

Free Lance

Life's boring when you don't have a friend; I wrote as the carriage clock ticks on the mantelpiece, a perpetual *rhythmic* clicking sound. Next to it lies a book of biological thesis that I don't feel like reading. I've a dissertation to write for Mr. Thomas plus a letter to the D of E and the longer I leave them the more tiresome one becomes. I count how many pages i've left to cover then aim for a few more before lights out. The tune, playing softly on the radio came to a close. One likes to listen to classical music while writing. The rhythm fills a void in space. I find anything with lyrics tends to distract the mind from the text, alien words in working mind-span. I turn the page to 'yay', another profile of Christian doctrine, about how antidisestablishmentarianism would affect the monarchy. From studying, i've concluded most books are boring to read and write. People buy books as gifts and never read them, they become a fashion statement situated on a shelf in their study... When its finished i want my book to be novel, shed a new light, be more interesting and more enjoyable, *thereby having greater impact.*

Bang! Bang from Dave's room. Bang, bang, bang again! What the hell is he hammering at this time of night? I get up, wrap myself in my nightgown, insulating from the chill. Its after 11pm so this is really inconsiderate. The perks of communal living.

“Dave, what the hell are you up to?” I said, after knocking and entering.

“Fixing my room”

“Its almost midnight” I insisted.

“So, where you in bed?”

No, i'm stood here asking him, 'what?'

“Yes, i'm trying to sleep.... I have an early start in the morning!”

“So do i”

“Well, go to bed then, **why don't you?**”

“I'm just putting up a few pictures, brightening the place up, its glum”

“Can't it wait?”

“I had a lease of energy and thought...”

“The neighbours, Dave; consider their sleep”

“Yes well; they were going at it last night”

“Today's Sunday.” I pointed out “Please. **Its a night for us all to decline earlier.** I'm up with the milkman.” he waved smoke after inhaling a cigarette, “..and put that out, its a disgusting habit. Need i remind you that this house has a no-

smoking policy?” I asked, pointing to the red-cross stickers the landlord had stuck to the door; before slamming it behind me

I got back into bed and switched off the light to yet more vibrations. 'what is he doing now; is it deliberate?' Seeing no point in getting up again, i found a dense object to bang back. But failing to sleep induces further hunger and i toy with the idea of a nice biscuit and hot, milky, Horlicks.

“Cock” i call Dave through the wall dividing our rooms then put my gown back on and pop down for a midnight feast.

Downstairs, Jack is watching football on T.V. European League, the score is tied at nil. Someone's been cooking tacos and left a mess to be tidied. In the fridge there is one can of lager left, one can, but for now i make tea.

Interrupting my pad-pal's game, i ask if he'll help me progress with my written work.

“More writing; what's this one called?” he asked, i could detect a hint of sarcasm in his breath.

“Free Lance... a semi-autobiographical piece.”

“Is it full of big words?”

“Gianormous”

“Sounds okay; or how about just Free by Lance Longright?”

“I'm writing under my pen-name. M.B. Have a read, see what you think” He hovers, browsing the passage for a moment.

“Oh my... am I in it!” he exclaimed on reading.

“Yeah. You're talking to me as we speak”

“Wow, so that's in real time”

“Post hence, as most prose is”

“I get it, like a 3D story”

“I suppose so,”

“Got ya.. so what should I say next?”

“That's up to you”

“I watched Jack 3D the other day”

“Jack 3D. That's a fucking energy drink”

Dave laughed at his own joke “Well, if you're writing it, you're putting words in my mouth”

“Let's see,,; give me something to go on, how about...”

, “I don't know” his mind had gone blank.

“Well think of something because i've got what is known as writer's block, and its driving me round the bend”

He chortled, “that reminds me... I did have a

plan”

“Writer's block's given you a plan”

“No that other thing you mentioned, about going round the bend” Jack informed.

“The bend. You're suggesting i go for a walk outside... describe the great outdoors in detail,”

He interrupted, “No actually, i've conversed with the other housemates and we think you're losing it”

“Losing what?”

“Your marbles”

“I don't have any marbles”

“But you did have and now you haven't because you've lost them”

“Have i now?” i queried, perplexed.

“We think so... so we've arranged a mental health assessment” The doorbell rang, “That'll be them now”

“Wait a minute... you've done what?”

Jack ignored my further questioning and went to answer the door. I was perturbed, i didn't want to see any psychiatrist but Jack let them in to see me....

I sat down casually and pleaded my sanity, assuring them one need not be assessed but they, as a collective whole simply wouldn't have it. The

three of them sat down all prim with briefcase and clipboard and began to ask me personal questions; then suggested i go with them to hospital.

“I’m meant to be at college in the morning,” I insisted, “i’ve an important assignment to hand in!”

It took no more than fifteen minutes for the trio of professionals to diagnose me with Bipolar disorder, a modern day schizophrenia warranting incarceration in a mental asylum. “We’ll have to wait for an ambulance,” they said and stood guard in case I tried to elope.

“Can I just get a few bits? My toothbrush, dressing gown & a change of underwear perhaps”

“Of course” they replied obligingly. As stated my GP, newly allocated shrink and social worker all wanted the best for me and as they knew best, were to force me into a secure psychiatric unit. Jack seemed tickled as he stood by caustically watching the medics do their thing, ticking boxes on forms as though i was yet another potential psycho about to be carted off for analysis. I went to get my toothbrush.

Chapter 2

I didn't like it, I don't like it now. Its a most unnerving feeling to think that you can be locked up for being ill. It seems unjust and perhaps always would, unless you'd been quarantined which i hadn't, in this case. I'd just been set up by my vindictive flatmates who were blatantly jealous of my writing talent and wanted to grind an angle to oust me, this was their idea of angle-grinding. I planned to make it a vendetta; couldn't believe they'd stitched me up in my own story! I should never have asked them to contribute; what was I thinking? But not to worry, i'll be right in finishing this baby. I can get us out of here, me and my avid readers, then we can have a happy ending. But I think i'll take Jack's reckless advice and write anarchy on the wall of the room in the hospital one is now in. Then all one can do is go to sleep like I had wanted to earlier. If I hadn't have got up for the biscuit.

Of course I could get agitated but then there'd be reason for them to give me tranquilizers.

I'd requested a copy of the Codes of Practice, to

pick out a few regulations and keep them under my sleeve, in case staff continually acted untowardly. I was also prepared to vandalise my room to show i'm the type of person who gets what I want, and in this instance it would be discharge; lots and lots of discharge!

The ward smelled rank... anaerobic and my room was too warm. I didn't like hospitals for the specific reason that they are full of sick people.

I felt like a prisoner... a prisoner without a case. I tucked my head into the pillow.

I smashed up my room, kicking the door then picking up the chair and bashing it off the double-glazed window that didn't open very widely. They moved me to a desuetude room.

I wake, my glands are swollen but that could just be from the passive inhalation of my own distasteful farts. I put it down to something i'd eaten for supper. The egg sandwich or the scones.

The Doctor barged in my room and asked, "How are you feeling today Lance?"

“Fine like the weather” I replied, mordantly.

“I would like to have a little chat..”

“Go right ahead” I said casually

“What do you do for a living, Lance?”

“I’m a student”

“And before that you were unemployed for a while weren't you?”

“I was, after I left school then I started writing and enrolled at college.” I stated my academic strong points “I’m writing a novel called Junge... it means young in German”

“Are you writing the book in German?” exclaimed Doctor Paniki. To which i didn't reply but shook my head, it seemed we had got sidetracked. I continued, “i am working on my own book and doing coursework as part of my Diploma in English, I assume its not your first language”

“No” he said and smiled

From the meeting with the Doctor a report was drafted and because I had to say I was writing a novel story they then accused me of 'grandiose ideation;' an orotund comment... It seems they're trying to confuse patients with big words; medical terminology ornately contrived by the

tutors of medicine. Terms like asthma or cancer, diabetes and ddd, Umbrella terms used to replace the word ill. Well, they've picked on the wrong person because one is not alliterate, but some perhaps are. I spoke to a young man called Billy who has been here over six months. Billy claimed to be unable to read or write. If I was to believe him then it indicated to me the type of person fitting a mental health incarceration. It seems most, if not all the people here are unemployed, in contrast with the staff who all work long hours. The working class have a hierarchy over those looking for work or just lazy. If i'd of had a work commitment instead of the latest college course, perhaps they would not have taken me in. They'd be liable and one could sue them for loss of earnings. My employer could sue them respectively; it would be a factor in their reckoning.

Besides mental health is surely ambiguous enough to not be conclusive, quite hard to truly detect someone's mentality unless they're faking. The disconcerting thing was that the Mental Health Act reserves the right to lock someone up forever, should it be deemed necessary. Not that they ever have done this, it would be impossible

as forever is timeless, but if one were to die in custody then t'would constitute a maximum penalization. Life can be harder when not spoon fed... but the wrath of hierarchy predominates this area of mental treatment.

“So,” “if this is for my own benefit, then why am I having to be forced to cooperate?” I said to the interviewer in the hospital, he didn't answer, “how long have you got to convince me that I need this treatment”

“You can be held for up to 28 days under Section 2 of the mental health act”

“28 days. But that's a month,” I said, with an element of fake anxiety, attempting to sound baffled at that which one had already become complaisant...

I also utilized the abundant free time to write. No longer was I wasting my time drafting essays, completing college coursework to appease tutors. I was writing my own stuff. Twisted poems and metaphorical limericks, letters to HMCTS & NHS complaints departments, and i was play-writing; contriving a piece of theatre about a mad rodent. A mouse, terrifying staff and patients in a hospital, echoing the one i'd now been residing at

for three weeks.

It was a positive note that I could focus on my own projects yet the tedium of daily care meant my inspiration was mostly derived from gloom. If anything was making my bipolar it was them as my mood here fluctuated from anguish to elation, looking on the bright side at what i did actually have going for me.

And I was escorted to the library where I had a greater choice of books to read than those circulating the ward. It fullfilled my time.

I quit smoking but I think I'm going to start again.

instead of wiriting a comedy one has decided to make this piece tragic.

The monotony of habitual confinement began to grate on one's sense... I fantasized that we were all on board a spaceship, a life-saving vessel we had been forced to construct and inhabit following environmental hostilities, making our own planet uninhabitable. One could have been captain of this ship,,; upholding moral when

facing the grim reality of being indefinitely confined, condemned to traipsing the cosmos searching for inhabitable land.

I was not alone in my melancholy; other patients exhibited the same depression, or atleast some did at certain times. You got the feeling that all were feeling like this often but concealed it, either deliberately or just by not speaking about it. I befriended a couple of other patients on the ward, an older man called Gerard who had a son and used to smoke roll ups outside in the evening. He would ask how I was to which the reply would be 'okay' even if one wasn't. He'd say the same when I showed concern for him and then we would both grumble at the poor standards and bolchy narcissism the staff could not avoid orchestrating. Why, one tried to fathom. Surely, they liked being such prigs.

If anything the ward was overstaffed. Each morning and throughout the day there would be a constant hum of busybodies circulating the hall, giving out medication, signing boxes for mail; cleaners polishing floors with machines as big and chunky as themselves. Each night they'd employ three persons who'd sit talking in the

office, updating reports on one of the computers, auditing or conducting hourly checks on residents. The job could have been done by one person but there were three in case of an emergency. A disruption from one of the patients perhaps.

Lights out was at 11pm, where one should resign to their own room and not make noise. Supper was served two hours earlier at 9pm and one of the twilight shiftworkers would comb the rooms and knock to tell you it was being served. If you had gone to sleep earlier than this point you would be woken up. If I was woken the chances of getting back to sleep were slim. Even if I wasn't hungry i'd be tempted to get up and eat while the option was there for half an hour later the canteen would be closed, the kitchen locked. If you wanted food then you would have to ask a member of staff to get you a sandwich or yoghurt at their own discretion out the kitchen. And there was hot water available 24/7.

I return to the draft, embracing the solitude of my work.

When I became tired of writing I read.
A novel I picked from the shelf in the lounge.
The book was typically boring in places but I was
compelled to finish it, most importantly, to find
out how it ends; skipping to the final chapter just
wouldn't suffice.

Nights are getting darker earlier now its
November.
I'd think I might die from oversleeping, the air so
clammy, the ethic so lax.

^^^ That stupid friend Dave! How could he stitch
me up like this. I'm sure they're sat their laughing
at the predicament they've put me in. Or they'd be
filling the minds of consultants with more
slandorous allegations or character destroying
aspersions. The twisted bastards.

Chapter 3

I met Phil for a coffee and digestive in the lounge. He's on the same ship as I and complains about the narcissism of the heirarchy, feelings stifled by suits and uniforms.

“They don't want people, they want vegetables,” he griped, “big melons and right bannanas”

“Watery melons and fracid bananas” i added.

“The place needs a good shake up.”

“I'd like to knock sense into my Doc”

“Francis Metcalfe did that last year on Embleton Ward!” Phil exclaimed.

“What happened?”

“He went nuts on the medics... split someone's lip, then started pounding the wall with his coccyx!”

“Sound's like St. Jourdan's... Imagine if one of us started doing that”

“I wouldn't want to” said Phil, “you'd just get yourself into more trouble.”

“Absolutely, it wouldn't be worth it. Although it would teach them a lesson. I've been writing a letter, to the complaints department”

“What good will that do?” Phil asked negatively.

“Some, hopefully. Its the diplomatic way of drawing daggers”

“i'm going to go for a roll”

I followed Phil outside, through the canteen. A queue of people hovered, scavengers waiting for their fill.

“Is it supper-time already!”

“Almost”

I missed the freedom to roam around town, to walk in the park, burn energy shopping or playing sports. To finish a ballgame with beer in the pub or at home. Trips to town were escorted and occasional. Only when a member of staff was free to take one out. And freedom was infringed. Why was alcohol banned, would doing so not contraindicate health? Was shoplifting 25cl wine apertifs not more dubious than actually paying for a 4-pack of cider? They were forcing errors; but, by the banning booze one acquired a taste for citrus fruits and tonic water. Still i craved a drink, some sup to wash the sandwich and crisps down. A glass of wine with cheese, an Irish Shandy. I was scheduled an automatic mental health tribunal... had been allocated a solicitor and

received a copy of the damning professional reports. Apparently i'm suffering from drug induced psychosis; schizophrenic with a history of violence... and have been labelled this because of Dave and Jack. Who've picked on a handful of stupid incidents to drop me in it, drunken Tom-foolery they were as complicit in as eye. And my persecutors have one trump card, an actual assault, a crime of passion handed from Police records. An incident, i will be forced to admit after being arrested and cautioned for it. Striking a peer with a glass in the pub. Despite expressing remorse immediately afterwards over a sobering coffee and all-day breakfast micro-meal, they'd still the account of assault on their side. This was the undisputable accusation, a trump card in their hand.

To stretch my brain and walk into the tv toom

Just when the stress or recurring bouts of stress became a nuisance, one of the guys on the ward introduced me to Koz, who resided in the room opposite mine but one. He had tried to commit suicide after his girlfriend fell pregnant to another

man. Passing his time drawing pictures in crayon, the view from his window, a bowl of fruit and one of the nurses in stockings and suspenders; pictures he showed me while we chatted. He talked incessantly and then I went to make a cup of tea.

Later that day, his door ajar he welcomed me in and we did the superso strawberry shuffle. I hadn't touched the stuff since having serious stomach cramps after dabbling a little under peer pressure at High School. I proposed him some money for his offering but he told me to simply enjoy it. Then at supper I honoured his wish and went to my room to mash out as they say. The powder I had sniffed was quite strong and kept me awake, well beyond my usual bedtime. I struggled to get to sleep often of an evening anyway so this energy booster filled a gap in my pattern. With the tunacity, I began to write and turned out 5 pages of spiel during the night. Typically, I barely ate but drank copious cups of tea and smoked cigarettes out my window in between checks.

By 6am I was still awake and hadn't slept a wink. I decided to stay up for breakfast and then go for some exercise in the training area but then fell

asleep shortly after and slept until noon.

I was alone in my stupor surrounded by shirts and ties...

the wind howling like a cholered spirit.
Like the goblins that heinously haunt the night,
my woes may be swept away by morning.

I was pretending I was in prison, lying in bed,
dozing and comparing the two incarcerations...

The key differences are:

You can smoke in your room in prison...

You're more likely to have a pad-pal, (gone are
the old hospital dorms with strings of beds
adjacent eachother)

Being safe is safer than being forced to live with
a convicted criminal(s)

Sharing tips is mainly unhygenic without medical
super=vision

You don't get daily leave unescorted from prison.

You are locked in your room,

And, as in prison, you aren't allowed to cook or
clean. Chores that can be tedious at home can
also leave one lacking when unpermitted. Despite

buying bleach on an escorted trip to the supermarket, the cleaning products were taken from me as deemed dangerous.

I'm thinking about what mistakes i've made. .. if I wasn't so glum I'd be ignorant to the stupidity.

I was visited by my Nana who had been dead since 1984.

/parents with whom I pleaded to help get me out of this hole but they actually agreed with the Doctor's diagnosis of schizophrenia. My own parents! Then they told me horrid tales from Victorian times of families having people locked up simply because they were a nuisance, exploiting the superficiality of medicine for what can be a most troubled mind

I went over the rudiments of my book, my brilliant, timeless work.

And replay the events that caused my flatmates to ring social services in the first place.

Chapter X (Home at Home)

The cat always comes back is a bad expression.
Some cats hate living at home

Doctor Pakini gave me some leave after a couple of weeks. Section 17 enabling an overnight stay back at my place. I couldn't help being excited.

instead of writing a comedy one has decided to make this piece tragic.

I return to the draft, embracing the solitude of my work.