

The Best of Bugged - A selection from submissions up to July 14th

Sonny
Ray Morgan

"I've started winking at dogs.
Sometimes, they wink back."
The luggage tag that swings tantalisingly
under the Essex-to-London train seat tells me
his name is Sonny. Sonny, I imagine,
has dreadlocks. I cannot see any,
or smell any,
but I like to imagine.
Sonny's voice is light, playful,
he sounds the sort of man
who winks at dogs.
He says it to his friend with a
hint of "I dare you" in his voice; urging,
"wink at one too, see what happens."
The name from his tag, the
crusted heel of a sandaled foot,
the dog chat;
it gives me a whole being.
This is a man who goes kite-surfing,
island-hopping,
does not own a TV.
He is fluent in Icelandic,
can breakdance,
knows a thing or two about real ale.
His home is all wooden floors,
spider plants,
dusty knick knack from worldly travels;
a lingering smell of rollies.
He loves Bukowski,
his favourite book is Fear and Loathing
with Riddley Walker a close second.
He has long eyelashes,
arms full of golden sun-tinged hairs,
this man can juggle.
He can crouch, in boardshorts,
salt-crusted cheeks from a day in the surf,
and wink into a dog's face.
He earns one in return.
He is a man of confidence,
a king among man and beast.
This is Sonny.
He winks at dogs.

Fire and Ice on the 17.50 to Hereford
Peter Leslie Wild

"I am aware of a large number of hot people in the rear carriage."

The speakers crackle and fizz. The legal eagle looks up from his paperwork and raises an unkempt eyebrow. The woman with a tattooed hand begins a furious text.

More crackle. More fizz.

"If the hot people would like to move forward there is plenty of space in the front two carriages, among the cool people."

Another raise of the eyebrow, another furious text. The Law leans towards the Tattoo. "You may be cool, but if you don't mind me saying, I think you're also rather hot."

A snap shut of the phone, and she makes to move away. "I don't mind you saying, no. But I'd better get down to the rear carriage with the rest of them."

Youth
Sarah Gallagher

(a young lad is chatting on his phone)

Nah, nah, nah, it was insane man. We was completely f****d.

Yeah it was wicked, you 'ad to be der man. It was mental.

What?

Nah, nah, she loved it. She was s*** faced. She was like 'waaayyyyyy. I'm f***in' well f****d'. Fallin' all over da place 'n I was like 'what you playin' at woman. Get off da floor.'

Dunno. Shoved her in a taxi innit. Stupid cow.

Huh? Yeh . . . Smithy, Bruiser, Big Dave, Switchblade. Yeh, da whole crew was out innit.

Ha, ha. Yeah. Smithy was mental. He nudded some k**b 'n chundered right outside da kebab shop. Nutter.

Yeh. Proper messy night innit. F***in' quality night man. You 'ad to be der.

Anyway mum, was ringin to say I 'aint about for dinner yeah?

Cool. Safe. Later.

Extracted from *The Visit*
Christine Howe
[...]

They made an early start, on their local bus, amongst workers with blank faces. Ivy had packed their lunch in a vinyl shopping bag, together with a thermos flask of tea and the box of chocolate brownies.

On the express train, stations flew past like snapshots. Domestic routines continued in houses behind the stations. Cows and sheep in the fields got on with things, heads down, pulling at the grass. Ivy sighed. Poor Jenna!

"You're worrying about changing trains, aren't you?" said John after an hour.

"It might be a tramp over the bridge, and with that leg of yours," said Ivy.

The change went like clockwork. Relieved, they shared tea and sandwiches on the next train, eating discreetly.

Outside the last station, John hailed a man who was passing, with a black spaniel on a lead. The man gestured to the appropriate bus stop.

"The bus driver'll give you a shout when it's time to get off. All the drivers know the place. Come away now," he said, pulling on the spaniel's lead. The dog was quivering, its muzzle in Ivy's shopping bag.

"Will we need to get a taxi after the bus?" Ivy said.

"Some take a taxi, I believe," the man said, "But you can walk it."

"Fresh air will do us good," said John.

"Good luck," said the man, giving them a smile that might have had sympathy attached to it somewhere, like a straining kite.

They did walk, John carrying the shopping bag, up the road from the bus stop and then on up the long drive. They rounded a bulk of shrubbery and saw the place.

"It's like an American prison," said John.

"When have you ever seen one?"

"On the films, that's what they look like," he said.

"I've brought some identity, in case we need it."

Ivy tapped her handbag. "Our passports, an electricity bill and that photo of Jenna's graduation, you know, the one with all the family on, smiling; that's what I've brought."

"I hope you won't go upsetting yourself, once we're in there; that's if we ever get in," said John.

"Here, she's coming John, here's our Jenna. Oh, look at her."

John grasped Ivy's wrist. "Steady on," he said.

Ivy's face ached as she framed a smile. Jenna slumped into a chair. Ivy scanned her; something about her eyes wasn't right. Her hair needed a good wash too, never mind a trim.

Other patients and visitors were having murmured conversations. One woman dabbed at her eyes and sniffed. Staff hovered.

"So, have you had your lunch, Jenna?" Ivy said.

"Yeh, friggin chicasee."

Ivy looked at John; it wasn't a meal she recognised.

"Chicken fricassee, get it? Vomit on a plate, twice a week, said Jenna."

"Oh, it's such a shame when the food's poor. Meals should be something to look forward to in hospital. Never mind, I've brought you some brownies, homemade." Ivy put the Tupperware box on the table and gave it a little push. "Jenna?"

Jenna's fist on the table made the Tupperware box bounce.

"Fuckin' brownies. It's all simple solutions isn't it? They'll have me making them next, for bloody therapy. Beat the blues with brownies!"

Ivy and John flinched as Jenna sprang to her feet and began shouting, bad, angry words, interspersed with kicking at a table leg. Other visitors stared. A member of staff glided over on soft shoes.

"Now Jenna, she said." To Ivy and John she said, "Perhaps you'd better leave now. Jenna's not having a good day."

"But we've only been here five minutes and we've come a long way," said John.

The nurse's smile was practised. Jenna didn't turn around as she was led out of the room.

"We shouldn't have come," said Ivy, wiping her nose on a clean, ironed handkerchief, as they trailed back down the drive. "I thought that she'd be pleased to see us. She's not like our Jenna. Maybe it's best that she's here after all."

"Don't upset yourself, love," said John. "They'll get her right again. Here give me that bag; I'll carry it."

[Overhearing (in a library): "...a semi-secure one, like a big American prison."]

The Appropriate Simile Norman Hadley

The climber jammed his fist into the crack
To haul his body up
But called down to the man who held the rope,
"It's loose as buggery, is that."

The man who held the rope was not convinced
That buggery and looseness were in parallel
"Well, afterwards, they are," the climber shouted back,
"Or so I've heard" while, sixty feet above the quarry floor
He felt the urgency with which his stretching skin
Was wrestling to keep his innards in.

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Thanks to all included – and all who haven't been, yet.