

Norwich



Arbor Norwich

Quick bits and bobs to explain (giving context). On the 28th July 2021 myself (Pinocchio Cudicini/P.K./James) and 3 other personages (1 - Stu Jameson/James, 2 – Francesco/Forino and 3 – İosif/Youssef/Limericks) drove from London to Norwich in Stu Jameson's sister's car (a Volkswagen Polo), in order to visit Roz and Leo at their new home in Norwich. We spent approximately 3hrs with them at their home (7pm-10pm). A few days after the trip, I suggested to everyone who had been there that they write an account of the experience from their perspective. The accounts are presented here, individually, in no particular order, read them in whichever order you prefer.

Roz

4-7

James

8-12

İosif

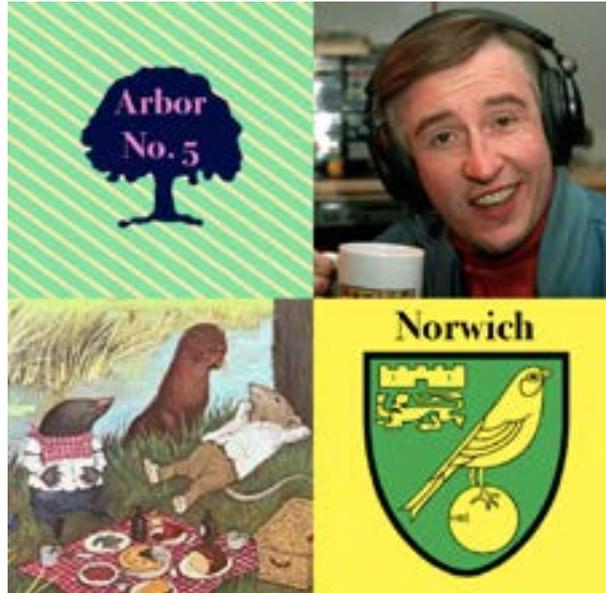
13-37

Forino

38-49

Stu Jameson

50-51



Additionally, there is also some footage of our trip available to watch here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16Vg4o9XGbe5XMzjy9TFi_vv7A2LSZ_-O/view?usp=sharing

Handles:

Forino - forinos on IG - Forino on YT

İosif - @milkslimes on Twitter

James - @pinkkudu on Twitter - Friends of the Arts on YT

Roz - @rozusername on Twitter

Leo - @darth_erogenous on Twitter

By the time it got to 7pm I was laughing. Earlier in the day I had been raving psychotically to Leo from the peephole in the kitchen while I cut scones out from a slab of wet dough on the counter with the rim of a jam jar.

I don't care if you're late, I was blathering, just say beforehand, don't wait until the ETA to say you're stuck in traffic and you haven't even passed Cambridge yet. Making me wait around all day like an idiot.

Leo was on the couch, scrolling through the messages on a Twitter group DM called "Woman Murder Chat".

Mmm.

Leo would later tease me for making scones and my suggestion that I would also offer to make dinner, calling me a *mum friend*, and suggesting I should cut out the middleman by just offering to breastfeed them. He never lets me be nice to people. But by 7pm we were both laughing. We'd run out of things to do and we were just sitting around, glancing nervously out of the window every time we heard a car pass, occasionally looking at ourselves trying to act natural and laughing even more. We've only been here for a couple of weeks and neither of us have found work or made a friend, so when we aren't walking around the city, buying groceries, or talking to people on the phone, we're usually just sitting around. But waiting to receive a group of strangers made it all the more apparent how comically unbusy we were. We were also laughing because their journey from London being 4 hours longer than expected had transcended any imagined inconvenience on our end and resulted in it just seeming a totally unworthy use of time for all of them. They would only end up being here for a couple of hours. Neither of us really seemed to know what P.K. was expecting to come from this pilgrimage, what he wanted from us, or why he had decided to bring his friends.

7:15. Leo remarked that the car's flashing red hazard lights reflected through the frosted glass of the front door looked like an encroaching malevolent UFO. I laughed. The flashing stopped. I heard a group of men emerge, talking amongst themselves, and saw a black mass slowly eclipsing the glow of the streetlight as it reached towards the house. 4 knocks. I felt like I had to steel myself a little before I opened the door, and was vaguely surprised/unsettled to see 4 men standing single file in the front garden. I was expecting 3 maximum. P.K. was standing closest to me wearing a paisley shirt; followed by a tall, warm-faced man with glasses, a dark-haired man with a serene expression, and a man with slicked-back hair and tattoos over his arms. I said something like *right on time*, but grinning, no venom in it, suddenly noticeably lightened when faced with the reality that these people I didn't know had come all the way to my city just to pay us a visit. We invited them in, out of the threat of the rain. P.K. (the only member of the group I had ever interacted with, but had still never met) introduced the others: James, Francesco, and İosif in the same order as the descriptions. Everyone lingered awkwardly around the doorway like moths. House party mode. P.K. handed me a bottle of Chianti Riserva and a copy of *The Mole Club* (which I had already read most of on my phone that weekend during a long car ride, but had opted to keep this a secret for reasons unknown), I was moved, thanked him gratefully, and everyone moved to the dining table. Leo went into the kitchen to make coffee. P.K. reached back into the backpack from which he produced the wine and pulled out two identical copies of a squat, white book with a crucifix-esque black symbol on the front and placed them on the table along with a purple mechanical pencil. I felt a little unwell. I had

my own copy of it in the house – I made the decision to bring it with me when I moved, but it had been months since I had looked at the front, opened it, or thought seriously about how there were copies of it existing elsewhere in the world.

You have two copies of Baby Alex?

Yeah. One has my notes in it, the other I'm keeping clean.

Leo piped up from the kitchen.

Are you trying to get it signed?

Oh my god...

Yeah, increases the resell value.

I laughed. Around strangers, I seem to laugh in response to every emotion except boredom or concern. I was embarrassed about the presence of the books on the table. While a decent (albeit often heavily edited) example of my writing, and I think a net positive work overall, it contained a lot of terrifyingly intimate things that seemed fine for strangers to read, but only if you never then met any of them. It was flattering that it made enough of an impact on P.K. that he felt it was deserving of being signed by me, however it didn't occur to me that thus impact actually had much to do with me personally. I had said to Leo the previous day that P.K.'s initial motivation to visit me seemed indistinguishable from his trip to Quentin's old apartment block in Edinburgh: I was part of some unofficial Book Club-themed tour across Britain that he had designed and organised himself. I don't say this maliciously, but it felt like in this situation I was an object: landmark, building, book, easy-bake oven. I felt very aware that I was a woman and didn't know what to do about it.

İosif also brought presents: two small rectangular packages wrapped in newspaper and tied with string, one for me and one for Leo. For Leo, Sartre's *Le mots* in the original French. For me, Turgenev's *Kaysan from the Beautiful Lands* and Durrell's *The Whispering Land*. He had written us notes in both. I was immediately a touch more at ease, and felt very appreciative of his kindness, but had to feign pathos as I scanned my note because his handwriting was so awful I didn't know what it said.

That's so kind I said.

After we were through with the coffee, Leo uncorked the wine and everybody except James, the designated driver, took a glass. The psychosomatic effect of my little warm serving began to take hold and the rest of the ambient, mostly-self-directed hostility started to wane. İosif, sitting at the bottom of the stairs and facing the table, spoke of his Russian heritage and his intention to leave the UK to study for cheap in the motherland. James talked about his South African mother, who he awkwardly admitted funded his undergraduate degree. P.K. mentioned his Italian heritage, and that Francesco's mother had made fun of him for speaking bad Italian. Leo referenced his French family (after İosif appeared to unsettle him somewhat by arriving at the house already with knowledge of his heritage) and I my Greek roots by way of the U.S. As we were smoking outside I told a long-winded anecdote about hiking up a mesa in Arizona and immediately after going to Wal-Mart and seeing a bottle of ketchup and ranch mixed together and labelled "K ranch".

It appears significant that so many of the British people I have met in this profoundly bizarre stage of my life since leaving university have, like me, had one foot out of Britain. Quentin, too,

is half French. It seems as if the question of toying with ideas of explicit Britishness in art — not just diluted replications of what the current writers and filmmakers of coastal America are pursuing — often comes from the vantage point of being on the edge of the environment. I will not comment on the explicit contents of *Baby Alex*, as it feels strange and obnoxious to*, but I was sure I saw the seeds of this perspective in *The Mole Club*— the delicate details of Edinburgh’s local pubs and bookstores, the futuristic Brutalist wasteland that lay outside Nigel’s library, the tweedy and effeminate atmosphere of the eponymous subterranean gentleman’s club, and especially in one of my favourite passages: the protagonist’s hallucinatory visit to a local Wetherspoons, where he and his father are clad in suits of medieval armour.

*Despite my insistence to Leo prior to the group’s arrival that I didn’t have much intention of talking about *the book* (as I’ve come to refer to it), it inevitably came up. I appreciated that nobody referred to specific passages, as that would have likely made me hide under the table**, but the circumstances of how it came to be were a topic of discussion. For anyone curious: Q and I agreed at the start of the first lockdown, towards the end of March 2020, that we would hold each other accountable for writing by emailing each other our efforts every afternoon. Upon realising that we were slowly constructing an actual narrative, we worked to refine and complete it both remotely and in person— once the lockdown relaxed by the summer, I would occasionally take the train from rural Suffolk to Leeds to print it all out, read it aloud, cut pages up, and spread them around the floor of his attic. The first time I visited I wrote a log of my time at the house that I sent to Q after returning home. The logs became a regular occurrence for the visits, and are what came to inspire the structure of the final section of the book. Despite this insistence I wouldn’t talk about it, I said all this to the group and more, and felt unashamedly relieved to finally have a captive audience to discuss it with. I ranted for a while about various things like poetry, nationality, and the internet, and to my surprise everyone listened. Maybe it was the wine.

**Francesco told us about his animation and short films, and said that before coming he had watched some videos that Alex and I made at university that I didn’t know were still on YouTube. I hid under the table.

He did, however, make me forget my melodrama with a phenomenal card trick that was so impressive it made Leo leave the room. How did he do it? It was a mystery.

The conversation later turned to collaboration. After some socially challenged gentlemen, following *the book’s* release, posted unflattering pictures of me from when I was fat on /lit/ and DMed me on Twitter to ask for my nudes, I said I wouldn’t write with other people again. But by then I was having such a good time, and was truly intrigued by what these strangers had to say, that the idea didn’t seem anywhere near as unpleasant. I had also said I wouldn’t write logs again, and here I am, writing this. The truth is I have no idea what the truth is. It is a mystery. I have always just wanted things to be interesting.

A good few hours had passed by then. P.K. was the only one to eat a scone. The boys revealed they were planning on sleeping in the car that night, with ĩosif leaving for London in the morning and everyone else heading to Cambridge for the next leg of the excursion. I would have offered

they stay, but my place could only really accommodate one guest comfortably, and I didn't want the encounter to either end with an awkward rejection or be prolonged with an awkward sleepover. We agreed we would stay in touch, and I meant it. I enjoyed their company and wanted to make things with them. I still wasn't entirely sure what they wanted or expected, but it no longer seemed to matter. Just as they were packing up, and James was filling metal canteens with water from the kitchen sink, P.K. handed me the "clean" copy of *the book* and the pencil. By then I felt it was right to put something in it.

I have absolute faith in the project

Roz

Norwich Expedition

Right, ba-da bing, ba-da bung, let us be-gung. First of all I would like to say sorry to Roz, Leo and the B & W cat, for being 6hrs late. It was never my intention to keep you waiting, and I never like to be late for appointments. However, the tardiness of the 4-man fleet's arrivals, does, I think, point to one key factor, that set the precedent for the big day out and how it went down. And that is, that the whole outing/summit was socially engineered by the group's most socially inept person (moi).



Myself as group organiser, channeling a similar energy to Alan from the hangover. Guys, let's do this.

Had I come on my own, it would have been a whole different story; I would have arrived punctually, in ample time, after a morning spot of birdwatching on the river Yare. But, as you know, I was accompanied by 3 fellow Discord Trannies/sperg mandem. It was my poor attempt to co-ordinate a point of departure and mode of transport that would suit all 3 DTs which made things more tricky (1); That and the 2hrs traffic getting out of London + the 2hrs traffic getting into Norwich (both unforeseeable), is what caused us to be so late.

I think it was when I took my second piss in the Moretti bottle, in the moving car on a motorway turn near Wembley *1, that I suddenly became fully cognisant of the mess I had created for myself and all parties involved. Yes, a complete mess, which was to be the consummation/tantric actualisation of the *bianco bambino* summer they speak of so fondly on twitter, as well as the start of a mythical pursuit in chase of the spirit of Middle England in 2000+ AD. - "We were truly on our way"

*1 The boys wouldn't let their socially challenged ringleader out of the car for a piss, which forced him to clamber about autistically in the back seat, face the back corner of the vehicle and pee uncomfortably into the glass Moretti beer bottle. (Complete with the curious discovery that his phallus was indeed so small that it could almost inside the top of the beer bottle.)

The car journey was an odyssey in it's own right *2, but for the purposes of this literary exercise and to keep things con-con-cise-cise, I will pick things up in Norwich.

2 I have a longer more detailed upcoming piece in the works to fill you in on such details

We drove into town through the Neptunian afterglow of a *thunderstorm/torrential rain* and the sun was already gently setting. James (Stu Jameson), pulled into the quiet Norfolk lane of terraced houses, inside one of which, there lived Leo and Roz. We parked opposite their home. I could make out some flittering figures in the glow of their living room which seemed so quaint and cosy in the blue evening light that I couldn't help feel we (the 4 musty boys emerging from the VW polo), were going to be an ominous terrorising force. I walked up to the front door. I wasn't nervous, but I could sense there was naturally a bit of apprehension for everyone involved, though deep down I knew things would be congenial. Roz welcomed us kindly and enthusiastically, which was a relief. The glasses she had on possessed the spectral symmetry of a butterfly. I have partial flashbacks to thinking about how awkward we might all have been, but once we made our introductions, I feel things settled somewhat.

At this point I would like to make a thank you to all of you that were there. Thank you to Roz, for agreeing to have us round, I (and, we, if I may speak on behalf of the troops) am very grateful for this, and it was a very kind thing of you to do. I'd like to extend this thanks to Leo, and say 'my bad if we annoyed you'; And, as importantly, I would like to thank my 3 merry friends, F, i and J; It's truly an honour to have you consider me a chum, and for you to have come with me to Norwich, means a lot <3.

Back in the Norwich household it was all, as I'd anticipated, really rather congenial. Animated, but calm, energy level was high enough for the cat to have fled to the safe refuge of upstairs, where he spends the first hour of the summit. *3 Oh yh, Roz, thanks for referring to us as 'men' throughout your account, maximum respect, - (and not as man-childs).

3 I admittedly wrote some of this after having read Roz's side of the story

So, once the 4 man man-childs had lumbered in, the cat fled, I give them (Roz and Leo) the bottle of Chianti from the wineshop on South Ealing road, as well as *The Mole Club*, iosif gifts them the Sartre wrapped in the Oxford Times newspaper, the paper itself containing specially chosen humorous local news articles that echo the Alan Partridgean vibe of Norwich.

Solid.

Here's for a real sterile sperg description, live from my head at the scene of the time:

The ground floor is one big longroom (open plan as it is sometimes known) with a diagonal staircase in the middle of it that leads to two bedrooms upstairs. I keep thinking about the

stairs, they are cool; it is rare you get to see the side profile of stairs like that. Roz explains to us she has made scones; as the most gluttonous boy in that evening's 4-man contubernium, I have one later.

Bah!

James (Stu Jameson) sits at the far side of the table with Francesco (Forino™), İosif is sitting behind me on one of the four stairs such that I move my own chair back a bit so we can all talk. He reprimands me for sitting in front of him. Leo is a cool cat, he leans - against a spot further up the staircase to my right. Roz was at the end of the table to my left. The floor was wooden panel like the desk I am writing on now. Right *snap*, back out of sperg mode*4.

I think initially we chatted quite generally, it turns out Roz, had studied the same degree as İosif (or İobbels as I like to call him now and again) for her undergrad, worked as a matron for a bit (something J Stu knew all about from his boarding school days), and now starts a year on the UEA creative writing programme. I think sometimes there is a disconnect between the impression you make of a friend or author in person and the impression you make of them from whatever they have written in books or texts, even when that text contains personal and confessional details that are an honest and detailed depiction/reflection of who they are and how they live. i.e. the Roz or P.K. one meets in person is different to the Roz or P.K. one meets in Baby Alex and The Mole Club.

It strikes me that writing a piece like this involves a careful judgement of your relationship to each of the people you are writing about and a careful consideration of how what you write will influence the immediate future of that relationship.

Eventually we moved from the dining table to the back garden, I remarked to Leo that the raised beds in the garden would be good for growing vegetables. It was currently all poppies or some plant that looked like opium, I believe it was James Stu who made a comment later to Leo about the opium plants being a potensh source of income for the Norwich residence.

*4 Long-winded story of autism test (optional read)

In the garden Roz tells us anecdotes about York and America, including the Arizona ranch sauce one which I later listened to again on the #IAMKILLINGYOU podcast*5 at 4 in the morning on a sleepless night (broken CO alarm in Edinburgh flat).

5* Leo/Darth Erogeous' podcast that Roz is frequently a guest on

Leo, James Stu and I discuss the para-social nature of podcasts, "they are friend simulators". I walk to the back of the garden with Francesco to talk about Italy where I am comfy.

Speaking of the pod, once we went back to the dining room table, Leo expressed a desire to have a co-host for the pod, as well as to have an escort guest on the show at some point, because, as he put it, 'they would be easy to get a hold of, and would be willing to spare their time'. (2) see video of J Toad Esq (Superb İobbels quip in reference to this)

It is also around this point, about 2-3hrs into the meeting of minds/chap-summit, soon before we leave (we arrived 7ish and left 10ish), that Francesco performs the most mesmerising display of the night - a magic trick. It starts as a kind of mime, where he gets us to go round the table pretending to shuffle a pack of cards, this takes a while and doesn't appear to be going anywhere, at which point I think 'Oo wuaglio, che cazzo stai combinando' but of course, at that moment he asks Leo, the classic, pick out a card any card, tell me what your card is and shuffle it back in the deck. Francesco fucking pulls it out the bag son, everybody like 'Woah, woah' 'Ooouuhhhh'. The cat comes rushing down again, even the cat knows whats good and is excited. About 15 mins later we bow to our hosts in height order and slowly file out of the vanilla wooden board room. It's at this point that Roz signs the book - see "Paragraph x, line y of Roz's account".

That rounds off the main interaction as such. Though perhaps Roz and Leo are maybe curious as to where we trailed off to. We drove out to this country park in the outskirts of Norwich, where there were a couple lakes; we parked the car in the gravel car park, and walked along the path between the lakes to a canal that was situated behind them, where we sat in the back of this docked and semi-abandoned boat together, for a wonderful late-night chat, in a haze of ciggies, beers and whisky, good times, (3) see vids in boat. *again all will be detailed fully in a longer account. At the end of this discourse which lasted approximately 1.25hrs, I made the decision to dive into the canal, by which time it was almost midnight. Francesco had my best interests in mind - looking out for a fellow Italian brother - when he said 'Frate, non farlo' İobbels was of course relishing the idea of chucking this autistic brainlet into a canal, and exclaimed "yesss, do it, hehehe". I dove into the canal. Hadn't felt such a rush in a very long time. Was amazing. Emerged from this Norwich canal in the early hours of the Thursday morning resembling pond-life, again, see vid. We all slept in the car together under the starry skies, I wouldn't have had it any other way.

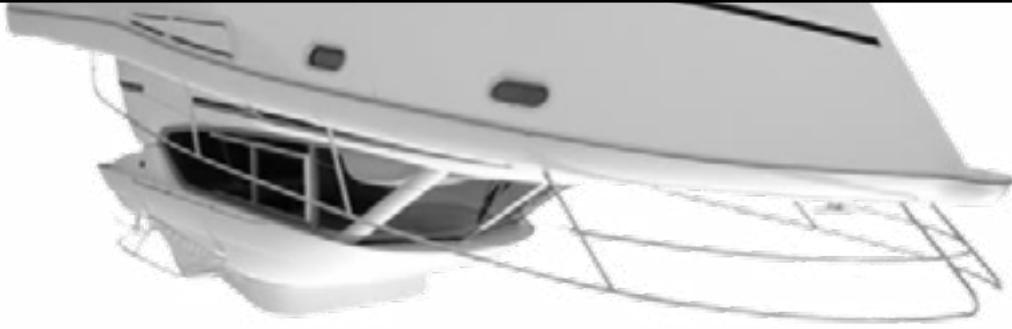
To be continued

Examples of Scenes in upcoming episode that cover the events of the night and following morning:

- Start shitting blood at the table-table premier inn on Norwich riverside.
- There are a couple other scenes too dw.

Thank you, yours, P.K.

Shoutout Ben and Lou Leicesterian, just cos.



Norbino





For Roz and Leo

Dear Charlie,

Please forgive my long silence. I've been moving all over the place, here and there, and have not had a chance to write.

At the moment, I am in a situation which necessitates my having to go to Norwich. Having to go to Norwich is an abominable thing to ask of anyone, and I go green with envy when I think about the billions of people all over the world who will never be subjected to such a trip.

I'm mainly worried because, although I know that there will not be a single true blue fully Saxon un-mixed English person there, we will still be playing by the Anglo rulebook.

I can't exactly say that I like English people. Here's why:

The Frenchman shows his distaste for you openly. He barely even needs an excuse to dislike you, and he will most likely setup an intricate web of emotional nodes with the explicit purpose of their violation as a means of ensuring a constant supply of excuses for this dislike. The German will just ignore you; he is unlikely to descend from the mind-attic and engage you in conversation, or offer you a drink, or even give you the time of day. All Germans are basically just Prussians which means they are basically just Huns &c. The Italian is a lazy good-for-nothing who will make a million promises, beautiful evocations, and pacts. But when the time comes to make these good, he is nowhere to be found. You search and search, run to his local watering hole to find him, where the barman informs you that he has taken an express train to Milan that very morning.

But the Englishman is by far the worst. He will go out of his way to be polite and kind and fail you at the last moment with this excuse or that. He has a peculiar way of making others do his dirty work for him. The awkwardness experienced by others in waiting for an explicit confirmation or denial or a certain thing – a cup of tea, help with moving house, or any such favour – will inevitably result in the interlocutory party backing down themselves, so as to spare them the pain of pressing the Englishman for a definite answer. He sits, squirming, trying to extract an explicit response which is almost never to arrive. The confirmation, if it does in fact come, is often much more painful than the refusal, if purely due to the fact that the refusal is at least in part honest.

We English are the enemies of sincerity. Sarcasm is our national pastime; Eton mess, "pint 'o lagah", egg-covered politicians, pissing in the street, hip replacement, shorts in the snow, "I hate Pakistanis", three-times-reheated Rustlers burger, public sex in Regent's Park, breaking and entering, Norf FC, stale sausage roll, the M25, Queen, "oh dear, all my teeth are falling out", large forehead, ritualised prep-school sodomy, vinegar, vinegar, vinegar, ketchup on everything, vomiting everywhere, geriatric royal rapist, and looking at trains for fun.

I wish I were foreign enough so as to be able to embrace Britishness as a novelty, some PG Tips-stained oriental phenomenon. As an English teacher, many of my students (most commonly teenage girls) have expressed a desire to immerse themselves in "English culture", to visit the UK and really "live" it. When I hear this, it takes a great deal of restraint not to cave their heads in with a paperweight.

This is all for now. I hope the funeral went alright.

Yours,

Elisha

Oxford

I'm not sorry. For being late, that is. I'm not sorry because it's not my fault but Carlo's. He's the one who dragged me out of bed (metaphorically) at 9 am with the instruction to reach Vauxhall by twelve thirty. Twelve thirty! This might seem a reasonable expectation to anyone who isn't acquainted with either Carlo or myself, but the reality of the situation is that this was quite a big ask. I only got to bed at 4am the previous night as I was virtually chaperoning the chap on his trip south on the Avanti West Coast. He was hiding in the bathroom from the rowdy passengers – a *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*-esque autistic coping mechanism.

He explained that this was due to his fear that speaking on the phone to me in the voice that he had would result in a swift death at the hands of his fellow passengers, just getting on the train from Birmingham. Ripped to shreds by a mass of gnarled, muscular Brum arms – their dirty nails ripping into his pale skin and pulling out lungs, liver, and stomach to make footballs or charms to ward off evil. I'm not sure that the custom is up there.

Reasonable fear, I told him, you definitely don't want to end up a mangled mess before you even get to Norwich.

Carlo is no stranger to hiding in bathrooms. In fact, he has practically perfected the operation and pulls it off with a tenacity that any bullied teenager would admire. An excerpt from *The Mole Club* describes his habit of taking lunch in the Edinburgh College of Art library toilets, 'ploughmans in one hand, dick in the other', or something along those lines, an episode which he would recount to me in personal as well. It's quite frustrating trying to videocall him as he bounces around in the lav, as the room inside a train doesn't offer the best internet connection, but I have to admire the technique, the elegance, the incredible style. He does it with an air of confidence, yet also an intense and paralysing shame which is most likely necessary for spending many of your meals, train-rides, and intimate moments in a room dedicated to shit and piss.

The video connection is especially poor, so all I see on the phone is a strange, pixelated face smeared across the screen. Its mouth is moving around, vibrating and whirring, periodically emitting strange groans. Carlo's robot voice comes crackling through the phone, set to the regular *cthunk-cthunk* of the train.

*"llllllllll think you u u u ----- long aanan extra pair of paaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa ----- aaa --
----- case we go sssswimming in the river Cam on the waeaeay back"*

What? What did he say?

"I sssssss ----- ssssaid that you neeeeeeeeeeeeeeee eee eeee ee ed two pai --- s of-" and the call drops suddenly. I close Whatsapp and try to dial him on the regular telephone, but he doesn't pick up, so I go back to what I was doing.

I'm sitting on the floor surrounded by books. To kill time while staying at my father's house in Oxford, I decided to climb up into the attic and retrieve several boxes of them to sort through with the aim of selecting which to keep and which to give away. Also picking out a few to give to the lads and tomorrow evening's hosts as gifts. It's honestly a risky game, seeing the shit I was reading in 2017. You either pull out something smart, which does wonders for your ego, but – and this is the far more likely option – you'll grab something incredibly pretentious and weak which upsets you greatly and puts you in a foul mood.

I do love books. Books are a wonderful thing indeed. Sometimes, when I've been drinking for a week or two, I chance to pick one up and read it, and it makes such an impression on me, lowers me to such a poor state of mind, that after I'm finished with it, I have to drink for a week or two just recover. Then I chance to pick up another one, and...

A call from Carlo rudely interrupts me. He's left the bathroom and is pacing around the bit in between the carriages.

"What should I take for... what were their names again?", I ask, "Rose and... what's it?"

"Roz and Leo"

"Right. I've got... hold on, let me give you an inventory. I have the following to give away"

I start picking through the pile in front of me. Several Penguin "Great Ideas" books. I used to love these very much because, between their bite-size copies of great philosophers and the flashy colourful covers, they fed simultaneously into my consumerist apotheosis and the idea about myself that I wanted to project to other people (women). Probably 70% of the books I own I bought to pick up women. Only started reading them accidentally after the fact.

What follows is a miscellaneous collection of rubbish. Anita Shapira's history of Israel (Carlo thinks that this would make a very funny present); a pile of Soviet camera manuals purchased at the book market in Kyiv; two books by Nabokov, *The Gift* and *Speak, Memory*. Inside the latter is a note from my mother, 'Read this in Russian, philistine'. Finally, a copy of Sartre's *Les Mots* in the original French.

"What about this?". I hold up the book, the cover of which is adorned with the author's young, cross-eyed face.

"Oh great. Classic. That's very funny."

"Don't take the piss please Carlo. I'm on the edge, this isn't the time."

"No no, I'm serious. Leo is French, he'll find it hilarious."

Will he? If someone gave me a copy of, say, Bulgakov, in Russian, I would probably be very upset.

"Are you sure? I might give him something else. I have... hold on... I have *The Stranger* in French as well. Would that be better or worse?"

"Na na yea give him the Sartre instead. Camus is just a piss-take and..."

But I'm no longer listening to him. I see the spine of *The Myth of Sisyphus* looking at me from among the other books on the shelf. This concerns me very much. I didn't think that I still had one of C*mus' books, let alone two... But behind that, there's another one. And then another. Four of his books. Four. My shelves are full of C*mus and I want to be sick. How did I even get here? How did I ever leave my adolescence? I stuff the handful of texts back into the packing box and turn back to the call. Carlo is saying something about something, but I interrupt him.

"What? Sorry, I wasn't listening"

His distorted, ghostly face floats across my phone screen, bulging eyes looking at me accusingly. I can't tell if the call is frozen or if that is just what he looks like now, messed up by the pixels. Poor guy.

"I said, do you want me to lend you Baby Alex to take to Russia?"

I don't know why he's doing this to me. He's mocking me, I'm sure of it.

"No", I firmly reply, "do you want me to get disappeared in the middle of the night for possession of dissident material/pornography? People have been imprisoned for less"

He laughs, which is weird because I wasn't joking. My friend Artyem vanished without a trace one day after posting about his copy of *Delicious Tacos* on his Instagram story.

"Suit yourself. I'm taking two copies tomorrow so that Roz can sign them"

"Two? What for? Is one for a snack on the way? Do you always carry two copies, in case one gets lost, or stolen?"

"One is with my annotations, one is 'clean'. I'm also taking them a copy of The Mole Club, as an offering"

An offering? I'm positive that he's mocking me now, so I make an excuse, hang up, and turn my attention back to the books, realising that they have yet to be wrapped.

My mother used to wrap presents in newspaper, "just like in the good old days", and it's a habit that I've also picked up. I tiptoe downstairs to search for one, digging through the recycling bin in search of last week's *Oxford Times* that I'm positive I saw at some point. Peeling back a tin can lid, the words 'FROM STATELESS IRANIAN DISSIDENT TO BALLIOL COLLEGE FELLOW' stare back at me from among the beer bottles. My eyes skim over the headline several times and my head begins to spin. 'SERBIAN WAR CRIMINAL TO BE TRIED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES' leers at me menacingly, quickly followed by 'TEENAGE DRUG DEALER GETS IN HIGH-SPEED CHASE WITH POLICE'.

I'm pretty sure that this is funny, but I can't really tell. My hands are elbow-deep in the bin, as if I'm delivering a child. Finally, pull out the newspaper, grab some twine, and head back upstairs.

'STATELESS IRANIAN WAR CRIMINAL IN HIGH-SPEED CHASE' bounces around inside my skull.

I want these gifts to be funny, partially to mask the fact that I am picking them out of boxes I haven't touched in years. To this end, I insert some pithy notes in the front. My mother taught me it was bad manners to arrive at someone's house without a gift of some sort, but I'm starting to become more and more concerned that I will somehow upset Rose and Theo, which is the last thing I want to do. They must already be on edge, considering that Carlo is our tether.

I look at the clock on my phone, which reads 02:32. Still need to wrap these books (as well as a few for the boys), locate my sleeping bag, and sew buttons onto the inside lining of my trousers. Hopefully I'll get to bed before 4 o'clock.

I head downstairs for a cigarette.

Chiltern Hills National Park – London: Victoria

Carlo Thomas | 11:41

@Elisha and @Forino I trust you boys are on your merry way?

Elisha | 11:43

M about to leave just having my bacon and eggs

Carlo Thomas | 11:45

Wot are you on about bacon and eggs ?

Elisha | 11:46

My breakfast?

What do u think

Carlo Thomas | 11:46

The sperg mandem are expecting you outside Vauxhall MI5 in 45 mins ?

!

Elisha | 11:47

Oh roflmao I forgot lemme just finish my brekkie and I'll hop on the bus

Mmm but I'm also halfway thru an episode of Rick and Morty

Carlo Thomas | 11:47

Clown

Elisha | 11:47

R u sure u can't come pick me up in Oxford

Carlo Thomas | 11:47

Wot a gimp

Elisha | 11:48

Stfu Blu-ray consoomer

It's 11 am the next morning and I am hurtling through the Chiltern Hills on the Oxford Tube (this is a bus, not a train). I'm tired as hell and dressed like a complete wanker because I was in a rush leaving the house. The outfit consists of corduroy trousers, braces, white collarless shirt, black timberland boots, and a long navy blue cape-jacket which is wide at the bottom, thin at the top and makes my head look huge. The jacket belonged to my ex's ex who was a punk rocker layabout unemployed type individual, so I am maybe hoping to channel something of that attitude. I also have with me a navy flat cap to match the jacket, which I feel is important to mention because it would become the subject of much jestery, and, having read the accounts of my companions, it seems that without it they would've been left with precious little to write about.

I also haven't had time to eat so I'm very hungry. Contrary to my wind-up of Carlo over Whatsapp, I hadn't had the time to have breakfast. The last thing I had had to eat/drink was a block of instant noodles, eaten raw, and washed down with several glasses of 'Professor Stiffs' Elixir' the previous night whilst packing. This is a very good drink for staying drunk for a long time, but not so much for sating one's hunger. Professor Stiffs (peace be upon him) managed to

stay drunk for about 35 years, give or take, and this drink will similarly help get you from your 9am seminar to your 7pm lecture in one piece.

The reader will be unsurprised to know that I am one of the foremost cocktail-makers – or “mixologists” as they are now called – between Vyritsa and Okulovka. My cocktails are very famous and have spread all over the country. Old and young alike enjoy them, and for good reason. For the reader’s benefit I will provide the recipes herein.

Professor Stiffs’ Elixir

Ingredients:

3 measures Gordon’s gin

½ tsp. vanilla extract

4-6 sprays Chanel No. 7

Squeeze of Boots athlete’s foot cream

Splash soda water

Salt to taste

Ice, to serve

Ballpoint pen, to mix

Instructions:

Add the gin, vanilla extract, salt and foot cream to a glass. Mix thoroughly using the ballpoint pen until the cream and salt are dissolved. Frost a tumbler and spray the inside liberally with Chanel No. 7. Add ice and pour the gin mixture over it. Finish with soda water.

You cannot, and this is very important, switch out the Chanel No. 7 for any other perfume. No. 6 will make you ill and No. 8 will do much, much worse. Take my advice and stick with No.7. If you have trouble acquiring it then try and track down a local college girl (student of history or architecture will usually do the trick) and try borrowing some of hers, just don’t forget to ask nicely. Tell her that you are making a ‘Professor Stiffs’ Elixir’ and she will understand immediately.

You also have to use a ballpoint pen to mix. I laugh when I see people using a pencil or a fountain pen. It’s downright criminal. Hang, draw, and quarter me if you like, but you will never make me mix a ‘Professor Stiffs’ Elixir’ with a pencil – I will only ever mix it with a ballpoint pen. It’s as Venedict Erofeev says, ‘A person gets to live only one life, and it’s imperative to live it without screwing up your recipes’.

I’m still on the bus and we are passing Hillingdon. It is a grim, grey little place. I have a half bottle of wine with me which I poured into an empty *Ribena Light* bottle, sipping it now and then to calm my nerves and ease my stomach-ache. The person sitting to the left of me across the aisle – a wizened old grandmother with a huge underbite, tiny black eyes and maybe four strands of hair – was giving me the eye. You know, the one that old people give. I have been all over the place and all the old people look at you the same way. Suspicious dread, strange

cannibalistic curiosity. I try to ignore her gaze and look into my Ribena bottle. She licks her lips and slides over one seat closer to me.

I know she is about to pull some sort of geriatric manoeuvre, so I turn and stare her dead in the eyes. It is important not to show fear in situations like these, or you may end up in a very unfortunate predicament. The old woman is still creeping and crawling along, grunting, and I can swear I hear her bones creaking as she shuffles over, salivating. Bits of spittle are dripping from her chin. She is craving young flesh.

Still staring her dead in the eyes, I get up and move to the front of the bus. I can still see the old woman in the reflection of the window, looking at me and grinning. When we arrive at Victoria, I practically run off the bus and straight down into the tube station.

London – Vauxhall

It's 12:15 and I'm standing by M16, watching Forino waddle up the street from a distance.

This was my first time meeting him in person. He looked quite different from how I pictured him – shorter than me, thin set, curly hair, soon-to-be-drooping moustache. I'm sure he would've made a fantastic *umarell* later in life, but now he looked almost like a young member of the *Polizia Rustica* and gave off the air of a bastard Borgia, enfeebled my several attempted poisonings, squirrelled away in a secluded wing of the palace to safeguard him from the scheming countesses who would see him dead.

We embrace with spergic passion.

“Hello Forino” I said.

“Hello. Nice to finally meet you. I need to break up with my girlfriend” said Forino, shifting his weight from one leg over to the other “she's doing my head in”. He explained that he had been dating this Russian girl from Moscow for nigh on a year and was bored out of his skull with her.

Now, I'm a firm believer in making an honest go of things and trying one's hardest, but I have an even stronger principle against dating or talking to women from Moscow (or just people in general who hail from there). I don't fuck with Muscovites.

The entire evolutionary reason, the whole *raison d'etre* for the existence of Russian men is to safeguard the West from Russian women. This is a cross we must bear. You are welcome.

Forino and I discuss ways of breaking up with his lover. He thinks that he could just break it off before she heads back to Moscow (aka hypebeast city), but I tell him that this is unwise as it may end up costing him dearly. Russian men are all misogynists and daughter/wife-beaters (I have rarely seen women treated more poorly on such a broad scale outside of the Muslim world, except maybe in Russian orbiter states like Georgia or Montenegro, where they have perfected the practice. Something about mountain people makes them all incredibly angry and irritable).

This, however, has the adverse effect of making Russian men incredibly protective of their daughters, especially when it comes to their boyfriends. This is presumably because they are worried that their daughter's boyfriend will hurt her more severely than the father can. The weak must make way for the strong. This is how dialectics works.

Forino sees what I mean. He knows that this way of going about things can result in a messy conclusion. Many difficulties can be had with these women, so it is important to tread cautiously, with a bottle in one hand and a Mosin in the other. Like a partisan, creeping through a minefield at night.

We are still waiting for Stu and Carlo to pull up in the indigo Hitlerite peplemover, but they are nowhere to be seen, so I reach into my pocket and begin to munch on my sausage roll as Forino looks at me uneasily. His brows knit in the slight suspicion typical of a Mediterranean at a bazaar. I ask him if he wants some, but he politely declines, so I reach back into the pocket and retrieve a torn bag of Hula Hoops, which I offer.

“Want one? They're warm”

“No, I... Warm? Why are they warm?”

“They were in my pocket, underneath the sausage roll. The sausage roll was hot, so it kept the Hula Hoops warm. Do you want one?”

“No thanks” says Forino, but I know he’s just being polite. I think he’s beginning to become slightly ill at ease, so I make a congenial facial expression to ease his discomfort, pressing down my brow and grinning, like a Hammerhead shark. Unfortunately, I think I overshot the mark a bit, and ended up looking a bit more like a Goblin shark. Not to worry, there is always room for improvement.

I washed the sausage roll down with some water and check my phone again to see several messages from Carlo, saying that they had overshot the meeting point and crossed Vauxhall bridge out of awkwardness, and were now parked up on the appropriately named Ponsenby road.

It begins to rain. Forino and I cross the bridge and over onto Vauxhall bridge road, whereupon we see a funny little man running across the road and flailing his arms about. Its Carlo. He’s wearing a Hawaiian shirt, white with blue and red flowers, tucked into corduroy trousers, same as mine. They are missing a belt, which irks me slightly. My father always used to say that tucking your shirt without wearing a belt distorts the symmetry of your body and makes you look crooked. Sure enough, Carlo looked crooked. Well, more crooked than usual.

“Hi chaps!” he beams from beneath a patchy moustache, “sorry for the wait!”. He’s not sorry. I know he’s not sorry because the corners of his mouth are wriggling around hysterically, a sure sign he’s being insincere. He says that I look like R C Waldun. We embrace and stroll over to the car. Forino tells Carlo about his love life dilemma. Carlo tells Forino about his train ride and the toilet hermitage. I don’t say anything, because Carlo has upset me with his R C Waldun comment.

As we round the corner Stu comes into view, leaning gracefully on the bonnet of his sister’s Volkswagen Polo, with an expression of predatory confidence. He looks like a character from a Fassbinder film, some tall, handsome yet sleazy gay nightclub owner, elbow on the bar, on the hunt for a twink to corrupt. Greetings are exchanged all round. Forino climbs in the back, and I look at Carlo expectantly.

“I called shotgun, c’mon, get in there”

“Urgh ah but I’m supposed to run the mobile bar...” he stammers, “I need to be up front”

“Get in the back, Carlo” Stu commands. Who can refuse to comply with the porno moustache? Of course, Carlo clambers over into the backseat. Daddy’s orders. I get in the passenger seat, locking Forino and Carlo in the back.

I think I should be the one to run the mobile bar anyway. I am much more responsible than Carlo and have had experience with this sort of setup before, so I know what I am about. One time, when I was accompanying a friend on his drive from Astrakhan to Dushanbe to pick up seventeen large barrels of *adjika*, I was forced to sit in the passenger seat for 40 hours straight. This was because said friend was driving a very old Kamaz truck. The passenger side door was falling off, which naturally worried him quite a bit, so he welded it shut. The only way to leave was to climb over him, but he wouldn’t let me. So, to while away the time, I invented the Samarkand Sling, using the things we had in the car.

Samarkand Sling

Ingredients:

2 measures moonshine

2 measures Nemiroff Honey Pepper

20ml Lukoil Red antifreeze

35ml 'Clove' eau-de-cologne

2 tsp *adjika*

Salt, to taste

Large empty bottle, to mix/serve

Instructions:

Add the moonshine and Nemiroff to a large bottle and shake to combine. Slowly add the antifreeze without agitating and wait for 20 seconds until the mixture begins to froth slightly. Take the bottle to a place with good ventilation, and quickly tip in the cologne all at once, and leave it for 15 minutes, or until it stops fizzing. Make sure that the liquid inside is clear and separated from the layer of scum at the top. Pour through a mesh sieve to separate. Add the *adjika*, stirring vigorously, and the salt.

NB: The moonshine used in this recipe must be sourced between Jizzakh and Qarshi, otherwise you might as well not bother with it at all.

The 'Samarkand Sling' is also known outside of the region as "the drink that makes you want to kill yourself instantly", and for good reason. After consuming it, one must be held down for approximately thirty seconds to avoid any unpleasantness with nearby sharp objects, cars, or high places (this wasn't a problem for me at the time, as the door was welded shut). However, after the thirty seconds are up, everything becomes fantastic. Just make sure to drink in shifts and everything will be fine.

I don't recall who it was, but I remember someone telling me that after downing a full bottle of the drink that makes you want to kill yourself instantly, his friend jumped into a woodchipper. They were sitting out by the dock near his dacha and had just finished chopping a bunch of wood. I think they probably messed up the recipe, so they really have no one to blame but themselves. This may sound strange but having invented it I can definitely understand where he was coming from. You may call me a liar, but this doesn't upset me. I know I am not a liar. I never lie about serious things like this.

Stu cautiously pulls out of the parking space, making an elegant twelve-point turn, and we turn out onto Grosvenor road. Carlo, already connected to the Bluetooth, puts on a song by the artist formerly known as Quentin Scobie. I look at him, and the betrayal in my eyes is evidently enough for him to change the track. Every *Book Club* album is a concept album, and that concept is doing ketamine in the cellar.

I begin to roll myself a cigarette.

"Oi, I'll have one of those" Carlo pipes up from the back seat, reaching his hands through the headrest and pulling on my ears.

"Yea yea, one for me too" drawls Forino, stretching out his palms in supplication, Sicilian-style. Whose idea was it to put the Italians together in the back seat, where they can plot and spit and shout? Should've stuck them in the boot, coach class style, like the good old days. Stu pipes up that he wants one also. He has an excuse though; he is the chauffeur.

I pass Carlo the cigarette I just rolled for myself and produce one for Forino. I'm not one to blow my own trumpet, but I do think that I roll very good cigarettes. When I was 13, my parents left town for two weeks, and sent me to stay with my aunt Orpina (God rest her soul). After catching me sneaking outside to smoke the Marlboro Reds I had brought with me, she scolded me angrily, tossed the pack, and took me inside. She sat me down at the round oak table in her room, to teach me how to roll good cigarettes, "so you don't embarrass yourself later in life". This was before she died from lung cancer (unrelated). I would watch in fascination as her gnarled, yellow hands deftly rolled up cigarette after cigarette, whilst the record player in the corner spat out the broken chords of a waltz, *The Waves of Amur*. She taught me to follow each action with the flow of the song, and this is how I learned. Just like learning to dance. She was a very good teacher, and I have her to thank for my current skill.

I finish up another rollup for Stu, one for myself, and the four of us start puffing away, filling the Volkswagen Polo with thick, pillowy clouds of acrid smoke. We sit in silence for a second, appreciating the general atmosphere.

"I love smoking" Carlo says.

"Oh yes, I *adore* to smoke" Stu replies. Forino is hacking and coughing in the back, laughing for some reason, probably out of awkwardness.

I choose to say nothing, because I am scared of what might come out of my mouth, so instead of speaking I pour a round of Pernod into the flimsy paper cups, adorned with a retro Coffeehouse design, passing them to the Italians in the back. Bottles, drinks, cigarettes, ash, and sausage roll crumbs fly around the car as we barrel down the embankment.

London: Clapham – Vauxhall – Harrow

Not fifteen minutes later we are stuck in a traffic jam. The entire road has ground to a halt, and we are sitting in a long line of cars. I can see Forino picking his nose in the rear-view mirror.

I know that things are alright for now, but that the situation has the potential to deteriorate rapidly if we aren't careful. We were beginning to get antsy, and when four men in a car get antsy then violence often follows. I was especially worried as I was sat next to a South African porn director-looking individual and didn't fancy my chances if it came to blows. To push us in the right direction, I pour everyone another drink, except for Stu, who is driving. I feel like a dwarf or gremlin or whatever from the hobbit film, juggling bottles, cups, and wheels of cheese. The thought frightens me quite a bit.

"You know what I like about Pernod?" pipes up Carlo from the back, taking the proffered beverage.

I zone out and look out the window at the Thames as it starts to rain. The river meanders lazily downstream, buckets of thick grey sludge water churned out of the sewage plant on the opposite bank, boats and ships chugging along on the foamy surface. Fat droplets of water patter down from the sky as *Cruel Angel's Thesis* reverberates throughout the body of the Volkswagen. Stu is bobbing his head in tune to the rhythm and making Japanese noises, whilst Carlo is asking when we can stop for him to pee.

"You should've gone before we left Wandsworth!" Stu chides, looking sternly into the rear-view mirror. "Fuck me", he adds, checking the satnav, "can't we take a detour?".

The robot in the car computer is telling us to stay in this traffic jam, most likely for several hours. We are already late. Personally, I value the ineffable human spirit and intellect over the whims of some German machine, so I turn her off and tell him to make a left, over Albert bridge.

"Don't worry, its fine, I used to live here, all over the place, I'm a local" I reassure him, trying to remember where we are and how to get to Harrow from here.

We shoot up the Queenstown Road, past the overground, the disused mattress factory, the roundabout, the billboard with the HSBC advert from 2010. I greatly enjoy showing off my local knowledge – I'd grown up all over here. Over there, by the Cetra estate on Victoria rise I remember getting my bike kicked out from under me by a few Millwall fans, lost on their way back to their riverside ghetto. They kicked it out from under me as I was slowly cycling up the hill from the newsagent after spending my pocket money on cigarettes (they still had the original packaging, before the deluge of swamp green smoking children and pale corpses splayed across radiators (but I'm still glad I caught the tail end of cigarette brand consumerism)). I remember walking back up that hill dragging my bike and my pride behind me, retreating to echoes of "wanker faggot" at my back, and now we were just driving by like it never happened, 7 years of my life locked up in a brief 5-second glance framed by the Volkswagen's misted up window.

Next, Vauxhall Road, past the headshop where they overcharged me for Margarita-flavoured blunt wraps; along the estate where I'd first listened to Aphex Twin at some party; through the bus station where I used to come to write bunk for school (we didn't have internet for around 6 months).

I would've teared up, if I was the type of person to do that. But I am not, I am a big strong man. Plus, I was beginning to feel *the fear*. We were circling back into Vauxhall, and I was starting to think that we may never get out of here. Stuck in the North-South London turnstile forever, twirling and twirling away.

I was also starting to feel a little funny and wanted to mix myself a 'Vichy France', but I didn't have any Weissbeer or rubbing alcohol, so I had to settle for Moretti and no rubbing alcohol, which tended to upset me a little bit. But then life is full of little disappointments and challenges such as these, and it is our job to overcome them. I will provide the recipe for a 'Vichy France' below, for those who are curious.

Vichy France

Ingredients:

2 measures Pernod Ricard

300ml Weissbeer (preferably Ayinger Brauerweisse)

25ml rubbing alcohol

Stopwatch, to measure the time

Instructions:

Pour 10ml of the rubbing alcohol into the glass and roll it around to coat the surface. Set the stopwatch to 8 minutes and 20 seconds. Add the Pernod and the rest of the rubbing alcohol and stir vigorously until bright green and homogenous. Pour beer in slowly, so as not to create too much head. Consume before the stopwatch reaches zero.

We get back on the recommended route, driving through Pimlico, up to Finsbury, onwards to Harrow. Kebab shops and Betfreds fly past the window.

"I need to pee!" Carlo whines.

"Hold it in!" I command him.

"I'm going to have to piss in this Moretti bottle if we don't stop soon".

Stu pleads with him, "Aw, christ, really? Carlo, can't you just wait? We'll stop soon".

Carlo makes an affected face, like Rubens' *Saint Sebastian*, presumably to convince me that he is very frustrated. But I am more frustrated than him. I have been frustrated for six years straight now, so I am acclimatised to the sensation. He can stay in the back seat and piss himself for all I care: he should've gone before we left. I have a small bladder myself, but this is just ridiculous.

It is important to live life without acquiescing to the needs of every person who might need to empty their bladder. You have to know where to draw the line, otherwise you will be everyone's piss-bitch forever.

But it's too late. We are already in Harrow, moving fast. No chance to stop. Roundabout after roundabout – we are finally leaving London, two hours behind schedule.

"Peeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee" moans Carlo from the backseat.

I look back and see that he is hunched over something, like a cowboy sitting astride a bucking calf. I realise that he has slipped his cock into the slim neck of the beer bottle and is slowly

filling it up with steaming yellow piss. Forino, face pale, is pressed up against the opposite window, desperately clawing at a door handle which isn't there. I want to feel bad for him, but in situations such as these you have to look out for yourself, it's a matter of survival. Life or death.

"Ouuuuuuuuughhhh" sighs Carlo contentedly. His urine is a deep shade of ochre.

"That piss is not a very healthy colour" I tell him. I am worried that he will shrivel up and die of dehydration.

"Never mind that" he interrupts, "I need to pour this out the window. Please let me pour this out the window, I want to get rid of it".

Before I can say anything, he reaches his bottle past my head and empties it out of the window into the roaring wind.

We are driving at 60 miles per hour and the piss goes all over me, Stu, and Forino. Only Carlo is protected. Somewhere deep inside me, a younger version of myself begins to laugh. I can see the little fucker giggling and giggling away, rolling on the floor with laughter. But I am not laughing. I am crying in the front seat, tears whipped back by the wind, streaking salty rivulets across my piss-covered cheeks. Stu is screaming. Forino looks like he wants to vomit.

Carlo begins to laugh like a malevolent dwarf, his guffaws carried away by the wind, thrown out of the window, left behind on the A134.

Sudbury

We're sitting at a service station McDonald's; Stu, Forino, and me. We've just spent the better part of twenty minutes wiping ourselves clean of Carlo's piss with hundreds of tiny lemon-and-lime-scented wet wipes. Now we're outside, and I'm eating a Spicy McChicken, watching the traffic run loops through the roundabout, like moths circling a flame. They are all trying to get to McDonald's but cannot find the road that leads into the drive thru. Carlo has run back to the car to get his wallet. Forino has ordered a chicken wrap and an espresso, to remind all of us that he is Italian, just in case we'd forgotten.

Stu recites, mantra-like, "For me, it's the McChicken. The best fast-food sandwich...".

Forino chokes on his wrap and I make a stern facial expression.

"You shouldn't joke like that, it's not in good taste".

Just then Carlo comes bounding over across the parking lot like an excited retriever puppy, phone in hand. He thrusts it under Stu's nose triumphantly. "Look!" he says, with a great deal of pride.

On his phone is a video of the Volkswagen's back seat. It is covered in shit. I am very impressed. Sometimes someone makes such a great deal of mess that it is downright admirable. Stu, however, doesn't have my eye for aesthetics, and gets very upset.

"What the fuck Carlo?"

"You know how I was looking for that Kinder Bueno for ages? Turns out I was sitting on it the whole time!" Carlo laughs triumphantly. "Look, it melted all over the back seat!"

Stu rises solemnly, clearly restraining himself, and walks back to the car. Carlo, chest puffed out with pride, walks into the McDonalds.

"Is he always like this?" Forino asks.

"Almost the entire time I've known him," I reply.

We munch away silently on our pucks of gristle. I chew thoughtfully, begin to think, and quickly become very concerned. The future of the journey could be in serious jeopardy. God knows what Carlo might do next. The whole stunt with the piss-bottle, and now the Kinder Bueno – these were just an *amuse-bouche* for what was to come. He just did this to show you what he was capable of, to get you interested. The *entre* will follow eventually. It always does.

I sit and ponder how to alleviate the pressure. I really want a 'Ronald's Bourbon McFloat', but there is no diazepam. This day keeps getting worse and worse.

Ronald's Bourbon McFloat

Ingredients:

2 measures Jim Beam

10ml methylated spirits

10mg diazepam, crushed

Large size McDonalds Coca-Cola

Plain McDonalds vanilla ice cream cone

Fries, to dip (optional)

Instructions:

Add the methylated spirits and crushed diazepam to a separate cup and stir vigorously until combined, then add the Jim Beam. Drink/pour out 1/3 of the Coca-Cola, and add the Jim Beam/methylated spirits/diazepam mixture, stirring to combine. Scoop out the ice cream from the cone and add to the top.

Calories consumed, we saunter over back to the car. Forino hands me the rest of his burger.

“Burger.” he says.

I thank him, take the half-eaten Filet-o-Fish, chuck it in the back seat and climb in after it, taking care to avoid the mess left by Carlo. The seat is stained with piss and Kinder chocolate.

I begin to suspect that Stu’s sister is estranged from him somehow, or maybe just doesn’t know her younger brother at all. How could she, in good conscience, knowing him and the company he keeps, lend him her car? Had his sister minded what she was about when Stu asked her, she could probably safely drive around without the persistent, cloying scent of urine, cacao, and smoke.

Carlo jumps in next to me. “Off we pop lads!” he beams and plonks himself down right on top of my Filet-o-Fish box. I choose not to say anything, but I sense that if the car ride goes on for much longer at such a tempo, I may lose control.

We pull out of the service station and onto the motorway. We are now two and a half hours late. I close my eyes and begin to drift off, worrying very sincerely about Roz and Leo, and the impression we might give off upon our arrival (if we ever reach Norwich at all).

I can imagine their conversation, squirreled away in their cottage, over a pot of tea, biscuits, and a game of bridge. There is a fire burning softly in the hearth, its flames bouncing off the shiny porcelain tea service, encasing the room in an amber. A fat tabby cat is asleep on the aga, where a tray of crumpets is keeping warm, and a grandfather clock ticks away the minutes to six o’clock. A large gramophone in the corner pipes out a scratchy rendition of *Everyone’s Wrong but Me* by Mildred Bailey.

Roz: *(Disdainfully; peeking over the rim of her spectacles at the cards in her hand)* Can you believe it! The nerve of some people! They promised to be here by three and it’s already five thirty! How much longer do they expect us to wait?

Leo: *(Rocking back and forth in the rocking chair that they bought at the village fete)* I know, I know... But you’ll have to forgive them, won’t you? After all, they seem severely off. Have you actually spoken to Carlo before?

Roz: *(Sighing)* Yes. I know what you mean. I suppose I can’t be angry at him, or his friends... what were their names again?

Leo: Stoube, Ninõ, and Yusupov.

Roz: And they’re what, his caretakers?

Leo: Something like that.

The grandfather clock strikes 6, except the clock face is gone, and Carlo's face has replaced it. He beams gleefully from the round hole, eyebrows raised in anticipation.

Carlo-face-clock: *(Joyfully)* Bing bong! Bing bong!

Leo: Oh dear, it seems that its Carlo o'clock again. Roz dear, could you please put the cat out?

Roz jumps up, grabs a nearby slipper, and leaps across the armchair. She makes for the aga, brandishing her weapon, grabs the cat by the tail and flings it into the open oven door, slamming it shut.

Roz: *(Triumphantlly)* Hah! There you go, you little bastard!

The Carlo-face-clock starts to whine a high-pitched whine, almost like a mosquito.

Leo: *(Shaking his head)* We really must get that fixed.

The Carlo-face-clock's whining grows louder and louder, from a whine to a moan, from a moan to a shout, and finally from a shout to an ear-splitting scream. All the spoons and knives and plates on the table begin to rattle. The handle flies off the record. The glass of the clock-face shatters, the teapot explodes, the pictures fly of the walls, the bookshelves vomit out their contents onto the floor. The cat screeches from inside the oven. Leo sits there serenely, laying his hand out on the table, cutlery and whatnot spiralling around him.

Leo: *(Smirking)* And that's game! I think you owe me sixpence!

Roz rolls her eyes and says something in reply, but her voice is drowned out by the Carlo-face-clock's deafening scream.

Thetford – Norwich

I wake up in the back seat of the Volkswagen Polo to see Carlo leaning over me, grinning like a donkey.

“Did you think you were going to die?”

“What” I reply groggily.

“We wanted to scare you. Make you think that we were about to crash” explains Forino from the front seat. For someone unacquainted with Carlo, it may seem odd for a seemingly ordinary young man to wake you up by screaming in your face to simulate a car accident. Honestly, if we were *actually* about to die, I would prefer him to keep quiet out of courtesy, so that I could stay sleeping.

I’m not even sure how they imagined this scheme would work, considering that we are stuck in another traffic jam and moving at about five miles an hour. The only way we could die here is if we were to rear-end a Midlander who was having a particularly bad day.

“Don’t worry boys – we’ll be there soon” Carlo pipes up cheerily. His attempt at motivation is undercut by the fact that we are now three whole hours late, and I am growing increasingly worried that we’ll be turned away at the door, more out of principle than for any other reason.

We crawl along a filthy motorway. The rain is pouring down yet again, and thunder booms somewhere above us. Looking out of my porthole-style permanently sealed rear window I can see the side of the road, strewn with gutted engines, roadkill, and beercans. I wonder if a similar fate is to befall us on the way back; it would be well-deserved.

The rain pours and pours, and to celebrate this, Forino (now in charge of the mobile bar, although I doubt his qualifications since I didn’t see him drink very much) passes us a few cups of beer.

“When we get to Norwich” Stu says cheerfully, “we should all find a *literary* bar and have a drink there”.

Carlo thinks this is a wonderful idea. I tell them I’m very happy with my beer thank you very much. I once went to a *literary* bar and tried what they call a “white wine spritzer”. That was quite enough for me.

Carlo and Stu start talking about Nabokov, so I tune out and let my mind drift to other things. They do this very often around me, even though they know about my problem. They talk about Nabokov just to spite me. They will pressure me and pressure me. They know that it makes me very unwell, but they do it anyway, because they are sadists with no conscience.

Carlo and I actually met under the pretext of talking about Nabokov. I was roped into it. Anytime someone meets me, and they figure out I am Russian, they inevitably ask me about either Nabokov or Solzhenitsyn, or some such dilettante, and it makes me sick. It is downright racist. Several hundred years of literature and this is what people ask you about? It is enough to destabilise even a healthy person.

My thoughts are interrupted because Carlo just said something stupid.

“What did you say just now?” I half-shout.

“Oh, you mean about Nabokov?” he giggles back at me, like a talking jack-in-the-box.

“What did you say. Repeat what you said”.

“I said that Nabokov and Huysmans are total chaps, like peas in a pod, same old story, same guy, same books”.

My head is spinning. I want to get out of the car, but I can't because we are moving again. I want to throw my £36,000 degree in the bin and become a welder instead. This is all my fault, I know, for letting things go this far. I should've stepped in before and taken some sort of decisive action, but I didn't. I only have myself to blame.

I look out the window and count the passing megamalls. We are already deep in Norwich proper, and I can't wait to arrive.

The city is just like one never-ending Dulwich. Shopping centres, semi-detached houses and precious little else. It looks like there is a DFS superstore for every man, woman, and child here. Pretty convenient, I suppose.

I realise that Carlo is absolutely hammered, which is probably why he is saying more stupid things than usual. This worries me more than a little bit. Forino, even though I don't know him very well, has shown a heroic amount of restraint so far on this trip. Stu, for his part, looks like he wants to find the nearest ditch to lie down in and close his eyes for the rest of time.

That leaves me and Carlo. I know that, although dressed like a bum and stinking of piss, I still have the wherewithal to conduct myself with the appropriate decorum. However, having to prop Carlo up and carry him around will reduce my own respectability to a point below zero.

I know Roz most likely isn't expecting four upstanding gentlemen, but this is just ridiculous.

“I think we're here” mutters Stu.

We pull up outside the terraced house. A soft light from within casts slow-moving, dim shadows across the front window, and I swear I can smell something cooking. It is almost eight o'clock.

We hop out of the Volkswagen, reeking of beer and anise and tobacco and piss. Definitely not presentable. On top of that is the fact that Carlo, our “chief node”, is piss drunk, and we have to prop him up on the way over to the door.

The house looks delightful, and we are about to ruin it by coming in. We huddle around Carlo for a pep-talk.

“Listen here” I tell him, “We're about to go in this house”.

“Heurgh haa ha, right, right, and what?” he slurs, swigging from the Pernod bottle.

“We're about to go into this house, and, uhm, I...”

“We'll introduce ourselves to Roz and Leo”, Forino helpfully reminds me.

Shit. Roz and Leo. I almost forgot about them in all the excitement.

“Carlo”, Stu shouts, grabbing him by the lapels, “you've dragged us all the way here to Norwich to meet your friends from the internet. You have to sober up immediately and act your age”. He shakes him violently like a drunken punter shaking a fruit machine that refuses to pay out.

“Listen, boys, it's alright,” reassures Carlo. His face is a light mint colour, almost the same shade as the Pernod. “It's alright, because... because I have a bottle of wine for them, and Elisha has books, and, and, and...”

With each successive “and” he turns more and more green. Stu realises what is about to happen and lets go of his lapels in disgust. Carlo crumples to the ground like a sack of potatoes, hitting his head on the garden wall as he goes down.

He vomits immediately upon impact, spewing out a viscous medley of burger, Kinder chocolate, Pernod, beer, cranberry juice, and sausage roll. The pool of sick gushes out, forming galaxies coloured crimson, emerald, and mauve, speckled with stars of pickles and sesame seeds.

I turn to Stu.

“Isn’t this great?” I ask.

“It’s ok, but I’ve seen better” he replies critically.

Carlo is singing softly, recumbent in the dirt, cheek to the pavement.

“Non mi daresti baci per la strada, davanti a tutti, davanti a tutti...”

We retrieve a canteen from the car and splash his face. Forino pulls him up from the ground. I grab him like a puppet and wave his arms about. He almost looks like a real boy.

“I’m fantastic – I’m in heaven” he says.

Norwich: Leo & Roz's dwelling

Knock knock.

There's some shuffling behind the door, and it swings open to reveal an authoritative-looking woman dressed in a turtleneck and plaid skirt, over long black tights and thick-soled boots. She has the bearing of a maths teacher, which puts me slightly on edge. This is Roz.

She says something like "right on time", to which I want to reply something very rude, but I remember that she doesn't know what we've been through, so I keep my mouth shut.

Carlo beams up at her with the eyes of a pilgrim looking upon the dome of the rock.

"Hello, I'm Carlo," says Carlo.

Roz doesn't know what to say to this, so she motions us inside.

The door closes behind me, folding us into the warm embrace of the house. It is really rather nice. I can smell the lingering scent of baked goods, at which the hairs on the back of my neck prick up slightly. For some reason, there is a flight of stairs in the middle of the room, which irks me a little bit, but I decide to wait until we all get to know one another a little better before raising this.

Leaning against the stairs is a man dressed like the brother from that Bertolucci incest film (the one in Paris, about people who enjoy the films very much), from the hairpiece right down to the sweater. He has about him the air of a teaching fellow who wants desperately to back out of a lecture after seeing that only three people have shown up. I'm quite curious which one of us worries him the most but remember that it is probably a combination of all four.

Carlo is clearly ecstatic. He has finally arrived at the shrine, the holy site of his seven-hour odyssey. Personally, I don't see what the big deal is. It is a house with two people in it.

"We bought you wine, and, uhm, here you go," I say, handing them their presents and the bottle. They both look a little worried. I would probably also be worried if I received a nondescript parcel wrapped in newspaper with the words "BOSNIAN WAR CRIMINAL" circled several times. They both struggle to unwrap the twine because I tied three knots.

My joke (giving Leo a copy of Sartre) doesn't seem very funny anymore. He opens it up.

"Oh wow nice thanks!" he says, and I am almost fooled. I have half a mind to tell him that I meant for it to be a joke. I'm not sure if that would help the embarrassment or make it worse.

"Thank... you?" adds Roz, leafing through her copy of *The Whispering Land*. I know she cannot read the dedication. I have already forgotten what it says. My handwriting is very *out there*. It is like that because I have a lot of ideas, all the time, and I need to get them down very fast, on the page, so that they're not lost, which is why the script looks the way it does.

Pleasantries out of the way, Leo motions us over to the table. Stu, Forino, and Carlo sit down. Leo leans, Roz stands, I sit on the steps. There is one chair left but, of course, nobody takes it, because that would be very rude.

We must've looked very bedraggled and shaken up, because Leo took pity on us and went to make some coffee. We sit awkwardly and chat about the drive.

Not a person among us is fully English, yet this weird Anglo-atmosphere persists nonetheless. Some collective unspoken emotional milieu which we all abet for no reason at all. Can I come in for a cup of tea? No. Go away. Go away and stay outside, don't come back until I invite you, at least 3 weeks in advance, signed in triplicate by the home office, confirmed by a C of E

priest, filed at your local council and translated into Polish. This is what English people are like. I don't like it either, but there you are.

Carlo wants me to put something here?

The evening is nearing its end, our time together meted out by the ever-dwindling pot of coffee. I feel that the pressure has been building for a while now, and it is time to make our excuses and find a vacant lot to pitch up in.

Of course, there is no question of our staying here, there never was. There is only a question of our eventually leaving.

"Are you sure you don't want to find a Holiday Inn or something, I'm sure there's one around here someone" Leo asks. He is kind, very nice, but Carlo is dead set on 'camping' under the stars, and we all know better than to deprive him or attempt to change his mind.

"Oh no, we've already decided, Carlo is going to sleep in the tent with Forino. Stu and I will be in the car. We'll be fine, we're used to it," I reassure him with an expression which says *If only you knew how bad things really were.*

Carlo approaches Roz with a kind of gleeful malice, dual-wielding two copies of *Baby Alex*. She cautiously backs away, and I swear I can see fear in her eyes. She looks very ill at ease, and rightfully so. I've never been much of an empath, but even I would most likely feel the same in her situation. She looks like someone who has decapitated their mother-in-law, buried her in the garden, and is now being confronted with her semi-decomposed bones, Macbeth-style.

"Look" Carlo giggles, backing Roz into a corner like a junkie in a dimly lit alleyway, "Book!".

"I urgheuh, I uhm, hehehe" Roz half-gurgles, half-laughs, clearly terrified.

"Haha!".

My morals tell me I should intervene, stop this assault, but my inner journalist tells me to watch it play out and not to stand in nature's way. Besides, this seemed to be, at least in part, one of the reasons why Carlo had come all this way, to fulfil some strange, fetishistic desire. Who was I to stop him? Plus, I knew that if I intervened, things had the potential to get very ugly.

"Urhmm do you want to uahrm sign haha the book please?" Carlo asks, thrusting the book into Roz's arms, spittle flying everywhere.

She scribbles something down in one of the copies with the expression of a political prisoner being forced to sign a denunciation.

"Oooo-hoo-hoo!" yelps Carlo and slaps his thigh excitedly, prancing around the table like the nutcracker as he stuffs books, binoculars, and bottles into his bulging sack. Stu is standing in the doorway with a tense expression on his face. I can tell that he is also very worried that this encounter may devolve and end very unpleasantly unless it is halted. I look into his eyes, his tranquil, Rhodesian eyes, and understand immediately.

"Comeonnowquicklycarlo" I shout, and, grabbing him by the belt-loop, drag him out of the house. He is still giggling like a maniac.

Forino is filling several canteens from the kitchen tap, like a lanky Sancho Panza preparing for a long journey. We all pile out, bowing, and hop into the peplemover.

“What’ll it be tonight then gents?” asks Stu, cabbie-style, “the Atheneum or the Ritz?”

Oh my God, he’s so funny.

“I’ve composed a poem” announces Carlo, to my great surprise. In all the time I’ve known him, he has never written a poem. I’ve never even seen him put a pen to paper, and, quite frankly, I’m not even sure he can spell.

He begins to recite:

*To England I am wedded,
And England’s where I’ll stay.
I know not where I’m headed,
But I’m sure I’m on my way.*

*How foreign shores do call me!
They beckon from afar.
A wonderous land across the sea,
Beneath the distant stars.*

*Release me from my fetters,
And cleanse me of my fears.
I could not wish for better,
Oh Albion, my dear.*

I want to laugh, and I do. I laugh and laugh into the night as we speed through the deserted Norwich streets, whipping past empty shopping centres, chippies, and council estates, deep into the Mercian night.

the fellowship of chap summit

by

forino

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHAP SUMMIT

The sun-baked earth, scarred with cracks, horizons distorted with a vibrating heat wave, backdropped with apocalyptic skies. The only figure is a lily-white skinny horse with a rusty knight mounted ontop and cartooned with a pointy noise, a beard and a moustache.

NARRATOR

(v.o)

I was 21 the first time I met with
all the lads of the spergmandem.

EVERDAY - BUDDY HOLLY

It happened in the summer of
'21... A long time ago...

EXT. MACCYS DRIVE THRU IN COUNTRYSIDE. MORNING

A humming neon M sign blesses the boring British countryside. Exiting a drive through Mcdonalds, FORINO a manlet with an aquiline nose and a handlebar moustache that extends in a french curve, rummages through a brown bag with breakfast.

FORINO

So the horse is supposed to
represent your partner or some
shit, and when I did it, I
described this pale bony horse like
death as she was giving me the
psychic reading.

PK follows through the exit like a restless hedge bird, eyes as keen as a hawk, and a tropical shirt startling with colours like a macaw. His bird watching binoculars tied round his neck swaying.

NARRATOR

It was almost noon when we set out
on a pilgrimage to Norwich. Some
sort of physical-virtualtour to
connect with figures of a niche
subculture from on the internet. At
the time I was in the midst of
figuring how to break up with my
girlfriend of a lockdown
relationship.

PK

How did she react? Ouch hot.

Munching into a steaming McDonald's apple pie.

FORINO

She seemed confused, I don't think she knows who Don Quixote is and why he's mounting her.

NARRATOR

I'd first met PK in my childhood home town of Milton Keynes, home of the codebreakers and where the first installment of robots began.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLETCHLEY PARK. DAY.

Minecraft block looking Box car robot, peddling along the pedestrian path with a blinking orange sattelight stretching to the stars.

PK

Wee wuaglio che cazzo e?

FORINO

Delivery Robot fra.

PK

Mingya...ce' sta.

CROSSFADE:

EXT. MACCYS DRIVE THRU IN COUNTRYSIDE. MORNING

Josef, inbetween a sleazy car sales man with a coppola cap and a Waldunian dark academic with suspenders, always, though, with a ciggy.

i

See these readings are all a bunch of baloney you can insert any meaning into them-

PK

(interrupting)

-No-No I like that. So my little black pony answer symbolises?

NARRATOR

Josef and I came acquainted through PK, initially over discord, this was our first time physical. A sensation not dissimilar with knowing how a magic trick is done. Seeing the face behind the voice. The curtain unveiled.

Six foot Stubbs with a sus single stache and square-framed spectacles.

STUBBS

You got my sister's car keys?

NARRATOR

This was the first time meeting Stubbs, who'd later in life become a humanities teacher in South Africa. Josef would go off to St.Petersburg. PK to Piombini Italy.

The Quadriad are lined up together in heigh-order towards a yellow 1996 Fiat Cinquecento, with one odd red door.

ï

Shotgun.

INT. CAR. MORNING

Zooming onwards, landscapes whizzing past. Raindrops start to drum hard on the windshield.

NARRATOR

We were all woven from the same web on the internet. Entangled in the same literary circle. The nexus point ultimately being 4chan. PK first stumbled on me from the mystical MrCoolMug, a myth-like legend Youtube commenter, who had shared him my videos.

STUBBS

Watchu' get PK?

PK

Quarter pounder with cheese.

NARRATOR

It is futile to track These cyber prints that have so buried their roots deep in the web. What's important is this fruition in the physical.

ï

You know what they call a quarter pounder with cheese in France?

INT. CAR. AFTERNOON

NARRATOR

And what a fraternal fruition it was-

PK

I need a piss can we stop?

STUBBS

Wait till we get out of London.

PK

I can't. I'll just quickly get out and meet you further in this traffic.

i

Don't be stupid.

PK unseatbelts and unbelts his corduroy trousers, crouching himself in the corner of the backseats next to Forino, aiming an empty moretti bottle, in the background a mashup of pop shit trash blasting on the car radio. PK slumps his bottom onto a kinder squishing chocolate seaming from the wrapper onto the seats of Stubb's sister's car.

PK

Do the psychic reading on Stubbs go on.

STUBBS

Yeah what's this?

FORINO

Sure, so imagine a white void.

BASS THROBBING WHITE VOID.

STUBBS

Ok

FORINO

And in this white void is an object, it can be of whatever object.

STUBBS

A bed.

A bed pops into the empty space, cutting off the erupting noise.

FORINO

What condition is the bed?

STUBBS

King sized with an oil stained wooden frame, blue velvet bed sheets, though with a slight spring sound once you get inside.

FORINO

And once you do get inside it, it transports you to a room, describe the room. Is there windows?

PK
Jheez almost filled it up.

ï
Get that piss away from me.

STUBBS
Yeah with a stair case oddly right
in the middle of the room.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ROZ & LEO'S PLACE. NIGHT.

A staircase seperating on one side a barely furnished livingroom and the dining room with a wooden table. Roz, a 60s secretary looking-lass, stands at the door greeting these strangers with a warming smile. Behind her was Leo a grown-looking Teddy Duchamp.

ROZ
Just on time! Come in get out of
the rain.

The 4 chaps enter 1 by 1 and cramp up the living room.

PK
Sorry we're late.

STUBBS
Hectic traffic on the way here.

FORINO
Yea some police blocked off the
road.

ï
We brought you some wine!

Loitering awkwardly in the living room waiting for directions on where to sit.

ROZ
We were thinking you'd never show
up!

LEO
Anyone like some coffee?

ROZ
So what took you so long?

CUT TO:

INT. CAR. AFTERNOON

Seatbelted , maxing up volume to autistic levels, gingerly smoking ciggareates avoiding ash on the car seats.

PK
Get lit slapped.

FORINO
Goethe met Napoleon, fun fact.

STUBBS
Oh yeah and he said when riding off his horse after defeating Germany that Napoleon was the spirit of our age.

ï
Didn't Goethe find him proper dull or something?

FORINO
Yea but Napoleon was a big fan of his Sorrows of young werther having read it like 7 times.

ï
Wow it resonated with him that much?

FORINO
Yea 'cos he was like a proper incel.

PK
Facts don't care about your feelings.

STUBBS
Feelings don't care about your facts.

ï
I hope they like my gifts.

PK
Oh you got them gifts as well?

Forino's trouser pockets buzz, quick glance at his mobile to switch it on silent.

FORINO
Look at all this rain.

NARRATOR
We were rambling 20-somethings, waxing pretensiously. The daytime was for our outer pepe shedding by the time it went night, all our inner wojaks came out.

EXT. BOAT ON CANAL. STARRY NIGHT

The chaps are slouched on an abandoned cabin boat anchored at the side of a canal. Night time trains tremouring on tracks and a silvery moon are their only accompaniment to their boyish talks of-

ï
Honestly, just let the Mexican play out.

STUBBS
Yea see where it goes I mean if she's coming all this way just for you-

PK
(interrupting)
I just don't want her to have high expectations of things to do, she'll be quarantining in my flat.

FORINO
Do your parents know?

PK
Oh no I won't tell em.

STUBBS
Fair.

PK
Shall I jump in the canal?

ï
Yes.

STUBBS
Yes.

FORINO
Fra no farlo.

A splash and a

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CAR. AFTERNOON

ï
Got any other stupid things to say?

PK
Debate me.

İ

You can't just mention a book and expect me to debate you on it when no point has been made to debate against.

PK

The classic İosef tactic is; we want to discuss an author, and he just immediately shuts down the author "you've not read this russian guy"

İ

I never said that- I never do that

PK

You do that all the time.

İ

No I don't.

PK

I'm like let's debate Nabokov and he's like "No he's trash you've gotta read this Kharms guy no ones heard of."

İ

I never do that.

PK

You do that all the time.

NARRATOR

They were like a comedy duo. Dressed in the same corduroy trousers. I wasn't in tune with what was being debated but more so to their rhythm, a call and response of PK fiddling İ's strings and his return of clash and tremour. An autistic symphony out of tempo.

FORINO

Are you guy's wearing the same trousers?

İ

Mine are better though cos no kinder chocolate stained ass.

STUBBS

How bad is the seat stained?

PK

We will clean it after I swear.

CUT TO:

INT. ROZ & LEO'S PLACE. NIGHT.

ROZ
Take a seat I got some scones too
if anyone'd like.

The quad shuffles and navigates around a staircase
inconvineintly built in the middle of the room.

ï
(to PK)
Careful not to stain the chair in
chocolate also.

LEO
Milk in anyone's coffee?

ROZ
I hope no one is allergic to cats!

NARRATOR
I thought I had recognised her from
some place, some video some where.
A quick search in my internal
archive history recalls-

FORINO
Were you in some short film about
some board game, I think I remember
seeing you in that?

ROZ
Oh God

Roz, in embarassment, hides under the table.

LEO
What's this?

FORINO
I liked it, quite a quaint lil'
idea.

NARRATOR
Beyond the image on the screen,
frozen in time, stored deep in our
internal hard drive, waiting to be
resurrected by their living present
counterparts, there we all were,
once strangers in strangers house,
affined with the internet acting as
a bonding agent, resulting in a
physical friendships.

Around the table, all eyes focus on Forino as he pulls off a
trick up his sleeve directing to Leo participating in the
performance. Hesitating to reveal if the card is indeed his

card.

CROSSFADE:

EXT. CAR. MORNING

The boot of the car is open Forino emerges with bags being donned and friendly palms out to be shaken goodbye.

FORINO

Well fellas I had a great time, we should do this again.

STUBBS

Definitely, nice meeting you.

ï

Speak to you on the web. Good luck with breaking things off.

PK

In bocca al lupo with la ragazza fra.

EXT. HOUSE DOOR. AFTERNOON

NARRATOR

Playtime was over, it was time to answer those missed calls in person. There I stood outside her door with flowers ready.

Forino hesitates to knock. Slicks his greasy hair back and knocks.

FORINO

Hi.

CUT TO:

BLACK.

"You listening?" I said - "The storm is dead". Youssef's mouth tipped over onto James' shoulder as I exited the roundabout, two corpses in brown corduroy snoring and swinging their legs in harmony. "It's the Butlin's ballroom" I said to myself, soon imagining these chaps as ol' swingers stamping on each other's toes during the Kensington two step. I chuckled silently, then choked violently when I caught the stench of a steaming bottle of piss in the backseat.

"Water?" Forino said.

"I'm gonna need a cigarette too." I replied, "I'm opening the windows fully as soon as we hit the motorway, I don't care about our ears."

He grinned cheekily, "C'mon now, we've been stuck in traffic for a while, I'm sure there's some fresh Norwich air to enjoy right here..." Forino proceeded to cautiously poke his head through the window, his head creaking slowly to the right. There was a hesitation. I suspected he was calmly examining the entrails of the seventh mutilated deer on the side of the road, but soon noticed his moustache twitch uncontrollably as he slowly tipped back into his seat. He came back with a beating heart like he'd seen a ghost. "The fucking exhaust pipes" Forino cried, "I can't feel my face." I turned to see his eyes' bloodshot and watering. "I don't care about the fumes, I'm still gonna light my cigarette - I'll blast this sordid chap-wagon to pieces!" I said, mentioning the scene in *Zoolander* where all the models are blown up while heading out for their *Orange Mocha Frappicinos*™.



Despite my quip, this chap-wagon soon became my lifeline. Once we hit the motorway, I couldn't get over the sensation that the wheels of the car had wings, finally leaving behind a yellowing chem trail of James' steaming piss. As I had closed the car window, a fresh, hard air was breathed down, with the earthy undertones of the Pernot settling into Youssef' Georgian tobacco blends. We now clearly felt the old sun. Youssef and James, briefly lying dull and dead in the back, began to stir and spring forth in the primordial smells of chapdom. Forino, this tanned gentleman from the Southern mediterranean, gracefully commanded their eyelids open with the sultry tones of an even more tanned gentleman - MC Ride. With the wind running, we all turned our attention to faint grey vapour of summer steaming off from moist tarmac - "I fuck the music, I make it cum" the shaman barked "HIT! HIT!". In the distance, very blue, Elveden Column bristled against the sky, the cars clustered at its base, like shining ants.

I feel it is necessary to mention that any round tower - according to the ancients - served as a figure of the lingam, a symbol of the male sex organ, which pierced through the yoni, a symbol of the female sex organ. More importantly, it should be noted that Elveden Column is in fact a tower, a revelation of architectural trickery which only our resident Architectural historian - Youssef - had the keen eye to notice. This pillar, at the forefront of our minds for less than a minute, possessed what Youssef called "*slats*."

“My God, he’s right!” James cautiously conceded - “there are slats everywhere.” Before we could take a proper mental snapshot of these details, the chap-wagon sped along at full tilt, like a randy whippet, sniffing its way to the finest snatch which middle England has to offer - Norwich city.