

The Best of Bugged – selections up to July 21<sup>st</sup>

Forgive us our sins, for we have re-formatted some of your work to make it a consistent read...

Eavesdropping  
Benjamin Morris

We should make popcorn, someone says,  
and we all laugh, because we need  
something other to do besides

stare. It's a rainy Sunday and in the flat  
across the street our neighbours  
are making love, him in his chair,

her on top, rocking gently back and forth  
like a reed in the river wind,  
still dressed but leaving no doubt

over what they're up to. We turn away,  
turn back, and away again—and when  
at last they finish, and see us there,

with our beers and our clumsy glances,  
she starts to laugh, and shed the rest  
of her clothes, him following suit,

and start right back up all over again—  
this time harder, and faster, and louder,  
so rending the air with their cries

that below them on the street  
men and women quicken their pace,  
lower their heads, shake their umbrellas dry.

A Day Out  
Roz Goddard

So we're sitting there, in the park, on a tartan blanket, Suzie's bought a pork pie, a baguette, butter, and a trifle, and she's laid it out, as if we're normal people. Her whole life she's had this thing about wanting to be normal, it's important to her. I keep telling her she is normal, she lives in a house, she's got a window cleaner, she buys trifle. Anyway, that day she was trying too hard. I've said to her, it's like she wants to trim the edges of life. She had a job on her hands that morning when she picked me up outside the prison. I'm basically hyper, hysterical when I get in the car, I start counting trees, then I'm going on about how loud everything is and I can't get over the number of good looking men walking about.

'I'm changing the radio station Andrea,' she says, 'let's see if Radio 3 can calm you down.' I'm still gawping at how fast the women with the shopping trolleys are walking and I'm not coping well with the breeze on my skin. And the birds, don't mention the birds, since when did they have so much to say? I sometimes think Suzie is the only person in the world who isn't afraid of me. I know she isn't because I can read expressions. I'll say something outrageous to get a reaction and she'll just look at me as if I'm a silly kid looking for attention. 'What you need to remember, Andrea, is I have seen you sharing bath water with a dog and your weekly wash. I cannot be shocked by anything you do.'

Fair enough. So we're sitting on the grass eating pork pie, which is disgusting. 'Suz, this pastry tastes like it's been left out in the rain.' I was grateful that she'd gone to the trouble, but as she would admit herself, going to the park was not her best ever decision. For one thing there was too much sky and for another it wasn't the most sensitive thing in the world to take me to a place where courting couples were snaking over each other in the sunshine, as if all that mattered in life was love and kissing. Frankly, she shouldn't have come to pick me up in a car that colour, she shouldn't have taken that left turn through the estate, it might have been better all round if an organisation had stepped in. Someone from an organisation would have taken me to an office up a few flights of stairs and given me a cup of tea, it would have smelt of paper and photocopying, there would have been phones going off every two minutes, it wouldn't have been so emotional. But Suzie's the saving type and she thinks everyone deserves a second chance.

There's music from the tiny radio and I'm picking daisies and arranging them in a square on the picnic blanket. I'm afraid to look up in case anyone recognises me, or more likely recognises Suzie, who is, I'm imagining, 'well known' in the area. She gives her runner beans away in the summer. Always grows too many, for that purpose, to give them away. If, heaven forbid, she died and a reporter camped outside her place, the description of her house with its shining windows and riot of geraniums in the front garden would conjure up the warmth and self-respect of the woman. I don't deserve her. Would anyone recognise me? The only way might be the way I walk, you can't alter that can you? The jizz of a person.

I shall get over this, this not wanting people to recognise me because I will tell anyone who asks that I stabbed my boyfriend to death, in his Ford Capri, on a country road where there were no street lights and tried to blame it on a road rage incident. Just not today, with the pork pie and trifle sweating in the heat, it's not right. And the dogs and the sun and Suzie flicking her hair back and wearing her sun hat on a choker round her neck. I've come to terms with it. His face is quiet now, there's no movement in his eyes and his lips are closed, he has nothing to say to me. When he appears in my head, it's like he's in a photograph having a pleasant day out, not a fabulous day, but a pleasant one.

Coming out of prison, being picked up on the cobbles in front of the place and being driven to the park with the flowers and dogs and footballs made me feel ill. 'It's the sun,' says Suzie, 'let's move into the shade.' I'm looking at her with a kind of awe, as if she's an angel. I'm starting to laugh and the grass is a crazy green, like it's been laid out for a film, and there are arms in the air waving and catching balls and there's a girl doing a handstand and her red skirt is turned inside out like a tulip and you can see her dark knickers. I am suddenly a dog myself, sniffing the ground, Suzie's pet on a leash, a dog she can't let off in case it savages a kid. I'm drinking juice from a carton and looking at the pork pie and I'm seeing pearls in the meat. 'That's the tasty bit, the fat, eat it, it's lovely,' and that's Suzie sounding so tender, like my mother. I am a kid again, at the fairground on the spinning tea cups and my insides are in a mixer travelling up to make their way into the air. A dog comes over and starts licking my toes and he has some pastry off Suzie who is laughing with the owner and I'm in sawdust somewhere or straw, an animal lying down in the heat, squirming and suddenly I'm howling and no-one knows what to do.

Nellie the Elephant  
Sam Burns

– I saw it happen.

– Serious?

– I didn't see it happen. But I come along right after and I saw him in the street with all this crowd around him before the ambulance come.

– Why didn't you say?

– 'Cause there's this theory. Like before they used to say it was best to talk about stuff that happened to you if you wanted not to get PTSD? Only now they say maybe it's best not to. This is how I see it. I go with the first one, spill it all out, but once it's said I can't unsay it.

– Was his mum there?

Pause.

– Someone'd gone in the café to get a load of buckets of water like it was someone giving birth or something. So there was all these buckets of water standing round him 'cause no-one actually needed any water.

– Was his mum there though?

– Someone run to get his mum. She never turned up in time. (Beat) His brother was there.

– The little one?

– Older one. Doing CPR on him like they taught us in PSE.

– Resusci-Annie. God. I remember. Tasted of wet-wipes.

– Only someone must've told him you got to do it to the tune of 'Nellie the Elephant' 'cause that's what he was mouthing right in his brother's face. Like really pounding down on his breastbone and singing 'Nellie the Elephant' at him under his breath.

– You're meant to stop after the first two verses. After the trump-trump-trump bit. Do a couple of breaths.

– Only he never. He just kept singing till someone yelled 'breathe'. And he couldn't really breathe.

Smorgasbord : a selection of real and imaginary conversation snippets:  
Colin Henschley

The cast crisscross the stage in silence. Each is walking fast, ignoring the others. Each stops when their thoughts are spoken, then speeds up again. After each speech they don or lose an article of clothing. WOMAN1 steps to the fore and holds her head.

WOMAN1: Everyone does something they shouldn't do. Sometimes I rest and read the thoughts of the busy people as they pass me in the street.

MAN1: She split up with me using a badly spelt text: "I dump U. U R my X. XXX." (BEAT) I never found out if those last three X's were her rubbing salt in the wound or sad goodbye kisses.

WOMAN2: He dumped me with a recorded telephone message. One I had to call back. A bloody premium rate line, an' all! (BEAT) I've never trusted a man since.

WOMAN3: When Sarah got this dump-a-gram bloke knocking on her door she was so heartbroken she attacked the poor man with her fists. 'Cause, she made him give up being a dump-a-gram once they started dating. Too many opportunities to catch some poor girl on the rebound, see.

WOMAN2: Ralph asked me to marry him at the whispering gallery. All I could do in reply was scream. I think bursting Ralph's eardrum was the beginning of the end.

WOMAN3: I'd been teaching myself sign language for months, and dreamt of Tony hand signing 'Will you marry me' – then when he did, I misread his fingers. He thought I was rejecting him and didn't ask again for six miserable months.

MAN1: When did we fall in love? We were playing strip poker and I suddenly realised I was admiring her lovely blue eyes. When did we fall out of love? You know, I have no idea.

WOMAN2: Vain? When he wasn't grooming himself he was undressing himself with his eyes.

WOMAN3: When they told me it was twins I just thought "Eating for three: Result!"

WOMAN2: We communicated with two empty baked bean cans on a string. Only the string was so short you could hear what was said without the tins. He was eight and curious; I was nine and bored. So I showed him mine and he showed me his. He promised he'd call me later but he never did. First of a long line of boys who let me down. I've still got that can somewhere.

MAN1: She called me a stubborn bitch so I stormed off and didn't speak to her for two years and then she went and died. That was typical of her, she always had to have the last word.

WOMAN2: When she came out of the chemotherapy and found the whole family had shaved their heads she nearly died. Later she did die. Love, laughter and will power can only do so much.

WOMAN1: Sometimes I rest and read the thoughts of the busy people as they pass me in the street – and cry. Even an angel can't help everyone.  
(WOMAN1 RETURNS TO THE CROWD)

END

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