless infatuation with this fickle creature.

Supposing she's not just an hallucination, a wishful projection of his longing, an anima image, presumably this demoiselle has feelings & thoughts of her own. He doubts if she notices him. He could do with a P.R. campaign to promote his beautiful soul. A soul for sale, a beautiful soul. He would sell his for her & be damned like Faust. O he wishes to show her his beautiful soul. It has always been immaculate, shining, though his body is soiled, threadbare in places, his dirty underwear best left hidden. How can he reveal that which is invisible, tantalisingly intangible?

Admires her from a distance, as she sits with her back to the bar. Given the choice between her & more booze, he knows which he'd choose. He could swoon at her feet.

Was he then the Last Romantic? A latterday Petrarchan Lover? And if he attempted to initiate a conversation, she would likely tell him to frog off, hop it, like. But inside this wet-looking amphibian was a prince trying to get out. He would be transmogrified by love. Just give him a chance & he will prove himself worthy. Let him take her away from all this to where they can stroll hand-in-hand in a fairy tale, live happily ever after on an enchanted island or something.

But suddenly she's nowhere to be seen. Hey presto, the Lady vanishes, melts into thin air. His quixotic dream, to get there together with her withers through lack of reality.

He would never get over her. Never mind, he could apostrophize her later. Address her absence in verse as the one that got away. His Beatrice. Nothing for it but to get the same again. More of yer amber nectar, squire. While in Rome. It's what a man's right hand was for. His left hand strayed to his pocket. He felt his old faithful warm against his loins. Was the French letter his lucky talisman? It would surely protect him, should he have occasion to use it. As to its magical qualities, he had some doubts. So far it had conspicuously failed to attract anyone of any description.

He should be wearing aphrodisiac pheromone aftershave, that would bring them swarming like bees to a stamen.

Fragrances mingled in the smoky air. Alcoholic smells of hops, grain, grape & juniper. Stale male B.O., those apocrine glands sweating away in the humid heat. Some brute in Brut. The wafting pong of Lifebuoy toilet soap. Odiferous deodorants. And other more exotic perfumes, essential oils, patchouli dark & heavy, lighter jasmine flowers, cool Cologne, & the synthetics, 'Samsara', 'Opium', 'Obsession', offering olfactory titillation. Somewhere a faint whiff of what? Which spoor to follow? His nostrils tingled till he sneezed in quasi-orgasmic release. He blessed himself, soto voce. But soft, a phut, tut, tut, he farted. Furtively. Covering the nether detonation with a cough. Nothing human alien.

He must pursue her scent. But the trail had gone cold, not that it was ever even lukewarm. Would he never find Her tonight then, the big Her, middle-size or small? Perhaps the one he's after has gone to ground. Almost anyone would do, could be the one. Would there be mutual recognition, a subconscious fore-knowledge that they would act out the scenes of a little drama together? A dialogue & then a dance, a pas-de-deux in slow motion....

Nature was calling, yelling at him to attend to another bodily need. He descended to the Gents. In one end, out the other. There were no flies on his flies. He was the fastest draw in the West. His cock discharged a torrential Niagara into the smelly trough, the stink of stale pervasive. Previous customers had left their marks scrawled all across Democracy Wall, predictable obscenities, jokes & names. Call it Freedom of Expression, clichéd graffiti on a peeling palimpsest. At least Kilroy wasn't there.

Back in the bar, he resumed his seat, took out tobacco & rolled an umpteenth. Naturally, for oral gratification he'd rather kiss the white breasts of the Queen of Love (he was a sucker for mammary glands). This dark half-shag seemed very poor substitute. Still, it was a dummy for his vacant mouth, & a smokescreen to hide behind. Drawing on the pencil-thin tube, he mentally doodled. Maybe he could make smoke-signals, spell a message in the air,

S.O.S./ S.W.A.L.K./ R.S.V.P., something along those lines. Blow some rings or more artistically a heart. Obscured by a billowing cloud of smog, fag fug fog, he sat there, vaporous, hazy.

Beer-soaked on the tabletop, a folded copy of The Sun. Pages so stuck together, they wouldn't open to reveal the Page Three Bunny. Not that he would dream of looking. Well, perhaps a little peep to see what he's missing. How he despised such nasty, sensationalist tabloid trash. Yet this was what the punters wanted, or rather it was what they got. A spiffing spoof suggested itself: the fool Moon or distorting Mirror. Parody, pastiche, some sort of send-up, wouldn't be too difficult. In his mind's eye, he composed the copy.

VAGINA SINGS BLUE

Yes, the diva of dirt has done it again. Just when we thought she could go no further, the high priestess of porn & patroness of pudenda has reached new depths of debauched depravity.

Supernova star Vagina's latest hype to outrage the pubic is currently riding at Number Nine in the video nasty charts.

'Neurotic, neurotic, I am virgin on the psychotic' sings the sultry sex goddess while simultaneously fellating mike (no mean feat, as you'll know if you've ever tried).

You've got to hand it to the lechy lady, she sure knows her audience.

BIGGER BOOBS

You may have noticed some slight typographical errors & spelling mistakes in the above article (MADONNA WITH CHILD). These were, in fact, intentional. But enough Big Words....

Cor, blimey, talk about Bloomers!

Davy King

Titillating

Due to the continuing recession (the pun fell sharply in the Shock Market), we are going for cheaper laughs.

So, why aren't you laughing? Didn't you get your innuendo away last night?

You may think it's sexist, but it sells newspapers.

Remember, folks, *there's nothing new and it's in the Sun!*

Your Raving Reporter.

He'd read recently in another newspaper, one of the better quality broadsheets, how astronomers had discovered a newly-formed star surrounded by ethanol, an inconceivably vast ocean equivalent to squillions of litres of Stella. You could get off your face in space. Might be someone's idea of heaven, that great inn in the sky. He'd stick to his local in case he was done by the intergalactic police, a little prince drunk in charge of an asteroid. Made his mind reel, he felt squiffy just thinking about it. The universe still held a few surprises.

As if to illustrate that universal principle of novelty ingressing into the habitual familiar, back down on earth, a bloke arrives dressed in a skirt, kilt rather. He's not in fancy dress, it's the reel fling. No drag artist this, you don't question the manhood of a burly six-foot-sixer. So, this braveheart, clan unknown, what does he wear underneath? Boxer shorts, Y-fronts, briefs? Those new Calvin Klein jersey knickers, knitted trunks, a little Lycra number? Or bugger-all, in bare-arsed cheek. Old joke. Jockstrap perhaps. Is that why they call a Scotsman Jock? Billy Connelly, you should be here at this hour, or Ivor Cutler, Robbie Coltrane, or Rab C. Nesbitt, even Rabbie Burns, Scotch broths of boys the lot. Stage comic Scotch.

But this is no laughing matter. Too much Irn Bru had entered his soul. Erect, well-hung ape, he is. Dominant male. Testosterone monster. Hairy scary. Tattoo too, dagger-thru-the heart design on bulging Bluto bicep, well-armed & legged, dirk down the sock. Who does he think he is, this Rob Roy, Willy Wallace, Bob the Bruce, brute of a kilted Caledonian? Barges right up to a heavy-breasted floozy & puts his arm round her. Private property, keep out. Looks daggers. Bares his teeth, in case you haven't got the message. It's survival of the fittest, fight or flight, in this human zoo.

Wild. Should get an Oscar for that performance. But could easily turn nasty. Undercurrent of violence & not that far beneath the surface. So split the scene, the night once young was aging fast. He still had a way to go, to seek to find. Try somewhere else, somewhere more.... where? Finnegans. The Neptune. World's End? So many to choose from. This bar, that bar, another bar - bar in the cage. What was that place called? 'The Laughing Pirate'. The one with the. He would go there, tho it was far from the nearest in this weather.

The forecast had warned of the possibility of slight drizzle. That was the meteorological understatement of the year. This was no mere mizzle, more like the Deluge. 'Funny intervals & scattered flowers', he had quipped to himself earlier in the day, while still dry indoors. Any such witty repartee was out of the question in his present predicament.

By now, his trousers were damp, uncomfortably so. Shoes soaked thru to the socks, he squelched along. The would-be Don Juan was a very wet one. Such a downpour was enough to dampen anyone's ardour.

This was not Spain. This was not even the plain. But, my gawd, it wasn't arf rain, awright.

Across the street, a man passes, clad in souwester, oilskins, gumboots. Now that's what you call Prepared (obviously a Queen's Scout this). All the man needed was a life jacket & the costume would have been complete. Better throw in a snorkel & some goggles to be on the safe side.

Stay out in this weather long enough, you would evolve webbed feet. He'd often wondered about the absence of Duck references in Wordsworth, that denizen of the big puddle Lake District.

Davy King

The pavement artist's coloured chalk reproduction had smudged & run in the rain, leaving a half-recognizable blur. The Botticelli Venus on her scallop-ashtray shell, skimming the waves like an ur-surfboarding california girl, was being inexorably washed away, the blues blending with the rain-blackened pavement. Briefly he mused how that would happen to us all in time, the tide of history sweeping all before... He decided not to pursue the image. After all, it was Friday Night & he was out to enjoy himself. He must look on the Bright side, the Funny one. At least, there were no frog patches. Yet.

Skilfully side-stepping a puddle, veering away from the spray of passing vehicles, he whistled a few bars of 'Singing in the Rain' & continued on his sodden odyssey, or wild goose-chase as it was beginning to seem.

The goose had flown. He wouldn't make a very successful hunter. Perhaps his heart wasn't in the chase. He didn't want to seem the predatory male. He loved women. Maybe he didn't love himself enough. Anyway, he wasn't exactly riding along on the crest, as he bowed his head in the face of the elements, rain in his heart a la Verlaine. Pathetic really. He wiped his face in case it looked like he'd been crying.

A skull & crossbones flag flying on the mast outside raised false hopes of what might be found within. If you were being very generous, it's what you might call a Theme Pub Manqué. It was just about plausible that someone once had the bright idea of rigging out the premises as a ship. In odd touches of décor the gimlet-eyed could almost discern faint traces of a feeble & clichéd imagination at play, one with only a limited budget to expend on exuberance or frivolity.

Of course, there were the usual fishermen's nets, & creels, one or two nautical knick-knacks, the jetsam of junk shops, haphazardly strewn about, cluttering the place & gathering dust. Shipshape it wasn't. But this may have been the new fashion in Bristol. A rusty cutlass was displayed on the wall behind the bar. In case of mutiny.

To be sure, the Landlord was a sort of Long John Silver cum Captain Hook look-a-like, except for the absence of wooden leg & hook & eye-patch. There was sadly no parrot either (not even a stuffed one, an ex) perched on his shoulder. He was no Captain Jack Sparrow, nor Johnny Depp in make-up. (Besides, that would have been anachronistic anyway.) Disappointing really.

You'd think he would have made a little bit more effort to enter into the spirit of things. Still no need to Boo & Hiss him, he's only doing his job & doing the best he can. It's just that he's not really cut out to be a Pantomime Villain in fancy dress. Too reserved for that, but it would have been fun.

Also, surprisingly, there were no old sea-dogs willing to spin a swashbuckling yarn about life on the briny or sing a sea-shanty. Only one landlubber of a young mongrel on a rope held by a dreadlocked white twenty-something guy, more likely to include Bob Marley in his musical repertoire ('old pirates yes they rob I'). There was not even a plank to walk, unless you counted the floorboards.

And where, pray, was that sultry Marlin Brandy eating a Bounty bar? He should at least make a cameo disappearance on this waterfront.

No, the establishment fell far short of expected epic Hollywood standards. The sad reality wasn't even remarkable enough to be considered vulgar & tawdry. It left too much to the imagination, Compared to the movies it was frankly unconvincing.

Apart from the few aforementioned props there was nothing whatsoever to suggest an authentic maritime connection. The characters in their various costumes more intent on playing parts in different genres.

Well, that's the tedious descriptive passage over with. Rather vague & poorly defined but you get the general impression. See, one picture's worth a thousand words. Who wants to wade thru page after page of description trying to visualize a place which (if some Quantum Physicists are to be believed) only has a tendency to exist? Anyway, let's not halt the narrative. He has unfinished business to take care of, serious business. He needs a drink.

Eases his way thru to bar & waits to be served. Behind the counter, three graceful barmaids dispensing the sacrament. His favourite administers to him, vouchsafes an accidental touch to his hand as he receives the change. Sweet Jesus, it had been so long, so long since he had touched someone or been touched.

He makes a circuit of the premises. On the lookout. He smiles & smiles at the pretty women. Smiles at every woman, all pretty in the eyes of this beholder.

Davy King

In his eyes a kiss-kiss for anyone with the double X chromosome. And yet, he couldn't find one single woman (single, separated, divorced) who was willing to play with him.

He was not quite Quasimodo nor the Elephant Man entirely yet. Or was he? He may have metamorphosed in the last few minutes. Maybe he was shape-shifting ever so slightly into some ogre or beast, not to be embraced. Perhaps he had developed leprosy. Or why was he persona non grata to the opposite sex? Could they discern in his thoughts stains of dark prurience? Did they recoil from the sickening monstrosities of his perverted imagination? In brief, what was wrong with him? Was he cast as untouchable lumpenproletarian in the sexual politics of the night, impotent in the power games played? And could some old sugar daddy who wields the big stick-carrot-prick buy any of the flesh here for sale? O, sexist cynic he.

Maybe he should just come out with it to the next girl he stands next to. Gis a fuck then, darlin'. Why pussyfoot & beat about the bush? Get right in there, boy. His evil angel spoke.

No, he could only ask with his eyes, imploring reciprocal answer. But any interrogatory ogle met with blank walls or averted eyes. No instant flash-fusion-of-mutual-recognition, love-at-first-sight. No.

He couldn't bank on a bonk, too much to expect maybe. Expect too much, might be disappointed. He should lower his sights a little. Kiss & a cuddle would do. Let's be brutally honest about it, a conversation would help. You've got to start somewhere. Still he wasn't out of the game yet, not by a long chalk. He could bide his time. Early days, tho the night was getting on & he wasn't getting it on or up.

He would have to sit in his sticky-prickly wet till it dried on him. Feeling more bored than bawdy, he retired to the brown study of his head. There, in the musty-fusty-dusty cobwebbed vaulted cerebral archives, he was able to cogitate, undisturbed by minor perceptual inputs from his immediate surroundings.

There were lonely-hearts columns for people like him. He often read them with interest, hoping to locate a kindred spirit, someone after his own heart, of the opposite sex (gay he wasn't in any sense of the word - maybe he'd have

done better if he were). He wouldn't know how to advertise himself. To do so honestly without exaggeration, self-aggrandisement or deprecation, would require a degree of self-knowledge to which he could make no claim. As far as that was concerned, he had just started in kindergarten.

Tonight, however, he was mainly interested in knowledge of another, in a Biblical sense. Thus he mused as he philosophically sipped his pint. As he drank on, he was drying out (in the non-alcoholic connotation), his dank clothes steaming, he too getting that way, 'steamin' in the sloshed Scots signification.

He thought of all those bleeding lonely hearts with gsoh (and even vgsoh). They must be having an hilarious time cracking jokes right left and centre. Well, TLC or TCP, he was in sore need of something asap.

So, how would he describe himself, list his various attributes, qualities, interests, desires and dreams? How in a few simple words could he convey the complex chaos of his fractally-infinite existence, the minute nuances of character & personality, without reducing himself to caricature or stereotype? Précis not being his forté. Perhaps he should write his autobiography. Then, if people asked him what he did for a living, he could give a smart-arse answer: "I'm writing my life-story. Do you want to be in it? Watch what you do, mind what you say. It may be taken down and used in evidence..."

Yes, and wouldn't it be fun to be able to look at one's former life from a posthumous vantage point and rewrite sections one didn't like? Add, delete, edit and amend. But, no, however glaring the mistake or infelicity of style, in honesty and in real life, the text must remain uncorrected, as it were, the authoritative stet not to be gainsaid. The moving finger and all that.

These were the self-obsessed meanderings of a maudlin mind. So many thoughts racing thru his head, yet he said nothing. Not one word, except brief businesslike interchange with barmaid. To speak to a stranger would require dutch-courage. He's got some of that alright but then if he spoke it might be double-dutch & seem like drunken interjection, a gross interruption.

Of the emotional & psychological dramas taking place around him, he was oblivious. There were other stories taking shape he knew nothing about. There may have been someone here, lonely too, hoping he'd speak to her, too shy to speak herself. How was he to know? He was not telepathic.

Davy King

There had been incalculable occasions on which he could have done this or that, done otherwise, and in retrospect wished he had. Could have never did. What might have been wasn't. Ah, what regret, what hopeless damned regret one feels condemned to feel about the irrevocable step taken or not taken.

Useless such lugubrious speculation. Comes of too much introspection, too much philosophy not enough sex. Wilhelm Reich was right. We'd all be happier for a good fuck, it's obvious, innit?

Should come out of his shell. He's too wrapped up in himself, rapt. He needs to unwrap, rap. Go get a refill. What would it be this time? He looked at the array of hand-pumps. At one end 'Best Bitter', the other 'Worst'? And in between 'not so bad' & 'quite good'? Merely OK was OK by him. He leant a moment on the tropical hardwood bar; far away in the rainforest a butterfly flapped its wings. He sighed & didn't know why.

Ms Bella Donner (an obvious pseudonym) is doing a sex survey, market research into people's horny habits. With wad of sheets on clipboard, she comes over to the table where our Main Man is sitting idly with a faraway look on his face. She flashes laminated I.D. to reassure him she is pukka & above board.

- Excuse me, sir, do you have time to answer a few questions? In complete confidence, of course.

(No need to go into the details of whom the data would be made available to, of course.)

- Er, yes, certainly. Of course.

He blushed a little at her forthrightness as she began reading to him quietly in dulcet tones the questionnaire. It was quite a catechism. He wasn't easily shocked but the startlingly unexpected frankness of the enquiry took him aback somewhat.

- On average, how many times a week would you say you have sexual relations?

(Or if you prefer to be less specific: often/ very often/ all the time non-stop/ not very often/ almost never/ not at all/ mind your own business?)

He wasn't sure what to say. He felt quite attracted to her. The first female he'd had a proper conversation with in an immemorial aeon. He didn't want her to think he wasn't available, on the off-chance that this was the start of something good. So he told her the truth. No, I don't have a fucking partner.

- Well, actually, I don't have a girlfriend at the moment. I don't suppose, you'd like a drink, would you?

- Sorry but I'm not allowed to drink while on duty. It wouldn't be professional. And, sorry, I won't need to trouble you any longer because there wouldn't really be any point, would there? We're only looking for positive responses. Hard data from the sexually-active.

And, at that, she thanked him for his help & assistance et cetera & walked off to interview another prospective candidate, that hunky-looking stud over there by the dartboard.

Cupid's Dart had missed the board in our hapless hero's case.

Fuck! He'd made himself sound like some neutered wimp, a virtual eunuch. Why couldn't he have invented a more exciting sexual persona? An assumed name & nature: Robert or Randolph the Randy Rabbit, Larry the Lascivious Libertine, Macho Martin, Lewd Lewis the Lecherous Lothario, Gary the Gallant, Samson the Satyr, Roger the Roué, Frank the Fornicator, Wally the Womaniser... A whole pantheon of characters was available to adopt. For future reference, he must compile an alliterative list of them in alphabetical order.

He was such a novice Casanova. He could kick himself. But that would be to add injury to the insults he was heaping on his own head, & his pride was wounded enough already. Just put it down to experience or rather inexperience. You'll know better next time, lad. Assuming he is ever again approached by a sexual researcher, an admittedly rare occurrence. O forget it. Don't give him that kinky Kinsey or Shere Hite shite. His sexual case history was Ancient History.

He might at least have mentioned the condom in his pocket.

Davy King

How many units of alcohol had he consumed? After the fifth (the number of fingers on his hand, including the thumb), he had stopped counting or caring. The bitter's high original gravity induced in him a feeling of mild levity. Foolhardy lush, he had mixed his drinks. Should have stuck to Tristram Shandy. He would be sorry the morning after, but this was still the night before & whatever gets you thru.

Gauloises roll-up at the ready (the boho intellectual, Latin Quarter look), he struck a light, - quicker than rubbing two sticks together, as he might have done in the Scouts - but he still couldn't see the woods for the twigs, branches, trunks, trees. He really was feeling a wee bit tiddly, his interior monologue auditioning as a stand-up/ falling over comedian, running commentary sprinting towards the punchline pun, babbling stream-of-consciousness carrying him away...

It was reassuring that they were called safety matches, he thought, he would be in no danger of getting his fingers burnt or accidentally starting a conflagration, forest fire, inferno. Of course, soothing language, euphemisms especially, could lull one into a false sense of security, as if the words gave spurious control over, or somehow altered the nature of, what they designated. That's the primitive belief in the magic of words. But an abracadabra spell don't always work. And some things were easier said than done, not done, or undone, not to mention John Donne. Then again, it was sometimes easier to show than say & actions spoke louder than empty words. How true these clichés. Words, they could be seductive, fickle, equivocal, any number of things apart from straightforward, honest, & reliable. He loved words, but sometimes they let him down, deceived, deserted, used him. He had known women like words.

A hot-air condom-balloon floats lazily towards his mental horizon. He pops it with a metaphorical pin & the thought is gone. He's deflated. Could do with some pneumatic rumpy-pumpy with a bit of crumpet. He's back in the bar, suddenly sombre & somehow sobered up.

Off the wall screen tuned to MTV, Blue Peter Pan Man Michael Jacksoff. Mercifully the sound's turned down so all that's audible is Sony Walkman sort of distant tinny jangle & we're spared strained vocals at high volume. What presents itself is a grotesque mute tragedia dell'arte in which our deadpan whiteface martyr appears in guise of zombified risen christ morphing into a

protean succession of his favourite Disney cartoon characters. It's enough to bring tears to the eyes.

He'd rather watch Vagina-Madonna any day. What he was looking for was a Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, or Pocahontas, Esmerelda, a Sindy-doll Cinderella to play the Action Man Prince Charming to.

Perhaps he was in the wrong place at precisely the wrong time. Where else could he be but here, & when if not now? Maybe he laboured under the illusion of some holy grail outside of himself, some blessed state to be bestowed by an enchanting other. Was he not self-sufficient, complete in himself? Obviously not. No man is, tho he felt like a desert island, or not even that. No more than a grain of sand, blown hither & thither by the winds of. Or slipping thru the hourglass. Time, he had lost all track of it, tho the clock ticked on & it would soon be 'Time', or what the barstaff call.

Careful not to dislodge the condom (how embarrassing if it fell to the floor), he took out his geriatric chronometer. No, it couldn't be that early. Of late, his timepiece had been slow, seemed to be developing a nervous tick, bit of a dicky ticker he reckoned. The heirloom half-hunter was definitely past it, decrepit as some elderly grandfather clock that had seen better days, hours, minutes & too many of them. Now he noticed the second hand remained stationary in its orbit. Time hadn't stopped but his pocket watch had. When neither winding nor shaking restored motion to the paralysed hands, he had to admit the possibility that its previous stroke had proved fatal. Long moribund, the horologe had given up the ghost. Blame it on the blind watchmaker.

With perfect timing, they ring last orders on the old ship's bell. Pavlovian cue for eager customers to rush to the counter. One for the road then. Splice the mainbrace, me hearties. Ask not for whom the bell tolls, Jimmy.

Drown those sorrows, tho they're like Olympic swimmers or Byron swimming the Hellespont. Pint of nepenthe please. Liquid Amnesia. Forget it. 'Here's to.... Oblivion', he toasted himself, as Lethe-wards he sank.

Davy King

The clientele, having had enough, or at least unable to get any more, leave like rats the sinking ship we're all in.

A rowdy crowd were off to a party. Happy hunting ground. Mohammedan heaven of houris. Mind if I gatecrash? Honest, I'll be the life & soul. He'd never have the effing effrontery. Faint heart. Was he lacking in spunk? Where was he going? Home to limbo he supposed.

Outside it continued to rain on the just & on the unjust, indeed on just about anyone reckless enough to have ventured out on a night like this. Fecundating inundation. Fuckindating damnation.

He could be forgiven for thinking that someone up there wasn't exactly working overtime to ensure his every happiness. But God works in mysterious ways, & how could he be absolutely certain that some deus-ex-machina wouldn't suddenly descend to offer him salvation? However unlikely, for all he knew round the very next corner a positive peripeteia might be in store. Very well, not this corner but the next one.

In a good movie, something would happen. Our protagonist would have an encounter. But movies are elliptical. Life isn't. We have to endure the longueurs...

The longueurs were getting longer & longer. His longing no way abated. Now he was scouting in earnest. Thru the concrete jungle without a compass. The road black river in the rain, deep in canyon of tall buildings.

Options were running out. Where was there left to look? There was one place he knew open till two.

Thus was he drawn towards the nadir of his dissipated peregrination. Gravity was gaining ground. Downhill all the way, he would go with the flow.

The late-nite low-dive was, of course, the pits. There was only one word for it: tacky. No, there were plenty words for it, mainly derogatory. It was the last ditch before overdue defeat. Everytime he ended up there, it was always never again. Its dubious easy virtue was that it was open, not fussy about whom it welcomed into its whorish embrace, & conveniently within short

staggering distance of his beckoning bed. It was where you went when you had nowhere better or should have known better. The place where beggars forwent choice, abandoned hope.

Low-life aficionado's might see the charm in it. A Stanislavsky devotee, dedicated method-actor on field research for a desperado role, could come here to do some homework & go unnoticed. Here you could slum it in style with the worst of them & no-one would give a damn.

So, anxious now at last lest he'd lost in the lists of lust, he crossed fingers &, inhaling a deep draught of sobering air, prepared to enter the final port of call on his long voyage to drunkenness. One ultimate nightcap, a concluding slurred cri-de-cœur of a flirtation, then, if that failed, he'd throw in the towel & wend his sorry weary lonely way homewards.

In the nightclub's heyday, long departed, its red neon sign had spelt 'Shades'. Now, with the 'S' on the blink, its name appeared as 'hades', which was somehow just as apt.

Heavyweight bouncer, evening-dressed to kill, stands guard at the portal, unsmiling, unblinking, recent scar from broken bottle, below left eye. On the lookout for trouble. Would our wayward anti-hero pass muster?

A blue note, or an orange one, any colour would do, waved beneath the nose, usually did the trick. No-one would sniff at such legal tender, the currency to buy a ticket to the pleasure-palace. You takes your choice in the market-place at the going-rate.

The needful paid, he took the plunge down ill-lit stairs to face the music. Geronimo.

A few sheets to the wind, he breezes in to instant din. No fanfares, not even 'Entry of the gladiators', just some old pop song blaring out. Fights his way across arena, to the crowded bar.

He was in need of a fidus Achetes, or a Virgil to guide him thru the gloom & glare.

The other last survivors were a motley crew, night's castaways, they must have shared one thing in common - the unslaked desire for a ninth or tenth or however many over the abstinent eighth. Let him treat himself, live a little. He'd splash out on a single malt, Glen MacSomething, to warm the cockles.

Davy King

Waiting for the firewater, he eavesdropped on the chat behind his back. Some rant about road protests, reclaiming streets from tyranny of infernal combustion engine, stopping trees being felled to make way for another unnecessary bypass, they were talking with righteous indignation of direct action. Yeah, his sentiments exactly. It was refreshing & not a little surprising to listen to some green idealism for a change, especially in an ecological hellhole like this.

He turned his head slightly, glancing over his shoulder at the earnest debater. Small world indeed, for what if it wasn't the dreadlocked, white, twenty-something guy of previous acquaintance, minus mongrel but plus a wondrous wood-nymph of a woman. Freshly returned from the woods by the look of it, both clutching cans of Special Witches' Brew. But where had the doggone dog gone? It was one of the night's strange mysteries that would haunt him for a while or so. He hated, well disliked, or was not awfully fond of, an unsolved puzzle. But he felt it impolite to interrupt & ask. Two's company. Maybe he should let his hair grow long like that, let it go matted & tangled in dreadlocks. If it would endear him to the likes of such a luscious leman, a very desirable dryad if ever there was one.

Wonder what they're called? Name of Sylvana would suit her. And he, maybe nicknamed Rafe the waif. His missing mongrel on the rope, let's christen it Muzz the mutt. I here baptize them. Bet they have a story. Probably smoke dope. And why not? She carried a penny-whistle on which to toot her woodnotes wild.

Dram in hand, he noticed an empty table in the corner. Like Little Jack Horner, he could sit there unobtrusively & peruse the proceedings.

Background music was drowning out snippets of conversation interspersed with raucous laughter. He kept missing the joke. Soundtrack changing to 'Wet Wet Wet', watermusic reminding him of the rain now he was dry inside. Soundwaves breaking, lapping, washing into shell-like ears. He was Brahms & Liszt as a newt.

The brief songs continued, each with a message, the expression of shared sentiments of the only-human, all-too-human tribe. Soul music, blues,

heartbeat pulsations, bass to the belly, foot tappers. Less-repressed, he would get up & dance. Parisian Apache. Last Tango, Last Waltz, anything but the Quadrille. Even Twist in the end, Hokey Cokey & Conga on out. Pelvic-thrust in Reggae rhythm, fucking fully-dressed. Come dancing indeed.

But he was reeling already. His head swimming, awash in alcohol, like a newly-formed star, thoughts drifting off in the current of music. He must try to anchor himself. Concentrate now. Remember the poor porpoise purpose of his mishmash mission, which wash.... one, to get pished. Yes, he could count himself successful in that at least. And two, to....

The music prompted him. “No Satisfaction’, it was his song. That time of night. Wait long enough, it always comes round. Raw energy, primitive & classic, gathering no moss. ‘I’ve tried & I’ve tried & I’ve tried & I’ve tried’. And so he had.

Alcohol night slips smoothly down the throat & lodges at the back of the skull. Lights flash on & off red yellow green blue white their colours as the music continues. On the smooth round tabletop an ashtray emblem of a harp he puts the spent match in. Looks round. Still no sign of ... her the one he seeks who is seeking him. Alcohol continues as light-headed white red yellow green blue he smoothly lights another & fag ends & ash pile up in emblem of a harp ashtray on tabletop. Colours flash on & off smoothly lodging at the back of his white skull as down & spent he continues looking round drinking in the blue scene for a green sight of her his match seeking him in the music & ash of alcohol night.

This night sea journey, a perilous crossing, on the metaphorical ferry, is getting a bit rough. Choppy. You could feel seasick. Travel tablets might settle the stomach.

He could cry ‘Help, save me, I’m drowning, drowning inwardly in suppressed salt tears, in alcohol, drowning, not waving...’ His distress-signal goes unnoticed & he goes down, down into the deep, deep dark of dark despair, gasping for air. ‘O mermaid-barmaid bear me up, rescue me from this watery grave. Give me the kiss of life & let me breath.’

Davy King

He made a steeple with his fingertips in an attitude of silent prayer. What pathos! These were them ol' blue devils alright, these were they. Whingeing melancholia had him in thrall. He had no straws to clutch at or suck.

Alcohol, you could call it. A realm of dead & dying.

He had to snap out of it. Why couldn't he be more rugged & rude, more like one of the loud-mouthed, lewd, thuggish rigger lads? Bring on the go-gos then, hips gyrating, naked to the waist, breasts pert or pendulous bouncing in time to the suave song. Yeah, that would liven things up a bit. But such sexist sentiments were a no-no, a gross affront to his PC sensitivities. Though he somehow suspected most of the males in this vicinity were unreconstructed in feminist terms. The swine. They seemed to be getting on better than him.

He spots a Vague Acquaintance, not so Auld. Pretty enough in a plain sort of way, not that he was one to make superficial value judgements, of course. Miracle of miracles, she walks towards him & speaks.

- Hi, how are you?

- How!

He replies in injun-speak, right hand in air, palm forward. Just his little joke. What an utter guffaw. He's trying to impress her with his spontaneous humour, his lightning-quick, off-the-cuff repartee (tho he had been rehearsing his line for weeks, just waiting for an occasion to use it).

But the Vague Acquaintance, name of... of, isn't it embarrassing when you can't remember & you don't want to ask because you've seen this person so many times & they know your name & ... O the mental frustration when it's on the tip of your coated tongue, or rather in some dark, infrequently-visited recess of your reticulate grey-matter, stranded in an abysmal synaptic gap, & you can't retrieve it for love or money.

Funnily enough, the Vague Acquaintance is, in fact, rather vague herself & cannot for the life of her remember what he's called. Anyway, she wanders off, having seen someone else whose name she does know, & is soon lost in the crowd.

What of the others? Faces. Let's face it. They are nameless, all nameless here, or names unknown or rather unknown to him, his name unknown to them. Those round the rectangular table were gesturing in sign-language, eloquently expressive prestidigitation he could neither decipher nor participate in. All he could have done was point to himself, give a thumbs-up or two fingers. In this noise, being deaf & dumb was probably little disadvantage. Sure you'd miss the tunes but could communicate better without having to raise your voice or strain to hear what was said.

Perhaps he didn't even speak the same vocabulary as the others, the right code. He didn't know the shibboleth, the open sesame or password. Was it just that money talks so he didn't have much to say?

And what of his body language? He scratched his head in an ambiguous gesture. Chest out, stomach in, shoulders back, he should sit erect, or then again relax, adopt a more laid-back pose. As indecisively he crossed & uncrossed his legs, he was no doubt sending out mixed messages to anyone who cared to watch. Were his movements fluent, his limbs articulate? He was getting a little stiff, so he shifted slightly on his seat. His hand rubbed the back of his neck & he rotated his head a few times to get rid of the tension there. What a dumbshow this was. Marcel Marceau could give him some tips on how to express his heart in silence. His own preferred minimalist mime would be lost on the audience. They'd miss the nuances in a twitch. You'd need a close-up to discern any glimmer of meaning in those short-sighted eyes or correctly read the enigmatic twist of his shy-smiling lips. (His upper one wasn't stiff, nor did he bite the lower.) Considering all this, he became self-conscious & suddenly didn't know where to put his face or hands. Besides, how could his fingers keep up with the latest slang? If he tapped them on the tabletop hoping to catch the beat, said something percussive talking-drum-style, would that be misinterpreted as impatience or boredom?

What did his physical mannerisms convey of the inner man? No extrovert, he desisted from waving his arms about in the air in a manner likely to draw attention to himself. Nor would he risk any hesitant steps on the dance-floor.

If he tried to trip the light fantastic, he'd probably trip over. He'd look a jerk. A trainee Travolta in trainers.

More significantly shod, his feet could have made a conscious fashion-statement in a good brogue, or in D.M.s spoken the vernacular with more confidence. Walk his talk. To fit in with the diverse dress-code on display would require chameleon clothes or camouflage. Perhaps he was invisible, seated in the shadows, observing. Had he wished to stand out, be conspicuous & blatant, he could have worn a teeshirt with a slogan (SEX APPEAL - GIVE GENEROUSLY), 'kiss-me-quick' hat or non-verbally provocative codpiece. That would have proclaimed his status as a rake on the make. Too introverted to be outré, he deemed such tactics tactless, only befitting a buffoon.

To see ourselves as others. From the outside this stranger. How did he look? Cool? Cold? (He was yearning for warmth.) Indifferent? Did he perhaps appear inscrutable? Or was he rather an abject object liable to elicit pity, contempt or no response at all? Internally, subjectively, in elevated moments of bravado he pictured himself a Valentino with piercing eyes. And then again insecure, in Eeyore mood, he was once more a lousy, unlovely eyesore, a sight.

But look. Over there. That girl-woman, female of the species. Real stunner, pre-Raphaelite redhead. Alone & a spare seat next to her. Dare he? He dared himself. This was his last chance. Speak now or forever...

He wasn't completely paralytic. Almost but not quite. Hope sprung, he rose unsteadily to his feet, which now seemed distant at the end of his legs, & half minced, half tottered towards her. Irresistible force of magnetic attraction pulling him thither. Smile, don't leer. Leaning over, he made a tentative diffident query.

- Is that seat...

- It's taken.

- Sorry, I thought...

A violent voice behind him butted in.

- Are you hassling her, pal?

Oops. He turned to face his interrogator. It was the kilted Caledonian, the tartan terror, he'd seen earlier in the evening.

- No, I...

- Well, you'd better leave.

- I was only...

- Now.

And with that exigent prompt to present awareness he was pushed bodily in the direction of the door. By some minor miracle, he just about managed not to fall over, & so narrowly escaped complete indignity.

No point in arguing. He didn't mind the repetitive beats from the dancefloor, but didn't take to being repetitively beaten. He didn't feel like fisticuffs. Had left his six-gun at home. He was not John Wayne. Couldn't defend himself with rapier wit. Time to make a quick exit, via the Emergency Exit, not he hoped pursued by that boorish bear. Avoid confrontation or a scene. Why hang around for a Glasgow kiss? He was a pacifist. He was a coward. But he would live to tell the tale.

Was this his come-uppance for being so bold? He had only tried to be friendly like, indulge in some pleasant conversation, harmless social intercourse. His name ain't Jack the Ripper. Rape not on his agenda. Repulsive even to consider. And look where his audacity had got him. Rejected, ejected, dejected. His stratagem scotched. Any buoyancy deflated, he was out in the cold again. What a Dante-climax...

Mr not-so-Big-Shot, tiny Tim more like, had shot his bolt to no avail. He'd missed the last streetcar named Desire & would now sadly have to walk home alone.

Davy King

Still pissing down. He was pissed, pissed off, & needed a piss. So that's what a man's penis is for: pissing. Effete pee-shooter. Forget about ejaculation, his main desire now was to take a leak. That's what's known as getting your priorities right. He could hope & pray for a woman all he liked, but there was no escaping actuality.

Wet & desperate for a pee, in danger of wetting himself still further, it would be bliss indeed to donate a bladderful to the gutter's Zambezi. Too civilised, inhibited, for that, the discomfort needs must be endured, till home & dry in the heaven of the domestic water closet.

Come hell or high water, he had to get home. Put one foot in front of the other. One small step for man... on crazy paving. Was the pavement moving or was he? All relative, he thought, in Einsteinian inebriation. His mind spun, the globe too spinning round. Like a snooker ball, the blue one.

Man, he was arseholed, mortal, guttered. Mustn't end up in the gutter tho, tho all of us are, some looking at the stars. He could see none this cloudy rainswept night, but he would, no doubt, if he walked into that lamppost. Stars! Blame it on the Zodiac. His horoscope had failed to promise any wild romance. No conjunction with Venus. Destiny celestial had confounded his desires. Perhaps that was what was wrong with him. He had this gloomy Calvinist foreboding about predestination, the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. You had to make it happen, did you, or did you let it happen, be open to opportunities? None had knocked for him tonight. Maybe it was karma. He'd rather enact the Kama Sutra. One thousand & one exciting positions for bored missionaries to make love in. That would be stretching his one condom a little too far.

Zonked, he zigzagged zanily across the zebra-crossing, almost tripping over the kerb when he got to the other side. No traffic in sight, no streetwalkers. Almost sleep-walking by now, he was on his way to zzz.

Don't look now but there on the wall, high out of reach. He waved merrily at the close-circuit camera, a cyber Cyclops with ne'er-sleeping eye. Hi there, Big Bruv. Perhaps he should perform a song & dance routine for it. Could be his big break into showbiz. He could stand there for quarter of an hour & have his fifteen minutes of fame. Nowadays we can all get on CCTV. You see, it's a free country. Ah well, Orwell would tell ye he told us so.

So, he was under surveillance. So what? As far as he knew there was no law against walking home yet. Admittedly he was somewhat sozzled, not quite sober as a judge, Your Honour, distinctly drunk he could not deny but not outrageously disorderly. He would place his arms straight by his sides & goose-step smartly away: right, right, right, right, right.

The quick march & all this fresh air & bracing rain has whet (or was that wet?) his appetite. He felt positively peckish, veritably ravenous as a... er raven, voracious as a gourmand gull. What could he tempt his tastebuds with? A Wimpy. Spicy-beanburger, it would have to be, for he was squeamish about the flesh of slaughtered steer. Wimpy. Perhaps he was too. The well-known wimp-factor. He could never become President, but luckily he harboured no such lofty ambition. Just give him a First Lady & coke to go. No, it would be closed. He kept forgetting how late it was, how early now.

Then a fish. He feels like a fish in this weather. But at this small hour, the fish'n'chip shop on the corner of his street is shut also. No piscatory catering taking place, cod or sole. He'd have to go without. Alack. He's hungrier for love, malnourished, sex-starved. He'd not be putting eely finger in any fish pie tonight.

So, it's back to his place, without her. With her, he would have said, 'Come into my bower, bird.' He'd been saving up his best lines for last. When he reached the door, he had no little difficulty inserting his key in the hole. Given sober reflection, he may have discerned some crude symbolism there.

Over the threshold without a bride. His evening had been a washout. He was right back where he started from, no better off, the worse for wear. Back in the safety of his bachelor-pad. He must be thankful for small mercies, even the minutest not to be despised. He had not been set upon by footpads, mugged, subject to lager-lout assault, left in a dark alley victim of g.b.h. No blood drawn, not a drop. Something to be grateful for. Simply to be alive, not too badly mauled or scathed, was, in this dangerous day & age, its own reward.

Davy King

He patted his hip-pocket, still containing the superfluous condom. Think of the money he'd saved. 'Safe sex', he sighed. The safest he supposed was not to. So the condom had been a red herring, pale pink anyway. It was no garishly day-glo, banana-flavoured ribbed tickler, nothing ostentatiously exotically-erotic or sado-masochistically kinky. Just a plain old-fashioned prophylactic contraceptive, purely functional rather than flash - in some ways a bit like it's would-be wearer. (Not like the ones in that commercial he'd seen, edible, chewy concoctions, free gifts in a novelty adult breakfast cereal, new to the market: Pornflakes, the bright-eyed, bushy-tailed way to start the day, get your oats in a bowl, with extra added forbidden fruit - nuts! Whatever would they think of next? A plastic toyboy in every pack?) His was just an ordinary single condom wanting a mate. (Don't ask what happened to the other two, that's another story - let's leave it to your imagination.) He hadn't need it after all. It would have to languish longer, this frustrated lunger, tight night-fighter, jousting johnny, cocksure sheath.

In loo at last, the piss-artist points pecker at pan & peeing feels ecstatic release after prolonged pain of containment, an oceanic sensation flooding him as his warm live liquid flows into cistern water which flushed descends past U-bend on its never-ending circular journey: the stream-sewer-sea-shower-sap-cell's solution, all one water recycling round & round & he some delicate plumbing, a thin-skinned bladder emptying out...

Well, that was verging on a mystical experience. Phew! He needed that.

He undresses quickly, a speeded-up striptease, discarding clothes where they fall till he's naked for none to see. The body in the full-length mirror, no female nude, only his own familiar flesh. To bed, his single bed, his cold hard monk's pallet. No bouncy-bouncy water bed, no naiad to sport in it. What he would prefer is a Bed of Roses, her fragrant petal-softness & he the only prick in it. He switches on the bedside lamp with its seductive red lightbulb.

At this very moment in every direction are copulating couples in conjugal coitus. Overheard thru thin walls, sounds painful, the cries at climax. If all

come simultaneously, the sheer surge of vocal abandon would make the welkin ring enough to wake the dead. Imagine a planetary orgasm, rising to the heavens.

Well, that's all very well for them, but what about him? What he needed was a wank & he needed it bad. Baden-Powell wouldn't have approved of his unclean habit, his unnatural vice, but damnit, what's good enough for Onan, Portnoy & the hand-reared boy... Unsatisfying it may be, but at least it avoids complications like unwanted pregnancies or the risk of sexually-transmitted diseases. This was the best that could be said for it. Anyway, it was the best he was likely to come by that night.

He could do with a sexual fantasy to arouse his dormant member (there was the danger that it would atrophy through under-use). So soft & floppy, it was hardly enticing. He should make oblation to Priapus, find some lingam to venerate, anything to assist tumescence. A 'pillow-book' might help, not to send him bye-byes but awaken that old snake in the grass. (Alternatively, he could write a book, all turgid purple, hot & steamy.... no, masturbation would provide more immediate relief.) Let him rise to the occasion.

A male acquaintance of his had confessed he resorted to ogling blue videos late at night. Freeze that frame at the juicy bit: the tit with its nipple erect; the thighs spread wide in abandon, revealing beneath an undergrowth of pubic hair the secret entrance to her dark unfathomable cave. But a two-dimensional image wouldn't do. He needed something to touch, someone, some body. He wandered the red-light district of his mind in search of strumpet thoughts to give him the come on.

And.

From the shadows, in his imagination, she reaches out to him her hologram hand, insubstantial as a rainbow he cannot grasp.

Virtual Sex was coming soon, jack in, the computer jacks you off. In a smart-suit feel your virtual playmate all over your skin. Download sensual delight, voluptuous pleasure's at your beck, be promiscuous as you will, no fear of V.D. with V.R. Yes, come that electronic dawn among the sybarites of cyberspace, he'll be lasciviously online, digitally dissolute, a loose fish in the Net. Till then he'd just have to use his imagination & an ungloved hand.

Davy King

Action replay of the evening. Action, what action? Flashback to earlier, with hindsight rewrite the night. At what point could matters have turned out different & better for him? A smile given, a word spoken, the moment seized. Suppose he'd dared to enter the place with the Alluring Siren. Perhaps just perhaps. She would have been at a loose end too. They would've got talking. He'd have bought her another cocktail on the rocks. That would've melted the ice. She a little tipsy. Lonely because her sailor-boyfriend (merchant seaman cum semen-merchant) had been away at sea for six months &, well, she needed a little warmth, affection & attention, don't we all, & he would do as well as any. Stranger things have been known to happen, in truth as well as fiction. Why not? It happened everyday the world over: casual pick-up, one-night-stand, all-too-brief meaningless affair.

What an opportunity missed. Yes, he could see it all now. How they drank Blue Moon cocktails in the Port by the lager-lagoon & half-seas-over sank schooners of Rum with a yo ho ho, & O what jolly rogering till Tequila Sunrise. And so, after a few drinks & jokes... she (call her Molly Malone, an obvious pseudonym) says she would have to be getting a taxi home... well, says he, I've a spare bed at my place, Molly, you'd be very welcome... OK then, she says. Can you believe this is happening? It seems too good to be true, too true to be good. Good Golly, Miss Molly!

Then, all night long talking & fucking & talking fucking nonsense till late next afternoon. To bed in the dark, the light already fading before they get up. Sustained on nothing but adrenalin & pure libido. Naked skin between sheets. She, a New World. He, the explorer. And vice versa. Both craving contact only two can give.

'Talk to me. Fuck me.' Talk. Fuck. 'What do you feel?' No way of telling. Touch more eloquent than words. What words could describe her body, that smooth soft flesh, the lovely face that launched a thousand ships... And how speak of their kisses moist mouth to mouthful of tongue in moist lips licking labia vulva voluptuous the clitoris all lovely liquid lubricated delicious lubricious melting in slippery moist merging in & out she so wet & he slipping into her sea she wets herself he melts moistly into her lovely warm yes, O, yes, tumultuous salt sea of passion, undulation of waves to seismic tsunami, the danger, desire, & the little death, shipwrecked between those thighs, his groin, the

groans, her harbour, & the high dive in, in to milky white mother of pearl, the oyster slipping moistly down deep open throat....

And in the magic kingdom of the bed with her. The timeless twilight of the curtained room. Caught in the enchantment of her golden hair. Beneath the blanket, under her spell. The fairy tale princess. A kiss to waken, put to sleep or utterly transform.

Drowsy with love-making, they make love then drowse again, again make love & drowse. After it all, left speechless at last, they yawn, he smiles, she says 'speak to me'.... Fuck!

It was a rude awakening from that reverie to find himself alone in the bed. But the fantasy had had the desired effect of giving him an enormous erection (that's why he called his dick Moby, a whopper of a sperm whale as it were), a huge hard-on, no brewer's droop there then. Now he would assay some sexplicitly auto-erotic pornographical foreplay on himself, caressing his own curvaceous contours with salacious intent.... but no, he'd make an inadequate hermaphrodite. It just wasn't the same, trying to seduce yourself.

O go on then, grasp the unicorn by the horn. Have your way, O mighty phallus, I pay homage to thee. Pulling his gentile foreskin over the glans, he began gently to stimulate the sensitive nerve-endings of his primary erogenous zone. He twiddles his knob & turns himself on. With a flick of the wrist, it's all systems go.

He launches forth into blue yonder, on a dreamflight from reality by libido rocket. Thrusting. Up. Over the moon. In intercourse with the cosmos. Whoosh a shooting star at the climax sunburst supernova explosion of light letting go out into the milky way....

He didn't need the Durex, used a Kleenex instead, coming into the soft tissue, scattering his seed on barren ground, millions of microscopic princely tadpoles wiggling their determined way to oblivion.

Sleep, he thought. Perchance a wet dream. A succuba to seduce him. Maybe he should put on the condom to save the sheets.



Davy King

