

Bedford Writers' Circle Literary Supplement

Showcasing the writing of our members



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For one of our monthly meetings, we were tasked with writing a piece using the first line of a well-known book as our starting point. As usual, the resulting work was varied and fascinating.

The Arrest

By Caroline Coleman

'Somebody must have made a false accusation against Joseph K., for he was arrested one morning without having done anything wrong.' This is the opening sentence of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, about a man arrested and made to stand trial for a crime that is never divulged to him.

It was early. Even for Joseph, who was an early riser. Every day was a work day and he had been expecting to get in his van and drive. That was what he did, every day. But this morning, he was still in bed when he was woken by a knock on the door. He couldn't think who it would be. Sometimes Mr Moore next door would complain about something, but Joseph had been really careful to park his van neatly in the correct parking spot, and did more than his fair share when it came to putting the bins out on a Friday morning. Surely it couldn't be him. But nobody else ever came to Joseph's door.

The knock came again, and the doorbell rang too, loud and urgent. Joseph jumped out of bed and hurriedly put on his clothes from yesterday, although, in his panic, he couldn't find his socks or shoes. More important to get to the door. There must be some emergency, he thought. He could find his socks and shoes later.

At the door stood two men dressed in grey overcoats, almost exactly matched in their height and girth so they blocked out the light as effectively as the door had done. Even their faces looked the same. Joseph knew enough to recognise who these men were. His heart sank.

"Mr Joseph K?", asked the man on the left.

But he didn't wait for an answer, launching into a long speech dense with double and triple negatives, wheretofors and foreign phrases, all delivered with the speed and efficiency of a machine gun. It went on for several minutes and Joseph's attention wavered. He noticed that one of the men had a spot of pale mud on his left shoe. And that brought his attention to his own unshod feet. They were getting cold. He wondered if he could just walk back into the house, quietly shutting the door on these strange men, put on his socks and shoes and continue his day. He thought about his van and felt a pang of love for its messy passenger seat, smothered in maps and papers. His van was probably his best friend, and Joseph even started to wonder whether it might rescue him from his predicament.

Then the talking stopped and the second man said. "You have signed the papers already confessing to the crimes aforementioned. There is no need for any further comment. Where do you live?"

Underneath Joseph's cold feet, the world seemed to spin. When and how could he have signed the papers as they had said? And then the question about where he lived. Wasn't this where they were now?

"Here. This is where I live".

The men took out tablets from their pockets and both started tapping. "No. That is not what the records show. Where do you live?"

"I'm sorry. I have no other address."

"But you live next door to this man?". They shuffled to one side to reveal Mr Moore, peering at Joseph more unpleasantly than ever. Despite the poison in his neighbour's face, he was relieved.

"Why yes. That's right. This is Mr Moore. My neighbour".

"Then you cannot live here. This gentleman lives at Leaders' Park. And we know you don't live there. We have reason to believe you are lying."

"I don't understand. I have always lived here, since it was allocated to me. Mr Moore, surely you know this. You have been next door for a long time, your records must show that. I can find you the papers. Show you proof."

But the men were not willing to argue any further. "This will be added to the list of crimes you have admitted to. We do not need any further proof. Now, you must return home so we can arrest you."

"But where? Where do you think I should be?"

"At your home, of course. We will follow you."

Joseph was beyond tired now. His feet were aching and he felt like crying. He started retreating into his home.

"No!" shouted the men, "Not in there. You must leave so we can follow you."

One of them stepped forward, turning remarkably neatly inside the hallway and shoving Joseph out of the front door.

He begged to be allowed to find his shoes and this was added as a further crime on the list being held against him. He asked where he should go and this, too, added to a growing list of offences.

And so he started to walk, gingerly, feeling the rough pavement beneath his sensitive feet. And three metres behind, he was trailed by the two men, with Mr Moore following curiously at the back. It was a fresh, dry morning, although rain had fallen in the night. Puddles soon became a relief for Joseph's sore feet. The procession continued, passing the boarded up charity shops on the high street and a roost of staring paper boys loitering outside the newsagents. Joseph noticed the birds singing. He supposed they must do that all the time, although, from his beautiful van he had never heard them before. From behind a window, he saw a dog growling at him and wondered if it got face ache, gurning and grimacing all day.

Outside the State Church, he turned right. He regretted it slightly, because the road went uphill and he felt the pressure more keenly on his feet. But he slowed slightly, and the men behind slowed and so did Mr Moore. And they continued past the chauffeurs lined up to take the Governors to their offices, past the censors' offices and the old theatre which now doubled as a meeting place for important announcements.

And then they reached the town's green belt, with its carefully manicured gardens, zoned to avoid anybody meeting the wrong kind of person. He needed to rest now. The shock of all that had happened was abating and now he felt only exhaustion. He sat down, knowing that a timer would

monitor how long he stayed there, that he would be moved on by an Attendant if he outstayed his allocation. The men and Mr Moore loitered.

This strange, lonely, walk continued. All day, all night, and on into countless days, months and years. Joseph is elderly now, but he is strong. He has learnt to appreciate the details around him. He notices how plants grow from walls where the houses have been left empty, watches the trees give up their leaves to create a soft, sweet humus around their bases, knows the birds that come and go through the year. He observes the clouds and knows what the weather will be long before the professionals have made their forecasts. Joseph and his followers fell into a routine, but now only one man remains, a constant, silent shadow. The other man in grey succumbed to bunions and was transferred from the pursuit. Mr Moore was run over, waiting in the middle of the road while Joseph rested at a bus stop. He was not missed.

Neither man talks. Neither pays attention to the other. And so they walk, day after day, Joseph still ignorant of the crimes he was supposed to have committed, ignorant of the place he is supposed to live.

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Valentine's Day

By Jacquie Gulliver

'In the beginning the Lord of Beings created men and women, and in the form of commandments, in one hundred thousand chapters, laid down rules for regulating their existence with regard to Dharma, Artha and Kama.' is the opening line of the *Kama Sutra* by Vatsyayana.

Nigel knew he was not going to like this book. 'Who the fuck is Arthur?' he asked.

'It's Artha.' His wife Lucy peered at him over her reading glasses. 'The footnote says it means the acquisition of wealth and property etc.'

Nigel relaxed a bit. He had thought the Karma Sutra was about sex and had been worried, coming to bed, that Lucy would want him to contort himself into uncomfortable foreign positions. 'And the other two?' he asked.

'Dharma is the acquisition of religious merit — I don't think we need to bother with that one.' Lucy paused, 'And Kama is love, pleasure and sensual gratification.'

'Ah, that sounds more like it.' Nigel tilted the cover of the book towards him. 'Are you going to wear jewels and a nightie slashed to the waist?'

'Yes, if you adorn your chest with pearls and rubies...' Lucy wacked him gently with the book. 'But that's not why I want to read it...'

Nigel looked down at his paunch, and, relieved that athletic prowess would not be required, concentrated on staying awake. Lucy read on through what sounded like the Bible with lots of names and numbers but then, quite suddenly, it was not the Bible. Set out in bullet points, with special words to denote, the correct behaviour for different types of sex: For example with one's own wife, with other people's wives and with courtesans.

'Blimey.' Nigel gave a start. 'I don't fancy Janet Brown or Anthea Ridley. And I don't have a courtesan...'

'Lucky for you,' said Lucy. 'And please note there's no reference to sex with one's own husband, sex with other people's husbands or sex with... Dear God,' she paused. 'Do we Brits even have a word for a male courtesan?'

'Gigolo?' her husband offered.

Nigel drifted off again as Lucy read a footnote about some poor man who was punished for a sexual transgression with a thousand ulcers all over his body.

'Poor sod,' Nigel commiserated. But his wife rounded on him.

'He was being punished because he had tricked a young woman into having sex.'

Somewhere between how to spread flowers on the ground and the correct behaviour surrounding the sport of cock fighting, Nigel fell asleep. But Lucy read most of the night skipping the cultural details, like stringing garlands or adorning idols with rice and flowers. What grabbed her was its honest and open approach to sex.

In the morning Nigel had kissed his wife goodbye and she had seen him off to work as normal. But he was worried. They had been married for nearly thirty years, but lately she seemed dissatisfied and unhappy. Was she disappointed in him?

He stopped on the way home at the garage and bought her a box of Ferrero Rocher and some flowers. Then, determined to cover all bases, he went back in and bought the huge Valentine's card he had spotted on the way out. He knew Lucy did not rate them, but it was a picture of a man carrying a massive heart and inside it said simply, 'Here is my heart.'

Lucy was not at home. Her Head Teacher had asked her to go back in to provide snacks for an evening function. So Nigel let himself in, found a vase and put the flowers with his other offerings, on the coffee table in the sitting room. Then he sat down with a Friday evening beer and the Times.

Lucy's copy of the Kama Sutra was next to him on the sofa. Idly he picked it up and read the blurb on the back cover. Oh dear, his wife must be really unhappy to be reading this. Maybe the Valentine's card was a mistake? His Lucy was a practical sort of woman and it was a cold wet evening, a roaring log fire would be more to her liking. The smell and sound of wood burning in the grate always made her happy. He put down his glass, carefully selected some kindling and laid a good fire. When it was blazing he decided against the Valentine's card and threw it into the flames just as he heard her key in the door. Whew! If she had been thinking of leaving him then sappy sentimentality might have been what pushed her over the edge.

Lucy came through and looked at the fire. 'Oh how lovely — but what's that?' She pointed to the Valentine's card. Its envelope had burned quickly but the huge plasticised heart had blown up, turned an angry purplish red and was throbbing in the heat.

'I bought you a Valentine's card,' he stammered. 'But I know you don't really like them so I threw it into the fire...'

'What did it say?' she smiled.

'Here is my heart.'

She bent to kiss him. 'And flowers and chocolates too, my lucky day.'

'Well, I thought with all this Kama Sutra stuff,' he held up the book, 'You might be getting a bit fed up with me...'

'You Wally.' She sat down next to him. 'I have something to tell you. I was going to tell you last night but you fell asleep...' She snuggled up to him. 'I've decided on a change of career. You know how much I enjoyed that series called Sex Education?'

'With Gillian Anderson?' Nigel asked.

'Yes, that one. Well, I've been doing some research. There is a desperate shortage of therapists and I've had enough of being a school cook. I want to retrain as a sex therapist, that's why I was reading the Kama Sutra.'

Nigel put his arm around her. 'Whew! I thought you wanted me to do all that...' Lucy started to giggle and he did not finish what he had started to say...

There's a famous seaside place...

by Joan Lightning

'There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool' is the first line of the poem 'The Lion and Albert' by Edgar Marriott

There's a famous seaside place called Britain,
The beaches are covered with turds.
But the waterboard bods say 'Don't worry.
It all could have been so much worse.'

Oh, but please don't go swimming int' rivers,
The water is full of e-coli.
If you drink it, you'll right get the shivers,
But it's alright, it got there lee - ga - ly.

And maybe don't eat any lettuce,
It needs lots of water to grow it.
And it's not that they're trying to scare us,
But that water comes from... yeah, you guessed it.

So now we've got an election
And everything's going to pot.
It's time for some deep introspection,
And a wooden spoon stirring the pot.

Inflation is down, so they tell us,
it's all back to normal, it's sorted.
'course the prices of food have all doubled
And your mortgage or rent bills have vaulted.

The ones who are in say they'll fix it,
Just let them keep hold of their chairs.
The other side thinks that's a good one,
And points out they've had fourteen years.

Reform says it's all down to migrants.
The Greens say we're all going to burn.
The indies are full of defiance,
And the voters don't know where to turn.

The country's turned into a panto,
We can't even agree if it's hot.
No matter how loudly one side says 'it is',
The other side shouts 'No it's not'.

So our choices, it seems, are as follows:
Status quo for another four years,
Or the reds or the greens or the yellows.
I predict it will all end in tears.

What a start to a story by Ray Mayhew

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.' is the opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

"I do wish you could make up your mind Charlie, next you will be telling me that you used to be indecisive but now you're not so sure. It's such a confusing nonsense opening to a story that nobody will read any farther than that. Mark my words your readers will be demanding their money back and your name will be mud. Before you know it you'll be back at the boot-blackening factory of your youth."

"Please could you be a little more civil Mr Samuel Smudge? It's Charles or Mr Dickens. Since when has a chimney sweep been an expert on literature and book sales? My agent tells me he is sure it will outsell my previous novel"

"That's as may be but all your readers have no doubt bought copies on the strength of your previous good work. It would be a great sadness if 'A Tale of Two Cities' is a good book and nobody reads it because they are deterred by such a daft and off-putting opening. I only speak so boldly about this matter from concern for you, my dearest friend."

"Well my dear Samuel thank you for your concern but I think we will have to agree to differ on this matter. May I take this opportunity to say how much I have enjoyed you supplying me over the years with amusing names for my characters. If my readers knew about this I am sure they'd be full of praise for you. Have you perchance conjured up any new ones of late?"

"Well I'm working on Gertrude Grimble at the moment but I can feel it in my bones that it can be better with some more head scratching."

"Very considerate of you to take it so seriously and I am so grateful because I do not have your skill in this respect. My stories would be sadly lacking without your contribution. Do you have a favourite Samuel?"

"Uncle Pumblechook. His name announces a very round figure of a fellow with enough money to eat well every day, hence his rotund appearance."

"Quite so but my favourite is Mr Gradgrind. Surely this name shows the joyless rigid tyrant that nobody would wish to befriend, unless they did so falsely to avoid his harsh treatment."

"Aha, so Charles you can make your mind up after all!"

“So I can. You and I will always be good friends and I have great expectations of our continuing collaboration.”

Robin & friends

By Rosemary Ostley

“Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin.” is the opening line of The House at Pooh Corner by A A Milne.

“Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin.” DI Rawlins paused the video as the man opposite him and his fellow officer DS Charlie Short, stared stupidly at the screen. They’d endured a good half hour of this man’s ‘no comment’ answers to their questions, a smug lawyer twiddling his pen in the corner, but now they were going in for the kill. “That’s you, isn’t it, Robin Christophilis as ‘Christopher Robin’ in this little video clip. And ‘Edward Bear’ is our murder victim, your old pal Eddie Brown. You and your little band of nasties called Eddie Pooh Bear because he wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer. And you decided everyone in your pack of what you no doubt thought of as desperados, should take on the name of one of the other characters. Funnily enough they all fitted them well and that big lugubrious lump Lenny Fox, aka Eeyore, was the one behind the camera when that clip was taken. His voice is unmistakable, especially at the end when he asks, ‘how was that, Rob?’ The two officers sat back in their chairs, watching the effect of what they’d all just seen sink in with both Robin and his sleazy lawyer.

A duly charged Robin was taken to his cell and left to ponder a future banged up and known to the rest of the criminal fraternity as the Pooh Bear killer, while his lawyer, Danny Pratt (by name and nature) exited stage left to drown his sorrows in the nearest pub.

Where had it all gone wrong, wondered Robin? Twenty years ago, he and his little gang of misfits, having spent most of their school careers bunking off, had congregated behind the local abandoned Methodist Church. Because of his name, Robin had always jokingly been called Christopher Robin and it wasn’t long before Eddie became Pooh Bear, little weasel-like Shagger Moffat was christened Piglet, nice but dim Andy Richard was Tigger, and the afore-mentioned Lenny took on the mantle of Eeyore. That left Marty Fennick, who wore round National Health specs, as Owl, and fleet of foot, especially after a spot of larceny, Johnny Fritt as Rabbit. Robin had a girlfriend, Tracey, who toted round her small girl Penny in a buggy and they became Kanga and Roo, obviously. No-one knew who Penny’s father was and Tracey wasn’t saying, but the child came in handy as a diversion when there were old ladies to be robbed. As a group they’d been tight but on reflection, the signs had been there from the off.

You always took a chance when someone wasn’t the brightest, and Eddie was always the weakest link. But loyalty went a long way and Robin looked out for Eddie. Robin’s mum, Tallulah, had a soft spot for him and Eddie was to be found round at Robin’s more than in his own home. Eddie’s dad had jumped ship at the first opportunity leaving his mum to turn to unspecified vices to make ends meet. You couldn’t take offence at Eddie, he was just a big loveable lump, but one with an unfortunately loose tongue when under the influence (or ‘gabby when pissed’) as Shagger put it.

Having had time to reflect on his client’s situation, aided by two pints of lager and blackcurrant at the Angry Horse, Danny Pratt presented himself at the door to Robin’s cell and re-ingratiated himself, telling his client ‘I got a plan, mate.’

Meanwhile, Officers Rawlins and Short were engaged in plugging any leaks in what looked like a watertight case. A mob-handed trip to the idiot gang’s HQ, also known to the local force as ‘The house at Pooh Corner’ but in reality Tallulah’s assisted living bungalow on Fortune Street, had netted them Eeyore, Tigger, Owl and Rabbit. Kanga and Roo were out asset stripping in the local shopping centre. Piglet, something of a chameleon, remained unaccounted for, but would

probably be given up by the others once the right incentive was offered. Interviews under caution revealed a sad but predictable sequence of events.

In separate interviews, each member of the gang told the same story: Eddie had shot his mouth off once too often when he drunkenly let slip to the landlord of the pub that Robin and his pals were planning to ransack the house of a well-heeled local couple who had rather stupidly bragged about their impending two-week jaunt to sunnier climes. Robin had picked up on this and whilst on his regular window-cleaning round had taken the opportunity to assess the possibilities. Shagger was the man with the skills to disable the burglar alarm and they were all set to do the business on the Sunday night. Eddie was warned to stay off the booze on Saturday night, but he slipped out 'just to wet me whistle' and finally rolled in at midnight having spilt the beans to said landlord. Once he'd sobered up he fessed up to Robin, but Robin was in no mood to forgive him this time. It turned out news that Tracey had decided to go back to Penny's father, and who that person was, had pushed his temper to unsafe levels and he took it all out on Eddie. By the time he'd finished beating on him it was too late. When the red mist cleared he found himself gazing at a very lifeless Eddie.

Half a bottle of Scotch later, Robin called the gang together. All, that is, except Shagger who was nowhere to be found. "Go and find the little scrote," he directed Andy, Marty and Johnny. "Lenny, you stay here and help me dispose of the evidence." And that was when Lenny shot the video using Robin's phone. Eddie's body was still unaccounted for, but the video ended up on social media and was brought to the attention of the Police by a 'concerned citizen'. "I suppose it could have been all for the benefit of the camera and Eddie is still alive somewhere nursing his wounds," volunteered DS Short. "Doubt it after his head hit all those stairs," countered DI Rawlins. Still, could all be academic: that excuse of a lawyer of his says they're going for a plea of diminished responsibility." "Well," mused Short, "he has a point."

A short story by Veronica Sims

'Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts.' is the first line of Hard Times by Charles Dickens.

We were being subjected to a visit from one of the local candidates in the upcoming General Election. My best friend Penny looked over toward me and winked. I thought she was quite brave to do that as the visiting dignitary was standing at the front of the class dictating teaching principles to our class teacher, Miss Parsons. I suspected that Miss Parsons did not need a lecture on how to teach from a passing politician, as she had been teaching at our school for generations. My Mum and Aunt Judy could both remember being taught by her. The man was clearly a Twit. And rude. I felt very indignant for my beloved teacher. How dare he?

Penny raised her eyebrows at me and then raised her hand. I admired her bravery. After all, she was only fourteen years old, and this pompous candidate obviously thought that he knew everything. Miss Parsons gently pointed Penny's raised hand out to the visitor. He nodded his permission for Penny to ask a question.

'But, Sir, Mr. Jenkins,' Penny started to speak with a timid voice (*fa/se*, she is never timid) 'What if the facts we are taught are not true facts?' she asked. 'How do I know when the facts are not true facts?'

Mr Jenkins looked a trifle taken aback. I appreciated his bewilderment. How to answer that question?

'Well, er, good question, you are correct, the facts need to be true facts, of course.'

'But how do we know, Sir?' Penny persisted. 'There are people who think climate change is not a fact and won't do things to protect the environment.'

Now our self-important Mr Jenkins had made his doubts about the climate crisis well-known in the media, along with his determination to open more coal mines and North Sea Oil fields, if he were elected and became a minister. A red stain started to spread, from the neck up, on his face. 'Oh dear,' I thought, he has realised he is being cornered. 'What would happen to Penny now'.

'No my dear, you are mistaken. The fact is, the rise in temperature is a perfectly normal phenomenon and not the fault of human activities.'

'Oh!', Penny retorted with a puzzled frown, (which I knew was totally manufactured) but that is not what Sir David Attenborough says...' There was a moment of silence before Mr Jenkins' assistant glanced at his watch and said: I think we need to leave now Sir; your next appointment is in twenty minutes and the roads might be busy.'

'Yes, **Yes**, you are right Dominic.' He turned toward Penny. 'Sorry, my dear, we will have to have this discussion another time.' His assistant had rescued him.

Miss Parsons smiled. He left.

Game! Set! Match! to Penny.

Invisible

By Andrew Stock

I am an invisible man' is the first line of Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison.

"I am an invisible man."

"What?" She rolled towards him, her eyes barely open, her hair flat to her cheek with sleep and yet still she looked to him as gorgeous as she ever had.

"Sorry, I didn't want to wake you." Although he was a man who had lived, a man of 40 with an ex-wife and a child, he still felt himself blush into the cold early morning light that squeezed through the gap in the curtains. "Please carry on sleeping. It's early and it's been a" He blushed harder "Long night." She smiled sleepily and snuggled into his arm wafting the gentle remnants of the perfume she wore at the start of their evening together towards him. Folding himself around her he felt the warmth from her naked skin wash over him filling him with the desire he had felt so strongly towards her for months. He breathed deeply at her hair and settled himself towards a sleep he so needed but could not settle as he felt the schoolboy urge to laugh bubble inside him hiding the expulsion of air that wanted so desperately to emerge behind a yawn. He couldn't believe this was happening. After all this time.

He had first met Sarah when he had joined the university as a language master. He was newly arrived in the city, newly divorced and instantly smitten. Sarah was the Deans personal assistant, tall, slight, ethereal Otherworldly was the word that sprang to mind when first they had met. She had approached him full of confidence, her eyes alight with a glow that said 'welcome, I am pleased to meet you, I see you for who you are'. Her voice was deeper than her demeanour would have you believe. Her teeth were bright against the natural redness of her lips which arced in a smile matching the gleam in her eyes.

"You must be Daniel. We have been expecting you. So pleased to meet you." She held out a slim hand which gripped his own firmly. Its going to be a full day for you today, so much to bring you up to speed. The Dean will meet with you at 11am as he is in a meeting with the board so until then it is my task to give you the walk around and sort out your pass and all the other trivialities of preterm

newbies.” She had laughed, dipping her eyes briefly over him, soaking him into her, holding him to her spell.

Their courtship had begun slowly, the odd nod across the hallway or canteen, a brief conversation over the dining table set at the far end of the refectory for staff members only, a casual conversation at the end of first week gathering of staff and board alike. He had plucked up the courage to ask her for a drink months later waiting in the carpark fiddling with his tie rubbing his shoes down the back of his trousers planning the words he would use. He had failed with the practiced speech stumbling over the first words as though they somehow didn't quite fit his mouth. She could have jumped in with a reassuring smile or nod of understanding, taken over the situation but she had stood her ground allowed him to find his voice. Laying here now he smiled, God he must have seemed like a schoolboy girdled with pubescence, washed with embarrassment. There he was a language master and he could find no words to ask her for a drink such was her hold over him.

Time had passed and drink turned to meal, meal to theatre, theatre to weekends away or visits to families. His parents were besotted with Sarah why would they be any other way. Sarah's mother had been more precise, clipped and yet her words had spoken of excitement that at last her precious daughter had found a man who 'at least looked as though he were capable'. He hadn't been sure what she had meant but the woman had grown fonder of him with every meeting linking her arm through his as they walked the country paths near the home she had shared with her darling Brian who had passed some seven years before.

He felt his eyes beginning to close but wanted now to fight the urge to sleep, needing somehow to fix this moment into his memory after all it had been a moment that matched fully the dream he had so firmly believed would come true. Lovemaking, sex, intercourse, copulating, congress dalliance even all words for the act, all used by poet and playwright alike and yet none of them fit, none of them matched what had occurred between them this night. Of course they had kissed, sometimes too passionately, leaving them in a state of almost broken promise. He had been the one to broach the subject. He was after all human and they had been a couple in all but the act for some months and he was still and would be always besotted by her. she had smiled warmly and taken him by the hand gazing into his face so intently that he felt as though his mind was full to overload. She had spoken softly her breath warm and close. She had told him of her heartache and her fears, talked of her pain and explained her need to be fully present. He wasn't entirely sure that he understood all she was saying and yet such was his depth of feeling towards her and for her he would be exactly as she needed him to be.

It was a week ago that she had suggested a weekend away to their favourite place a place they jokingly called their retirement plan. He had picked her up from her flat as usual, her dress casual and befitting a cold autumn day. She had kissed him as usual and settled back into the seat enjoying the drive as he enjoyed her observations and conversation. They had booked into the small hotel and walked along the beach hand in hand, hardly talking but enjoying the company they kept serenaded by the gulls overhead and the waves that crashed like drums to their side. They ate in the hotel dining room and shared a bottle of wine, white her favourite and spent some time reading by the open fire two people apart and yet together as one. Evening drew to night and she rose yawning loudly and they made their way to their room. As was his way he made use of the bathroom first whilst she looked from the open window of the room listening to the sea crashing to the rocks. He lay in the bed listening to her humming softly from the bathroom as she prepared herself for sleep. He re-lived the moment now, could see the light behind her as she walked from the room her face smooth, bright, her eyes alive, gleaming, her mouth smiling a smile of warmth and seduction, her figure as naked as Venus, her arms splayed slightly from her side wishing him to an embrace.

He hugged her tightly and sighed into her neck hoping the tears that ran from his eyes would not dampen her skin, would not ask her to question herself, for these were tears of the strongest kind, tears of absolute happiness. Laying here with her now he knew that she was his forever, she was his everything. Without her he was nothing. She was the light that he would hold before him. Without her to guide him through a world he had seen as spoiled he would remain a no-one, an unseen being. Oh yes without her he was an invisible man.