

The best of Bugged – selection from August 3rd

At the Bus Stop
Rosie Sandler

When she said they were
“all right at that age”
(pointing to a small girl (black))
I said, “black or white, they’re all right
at any age – if they’re all right.”
And she looked at me slantwise
like I was a puzzle
she’d like to put straight.
Jewish
I could have whispered
if she’d known what to ask

One-eyed Angel
Suzanna Fitzpatrick

‘I was an angel yesterday,’ she said,
‘Sam’s twenty-first, we all went fancy dress.’

‘Yeah right, an angel, that’s in character.’

‘I wore that miniskirt I got last year,
the t-shirt with the little silver star,
Jen’s plastic mules. Put tinsel on the shoes
and round the sleeves – it fucking itched as well.’

‘And wings?’

‘A pizza box.’

‘A used one?’

‘Yeah.

I stuck on white fake fur, and no-one knew.
I looked all right – had a tiara too –
got off with Jonathan at any rate.’

‘You never!’

‘I was pissed – I was so drunk
I had to shut one eye the whole way home.’

They wander off, South London seraphim,
hung over, shedding glitter, moulting fur
and shreds of pepperoni; breaking hearts.

Elephant Spoon Thieving
Catherine Fearn

'Doug' is based upon a man I overheard on the Glossop-Manchester train talking about a Canadian rusty barge, elephant spoon thieving and Greek ruins. 'Steve' is based on a man I sat near to in a Wetherspoons who was dining out with his blind date, whom he had only just met that afternoon...

"And then they brought out the Canadian rusty barge, and I was like: 'Oh no! Not the Canadian rusty barge, anything but the Canadian rusty barge.' It was so embarrassing for my country!"

I think I'm falling in love with Doug, it's only been 60 seconds (and counting) but he's the most promising guy I've ever met on a speed date.

"So why was your country embarrassed by that?" I ask.

"Because they brought out the rusty barge in front of the Queen and that other guy."

"Prince Phillip."

"Yeah, Phillip. I mean would you bring out a rusty barge in front of royalty for Canada Day?"

"No way."

"Exactly."

"So, where else have you visited on your travels?"

"Glossop. That's where I'm staying at the moment."

"I meant, where else in the world?"

"Oh right, yeah, we had to do a tour in Greece once. You can't dig anywhere without hitting a fricking ruin over there, that's why they're in such a mess now after the Olympics."

"Which Olympics?"

"The last one. You can't build anywhere or do anything without getting permission from the authorities. You're doing training in the Greek countryside but you can't go anywhere for fricking ruins. It's worse in Africa though."

"Why?"

"The elephants. They come up to your house and scratch their butts off and then they steal your spoons."

"Spoons?" I start laughing, trying not to do my embarrassing breathy laugh.

"Yeah, they get their trunks in through the kitchen window and steal the spoons. I don't know why."

"That's crazy. So, you like it in here, you like it around Manchester?" Doug is looking straight into my eyes, he's gorgeous. God bless Canada.

"Sure I do. You see that tower over there," (he is pointing out of the window toward the Beetham Tower), "that is the tallest building in England."

"Really?"

"Sure is, maybe we could go there next..."

Before Doug can finish, Tony, the Speed Dating Host, rings the bell and announces, "Ok folks it's time to change the tables - get those chat-up lines working, cos I wanna see you flirting!"

Sat across from me now is a guy aged about fifty with short grey-flecked brown hair and blue eyes that are set close together (always a bad sign). He wears blue-rimmed glasses and an immaculately ironed white shirt. He is not saying a single word and I can hear his every breath because it whistles slightly. His top lip puckers momentarily as though he's about to say something, but then falters as he continues to look at me, staring at me, waiting for something to happen - I feel like a bird being watched by a cat.

"So this is your first time at one of these nights then?" I ask.

"Yes," he replies, "I'm a virgin."

"Really?" I splutter and some of the pink cocktail I'm drinking comes out of my nose. Doug is on the table next to me (God I hope he hasn't just seen that).

"I'm a speed-dating virgin," the guy continues, "But I am not a virgin. I've been on a date before."

"Sorry it's gone up my nose. When was your date?"

"23rd November 2001"

"Wow, that's a long time ago, no offence."

"Yes. Here's a handkerchief." He passes me over a handkerchief – not a piece of Andrex or Kleenex, but a proper handkerchief with initials on it. "They're brand new. Reader offer in The Daily Mail - 10 pure cotton handkerchiefs for £9.99."

"Thanks," I reply, blowing pink cocktail into it, "Shall we start again, I haven't even asked your name." I take a drink of my cocktail and wait for the reply. I take another mouthful and wait some more. But he just sits there. And I just sit there. And I'm beginning to wonder why he came here. (Maybe he's shy. His last date was nine years ago. Give the guy a chance. Cotton handkerchiefs. For God's sake.)

"So, what's your name?"

"Steve."

"Steve what?"

"Steve Shuttlecock."

I nearly snort some more drink up my nose at the way he says 'cock'. Again, I hope Doug didn't see that. I carry on, "And what's your current status?" He looks at me as though I've asked him what string theory is, "I mean as in widowed/divorced/gay/straight/bi/Christian/aetheist/muslim/Buddhist."

"I'm straight. Very straight. And single."

"Very single."

"Pardon?"

"Very single, so you like to mingle. I talk in rhymes when I'm nervous. So Steve, what have you done work-wise?"

"I've been a care assistant, bus re-fitter, sales assistant. I've looked after horses. I've not had a dole life. I like to keep my professional and personal life separate."

"That's a good thing." I say, "It's a bit like Twilight with the Vampires and humans." Where did that just come from?

But Steve continues, "I tried to watch First Blood the other night, but I found it a bit pornographic."

"A bit pornographic?"

"Well I turned it on and there were two people banging away at each other." He stares at me, hard. The way he just said 'banging'. Ugh. Is he enjoying this?

"You're a tease." He says.

I try to laugh. "It's good to tease." Oh God, am I flirting? Am I flirting with Steve who still lives at home with his Mum? He cracks a little smile at me, but in a pitiful rather than amused way, the type of smile a bully gives you when they see you are trying to play it cool.

"You're Bridget Jones, you."

And before I can ask him what he means by that, Tony has rung the bell again and I have to get up, and move onto the next table.