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# **Love and Other Problems**

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Ashley Chantler

**The Alternative Press**

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*For Gary*



## Contents

What We Talk About When – 7
The British Library is Falling Down – 8
A Day in the Life – 10
Remembrance of Things Past – 11
Bachelor – 12
Bachelor (2) – 13
Bachelor (3) – 14
Bachelor (4) – 15
Bachelor (5) – 16
Love – 17
If You Feel a Cold Coming – 18
Paradise Lost – 19
Blue – 20
Manscaping – 21
Silence – 22
Cogito... – 23
Love (2) – 24
Love (3) – 25
<i>Acknowledgements</i> – 27



## What We Talk About When

‘She’s on all fours, her white buttocks parted very slightly, hinting at her anus. He moves onto the bed, strokes her cheeks, kisses them, soft lips on tender flesh. He parts her further and tongue-tips her hole. She arches her back, sighs. He rises and tries to enter.’

Silence.

‘You think it doesn’t work?’

‘I think there are better ways to talk about love.’

## The British Library is Falling Down

I can't be the only person who does this, he thinks, tucking away his softening cock.

Back at his seat, instead of looking for Robert Lowell poems in an issue of the *transatlantic review*, Sam looks round Reading Room 2 for cubicle wankers.

Bearded guy, mid-fifties – possibly. Queer-looking fellow – probably. PhD geek with adolescent spots – certainly. Early thirties twat with spiky hair and an iPad – definitely.

Outside for a smoke, Sam rings his mate Dave, a lecturer in animal behaviour. 'Have you choked the chicken in the British Library?' 'Of course.' He rings his mate Gary, who's writing a book about village churches. 'Have you bashed the bishop in the British Library?' 'Of course.'

After two hours inside, Sam has pencilled on his A4 pad: 'David Lodge must have lodged a dollop; Frank Kermode must have dropped a load; Will Self must have willed out a bit of himself; Andrew Motion must have drawn a seedy motion.'

At home, Sam goes on Wikipedia. 'The main archives of the British Library opened in 1997...' He clicks on the link for the British Museum Reading Room. 'Famous users include Kipling, Orwell, Wells, Shaw, Rimbaud, Lenin, Gandhi...' Click.

'At the age of 18 on 4 September 1888, Gandhi went to University College London to study law and train as a barrister. His time in the Imperial capital was influenced by a vow he had made to his mother in the presence of the Jain monk Becharji, upon leaving India, to observe the Hindu precepts of abstinence from meat, alcohol, and promiscuity.'

Gandhi must have gone to the Men's to mangle the monk.

Sam rings Dave. 'Did you throttle the throstle in the British Museum?' 'Of course.' He rings Gary. 'Did you pummel the parishioner in the British Museum?' 'Of course.'

Dave then texts: 'Check out macniece's poem the british museum reading room'.

'Under the hive-like dome the stooping haunted readers...' Bingo! A subtle nod to those in the know.

Back on Wikipedia. ‘Gandhi, Marx...’ Click. ‘All that is solid melts into air.’ Indeed. You have nothing to lose: yank your chains. Click, Click. To celebrate writing ‘Imagiste’ on H.D.’s manuscript, Ezra Pound swaggered away, a smirk on his goateed face, and beat his meat. Click, Click. After proposing to Constance Lloyd, Wilde walked to the Museum, went into the toilet and wept, and spunked, a futile gesture against the age.

Women? Germaine Greer, definitely, and Virginia Woolf must have popped down from Bloomsbury, done some research, then relieved her bushy cunt. George Eliot? Elizabeth Gaskell? Perhaps H.D. whilst Pound was on short strokes. Surely Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Carol Ann Duffy... Women lurking in the loos, fingers on clits.

Back in Reading Room 2, Sam looks round, troubled. They’re all at it. Bearded guy, queer-looking fellow, PhD geek, early thirties twat, man in jeans, man in dark suit, man in light suit, woman in floral dress, woman with big tits, girl with big tits, girl with bigger tits... Christ. Her and her and her and him and him and him and her and her... And if them, and if here, then... In libraries up and down England, in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Newcastle, Exeter, Leicester, Chester, in Melton Mowbray, Grimsby, Nantwich, Sturry, St Austell and Diss, in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, in Europe, in America, in Australia, Japan, India, South Africa, in libraries everywhere, there are shoulders shrugged and eyes closed.

## A Day in the Life

Morning followers! Porridge as per! Another day, another dollop.  
Lol.

Dreamt again about H. Wizard!

Off to work!

On train opposite some lovely breasts. Milkydoodles! Trying not to lol.

In meeting. Yet another powerpoint presentation. Give me a rifle!  
#getmeoutofhere

Hey! Why do other people's packed lunches always look better than your own?

Who invented UHT milk? Genius.

Confused by spreadsheet. What's the diff between median and mean? #whogivesatoss

Hometime! Another day, another dollop. Lol.

More milkydoodles!

Welcome home, followers!

Who invented kiev's? Genius. #stevererecommends

Before the internet, life must have been mad!

Bedtime! The wizard awaits! Night night followers.

## Remembrance of Things Past

Sleeping Dave:  
Snug as a grub;  
Free from fear;  
His blood-swelled penis nudging the duvet.

Ash creeps out of the spare bedroom and dusts.  
He erases Dead Dave and he grins,  
Imagining Awake Dave will now always be happy.  
He is warmed by what he calls 'humanism'.

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Ash is asleep on the bathroom floor.  
Awake Dave nudges him with his right foot.

'What have you been doing?'

Ash stands. 'Dusting.'

'Why?'

'Because I love you.'

Ash smiles,  
Sees the skin under Awake Dave's eyes,  
Shudders.

## **Bachelor**

If he's grumpy, he irritates himself.  
If he wants silence, he withdraws from himself.  
If he needs solace, he tires himself.  
If he asks for an opinion, he lies to himself.  
If he fancies a fuck, he manipulates himself.

He expects and needs nothing,  
Except from himself.  
And he's never at home  
Worrying why he's late.

## **Bachelor (2)**

He stands by his bed that he's covered with washed socks  
And couples them, folding black with black, black with black,

Coupling and folding, coupling and folding, coupling and folding,  
Until he can throw them, one by one, into the drawer.

He does this every three weeks, or every sixteen days if it's winter.  
He usually does this with a smile, but sometimes he doesn't.

### **Bachelor (3)**

His lips begin to twitch as he crosses the threshold,  
And he's grinning by the time the door is shut.

He cracks open a can of Cains –  
'Finest bitter traditionally brewed' –  
Rolls himself a Drum –  
'Original premium quality handrolling tobacco' –  
Puts on Pink Floyd –  
'Home, home again. I like to be here when I can' –  
Falls onto the sofa.

Outside, the phone lines carry a mixture of messages.

## Bachelor (4)

He gets home, pours a beer,  
Rolls a fag, puts on *Dark Side*.  
'Breathe, breathe in the air,  
Don't be afraid to care.'  
He remembers her hand on his,  
The fragile fingers, their power,  
And her smile at his.  
'I will caress you until I die,'  
He wanted to say.

## **Bachelor (5)**

He gets home, pours a beer,  
Rolls a fag, puts on *Dark Side*.  
'You are young and life is long  
And there is time to kill today.'  
He drinks, inhales and goes to bed.

## Love

The mouse had gone for the cheese and sprung the trap.  
It was now struggling beneath the wire, back broken,  
Its front legs splayed on the wood,  
Its rear legs scraping the piss-stained hearth,  
Its rump distended,  
Its eyes glistening.

It was a process.  
A dying.

## **If You Feel a Cold Coming**

1. Chew three cloves of garlic.
2. Take 1000mg of vitamin C.
3. Bath, soak, secrete.
4. Drink a litre of orange juice. Avoid coffee.
5. Siesta on the sofa. If necessary, masturbate.
6. Eat a curry with extra cumin and chilli.
7. Defecate. You might not want to. Push.
8. Down a shot of Scotch. And two. And three.
9. And four. Avoid herbal tea (you're not a ponce).
10. Go to bed. Try not to think about death. Masturbate.

## **Paradise Lost**

His friends have lovely wives in lovely homes  
And lovely kids in lovely schools,  
Go to decent jobs in decent cars,  
Take decent breaks in decent spots.

Gone are the days of bars and clubs,  
Shots of Dutch courage, burgers in the street,  
Talking about what could have been  
And what they will never be.

## Blue

Upgrading his broadband,  
He wonders if progress is positive.

\*\*\*

Upgrading his broadband,  
He wonders if progress is positive.

*The Sun* used to be enough.

\*\*\*

Upgrading his broadband,  
He wonders if progress is positive.

*The Sun* used to be enough.  
Now the page is dark.

## **Manscaping**

He's begun to apply  
Veet to the balls.  
Remington at 3  
Tackles pubes and face.

Crack, torso and brows  
Are trimmed by Braun.  
BaByliss epilates wrists,  
Shoulders and toes.

He Gillettes the neck,  
Occasionally the lobes.  
Tweezerman plucks ears,  
Nostrils, tip of the nose.

When standing in the bath,  
Over basin or bowl,  
He sometimes recalls  
Prepubescent dreams.

## Silence

He has a feeling she'll never hear him fart,  
Laugh completely, inappropriately,  
Trip down some steps,  
Abuse a cold-caller,  
Shiver, cry,  
Scratch his nads,  
Breathe on her belly,  
Kiss her ears,  
Roll over,  
Cough, a semi-death rattle,  
Ask her to go halves,  
Sign a form,  
Check a mole,  
Hold his mug of tea, hand, him,  
Burp – 'Get out and walk' –  
Sing out of tune and time,  
Deny the existence of God,  
Call Him when he comes,  
Slur his words,  
Forget their past,  
Holler for bog roll,  
Beg,  
Sigh when he sits,  
Her mother rings,  
Friends ring, text, text, ring,  
Tell her about his will,  
Lie about how much he's drank, drunk,  
Whistle when she presents her arse  
Or bubbling lasagne,  
Gasp,  
Apologise,  
Fall silent,  
See what she's doing tomorrow.

## **Cogito...**

In the room:

Wooden table, bare.

Wooden chairs, empty.

Wooden sideboard, shut.

Radiator cold, unbled.

Walk into the room,

The sensor flashes red.

Do nothing,

The sensor goes white.

## Love (2)

His favourite day is Monday,  
Bin day.  
He sits in his front room,  
Chair, concrete, plaster,  
Listening for the reversing bleeps,  
The clatter bang shunk,  
The departure;  
His fingers hot,  
Pulsing for the purging,  
The return of control.

### Love (3)

In his dreams he is a swan rubbing his two-foot neck above the white socks of girls with bread, the hems of their skirts runkling as he passes backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, and higher and higher, their giggles lowering to sighs, the bread forgotten.

He's never told his wife. She is full of sleep and can't compete. He nuzzles her and is full of warmth and sadness.



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