

The Society of Civil Service Authors

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Dickens Afternoon
21st April 2001

AGM
12th May 2001

PW Weekend
13th-15th July 2001

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EDITORIAL

Adrian Danson

In the Winter issue Howard Frost advised you of his resignation as Editor. I have taken on this role in addition to that of Treasurer, at least until a new Treasurer can be found.

“Author” advises SCSA members of meeting dates and venues, competition entry and result details, offers advice to members, publishes a variety of stories and poems and letters by members. So obviously its publication is important. When Iain McIntyre’s ill health forced him to give up his editorial work, it was imperative that someone should urgently take over the editorial role and Howard Frost was good enough to do so.

Unfortunately his other duties and interests prevented the accurate and timely production of our magazine. Nevertheless, the committee remains obliged to him for his efforts.

Though I gave 12 month’s notice of my wish to give up the role of Treasurer, my request for a replacement was twice omitted from “Author”. To date no one has volunteered and I can only appeal once more for someone to do so.

A computer eases the Treasurer’s task, but is not essential – indeed, I believe I am the first Treasurer to use one. The task requires a tidy mind, access to a bank and about an hour’s time a week. (Several hours some weeks, then nothing for a month or two.)

I hope to ensure that future issues of our magazine are published on time. Whether or not I succeed remains to be seen, but clearly it will be difficult for me to continue as Treasurer and to also edit the magazine. So I hope someone will offer to take over as Treasurer from April 2001

I trust that I will be deluged with work that members are seeking to have published, using a pen name if required. Of course SCSA news, member’s letters, winning competition entries, Gordon Gompers’ pearls of wisdom and your poems selected by Joyce Thornton, will continue to be given priority. (N.B. POETS – Joyce needs more!)

I look forward to hearing from you.

Adrian Danson

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Following Iain McIntyre's illness, we had great difficulty in finding a new editor, so we were extremely relieved when Howard Frost came forward to take over the reins. After all, "Author" is our lifeline to members, the only effective way of advising times and dates of forthcoming events and competitions. Unfortunately, Howard, being a busy man, could not produce the magazine to time: there were complaints, and knowing he was finding it hard to meet the demands of the job, he tendered his resignation. I thereupon contacted members of the Committee by post, and reluctantly it was agreed to accept the resignation and also Adrian Danson's offer to take over as Editor, while acting for the time being as Treasurer also.

Alan S. Watts

OBITUARY

I regret to report the death late last year of Victor Negus Moore, our Vice-Chairman. He was not only a long time member of the Society and reliable contributor in committee, but was also a talented writer and poet. In a future issue of "Author" I hope to include a more complete obituary, in recognition of his place in our history and the sad loss which many of us feel. – Ed

LETTERS

I would like to express my grief, widely shared, at the sad news of the demise of Victor Negus Moore. Although Victor and I were often at variance, I always admired him tremendously. Indeed the fact that we were often going at each other hammer and tongs only indicated our mutual respect. We would never have entered into dispute at all if we did not regard the other, to quote from Jane Austen, as meriting the compliment of rational opposition.

He was a very generous man and a perfect gentleman. If he was ever in the wrong he had the courage to admit it. We shall not see his like again.

Gordon Gompers.

COMPETITIONS

The W F & F G Froud Memorial Competition.

There were 21 entries to this autobiography competition. Entries were divided amongst several judges. Each judge selected what they considered to be the best 2 and these were forwarded to Val Whitmarsh for the final selection. Her report follows.

The winners are as follows:

First Prize £100 *I'll tell you when you are older*, by Elvira Bridges of Harrow,

Second prize £30 *The Light of Other Days*, by Rosemarie Heggie of Tunbridge Wells,

Third Prize £20 *A Soldier's Tale*, by Iain McIntyre of Ardgay (Our esteemed ex-Ed).

Runners-up (in no particular order):

Of Pleasure and Pain, by Roger Woodcock of Mansfield,

A Stockingers Lad, by Derek Taylor of North Hykham,

Where They Play Tennis, by Joan Hykin of Wing in Rutland and

Village Where a Lion Roared, by James Lancaster of Chorley.

In our efforts to ensure we do not have to increase annual subscriptions, the committee accepted the Treasurer's recommendation that the prize money for 2001 shall be as follows:

Lewis Wright Short Story Competition:

1st prize £75, 2nd prize £50 & 5 x 3rd prizes of £5.

Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition:

1st prize £50, 2nd prize £30 & 3rd prize £15.

Vincent Brennan Travel Article Competition:

1st prize £30, 2nd prize £20 & 3rd prize £10.

Victoria Neilson Gattey & George Farley prizes are paid by sponsors and SCSA will pay competition expenses, so these remain unchanged.

W F and F G Froud Memorial Competition 2000

Judge's Report

It was extremely difficult to choose a winner from the nine finalists short-listed by the panel of readers, and the first and second entries were a mere whisker apart. What was required were any two chapters from an autobiography.

An autobiography needs to be approached in the same way as a novel: plan what you are going to say, and write a preliminary synopsis; identify the highs and the lows, and write your heart out about those events. This will make the story of your life interesting and entertaining, and keep the pages turning, whether you are writing a book for publication or a memoir for your family.

All the entries were nicely presented and well written with the minimum of spelling and punctuation errors. There was a tendency for some second chapters to become free-standing tales in their own right, moving away from 'auto' to 'biography'. The three winners all managed to retain their own selves through both chapters.

All three were set around the Second World War. The winner, *I'll Tell You When You're Older*, jumped off the page to take first prize. There was a real sense of personality, and community in war time. What was left untold about unhappy events made what was shown become even more powerful; there was also humour to lighten the starkness of Swansea bombed, and I was left with a desire to know what came next. *The Light of Other Days* contrasts the golden warmth of a close family with the uncertainty of evacuation, but then the happiness and relief of reunion is snatched away in tragedy. It is no easy matter to expose yourself to a stranger and I felt it was a privilege to be allowed to share these memories.

A Soldier's Tale is the other side of the coin of war: the first two little girls give way to the men, mud and bullets. A close-packed piece, full of detail and with excellent use of dialogue, and with all the traditional good humour of the British Tommy.

Val Whitmarsh

Our congratulations to Pamela Shields on the publication of her fascinating book, “Essential Islington”. “What makes Islington so special,” says the synopsis. Well the sub-title, “From Boadicea to Blair” gives a clue. For anyone interested in buying a copy, let me know and I will provide details. – Ed

Treasurer’s Note:

SCSA is aware that some members have very tight budgets, such that the annual SCSA subscription has to be given second thoughts.

I have therefore tried to keep all costs and thus subscriptions to the minimum. One unfortunate consequence has been the reduced number of issues of “Author”, but this was considered preferable to another increase in subscriptions.

Also, we no longer send out the first issue of the new year to those who have not paid their renewal fee. Sending copies to those who subsequently do not renew their membership would cost us about £200, a sum we can ill afford.

In these circumstances I must express gratitude to those who have contributed “a little extra” when making their renewal payment. I must also thank those who apologise for making a late payment when we are still in January, contrasting with one renewal made without explanation in August 2000.

If all of this sounds rather mean, may I mention that no honoraria was paid last year and is unlikely to be paid again this year.

But fear not – we will survive.

Adrian Danson

MARKET INFORMATION

Beyond Our Shores

By Gordon E Gompers

It might seem unjust that members who write much better than I do fail to place more material. Others write better, I am undoubtedly better at marketing. When I got my first acceptance I felt that I was making progress: when I first cross water I felt that I was making even greater progress.

The first overseas publication I made was *Agfa Gevaert* on a tape recording process I had thought out. It was all in German. I had discovered this market by reading the printed matter at my local tape recording shop. Another German trade paper, *BMBH News*, published a piece on theatrical audio engineering.

I learnt about the American directory *Writers' Market* from the *Writers' & Artists' Year Book* and sold a similar piece to DRAMATICS, the American equivalent to our *Amateur Stage*. My interest in chamber music and the recorder in particular enabled me to sell to various American music magazines. Other overseas successes have been with Channel Island publications.

You will notice that all these successes were to do with practical writing. I have never placed overseas any poetry and fiction. This in spite of the fact that I had plenty published by the home market. So my advice to anyone interested in overseas is to concentrate on one's hobbies or practical work experience.

It is often stressed that before sending off material one should write to the editor first: before sending material to an overseas editor this is imperative. British qualifications are well respected by Americans. Thus the fact that I was the Accredited Music Critic of Morley College was definitely helpful.

Always use International Reply Coupons, whether for letters or manuscripts. Special care should be taken with photographs. I use cardboard backed envelopes for glossies. On the outside of envelopes I

write in red: DO NOT BEND – Photographs. I send transparencies in a jiffy bag.

Travel writers should be aware of that rich seam in-flights. One will find their addresses in the Overseas Volume of Willings Press Guide.



IF A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS...

Then why not use your camera as well as your pen?

Asks ex Photo-journalist Bernard Stanley.

Back in nineteen hundred and mind your own business my dad bought me my first camera. It was so old I think the instructions were written in Latin - but I was so proud of it. I snooped around photographing everything and anyone. Nothing was safe from my prying lens. And

then the event that changed my life happened.

I was walking down our High Street when a little child ran out of a shop onto the road and straight into the path of an on-coming car. The car screeched to a halt inches away from the child who had now fallen.

The frantic mother rushed out of the shop and scooped the frightened child into her arms and my camera went *click*. It turned out that mother was a council bigwig and the local paper bought the photograph for the princely sum of £3.00 - which was a lot of money in those days.

I was so chuffed when I saw my first photograph in print that I could hardly get my head through my door that night. To this day I still get a kick out of having a photo published.

Eventually I realised that photographs were no good on their own. Editors needed a tight, fact filled report to go with the picture. So I trained myself to write the stories to go with the photos.

And you could do the same in reverse. Use the interest in writing that you obviously have in conjunction with a camera and it will open up a whole new world of interesting markets.

With today's technology almost any camera will give good enough picture quality for newspaper reproduction - all that is needed is a bit of care and attention by you before you press the button.

That world famous photo scoop that we all dream off could happen.

I would like to develop this (pardon the pun) over future issues if enough readers (and Adrian) are interested. My address is on page 1 or e-mail me at csauthor@hotmail.com

Bernard Stanley

POETRY WORKSHOP PAGE

by Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA

Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

PW 2001

The date of the Poetry Workshop Weekend was given incorrectly in both the last issue of The Author and in the Winter Newsletter. Please note that it should be **13-15 July**. The cost will be in the region of £118 per person, which includes full board and conference facilities. Contact Mike Boland, at the address above, for an application form. Provisional bookings can be accepted until the full cost is known. Payment can be made by deposit of £30, with the balance due by the end of next May, or by instalments by prior arrangement with the Treasurer.

WAVES 2001

Deadline for submissions for this year's edition of WAVES is 31 March 2001. Contributions (from PW members only) are invited on the usual basis i.e. no more than 3 poems, max 40 lines. Successful contributors will be asked to buy six copies (approx £2 per copy) to cover costs. Poems to Bill Douglas, 47 Walkerston Drive, Largs, Ayrshire KA30 8EP

Bill Barnes Poetry Competition

The 2000 competition was won by **Joyce Thornton**, with **Margaret Pelling** taking the second prize. **Barbara Dickinson** and **Barbara Stewart** shared third place.

Details of the 2001 competition will be given in the Spring Newsletter.

Subscriptions

Subscription fees for 2001 became due in January. The cost of membership to the Poetry Workshop remains unchanged yet again at £3 for Society members. For this small sum, membership of the Poetry Workshop gives you:

- three lively Newsletters each year, expanding to four in 2001
- the chance of publication in "Waves"
- access to Postal folios
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Competition
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at Birmingham University

If anyone is interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact Mike Boland at the above address, who will be pleased to provide further details.

PW Dates

31 March 2001	Closing Date, WAVES submissions
30 April 2001	Spring Newsletter
13-15 July 2001	PW Weekend
30 September 2001	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2001	Closing date, Bill Barnes Competition

New Year Party 2001

Despite frosty weather, sickness and transport problems, the party went ahead. We missed our Chairman Alan Watts and his very supportive wife Marjorie who was ill; Joan Hykin was also unable to make it. Members present were stunned to hear of the sudden death of Vice Chairman Victor Negus Moore on the 10th of December in Orpington Hospital. He will be sadly missed by all. A card was signed by all present to send to his daughter.

Roy Froud had his "*Moment of Glory*" when he presented the prizes of the W.F and Froud competition, which he had sponsored in memory of his parents.

First prize of £100 went to a delighted Elvira Bridges, Rosemary Heggie from Tunbridge Wells received second prize of £30 Iain McIntyre won third prize of £20 unfortunately he was unable to be present but sent his good wishes to all members.

The New Year competition was held with the theme "*Celebration*". First prizes of Folio books were awarded to Gordon Gompers for his short story and to Terry Austin for his poem. The books this year were, "The Best of Dorothy Parker" and "The Pick of Punch".

Second prizes for poetry was won by Terry Austin and to Ethel Corduff for a short story.

Gordon Gompers who despite a recent broken leg managed to get to the Civil Service Club on crutches was given a special prize for his support over the years and particularly for his regular helpful column. Members came from London, Middlesex, Kent, Milton Keynes and Bournemouth. We were pleased to meet new member Rod Burns from Streatham and his charming American wife Caroline.



Tidiness is a virtue they say,
So I collected birds of prey
In a plastic bag of colours gay,
But they pecked holes, to my dismay,
And quite untidily flew away.

Adrian Danson

POETRY PAGES
Editor Joyce Thornton

WHAT I KNOW

Albert Thornton

I know that fluorescent lights are harmful.
It is better to have clean spectacles.
There are few spectacular epoch making occurrences.
There is a great difference between
the one and the other.
A straight line is said to be the shortest distance.
Any distance may be measured using a piece of string,
provided it is long enough.

I know that many people get strung up about little things.
Little things often carry big messages.
There is a limit to the weight of groceries
Which can be carried in a Tesco carrier bag.
there are always old bags
lying around at each check-out.
Lying about the amount of stuff nicked from Tesco
does not hold up in court.

I know that the courtship of birds is a delight to watch.
Faucalt's Pendulum cannot be used
in a wrist watch,
a pendulum swings with a precise rhythm.
We do not pronounce "Swinging on a star"
like the Americans.
The British Film Industry is owned by the Yanks.
Yanking out teeth can be painful.
Pain can be measured.

I know that pain cannot be measured
by using a piece of string.
When words are strung together
they may be prose.
Sometimes words
strung together may be poetry.
Words cannot be worn around the neck.
If you are strung up by the neck,
you're dead.

THE KING

Terry Austin

A monarch stands alone,
amid darkened hills
nestling between the three
shires.

His loyal retinue waits
in silence.

To his right
three knights are gathered close
in furtive posture.

The king faces
eastwards
as the rays of dawn
strike him,
his long shadow
spreads to the countless host
beyond,
diviners ply their craft,
knowing it is the time
of solstice
among the rollright
stones.

SPITFIRE

Terence Rickson

Upturned Air Show faces,
then unborn,
held by the roar of a Merlin engine,
carry a folk memory;
the hop-fields, woods and orchards
of the Weald, that glorious summer.

In quiet Kentish churchyards
still, white stone crosses,
“Pilot Officer
killed in action,
aged 19.”

The classic shape,
beautiful, deadly,
swings in an arc
and climbs towards the sun.

William Wood

“Do you know where we are?” asked Anne in the sudden silence. Her finger pressed into the centre folds of the tattered map in her lap. Her companion opened the door of the Land Rover to let in more air.

“About half way, I guess.”

“I mean do you know *where* we are?” She wanted to share her discovery but Larry chose not to hear the childish delight in her voice.

“India.”

“Yes, but where in India? Larry ...”

“About half way down, I guess.” He was tired of this dreamy, impractical English girl in her flimsy, Laura Ashley cotton frocks.

“Exactly.”

He swung his legs out of the cab and stepped out on to the burning, stone road. He nodded back at her. “If we’re not, we’ll never make it in time.”

Anne dropped down on her side and came round to him, spreading the map wide, trying to make herself clear. “Look, Larry, we are at the geographical centre of India.”

He was unimpressed. “Too bleeding hot, wherever it is. I only hope the clutch lasts out to Madras.”

Anne gave up on him, took her woven, Greek shoulder bag from the Land Rover and went to sit in the shade of some smooth boulders. There she took out her diary and began to write in pencil.

Dear you, it is mid-day in the middle of India. I am sitting on the Tank Bund. Bund is what they call the dam at the end of these reservoirs, these tanks. We’ve been driving all day. It’s nice to get out of the Land Rover to stretch your legs.

She glanced up. Larry had opened up the bonnet of the vehicle. He could never relax. With a sigh she put down her diary and made one more attempt to explain the significance of their position.

“Nagpur. See, we’re just outside Nagpur.”

“If you can trust that map.”

Anne gave up. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter does it?”

“Matter?” He wiped an oily palm on his unwashed khaki shorts and brushed pearls of sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

“Where we are. To you?”

“Of course it matters, Anne. We’ve got a schedule to keep up. I sometimes wonder if you realise that.”

“It’s not the temple at the end of the road but the shrines along the way that make a journey worth while, Larry. Not me. Rabindranath Tagore.”

“Yes, well maybe he had an air-conditioned car.”

“There were no cars in those days.”

“Yes? And you say I do not live enough in the present. Well, I’m in the present now and it’s 1965. I’ve driven 8000 miles. Another 800 and we’ll be in Madras. If we make it that is. And if we miss the boat to Singapore, you know where we are? Up the creek. Doesn’t matter! Of course it bloody matters.”

“There’ll be another boat.”

“Next month. And where’s the money coming from? We’ve got to live.”

Anne shrugged and returned to her rock. If only Larry would relax a bit, that was all she asked. She picked up her diary, her consolation, and wrote,

A breeze is blowing across the water, over the Lily Pads. Just enough breeze to evaporate the sweat on my face, on my arms. Just now a lorry bumped and clattered by, crawling like a lizard along Tank Bund Road. The way we came. I can still smell the diesel. But the dust is settling. It’s so still, so quiet again. All is quiet and green. The stillness is broken only by the sound of wet clothes beaten on a rock at the lake side. And Larry tinkering. That man has to be tinkering with the engine again!

“Call that living?” she shouted over to him in exasperation. He slammed down the bonnet and came over to her.

“Listen, what the hell’s got into you?”

“Nothing.”

“We can go back if you like. We’re only halfway.” He was shaking and she recognised, not for the first time, that his rage masked deep anxiety. “We’ve got a month before the snows return over there. A month to get back into Europe.” It was the first time he had suggested turning back, however, and now it was too late even to consider the idea.

“No thank you. I’m not going over the Kyber Pass again.” She shuddered. “We were lucky not to be killed,” she said taking his hand and drawing him to sit beside her. He sank down and rubbed his bronzed face in his big hands.

“Yes, only the Turks were worse. Ah, they’re all bandits.”

“India’s different. I don’t know what it is about it.”

“You’re different you mean. I don’t know what the hell’s got into you.”

“Are you so sure it’s me? Look at yourself, Larry. You are so tense, so hunched up. You want to take it easy for a while.”

“I’m hunched up because I’ve been driving over dirt roads and potholes for weeks.”

“So take time out. Let’s rest a while.” Her voice was softer now and Larry gave in.

“I guess you’re right. Yeah, I’ll take a spell.” He eased his stocky back into the smooth rocks, pulled his hat over his face and without a further word fell into a snooze. A few weeks back, a month, Anne would have smiled at him fondly, stroked the hairs on his legs perhaps. Now she barely gave him a second look, but returned to her diary.

He hasn’t stopped beating once. The rhythm has not been broken. A little dhobi man squatting on the rock beating, thudding, beating. Ripples radiate from him, he’s sending out waves at regular intervals across the green water. The splashes from the clothing beaten on the rock spread and fall into his self made ring. The air pulses to the dull thud, smack, thud.

Pencil poised over her exercise book Alice watched as though hypnotised. Her trance was broken when suddenly Larry jerked out of his doze like a dog from a dream. He looked about him as though lost and barked,

“Are you ready?”

“What’s the rush?”

“We’ve got a boat to catch. Remember?”

“There’s always a boat to catch or a monsoon to miss.”

“Got to be practical.” He rose to his feet, stamped his leather boots, raising the white dust.

“You’re certainly practical.”

“Look, you’ll be all right in the morning,” he pleaded. There he was again, blaming her for his own malaise.

“I am all right.” One day her patience would snap. But she was shrewd enough to understand that until they got to a port or city, she needed him as much as he needed her. If he still did.

“It’s probably the heat or the time of the month or something,” he said, trying to explain to himself her detached behaviour, her loss of purpose.

“I’m all right. Now!” she screamed.

“Good night’s sleep does wonders for the temper.”

“I’m not in a temper.”

“Just a mood, I know. Well listen,” he said in a conciliatory voice, “I’m going to have another go at that clutch.”

She knew he was making an effort at compromise, but all she could say was, “It’ll last.”

“Sooner repair it here where there’s a bit of shade than in some glowing red hot desert.”

“It’s not all deserts.”

“According to your map there’s a fair bit. Besides this is not such a bad spot.”

“You don’t say!” She had intended sarcasm but instead sounded surprised that at last he was noticing his surroundings. He looked round.

“Beaut breeze.”

“Keeps the bloody mossies away at any rate,” she said, imitating his Australian accent.

“Look at those rocks,” he said as he walked back to the Land Rover. Anne relaxed, knowing the clutch would keep him happy — she considered the word — busy perhaps, for some time. She shifted her position and continued her diary.

Those are water buffaloes, not rocks, lying submerged in the green slime. Occasionally a wet flank, more like fish than beast, is exposed, glints, as they search the bottom for grass or weed. You can predict when the head will surface from the bubbles. Most are rigidly, blissfully motionless in the tepid water, with just their nostrils pointing vertically from the water’s oily skin. I envy them. It is so hot when the breeze drops, so hot here on the tank bund and the smell of dung and dirt rises in the heat. A fish jumps from the water. Jumps from its cauldron, prefers to fall back into it away from the mid-day fire.

It was too hot to continue. Anne put her diary down again and took a little walk along the bund. The faint breeze over the water, drying the sweat on her limbs, made her more comfortable, but it was relaxing rather than bracing. She soon returned to her lair in the boulders.

She was startled from her day dreams by Larry’s voice. “Where are we going?” he was asking her. Dazed and uncomprehending she sat up, gathering her skirt round her knees. She answered harshly, “Jeez, you’re not starting off again are you?”

“Where?” he persisted, like a child, she thought, or a madman. She told him slowly,

“We’re going to Australia. We coming from London, England. If you’ve forgotten, just look at the route we’ve painted on the side of the Land Rover.”

“Which reminds me, you’ve not painted in the last leg of the journey yet.”

“There’s time.”

“Look Anne, you’ve been great. I admit, we’ve had our fair share of tricky moments. And you were just great. Don’t give up now. Don’t let it get you down.”

“We’re half way,” she repeated, trying again to still his panic, but all he could see was a girl dulled by apathy, a passenger no longer a true companion.

“Sure. In a month we’ll be in Perth. We could get across the Nullabor, across to Sydney even, in five days if we pushed on.”

“And then?” To him the answer was obvious. To her it was what she dreaded most.

“Then we’ll be there,” he said. “We’ll have made it. And this will be behind us.”

“Just give me a few more moments, will you?”

“Oh no, not that bloody diary again!”

Funny how you get used to the silence. And in the silence itself you identify sounds. There must be a village somewhere behind us. Behind that ridge of fresher, greener green, when the breeze falls, the cackle of uncountable cocks, a dawn chorus quite out of place and time. At the roadside, as at roadsides the world over, sparrows chirrup with occasional cheerfulness. The tank is surrounded by gently undulating, green hills covered in rough barked eucalyptus trees and furry, untidy tamarinds. And in those woods you can hear the bleat of goats. You can hear the small wooden wheels of that bullock cart grating on the stones, the cry of a man to his cows on the far shore, urging them down to the water. Funny how cows and buffaloes don’t mix. Don’t bathe together. Observe their own caste.

Over at the Land Rover Larry was packing away his tools, re-arranging the baggage, killing his impatience to move on. As she re-joined him she called, in an attempt to be cheerful, “Isn’t half way enough?”

“You’re crazy.”

“Why?”

“Half way’s only half way. Jeez!”

But Anne could not quite turn her thoughts from what she had so recently written or intended to write:

The old man gave me quite a fright. He’s sitting behind a tree quite close. I smelt the beedie first, sweet like marijuana. Motionless as a heron fishing, and as poised this old, dirty peasant drawing on his weed. And he’s been sitting there, he’s been watching us all the time.

“You know, I don’t think I will bother about the clutch.”

“No? I thought that’s what you had been doing all this time.”

“Couldn’t be bothered. I’ll fix it when it busts.”

“Even if it busts in red-hot desert?” she mocked.

“So long as we’ve got food and water. No. I think I’ll take the afternoon off.”

“Well then, perhaps we could walk round this lake. I think there must be a village over that hill.” It would be like old times, like the early days, exploring together, sharing the wonder and the novelty: walking hand in hand.

Larry considered her suggestion, but all his insecurity rushed to fill the pause. “If only it weren’t for that boat. If we miss the boat, then we’ve got to wait a month.”

“We’ll manage.” She took his hand for the second time that afternoon.

“No, better press on. Tell you what, if we press on now, if we make Madras in good time, we’ll find us a beach somewhere. How about that? A nice, quiet beach. All right?” She knew they wouldn’t. Their time had passed. She sighed her acquiescence.

“All right. If it’ll make you happy.”

“It’s you I’m thinking of. Okay?”

“I’ve stowed the gear. What did you say this place was called?”

“Nagpur. Just outside of.”

“Pretty spot.”

“Yes.”

“Did you take a photo?”

“Didn’t have time.”

Before she climbed in beside him, she took the stained exercise book out of her shoulder bag one last time and opened it flat on the baking bonnet of the Land Rover. Ignoring Larry’s gesticulations she completed, in her slow and deliberate way, the final paragraph of her diary.

Motionless as a heron fishing, and as poised this old, dirty peasant drawing on his weed. And he was sitting there, sitting watching us all the time.



PHOBIA

Elvira Bridges

Roy Mottram stood beside his wife on the cliffs overlooking the bay. The view was fantastic, soft purple hills in the distance, the cerulean sea, calm with barely a ripple.

Heather clung to his hand and said “Can’t we go now?”

Roy scarcely glanced at her, “You can’t mean that, look, it’s beautiful.”

“I can’t look. You know I can’t, I’ve got my eyes shut.”

A sudden movement as Roy held her arm tightly made Heather gasp.

“What’s the matter, dear? Did you think I was going to push you?”

“For God’s sake, Roy, stop it. You’re frightening me. You know I can’t stand heights. Why did you bring me here?”

Roy’s mind went back to her nagging earlier in the week.

*

“Roy! Why don’t you take me out somewhere. I’m sick of it here every day, hardly ever going anywhere. I’m bored.” Heather Mottram’s voice had had the familiar whine that drove him mad.

“You always complain if I do.” Roy had replied, “Look at the last time we went out on a that nice trip, you grumbled all the way there and all the way back.”

“Yes but you know I can’t stand ...

Roy did what he usually did ... he’d ignored her grumbling, he’d switched off, his mind wandering. Heather’s voice was flat, on one note. Quiet, utterly boring and easy to ignore. Since their children had gone their separate ways she’d become worse, insular, completely wrapped up in herself. He’d glanced up, nodded as he usually did to satisfy his wife and dreamed on.

Startled at the change in Heather’s tone he’d jumped, the ash spilling from his cigarette down his jumper as she’d shouted, “Roy. ROY!”

“What?”

“Are you listening to me?”

“Course I am.”

Heather didn’t miss the sarcasm in his voice but chose to ignore it. “Can’t we go away. We never have a good holiday. We could go abroad. France

would be nice,” she cleared her throat, “or even somewhere hot, say Florida, they say it’s ...”

“Florida! You must be joking. You ARE joking aren’t you?” Roy had stared with disbelief at his wife. “Where the hell do you think I’m getting that kind of money from?” His tone changed,

“Unless we use your ...”

“Oh no, don’t even think about it. I’m not using the little money my father left me.”

“Little? You know he was loaded, there’d be plenty for a really good holiday ...” He gave his wife a sidelong glance, “We might be able to go to Flo...”

Heather cut him short, “No way.” She’d continued, “What about the insurance ... that policy of yours is due out soon, isn’t it?”

Roy thought quickly. He’d got plans for that lump sum and it didn’t include his wife. He sidled up to her, “I was going to surprise you, darling.”

Heather hadn’t been married to Roy for 14 years without recognising when he was lying.

“Oh yes, surprise me with what?”

“Don’t be silly, if I told you that it wouldn’t be a surprise, now would it?”

*

The weather was changing, becoming cloudy. Roy was brought back to the present as he heard Heather sobbing.

“Please, p... please let’s go home.”

“No. I read somewhere that you should face your fear.” His tone changed, “You are scared of looking down aren’t you? Well, I’ve got you, open your eyes, go on, the view is wonderful.”

“Please Roy, I don’t want to, I really can’t. Let’s just go back to the car and drive along the coast road. We can see all the ...”

Her husband stopped her with a quick move at her back.

“What ... what are you doing?” Her voice rose hysterically.

Roy laughed, “You did think I was going to push you, didn’t you?”

Heather opened her eyes and as she looked at her husband she saw an expression unlike any she’d seen before. “Why are you doing this? Roy, answer me.”

The temptation to tell her how much he despised her came to the front of his mind but he'd always been a coward and said instead, "I told you, I want you to face your fear, your phobia." Roy planted his feet firmly on the loose earth at the top of the cliff and placed both his hands in the centre of his wife's back.

"Roy ... What ..." Her words ended in a scream.

*

A group of scouts gathered around, their Alsatian dog barking excitedly.

Their leader, an earnest young man, leaned over the cliff edge holding on to Heather who'd fallen a few feet and was caught on a tree stump. "Give me a hand here lads, looks as if she's got a nasty head injury." He took his mobile from his belt and dialled 999. "Steve you hang on to her."

"OK. Dave, I've got her." He shouted to the dog, "Prince, get away."

The scout master turned to Roy who stood shaking violently, "What happened? Lose her footing did she? Quite treacherous on the edge here." He touched Roy's arm sympathetically. "I say, are you OK? You're as white as a sheet, don't worry, she'll be fine, I'm sure."

Dave turned to the others, "Watch her Steve, don't let her slip. I think we can lift her up if we're careful." He pushed the dog away, "Shut up Prince, stop making that racket."

A noise behind him made him turn his head. "Get off. Get that animal off me." Roy whimpered, "I'm terrified of dogs. Please get him off me."

Dave said kindly, "It's OK, he won't hurt you, he's barely more than a pup. He's just playing..."

His voice trailed off as Roy, stepping back, in an effort to escape the dog, lost his footing and crashed to the rocks below.

*

Heather struggled up, with the help of the boys and stared down at her husband's body.

"Roy! Roy?" Her voice cracked into muffled laughter.

The scouts looked at one another, Dave whispered to Steve, "Poor woman. She's hysterical!"

Heather put her hand to her mouth, turned to the Alsatian and said softly, "Good dog!"

FROM THE ENDS OF TOWN

Alan S. Watts

He lives in the small pink cottage at the end of the village. I am not sure what his name is, and I have never spoken to him. But he frightened me. Whenever I saw him coming down the street — and with his white curling hair and his thick spectacles he was unmistakable — I got out of his way. I'd rather not have confronted him. As I say, he frightened me.

Fortunately my own house was at the far end of the street, well away from him. You can't miss the place because it was and is the largest house for miles — and the oldest. Some people are very critical of it. I've heard all sorts of remarks made to the agent when he has been showing it to possible summer tenants. "Too dark," one woman told him. "Much too creaky in every floorboard," said another. "I'd soon get lost in all these weird rooms," said yet another.

It's very surprising what excuses people find. Now, I lived in the house for years, and to me it's the cosiest place I've ever been in.

Yet despite all the criticisms, there were always people quite happy to take the place for the summer. It's very suitable for a family. And especially for a family with a number of children, perhaps with cousins and school-friends who are invited to share a vacation with them. It's wonderful what a difference such a family can make to the place when all the bedrooms are occupied, and every one of the old carved chairs around the big dining-table has been allocated. That's what I liked to see. And then, there can be so much fun in the house — youngsters running up and down stairs, games being played in the parlour, the older ones gossiping in the state drawing-room.

At such times, my accommodation was in the attic, and I kept as quiet as possible and tried not to disturb anyone. But you can't ignore what is going on, or fail to overhear certain conversations and snatches of talk. And I happened one night to overhear a very comical story, one of the funniest I have ever chanced to hear. It came back into my mind as I was lying in bed that night — about midnight, I should think, because I heard the old grandfather clock striking down in the hall. It was such a comical story that I had to laugh as I recalled it. But, mind you, I had no intention of laughing aloud. That was accidental.

At breakfast the following morning, it was clear that very little stir had been caused by my lapse. The previous day had been a hectic one and most of my guests (I used to call them ‘my guests’) had been in bed by eleven and asleep almost immediately. Only Jack — he was the teenage son of the head of the family — made any comment at all.

“What did you make of that queer sound about midnight?” he asked.

“What queer sound?” was the general response.

“Like a demoniac laugh,” said Jack, and gave a chilling imitation.

“Well, perhaps I did hear something,” said one of the girls.

“Not a noise like that, though,” said her mother. “It was probably air in the water-pipes.”

“Do water-pipes run in the loft?” Jack wanted to know. “Because that’s where the sound came from.”

Interest in the matter seemed to evaporate with the arrival of fried bacon and eggs from the kitchen and their distribution.

It was two evenings later when Jack revived the topic.

“I say,” he began, with a typical schoolboy opening. “What d’you think I heard down in the village today?”

There was a general yawn from his companions. I got the impression that Jack would grow up to be the club bore.

“Well. What did you hear?” someone had the temerity to ask him.

“This house is *haunted!*”

“Oh, sure! Not a doubt of it.”

But interest had shifted to what was on the TV that evening. It was left to his sister to make the comment which I found to be really pertinent.

“Haunted!” she said. “That would be fun.”

So at midnight, as the clock was striking, I gave another laugh, trying to imitate Jack’s laugh, but not managing it very well.

There was more interest shown over breakfast because several of them had heard me.

“Where d’you think it comes from?” one of them asked.

“The top of the house,” said Jack. “I know. I’ve heard it twice.”

“What’s up at the top of the house?” some one enquired.

“Dunno. Never been to see.”

“I can’t believe it’s ghost,” said a boy disbeliever.

“It could be,” said a girl believer.

“I hope not,” said her friend, who wasn’t sure and didn’t like to face unpleasant possibilities.

“It’s fun though,” said Jack. “A holiday in a haunted house! That’s a real experience.”

He was nothing if not a practical ghost-hunter. I heard him clumping up the stairs in his boots while I was lying in bed that morning. Why he didn’t come in his slippers, I don’t know. The noise he made would have scared most ghosts off. He peered all round my attic, turned my bed upside down, drew his finger along the dust on the window-ledge, and tapped suspiciously on the panels of the little room, before investigating the adjoining one and finally climbing up into the loft, where, to his mother’s annoyance, he got very dirty indeed.

He was very disappointed with his psychic researches, and suffered from the scorn of his companions. Eventually he reluctantly agreed that any strange noises he had heard must have been caused by purely natural and scientifically explicable causes. But I could tell he was not really happy at having to bow to this admission.

So I determined to enable him to vindicate himself. I would put on an extra good show, and there would be no chance for anyone to say it was caused by air in the water-pipes, creaking stairboards, or any of the other reasons which the sceptics had advanced.

As usual I waited until the clock was striking midnight, and then off I set to call on all the bedrooms. One after the other, I slammed all the bedroom doors. There was real consternation.

“What’s happening? What’s going on? Was that you, Jimmy? What’s the big idea? Is this someone’s notion of a joke?”

And because it was my notion, I gave one of my special laughs, and set off right away to open all the windows and ensure that the breeze (which was brisk that night) would make all the curtains billow out into the rooms. And with this done, and all the guests in commotion, I slipped upstairs and into bed.

Lying there, I knew I had overdone it. I foresaw the consequences, and I began to regret.

Breakfast was not the usual happy meal. There were disputes between rival groups. Not friendly disputes, but rather bitter ones.

“Come off it, Jack. Don’t talk rot.”

“I’m not talking rot. You saw what happened last night.”

“Yes, but because doors slam and curtains blow out doesn’t mean —”

“Well, what does it mean? Can you explain it?”

“No, and I’m not going to try until we get some scientists up here.”

“Scientists!” scoffed Jack. “All the village knows this place is haunted — and you’ve see the proof. What more d’you need?”

“I’m told it’s a poltergeist,” said his mother, with the air of having solved everything now a name could be put to it.

“No doubt,” said Jack. “And what’s a poltergeist, but a ghost?”

“Anyhow,” said his mother, “there’s a gentleman who lives in that little pink cottage at the other end of the village, and he is coming to see what he can do about it.”

“I can’t see him doing very much,” said Jack, but at his mother’s words, my heart sank.

The man came. I saw his curiously billowing white hair — beautiful hair really, but not beautiful to me — and his large spectacles, and I wondered where I could hide. But there was nowhere, of course. I had done myself a dreadful injury, and I would never again be able to lie comfortably abed. There was nothing I could do, and I had been warned he was an exorcist. I just had to abide the consequences.

He called me. He came up the stairs slowly, calling and calling, persistently, with all that dreadful authority, until in the end I had to answer him. It was over then. He spoke to me. He knew my name. He ordered me to go. There was no disobeying him. So with a shriek and another shriek, I flew out of the house, and round the village and down the hill and back to Hell where I had come from.



THE PRODIGAL

Adrian Fry

I've been back home from University three days now, and we're still not having The Row.

It's five o'clock. We're sitting in the front room, disinterestedly watching some interminable television word game that has evidently become a major fixture in my parents' lives in my absence

At the now familiar synthesized plink plonk of the programme's closing theme, Dad goes out into the hall and collects the sodden evening paper from the front door mat.

Mum pours us all cups of sweet, milky tea. She tells him the tea is ready as he settles in his armchair to read the paper. He won't come up to the table and drink the tea until it's cold, at which point he'll complain, "Pah! It's ruddy freezing!" as if the same thing didn't happen every night of his week. But she won't force the issue early enough to make any difference because she knows how much he hates being interrupted while reading the evening paper.

I notice, for the umpteenth time since my return, how small the house is.

"Well I'll be damned!" he exclaims from behind what is very much *his* paper.

"What?" she asks.

"Old Ron," he says, by way of an explanation.

"Ron?" she asks. "Ron who?"

"You know, *Ron*. Old Ron. We only know one Old Ron."

"Ron Wallace, you mean?" she hazards.

"Ron Wallace? He's not old. Not *that* old, anyway. Blimey, what on Earth made you think I meant Ron Wallace? Next time I see him up the club, I'll tell him you think he's old. He'll like that, Ron will."

I sip my tea, preferring coffee.

“You don’t mean Ron that used to work on the railways? That one who used to carry a tube from out the middle of a toilet roll with a couple of fivers wrapped round it to make it look like he carried a lot of money.”

“Who are you on about now?” he says.

“Ron,” she replies, exasperated emphasis not clarifying the matter.

“Ron didn’t carry an old toilet roll about with him, for God’s sake. Ron wouldn’t have done a thing like that if you’d paid him to. You’re obviously thinking of someone else, God knows who.”

“Look, I know the Ron *I’m* thinking of. Who’s this bloke you’re on about?”

“*Ron*. Used to have an allotment next to mine.”

“When was that?”

“You know. Back when I had the allotment.”

“Oh, *that* Ron!” she says, a sort of dawn spreading across her face. She pauses, briefly satisfied, then asks, “What about him?”

“He’s in the paper,” he says, shaking the paper as if to prove it.

“I know that, but *why*?”

“He’s dead.”

“Oh.” A sort of dusk darkens her face. “When’s the funeral?”

“There isn’t a bloody funeral.”

“There’s got to be a funeral, surely. You can’t not have a funeral.”

He’s really annoyed now, throwing the paper to the floor. “Look, there’s no funeral because he died last year. Someone’s put one of those *In Memoriam* ads in the paper, God knows why. I mean, if you don’t know someone’s dead a year after he’s dead, you can’t have known him well enough to mind very much, can you?”

“Didn’t he give you some books once, Malcolm?” she asks me, not changing the subject as much as the sunny way she says it suggests.

“Yeah, I think he did,” I say, knowing very well he did, knowing the books are still upstairs in the loft, unread, accusing. He’d given them to me when I was about ten, adventure stories with titles like *Caruthers Comes Through*, all hardbacks, their pages yellowing at the edges and the vague whiff of old cabbage about them. I never read them.

An inarticulate “Hmph!” from Dad signals that the Row we’ve been managing not to have is thickening in the air around us, waiting to explode, like some highly flammable gas in a room full of smokers. I’m determined not to be the one that strikes the first light, so I take another sip of cooling tea.

“He was a nice chap, Ron was,” she says, probably still thinking of the books.

“Couldn’t grow vegetables for toffee. Always had his head in a bloody book. Used to sit up on his allotment in a deckchair, reading gardening books one after a bloody nother, and the vegetables going to pot all around him.”

“That’s education for you,” I say before thinking.

There’s a moment of incredulous silence during which we’re all stunned by the flippancy with which I tossed the incendiary comment into the conversation.

“Oho,” he begins, the triumphant laugh cut short to make way for the tirade coming after, “that’s *education* is it? And what’d you know about that then, eh? Clever enough to find excuses for peeing your grant down the pub toilet, weren’t you? Clever enough to run up debts bloody *Brazil’d* be ashamed of. Just not clever enough to stick at anything, oh no. You haven’t had an education, son, but *by God* you could do with one.”

He’s shaking with rage, a rage he has every right to. But I can’t tell him that.

“It’s down to me to break the lengthening silence. “I’m going out,” I say.

“Where’s there to go at tea time?” she asks, a bewildered tone in her voice.

“Don’t come back,” he grimaces, reaching to pick up the paper in a show of disinterest.

But I don’t answer.

In my mind, I’m already walking, hands in pockets, down streets shiny with the cold sting of winter rain, to the warm, smoky half-welcome of a pub where nobody knows my name.

I’m going home.



THE SULTAN

An 'Incident' or 'Moment in time'.

Jan Jefferies

No one ever came here. It was lonely, catching the chilled winds from across the sea. The big, grey stone building was weather worn and crumbling, yet it held a fascination for Rose that she could not explain. She stood in defiance of the harsh wind, underneath one of the windows, listening. There was the sound of movement, a clink of metal on stone. Alien sounds for no one had lived there for many years.

Rose stretched up to look, not quite reaching, curious. She gave up and went to the oak door, still resisting time and the elements. It refused her first efforts to push it open and then creaked in protest as she stepped into the dim interior of a large room that led into a smaller chamber. The light from the window was just enough to see the tethered horse. He was magnificent. Rose could only stand and stare before she approached to lay a hand upon his neck. He in turn whickered, a gentle sound blown through his nostrils, nuzzled her in pleasure at her presence. He was as black as a raven's wing, a horse of noble blood and pedigree. Even though the light was dim she thought she recognised him, yet unable to believe. The Sultan. The greatest race horse known, mysteriously disappeared and now found hidden here. The perfect place.

She untied him and led him out. The stallion arched his neck and pawed the ground as the wind brought the smell of salt spray on the air. She led him down to the beach along the narrow shingled path etched through the wild grasses, his energy and spirit in communication with her. The impulse was too great. Lightly she sprang up and astride his back, winding her hands in amongst his mane, feeling the warmth and smoothness of his flanks against her bare legs. He needed no bidding. The Sultan surged forward, his stride easy and effortless, splashing through the wavelets lapping at the sand.

Exhilarated, she crouched low upon his back. Ahead the space and freedom were hers and his. They would go on forever, horse and child-woman as one.

PROMOTION

Terry Rickson

I was nineteen, the ‘baby’ of the Squadron. My promotion to Flying Officer had appeared in Orders that morning and loud cheers greeted my promise of “pints all round” in the mess that night. They had barely subsided before we were given the order to scramble.

This was the moment the adrenalin worked overtime, a heady mix of fear and excitement; I loved it!

Strapped into the cockpit of my Spitfire and I was airborne.

“Tuck yourself in behind me and Yellow One, Yellow Two.”

A force of enemy bombers had been detected crossing the French coast near Fecamp.

“Bandits nine o’clock, Yellow Leader.”

We swung in on an arc and went for the bombers, the other members of the section to draw off the Me’s.

Then we were amongst them, a whirling mass of combat; cannon and tracer coming from all directions. I got a good squirt into the engines of one of the Heinkels. We succeeded in breaking up the bomber pack, driving most of them back inland.

“Hun on your tail, Tim,” a voice yelled, “seven o’clock closing.”

Flinging my Spit. to starboard, I dived in an effort to shake off my pursuer. Cannon streaked over the wings. I skimmed the rooftops of a village, catching a glimpse of a church steeple rearing above me. My attacker was intent on forcing me to crash-land. I saw one of those long, tree-lined roads in front of me. There was nothing for it, I shot between the trees, the civilians on the road flinging themselves to the ground as I roared overhead.

I climbed steeply once clear of the trees, twisting my head sharply from side to side for any sign of the Hun. All clear, or so I thought. My Spit juddered as cannon thudded into her, the engine coughed and began streaming glycol. I struggled with the controls as more cannon slammed into her belly; the tail rudder must have gone too. There was nothing for it but to bale out.

I forced open the canopy but as I eased myself out, the Spit. flipped over on to her back tipping me out at the same time. The 'chute responded to the rip-cord, to my relief. I watched my Spit. go spinning away to explode in a ball of flame as she hit some wagons in a railway siding. I thanked God I was not still strapped inside.

I drifted to earth on a warm summer morning, the smells of the countryside wafting up towards me. I made a good landing in a field, unbuckled my 'chute and stuffed it under a hedge quickly.

An old woman was crossing the field towards me, leading a cow. As she drew near, she placed a finger across her lips then pointed in the direction of a wood at the edge of the field. I followed her advice.

Presently, a farm cart came trundling along the track through the wood, driven by an elderly man. He halted near me, glanced round warily before handing me a small bundle; it contained bread, cheese and an apple. He had very little English and I little French but I gathered enough to understand the Germans were scouring the countryside for English aircrew. He conveyed I should head towards the coast, where I might meet some of the Resistance. I thanked him. "Vive la France," I said. He looked at me for a moment, then his eyes crinkled into a smile, "Vive la France," he growled and drove on his way.

I moved under the cover of darkness. With only a compass and the map ripped out of the lining of my jacket, it was difficult to make out my true location. I had a couple of scares from German patrols. I hid up the next day.

By that night, I was faint with thirst and hunger so I took a calculated risk. In the half-light, I saw a woman leave a barn and cross to a farmhouse. I followed discreetly and knocked at what I hoped was the kitchen window. The poor woman nearly died from fright. I indicated that I was thirsty and hungry. She came outside eventually, with a mug of water and a piece of cheese. Then, to her whispered cries of "Allez! Allez! Vite!" I left.

I found an isolated building and slipped inside, making myself as comfortable as I could, I fell asleep.

I was awoken by sharp kick. Several men stood round me, “Resistance,” they said. They took me to a village and fed me, with instructions to move that night to a small town nearby, where I would be met by another group. The relief of friendly help lifted my spirits enormously.

The journey to the town was easy and I found the church where I was to meet my next helpers. Suddenly, the lights of torches flashed into my eyes and I heard German voices; I’d been betrayed, by collaborators.

It had all been so easy, too easy and I had been completely taken in. Tears of anger at my own stupidity pricked behind my eyes. I was glad that in the excitement of my capture and the darkness, the dampness on my cheeks went unnoticed.

“Kom, Englander!” a voice barked and I was shoved forward unceremoniously at rifle point and marched down the street.

The German officer who interrogated me, spoke very good English. I gave my name and rank. He glanced up at me with an attempt at a friendly smile, “You are very young to be a Flying Officer.” I said nothing. I made no reply to enquiries as to my unit and location, though I did not feel in the least bit brave!

“I think you are from Hawkinge,” he said.

I went to open my mouth.

“Ah, yes,” he said, with a satisfied smirk.

The train journey across France was a nightmare. I had little to eat or drink, lacked sleep and the train was often held up because of air raids. There was the added indignity of having to go to the toilet shackled to my guard.

I arrived at the POW camp, dirty and exhausted; made to answer a few questions before being marched off to one of the huts. I was greeted by a big, rangy Australian, a Squadron-Leader by the insignia on his threadbare jacket.

“Ah, Jeez, another Pommie bastard,” he drawled, grinned and held out his hand, “Welcome to the Ritz, mate, sorry the bar’s not open.”

Lying on the hard bunk that first night, tired as I was, my thoughts turned to chances of escape and re-joining my squadron in England. I

wondered too, as I had done several times previously, if any of the chaps had seen me bale out. Had they had that drink on me in the mess? I was determined they should and I was going to be there to stand my round!

QUESTION TIME AT THE LITTLE CHUNTERING GARDEN CLUB

Terry Rickson

CHAIRMAN We are delighted to welcome Arthur Buttertubs. He has agreed to come along this afternoon to answer any of your questions. Arthur needs no introduction, as he is well-known on both TV and radio. So, without more ado, we'll get on with the questions.

I'll set the ball rolling, then. I've had a lot of problems over the years with a 'spicata officilanis', so what can you recommend?

ARTHUR That's a nice straightforward one, Fred, to get us off to a good start. Your best course is to cut it down to size, then you should find that it won't give you any more trouble.

CHAIRMAN That sounds like good advice to me, Arthur, which I shall certainly follow. I believe you have a question for our visitor, Mrs. Huggett?

MRS. HUGGETT Oh! Yes! Thank you. Yes. Recently, my daughter brought home a 'virum splendorum' and a very handsome young plant it is too. I managed to sneak it away from her and can only say, that it has bloomed magnificently in my care. My daughter is very cross with me and wants it back. Do you consider it would stand division or moving about occasionally?

ARTHUR You can become very attached to a ‘splendorum’, as it provides a great deal of pleasure. I remember my sister had one years ago and it caused no end of high jinks.

First and foremost, on no account should it be divided. As it can be moved about, I suggest you share it with your daughter but great care should be taken not to sap its strength.

CHAIRMAN Thank you, Arthur, that sounds like sense to me. Ah, good, Mr. Seeking, one of our new members, has a question for you.

MR. SEEKING Yes, thank you. I have a ‘vicinus’, variety ‘adamas rudis’, whose habits leave a lot to be desired. In addition, it is too well rooted in to allow it to be moved. Do you have some advice on how best to deal with it?

ARTHUR Ah, yes, you’ve got a problem here all right! Now this variety can be tiresome and if large, too much of a good thing. A bit of judicious snipping back now and again won’t do any harm. Oh, and by the way, do handle with gloves on, kid for preference.

I recommend a hedge of ‘rosa apricus risus’, a rambling form of hybrid tea, planted a yard or two from your ‘vicinus’, should do the trick and cause least disturbance. It won’t spoil your outlook and may help to soften the glaring colour of the ‘adamas rudis’. And the best of luck to you.

CHAIRMAN We can all say amen to that, I’m sure! Now, Mr. Hope, I know you have a ticklish problem.

MR. HOPE I’ve long had my eye on a ‘lilium superba’. My wife has a strong objection to my cultivating it. Indeed, she said she wouldn’t be responsible for her actions if I do. She pointed out that its rich colouring and strong perfume would, in any case, be bad for my blood pressure. What can I do?

ARTHUR Ah, yes, I think I know which sort you are referring to. This variety does tend to cause a lot of trouble. With its deep creamy throat and curving crimson lips, it can become rampant and difficult to control, running riot amongst an otherwise well-ordered plot. My suggestion is, just go on admiring it from a distance, thereby saving yourself a lot of trouble.

CHAIRMAN Very sound advice, Arthur. Mrs. Battersby, we mustn't forget you, must we!

MRS. BATTERSBY I should hope not, indeed! I have a 'henricus horizontalis', which, despite my best efforts, presents me with a great many difficulties. It is particularly troublesome in the summer months, with a tendency to trail over and into my garden seat. Can you suggest some vigorous action I could take than hitherto?

ARTHUR Yes, the 'henricus' does cause problems, especially the prone variety, which you have. There is not a lot you can do, particularly where it has become well established over many years.

I would suggest tying-up the garden seat, so that it is less inviting and keeping an eagle-eye open for its more lackadaisical habits. It would be a good idea too, if you were to remove any suspect bottles from the potting-shed, as it has the habit of creeping into sheltered spots during inclement weather.

CHAIRMAN Good luck with your efforts, Mrs. B. Er, George?

MR. FAWCETT Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was wondering, Arthur, if you could tell me what to do with my rhubarb ...

At this point, a member of the Ladies Committee, who were preparing the refreshments, appeared flapping a tea-towel, hoping to distract the Chairman's attention. She thought she'd heard the fire-alarm go off. In which case could someone go and warn Mrs. Entwistle, who was in the loo, as they all knew she was rather deaf. She'd go herself, only her hands were all buttery.

CHAIRMAN Oh, er, right. Would one of the ladies ... yes, thank you. This might be a good time to break, everyone, so we'll resume after tea.

Now, Arthur, while the members are sorting things out and getting their tea, about my 'brassica gigantea' ...