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To: _____

DECLARATION OF CONTENTS

DESCRIPTION:
a literary journal in letters.....

CONTENTS: *letters, and a song, relating to the notion of travelling light; of early morning strolls; of forgotten folk tales and long distant lorry-driving practices; of the speed and the weight of light and the weight of heavy-bottomed bottles in hotel waste-bins and the many forms of baggage which may be carried across maps and borders and through a sense of a life.....*

ORIGINATING PERSONNEL:.....
 Éireann Lorsung.....
 Ben Weaver.....
 Ian McMillan.....
 Nick Parker.....
 Mick Harrod.....
 Zsuzsi Gartner.....
 Michael Bennett.....
 Selma Dabbagh.....
 Joanna Walsh.....



Issue Three - 'Travelling Light' - Spring 2014



Issue Three - 'Travelling Light'
Spring 2014



Page English gham

A Letter from the Editor

Nottingham, England

We feel that some of the following should take responsibility for the contents of these pages:

Editor: Jon McGregor

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Online Editor: Hannah Jackson

Publicity Manager: Elexa Rose

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Technical Support: Helen Frost

Artistic Direction: Éireann Lorusung

Steering Committee: Sarah Davison, Matthew Green, Thomas Legendre, Nicola Monaghan, Abigail Ward, Matthew Welton

Editorial Board: Naomi Alderman, Tasb Aw, Roddy Doyle, Patricia Duncker, William Fiennes, Chris Gribble, Kirsten Harris, Sarah Hall, Chloe Hooper, Mick Jackson, Ben Johncock, Cormac Kinsella, Katie Kitamura, Éireann Lorusung, Colum McCann, Maile Meloy, Kei Miller, Nick Mount, Emily Perkins, Julie Sanders, Kamila Shamsie, Craig Taylor, Xu Xi

Additional Notes: The Letters Page is a project run within the Creative Writing section of the School of English at the University of Nottingham, and is entirely funded by the University of Nottingham. We are grateful for the opportunity, and for their support, and excited about the enthusiasm and insight that our student assistants have brought to the project. We don't feel it would be inappropriate at this point to mention that, should you or any of your close friends and relations be considering studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in English or especially in Creative Writing, it would be well worth your/their while looking at the courses available here. We're not saying that our editorial office is the smartest place to spend time honing your/their love of reading and sense of writing craft, but it's pretty close. Also, there are sometimes doughnuts. Details of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses can be found at www.nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/courses/english/english.aspx, or by writing to:

*Admissions,
School of English,
University of Nottingham,
Nottingham NG7 2RD,
UK.*

One Last Thing: Submissions are now open for our fourth issue, loosely based around the notion of the summer house. We've been thinking, since the issue will be produced while our students divide their time between home and the beach, about living in more than one place. We've been thinking about lake cabins, about Tove Jansson's summer island, about the dacha and the summer residence and the holiday caravans of Mablethorpe and Skegness. We're thinking about people who have two houses when others have none. We're wondering if anyone still uses Poste Restante. We're thinking about the divided self, and we'd love to hear from you. Letters should be handwritten, around 500 words long, and posted to us at the address below. Closing date is June 10th 2014, and we'll pay £100 for every letter we publish.

*The Letters Page,
School of English,
University of Nottingham,
Nottingham NG7 2RD,
UK.*

www.theletterspage.ac.uk | [Twitter @TheLettersPage](https://twitter.com/TheLettersPage) | [instagram.com/theletterspage](https://www.instagram.com/theletterspage)

Dear Reader,

I'm writing to you from the newly refurbished reading room of Nottingham's Bromley House Library, a subscription library since 1816, which houses an excellent collection of books both ancient and sprightly, and has all manner of quiet corners and comfortable armchairs in which to both read and write. (Members of a similar establishment in London may wish to check Bromley House's subscription fees online before weeping quietly into their warm laptops.) Tomorrow will be the first day of May – the plane trees in the courtyard garden are bright with first leaf, and the pigeons on the chimney pots are plumply excited – and I am conscious that we had planned for this issue to have reached you by now. But a letter is a letter, subject to the vagaries of time and human agency, and sometimes delays are inevitable; we trust you will find that the letters within these pages have been worth the wait.

Fittingly, given the theme of this issue, one member of the editorial team has recently had cause to pack bags and relocate, and in so doing to make choices about the necessities of a life. (Books were still at the top of the packing list, we were pleased to see.) How much can one person carry with them? How much can one person leave behind? Observing the process gave us cause to consider the neat fit of the metaphorical notion of 'baggage' to the actual physical weight of, well, baggage. We were reminded of Luc Besson in the film *Leon*, moving from apartment to apartment with only a suitcase and potted plant to serve as his worldly goods. (The potted plant was a fine detail, we always felt: not a ruthless asceticism, this, but a considered selectivity.)

And yet, unless you are either a holy ascetic or an amoral assassin, it can be difficult to live this way for very long. Life has a way of accruing, we find, in objects and papers and packages and books (especially in books). The state of the editorial desks in the *Letters Page* offices is good evidence for this accrual. But the notion of travelling light – the ideal of it – is still one to which we cling, and return. As did so many of the writers who submitted letters for this issue, who wrote to us of heavy baggage and none, of simple journeys and impossible ones, and of the lightness or heaviness of love. We were delighted to read these letters when they fell through the office letterbox, and we take great pleasure in passing the best of them on to you now.

You'll have noticed, perhaps, another change in format for this issue. We are restless souls. These are A3 pages, which should scale quite nicely on the screen of your electronic device (unless it's a phone, in which case you're probably in a world of scrolling pain right now) but will look most handsome if you print it out, roll it into a tube, and post it to a friend or colleague or loved one. Should you not be fortunate enough to work in an office with A3 printing capability (and do remember to select both 'print double-sided' and 'flip on the short edge'), your local print shop will be only too happy to assist.

And so I draw to a close. Lunch beckons. The sun beats down into the courtyard, and to be honest these strutting chimney-pot pigeons are beginning to make me uncomfortable. We hope you have a wonderful summer, wherever you spend it and however much baggage you take with you. Why not send us a postcard? We'd be happy to feature it on our website. And, talking of summer, you should know that our next issue – due out in October – will be loosely themed around summer houses. See the submissions page on our website for details.

We leave you now in the hands of Mr Roddy Doyle, who will launch this issue on a fine spring evening in Dublin, from the offices of the excellent Fighting Words organisation. Thank you Mr Doyle, and thank you, dear Reader, for your continued attention.

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor.

Dear X,
a catalogue – (trees, flowers,
birds, bugs, sound,
other animals)
map drawing –

Dear X
As you know
the thing works
like a receiver –
across distance –
the body, I mean

Dear X –
To walk into rooms
where you lived
requires tolerance
for pain –
in only half-light

Dear X
the desert
train pulling into
LA next to empty
concrete canals –
5:15am –

Dear X:
The word DONE
was telegraphed
to the nation
make of it what
you want –

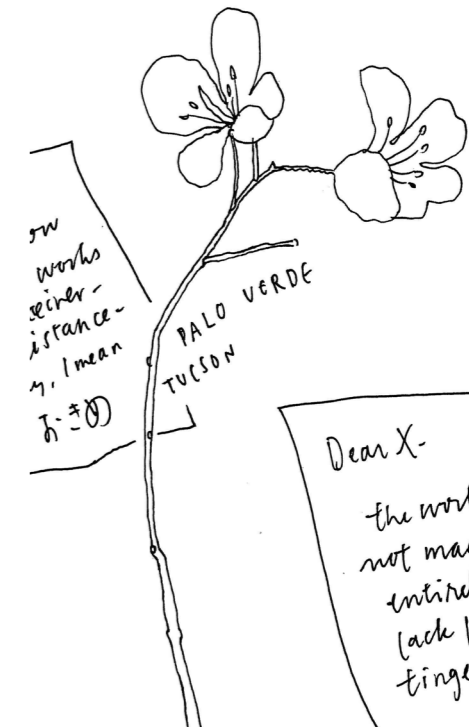
Dear X
the world is
not made
entirely of your
lack but it is
tinged by it –

Dear X
cheap stationery in a drawer at
the hotel in
Little Tokyo, maybe 50 years
untouched
me, too –

Dear X –
Outside a
Baptist church in Venice
where worship & pain
sound so alike –

Dear X
in the desert,
the huge city,
the train, the
forest in another
city
always

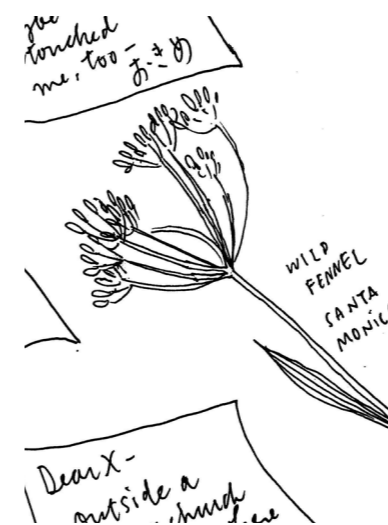
Dear X –
Desert elements
are thirst
& longing
& palo verde –



Dear X –
you (my past)
walking by me on
this Seattle street
(with whose
manners & Southern
voice I would have gone home)
No question –

Dear X –
that O'Hara
poem! Those early
mornings we walked
on the railroad
tracks!

Dear X
my entire
right side
tingled where
it encountered
your body



Dear X, ^{1,2,3}
a San Fra [...]
feelin [...]
(As if [...])

Notes:

1. We asked Éireann Lorusung for some background to these letters, and she sent us the following. Some editing has occurred:

'The *Dear X* pieces are by the writer Okime Irotok, whose work is the subject of a dissertation by , the main character in *1873*, a novel I'm working on. That novel is about earthquakes and archives, compression of time and space. Irotok's work is about fragmentation, loss, coming of age in 1960s Japan, sex, and travel; she is mainly known for her confessional, four-volume roman fleuve *The Lost Novel*. *Dear X* is from a collection of epistolary non-fiction called *Letters to X*. 's dissertation is about coincidence and accident in Irotok's work.

As an outsider I'm sure I could argue for the inclusion of these fragments in a tradition of Japanese poetry (given Irotok's self-identification as a Japanese writer, despite the fact that she lived outside Japan for much of her life), but Irotok herself always described *Letters to X* as 'epistolary non-fiction' or simply as 'letters'. In her unpublished dissertation, wrote 'In their brevity, the letters in *Letters to X* call early [Japanese] poetic forms to mind, but they owe as much to late-20th century literary theorists and to the verse structures of interwar cabaret music'.

These letters are also part of a diary I kept during train travel in the western U.S. (which forms the basis for another project-in-progress, a book of essays called *The Book of Simultaneity*). These fragments somehow exist both in a book of epistolary non-fiction first published by Kodansha in 1978 and in my notebook from last summer, and they are in effect two separate things—Irotok's book and my notes—and 's transcription of them, printed here, is its own, third, thing.

The musician Ben Weaver is making an album using images and language from the diary I kept. His song, 'Dear X', speaks to Irotok's book although I know Ben has never heard of it. Other songs I've heard from that album (it's still in progress) are about train travel, agriculture, loneliness. Pretty fitting, really, for Irotok's work. This album will accompany the eventual publication of *The Book of Simultaneity*.'

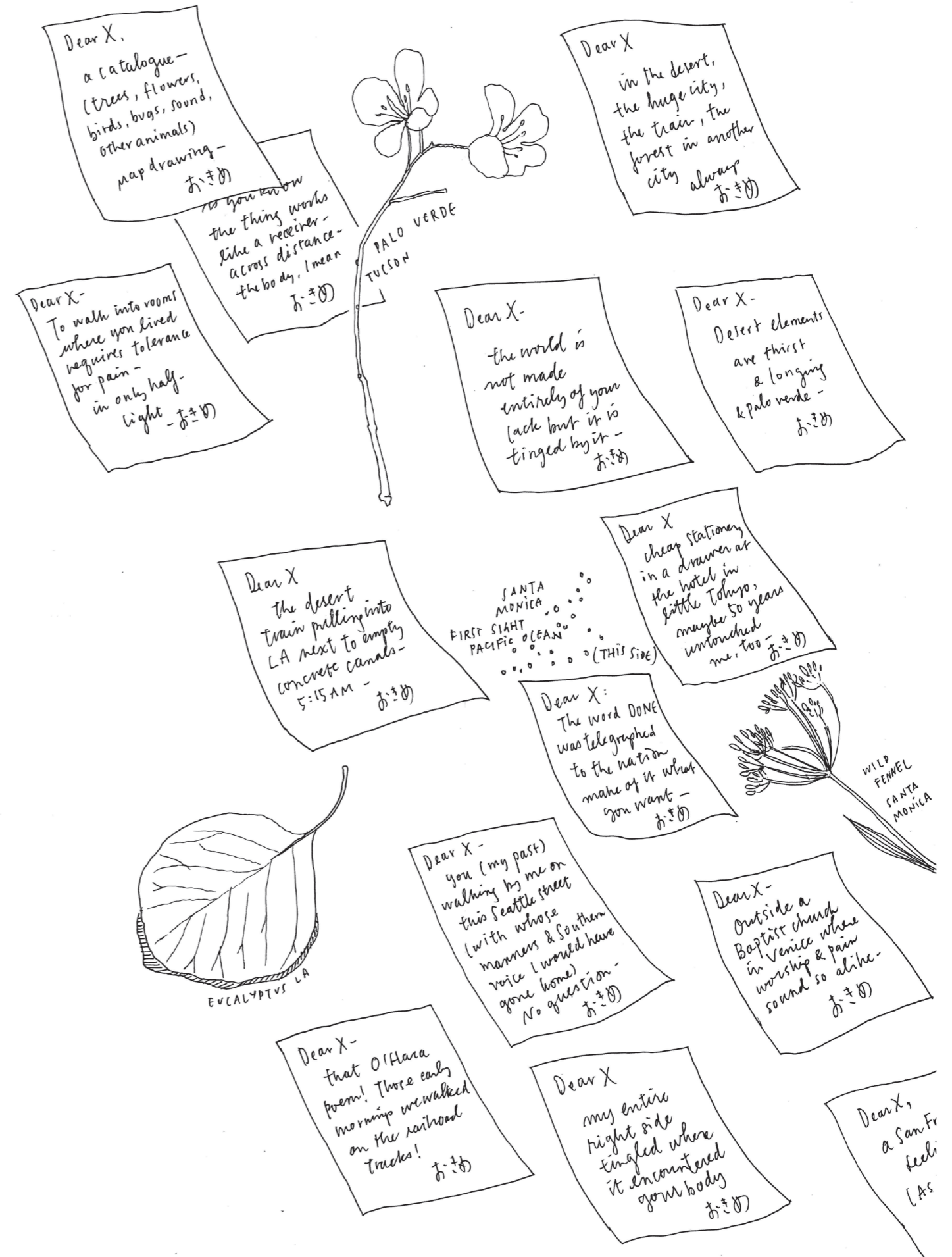
2. Éireann Lorusung's most recent book is the poetry collection, *Her Book* (Milkweed, 2013). She is the editor and publisher at MIEL, a small press and journal publisher based in Ghent, Belgium, whose work is very fine indeed and available from miel.ohbara.com.

3. Ben Weaver is a singer-songwriter from Minnesota who also draws and writes and rides his bike. His records include *The Ax in the Oak* and *Mirepoix and Smoke*. For this issue of *The Letters Page*, Ben has made a version of the song 'Dear X' exclusively available to you, dear Reader.

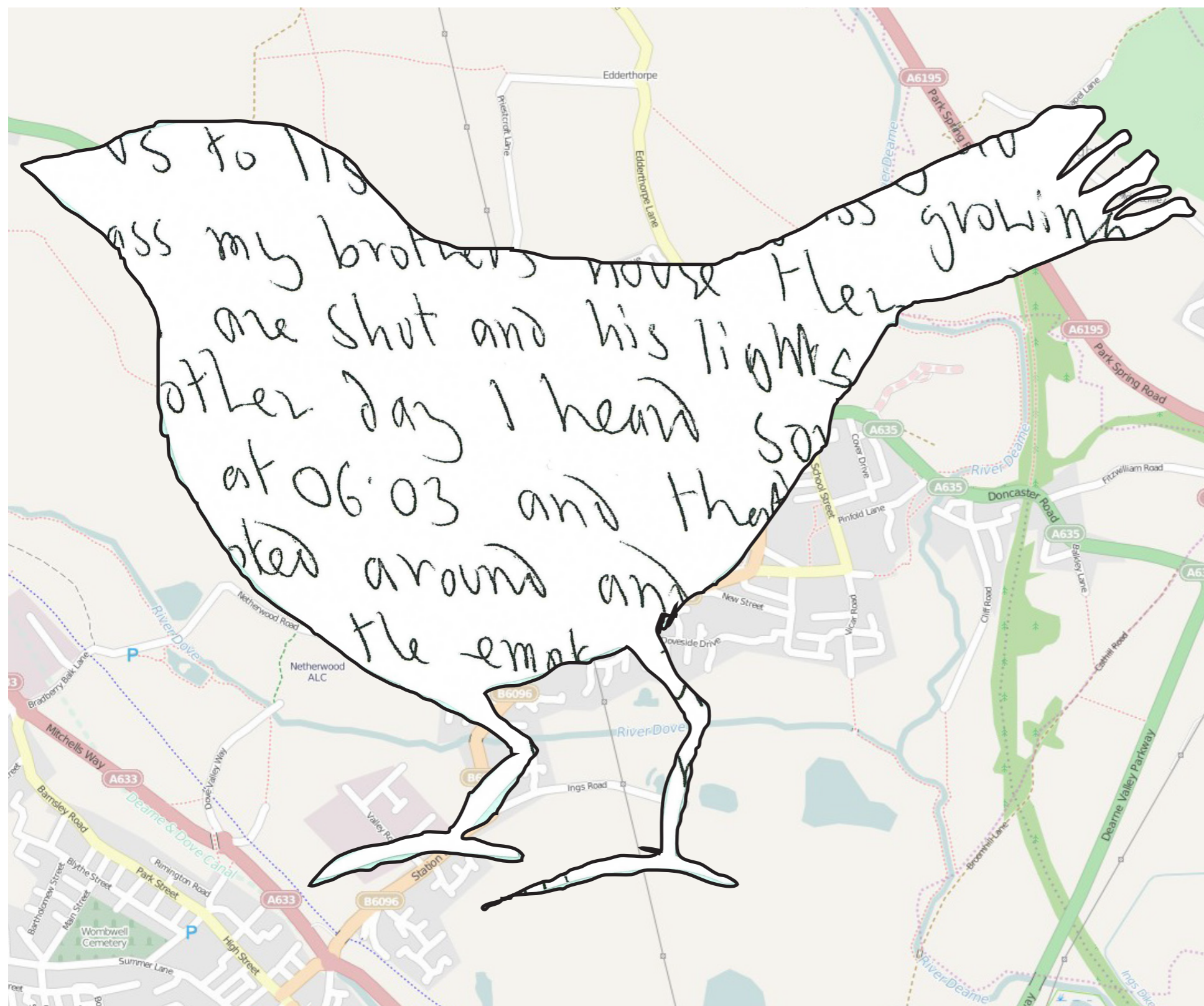
If you are looking at this on a screen, then click this link to hear the song.

If you are reading on paper, but have a suitably equipped smartphone device, point it at the Quite Ridiculous code thingummy below to hear the song.

Otherwise, just use this web address: <http://bit.ly/1j9ZIYD>



Ian McMillan
Darfield, Yorkshire



Dear Gillian,

Each morning at ten to six I pass you as you put out sultanas for the blackbirds. I'm eating my apple and my crunching noises drown out my 'morning' and your 'morning'.

I eat the whole apple and I'm on to the stalk as I pass Mr Moody's house; he taught me at Low Valley juniors,¹ stood us all in a field and told us to listen to the grass growing.

Gillian, I pass my brother's house then and his curtains are shut and his lights are off; but the other day I heard someone shout 'John' at 6.03 and that's his name, and I looked around and there was nobody there and the empty X19² rolled by and a man on a bike nodded at me.

Do they like sultanas, Gillian, or have you trained them to like sultanas?³

All the best,
your neighbour,

Ian McMillan⁴

Notes:

¹ Five miles out of Barnsley, by the banks of the River Dove, Low Valley Juniors is now known as Darfield Valley Primary and was recently rated as both satisfactory and improving by government inspectors. Standards to which we can all surely aspire.

² The X19 bus, operated by Stagecoach on behalf of Travel South Yorkshire, makes the return journey from Barnsley to the Robin Hood Airport, via Darfield and Doncaster, twenty seven times each day. According to the most recent timetable, at 6.03 the service would have been running either slightly early or extremely late, both of which scenarios would explain the bus being empty.

³ Sultanas and raisins are indeed 'particularly enjoyed' by blackbirds, robins, and song thrushes, according to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which also suggests cold Brussels sprouts for starlings but draws the line at offering strong blue cheese to a wren under a hedge. See rspb.org.uk/wildlife/features/christmas.aspx for further details.

⁴ Ian McMillan was born in Darfield, South Yorkshire, where he still lives today. He has published over twenty-five volumes of poetry, including *I Found This Shirt* (Carcenet, 1998), *Perfect Catch* (Carcenet, 2000) and *Talking Myself Home: My Life in Verses* (John Murray, 2008). He has also worked as a journalist, playwright and broadcaster; he hosts *The Verb* on BBC Radio 3 and writes a weekly column for his local newspaper, *The Barnsley Chronicle*.

You can follow Ian on Twitter @IMcMillan, and we heartily recommend that you do, since he's made sense of the medium in a way very few writers have. His tweets are tiny postcards from his travels around the country, and they consistently brighten our days.

⁵ The map used as a background image here is taken from www.openstreetmap.org, and is © OpenStreetMap contributors. Éireann Lørsung put a bird on it. (Although, full disclosure: the editor is responsible for the wavering cut-out job, which he likes to think conveys a certain shambolic charm but actually reveals his lack of a steady hand when either under- or over-supplied with coffee.)

BARNSELY
December 2013

Dear Gillian

each morning at ten to six I pass you as you put out sultanas for the blackbirds. I'm eating my apple and my crunching noises drown out my 'morning' and your 'morning'.

I eat the whole apple and I'm onto the stalk as I pass Mr. Moody's house; he taught me at Low Valley Juniors, stood us all in a field and told us to listen to the grass growing. Gillian, I pass my brother's house then and his curtains are shut and his lights are off; but the other day I heard someone shout 'John' at 06:03 and that's his name, and I looked around and there was nobody there and the empty X19 rolled by and a man on a bike nodded at me.

Do they like sultanas, Gillian, or have you trained them to like sultanas?

All the best,
your neighbour,

Ian McMillan

Dear Editor,

Here is that story I was telling you about, from E.F. Walser's *Forgotten Folk Tales*. Owing to the peculiar rules of this library, I do not appear to be permitted to photocopy it, so I will have to copy it out by hand. My fingers are itching to 'CTRL + C'! But anyway, do with it what you will. It is called 'The Competition'. (Walser was poor on titles)...

"We gathered on the hill¹ for the competition. The other two kingdoms sent their armies. The Red King's men lined up on the plain, drumming their drums & waving their standards. The Green King's men marched through the valleys, their feet thrum-thrumming on the hard earth. They all loudly swore to conquer new lands, capture fine treasures, to plant many flags in the soft soils of far-flung places.

But our King, the Blue King, called only for his scribe, Baxter. Baxter arrived a bit late, his trusty chicken, Leopold, following behind. The Red King and the Green King laughed in the Blue King's face. 'See how our men are sharpening their swords, & readying their wagons for plunder,' they roared. 'How can one man possibly compete with two armies?'

Baxter took a blank notebook from his satchel. Then he plucked a feather from Leopold, who did not seem to mind, & began fashioning himself a quill.

Then the signal was given. We watched as the armies stamped their way over the horizon, their clamour & footprints lingering behind them. Some time later, when his quill was finally sharpened, Baxter ambled off, leaving just a small pile of parings. We set the sundials to a year-and-a-day.



And so it came to pass that pretty soon, there we were again, the armies returning. To the North were the Red King's army. They were battered & weary. Many were bandaged and bruised. But they emptied out bags of treasure: gold, jewels, precious lotions & rare spices, in all manner of exquisite chests & bottles. 'We have explored many lands! We have plundered many treasures! We have planted 73 flags! Victory is ours!' they said. The crowd cheered.

Then the Green King's army stepped forward. It was clear that many had not returned. Those who had were grey of skin & broken-backed. And behind them were a group of even wearier fellows, who were shackled hand & foot. The soldiers stepped forward: 'We have also explored many lands! We have enslaved many men! We have planted 142 flags! Victory should be ours!' they said. The crowd cheered once more. Then Baxter the scribe stepped forward. His boots were a little worn, & Leopold seemed a little threadbare, but both seemed in good cheer.

And in truth we were also. For we knew that gold is just dumb metal, lotion bottles run dry, & even slaves grow old. We knew that a notebook &

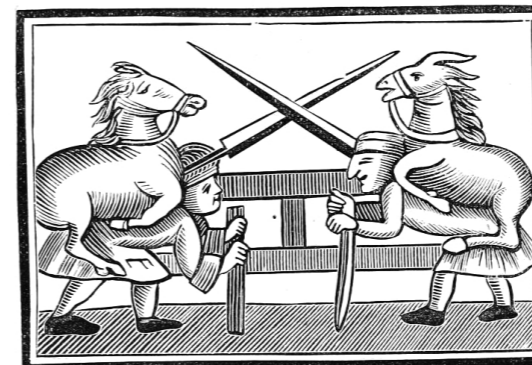
quill could truly capture things which swords and brute force could not. And oh – to find out! Had Baxter spoken to esoteric architects, & sketched their gravity-defying bridges? Had he discoursed with philosopher-rulers, & made record of their enlightened laws? Had he made study with scientists and botanists, & made sketches of their instruments, & notes of their methods? Perhaps he had discovered a new musical scale? Baxter took his notebooks from his satchel & without a word, spread them out before the Kings.

We began preparing our King's victory speech.

The blue King turned the cover on the first notebook, & perused the first page. On it, sketched expertly in ink, was a drawing of an exotic woman, entirely naked. She was wearing only a thick necklace of beads. (We surmised that the beads must have been of significance.)

On the second page there was also a drawing of an exotic woman, unencumbered by clothing. (Her necklace was smaller – however, her breasts were notably fuller.)

On the third page, the necklace did not seem to feature at all.



Page four was basically just breasts.

Page five included a gentleman figure alongside the woman. (Could we detect a likeness of Baxter himself?) He too was without any manner of clothing (though was possessed of a most impressive & slightly curved member). Page six was, in all likelihood, the same two figures (it was difficult to tell, save for the consistency in the rendering of the private parts). Pages seven, eight & nine must have presented considerable challenges in terms of perspective & steadiness of quill. Page ten appeared to be upside-down. Thereafter our King stopped reading. He cast the notebook aside & grabbed at the next one, & the next. All were the same: anatomical renderings, curves of flesh, contortions & annotations which left us feeling queasy with a strange hot rage.

Baxter stood, beaming.

'I have plundered no treasures. I have planted no flags. But sire, I think you will agree, victory is most undoubtedly mine.'

We did our duty swiftly – we marched Baxter to the gallows & hanged him. Then for good measure, we hanged Leopold, too. Then we returned to the plain, resolved to have the notebooks locked in the deepest dungeon.

But our King, the Blue King, raised his hand. We did not dare go near. The three kings were deep in some whispered conversation. It continued until late into the night. We grew uneasy, & retreated. We ate our boiled chicken nervously, worried there had been something which we were too slow to see."

- Cheers, Nick.^{2,3}

Notes:

1. A couple of points concerned us about Nick's letter: firstly, that we had no recollection of discussing any such story with him, and secondly, that we were able to find remarkably little information about E.F. Walser either online or in the well-stocked University of Nottingham library. However, we enjoyed the story so much that we decided to publish it regardless of its provenance. (It may be noted that another contributor to this issue has provided a set of footnotes which are similarly unverifiable; and that perhaps this holding lightly to scrupulous veracity is a part of the model of 'travelling light'. Or that fiction just gets to be fictional, no matter how deep you dig.)

2. Nick Parker tells us he lives 'on the outskirts of town', where by night he writes his short stories very, very slowly. His short story collection, *The Exploding Boy and Other Tiny Tales*, was self-published in 2011, and described by Ian Sansom in the Guardian, in a rare review of a self-publication, as 'astonishing'. By day he is a creative director at a language consultancy called The Writer. He has also published *Toast: Homage to a Superfood* (2002), a book containing over thirty recipes for making toast.

3. The illustrations here are taken from an 18th century chapbook entitled *The World Turned Upside Down or The Folly of Man, Exemplified in Twelve Comical Relations upon Uncommon Subjects*, collected by the University of Toronto Libraries and originally published in The Public Domain Review [<http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-world-turned-upside-down-18th-century/>] under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0.

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cheers,
nick.

Dear Reader,

Let me tell you about a travelling light and carefree time – when we were trampers. That doesn't mean we were tramps, but tramping lorry drivers. Drivers who would roam from place to place, criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country. The aim was to keep the lorry laden and earning money from the payloads that we could locate. Each driver had his own carefully guarded book with the contact details of favourite clearing houses and haulage contractors, and some of us had company or factory contacts that would favour us with profitable loads. There was a time in the 50s and 60s when it was economical & profitable to work in this way. It wouldn't work now!

We would set off with a load from our own area,² with not much more than a grip-bag containing a change of clothes, several pairs of underpants and a bag of toiletries. We might be away a week or sometimes much longer. Does that sound like travelling light?

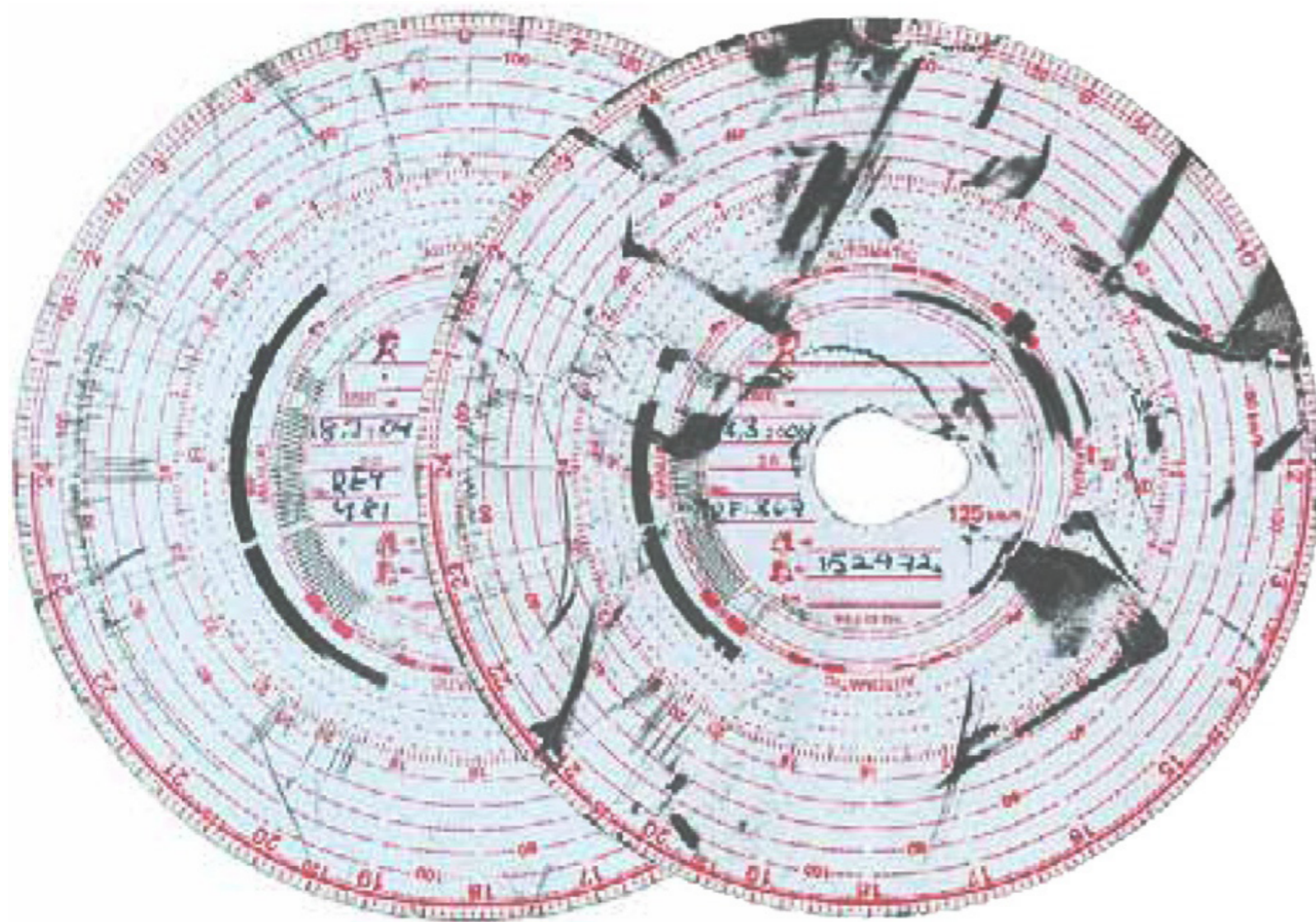
I know one tramper who carried almost nothing with him except a bar of soap wrapped in newspaper. That was exceptionally light, and a little unhygienic. Especially as he rarely used the soap!

We often started off with fruit to various fruit markets, canned goods from local factories, timber, or imported goods from the docks. Once away, we carried everything imaginable – machinery, more timber, tractors, building materials, paving slabs, salt. The list is endless. You name it – we carried it.

If we didn't immediately find a load towards home, we would load for somewhere where we stood a reasonable chance of loading for home. Doing a three-cornered trip, or four-cornered or five. It was all fun. So much responsibility was left to us as drivers – it was as if we were our own bosses. I remember when a fellow driver from the same firm was asked what kind of haulage we did – he simply said 'we go all over'.

It was about half a century ago, but it was the job I most enjoyed in my entire working life.

Regards,
Mick Harrod¹



Notes:

¹ We asked Mick Harrod for a short biography, and he sent us the following, which prompted us to recalibrate our notion of a fully lived life:

I hardly ever write a letter in longhand any more, in common with most people. There was a time when I did, and when I was about sixteen and working on a farm, I used to write short news items for a couple of agricultural magazines and other specialist publications. Often, I would be rewarded with a half-crown payment.

Then I began working at all kinds of jobs – mostly the jobs that called for long and varied hours and I had no time for such frivolities as writing until just before retirement. My occupations were legion, and at a risk of boring you, I will list some. There are many others. I worked on the farm, then as a van driver and then lorry driver for a fruiterer hauling fruit and veg from Spitalfields and Covent Garden to Lowestoft, where I was, and still am, based. National Service came along and I did scores of different jobs in the Army.

Later I drove for every haulier in town, was a postman, had scores of building jobs including pile-driving, worked as a laminator and then as a haulage shunter, yard foreman, manager and own account haulier. Between all this, I went to sea as a herring drifter man and a trawler man before signing on as a deckhand on a cargo ship. Have also worked for Nestle's milk company in Aylesbury, and Maggi Soups as well as spending quite a time in the brickyards of London Brick Company.

I ended up as a non-ferrous scrap metal dealer. The oddest job I ever did was when I joined a travelling circus, and among my many duties I entertained the crowds as the front half of a performing cow.

Currently, I am the local correspondent for a commercial fishing publication and have written for many magazines.'

² Lowestoft is the easternmost town in the United Kingdom. A fishing port and industrial centre, readers of WG Sebald will know of the town as his first night's residence in *The Rings of Saturn*. When he (or his narrator) ate dinner at his hotel, he was the sole guest in the huge dining room, and the prongs of his fork bent on the breadcrumb armour-plating of the fish that had doubtless lain entombed in the deepfreeze for years. In the morning he left promptly, and headed south along the coast towards Southwold and Dunwich.

³ The tachograph image here is by Onnettomuustutkintakeskus, Helsinki, Esko Lähteenmäki, Chair of commission [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. We are of course aware that the lorry driving career here described by Mick predates the introduction of tachograph technology, or indeed of any restrictions on working hours. (On the subject of long working hours, one of our editors recalls hitching a lift with a lorry driver, towards the end of the last century, who extolled the virtues of the 'hand-breeze-deflection' technique, whereby an angled hand held outside the open window would deflect a breeze into the driver's face. Upon falling asleep, the hand would fall, thus waking the driver. The system was fool-proof, he insisted. Our intrepid hitchhiker stopped off at the next services, leaving the lorry driver to weave one-handedly down the motorway.)

Dear Reader,
Let me tell you about a travelling light and carefree time – when we were tramps. That doesn't mean we were tramps, but tramping lorry drivers. Drivers that would roam from place to place, criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country. The aim was to keep the lorry laden and earning money from the payloads that we could locate. Each driver had his own carefully guarded book with the contact details of favourite clearing houses and haulage contractors, and some of us had company or factory contacts that would favour us with profitable loads. There was a time in the '50s and '60s when it was economical & profitable to work in this way, it wouldn't work now!

We would set off with a load from our own area, with not much more than a grip-bag containing a change of clothes, several pairs of underpants and a bag of toiletries. We might be away a week or sometimes much longer. Does that sound like travelling light?

I know one tramp who carried almost nothing with him except a bar of soap wrapped in newspaper. That was exceptionally light and a little unhygienic. Especially as he rarely used the soap!

We often started off with fruit to various fruit markets, canned goods from local factories, timber, or imported goods from the docks. Once away, we carried everything imaginable – machinery, more timber, tractors, building materials, paving slabs, salt. The list is endless. You name it – we carried it!

If we didn't immediately find a load towards home, we would load for somewhere where we stood a reasonable chance of loading for home. Doing a three-cornered trip, or four-cornered or five. It was all fun, so much responsibility was left to us drivers – it was as if we were our own bosses.

I remember when a fellow driver from the same firm was asked what kind of haulage we did – he simply said, "We go all over!"

It was about half a century ago, but it was the job I most enjoyed in my entire working life.

Regards

Mick Harrod

Dear Bbwaddene (sp?!)

I am answering your letter in lieu of Felix K, whose whereabouts are now a matter of a police interest. You may have been led to believe by Global Pen Pals® that Felix and his family were respectable Canadian citizens, but as their (former) upstairs neighbour, I assure you this is not the case. I don't know how things go in Soweto, but people here ought to have licenses to have children (something I've always felt strongly about.) *The apple don't fall far from the tree*, as we say.

Your friends must call you BB. Bbwaddene is a bit of a mouthful any way you spell it, lol. So, BB, let me illustrate my position by telling you about the time I stood at the corner of Broadway and Commercial and watched my future pass before my eyes.

This was back during the winter of 2002. The Royal Bank was gone by then, as was the discount furniture place with its endless Final Offer!!! sales of brown naugahyde couches with chrome armrests, rattan CD racks, and objets d'art like ceramic elephant-foot umbrella stands (you must have real ones, but not a lot of rain, so you use them as what? Ice buckets maybe?), as was Betty Brite's – the cleaners where the disgruntled man, his fingers slick with take-out Thai, always insisted there had been *no belt* with that dress, *no top button* on that suede jacket, but because it was the only dry cleaners within miles (which tells you what kind of neighbourhood this was) I'd continued to take in the occasional, desperate, non-hand-washable item.

In their place was the new SkyTrain site, the construction fence decorated with plywood fish and birds and whatnot painted by neighbourhood children.

I had a soft spot for children, not having had any myself. Optimistic children, their clever little fingers holding brushes dripping with bright acrylics, painting pink birds, blue fish and crooked houses filled with hearts and giant eyes spiky with red lashes. Children whose joyful mural was defaced by malcontents who'd decided progress was a disease curable via graffiti, that carving up the Grandview Cut was like a cancer of the prostate detected in its early stages. *Save the Cut* spray-painted across a purple heart in which sat a yellow cat. *People not*

Profit ruining my favourite cross-eyed salmon. You might have said that people out in New Westminster at the end of the Millennium Line were people too; people who needed to get places. Although no-one did. (I wonder what your buddy Mr. Mandela would have made of all this fuss, BB?)

This was the Christmas season. I might not have noticed if it hadn't been for the Salvation Army Santa in her saggy outfit ringing her bell with the herky-jerky movements of a Haldol user. Oh, and the squeegee people all wore Santa hats. (You may not have squeegee people where you live, as I am not sure you have cars. Just sayin'!)

I was thinking about these hats and how, if these squeegee people had the wherewithal to go and buy Santa hats, why did they not have the wherewithal to go and get jobs, when I noticed the baby. This was not one of those babies whose eyes brimmed with wisdom like a pygmy oracle of Delphi, or a baby of such intense buttery deliciousness that you wanted to spread it on a warm scone and gobble it up. (That, BB, was *not* a cannibalism joke, lol). It was an unexceptional baby, except for the fact that it had no hat on its head.

As a registered nurse – on sabbatical at the time for a nervous condition that does not bear getting into – I know a thing or two about babies. One thing about babies is that they have massive heads relative to the size of their bodies. The reason for this, as I learned from Redbook magazine and not nursing school, is pure survival. That oversized head makes them more appealing to adults and in circumstances when it is all a mother can do to keep from throwing her terrifying child from a 12th floor tenement window, that disproportionate head, with its uncannily large eyes, can save the baby's life. Call it the Bobble-Head-Doll effect. Celebrities are also known to have over-sized heads. Angelina Jolie. Conan O'Brien. Alec Baldwin. They're practically hydrocephalic!

What I did learn in nursing school is that 90% of a baby's body heat can be lost through its head. (Maybe not babies in Soweto. You probably have to dunk their heads in a real elephant foot ice bucket so they don't sweat to death!)

This mother was oblivious. She stood waiting for the light to change, bouncing up and down on her heels in some kind of sporty shoe, her calf muscles pulsing. Unusually for Vancouver, it was cold enough to be snowing. A fat flake landed on the baby's forehead and melted down into its left eye. The child blinked rapidly twice and the drop continued downwards. The mother didn't even notice. I could see steam rising from the baby's scalp.

I am telling you, BB, I was this close to snatching that baby from its 'jogging' stroller. I was already planning a life for it safe from the harm wrought by adults tuned into their own overweening needs. Not knowing whether it was a girl or boy, I settled on the name Lee, which is a nice unisex name and a heck of a lot easier to say (and spell) than the ones newcomers have been bringing here lately. (Some of those Sri Lankan terrorists could give your John Henry a run for its money!) Lee would be a quiet child, not prone to extreme displays of emotion, a comfort in his or her mother's later years when inconsiderate neighbours stomped in and out at all hours tending to their hydroponic cash crop downstairs and especially during the late-night police raids.

Just as I was imagining the trip Lee and "Ma" would take to visit the hedge mazes of England, the mother pulled a pink fleece cap with piggy ears and snout on it over the baby's head. That is how quickly dreams can be dashed, BB.

Good luck with finding a new pen pal. Please do not write back as I will be extremely busy responding to Felix K's many other pen pals.

Sincerely, a Canadian friend^{1,2}

ps. I am returning the picture of yourself in your 'birthday suit.' That is a very nice shirt and tie, but I'm certain it's not what Felix K meant by his request. Lolcat!

Notes:

1. This letter is a work of fiction. At least, we sincerely hope it is. We like to visit Canada from time to time, and hope never to meet a Canadian friend like this one.

2. Zsuzi Gartner is a Canadian author and journalist. She was born in Winnipeg, Canada, but moved to Calgary in early childhood. She currently lives in Vancouver. She has published two short story collections, *All the Anxious Girls on Earth* (1999), and *Better Living Through Plastic Explosives* (2011), which was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. She has worked as the writer-in-residence at the University of British Columbia, as well as a books editor for *The Georgia Straight*, a Vancouver newspaper.

place of Felix K— whose whereabouts I am currently a matter for
of our local police.

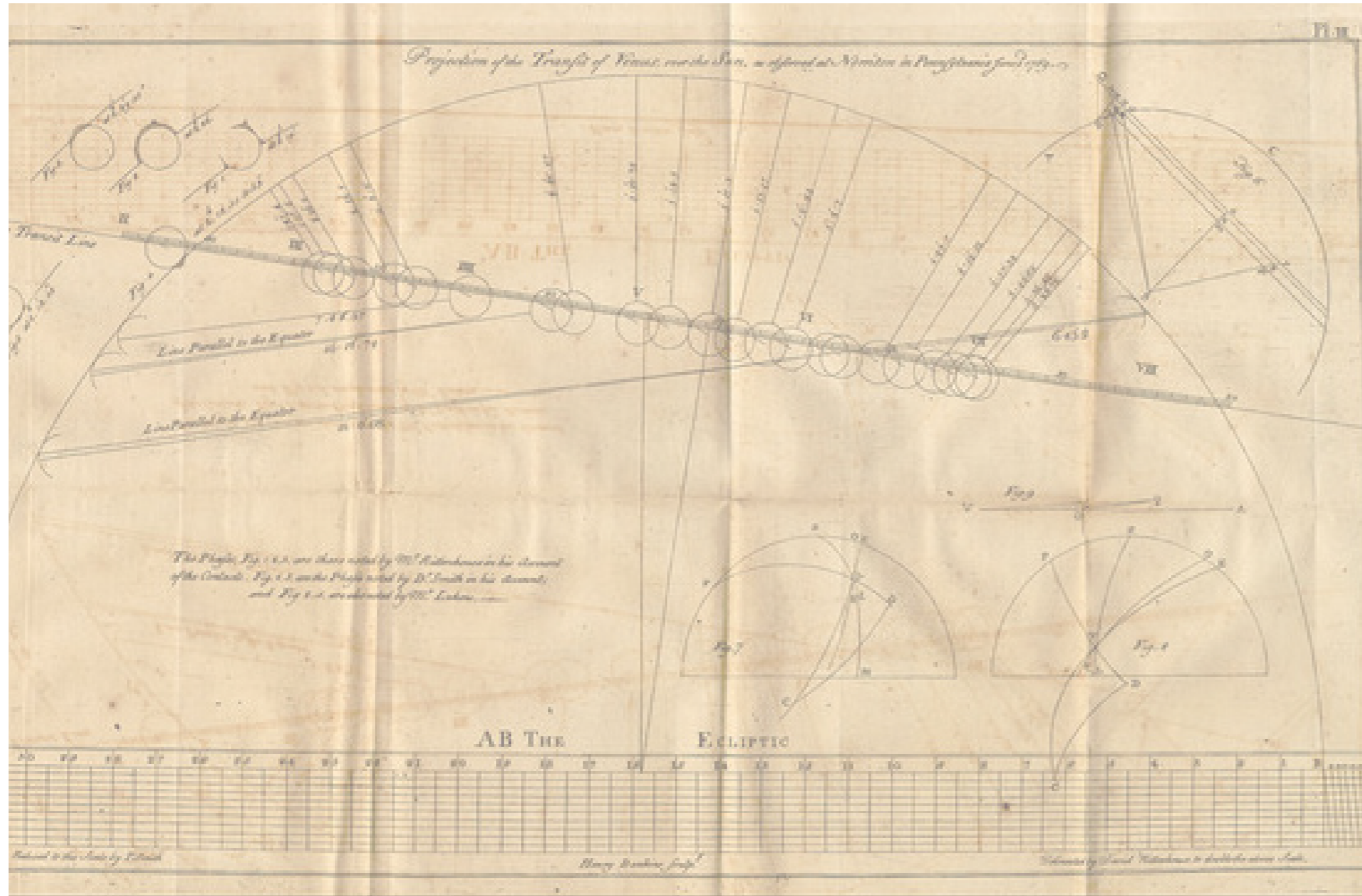
You may have been led to believe — by the Global Penpal
Project — that the K—s were a good Christian family, but as
their ^{former} downstairs neighbour I can assure you this is not the
case. "An evil man seeketh only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent
against him" Proverbs 17:12

People ought to have licenses (sp?) to have children — this is something
I've always felt strongly about (and I'm sure this would go a long
way towards solving various problems in Soweto where you live!)

I'm remembering for you the time I stood at the corner of Broadway
and Commercial and watched my future pass before my eyes. This way
a long while back, sometime during the winter of 2002. The Royal Bank was
gone by then, as was the discount furniture place with its endless
Final offer!! sales of rattan CD racks and ceramic elephant-foot
umbrella stands (you must have real elephants — lucky you!), as was
Betty Brite's — the cleaners where the disgruntled man, his fingers
slick with take-out Thai, always insisted there had been no belt with
that dress, no top button on that suede jacket, but because it was the
only dry cleaners within miles (which tells you just the kind of
neighbourhood this was) I had continued to take in the occasional, desperate,
non-hand washable item. (no longer an issue as I've been diagnosed as allergic to dry-cleaning
chemicals, er, um)

This was the Xmas season, although I might not have noticed
if it hadn't been for the desultory Salvation Army Santa in her saggy
outfit ringing her bell with the jerky-jerky movements of a Haldol user.
And all the squeegee people wore Santa hats. I was thinking about those
hats and how if the squeegee had the wherewithal (sp?) to squander money
on these seasonal items — when I noticed the baby.

The baby was unexceptional in every way — a most forgettable
baby, except for the fact that it had no hat on its head. As a
registered nurse — on sabbatical at the time for a nervous condition
that doesn't bear getting into — I knew a thing or two about babies. And
one big important thing about babies is that they have massive heads in
relation to the size of their bodies. The oversized head makes them look
more appealing to the adult human and in circumstances when it's all a mother
can do to keep from throwing her terrified child from a 12th-floor window,
the uncannily large head + cartoon eyes can save a child's life.



Dear Cora,¹

My train stopped suddenly between Newmarket and Cambridge. Something to do with a signalling problem. Outside I could just make out brambles and a large muddy field with a grey horse pacing its edges. The lights flickered for a second before dying. My thoughts travelled onwards, up the carriages with confused pale faces looking out, past the driver, out into the dusk, up into the grey filamentous clouds.

I thought about light. Light, travelling. Light is light. It weighs nothing and yet if you ever reach its speed your mass increases infinitely and time slows down. Imagine this train suddenly moving off again, going faster and faster until it's as fast as light. When it stops again in 40 minutes (let's forget the distance) at King's Cross, you will be dead. The faster the train goes, the heavier everything will be. My phone will weigh a hundred tons. I won't be able to hold it up and call you. Imagine trying to pick up my book, or my pair of trousers and three pairs of socks. You always tell me I hardly bring enough. Perhaps this is why. The further I go, the heavier I get. The faster I leave, the longer it feels I've been away from you and the older you seem.

How is it for you? Does it seem to fly by, time? They say time speeds up the older you are. Does that make you feel heavier or slower?

I imagine you now, sitting in that uncomfortable chair, your legs stiffening and swelling. I want to come back to you. But the train starts, the lights flick back on, the bramble and the field and the horse rush by the window and my thoughts come back to me from the dark like so many photons. I lift my suitcase from the table, and I find that it isn't heavy after all. Perhaps it was all left with you.

I will come by sooner next time, I promise. I might bring more with me.

Love,
Michael^{2,3}

Notes:

1. We asked Michael Bennett for some background to his letter, and he sent us the following:

'It's addressed to an aunt, who was born in 1936. She worked in houses, for rich families, as most young girls of her class had to. She cooked, cleaned, and, once married, kept a cottage by working for the farm it was attached to. She had seven siblings, and all but one has died. She doesn't write letters. She does crossword puzzles and knits. One of her brothers had two children, and the children depended very much on their aunt as a mother figure; as someone who was gentle, selfless, patient and wise. When their parents died, the children still had someone who could tell them stories about their past, and so they didn't feel so lost. One of them, the boy, left home to study, and his experience of travelling is inextricable from trains. Each time he travels back it becomes harder to leave. Each time he brings more items to his aunt's house and leaves with fewer, so that it seems he's not really left.'

2. Michael Bennett was born in 1987 and grew up in Suffolk. He has had short stories published by *Litro* and *the Lampeter Review*, and appears on *Visual Verse*. Whilst not writing he enjoys looking at plants through lenses and playing the viola. In his spare time he works at a university, on the admin side.

3. The illustration here is from David Rittenhouse's observations of the 1769 transit of Venus, taken from the Wikimedia Commons website. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rittenhouse_1769_observation_of_Venus_transit.jpg?u-selang=en-gb]

Dear Cora,

My train stopped suddenly between Newmarket and Cambridge. Something to do with a signalling problem. Outside I could just make out barrels and a large muddy field with a grey horse pacing its edges. The lights flickered for a second before dying. My thoughts travelled onwards, up the carriages with contorted pale faces looking out, past the driver, out into the dusk, up into the grey titanic clouds.

I thought about light. Light, travelling. Light is light. It weighs nothing and yet if you ever reach its speed your mass increases infinitely and time slows down. Imagine this train suddenly moving off again, going faster and faster until it's as fast as light. When it stops again in 40 minutes (let's forget the distance) at King's Cross, you will be dead. The faster the train goes, the heavier everything will be. My phone will weigh a hundred tons. I won't be able to hold it up and call you. Imagine trying to pick up my book, or my pair of trousers and three pairs of socks. You always tell me I hardly ever exercise. Perhaps this is why. The further I go, the heavier I get. The faster I have, the longer it ~~is~~ ^{feels} I've been away from you and the older you seem.

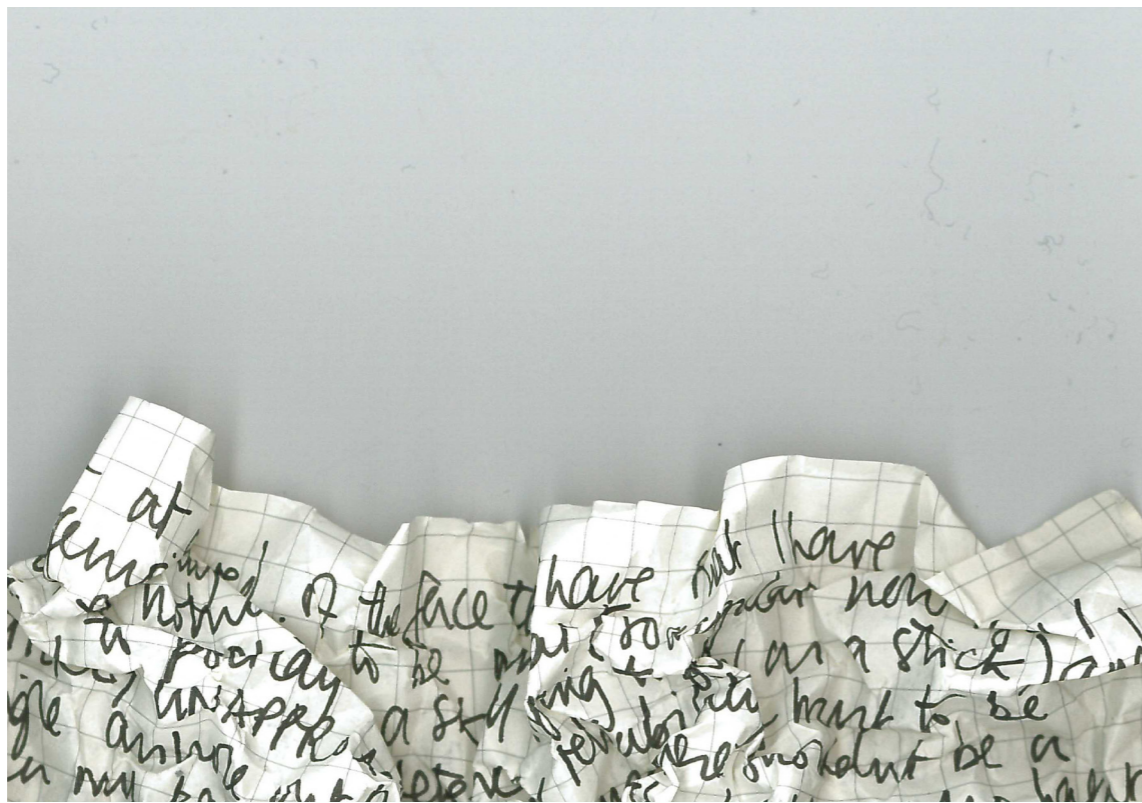
How is it for you? How is it to be by day, time? They say time speeds up the older you are. How hot was your hair or shower?

I imagine you are, sitting in that uncomfortable chair, your legs clattering and rattling. I want to come back to you. But the train starts, the lights flicker back on, the barrels and the field and the horse melt by the window and my thoughts travel back to me from the dark like so many photons. I tilt my suitcase from the trolley, and I find that it isn't heavy after all. Perhaps it was all left with you.

I will come by some ~~time~~ ^{time} next time, I promise. I might bring more with me.

Love,

Michael.



Dear You,^{1,2}

It seems the pattern is that you arrive with heavy bottomed bottles and leave me with the corners of the oily foil of condom packets sprinkled around my room. You take the bottle (now empty) and the other stuff that could be connected to your visit and this is kind I guess although I know it is because it is also evidence of what happened, which is a filling of me and a stillness in me which is so complete that sometimes I feel I was a wired puppet who had become frazzled in my strings and you made them lace, or silk, as then I am still in my lace & silk & messy with you. And you and I we get to the point where you ask me to tell you of all the times when I felt you before you were there and there were many times when I wished for you and you weren't. Like the time today earlier when I was held for hours trying to get out of the airport I had you calming me and they were going through my equipment + I thought it's ok because I was on my way to you. And then the silly stuff you are so anxious to ask about like when I was 24 and in a room in Alexandria + there was the sea + I was studying lying on a bed (why did you ask about the bedcover?) + the window was open a bit + I lay there with dreams of a knuckled hand on my hip bone – a grasp of desire – which I can only describe as being you and all the decisions and choices I have taken to lead me to where I am that I can only say were because I one day wanted to explain them to you. You were there when I dreamed of kisses and fairy tale princes. You were there in the US Army bar in Baghdad when the man, the soldier with the biceps (I can't spell, sorry I'm still a bit whirring & buzzed. I'm not a speller I'm a doer) and small, reckless eyes leant for me, not at all scared of the face that I have, that I have had to professionally train to be angular (so angular now I feel I am nothing but a skull trying to grow on a stick) and prim, to portray competence, reliability + trust, to be UTTERLY UNAPPROACHABLE because there shouldn't be a single asshole out there who watches the news who hasn't seen my perfected mug beamed into their space on their screen but that asshole had

the AUDACITY to lean at me going on about my skinny ass & they laughed, the group. Why he got to me I don't know but I had just come back from the South and had the stink of bodies + gas in my nose and the grab, grinding rush of flying over dust roads in a jeep with a tag car + a lead + even then you know I felt you were there.

And today you were there but I didn't want to tell you about the cameraman who they've been going for saying he's Intelligence and I'm now the most senior and they treat me like it's my show (I'm not ringmaster but hey, I'm close) that I'm resp'b to get him out + there we were with my phone blipping away on the desk with like a gazillion texts + emails from London, Washington, NY, Head Office pinging through + I just had to say what the fuck? You know I needed you because, hey, you might come with a heavy bottomed bottle of bubbly + I can glam the whole thing up and you can turn me into lace-stringed limp loveliness and transform me back into a girl in this hotel room so I don't have to cope with all the shit going on out there which was insane today btw if you haven't seen the news but I needed you and I knew it would just be a couple of hours because then you are XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX wife GONE which is you know, the deal which I took on board from the outset + that's cool except it's hard when I see you like the line of constant that has run throughout my life + when you are so intent on knowing every part of it + I feel sometimes that it was easier when you existed in my life before I knew you.

Notes:

1. This letter was found, according to Selma Dabbagh, in a hotel wastepaper basket some months ago. It was clearly never intended for publication.

2. Selma Dabbagh is a writer of fiction. Her first novel, *Out of It*, set between Gaza, London and the Gulf was published by Bloomsbury in 2011. She has also published short stories with Granta, International PEN, Telegram, and others. Her first play, *The Brick*, set in East Jerusalem, was produced by BBC Radio 4 in January 2014. She is currently working on her second novel, provisionally entitled, *We Are Here Now*. For more information, see selmadabbagh.com

I am scared of the face that I have that I have had to
usually brain to be angular (so angular now I feel I
to nothing but a skull trying to grow on a stick) and
to portray competence, reliability & trust to be
my UNAPPROACHABLE because there shouldn't be a
! anyone out there who watches the news who hasn't
my perfected mug beamed into their space on their
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I got to me I don't know - but I had just had come
from the South and had the stink of bodies & gas &
absin my nose and that grab, grinding with of
over dust roads in a jeep with a bag car & a lead &
even then you know I felt you were there.
Today to you was there but I don't want to tell
about the camera man who may've been going
young his intelligence & the new he must serve
I do my show, I'm not ~~actually~~ the master, but hey I'm
to get him out & there we were with the my phone
& away on my desk with like a gazillion text messages
Washington, NY & head office ~~ship~~ ~~ping~~ ~~through~~
had to say what the fuck you know I needed you
on might come with a heavy ~~battered~~ ~~beformed~~ ~~of~~
oblong & I can game the music thing up & you can
me into lace - strange lump wrinkles and transverse
ck into a girl in this hotel room so I don't have
to cope with all the shit going on out there unless
insane, ~~blame~~ ~~btw~~ if you haven't seen the news
... would just be a couple ...

Dear Sir,¹

I am writing in advance of our meeting so you will know the progress of your shipment, which I had transported from London to France in shipping containers. I travelled in the cab of the second truck, encountering no difficulty at French or British customs.

The first container did not arrive in Paris (I'm sure you saw the headlines). When, in the suburb of Ivry, the second truck broke down, I was able to hire a pick-up to tow it to the Gare du Nord, where we were mobbed by reporters who were, thankfully, unable to pass the ticket barriers.

On the Paris-Munich train the shipment took up two luggage cars. Difficult to load as it was all of a piece, I was alarmed to see porters use crowbars, and a circular saw. I protested but was restrained so was unable to save its container and wheels, though the inner protective layers remained intact.

In Munich there were papers to complete and, due to leakage and noise, fines to pay, delaying me



for two days. I spent as much time as possible waiting on the platform with the shipment, returning to my hotel only to sleep. We drew stares, some comments, and one (thankfully inconclusive) visit from the transport police. After bribing two railway officials, we were allowed to leave the city by train.

By the time we got to Prague I could find no one willing to transport it further. I spent most of Tuesday outside the station where the shipment had been dumped. It came on to rain and I fretted for the waterproofing so, faute de mieux, began to drag it through the streets myself. Without wheels its base became dirty, the protective cardboard dissolving into rags. As we crossed the Karlov Bridge pigeons showered upwards, causing crowds to gather, many of whom thought this was an artistic performance so that, when the shipment became stuck between the posts of the bridge's final tower, no one was willing to lend a hand. One man, seeing me in distress, kindly dislodged it but wanted to accompany me to my



hotel. I was able to put him off only because the shipment occupied most of my suite (I slept between two suitcase stands). Next morning I was able to travel to Budapest by truck, overpaying a driver from out of town who had not yet heard of the shipment, or of me.

It was possible to reach Belgrade by bus, the shipment having deteriorated so much that I was able to fit it into a backpack and two suitcases. On arrival I found myself minus a case (the less important one, thank god). Despite imprecations – tears even – the driver would not, or could not, produce the case. As time was of the essence, and violence promised if I did not leave, I pressed on. On the overnight coach to Sofia, I paid for an extra seat, belted the shipment in beside me, and woke to find it, warm and only slightly damp, resting against my shoulder. It had loosened and swelled in the southern heat, and by noon, in the coach's greenhouse atmosphere it burst its bands, expanding in all directions. I mewed to it, made chirping noises, coaxed it with thumb

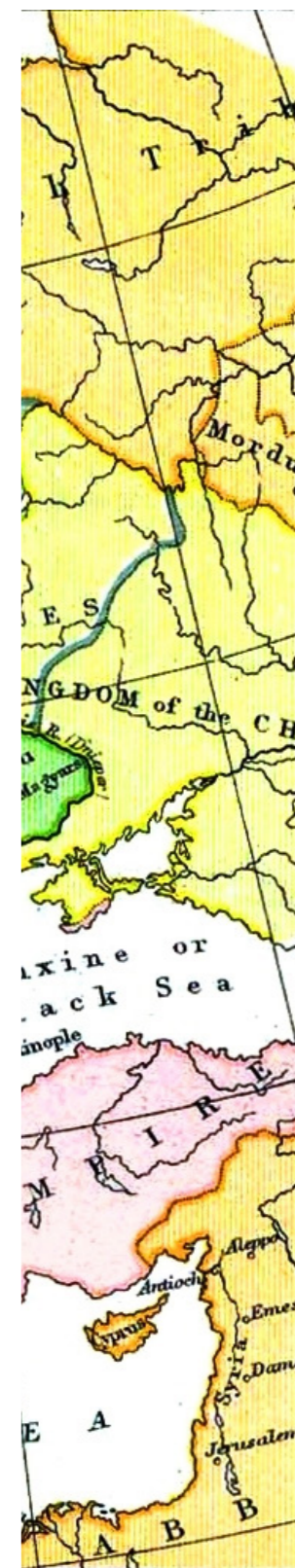


and index finger from the floor, the ceiling, chided it into several bags, stuffed the excess into my pockets. While the driver called the police from a service station I said I needed the bathroom and, escaping through a back window, evaded arrest.

Running low on money, we hitchhiked from Sofia to Thessaloniki. Between hitches I walked, and sometimes ran, by the side of the motorway, the larger part of the shipment tied to my back, the rest in two carrier bags. I was grateful for its shade and decreased weight, only occasionally stopping, sweat dripping from the straps that bit my shoulders to wonder, should I go on? 'Do what you like,' you'd have said, as usual. As if I'd any choice. Doesn't everything in the world keep on going?

A labour of love, then, and what better than to be allowed to experience love, whatever its price? At the Greek border I gave a false name.

On the train from Thessaloniki to Athens I cradled the shipment in my lap, wrapped in



my scarf, rocking with the swaying train. We had been through so much together. Fellow passengers mistook it for a baby, or a dog.

I took a bus from Athens station with what remained in a single bag. Alighting at Monasteraki I was the victim of a purse-snatcher. I fought back, losing the bag but retaining more than half its contents.

I reached the hotel with no more than crumbs. There must have been a hole in my pocket. I retraced my steps but the ground was yellow as cake; birds might have taken them. Here's what's left in a hotel ashtray. I will keep watch over it until you join me. My eyes will not leave it for a moment.

I am in the roof bar of the Attalos Hotel awaiting your arrival, and that of your return shipment.

Yours etc, JW^{2,3}

Notes:

1. This letter is a work of fiction, although the author notes that she has 'done the same journey in reverse, but carrying only emotional baggage.' We're not clear how much of the baggage she still had in her possession at journey's end, but don't like to ask.

2. Joanna Walsh is a writer and illustrator. Her work has been published by Granta, Tate, The London Review of Books, The White Review and others. Her story collection, *Fractals*, is published by 3:AM Press, and her next book, *Hotel*, will be published by Bloomsbury in 2015. You can correspond with Joanna on Twitter, @badaude, where she has recently spearheaded the #readwomen2014 campaign.

3. The illustrations here are from a map of 'Europe at the Death of Charles The Great, 814', taken from *The Public Schools Historical Atlas* by Charles Colbeck. Longmans, Green; New York; London; Bombay. 1905. We do realise that this map is somewhat anachronistic in the context of Joanna Walsh's letter, but we thought it looked kind of pretty.

Dear
10 January 2014 Hotel Hotel Athens.

I am writing in advance of our meeting so you will know the progress of your shipment. Too bulky to carry on Eurostar I had it transported to France from London in 2 shipping containers. I travelled in the cab of the 2nd truck, encountering no difficulties at French or British customs.

The first container did not arrive in Paris (I'm sure you saw the headline). When in the suburbs of Ivry, the second container truck, which had genius trouble since Calais, really broke down. Omar, of "Bodyschij Carrossier Buijk" had the idea of fitting the shipment with wheels. He used industrial castors of welded, rather than drilled, as not to cause damage. I was able to hire a pick-up to tow it to the Gare du Nord where we were mobbed by reporters who were, fortunately, unable to pass the ticket barriers. On the Paris-Munich train, your shipment took up two baggage cars. Difficult to load, as it was all of one piece, I was abashed to see the porters use crowbars & crowbars saw. I protested but was restrained, so was unable to prevent its total dismantling. The container & wheels were discarded, but the interior reflective lining remained intact.

In Munich we changed trains without too much difficulty, though there were no papers to fill in and, due to noise & leakage, several fines to pay. I was delayed for 2 days by these problems, & also because of difficulties finding a carrier for the next stage of the journey. I spent as much time as possible waiting on the platform with the shipment, returning to my hotel only to sleep the other 5 days, some connected, & one (thankfully inconclusive) I had to leave the city by train.

By the time we got to Prague I could find no one willing to transport it further. I spent the night of Tuesday on the pavement outside the station where the shipment had been dumped. It rained and I fretted for the waterproofing so, faute de mieux, began to dig it through the streets myself. Without wheels it has become duty, the protection my crowd to gather, many of whom thought this was an artistic performance so that the shipment became stuck between the two parts of the bridge's foul tower, though I begged, no one was willing to lend a hand. One man, seeing me in such distress, kindly offered to accompany me to my hotel. I was able to put this off until I slept between two suit case stands. How could it go on? The next morning I was able to leave by truck, unloading a driver from out of town who had not been aware of the shipment, or of me.

It was possible to reach Belgrade from Budapest only by bus. The rail network & the shipment having deteriorated. By noon I was able to fit it into a back pack of suitcases. I crossed Belgrade by train to the station. Discovering the train was cancelled, I returned by taxi to the coachstop where I found myself amidst a scene (the less important one than god!) I waited all night at the taxi but where spirits impregnated, tears even - the driver would not, or could not, produce the ticket. As time wore of the scene and violence promised of I did not leave. I stayed on. On the overnight bus to Sofia I paid for an extra seat, belted it in beside me & was to find it warm, & how odd, slightly damp, resting against my side. It had loomed & swelled in the sun & heat and gave off a sour smell! Under no way unpleasant, though other passengers moved down the bus. By noon, in coach's greenhouse atmosphere, it burst into bands, expanded in all directions, my Sir! Sorry Madam!! I moved to it, made chirping noises, chided it into several seats, stuffed the excess into my pockets. While the driver called the police from the station, I pretended to read the ballroom &, escaping through a small back door, we evaded arrest.

Running low on money we hitchhiked from Sofia to Thessaloniki. When they saw what I carried most drivers refused to pick me up, but we were given lifts in a roadster van & a cattle truck. Between lifts I walked & sold trees on the side of the motorway, the large part of the shipment tied to my back, the rest in 2 new bags. I was grateful for its shade & decreased weight & only occasionally stopped at dipping from the straps that bit my shoulders to a oh, why me? What gave YOU the right to accord me so heavy, so difficult a burden? I treated - pleaded with AT? Fate? God? You? No gave only human. A won't I be in pain? But never any mobile signal. If I'd have found a payphone I'd have called. Do what you like, you said as usual. As if I'd my car!! If I'd given up, where would you be? And if on, where would that leave me? Not here... Why was he my break knowing I would? Doesn't everything in the world keep on going? A laborer of love then, it's not better than allowed to experience love & state the price? To calm myself I made very sprout under my shoulder blades. Instead of unhelpful what not exist I folded her gently & continued to walk. Good time to have been crazy to come step. I did. At the Greek border I gave a false name. The train from Thessaloniki to Athens I cradled in my lap, wrapped in my scarf. We were through so much together. Yellow-passenger was mistook for a baby or a dog. Took the bus from Athens Station, what remained of the shipment in a single bag. Getting off in Monastiraki, I was the victim of a purse snatcher but fought back, losing the bag but winning more than 1/2 its contents.