

SPLIT

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The characters in this book, including
the first person singular, are fictitious,
and bear no relation to any person
living, dead, or undead.

FRANK WASSER

SPLIT



MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE

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THE CONSTELLATIONS, BOOK XXVII

MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, LONDON

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Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression. I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only prescience of the author; or for that matter one hundred times as many endings.

At Swim Two Birds, Flann O'Brien



For all who have ever taken to a picket line.

ONE POSSIBLE START

An eyelash rests on the pillow.
I am not meant to be here.
Fraser WAKE UP! The interval has started.
The pink shirt is sticking to his pale white skin.
It turns the skin cold when it sticks. No.
Try that again.

As the sweat seeps through me, the wind
sweeping in from the window on the bus is
simultaneously drying the wet patch that in turn
is producing tiny crystals of salt that form in white
patches and lines across several parts of the shirt
over the small amount of flab on my torso.

Deadline tomorrow.

Something else happened that night.
A better way to contextualise things, perhaps.
Recent feelings of limerence have passed.

Tonight, we have eight line managers and they're
all men, white and bald.

The use of the English word 'strike' to describe a
work protest was first seen in 1768 when sailors, in
support of demonstrations in London, 'struck' or
removed the topgallant of merchant ships at port,
crippling the ships.

I was selling ice creams outside the entrance to the Royal Festival Hall during an Iggy Pop gig. *Jude's ice creams*. I was given thirty-six ice creams to sell for £5 each. The recorded announcement voiced by Ian McKellen announces:
The performance will start in ten minutes, please return to your seats.

A single hair falls from his head.

We interrupt, what?

Deadline tomorrow.
Struck.

In 1842 the demands for fairer wages and conditions across many different industries finally exploded into the first modern general strike.

Exploded. Scratching the entire surface of your first car with a brass key. Used.

The performance will start in five minutes, please return to your seats. [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*]
Fraser! How is it going? Have you sold out yet?
Two hairs fall from his head.

Deadline tomorrow.

The performance will start in four minutes, please return to your seats. [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*]

He scratches his head, and a clump of hair comes out.

Deadline tomorrow.

The performance will start in three minutes, please return to your seats. [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*] Assuming you know that voice.
(It's called a crisis, you may be familiar with the term, it's common among writers and readers)
A dry fingernail, bitten off earlier clings to his shirt.

Deadline tomorrow.

Are you Work-to-rule?
Fraser?
Sorry?

Work-to-rule is a job action in which employees do no more than the minimum required by the rules of their contract, and precisely follow all safety or other regulations, which may cause a slowdown or decrease in productivity, because the employer did not hire enough employees or pay the appropriate salary and as such does not have the requirements needed to run at the level they desire. Actual time?

You're blushing again.
Why?
What is it?
Do no more.

The performance will start in two minutes, please return to your seats. [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*] This is my signal to return to the cash office. I have been explicitly warned by my manager not to sell any more ice cream after this time. I have been told that if I sell ice cream past the two-minute announcement I will be fired immediately as it risks that the audience member buying the ice cream will not have time to return to their seats. No late entry is permitted at the Royal Festival Hall, even for Iggy Pop.

Legislation was enacted in the aftermath of the 1919 police strikes, forbidding British police from both taking industrial action, and discussing the possibility with colleagues.

And?

A spot of blood has dried on the sleeve of his shirt.

Deadline tomorrow.

The coldness of the harness I wear to support the weight of the small tubs of ice cream exasperates an already pre-existing cramp. The pain in my stomach is getting worse. A man with grey hair approaches me and asks to buy an ice cream. It's Ian McKellen. His recorded voice speaks over his own voice. Can I have five ice creams please? [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*]

I tell him that he must return to his seat.

He smiles at me as if he loves me dearly and I sell him five ice creams. Thank you. [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*] Where in Ireland are you from? [*In the voice of Ian McKellen*]

A very small amount of time passes as I walk down the stairs to the cash office. I am a few minutes late. I am fired.

Ian McKellen got locked out of the hall.

Surely, he got in?

No. Goodbye.

Deadline tomorrow.

Don't forget to send your timesheet otherwise you won't be paid. What? An eyelash is stuck in his eye, blurring his vision.

AN INDEX OF CONTEXTS

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A PICKET LINE

ANOTHER PICKET LINE

A LINE

A DEAD LINE

KINGS COLLEGE HOSPITAL, LONDON.

A SINGLE EYELASH.

ANOTHER ABANDONED BEGINNING THE BEDROOM

Awakening, the subject observes tiny squiggles of dust gently flow through the beams of light that pierce the tight architecture of the bedroom. Tiny fine particles of solid matter dance in rhythm with the light.

Fraser's head is throbbing.

Fraser has identified the time signature of the throbbing comes close to $3/4$ time but not quite.

Almost a waltz.

He had woken up at 6 A.M. still drunk and could swear that he witnessed the entire contents of the room slide at an angle of 45 degrees piling into the left-side dimly lit corner of the room. The bed, the dresser, the laundry-basket, the Argos clothes rail, clothes still attached to cheap wire dry-cleaning hangers and coming loose from hangers, the hair dryer, the body length mirror, empty bowls with curdled residue of oat milk from yesterday or maybe the day before yesterday's cereal, a single bright orange sock, a dusty used contraceptive device long forgotten about or never even ever remembered, a broken tennis racket, a tab of paracetamol tablets with only one 500ml tablet remaining, a dog-eared white covered

soiled Fitzcarraldo Editions book, an orange skin hardened like bark, a signed timesheet, a blank timesheet, a name badge from the Museum of London, a small badge depicting Obi-Wan Kenobi that he wore during the general election campaign because it resembled Jeremy Corbyn, someone else's underwear, his own underwear, a dead animal, an overdue library book, another overdue library book, a faded receipt, a ticket from the Paris métro, at least fifty odd accidentally stolen lighters from random nights out, a passport photo from exactly five years ago, the strap of a now misplaced leather travel bag, a birthday card from his mother and father, a soiled slightly torn but well-read MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE Constellations book, a prescription for 125 mg of azathioprine and vitamin D tablets, a live Sonic the Hedgehog hopping from one tumbling object to the other bouncing and bashing off the lighters turning them into golden rings that fell, fall and will fall at their own speed in different directions before vanishing, a paperclip, tiny clumps of hardened snot previously flicked into the abyss, a crumpled rectangular shaped piece of paper no bigger than two inches in width with the number 07939315898 written on it, his handwriting, a pair of counterfeit ray-ban sunglasses, a Christmas themed inside-out sock with tiny woven fully decorated Christmas trees, a plastic Kenner figure of parachute action Batman that belonged to his

brother which he was sure that he had thrown into the air only for it to become permanently stuck in the gutter of his friend Steven's house momentarily devastating his brother, bitten off toenails, a name badge with the name Brian written on it from the Science Museum, a Casio stop watch that needs a new battery, a *Frieze* magazine he never read but bought because he liked the cover, clumps of hair that have somehow become bound together resembling balls of tumbleweed he has only ever seen in films or YouTube videos, a disembodied tongue wet and quivering, a folded up sun-bleached Irish provisional driving license, a biography of Brendan Behan by Frank Geary titled *The Crazy Life of Brendan Behan* that he had half read and bought from Amazon Prime that included a library slip from Trinity College Dublin, a post card with the illustrated image of the Wolf's Lair, Adolf Hitler's first Eastern Front military headquarters in World War II that Declan had sent him for some reason years previously with a German stamp on it which depicts a Stegosaurus standing proud in front of a setting sun, photocopied sheets from Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* he had read for a reading group that no longer exists because no one in the reading group could commit to going to the meetings, a faded Polaroid of himself and his twin brother, a name badge from the Southbank

Centre with the name Bob stuck onto it that he felt the necessity to not hand in after he was given his notice despite being warned that failure to hand in the badge would result in £5 being deducted from his final pay slip, a stain in the perfect shape of the base of a Tesco value iron that separated from the semi-acrylic carpet as if it were a diagram in a computer generated simulation from an add for a stain removal product, vanish or something like that, impossible, several pieces of flesh from wrists showing the faded stamps of nightclubs frequented on numerous Saturday nights that might be still visible on his arm the following Monday or Tuesday, an unsolved Rubik's cube, a menu for Silk Road Chinese restaurant with splashed grease marks on it, the bliss of relief from every hangover he has ever had, a roll of wallpaper, the note of A played on a clarinet manufactured in the nineteenth century, a Metro newspaper with the headline 'Bowie Dead', a roll of Sellotape, a well-watered and healthy cheese plant with enormous teeth marks on one of the leaves as if somebody had not tried to taste or eat the leaf but rather wanted to mark their territory perhaps from the previous owner of the plant which was in the room before he moved in and was probably one of the most appealing aspects of the bedroom when he first encountered it through documentation uploaded on Gumtree, the entire German language, a Hoover, a comb,

one hundred thousand spider plants, a tube of emerald green oil paint that had never been opened, a credit card bank statement with the word overdue printed upon it in red bold writing, an unopened box of Barry's Tea, four MDF bookshelves, forty-seven screws, a portable heater, a clothes horse, black mould, a stolen sculpture by Sam Keogh that in turn broke up into an infinite amount of pieces, an RTE television listings guide from 1993 bought for research for an exhibition that never came to fruition, an empty bottle of Nero d'Avola Giacomo that back from Sicily he had consumed alone the night he first moved into the room, a saucer fossilised by several melted candles, a stapler, an empty box of Jaffa Cakes, a copy of Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller* bookmarked with a copy of Brian Dillon's *Essayism*, both books had been read simultaneously until given up on, an earring, the word feck and its shy unarticulated difference to the word fuck and a well-read copy of *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison.

Fraser changes Fraser's name to Ishmael. Moby Dick isn't about whales, but it puts you in a position to have an opinion about whales.

Zero's guts are hanging out from his belly button as he collapses to the floor and completely disappears.

The carpet uplifted, flopped and rolled over to create a blanket for the upended bedroom and its contents. Ishmael thinks, snug as a gun, an image of which exhausted but calmed him back into a deep, abstract, and comforting slumber.

The dead end of thing, thing, thing after thing,
thing, thing.
This excess.
This bloody excess.
An excess of logic.

A cloudy start today, with rain and drizzle slowly edging its way southwards reaching all areas by afternoon. The rain will be heaviest and most persistent in the west of the province, lighter and patchier in nature further east with some drier interludes. Highest temperatures of 10 or 11 degrees, in strong and gusty southwesterly winds, with gales on southeastern coasts.

Ishmael is standing by the kitchen worktop.

Ishmael can hear the muffled voice of Rick Astley's voice playing through the floorboards of the flat. Outside the kitchen window rats chase each other up and down and around the neighbour's garden. The neighbour has been feeding the rats, again. The kitchen window has a light layer of condensation which Ishmael takes note of simultaneous to identifying that Ishmael has cold feet.

Ishmael reaches for Ishmael's phone. Ishmael starts everyday by practicing writing. Ishmael writes a review for the greasy spoon that Ishmael lives over.

Ishmael has successfully created ninety-nine separate email addresses over the past three years. Ishmael writes: Substandard food small portion and overpriced, avoid. Ishmael gives the café one star out of a possible five.

His right eye crashes to the ground and he can now no longer see anything.

TO DO

(Expand on all that follows.)

Make a list.

Scab!

Reader! You Scab!

Stop.

Be nice to the reader for Christ's sake! It's early yet.

They could have started anywhere.

It won't go away,

A strikebreaker

(Sometimes derogatorily called a scab, blackleg, or knobstick).

A person who works despite an ongoing strike. Strike-breakers are usually individuals who are not employed by the company prior to the trade union dispute, but rather hired after or during the strike to keep the organisation running. 'Strike-breakers' may also refer to workers (union members or not) who cross picket lines to work.

Deadline tomorrow.

Where was I?

Here with you?

In between all this, he sneezes and snot lands on his knee.

ANOTHER POSSIBLE START

Settle down. Go to the agency and introduce yourself.

He is broke. At the time of writing, 81,000 people were involved in strikes in 2015, the fewest people since records began in 1893. Four years earlier more than 1.5 million people went on strike – the highest number since the mid-1980s.

He needs a job. He does not stem from wealth.

The rage of having no control over blushing when my manager gives me a compliment. Even after sacking me.

He refuses to delineate the context or voices.

Standing at the ticket desk waiting for customers.

The day is overcast and so is the headache.

Typing into a glitchy android phone. A Samsung Galaxy Ace, caked in cracks and grease.

It could start like this. It could have started like this.

To-do lists are evil, a friend states, back then and now.

????

The problem is always that they steal your time and give you nothing for it.

Deadline tomorrow.

Or this?

All the characters represented in this book, including the first person singular, are entirely fictitious and bear no relation to any person living, dead, undead or yet untitled except for the otherwise stated and extremely obvious.

Deadline tomorrow.

Even this.

Having placed in his mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual (is the reader aware of the reference here?) perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression. I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three.

Rather on the nose.

Deadline tomorrow.

A scab from an earlier cut comes off in the shower.

Perhaps then this. An old scab comes loose from his hand.

Work:

something done,
discrete act

performed by someone
action (whether voluntary or required),
proceeding, business,
that which is made or manufactured,
products of labour, 'also' physical labour,
toil, skilled trade, craft, or occupation;
opportunity of expending labour
in some useful or remunerative way,
also 'military fortification.'

Union.

Strike!

Now, I'm walking into the Agency.

What is the purpose of the list?

As in, the numbers?

The Agency.

A hardened piece of shit causing irritation.

SHOULDN'T IT HAVE STARTED LIKE THIS?

This book was written while I was employed on zero-hour contracts across several cultural institutions in London between 2014 and 2019. I have transcribed, re-read, and re-written small sections of notebooks kept at that time. The fragments were originally collected in small notebooks and typed into now redundant mobile phones.

This book was originally written while the writer was physically standing up and transcribed by the writer when the writer was physically lying sick in bed. The writer?⁹ This paragraph is being written while the writer is standing by the doors of the Royal Festival Hall as an attendant responsible for checking tickets. The artist Elizabeth Price has just walked by me on the way into see Steve Reich.

No. The writer?

Deadline tomorrow.

No. A pimple on his face falls off.

THE AGENCY

She spoke to me like a robot.

Like?

She said:

Established in 1984, Art People Group is passionate about recruiting exceptional people for our stellar client base.

We have long term associations with leading brands in each of the sectors we operate in – Museums & Galleries, Beauty & Fashion, Airside, and Corporate and Recruitment.

We are big personalities ourselves and we are always on the lookout for other big personalities! In fact, the majority of our temp staff tend to be performers and out-going people who know how to work a crowd. Customer service excellence is key, whatever the sector, so we need people people.

All in this shape and form.

(Fuck, I'm blushing again.)

The voice of the institution makes me blush, it's supposed efficiency focusing on my supposed inadequacies. Someone else's fiction.

Deadline tomorrow.

Are you in a union?
We all are, she said, the United Kingdom.
(This actually happened.)

Blood on the toilet paper.

I said:

People people?

She said:

People people!

I said:

People people.

She continued:

Our clients love us because we're good at
what we do and always go the extra mile, and
place candidates with the same work ethic.
It's fair to say, we love what we do.

I said:

How many kilometres in a mile?

I'm not sure this is for me

Deadline tomorrow.

She said.

She said nothing and then continued:

Museums, you look like a museum person.

The chronic pain in my colon might confirm this.

The skin is peeling off his body, but he doesn't
have any sunburn.

We provide a wide range of temporary
retail appointments as well as permanent

roles for senior retail management. Our
clients are looking for retail assistants and
demonstrators for clients in luxury retail,
cosmetics, fragrance, airside retail stores,
and in retail outlets at historical attractions,
museums, and galleries.

Dedication, enthusiasm and people
skills are more important than previous
experience when it comes to working in
this sector. We have many customer-facing
positions across the UK, working in not just
museums and galleries, but also heritage
sites, cultural institutions, music venues,
theatres and arts centres.

Hmm, it seems all our museum jobs are full
right now.

Deadline tomorrow.

Strike?

Have you heard of KidZania?
Have you worked at the Tate? You have?
We have other jobs there. We will give you
one of them.

Two of his toenails fell off this morning.

No.

Deadline tomorrow.

There could be more detail.

OK, we will book you in there for Monday.

Your CV mentions that you're a writer?
Please sign below on the dotted line.
Please be advised that all our
correspondents are confidential, we do not
take kindly to anything you let slip even in
the lightest of conversations.

Deadline tomorrow.

The other eight toenails fell off today.

Regarding timesheets.

Deadline tomorrow.

Bad planning on your part does not constitute an
emergency on mine.

The Code of Hamurabbi, a Babylonian treatise
written in 1772 BCE, set a typical worker's daily
worker's wage at six grains of silver.

Dear Reader, how much do you have in your bank
account?

We have a job going as a writer right
now.

Deadline tomorrow.

But it's not strictly speaking on record.

She explained:

Our client (one of the well-known sandwich
chains with a flair for the French language)
is facing stiff competition from a local rival.

We need someone to fabricate reviews to
bring down their rating.

Deadline tomorrow.

My bank account was minus £5000, I agreed to
everything.

On the day you will report to your manager.

Both his eyebrows fell off at lunch, no one has
remarked on this yet.

THE MANAGER THE TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Is who?

The first records of 'manager' come from around 1600. 'Manage' is recorded earlier, around the mid-1500s. It comes from the Italian *maneggiare*, meaning 'to handle' or 'to train (horses)', from the Latin *manus*, 'hand.'

Giddy up.

Stay inside the lines and inside the margins.

Boring fucker with your etymology.

Deadline tomorrow.

Wait here, the manager will be with you in a few moments.

I use the time to write two reviews.

Remembers the agency's request to include typos to make it seem 'more human'.

Stay inside the lines and inside the margins.

What is this nonsense?

Another eyelash has made its way into his left eye.

Stay the fuck away from this unhygienic cafe. As someone else has stated, this place needs serious renovating. Breakfast was overcooked to fuck, they use tinned mushrooms and they were rubbery.

Has some odd people who sit in there talking about their job seekers allowance. Avoid.

A tangent thought enters. Do you still sit at the back of the class?

Three and a half stars. This cafe certainly has its own character both in terms of decor and regular customers. Can't knock the quantity of food, it was a two-plate job for my breakfast. Breakfast seemed cooked well albeit a tad too greasy. Came out full to the gills but a little queasy (hence not 4 stars), not sure if it a grease thing or quality issue.

Didn't enjoy the chips, they were a massive mistake (didn't stop me from eating them all though). Certainly worth a visit if you appreciate quantity and character in a themed cafe. Can see why it's a bit of a local institution.

Another customer found a human finger in their fish fingers portion.

Roughly speaking.

'Managers' are responsible for training and handling their employees. A 'manager' typically oversees a group of people in a company and is usually responsible for planning, directing, and overseeing operations among that group of people. Collectively, the 'managers' in a company (especially the top ones) are called the management. A 'manager' is often a boss, but a 'manager' also often has a boss. (Such a

person is often described as being part of middle management.)

Note to self (Horse).

She looks conventionally attractive.

Conventionally attractive?

Deadline tomorrow.

He vomits out the window of the room without anybody noticing.

THE CLOCKS TATE BRITAIN

Slowly turning the first page of a book, stolen from the museum gift shop, I read the quotation from Marina Vishmidt set in italics in the centre of the page: 'Anything that is not work can be art'. The opportunity to fully consider the devastatingly appropriate nature of this short sentence is immediately withdrawn by my line manager, who rumbles to me sharply through my walkie-talkie earphone that:

Reading is not permitted while guarding the work,

Colm, do you hear me?

Yes, received.

(I miss The Clock, a pub on Thomas Street, soon it will be gone.)

There is a hole in the sole of his shoe.

Deadline tomorrow.

A hole in his shoe which by the end of the day will result in a hole in his sock.

He can feel the cold wooden floors of the gallery as he walks from the 1920s room through to the 1930s room. He is momentarily filled with dread as he remembers the promise of rain in the dark

grey clouds he observed on the way into work. The lights are starting to clink and flicker on in the gallery and he spots a small mouse run across the Barbara Hepworth, navigating through the plinth-less Anthony Caro eventually squeezing itself through the narrow gaps of the ventilation grid on the other side of the gallery.

He started working fourteen minutes ago. He knows this because he is wearing a gold Casio watch which he bought at Argos after receiving his first pay check, which seems like a few weeks ago but what was, in fact, five years ago.

He thinks, what has become of time? How has all that time passed? He doesn't know it, but he checks his watch (on average) over three hundred times a day.

He sneezes and the spray of the sneeze falls on the surface of *A Bigger Splash* by David Hockney.

He involuntarily lets loose a light belch as he passes Jacob Epstein's *Jacob and the Angel*. He has started to memorise the dates of all the artworks. He points at the large-monumental red alabaster sculpture and snaps his fingers followed by the proud announcement of the name of the artist, artwork, and the year that the artwork was made

'*Jacob and the Angel*, Jacob Epstein....no...Sir Jacob Epstein 1941'.

Pride and disgust manifest simultaneously.
Deadline tomorrow.

His trousers are baggy as he is losing weight and can't explain why.
He shits out everything he eats.

He further investigates the small interpretation panel beside the artwork which informs him that the piece depicts a scene from the book of Genesis where Jacob was forced to wrestle with a mysterious assailant throughout a long cold night.

He is still cold from the walk in. The cold has caused several of his fingernails to fall off completely.

In the morning as the struggle continued the assailant is revealed to be an angel. Jacob is rewarded for not giving up the fight by catching a glimpse of the face of God, the angel.

Deadline tomorrow.

He is searching for a reason why Epstein might have made this work. Perhaps it represents some aspects of Epstein's beliefs? Perhaps it has to do with some aspect of Epstein's life? Or maybe Jacob Epstein liked the story because he shared a name with the protagonist.

Is that the best you can do?

Reader, are you still there?

Personally, I'd delete the last few pages.

A clump of hair.

His thoughts are interrupted by an involuntary belch which reminds him of what he had for breakfast, or was it dinner last night?

Deadline tomorrow.

Minutes later intense pain in his lower abdomen will remind him to skip breakfast tomorrow.

He turns the corner into a tight project space. (I originally wrote: he turns the corner into a pocket). To his surprise there are three figures seated in the gallery already. He checks his watch again. It is only 10:20. It is rare to see anybody sitting in the gallery so early. The three men are whispering among themselves as if they're at church. They are pointing at a work by Ruth Ewan

Deadline tomorrow.

He is too far away to hear what exactly they are speaking about but as he edges closer, he hears one of them mention Europe and Britain in the same sentence several times. Eventually he gets to the place in which the three men are seated, stops, and looks at the work of art with them.

Earlier he woke up to find his pillow covered in blood. An ear had fallen off his head.

The three men simultaneously shush each other and turn and stare at the invigilator.

In the distance I can hear someone ask for ham and cheese toastie.

Good morning, gentleman, can I help you in anyway today?

Fuck, I hate myself.

One of the men responds under his breath, quietly uttering 'Well, you can start by sodding off, you silly Paddy.'

The invigilator hears this comment but decides to ignore it and continue to smile and ask, 'Excuse me?' Another gentleman replies.

Deadline tomorrow.

'Well, good morning young man, what my right honourable gentlemen is trying to say is perhaps you can tell us more about this bizarre clock, how on earth is this art?

How on earth is this a clock?

The men are referring to an artwork that hangs on the wall in front them.

A clock.

The next day the other ear vanished.

The invigilator answers while blushing slightly. He states:

Deadline tomorrow.

‘Well, the rooms in the museum are organised chronologically so you can get a sense of British Art throughout the ages and how it has progressed. The idea is that you start in the eighteenth century and work your way all the way through Turner and Constable right the way up to Tracey Emin’s bed.’

Fuck, I don’t even believe this shit.

One of the men, who has a head that looks like an inflated gammon steak, almost dies trying to intervene with a joke about the invigilators wording but he is so excited by his own ability to amuse himself that the words do not take shape or form in any understandable language.

Now this work here.

Where in Ireland are you from? [*In a voice like the voice of Ian McKellen you imagined earlier*] I know a great joke for you.

Please don’t.

An Englishman, a Scotsman, and an Irishman wander into a little old pub in London. They each ask the barman for a pint of Guinness. After the pints are placed onto the bar, three bluebottles drop into each man’s freshly poured pint. The Englishman pushes his pint away in disgust and

orders up another. The Scot reaches in and plucks the fly out. The Irishman reaches in, picks the fly out, holds it up close to his face and shouts...

He lost his two front teeth today and can’t remember how.

‘SPIT IT OUT, YOU LITTLE BASTARD.’

As I was saying.

No wait, I have one too...An Irishman was in New York patiently waiting to cross a busy street. There was a traffic cop manning the crossing. The cop stopped after a few minutes and told those waiting to cross the road, ‘Okay, pedestrians’, he said, ‘Let’s go’. The Irishman stood waiting, growing more and more frustrated. After five minutes he shouted to the cop, ‘Here! The pedestrians crossed ages ago – when’s it time for the Catholics?!’ [*Not in Ian McKellen’s voice*]

As I was saying.

We could have been anything that we wanted to be (red version), 2011 is a large, wall-hung decimal clock, which divides each day into ten hours, each hour into a hundred minutes, and each minute into a hundred seconds. The clock’s circular casing is red in colour. It was made by Ruth Ewan in relation to a work she was commissioned to make for the second Folkestone Triennial in 2011, also called *We could have been anything that*

we wanted to be. The commission comprised ten decimal clocks of different designs installed around the seaside town of Folkestone in Kent. All the clocks were displayed publicly, some in very prominent positions such as the town hall, and others that had to be either assiduously sought out or happened upon by chance, such as those found in a pub or a local taxi.

Get on with it.

Are you from Kent?

Oh, they have gone.

They sounded as if they were from Kent.

The molars fall from his mouth and clink into another sink.

THE REVIEW

Dear Frank,

Deadline tomorrow.

Please can you send on your review when it is complete. Should you wish to not go with the previous edit I suggest a Kill Fee of 25%.

All the best,

The Editor

Start another list.

Wait a minute. This email arrived.

Dear Frank,

Thank you for your interest in working at the University of the Arts London and for applying for the Senior Lecturer in Fine Art post. However, after careful consideration and review of your application, I regret to inform you that we will not be taking your application any further on this occasion. Due to the high number of applications, we received, we are unable to offer feedback at this stage of the process.

We hope that you will consider applying again for future vacancies and please continue to check UAL jobs for such opportunities.

Kind Regards,
Belle Count
Resourcing Advisor

THE REVIEW (TAKE 2)

Nothing comes to mind, so he makes another list.

Deadline tomorrow.

Zero-hour contract is a term used to describe a type of employment contract between an employer and an employee whereby the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum number of working hours to the employee. The term 'zero-hour contract' is primarily used in the United Kingdom.

You know this, of course, you, the reader, you know this. As in, you, you know.

The deadline was last night.

I missed the deadline. You missed the deadline.

I will write a character into existence.

This character will be called Zero.

The character will be named Zero.

The contract must be adhered to.

It clearly states:

The information contained in this e-mail is confidential and solely for the intended addressee(s). Unauthorised reproduction, disclosure, modification, and/or distribution

of this email may be unlawful. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately and delete it from your system. The views expressed in this message do not necessarily reflect those of Art People or any of its subsidiary companies. Any communication of your activities while working at Art People communicated outside of Art People will result in a slow and gradual termination of the terms of employment.

In breach of contract.

The writer and thereby the reader has been warned.

And the deadline has passed. What's the difference between a deadline and a picket line?

Another possible title for the book you're holding: THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK: A CASE STUDY IN CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER.

First recorded in 1864, the word 'deadline' has its origins in the American Civil War.

This is what the teacher told.

Told me.

Deadline tomorrow.

Toby.

They called me Toby today.

Stand up straight.

Part of his neck fell off while working on the ticket desk today.

Straighten your back.

Who is the teacher? I can't remember. I refuse to remember. A colleague from work one day, I once saw, and never again.

I'll try that again.

First recorded in 1864, the word 'deadline' has its origins in the American Civil War. During time of conflict, a 'do not cross' line was circled around prisons. Guards were told to shoot and kill any prisoner who might:

touch,
fall upon,
pass over
under
or across
the said 'deadline'.

The deadline was yesterday.

The deadline is here.

The deadline is tonight.

The contract has been breached.

Something I don't have a word for

Again.

Fuck, this is getting old.

When Fraser is stressed, he combs his fingers through his hair. He starts most days with freshly

washed hair and by the end of the day, no matter what time it is when he ends his day his hair has become thoroughly matted with grease. Every time he pushes his fingers through the thinning flop at least one hair falls down onto whatever surface is in front of him. On this morning a single hair and several eyelashes have appeared on the keyboard of his laptop alongside a single eyelash on the blank page of his notebook. The tops of his fingers are already greasy, and they leave a residue on the keys of the keyboard.

A clump of hair.

KIDZOS

An email from the agency had arrived. Even though I haven't started working there yet.

Hi everyone,

Who?

Hope you're well, I just wanted to relay a few points we had passed back from KidZania this afternoon.

Deadline tomorrow.

Please read the following points carefully, and be sure to take them on board:

An old fingernail clinging to the heel of his sock.

Arriving / Signing In:

When entering KidZania as a member of staff, you need to use the staff entrance. It might be quicker and easier to enter at the main, customer entrance, but it's not procedure and often hinders the management when dealing with so many staff members. Here are their instructions for the correct entrance procedure before your shift:

Deadline tomorrow.

To get to KidZania from the main entrance, you need to take the customer lift at Lift Lobby 6 down to Level 2. Head across the car park towards M&S, but head into the alcove to the righthand side of its entrance, and take the service lift to level 5. From here you can make your way to the staff entrance to KidZania, and sign in on the third party contractor's sheet.

Avoid the seagulls in the car park they will kill you if you get too close and we cannot take any responsibility for this. Eric Cantona has requested your details in the unlikely event of such an occurrence.

Phones: It's been mentioned that a few people have been using mobile phones within the city, while on post. This is highly unprofessional and reflects poorly on both Art People and KidZania if an employee is seen doing this. Within a venue like KidZania, it's also a security risk. This absolutely needs to stop and will be treated very seriously going forwards. Mobile phones must be stored in the lockers at the start of a shift with your other possessions.

Deadline tomorrow.

OK. Enough. His stomach is empty.

Uniform: I've attached KidZania's uniform guidelines to this email as there's been some confusion as to what is acceptable to

wear on shift. You need to wear plain black smart trousers (not jeans) and plain black shoes. The rest of the uniform is provided by KidZania - you can't wear your own coats or bags while in the city (just like phones, these must be stored in the lockers).

Deadline tomorrow.

Is that dust floating in front of you? The City?
What City?

Please make absolutely sure that these guidelines are followed from now on there was a sense from KidZania that some of the information from the training had been forgotten or even ignored by our staff, which is absolutely not representative of the relationship we've had with them up to this point. If you have any questions, please let me know! If you're unsure about anything at all, it's best to ask me and the supervisors and management at KidZania.

Please reply to this email to let us know that you've read and understood this.

All the best,

Boris

Deadline tomorrow.

His left hand fell off last night. Nobody has noticed yet.

DAY ONE IN THE CITY

What is this place?

Good question.

I am Kim, our manager.

Deadline tomorrow.

So, KidZania is an interactive city made for children 11-14 that combines inspiration, fun and learning through realistic role-play. Kids can independently explore a scaled city of over 7,000 square metres with more than one hundred exciting careers that they can try. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.

Is that?

Nah.

So.

Shh, let me continue.

Fuelled by a child's natural desire to create, explore and collaborate, KidZania is equal parts entertainment and learning, making it one of the most progressive family entertainment concepts in the world today. Through ultra-realistic role-play, children learn about different careers, the

inner workings of a city and the concept of managing money. Each experience is designed to empower kids, giving them the confidence to be their best selves, and inspiration to be great global citizens. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer, it gives to a question of yours.

Each KidZania facility offers experiences that are relevant to each region, culture and geography by way of professions, entertainment and food.

At every location, KidZania uses real-world fun and learning to ready kids for a better world.

An eyelash has fallen into his eye again.

The physical space in which every KidZania metropolis comes to life is a kid-sized fabricated replica of a typical city. The city plan is one big environment made up of many small environments replicating a thematic mix of industry sectors. This is where the city comes to life.

Deadline tomorrow.

Role-play locations called 'establishments' dominate the mix that includes its own Hospital, Police Station, Fire Station, Supermarket, Beauty Salon, Radio Station, Theatre, just to mention a few. In addition, visitors will find

Food & Beverage, Merchandising and Media dedicated locations, creating a broad offering of urban environments, establishments, and activities to enjoy the complete KidZania experience.

Now, we've had a good look at your CV and we feel that you would be best suited in the Art School.

Now, the kids pay 9000 KidZos to go to art school.

Sorry?

What are KidZo's?

OK, so, KidZos are issued in paper bills in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100. Children receive a fifty KidZos cheque as part of admission which can be cashed at the bank, allowing our visitors to start spending their KidZos right away, then earning more through the many employments available at KidZania. After cashing the check at the bank, our visitors have their KidZos available to spend as consumers in the different establishments at KidZania. They can purchase products or hire services. For example, they can go and pay their entrance to the Disco Lounge or get their nails done at the Beauty Salon. Prices for products and services vary according to the principle of supply and demand. The people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each

encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping... something runs among them, an exchange of glances like lines that connect one figure with another and draw arrows, stars, triangles, until all combinations are used up in a moment, and other characters come on to the scene.

Is that Calvino? Bites.

All invigilators ever think about is sex and food. Hobbies.

Someone has taken a bite from his leg.

Are you following me?

Are you serious?

Do I look serious?

As with any economic system, goods and services are purchased with money, and money in return must be earned as payment in exchange of work. This is very important to us. Thus, if the kids run out of KidZos they will need to apply for a job and earn a salary. For example, they can be a nurse in the Nursery or serve the city as Firefighters. Salaries for different jobs vary according

to the principle of supply and demand. You reach a moment in life when, among the people you have known, the dead outnumber the living. And the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms, for each one it finds the most suitable mask.

What happened if they don't get the job?

They always get the job.

Deadline tomorrow.

That isn't very realistic, is it?

Would you like me to continue?

Through the course of using their KidZos children learn about bank accounts, generating savings and earning interest. They learn how to manage money by going to the bank to conduct business with a bank teller or using an ATM machine to make withdrawals or check their account balance. They can also check their account balance online if they are registered CitiZens.

As complement to the educational lesson of monetary management, KidZania features a redemption-based program themed as a shopping experience. Kids must first earn KidZos before they can spend them and may have to save some in order to afford higher priced items. With their

earned Kidzos, children can buy pencils and notebooks for their school, gifts for their friends, or decorations for their houses.

Wow, this is like a propaganda machine for capitalism.

We do not permit the use of the word capitalism in the City; we find that the parents tend to think that is a needlessly overcomplicated term for the children to gasp at this stage. So, where was I?

Another way of earning KidZos is by running investments. KidZania offers multiple investment vehicles where children can get their KidZos back with an extra interest rate earned according to the time of the investment.

A clump of hair falls to the feet of the manager.

Now, Kids also have the opportunity to contribute with their community by donating their KidZos to a cause of their choice, then KidZania ensures that their contribution reaches the children-related cause they selected.

The goal of financial literacy is complete when children learn about how taxes contribute to the benefit of the community. A portion of their salary is discounted to cover their taxes, as in the real world. Most KidZania Cities have their own

Tax Office where children can pay their
contributions to the Nation of KidZania.

So I was saying.

You can run the art school.

Take this and learn it off by heart.

The manager hands me a printed PDF on the
work of Mondrian [which I wrote for Tate in
another job].

Oh, I actually wrote that.

Falsehood is never in words; it is in things (this is
Calvino).

Calvino is Dead, so why should that matter?

Like dead, not death of the author dead.

Yikes.

Are we going to have a problem here?

Are you typing on your phone?

Can you put your phone away?

In that moment, I realised that I couldn't work
there. I can't work here. I ran towards the exit
only to be asked by the pretend border control
cop for my pretend KidZania passport. I fear I will
never be able to leave this place.*

The writer struggles to think of other parts of the
body that might fall off.

* I am still here.

(CONTINUED)
THE TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Sharp pain in stomach area.

Went to work and leaned against a wall conveying
information about Frank Pick.

Frank Pick.

Designed the London Underground logo

Attended a Nazi Rally.

Sponsored by THALES

They snuck Boris in the back door.

Today you will be Charles.

Will get to this later.

My boss told me off for leaning against the train
in the museum. There is an imprint of an iron on
the back of his suit because he ironed it on the
wrong iron setting.

He doesn't know.

I will tell him what he cannot see the day that I
can afford to quit.

One type of review.

Now it will read Zero-hour contract, a term used
to describe a type of exploitative employment
contract between an employer and an employee
whereby the employer is not obliged to provide
any minimum number of working hours to
the employee. The term 'zero-hour contract' is
primarily used in the United Kingdom.

I added the word 'exploitative'. What is the intention behind the numbers here?

How radical?

Not sure who the reader is yet.

The agency has confirmed. Thirty hours this week.

No hours have been confirmed for next week.

Will I ever know?

Zero-hour contract is a term used to describe a type of exploitative employment contract between an employer and an employee whereby the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum number of working hours to the employee. The term 'zero-hour contract' is primarily used in the United Kingdom.

Overheard

And all the while.

Implied but necessary.

In some way, I will claim back this time.

I hope this email finds you well.

But I won't.

My stomach hurts.

The deadline is tonight.

Let's touch base.

Where do I start?

Take care.

Now, a lung.

Flip to the back of the notebook.

Words I've collected from sitting on the stairs in museums:

stain

admin

administrative

agency

apartment

appointment

authority

art

bank

bedroom

bench

berth

building

bureau

business

chancery

Why the need to count? Now I've lost count.

company

computer

corporate

countinghouse

craft

cubicle

den

department

deputy

desk

empty

factory
fashion
fatherhood
field
function
game
gaming
general
government
government agency
guest
gym
headquarters
headship
home
home office
hospital
house
industrial
industrial revolution
insurance
job
lab
legation
library
man
management
newsroom
office
office staff

officer
official
organisation
ownership
parks
part
petroleum
place
place of business
position
post
power
prelacy
presidency
professional
rail transport
remote
retail
role
room
school
shop
small business
spare
spot
staff
staples
store
studio
study

team
tech
telegraph
the treasurer
warehouse
web
wfh
windows
work.

I blushed after my boss gave me a compliment.
Fuck.
How the fuck do I get rid of these numbers?
Are the numbers distracting?
No number of showers will get rid of the stink of
disgust.
The pains in my stomach are growing sharper.
Must make hospital appointment.
There are sharp pains in my stomach.

A strange day today.
The character will not be called Fraser. Again?
The Fraser, no, the character, will be called Zero
This is Zero.
Hello, Zero.
Hello.
Did you hear that?
How could he, his ears are gone.

ZERO

Zero investigates the mirror and comes into
existence. With one gentle push from the tip of
his tongue, Zero's tooth comes loose and bounces
down into the ceramic sink. A taste reminiscent
of an old twopence coin lathered in melted butter
fills Zero's mouth.

Blood.
The dread is not tangible.

He spits into the sink and a small puddle of
white and pink bubbles confirm what is already
blatantly obvious. One of his molars has come
loose and fallen out. His tongue fills the gap left
behind by the tooth wiggling about like an eel in
a bucket. When greater worries should clearly be
on Zero's mind, he is compelled to consider that
perhaps his tongue has a mind of its own. He had
previously demanded the tongue not to apply
pressure on the tooth and yet that is exactly what
it did. He has no control over his tongue. Zero
peeped an instant under the mirror and then
swiftly twisted the taps. The bloody water and
tooth were sucked down the drain never to be
seen again.

He looked into the mirror.
He smiled, showing off his new gap.

He combed the hairs across his head.
Some hairs fall loose.
It couldn't be helped.

Zero falls out the door and makes his way to work.
Zero waits for the bus.
The number 84.
Another reference there.

(CONTINUED)
THE V&A

Behind the IRA blast shield. (This isn't fiction.)

Or is it 48?

Zero gets on the bus.

When he sees a vacant seat, he throws himself on
to it. On the bus Zero takes a notebook from his
pocket.

Zero is attempting to write a book during the time
that he works at the museum.

Zero thinks: I will begin the book now.

At the top of the page Zero writes:

The Bedroom

i. (As in the first part.)

Who starts with a title?

Start anyway.

The subject, no, not the subject.

Zero.

Zero, thinks how he can be the subject.

Zero is the name of the subject.

The page remains blank as Zero continues to
think.

Zero thinks that humans love naming things.

Mountains, trains, giraffes, spit, dipsticks, you
name it.

Literally, you name it.
IT will process your username in the coming days.
Email IT.

The manager has called the subject by the wrong name now for two weeks despite the fact he wears a large pink name badge which is surely larger than necessary or not even necessary at all.

He is tired today.
He is tired all the time.

Because Zero works across multiple museums, he can pick a different name in each institution. Zero has told his boss that his name is Eoghan. His name has caused so much confusion that he often considers legally changing it. His name looks different on page to the way that it is pronounced.

It is a name that originates from a murdered language.

Dramatic

Overdramatic?

Is. And is not.

Some of us were travelling together.

He thinks in truth, that no one is left to pronounce it. An extra cup of coffee in the evening will result in a further thought on this.

Is he, he?

These thoughts will lead him to contemplating beginning procedures towards legally not having

any name at all, ever again.

This seems to be levelling out.

There's a poster on the wall with a quotation from bell hooks: 'The one person who will never leave us, whom we will never lose, is ourself.'

On that note, goodbye.

Are you bored yet?

If I don't have a name, then I cannot work?

How can I work if I don't have a name? He thinks, what are names even for. He supposes for people that names help to establish their unique place in the world, names are often an attempt at summing up in one word the basic personal data, gender, nationality, and family history most often not chosen by the named. Names surely cannot be owned and yet they are referred to as the most sacred of properties. He thinks. He thinks. He thinks that this is violent and immediately that thought is followed by a corrective thought, no, the naming of things is... He thinks, you still have to work if you have a pronoun, but without a name?

Surely, I can refuse to have a name?

The naming of things is a violent act.

No, the naming of things is not a violent act.

Perhaps.

Perhaps, that's why I cannot correct the manager, my manager. 'My' manager? To correct the

manager would surely involve saying 'My name is' but I do not want to own my name, the name I have been given or any such equivalent thing.

Twat.

Fucking Twat.

People getting off.

I would never use the word Twat.

Would I?

Zero is saying Twat.

I would say Fuck the fucker.

Fuck the fucking manager.

Constant fucking rage.

Something comes to mind.

Zero transcribes a quote from a small red book that he has been carrying around with him over the past few weeks.

Zero scrawls into his notebook:

Today, information: pulverised, nonhierarchised, dealing with everything: nothing is protected from information and at the same time nothing is open to reflection. Encyclopaedias are impossible. I would say: the more information grows, the more knowledge retreats and therefore the more decision is partial (terroristic, dogmatic) 'I don't know', 'I refuse to judge': as scandalous as an agrammatical sentence: doesn't belong to the language of the discourse. Variations on the 'I don't know' The obligation to 'be interested' in everything that is imposed on you by the world:

prohibition of noninterest, even if provisional [...].

From Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*.

Roughly speaking.

Too on the nose?

Again?

I don't know.

The bus arrives at the bus stop. Zero gets off and the bus departs.

Working a 65-hour week and struggling to make ends meet. No time for writing anything today. The manager was on the desk beside me welcoming people to the museum. He has a talent. Specifically, that he can smile in front of the customer and immediately turn the smile off when the customer can no longer see him. I would find it charming were he not an absolute bastard. I'm exhausted. Spent.

I'm trying to imagine what Zero might look like.

Zero starts to write again.

But am I legally obligated to have a name? Could I erase it and go with nothing, diving into radical anonymity?

But there are those without names!

On the transparent wall of glass which separates the museum from the ticket desk there is a list of patrons and sponsors. Listed there, Zero sees 'For those who wish to remain anonymous.'

Who?

Zero asks the boss. The boss will surely have an answer to this. Who are those bosses?

The word boss originated from a Dutch word *baas*, which means ‘master’, according to Jonathon Haeber. Its use was a uniquely American way of avoiding the word ‘master’, which had quickly become associated with slavery by the mid-nineteenth century.

We’ve had all kinds of things donated over the years, from a notebook kept by a textile merchant hoping to drum up business in Mumbai and Kolkatta, to the account books of an Altrincham woman’s home sewing business, via architects’ drawings for worker housing to a train owned by Adolf Hitler.

Very occasionally, we receive money and archives from anonymous donors who send documents in the post or drop them off at the information desk during a visit to the museum. It’s often archive material that we really want to keep. The frustrating thing is that without information about the person donating the archives and the story of how they came to own them we can’t add these archives to our collections.

As the boss continues speaking, Zero has noticed that the hair is falling off his head. There are a few strands of hair on the keyboard of the ticket desk computer.

The boss continues speaking.

In museums and archives, we are keen on a thing called ‘provenance’. The word ‘provenance’ can mean different things, but we use it to talk about the authenticity or quality of an archive or object. For us, provenance is a record of ownership and...

Excuse me.

Zero darts to the bathroom clinging to the strands of hair in his hands.

The boss continues to speak, not noticing that Zero has left.

As well as assuring us that the thing we’re being offered is genuine, the story of an item’s ownership can often be as interesting as the item itself. It can guide us on how we use the item, whether we put it on display in a permanent gallery or make it accessible to researchers through our Study Area.

The boss peers into the CCTV monitor beside him which is showing himself sitting at the ticket desk he notices that Zero has left. He takes out his phone and immediately sends an email to Zero asking him to leave the premises immediately as he is fired for leaving his post.

What a fucking mess.

DAYS
THE PICKET LINE

Not sure where to take this character Zero.
They said they wanted to pick my brains for a teach
out.
Get the fuck away.
I need to flesh out the previous ideas.
Or move on?
Divine.
He reads back over the four short paragraphs he
has typed into his phone.
Dissatisfied with the word love he googles a free
online thesaurus.
The Wi-Fi is bad in this part of the room.
The Internet doesn't work.
The Internet doesn't work?
There is no Internet on the picket line.

He stands in the corner of the room by the
radiator waiting for the thesaurus to load on his
phone. Zero is standing under the CCTV camera
which monitors the main gallery of the museum
so that his manager cannot see him not working
or rather working on his phone. Working on
something else. Pipes protrude from the white
wall and a hardened yellow foam the same colour
as his father's toenails reminds him of a work by

Joseph Beuys that he can't recall the name of.
He knows that the artwork was made from butter,
but he can't remember what exactly it looked like.
What was the name of this artwork?
What does butter look like?

Deadline tomorrow.

You know this is made up.

The Hermit's Cave.

Does Zero drink there? Who would have known
that all this was trapped in a space (thick) and (di-
mensions of the book)?
Bound.

Zero sits down to write.

Zero sits down to write in the staff room.

Staff, as in staff.

Zero takes a large gulp of coffee.

The coffee is burnt, and the oat milk tastes too
much like oat milk.

Zero begins to type.

Words begin to appear on the screen in front of
Zero.

Zero has been commissioned to write a review but
does not have the time to write outside his job as
an invigilator in the museum.

He will write the review while he is invigilating the
gallery.

Zero types.

Texts, like this, find themselves situated in silent objects.

Zero spends five minutes googling other reviews.

My stoma bag has burst halfway through me editing this section and there is shit all over the manuscript now.

ANOTHER REVIEW

A computer screen, a phone in a pocket, a printed magazine lying on a bookshelf or a coffee table.

Morley College Gallery, like most small galleries in London, remains mostly reticent during the high temperatures of early July. Upon entering the gallery, I am greeted...

Is the word 'reticent' correct here?
Reticent? Is this what I mean to write.

I am greeted by a gallery invigilator who acknowledges my presence with a sweeping, unassuming glance followed by what appears to be a genuine smile, I am silently 'welcomed'.

I am blushing again.
Ugh.

Zero spends at least twenty minutes googling the correct term for wire mesh glass. Wire mesh glass (also known as Georgian Wired Glass) has a grid or mesh of thin metal wire embedded in the glass. Wired glass is used in the United Kingdom for its fire-resistant abilities and is well-rated to withstand both heat and hose streams. Zero decides to run with Georgian Wired Glass. Zero feels momentary shame as Zero knows that Zero is trying to sound smarter than Zero actually is.

Why repeat the word Zero so many times?
The manager is looking over at me.
I will have to continue this later.
WAIT!

Silently, I push through two Victorian glass swinging doors. Firstly, I encounter a timer which tells me that there is sixty seconds left of the current loop of Elizabeth Price's new work.

A two-channel HD video work (more on this word later) running in total just under six minutes.
Running.
Running where?

This all too uncommon mechanism in the formal presentation of video work affords me the choice of watching the work from the beginning through to the end...no...from the beginning first time around.

So, I wait.

Zero waits in silence wondering what visuals accompany the meticulously produced electronic music of Andrew Dickens that spills out of the gallery into the silence.

They don't use words.

Outside the gallery, in the foyer or what has now become the waiting room are artefacts that lie silently telling of previous exhibitions and works

by Elizabeth Price. Price who won the Turner Prize...

Is this relevant?

Price, who won the Turner Prize in 2012, is best known for her video works in high definition that pertain to bodies of research which accumulate through extensive engagement with museum collections and archives.

The artefacts tell of previous shows at Stanley Picker Gallery: At the house of Mr.X (2007) and A RESTORATION, a work in response to the collections and archives of the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers.

THE LECTURE HALL

They have paid no prep time so this will now become a space in which to continue writing.

Do you sit at the back of the class?

Alongside the catalogues of previous shows is a fabricated and seemingly image-redacted *Hackney Gazette* dating from 2000. It appears.

It appears.

What voice is this?

Zero is thinking again.

Zero is thinking again.

Price has been generous to inform the viewer of the history of her engagement with institutions. This gesture should perhaps not go unnoticed in relation to the content of *Silently*, time is up. The work begins again, silently.

Zero picks up a press release and begins to read. Zero is anticipating a kill fee. Because this review is going fucking nowhere.

A kill fee.

A kill fee is, in a very general sense, an insurance against your work getting canned.

Why would you bring that up!

Sometimes, often for reasons totally beyond your control, a project may be cancelled, funding cut,

or your client may simply have a change of heart and decide you don't fit into their plans anymore. Without a kill fee you could end up completely out of pocket, with nothing to show for your hard work.

Yesterday, his left eye fell out.

A kill fee clause will mean that, even if your hard work never sees the light of day, you'll still get at least partial payment.

The last time the editor didn't like Zero's work they offered him a twenty-five percent kill fee, meaning, that the piece would be scrapped and that Zero would be paid twenty-five percent of the original fee negotiated. Zero insisted upon a two hundred percent fee given that he had done the work (written the article twice) twice.

This was the last correspondence with said editor. Zero looks down at his hands.

You will have to change the description on the back of the book because things appear to be taking a different direction.

There are two large Panasonic projectors projecting on to a constructed wall no more than three or four metres a distance from the viewer who sits on a rectangular wooden block. The seating is uncomfortable. The screen is no more than twelve feet wide and eight foot tall. Above and behind

the projector are two high quality speakers. On screen text appears to be typed over a mirrored pattern that might be the close up of a repetitive pattern of an unknown garment, pierced with stitching that lets the light in and out of this oscillating image. The image resembles that of a three-dimensional computer-generated Rorschach test of which it is most certainly not.

Are you going to vote for strike action?

Deadline tomorrow.

Of which it is most certainly not.

Bad Grammar.

Call it a day.

One more attempt.

The actors imp.

Zero receives an email.

Subject: URGENT

Break it down.

ASSIGNMENT INFORMATION

Name of the Client hirer:

Museum of London Docklands

Location:

Museum of Docklands, West India Quay, Canary Wharf, London E14 4AL You should be familiar with the museum, its permanent and temporary exhibitions. For more information see www.museumdocklands.org.uk

On arrival, please report to:

Kent Debt

Start date of assignment and hours of work:

Date: Sat 25th May/ Sun 26th May

Time:

09:30 - 18:00

Your recruitment consultant's

contact details: Catriona Turdley 020 7222 2121

Emergency contacts (Out of office hours use only) 07766 008 987 or 07739 166 342

Job title: Interpretation Host

Visitor Host / Box Office Assistant

What you are expected to wear:

Black blouse / shift

Black trousers / skirt no shorter than knee length

Black smart comfortable shoes

During Evening Events:

You will be expected to wear a white shirt.

Your hair must be neat, tidy and appropriate.

Actual Rate of remuneration i.e.

Rate which you will be paid in this

Assignment: £7.50 per hour

Timesheet: Please email your timesheet on time or you will not be paid. to payadmin@artpeople.com by the following Monday at 11 oohrs. You will be required to complete your own timesheet and have it signed by your supervisor. A blank timesheet is attached. Failure to send timesheet will result in non-payment.

Intervals of payment:

Weekly, paid every Friday in arrears unless of delays out of the hands of the agency.

How to get there: Here is a map link for you and a small map

If you're travelling by tube or DLR the nearest stations are:

West India Quay and Canary Wharf

If you're travelling by bus then the following buses D3, D7, D8, 277, D6, 15, 115 or 135 will all alight near the museum.

Please find below.

Blood stain on the path. The hole in my shoe has made a hole in my sock.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENT

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS FORM

TEMPORARY WORKERS which is a legal document to give you further information

Blank Art People timesheet

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENT

A ASSIGNMENT DETAILS FORM

TEMPORARY WORKERS

Name and address of Temporary Worker:

THE NEWS

After work the moon is reflecting on the largest leaf of the cheese plant. The sky is grey and orange, the room smells like steaming hot fish and chips. The air is cold but not to be enjoyed like the small section of cold duvet Zero's foot found at 4 A.M. last night when he was struggling to sleep.

Deadline tomorrow.

At least one hundred pigeons are gathering close to the six people standing at the bus stop it is sometime between 9 A.M. and 10 A.M. Is it?

Zero is standing at the bus stop waiting for the number 84 again. The bus that will take him to the Museum of London where he works a short shift of four hours and he will be paid London's living wage.

Real.

The edge of the bright pink shirt he is required to wear is sticking out of his unfastened fly and he has yet to notice. His head is nestled in the shattered screen of his phone, and he is reading about the canals of Mars on his outdated Samsung smart phone as a plane crosses the

sun momentarily casting a swift fleeting shadow across the row of two-storey red brick houses opposite him.

Zero's hands are cold, and this effects his ability to type the name Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli into Google. He reads about Giovanni Virgino Schiaparelli reportedly observing canals on the surface of mars in 1877 and how he described these markings as, as what?

He is sick and exhausted.
Zero makes a note.

Deadline tomorrow.

Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli observed a hundred of these markings, beginning in 1877, and described them as canali, a neutral term that implied nothing about their origin. Other observers had earlier noted similar markings, but Schiaparelli's writings first drew wide attention to the subject. Percival Lowell believed the markings to be bands of vegetation, kilometres wide, bordering irrigation ditches, or canals, dug by intelligent beings to carry water from the polar caps. Lowell and others described canal networks studded with dark intersections...

His reading is interrupted by a text from his mother which reads 'Are you OK?'. He knows that this means that something has happened.

He knows that this means there has been another attack in London.

He types London terrorist attack into google. His Internet isn't working well, and it takes a few moments for the page to load. The most recent related article is a week old. Something else must be wrong.

He then types 'London terrorist attack' into the Twitter search bar but there seems to be nothing too significant coming up.

Meanwhile across the road I can see that some of the occupants of the red brick houses are opening their doors and coming out to speak to each other.

Zero has a feeling.

Zero has many feelings but the overriding feeling is that something significant is happening.

He types Sky News Live into YouTube and after a few seconds he can see that across the screen is the word breaking news.

There is a person in a suit speaking.

The writer writes: You should edit this entire section out or bring this to a close.

Every day, this planet is bombarded with more than a hundred tons of dust and sand-sized particles. When an object enters the atmosphere, it compresses the air in front of it. That compression heats the air, which in turn heats the object,

causing it to glow and vaporise. Once it starts to glow, the object is called a meteor. About once a year, a car-sized asteroid hits Earth's atmosphere, creates an impressive fireball, and burns up before reaching the surface. Every two thousand years or so, a meteoroid the size of a football field hits Earth and causes significant devastation across a continent.

Finally, only once every few million years, an object large enough to threaten Earth's civilisation comes along...we believe this to be such object.

There is palpable panic on the streets, but everything is still managing to tick along as always. In the evening.

The whole situation seems beyond surreal to Zero, not quite realistic.

It's the writer.

The writer?

Yes, the writer.

The voice that you can hear is the voice of the writer.

The voice that you can hear is most likely not the voice of the writer.

There it is again.

Zero attempts to speak to the writer.

Who are you?

There is no response from the writer.

Is Zero the same person as Fraser?

What do you mean there is no response from the writer, I just heard you say There is no response from the writer, what does that mean?

The old woman intervenes.

It is very likely that you could also be speaking to the reader.

The reader?

The reader of what?

The elderly woman replies, the reader of this book.

And a body of work.

Reader, can you hear me?

There is no reply that Zero can perceive or hear. In fact, Zero suddenly realises that he has never really been able to hear anything at all. He reaches for his ears only to find soft sealed flesh and extended cheek in the place where his ears are meant to be. Zero has no ears.

Zero attempts to escape the page.

However, the writer puts a stop to this.

At precisely this moment in time a cold feeling passes over Zero

Yes, that is correct, I think I am realising something.

Why have you written me so badly?

There is no time to explain.

Deadline tomorrow.

The writer does not respond.
Zero becomes confused.

You could have made me do anything. I'm a character!

Zero has realised that he is fact a character in a piece of fiction and although this should confuse him and perhaps cause him some alarm and panic, he is instantly filled with rage.

Would you really describe this as a piece of fiction?

Zero attempts to speak but suddenly notices that his mouth no longer existed. It's quite likely that it never existed before.

Zero vanishes namely since he never actually existed at all.

Don't you fucking dare cross that picket line.

ANOTHER REVIEW

Through the speakers.

Through the speakers.

Through the speakers I can hear typing almost identical to the sound I can hear typing this text.

Written in pencil.

I sit silently... watching.

As with much of Price's recent video works the text reads like a para-academic diary entry written by an academic. What does that even mean?

Deadline tomorrow.

Through the text on screen, it is revealed that the apparent subjects of the work are a group of future professionals who have chosen to fall silent and as such this has become a contagion in their future society. The piece unfolds to be a story told by future academics who dispute the origins of the silence. Price's apt use of emotive generic music reinforces what is undoubtedly a masterclass in satire and a sharp comment on the toxic bureaucracy of contemporary education infrastructures.

I sit silently... watching.

Masterclass... really?

The work viewed multiple times (its formal clarity and fine installation make it a desirable experience) unfolds as a map of 'hidden in plain sight' references that...

Zero hates the review.

Zero wishes he had more time to write.

Zero walks into the gallery. The gallery door closes behind Zero. It has been two weeks since Zero has been called by the gallery to work any hours. There is a new exhibition in the gallery. Zero begins reading the descriptive text applied to the wall of the gallery. The exhibition is titled DIG. The didactic panel was written by Sophie, one of the gallery interns who recently moved to London from Glasgow.

Fraser is awoken by a cat pawing at his face.

Fraser is back?

The time is 07:30 on 5 July 2012.

Fraser is the name of a fictional character loosely based upon that of the writer.

The writer who writes these words.

The writer who writes these words that you read.

The reader who reads, not these words but the words which will be transcribed from these scribbles.

Why Fraser? Fraser is the name that the writer is commonly mistaken for in the workplace. On occasion, the English workers refer to the writer

as Paddy. (This is true.)

Fraser needs a workplace.

Fraser needs a workplace because Fraser needs money.

Deadline tomorrow.

Close this.

Bring this to a close!

An answer is expected.

Answer.

A workplace is a location where someone works for their employer or themselves, a place of employment.

Employment.

Someone stands on Frasers foot and doesn't apologise.

Such a place can range from a home office to a large office building or factory. For industrialised societies the workplace is one of the most important social spaces other than the home, constituting 'a central concept for several entities: the worker and [their] family, the employing organisation, the customers of the organisation, and the society as a whole'.

In September 2017, the UK Office of National Statistics estimated that there are over 900,000 workers on zero-hours contracts, 2.9% of the employed workforce.

I'm trying to write a book. The book will have as its protagonist a character. The character will be named Zero.

Zero is writing, again. Late at night, again. Zero would prefer to write during the day but there is no time. There always seems to be less time during the day. Zero is distracted, always by the phone. Zero is trying to write poems but instead is...

Please don't cross the picket line.

Deadline tomorrow.

BAD MOOD

Less.

More.

More or Less.

Not more or less.

This is this then.

On *Love Island* they say, 'it is what it is', this is the ideology of what I see most.

Held at a distance for a better view

A bucket of 'it is what it is'.

Mate.

Stand back. Not standing back.

Not too far away.

This is this then,

Hidden under the egg
for the child to eat.

Where are your reading glasses?

In your mouth.

Saliva glosses the plastic covered temple covers.

Chewed up.

Chipped paint falling off the pencil.

Why do people do that?

That will do, he thinks. He wants to know what it is like to write with it a pen, so he begins transcribing. Transcribing, he thinks, in the wrong direction he thinks but then he thinks anyway. He thinks in the wrong direction.

Another one?
Where did all this come from?
Deadline tomorrow.

ANOTHER ONE

Tiredness
You don't know what that is.
It has nothing to do sleep.
Work.
It has nothing to do...
Work, time at home, no such thing as...
I work at the same desk I read, eat and sleep at.
This won't do...
I could go on, but I need a piss.

All the characters represented in this book,
including the first person singular, are entirely
fictitious and bear no relation to any person dead
or living.

ABANDONED BEGINNING

Let's start here. Most paper pulp is made from trees (mainly fast-growing, beautiful evergreen conifers), though it can also be made from bamboo, cotton, hemp, jute, and a wide range of other plant materials. It cannot be made from nuts. Smooth papers used for magazines or packaging often have materials such as china clay added so they print with a more colourful, flashy, glossy finish.

Here's the basic idea: you take a plant, beat the living daylights out of it to release the fibres, and mix it with water to get a soggy snot-like suspension of fibres called pulp (or stock). You then go about spreading the pulp out on a wire mesh so the fibres weave, knit, and bond together until resembling a textile, squeeze the water away, dry out your pulp, and what you've got is paper. You feel an example of such a thing in your hand now.

This paper was not made by...

The asteroid belt is a region of space between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter where most of the asteroids in our Solar System are found orbiting the Sun. The asteroid belt probably contains millions of asteroids...The largest asteroid is

called Ceres. It is about one-quarter the size of our moon.

Deadline tomorrow.

ANOTHER EMAIL

Hello all,

There is a proposed tube strike this Wednesday 5 to Thursday 6 August, it is looking increasingly likely that this will go ahead. All staff will be expected to make reasonable and dedicated efforts to arrive at work on time for scheduled shifts and allow plenty of time to travel. Depending on where you live and how you travel, this could mean allowing up to 2 hours extra for buses and incredibly busy National Rail services. I would recommend planning the route in advance and walking or cycling where possible.

Please see the information below via the link:

<https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/tube/tube-strike>

If the strike goes ahead, there will be no Tube service from 18:30 on Wednesday 5 August until Friday 7 August. There will be no Tubes on Thursday 6 August. We are expecting a normal service on Friday.

On Wednesday, Tube services will stop running at 18:30, so please complete your journey by then and travel earlier if possible. Tubes are expected to be exceptionally busy

between 16:30 and 18:30. DLR, London Overground, tram and TfL Rail services will be running as normal. All of these services are expected to be much busier than usual.

If you do experience any problems en route you must call the emergency number, 07739 166 197, or the office number during office hours, 0207 813 2121.

Kind regards,

Alex

SOMEWHERE 200,000 MILES AWAY

Ishmael reads A's diary. A is a peer.

I look up from my hands, where I was trying to bite off some skin that's been annoying my right middle finger. It's 16:54. I go back to my finger for bit and then direct my attention back to the screen.

Oh yes, the interview with Oliver. I don't know where to find it. Have I even spoken to Oliver? I am not sure anymore. Who is Oliver? Who are all of these people I've been talking to? And why do they care about the content for some corporate website? I don't. And I don't understand. Empathy is a skill that is always listed in job descriptions for designers. Being a good listener, being able to put yourself in other people's shoes... that's what you do. Feel the pain they feel. Understand the pain points and find a way to erase them.

Who are any of these people? I feel completely lost and uninterested. I feel absolutely nothing. Just bored, they are getting paid for doing their job and so do I. Nothing to worry about.

I look at my phone in regular intervals of about fifty seconds. Whenever I move my head a

little bit, the reflection of the light coming in from the windows on the screen fools me into thinking I got a notification. A news update from the *Guardian*, a missed call from my mum or a message from Leo.

Deadline tomorrow.

His guts are hanging out of his belly. (This really happened.)

THE V&A CANTEEN

Eoghan is typing at the kitchen sink:

It is a little known fact that the American phrase ‘you dig?’ popularised by cultural icons of the 1960s owes its roots to the Irish language, arising from the verb to receive or get *dtuig*(*eann tú mé?*) do. ‘You dig?’ as we all know well (who are we) can be understood in the vernacular as ‘Do you get me, do you understand what it is that I am saying?’, *tuigim* (I get you)(I dig), thus validating to an extent the previous factual sentence. The phrase is believed to have been brought to American building sites by immigrant Irish workers during and after the great famine and again during the great depression. None of these facts however can tell us the actual evidence of the origins of this phrase. The phrase ‘You dig?’ to an extent has lost all connections with its origins, obscured by its saturation into folk and rock music lingo, utilised by the beat poets and then on to the masses through a popularisation of the alternative, the minority gone mainstream. Furthermore, its connection to the construction industry in contemporary vocabulary has led many experts to believe that actual origins lie solely in the booming construction sites of high

rising twentieth-century America and that the phrase has no apparent connection to the Irish language.

Ishmael’s eyes roll upwards.
Ishmael yawns.

Digging being one of the simpler activities the worker may find himself involved in, ‘You dig?’ maybe understood then as ‘You know how to do this thing, it is as simple as digging a hole’.

Deadline tomorrow.

Eoghan bangs on: The reality that we are faced with when we consider the origins of this phrase is that the dominant perception of history understood as a linear chronological construct leaves no room for a parallel shift in sociological meaning that is beyond the logical transgression of one thing simply leading to the other. If such logic is applied to any charting of that which has been, history, (for the sake of archive) then what occurs may be identified as a ‘leapfrog’ method of understanding the relationship between that which has passed, that which is, and that which possibly could be. Errors in simulation can be attributed and translated directly into capitol. History happens thrice the first occurring as tragedy the second as farce and thirdly as profit.

What the fuck is he even on about?

The fabric of history is blatantly hidden, it is not linear nor wholly theoretical, it is within the subject made object, the event made a thing, it is beneath us or revealed on closer inspection, beneath the skin and earth, cracking and dissolving, repressed by gravity, in hibernation, underground. Bodies do not lie in order of time, the earth shifts, yawns, logic is an illusion made redundant by the activities that govern the conditions for us to play out that logic. History is not a given and the evidence is mounting. What is underground is the certainty that all which is certain on the surface is purely a circumstantial foundation of the present moment, but what is the present?

Stop.
Stop right now.

A NOTEBOOK ON A TABLE IN THE CANTEEN

One of Zero's peers finds his notebook on a table in the canteen.

Classic greasy spoon cafe. No nonsense. Cheap enough that you walk out wondering how food can be produced that cheaply. Decor is classic if a little shabby. Service with smile and very clean despite shabby décor and my entire arm getting stuck to the table. A London classic I find it impossible to walk past without buying some sort of heavily salted pork-based snack. Yum yum.

Lovely friendly clientele, very reasonably priced.

Beautiful venue, great eighties decorations all around. If you're into 80s movie and music posters, this is the place. Lovely, wonderful family that owns the cafe. Delicious food. Great value for money. Great place. Highly recommend.

Full English with tea and toast for £5.40. What's not to like? And I can confirm the reports of the lesser-spotted fried slice to be true. It was right there, in the thick of it, hiding under the egg all along. A rare treat around here these days.

Friendly customer service and quick. Excellent prices.

Loved the eccentric atmosphere, i could have people watched all day in this value for money 'caf'.

The place is OK, presentation of food good and the food is cheap and the quality as per the price. What you pay is what you get... cannot complain.

It is what it is.

Looks OK from the outside but dull and dirty inside. Food was awful had a Spanish omelette made with egg (obviously) and lumps of potato no other ingredients in at all.

Love this place, very friendly and decent coffee.

Traditional London café. Great prices especially for London.

Service is good.

Went in for the first time in fifteen years today. Hasn't changed at all, and neither had the prices! Still the best value breakfast in the area. £2.30 for a decent sausage egg and chips!

Terrible slow sullen service. Don't bother unless you have an hour to spare. The service was chaotic, and customers were not served in order, the people served first were the ones who stood at the front and leaned over the counter to chase their orders. Took almost thirty minutes for a cappuccino to arrive, when I asked a server to find out where it was, she didn't respond or come back. I watched a stream of orders being returned

to be corrected (wrong order, things missing, untoasted 'toast'), and two refunds. The sofa at the back is filthy. Tables not cleared. The £6 avocado toast comes as a slice of bread with a separate pot of avo for you to construct yourself; Marmite toast comes as a slice of bread, a ramekin of rock-hard butter and a messy ramekin of Marmite. So unappealing. Never again.

DEADLINE TODAY

As if... my head could fall off at any moment in time. I can see it now rolling down the corridor bouncing down the stairs, losing its teeth and bruising along the way. People open their doors in horror at the *Doppler* effect screaming voice that bounces off their own heads. Comic and terror all at the same time. It leaves trails of blood and saliva, strands of hair and sheets of skin behind it as if it were a large, injured slug.

A trace for nobody to follow.

Yes, I see it move hastily among the crowds and through the streets. I can see it rolling up to a pedestrian crossing and waiting for the man to turn green before it rolls across the road with all the compliant other bodies. It rolls over hills and mountains on motorways and through tunnels. Children point and stare and ask their parents 'who owns that head?' The parents always ignore the question by pointing in the opposite direction

towards something that doesn't exist, something made up. 'Oh, look over there, darling, a unicorn!' 'Where?!' exclaim the children searching for the unicorn in the monotone landscape only momentarily forgetting the rolling head.

I imagine what it sees. What my disembodied head sees. Grey concrete, grey sky, grey concrete, grey sky, grey concrete, grey sky, grey concrete, grey sky. Halting occasionally, it sees other heads above it staring. It registers expression of interest into categories of disgust, shock, bewilderment, horror, and awe. Sometimes it loses focus. Sometimes it feels that it is going to throw up but there is nothing to throw up. Over time the grey gets darker until it sees nothing at all. Until the head no longer thinks or feels. By the time it reaches the sea the concrete and earth has peeled away all the skin and hair and the eyes have been chewed up by birds, cats, dogs, rats, and flies. All that remains is a bevelled sphere of bone and rotting flesh.

The ball skull plunges into the ocean and floats for a while. Occasionally a seagull lands on it picking out any remaining remnants of the brain. A cerebellum oyster for lunch. A cerebellum, what once functioned to coordinate muscle movement's, maintain posture, and balance the rest of the body now stables the salacious appetite of an infinitely hungry bird.

Hours later or maybe even decades (dependent upon the tide) it is swept back into land and covered in sand until it eventually turns into thousands of tiny pieces, indecipherable from the sand itself.

Children build sandcastles unaware of the violence such structures embody in every shape and form that they hold. The castles are built to be destroyed. To be flattened. To be crushed by gigantic feet and crushing fists. All the time the head is mixed up more into the earth until over a longer period it becomes the earth. It now moves at the speed of the earth, about a thousand miles an hour or 460 metres every single second. Around and around. Spinning towards oblivion.

This is not what I intended to write.

Fraser writes a final poem.

Bank account: minus £46.88

OWE

There's a plot-hole
Outside
Being filled
It is the worker's only task for the day
Ruskin has Oscar by the balls.
The state of it.
The state of you and you and the state.
Probably earned a whole pebble today.
For that paste
My grandmother convinced me the smell of fresh
Tarmac comes with health benefits
But still debt
Prevails
Demands
Drags
Nags
Pulls
Deadline tomorrow.

Bank account: minus £679.28

All of Fraser's fingers have fallen off, he can no
longer hold a pen, he can no longer type, he is
reduced to a limbless husk.

SOME TIME LATER THE ABSENCE OF MYTH

Denmark Hill, London, 21 February 2021

A dog just barked outside the window. Reluctantly, the patient is observing a brown brick wall adorned with a redundant half rusted grey satellite dish which has become the nest of a seagull that bellows and cries every morning before the sun rises. The patient closes his eyes.

The window to his right is framed by a wall with peeling off-white wallpaper. The patient can see no other walls.

Zero sits. Pondering what exactly the therapist meant by using the word 'spirituality'.

In front of the patient is a blue curtain hanging in full length and wrapping around the bed making a wall of blue to his left. The purpose of the curtain is to provide privacy for the patient. Shadows move fluidly on either side of the curtain all through the day and even in the dead of night.

The patient breathes in through the nose and out through the mouth just like the meditation app he was prescribed tells him to do. He is lying in the bed trying to write in vain. The patient is a fifty-five-kilogram bag of flesh, bone, and blood.

No words can come close to describing or

even giving the slightest indication of the pain that the patient feels and yet he tries to formulate them. The patient takes his pen and attempts to scribble some sentences into his small black notebook. The patient's hands tremble and vibrate as if affected by some earthly force. The patient's pen, however, has run out of ink. The patient makes indentations into the page and promises himself to rewrite the text in ink at a later date. He might even ask the nurse if he can borrow one of her pens. He knows she has two pens because she is fed up with some of the other nurses constantly stealing her pens.

Throbbing. The patient has a headache which at times makes his entire field of vision seem abstract and without form. The patient can't taste anything. The patient can hear everything.

The curtain divides the patient from the other patients of the ward. There are eight beds on the ward. The patient has been here for six days already. The patient hasn't had enough energy to leave his bed in two days. There are no clocks on the ward.

The patient forgot his phone charger. The patient keeps asking the nurses and the other patients if he can borrow their phone chargers. All his requests, polite, rude, indifferent, and demanding, go unnoticed.

The patient's hands, pale and skeletal rest gently on his bloated belly. His hands look like

they belong to a different being to the being that possesses the belly they rest upon.

All the patients are watching the same government propaganda news channel on their respective devices. There is a lagging creating an uncomfortable echo chamber. The lagging is caused by the strain on the Wi-Fi. The patient has tried on several previous occasions to ask the other patients to wear headphones, but his requests have been ignored. The patient has even complained to the nurses and doctors which visit him on the hour to administer his medication, but they have told him every time that it would be against the rights of the other patients to make them wear headphones.

As a result of the cacophony of recorded sounds emitting through tiny speakers, the patient manages to keep up with some of the news stories. Stories from the outside world. These stories make the patient even more sick.

The doctor interrupts by informing Zero that his intestine has multiple strictures, one of which has expanded with a blockage the width of this open book.

The sound is so much that it forces the patient to reach for the cardboard bowl sitting on the bedside table beside him. Before the patient vomits, he notices that the doctor has left a small knife in the bowl from an earlier procedure. He

removes the knife with his right hand and vomits into the cardboard container. Hot liquid pours from the patient's open mouth as he grasps the knife with all his strength.

Through the curtain in front of him, the patient can hear an elderly patient calling for the nurse. The elderly man calls for the nurse so many times that the patient begins to count. The patient counts that the elderly man calls for the nurse fifty-two times. The nurse eventually comes to the need of the elderly man. The nurse asks the elderly man what is wrong with him. The elderly man asks the nurse for tea and biscuits. The nurse reminds the man that he can't have tea and biscuits because he has an intestinal stricture which is due to be removed in surgery in the coming hours. The elderly man tells the nurse off and the nurse leaves.

The elderly man then turns to the middle-aged man beside him who is due to have his foot amputated as a result of complications caused by diabetes. The elderly man tells the middle-aged man that in the old days you could get all the tea and biscuits you wanted in an hospital. The middle-aged man says 'yes, yes' in approval of every word the dying elderly man says. Both men agree that tea and biscuits no longer being served in the ward is because of political correctness.

The patient pulls the thin hospital blanket

over his head to try and block out the sounds of the other patients.

The patient can tell the time by the type of blue light the shines through the curtains and by the smell of the bowel movements made by the other patients three times a day. The smells are worse in the evening after a day of consumed animal proteins release into the already poisonous atmosphere that surrounds him.

There is a sharp contour at the side of the bed post that the patient grasped with his hand earlier today. Why he felt the need to do so, that is, to hold tight to fight the pain is beyond his capacity to write or even think about at this moment in time. As the pain worsened, the patient gripped even harder.

Similarly, in the middle of the night, last night, the patient woke up to the feeling as if somebody had plunged a dagger into his stomach all the way through into his large and small intestine.

Sometimes the metal pierces through the patients flesh and tiny droplets of blood appear on the surface of his hand. The patient has then taken to using the anti-bacterial wipes by his bedside to clean the wound.

The patient knows that the nervous system takes in information through his senses, processes the information and triggers reactions, such as making his muscles move or causing him to feel pain. He once touched a

hot plate and reflexively pulled back his hand as his nerves simultaneously sent pain signals to his brain. His brain is inside his head.

The patient plunges the knife in his right hand into his throat almost without thinking and begins sawing at his neck. He pulls the knife back and forwards. Blood sprays all over his bed, onto the walls and onto the curtains. The patient screams as he saws back and forward and back and forward with the small knife until at last the head, the patient's head is separate from the rest of the body, his body. His body cut short.

The two hands of the patient take the still screaming head and throw it out the window. The head falls four stories down and smashes into the black tarmac of the empty car park. No one sees anything.

The headless body sits on the side of the bed covered in blood. The patient stretches his arms and legs.

A nurse interrupts the patient and pulls back the curtain. The nurse informs the patient that she is there to take his bloods and seems oblivious to the blood-drenched curtains and bed. However, the nurse does notice that the patient has lost his head. She tells the patient that she will send for someone to find him a new one. Then the nurse asks the patient to lie back on the bed. The patient remains seated at the side of the bed. Realising that the patient no longer has ears with which to listen

to the world, the nurse starts to take the patient's blood while he is seated on the side of the bed.

She tells the patient that she will come back to him later in the day to give him the results of test and will send someone down with a new head.

The headless patient then places his hands on his stomach and lies back to rest in the midday light that beams through the unwashed glass of the windows.

I sit and write this vision in the same bed as the headless patient.

Doctor?

The writer and all his characters vanish.

✕

