



Here's a second selection of work from our core writers – this time a short script from playwright Steph Dale, the first ever short story from poet Jo Bell, and the final story in David Gaffney's sequence (see our July 25th posting for earlier 'episodes'). There is more to come from other core writers, and the anthology will also include work from these writers which hasn't been seen on the blog.

To find out more about our ten core writers, have a look [here](#). Thanks for supporting Bugged – keep reading, keep writing and enjoy this sample of great writing inspired by overhearings.

Jo Bell and David Calcutt

Script
Steph Dale

Overheard: "I got brain freeze."

SCENE A MAN is sitting scrunched up, leaning against the wall of a lift. A young GIRL is looking at the buttons; she runs her finger around the outside of one of them.

GIRL You're sure none of them work?

MAN This ain't going nowhere.

The GIRL presses all the buttons.

GIRL Used to have nightmares about being stuck in a lift. Nightmares about being trapped like this.

The GIRL stops and listens.

GIRL Someone's coming.

They listen.

MAN Nah.

The GIRL presses another button.

MAN Will you sit down!

GIRL Sorry.

MAN Get some sleep! Morning will come quicker.

GIRL I can't sleep.

MAN Used to better?

GIRL At least a pillow.

MAN "At least a pillow".

SHE settles then sits back up again.

MAN Stop thinking about it!

GIRL Can't. It was horrific.

The MAN stands.

GIRL What you doing?!

MAN Need to ...

MAN undoes his fly

GIRL Not in here! Go outside!

MAN We'll lose the heat. It's friggin freezing out there. Besides, this is my house, my rules.

The MAN urinates in the corner.

GIRL Jesus.

MAN Told you, I force the doors once to get in and once to get out. Don't want anybody else spotting this gaff.

He completes his task and does his fly back up. The GIRL picks at her fingernails.

Pause.

GIRL My fingers are going blue, look. (Beat). What time is it?

MAN Late o'clock. Go to sleep.

Pause.

GIRL Why do the suits have such a problem with us?

MAN Papers tell them we're scum.

GIRL I'm not scum. Got grade eight piano by the time I was eleven.

MAN (Beat). How long you been out and about?
GIRL Two years. You?
MAN Nearly twenty.
Pause.
GIRL Ta for getting me away from the fighting. Ta for letting me share your lift. It's nice.
MAN Apart from the piss.
GIRL But, really, what time is it?
MAN I dunno. I don't have a watch.
GIRL It must be six?
MAN Nah.
GIRL There'll be a clock on the ticket machine.
MAN It got bust when the kid in the suit was beatin' up on old Tom.
GIRL (Beat). You OK?
MAN I got brain freeze.
The GIRL takes a packet of half eaten Rolos out of her jacket.
GIRL Want a Rolo? I robbed the suit's Rolos. Dropped on the floor when he was smashin' up your mate.
MAN Ta.
They share the chocolate.
GIRL The suit will be in a nice, warm bed now. Sleeping and farting off the Christmas spirit.
MAN Yeah.
Pause.
GIRL What's your name?
MAN You choose.
GIRLRobert... Nah...St Nic. You look like a Nick.
MAN Whatever.
They huddle.

[Currently there isn't a 24 hour centre for the homeless in Birmingham which means many people, young and old alike, have to sleep rough: in the market, in doorways, in bus shelters and in lifts. Birmingham needs 24 hour interactive services for the homeless now.]

Domestic science for boys
David Gaffney

The head chef at the cafe concession in Ballet Rambert was never rushed off his feet, so Alfie used to sit in his floppy hat and black and white checked trousers reading superhero comics. One day between rehearsals I lied that I was attending a science fiction ephemera fair in Croydon which featured a guest appearance by someone out of Blake's Seven and asked him if he would come with me, and he agreed right away. I took Margaret from hats and over the next few months we attended dozens of these affairs up and down the country, and after every one, me and Alfie and Margaret from hats would go for a curry.

One day Margaret from hats never came and we never looked back.

The cafe concession was replaced by a Costa coffee and Alfie decided to become a consultant advising other chefs on their business plans. He developed a website which featured an animated dancing baker and a clickable interface of kitchen utensils and he came to live with me, the idea being he would run his business from my front room.

I began to install the technology a few weeks after he arrived because I was puzzled about what he did all day in the house on his own. No one ever seemed to use the clickable interface of kitchen utensils. I keep a scrupulously tidy house and when I come home from the ballet I notice every minuscule alteration. One time the coffee table was at a slight diagonal to the sofa, and when challenged he just said he forgot to move it back. But why would you need the coffee table at a slight diagonal? Surely you could move it closer to the sofa while maintaining its parallel position? My mirror, the one and only reflecting surface in the house because of my adolescent weight problems, was on the floor by the wrong side of the bed. And under the wardrobe I keep winter woollies in a set of cardboard boxes and for some reason the lid from one of these containers turned up in the bin, torn into bits and smeared with jam.

I had to take action and short of hidden cameras I came up with installing the fully intelligent and interactive household management system which would hopefully tell me everything about what was going on.

Once I was home it was clear that Alfie knew the prawns had sent me a message. A delicious smell was coming from the kitchen. He had flash fried them in President butter, garlic and black pepper and had dressed the table with a white cloth and glinting cutlery and set out crusty French bread and chilli jam for dipping.

We sat down and he poured a glass of white wine into my favourite handmade goblet and a tumbler of water for himself and we clinked and said cheers.

'Aren't you joining me?' I said.

'No, thanks. I've had cheese on toast.'

I pulled a face.

'I used the dustpan and brush.'

'Thank you,' I said, wondering at the same time why the brush had not sent me its usual update about bristle clogging.

'That message by the way. It wasn't from the prawns.' he said.

'Oh,' I said

'It was from me. I wanted you to come home early because I think it's time.'

I de-shelled a prawn and smeared it with chilli jam. 'Do you think so?' I was trembling inside.

'Yes. It's time you learned to chop. And I have set everything out over there, ready for your first lesson.'

I looked across to the work surface. Onions, carrots, celery, peppers, cucumber, tomatoes and oranges were lined up next to a chopping board and his precious five hundred pound Global knife which I wasn't usually allowed near.

'Are you going to show me how to form my fingers into a claw?' I said.

'Yes,' he said.

'And how to cut without the knife leaving contact with the chopping board?

'Yes'

'How to do leeks?'

'Leeks as well.'

I ate the prawn and looked at him. I knew that when we began the lesson he would stand behind me and I would feel his breath on my neck and he would kiss my throat between chopping, and I would learn quickly how to cut up vegetables like a professional. This was the first thing. After this he would explain to me about science fiction. Maybe then I would be able to switch off the monitoring system, because once I understood his special chef skills and his expert knowledge of comic book heroes there would be no reason to mistrust him anymore.

[David adds: These three stories were constructed from the following overheard snatches of conversation: "Wouldn't it be great if a bag of prawns could send you a text to warn you it was going out of date?"

"If he emailed you to say he never wants to see you again it means he's thinking about you."

"The worst concession I ever ran was the cafe at the National Ballet – those fuckers in tights ate nothing but Mars bars and fags."

"I pretended to like science fiction to get know him better. Now I'm in deep. He wants to take me to a fair which has ephemera. What's ephemera? Is it sexual?"

"His chopping technique is terrifying, I can't watch. He nearly took the tip of his finger off the other day."]

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW
Jo Bell

Aye aye, it must be quiz night: Stationery Dave's in. GOT A PEN, BOB? someone asks me too loudly when David shuffles into the bar, straightening his tie as if it were a court appearance, looking at no-one as he orders his tonic water.

Someone answers for me. NO, IT'S GONE MISSING. FUNNY, THAT.

Oh, give over, I say as they start up. So he's got a thing for pens. Could be worse: could be crack cocaine or Dale Winton. I don't have one on me anyway: never ask a writer for a pen.

David sits upright in his tweed jacket at the corner table, turning a pen over and over. There is always a pen, of course – a cheap plastic tube or elegant steel cylinder – and always a thick oblong notepad. He sets them out on the round brown table and steels himself with a swig of tonic. He looks as if he's sitting the most important exam of his life, in a subject he hates. He scribes a word or two in the book – strikes through it, flushing and rubbing his face – tears the page out, tucks it into his inside pocket. Takes out another pen. Starts again. His jacket gets bulkier, the pad gets thinner, the pens build into a little bundle. I know the small rituals of the writer, and this is no writer. If he looks up at all, it's the look of a rabbit in the middle of the road.

Why come on quiz night, if he's so antisocial? I ask the landlord. The place is bound to be heaving. But of course the people are all in teams, heads down, absorbed.

Besides, says the landlord, it's the only night when there are pens lying around.

The girl from W H Smith caught him at the shop door once. His pockets were bulging with gel pens – Uniballs in pink, yellow, lime green, like a bunch of headless flowers. She gave him a ticking off and let him go.

It's not his fault, she said. You know.

But I don't know; until I leave after a lock-up one night, and start the walk back along the canal. He's on a bench, staring towards the bridge. It's late. Even the ducks around his feet are sleeping. David doesn't look like he gets much sleep. I take a breath. Where do you live, mate? I'll walk you home. He follows like a lamb. It crosses my mind that he was waiting for me.

At his bungalow, I accept the mumbled invitation out of curiosity. It's an occupational hazard. You collect material. I'm collecting material as soon as I'm inside, like a burglar: clocking the photos on the wall, the standard shrine to a teenage son in a tank top, Millennium Falcon under one arm – and then we step into the living room.

Bloody hell, David.

Every surface is covered with them; the corner shelves, the crazy-paving hearth, the mantelpiece over the gas fire. The bookshelves are packed with raggedy shoe boxes and I can guess what's in every one, because I can see them everywhere else. Great sheaves of clear plastic Bics; the Parker 25s that we all got when we started work, stacked in their boxes like little coffins in a vault; heavy-barrelled Montblanc or Cross fountain pens in deep blue lacquer and textured gold. The fruit bowl is heaped with ballpoints in 1950s shades of turquoise or maroon, the vases crammed with Rollerballs. In the pick-up-sticks scatter on the table, I register the translucent RAC freebie that I lost in the pub last month. It's like the Leeds Armoury Museum: the ranks of different blades on the wall, all made for the same purpose. You could weep, really. You could weep.

David – What happened? Look at me for a moment. What's the story?

He does not look at me.

It's not a story, he says. It's not a story. And he takes me back to the little triptych of photos in the hallway, and tells me his story. He focuses on the skirting board. His voice is quiet: his account quick, unsparing and told with a kind of graceless wonder – how odd that it should all still be true. How odd that the details should be so sharp, when the years might have had the grace to blunt them. The forest green jumper his son was wearing: the Smiley badge they showed him at the station. The motorway junction number. The height of the bridge. The make of the truck.

He finishes. I must have been holding my breath. The tendons in his hands are taut like guy ropes as he mutters his question. When I ask him to repeat it, he says it too loudly.

Can you write this? A pause, then quietly; I've been trying myself. I have been trying. I have been trying. I have been trying. But I can't.

And I say David.... for want of words that might be big enough.

Hang on, he says. You need.... You need.... He dips back into the living room and bobs about in front of the great battery of pens, rubbing his forehead, frantic over his choice. With a grim purse of the lips, he settles on one: the one that might do the job, the one that might tell the story he needs told. He bears it towards me like a sword on a velvet cushion. The box is tatty brown cardboard, but the pen inside is sleek as a seal. Nothing magical, just a lovely object: a fat black Bakelite barrel, the 14ct gold nib just peeking from it like a secret.

He looks right at me. Can you write this? he asks.

I can try, I say. I can certainly try.

[Overheard: 'Actually, I'm sure I had a pen when I got on this train. Where's it gone?']