

a 'literary' zine

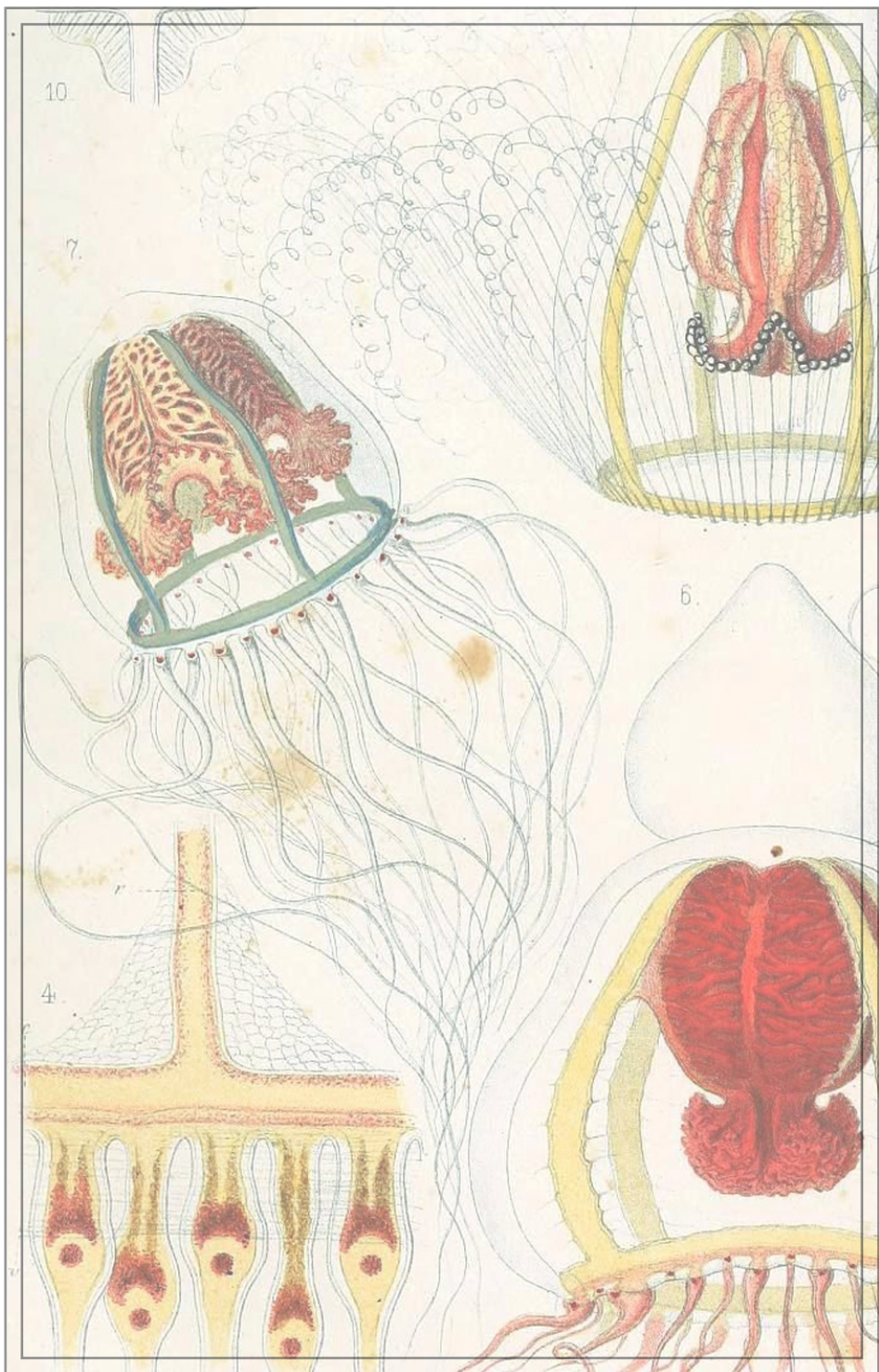
INSIDE:

*Welsh Wallys, flying squid,
R Kellz, new poetry & fiction*

PLUS:

*2 extraterrestrial
illustrated postcards*

#2



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→ A few themes came under consideration for Issue 2 of The Queen's Head. First up, jubilation, as how could we release this particular zine in the year of the Jubilee without a little fanfare? We missed the boat parade on that one, though, which brought us to lost time – it has been nearly 26 months since Issue 1, after all.

What emerged in the features, however, was an odd obsession with tentacled marine biology, several identity crises and, it seems, a general air of melancholia, of jubilation lost. So, um, happy reading, everybody!

Many thanks to Tawny Kerr, then, for taking us from the inky depths of the ocean to the fathomless mysteries of space with two beautiful illustrations in the form of postcards – send them to someone you miss or, if you miss yourself, send them somewhere that doesn't exist, marked return to sender.

A shout out also to The Print Box on Argyle Street for their technical know-how, seemingly limitless patience & bright enthusiasm in getting Issue 2 put together.

All illustrations of jellyfish were sourced from Vintageprintable.com, originally by Ernst Haeckel, taken from *Monographie der Medusen* (1879).

Robin Davis

WHEN WAS WALLY?*

*Finding a
childhood hero
lost among
identities*

*The original was
published by
Walker books in the
United Kingdom.*



Perhaps the very front line in the defence of the minority language is the commonplace: the road sign, the folk song, the family bible. *Ble Mae Wali?*, a Welsh translation of Martin Handford's bestselling *Where's Wally?*, was published in 1994 by Gwasg y Dref Wen of Cardiff. Without an appreciation of the rigour of bilingual equality in Welsh education, however, one might question the need to translate from one of the languages of Wales into the other a book known primarily for its pictures rather than its words.

The book's ubiquity is evident. To this day children hunt Wally in Holland, Italy, Spain, Poland and Portugal. In German they look for Walter. In Norway they seek Willy. Swedish children scour the scenes for Valle, Icelanders; Valli. Hungarians; Vili. Estonian's Volli. Finns want to find Vallu, Czechs check for Valdík. The French search for Charlie. *Ble Mae Wali?* is in fact just another translation; the repackaging of a product with mass appeal for yet another territory.

Published in the North American Anglosphere by Little Brown of North America, they speak of Waldo. Britons (and citizens of the Commonwealth) often wonder: why Waldo? Why not Wally? To British ears the name Wally fits Handford's beaming, feckless wanderer. The slang is quaint now, but to call

someone a 'wally' is a jesting, inoffensive way to call them gormless, silly. Whatever it was about the Walters of Britain that turned their diminutive into a light slur, we will never know. Was the name Wally not used similarly in American slang, is Waldo perhaps its equivalent?

Whether by design or not, Waldo's christener chose well, Walter and Waldo both being ancient and Germanic. Walter was the Old English Wealdhere, composed of the elements wald ('rule') and hari ('army'). Thanks to its longevity 'Waldo' is found everywhere; it was already ancient and detached from its origins when the twelfth-century heretic Peter Waldo preached poverty and founded the Waldensians.

The given name's popularity in America peaks in the nineteenth century, but no hero of American history or letters steps forth as the inspiration for the choice of Waldo. Not Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882) transcendentalist author and poet. Not the novelist Waldo Frank, chairman of the first American Writers Congress. In Britain and the US, Waldo and Walter decline in popularity throughout the twentieth century becoming one of those rare, near-archaic names inherited only by fictional boffins and nerds. Since 1951 Dennis the Menace, hero of the The Beano, assaulted and bullied his gentle neighbour Walter the Softy. Walter was the archetypal geek: skinny, hair

carefully parted, bespectacled in circular frames. If ever allowed the adult life the comic forever denies him, he would surely have travelled to escape his Menace.

Waldo is not an altogether uncommon given name in Wales. It was the chosen name of the poet and pacifist Goronwy Williams (1904-1971). The translator Tony Conran praised his poetry as:

The deepest and fullest expression of joy that I know of in any modern language. It was a country of brotherhood that he invoked, a field full of folk.

With more Waldos than Walters in Wales, the question ought not to have been Ble Mae Wali?, but Ble mae Waldo?

The publication of The Magnificent Poster Book saw the greatest single expansion of Wally mythology: the introduction of Wally's nemesis, the yellow and black striped Odlaw.



*Ranked 451st
most popular
in 1910.
(babynamewizard.
com)*

Brad Garrett, who voiced Whitebeard in Where's Wally?: The Animated Series, was once considered for the part of Kramer in Seinfeld.

Additional characters had already travelled with Wally, the usual heroic counterparts. First to appear (in 1989's *Where's Wally?: The Fantastic Journey*) was Wizard Whitebeard whose magic, it was revealed, facilitated Wally's travels. In those pages his mentor promised that the recovery of certain lost scrolls would reveal to Wally "the truth about himself". In *The Ultimate Fun Book* (1990) readers were introduced to Wally's girlfriend Wilma, a woman whose attire was the feminine equivalent of his own and whose dog, Woof, matched him also, in striped bobble hat, et cetera. In *The Magnificent Poster Book* Wilma was accompanied by her identical twin Wenda. After *The Magnificent Poster Book* Wilma, was never seen or spoken of again. From then on it is Wenda who is known as Wally's girlfriend and Woof as Wally's own dog. It was Wally's misfortune, clearly, to find his female-other already twinned. Just like the reader

catching a glimpse of something striped only to be disappointed, he was at first unable to identify which of these twins was his true soul-mate. But pity poor Wilma, for it would seem she more than most in that world of the lost was destined to lose everything.

1991: enter Odlaw. As evil holds up a mirror to good, it takes a villain to show the hero his true identity. When Waldo looks into the mustachioed face of evil, he sees every aspect of himself, indeed his very name, reflected. But what happens when Wally faces Odlaw? To confront one so clearly his opposite and be mirrored in all but name, Wally himself would wonder; why Odlaw? If it is 'Waldo' backwards: who's Waldo?

After *Ble Mae Wali* no further title in the *Where's Wally?* series undergoes translation into Welsh. Had there been further instalments of his saga, Wali too would have faced Odlaw and wondered, am I Waldo? Should

he not be llaw? 'Od law' could in fact be Welsh, roughly translated, it could mean: 'odd hand'. 'l law' would be 'in-hand'. What if he were to discover his ultimate derivation, his very first name - how would he reflect upon that?

'Y Llaw': 'The Hand'.

Up to this point we have assumed that Wally is short for Walter. It is still possible that our Wally is no Walter at all, but a Wallace. As first name or surname, Wallace is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon: weallas. Over time the term has been variously interpreted to mean alien, foreigner, stranger, other – even slave. The colonising Anglo-Saxons designated the limited territories of the ancient Britons by this same word, and thus came to call the western peninsulas Wales and Cornwall. The weallas were literally foreigners in their own lands, and the name Wallace therefore preserves that ancient otherness. What is Wally if not a stranger in a strange land?

The clue to deciphering Wally's ultimate identity is not in the Wizard's scrolls but in his many names: once the scrolls were collected Wally learned he was from The Land of Wallies, where he was "just one Wally among many", his name failing to distinguish him from his compatriots. The reader's task was to find him there, among his people. At last he was home, and still lost.

There is a German word for the genre to which Wally's saga belongs: *Wimmelbilderbuch*, teeming-picture-book. The tradition harkens back to Bosch, whose vivid populations of paradise and hell still horrify the viewer with so much impossible life. Surely if you stared long enough into those fantasies you would find him; Wally, still travelling, a smile upon his face, through a field full of folk.

✱

*Hand, n.
One who performs
manual labor*

**A note on the title: the author alludes to Gwyn A. Williams's wise and readable history *When Was Wales?* (1985)*

Katie Nail

JELLY FISH



“And men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, yet pass over the mystery of themselves without a thought.”

— St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

There is a jellyfish sitting on top of my industrial steamer. Its tentacles curl up towards the ceiling in extended, dissolving trails. Its body is dull and opaque but seems clear like cellophane or cling film. Inside it I can see the air, holding it aloft, pulsing—as if it had a heart—on the ocean’s current. This is not a real jellyfish but it looks so much like one, or it has been so long since I’ve seen one, that I can’t stop watching it. The tentacles keep pouring upwards, like hair floating in water and the body moves with such rolling, wavelike precision that the more I look at it, the more I can feel salt water stinging my eyes.

Jellyfish are sunny days. They are blue sky that is limitless—sky that meets the horizon and comes back as the ocean.

Jellyfish love sunny days. In late July the water in the Gulf of Mexico is so warm from the sun that they breed in excess and are pushed onto the shore, trapped by the sand. Some days swimmers are forced out of the water. The purple-blue orbs of gel with tentacles that light up and sting are so densely packed in the water, it's impossible to stretch out an arm to take a stroke. All the skin on your body reacts to their sting except for the thick skin on your palms. What would be a stinging itchy welt on your forearm is barley a prick on your palms. As a child I would touch them waiting to see if my hands were invincible. Very brave children would pick them up, and very mean ones would throw them at other people.

When taken to the beach, my little sister and I would poke them with sticks. We wanted to see what was inside them. We thought we could pop their outside like a balloon. We thought air would pour out of them or gel or something. But our sticks just entered their jelly bodies and nothing happened. They stayed the same despite us.

We would try to push them towards the water, but our sticks would just get lost in their gelatinous forms. We figured out that if we pushed enough sand around them, we could roll them towards the water, but we had to be careful because they would begin to break up. Their bodies would form strange separate pools of gel that remained stable and self contained.

We expected that once in the water they would take off and drowsily float away. We thought they were like fish, that when trapped on a boat would begin sucking for air. If we released the fish into

water, for a moment, they would float on their side, their wet bead eye looking at us. When their bodies recognized the water, they would dart down through it, like crazed junkies, and we would follow them with our eyes until we couldn't find them anymore.

But jellyfish don't come alive in the water. They just get battered by the waves. Once they are on land they are already dead. Their bodies didn't burst with our sticks because they had already burst in the sun long before we arrived to play in the sand. While they could still sting us—they were not conscious for the pleasure. We would bring them to the water and watch them hang between suspension and the shore until a wave came and broke their decaying bodies down even more.

Now, sitting on my steamer, in a kitchen in Glasgow, is a jellyfish. But this one moves, propelled by the motion of hot water evaporating out of a tube at the back of a large steel box. This jellyfish is really cling film that someone threw on top of the steamer in a hurry. As it floated through the air the ends met, and stuck, and formed a bag of air that moves in a way that suggests water. Anyone else in the kitchen would see it as rubbish—a sign of someone else's laziness. I see a jellyfish and it fills me with such longing, remembrance, sorrow and recognition that I fear—I will not be the fish released back into the water. I will not recognize the ocean and escape into its depths. I am something already dead, able to sting but unaware. I will not be carried out to sea. I will not rock on the waves. I am being broken into a million pieces. I am being destroyed.

★

Stephen O'Toole

HAPPY PEOPLE

(OR: U SAVED
ME, R KELLY)



I think that R Kelly and I have got a lot in common. (I'm assuming that you've heard of R Kelly.) I think that we're the same right down to our bones. What I mean is that: beyond our clothes and skin, the scaffolding that makes us up is just the same.

I think I say this now because, when I was smaller, I used to tell all my friends that our souls lived in our bones. I'd say to them--- and this was the proof I gave, I swear---I'd say that this is why no one gives a shit about invertebrates and this is why it hurts so much when our bones break. Recently, at that point, I'd fallen off my baby bike and my tiny arm had snapped in two. Oh God, I was so cute! And I said to all my friends that my cast was there to stop my soul from falling out. And here, I said, smell my cast! Because a soul smells bad and sweaty if you let it get out into the air. The smell is to show that something has gone wrong. A skunk would be the precedent in nature.

My point is anyway that if you gave me one of R Kelly's organs, my body would not reject it. In fact, if we were in the same room, R Kelly and I, I think that I could move

his arms and his legs and make him blink, just with the power of my concentrating mind. And not because I can do that to anyone, but only because I can do it him, because we are the same. (Though also it would help if he were asleep, just so as not to interfere with me on a brainwave level.)

I relate to R Kelly so much that whenever I find myself crying and I can't say why, I feel like it's because Kellz is in some kind of trouble. And if I weren't scared of heights, you know, I would climb up onto the nearest highest roof and put my hand around my ear and listen very hard: to see if I could hear him call for help. I would have my phone inside my pocket, just in case he needs to call the coast guard or whoever and also it has good 3G for Googling symptoms.

A lot of people have their own ideas about R Kelly. That's fine. I understand that they will. Pee is a hot button issue. Especially sexy pee, alleged or otherwise. But let me explain something to you, so you don't get the wrong idea. Although I am addicted to love, and to having ladies laugh and smile because of something I have said, I am not a big sex guy. I am not a Sexosaurus. So maybe with this fact in mind, you're wondering now how Kellz and I are the same.

This is how we are the same. My only goal in life is to do something that will make the whole world happy. And not just like ok yay, I'm happy, let's move on, but happy in a way that makes me better than me and that makes the whole world better than the whole world. This is how I feel in my bones, and this is how R Kelly feels too. We're a pair of real sincere serious guys. We are both totally committed to improving the world

through our art. R Kelly is so committed that he has his sound engineers on shifts, on standby, in his home studio, in America. I think maybe that there is a little bed and stove in there, and a TV. There will be a fridge there almost certainly, even if it's just a little one.

Everything R Kelly does is to help him achieve his goal of maximum happiness for the world. When he signed the cheque to buy that mini fridge, he was doing it to save the world!

'Hey, Clarence? Just make that cheque out to L-O-V-E', he might have said.

R Kelly and I, we are always open for business. Our art is us. And sometimes the world says Yes! and sometimes the world says No! and often it says But? or And? but we try not to let that stop us, because one day we will all understand each other and it will be so lovely.

The first time that I became aware of R Kelly was when I was watching The Space Jam. In my opinion a very underrated and moving film. I think you might say it's about male penis impotence. But at that time, R Kelly was just a joke to my friends and me. We sang I Believe I Can Fly and we would have our arms out like aeroplane wings. So literal! And once when we were in our swimming class (I suppose we were ten or eleven years old) we screamed those very words and ran past the girls in their swimming suits who were waiting on the edge of the pool, and we did a big loud impressive bomb! Of course, we didn't understand the important motivational message of the song or appreciate the chocolatey melody. In fact, we all thought that belief in any thing at all was just hilarious.

Also, just as an aside, at this time it wasn't as cool as it is now to be into The



Space Jam. This was before Bill Murray was a bro and anyway cartoons were shameful to us because we were ten or eleven and into girls. (Already, you say??! And I say, I know, right?!)

And so I forgot about Kellz for many years. But still he continued to be. He was waiting for me to mature. For me to come to him.

The first time that I understood who R Kelly was was when I heard his song called Echo. Echo is the closest so far that he has come to achieving his goal of world improvement. It is the holiest, most emotional song in life and here is the plot of the song: a man is so in love that he phones his partner's place of work and fakes a day of sickness for her. This is so that they can spend their day alternating between great sex and taking naps that they have really really earned. And on this day, whenever Kellz's partner has her orgasms, she will be having such an amazing time that she will actually make a full ghost version of herself float up out of her body and scream---a sexy happy supernatural scream---at exactly the same time as the real version of her screams. Thus creating: an 'echo.'

It seems to me a noble goal and one that is very sensitive to the needs of a woman. Notice that there is no mention here of the man echoing here!! (Please don't think I am being sexist.) And also here is my view of what this song really means: it is a metaphor for R Kelly's goal of world peace.

So how are you feeling just now? I ask because I want to know. Go and listen to Echo and I'll wait for you and remember to take a note of how you respond.

Okay. Hello again. Good. I think that there are three ways in which a person

can respond to Echo: 1. The person smirks and shakes their head and they criticise his use of light Autotune or 2. The person still smirks, but this time they cover their mouth to keep the words in, and then after a while they ask a thoughtful question like, 'Does that mean she's hollow? Is he saying she has a huge vagina?' or 3. Their smirk instead will be a beautiful smile and they begin to nod their head and accept the song into their bones and when they do their bones go TOOT TOOT like they're some kind of a Popeye and Echo is the spinach for their soul.

I think we know which way is the best, am I right? I hope that you do too. I hope that, like me, you want to take the power of this song and apply it to yourself and to the world. I try to do this every day that I'm alive. Because I have to stay like R Kelly. I have to stay the same as him right down to my bones. Because R Kelly understands. And one day, maybe, I will get to stand on his right hand: as humanity's second greatest entertainer.

It's important to have a dream.

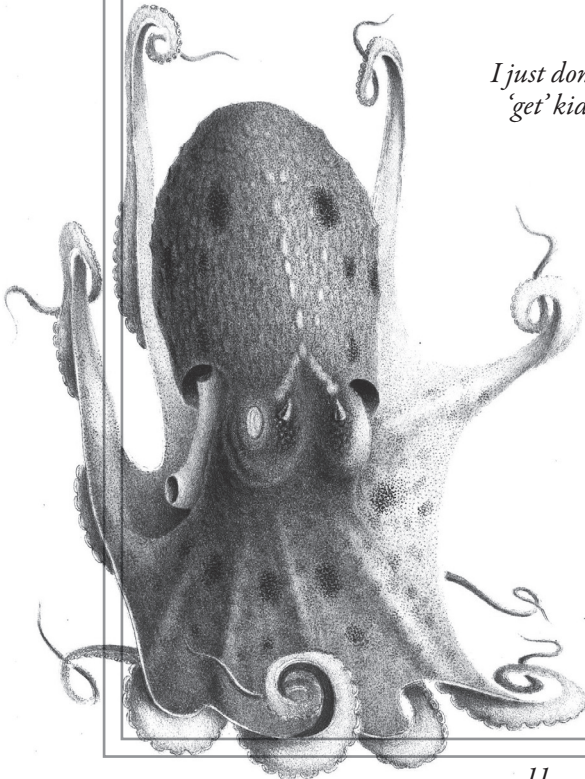


Sean McCormack

A ~~CERHALO-~~ ~~POD TOO~~ FAR

*From the Greek
κεφαλόποδα
literally translated
as: head-feet;
not included:
wings*

*I just don't
'get' kids.*



→ While almost all my interests since childhood have been underpinned by the same obsessive nature that, for example, allows a five year old boy to internalise and order by preference every variety of dinosaur discovered since the mid-nineteenth century, like most adults I've become disconnected from the 'ages 5-10' zeitgeist. This became a problem last summer in Italy, when I was required to devise a curriculum for a summer camp that might entertain children.

I decided to focus on science as a general topic. I thought I could quickly familiarise myself with enough information to come up with something stimulating and enjoyable. But, although research is no issue for me when aiming for 'relevance', when the single criterion is 'fun' I feel condemned to a purgatorial hateful land, in which every glimmer of light is accompanied by weighty piss-spewing clouds of doom. An ulcerous fear gripped me as the weeks went by, and I had nothing. I tried Google, then Wikipedia, then some Christian site teaching kids that Jesus predates the dinosaurs, via worksheets which I briefly thought about plagiarising.

I considered the humpback anglerfish, and imagined the children running around with lanterns on their head. But is ichthyology something children like? Is the humpback anglerfish



too esoteric? Is it even science? The weeks of research and forays into marine biology, however, came to a glorious culmination: Octopi! They're super-smart, they look cool, you can play many tentacle based games (trust me - I invented them), and they can fly.

Or, for a few weeks, I believed they could. I'm not sure how it happened.

I was sleep-deprived and in need of a miracle and I suppose I just must have dreamt it. My ethereal interaction with the airborne

cephalopod was by no means an especially glorious one. I did not dream that, as I lay prostrate in bed, a tentacled apparition floated elegantly through the window revealing its magical existence to me. I did not dream that on

Editorial staff have been pressed to clarify the correct plural of octopus is in fact octopodes, even if octopi sounds nicer.

some imagined marine-safari the majestic creatures ambled gracefully across the divide of marine and avian life form. The dream content was much more insidiously revealed to me.

I dreamt that this revelation had been discovered via Wikipedia articles and Youtube clips — the pillars of all contemporary information. The weeks of research had seeped into my subconscious and haunted my slumber. The mundane nature of my existence had transformed my dreams not into a realm of escape and fantasy, but a continuation of the malaise that permeated my every waking moment. The gradual thinning of the barrier between dream and reality resulted in the new information (and perhaps all new information gleaned during that period) becoming indiscernible from practically all the information I had gleaned through this method.

An embarrassingly large section of the curriculum I had created for the children was based on the science of flying octopi — I had even invented a bicarbonate of soda based experiment in which the children, in groups of six, could replicate the jet-propulsion of the flying octopus. The most important thing was that I had a curriculum in which I felt confident and secure — my employers hadn't yet seen this section, which was fortunate, as one of the women had once been a veterinarian.

This titbit of knowledge had another negative side-effect: I grew quite smug. I would ask people, 'How far do you think an octopus can fly?' They would shrug in disbelief. 'I don't know,' they would reply, and sometimes hazard a guess. Twenty inches? Ten feet? A metre? Some people didn't believe me; I now trust these people most of all.

Et tu, Google.

The Ptolemaic model of the universe, the creationist reading of the story of Eden; all such myths must come crashing down so that we may live in a universe built on reason. I was none too pleased myself when I found out that I was wrong about the octopi. The intellectual revelation occurred at a party, at the house of a friend in Modena. I felt the conversation was gradually tailing off and the time was right to drop my bombshell. I knew these people had a fondness for fact and a penchant for science - this was my opportunity to reserve my place in the pantheon of the greats. 'So, how far do YOU think an octopus can fly?' Some members of the group remained sceptical, then came the guesses, meagre as they always were. Smugness welled up inside of me as I revealed the 'actual' distance an octopus could fly: 50 metres, a record made off the coast of Hokkaido in 2008 according to my imagined Wikipedia reference. There was dubiety, and uproar.

My credibility was on the line and I intended to prove myself, so I calmly directed them to the Wikipedia article that would prove my wisdom on such matters. It wasn't there.

I took control and scoured the internet frantically for a corroborating piece of evidence. The deathblow fell when I clicked an Ask Jeeves link which answered 'Can an octopus fly?' with 'No, of course not you reatard (sic).'

As it happened, the curriculum became a moot point; devastating earthquakes meant an abrupt departure from Italy, and the abandonment of the course. Neither of which bother me nearly as much as the irreparable damaged to my credibility - not just among my friends but also to myself. I must now subject every iota of information which I hold to be true to scepticism and fine-tooth scrutiny. In attempting to appeal to childhood wonder, I've lost exactly that within myself, and must always fight against the urge to take for granted anything that seems too remarkable to be true - such as, for example, an octopus taking to the skies.

✱

Carl Lorcan English

Untitled 1

breathing is sharp but hushed,
each wince injurious.
maternal yelps are not expected by me
nor are they supported.
turpentine dreams are lush
and foamy, flicking over me like blobs of wool
flies are thick on the sheet, a rubbery mat that hisses
and they eject at the bang.
i am waiting to become a man.
you cringe and fold yourself into your knees
at every bend,
each favour a beg;
fetid dough is arched in the larder.
back in bed, i relent to you watching
over me as i half-sleep.
your breath-mists condense and unroll upon my body.
under you, i am wet.

Untitled 2

the opening grill is an aria
the ringing phone gives us mozart:
cacophonous, brutal and rude
meats hiss at me, making their greasy music
above water, i am a cook
and it suits me just fine
i care only about my sausages, browning fingers
the world outside occurs to me as an afterthought
this place was not made by me
but it is a prison i choose.
there is a guilty satisfaction in food
the orders line the wall and i remember you less and less

Ryan Vance

FORG- ETTA



Standing at the door to his bedsit, with the stairwell reeking of human urine and something unseen making a chittering noise, Matthew suspects he might never un-skew his life's trajectory, particularly as circumstance forces him now to present to the man he has brought home a wicker basket containing several makeshift masks.

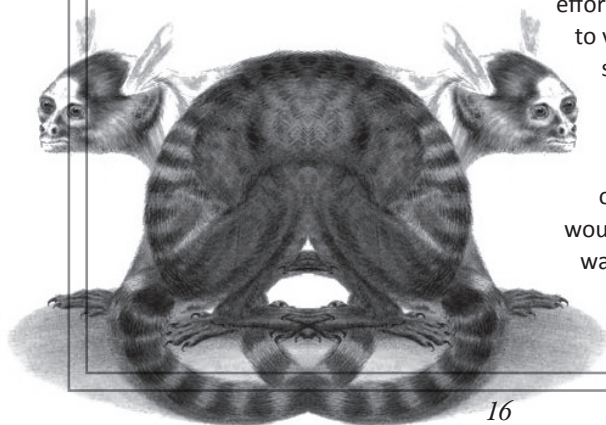
His date, Angus, observes the basket as if it is full of dead things.

"That's you."

"Yes and no."

The masks are smiling, and look like Matthew circa two years back.

Raising a finger Angus says, "One thing," and already he's put in more effort than the last five men to visit this temporary and significantly less-than-swanky accommodation, perhaps because he took Matthew's overly humble online profile at what he would call face value if he wasn't currently in a situation in which any mention of faces and the value



thereof could at best be construed as bad taste and at worst as rather threatening. "When I said I liked unusual I meant kinks, like feet or leather or whatever, but you're clearly not getting off on this. What's going on?"

"I own a monkey who reacts violently to anyone who doesn't look like me."

Over the course of three dates, Matthew's conversational style has been closed-book, with only the vague promise that something might emerge from under all the small talk that resembled a personality. Considering Angus' major motivation thus far has been Matthew's unbelievable body, which he seems to wear rather than inhabit, personality would be a bonus, and to get such a forthright answer, albeit one about violent monkeys, makes it seem as if their first date is only really beginning right now in this building's stairwell.

And so Angus has more questions.

"You didn't think to mention this before we came back to yours?"

"You wouldn't have come back at all."

"What if I was afraid of monkeys? What if I wasn't okay with them being kept as pets? Which by the way I am not."

"Trust me, neither am I."

"Or even if it's such an issue, I mean, neither of us can expect to be fucking mauled at the doorway by any sort of primate at my flat."

"Well, no, but here, if you wear a mask, you'll not get hurt. Please."

"And if that's the case, why on earth do *you* have to wear one? It's *you*."

Matthew sighs. "Because I'll get a face full of monkey shit if I don't, okay? She thinks I'm someone else. I can't say why it works. I only have to feed her, give her some attention, maybe clean up some

mess and then I can, I don't know, lock her in the bathroom? If I do that, will you come in? Please?"

"You know, if I'm not okay with monkeys as pets, I'm certainly not okay with monkeys locked in bathrooms. But," he picks up a mask, "you just got a hell of a lot more interesting in the last minute or so." The elastic snaps around his ears, his voice is smudgy behind the card. "And I want to see how deep this rabbit hole goes."

"Um. Thank you?"

The men observe each other through little openings in card, such little openings they make confident movement difficult, and yet Matthew feels he stands a chance of being seen entirely as himself for the first time in so, so long.

Koko, on the other hand, sees not one Oscar come through the door but two, and in her excitement screeches and pounds her little fists into the threadbare carpet.

All night on the other side of town, they've been biting back his name. Lovely to see you – Matthew. Where are you living now – Matthew? How did you and – Matthew meet? Pass the potatoes – Matthew. The inner mantra of *don'tsayOscar* is both so communal and overbearing you could jack an amp to any given guest's skull and vibrate the dining room into next week.

"It's not usually this bad," he whispers to Angus as they cross paths in the hallway.

"Are you saying it's *my* fault?"

"Not fault, no."

Angus hovers.

"Not gonna say any more than that?"



"Well I can't say you're not making a difference; it's just not an issue of blame."

"Whatever. I didn't even want to come. Which one's the bathroom?"

Matthew points down the hall and sends him off with a polite little kiss. From there he sweeps through the dining room, lifting a few empty dishes as he goes, to the kitchen, where he joins Eloise and Grant, who are divvying up a cheesecake between six matching plates.

"He's very nice," Eloise says. "Very lovely eyes. Does he know about Oscar?"

"Elly!"

"Oh, he doesn't mind, do you – Matthew?"

He doesn't mind. While everyone has been very understanding and, given the circumstances, exceedingly patient and generous, Oscar was never very close to Eloise and Grant, and they don't seem to miss him as much as, say, Hannah and Lucas, or (of course) André, who has not shown up. To Eloise and Grant the situation is more curious than heartbreaking, which is how Matthew sees it when he's in a good mood, which is not tonight. That said, Oscar doesn't seem to have been very successful at faking happiness, so when Matthew shows his teeth around this crowd they tend to think he's smiling.

"Well, yeah, he knows. And he's okay with it. But it's not as if that's how I introduced myself. I had to explain Koko."

"Has she settled any?"

"We still have to wear the masks."

"I'm amazed she can even tell."

Matthew freezes with his hands in the sink, "What do you mean? It's still –"

"So intuitive, monkeys, aren't they?"

"It must be a lot like coming out," says

Grant, gesticulating grandiosely as if he's saying something both self-evident and original. "After a while you just don't have to do it any more because everybody knows."

At this rate, Matthew's hands will prune. "I still have to come –"

"Mind your wine, darling, you'll have it all over the – oh for heaven's sake. Oscar can you – shit, oh, sorry, I don't mean to swear. Matthew can you..."

If Grant is spilling drinks before ten, it's a fair bet everyone's been knocking them back a little quicker than usual, which is certainly true for Matthew, and so a usually taboo topic, travelling, becomes conversation over dessert. Lucas has secured a semester's research position in Venice working on something unbelievable to do with biologically immortal jellyfish and stem cells.

"The department really are keen to have me there; they've been nothing but accommodating, trying their hardest to sort out, well, accommodation and the like. The places they were providing didn't look like much, though, so we're renting a villa from a friend of, um, you know, and it has an extra bedroom we won't be using. You'll have to come visit."

"If only to keep me from getting bored!" says Hannah, and nobody laughs, because it's true. She's a brilliant host but lacks the imagination to be alone with herself; or, as Angus once observed, she doesn't do much with herself, but she doesn't do it marvellously. Matthew will never understand what Oscar saw in her, but then again he's only recently realised any sort of understanding of Oscar, what he liked, who he loved, the reasoning behind certain inadvisable piercings, it's all largely unnecessary – as so now too is

his so-called friendship with Hannah.

Lucas rubs her back, "But all the culture! We'll be there for the Carnival in February, and Christmas will be lovely. We can take one of – well, one of the guides and find something nice to do."

"Which guide?" Matthew kicks Angus under the table. He knows which guide. There's a stack of them next to the loo, for a start.

"Oh, we have –"

"Well, had," Eloise corrects Lucas.

"No, we have a friend who writes – what? I'm preserving his memory. Would you rather I say that he wrote?"

"It would be more accurate."

"It would be offensive."

"Yes," says Matthew, "it would."

"He writes travel guides."

"Moved around a lot, because of his condition, and put it to good use."

"Is he going to be in Venice?"

"No," says Hannah, "he is not."

"Well then of course we'll visit," says Angus, and nudges Matthew. "I mean, if we're going to travel I'd like to go with you, not this smartarse Oscar cunt, whoever he is. We could even take one of his guides and chuck it in the canal, if you like."

Grant asks them to leave after dessert.

"Oh," Angus says later in the car, "I'm doing you all a favour. It was like watching someone self-harm."

They do eventually go to Venice and chuck one of Oscar's guides in the canal. It's not as therapeutic as expected, but makes for a good series of photos. In an internet cafe they look up YouTube rips of Oscar's adventure travel series.

"This is too weird."

"How long ago is this? You're so skinny."

"I don't know if I want you watching these."

"Oh my god, he's not going to – oh my god, Matthew, you're eating a snake. I don't know if I can kiss you any more."

"Oscar on a zipline, haven't seen that one before."

"Just Oscar. Always just Oscar. Like Madonna. Nobody got suspicious? Did they let you publish without a surname?"

"How does he not have my fear of heights? That's so unfair."

"You know what's unfair? He could speak Italian."

"He could speak everything."

"You just shoved your way in front of that girl! She needs to get to school on that thing and you just cut in. What a douchebag."

"Total dou... no, wait."

"You really hit the gym between series one and two. What was it like, waking up? Did you stumble around just crushing things and knocking over furniture like it was Styrofoam?"

"You know, between not knowing any Japanese, or what I was doing on a roof with a bunch of drunken bankers, that was sort of low on my list of things to remember for when I have to talk my boyfriend down from getting an internet crush on my doppelganger."

"I can't help it if he was more – oh look, related videos, Oscar does a tribal dance."

"No, no, no. Just, no. It's awful."

"But I've seen you dance."

"You also just saw me nearly push a schoolgirl down a Himalayan ravine."

"He's got moves!"

"He's never bad, ever, at anything." →

"Maybe when we get back to the hotel you can show me some of yours..."

"Get off, we're in public!"

That night they receive an email from Grant so curt it's almost bullet points: Andre has moved out of Oscar's apartment, the keys are with the neighbours, Koko has finally been handed over to the RSPCA, there's a wine-stained letter found tucked between a book on quantum theory and a biography of Chevalier d'Eon, it's addressed to Matthew, and the calligraphy is beautiful.

The words themselves, less so.

Dear Mr Dole,

You're coming back some day. They said when they found me by the side of the motorway and I couldn't tell them anything, weeks later after the tests when they couldn't keep me in the hospital because there was nothing wrong with me. They brought me your diaries, took me to your home, I had to hold your mother while she cried, and I'm meant to keep a card so when you come back so you know what to do. But what did you leave me? Debt and a totalled ride that I woke up in and have you any idea how lucky you are when you come back I've sorted all that shit and your old boss doesn't even care you trashed his car but you were so scared they said that you just left so they said write a letter to prepare you for when you come back. So I'm writing a fucking letter. But I hope you stay away. God, stay away. I have one chance, one chance. You don't deserve any of this. I've worked hard and I've done more with what I've been given than you ever did and you could just come back and take it away. Stay away.

Stay away from me, and my friends. You don't deserve them. From what I know of you they'll not love you. I'll forbid it. When you come back I'll tell him WHEN! God, WHEN! Why WHEN? Why not IF? IF YOU COME BACK! IF and I never will! I'm the most interesting thing that's ever happened to you and

And that's when Angus stops reading.

There's a man in Matthew's hallway who could be anybody.

These days he tends to go for the ones who crop their profile pics at the neck and describe themselves as discrete, or private, or not interested in looks. Matthew, meanwhile, leaves his bio empty and maxes out his image allowance with Google-sourced images of Oscar: Oscar in a boat in Vietnam; Oscar saving Koko from poachers; Oscar's travel guides laid out on a desk. While Matthew may not understand Oscar, he at least doesn't find him boring; nor do these men who give away nothing of themselves.

There's a wicker basket by the bedroom door filled with masks, all showing their teeth.

"It's a bit odd," says the stranger, "but okay. You said unusual, I said okay. Just gotta ask and I'm not backing out, I'm just curious."

Matthew sighs. He is so bored of this question.

"Why you gotta wear one of you?"



A detailed botanical illustration in shades of green and grey, featuring various plant parts such as stems, leaves, and seed pods. The drawing is intricate, with fine lines and shading, and includes several small letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z) and numbers (10, 13, 6, 15) scattered throughout, likely serving as labels for different parts of the plants. The overall style is reminiscent of 18th or 19th-century scientific illustrations.

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