

Mr Hebbly (Not a Golfer)

Metaphrog

Poetry was his interest (a sort of secret hobby). Highlighting a sensitivity that his outward appearance belied. He had been an electrician, was an electrician; but work was hard to come by and now he was sleeping later.

He'd even written a poem for the bin men after they had woken him several weeks in succession:

The urge to sing is great we know
The tenements close the walls echo
But spare a thought for those who keep
Some different hours and need their sleep

Neatly typed on Peter's word processor he had affixed the poem in purple ink to the inside back door of the close. That Thursday morning would henceforth in his mind be thought of as the laughter morning: the guffaws and groans of hysteria resonating well into the weekend.

He hadn't shown his work since but was proud of some fragments he had guarded in a small black spiral bound notebook that still smelled faintly of malodorous damp storage.

And another little piece of paranoid poetry (as he referred to it privately thus, with gentle irony, and no small amount of thinly veiled angst):

Didn't know how long he had been observed.
Followed. Hadn't seen them at the garden fence.
Under surveillance; electrically dense.

Interestingly, he couldn't explain just how, precisely, he had written this. It seemed to ooze forth from the ozone one Saturday morning as he sat ruminating breakfast.

The fridge had felt nice and cold to his head at first that morning. He'd almost wanted to hold a bottle against his scapula and then drink coolly, but on trying this the temperature had gradually increased and then the slow water trickled smelly towards the floor.

Of course, he did not attribute his verse solely to himself but rather ascribed to the somewhat cosmic view that inspiration was, relatively speaking and without religious overtones, divine. His muse had been the clothes pole standing slightly obliquely in the back garden closest to his window. Proud holder of knotted blue twine and rotting remains of Indian weave peg bag. It was while gazing upon this pole that he had seen the bush twitching. True bird watchers, twitchers, in the vernacular, would mutter and mumble to themselves or, more accurately, to microphone and cassette devices discretely secreted about their persons or hidden in their hats. These men were, it appeared, actually watching him (with binoculars). At least two of them were; one was reading a copy of *Understanding Alchemy* and occasionally giggling to himself attempting to muffle his mirth with the back of a rather large and hairy hand.

A sign snapped neon in his mind: Mr Hebbly (Not a Golfer).

Inspid figures drifted along the pavement, limp clothing over bent frames, horizontal rain washing everything grey.

Somewhere a dog barked, distant metallic sounds coming from over the trees across the park. He'd wanted to walk there, get some green air and escape the incessant traffic noise, but now he wasn't so sure. Maybe better to take the bus, with its don't-lick-me sticky poles. Interesting to observe people sometimes, not eavesdropping but listening to the musicality of their language; the pathos of the situations they found themselves in. His own situation was pathetic he realised, the world simply mirroring what he was. He was late and he actually didn't care. The precise nature of the trouble he would find himself in if he missed



the appointment, or made a poor impression by tardiness, sweatiness or general untidiness, was still a mystery. A place of unpleasant ideas he preferred not to visit, but which he knew would involve further penury.

Grinning, bounding figures danced past the window, then began banging and kicking, throwing stones; stopping the bus in its tracks. So much for speeding things along nicely. I'm so sorry I'm late we were attacked and then almost swallowed by zombies. They were drooling. Oh man it was crazy. You should have seen them. A chipped cup, emblazoned with the tired slogan: you have to be crazy... welcome to the world of grey cubicles and desk tidy tedium. He didn't want a job but was not sure how long he could continue without electricity or gas. Cold beans.

Slowly the bus restarted and crossed the little painted circle that designated a roundabout. "Circle the wagons", the driver had said. Hannah hadn't found it funny picking glass out of her head; for weeks tiny particles migrate outwards to the skin surface. Bus then tube, a real commuter today and a suit to boot. Cute.

He suddenly remembered BANG for no BANG apparent reason his last formal interview. Where BANG.

His late arrival had been celebrated with a photograph. Not a modern digital job but strangely film, left to develop as he awaited their bidding in a small overly hot antechamber.

Do you have any faults? Sunshine somehow seemed to stultify and strangle the air in the office. His mouth biscuit-dry and gummed shut. Faults?! He was a veritable tapestry of faults: it was what held him together. He tried humour. "I

get stress incontinence." BANG BANG

Three dull grey faces clouded over in lack of amusement BANG you bastards. "I'm not usually late," he essayed. Too late. BANG.