

## The Best of Bugged – a bumper selection for the 12<sup>th</sup> August

Honey

Emma Morgan

In the airport. Waiting for my mother. No book. No iPod. Purse in car. Mobile in car. Bored. So I eavesdrop. But nobody says anything because this is an airport and everybody is waiting for somebody and nobody knows anybody else and nobody does old fashioned things like talking to strangers anymore unless it's online. So I look at people instead. I think, for the manyeth time, why do really old people go in for those beige blousons? I am pleased with myself for remembering the word 'blouson.' And why is it that in an old woman you can see the pretty girl who still likes to do her hair nicely and wear things that involve flowers just like she did to tea dances in the forties, but in an old man all you can see is the BFG. I hope that the woman is called Vera though. I hope the man is called Ernest. Or Fred. Then there is someone who I think is a gay man until I realise that it is a French woman with very short hair and that sort of androgynous thing about her which the French call 'gamine'. I am pleased with myself for remembering this word. I begin to hope that she is from Paris and that she is called Madeleine and that everyday she buys one perfect mille feuille in a pink box tied with a ribbon and feeds it to her shitzu whose name is La Petite Princess. Then there is a man with very large man boobs who is wearing a blue and brown striped polo shirt that is, and there is a sense of inevitability about this, too small. His name is Simon. For a living he... no, I cannot get to grips with him because I am too sorry for him. There is a pretty woman in a cotton shift dress that has no wrinkles who looks like she strokes her hair with silk of a morning and she is accompanied by a man who looks like he works in a tyre factory. Her name is Lisa, her partner is Rob, and actually they are brother and sister and not WAG and bodyguard. There is a lady and her lovely blonde children who she bought from Boden along with a very nice jersey wrap dress. I am hoping she is called Constance but this is unlikely. She is probably called Penny and I bet she makes a lovely salad. Her husband is a banker or a lawyer called Mark. He is hardly ever home but when he is he is bullying Olly into the first eleven although Olly actually prefers Barbies. I am pleased

with my new form of self entertainment, I believe it show a certain inventive independence from the shackles of modern technology.

And then there is the middle aged man sitting in front of me. He is blind. I know this because he has a guide dog. He has a rucksack and a suitcase and a labrador in a harness and I would like to say to him, 'Excuse me, does your dog really go on the plane with you? Where does it sit?' But then a woman comes up. A woman in her sixties in three quarter length trousers who I bet likes clematis and whose name is quite obviously Jane, and she starts manhandling the dog without even saying, 'Excuse me' or 'Can I stroke her?' I bet she wouldn't do that if it was a rottweiler.

'What's her name?'

'She's called Honey.'

'How old is she?'

'Four years old.'

'How long have you had her?'

'About two years.'

'And is she your first dog?'

'No, she's my fourth.'

And Jane is doing that thing you do with labradors where you rub the front of their throats and the rolls of their fur go forward and back and I hate Jane because I like doing that and because she is failing to ask that interesting question about where a guide dog goes on the plane.

'She's a lovely dog,' says Jane as she gets up to go.

'Yes, she is.'

'Bye.'

'Bye.'

And Jane exits as if this was a play and she was scripted. Stroke Dog. Ask boring questions. Leave.

The blind man talks to Honey.

'Good girl,' he says, 'you like a cuddle don't you? Good girl.'

Now I am really stuck. I want to say 'Excuse me,' but I feel that I would be invading this man's privacy because I am a sensitive person unlike Jane who was just thick and rude. And now I want to ask all sorts of questions. Like 'Why are you blind, have you always been blind, what's it like, how do you train a dog like that, is it hard to get one, do you have to go on a dog waiting list? Where does Honey go on the plane?'

But now I can't ask anything, I have missed my moment and I am frustrated and I really hate Jane and now I also hate the blind man a bit, and I can't even think of a name for him or any kind of story, and then a lady comes, who is quite obviously his wife, and says 'Hello darling,' and takes the suitcase and the blind man picks up the rucksack and puts it on his back, which surprises me, though why I don't think blind people can carry bags I don't know, and he puts one hand on his wife's arm and another on Honey's stick harness thing and goes.

And then my mother comes through the arrival gate and starts talking to me about the luggage belt not working. But I am too pissed off to listen. And that is where eavesdropping and speculation and not having your mobile will get you. I go home and Google guide dogs.

Magic Mirror  
Valerie O'Riordan

A bowl of ammonia mixed with a cup of cornflour. Jemma beat them with the wooden spoon.

Mel watched. She said, "That's it, look – the whatsit, the pneumonia, it's blending right in. I told yeh, yeh'll be Snow fuckin' White by dinner-time." She watched Jemma dollop the runny paste onto her cheeks and smear it in, the rubber gloves dripping white liquid onto the ground. Like bird shit. "Me brother won't know what hit him – look at yeh, the blushin' bride."

"My face feels like it's burning," said Jemma. Her eyes watered. "How long do I leave it?"

Mel lit a fag and inhaled. The smell of wee was nauseating. "Ah, well," she said. "Freckly skin like yours takes a real blast. If it's not dead sore, you're probably doin' it wrong."

Jemma nodded. The skin on her left cheekbone began to blister.

Mel smiled. "Aren't yeh just gorgeous?"

The Illiterate Man  
Val Thompson

I have been in the dark,  
been in the dark,  
all this time

I have held onto a secret,  
held onto a secret,  
all this time.

I have avoided so many actions,  
avoided actions,  
all this time.

Wriggled round so many occasions,  
occasion after occasion,  
all this time.

I have felt the fear of discovery,  
felt fear,  
all this time.

Enacted and re-enacted exposure,  
practised exposure,  
all this time.

I have seen words but not known them,  
not known words,  
all this time.

I have dreamed of the light,  
dreamed of reading in the light,  
all this time,  
all this time.

Andy's Invalid Aunty

Catriona Child

Location: Ladies' toilets at campsite.

CATH and JULIE are in adjacent cubicles.

CATH: Cheers, you've really helped to put things into perspective.

JULIE: Aye, anytime.

CATH: He can be such a prick sometimes.

JULIE: That's men for you, hun.

CATH: As soon as Andy gets a drink in him he totally changes, and he has the cheek to call me a fucking drunk.

JULIE: I know, I know, it's totally double standards.

CATH: I'm so sorry you and Pete are caught in the middle of all this, it was meant to be a nice, chilled out camping trip and Andy has to fucking ruin things as usual.

JULIE: Don't apologise, it's not your fault.

CATH: Where does he get off speaking to me like that, eh?

JULIE: It's totally out of order. He can't speak to you like that, it's domestic abuse, you know, I'm not joking.

CATH: It's his fucking sister you know, every time he comes back from seeing her, he's totally changed. She's such a shit-stirrer. Stupid cow, does she think I don't know what she's been saying about me behind my back?

JULIE: What's she been saying, like?

CATH: Aw, she thinks she's so much better than me, eh? Always trying to split me and Andy up. Honestly, sometimes I think I just stay with him to spite her!

JULIE and CATH both laugh.

JULIE: She's just jealous of you. You're out having fun and she's stuck with those bratty kids. Honestly, how old is she? She acts like she's about fifty or

something.

CATH: I know, I thought we'd sorted all this out, eh? Then one drink and he has to drag it all back up again. He totally ruined last weekend by going on about it. I couldn't enjoy X-factor at all.

JULIE: He's just selfish...aw, jesus, you got any toilet roll?

CATH: I've not got any either, fuck sake, I only told Andy I would come because he said this was a good campsite. Talking out his arse again.

JULIE: Wait, I've got a tissue in my pocket, hang on, I'll rip it in half.

JULIE passes the tissue underneath the cubicle to CATH.

CATH: Cheers, you're a life saver.

JULIE: No problem, hun, better than having to drip dry, eh?

They both laugh, the toilets flush in succession. The two ladies emerge from the cubicles. They wash their hands at the sinks and stand under the hand-dryer.

CATH: I can't believe I have to share a tent with that prick tonight and all.

JULIE: Aye, you can't even banish him to the couch.

The ladies speak to their reflections in the mirror. They sort out their hair and makeup as they talk.

JULIE: It's like I said, you've got to put things into perspective. Here, have a swig of this.

JULIE hands CATH a half bottle of vodka. CATH swigs, grimaces, then takes another swig.

CATH: That's better, cheers.

JULIE: No bother.

JULIE takes a swig herself. They pass the bottle between them as they speak.

JULIE: I mean, did he really want you to turn up hungover at the hospital?

CATH: I know, honestly, I felt so shite, I probably would have been sick everywhere.

JULIE: There you go, some visit for his aunty that would have been.

CATH: Exactly my point.

JULIE: Besides, I'm sure his aunty would rather you were out having fun, than

being dragged to visit her in the hospital.

CATH: Aye, it's Andy and his fucking sister who made a big deal out of it, not his aunty. They're the selfish ones. Said I should have stayed in - on a Saturday night when it's Pam's birthday!

JULIE: They just don't get it, do they? I bet his aunty wouldn't have wanted you to miss your friend's birthday, would she?

CATH: Nah, definitely not. She can't really speak, but I can see it in her eyes, she's no like that at all.

JULIE: Exactly.

CATH: Thanks, JULIE, you always help to put things into perspective. I mean, for fuck's sake. How dare he call me a drunk, just because I didn't go and visit his invalid aunty?

CATH downs the last of the vodka and throws the glass bottle into the bin.

This is the time  
(Sandwich bar, Cheam Common Road, Surrey)  
Susannah Hart

This is the time and the place  
Of the small pleasures, of the weak coffee and the iced bun.  
Well, you've got to treat yourself a little  
When you're my age, haven't you?

This is the time of the special offers at Sainsbury's  
And the deal at the Morrisons fish counter.  
I must admit I do like their goujons,  
But they're a bit expensive for what they are.

This is the time of the grumble, the mumble,  
The lapsed season ticket and the highlights on the telly.  
Poor Derek! Hasn't made a game since April.  
Course everything changed when they moved to West Ham.

This is the time of the arthritis, the flat shoes,  
The bus passes and the help with the central heating.  
Lots of 'em could do a day's work but they don't;  
I told Eileen, you take what's yours.

This is the time of potatoes in allotments,  
Of thinning out and failed sweet peas.  
My children all went to school here  
But there's too many of them about now.

This is the time of closing inwards, of folding up,  
Of staying put and shutting down.  
I saw one once, on the train to Wimbledon –  
Black down to here, and then glasses, and black all the way down.

This is the hour in the morning  
When we've come to where we were going.  
This is the time and the place.