



CYNICAL MOI?

MAY ALLAN

A collection of satirical short stories and odd odes

Cynical Moi?

by May Allan



London, England

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To Tracey, without her help and encouragement there would be no book - many thanks.

To Leigh, my lovely daughter-in-law, for implanting my ugly mug on the front cover!

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Foreword for May Allan

What a great pleasure to write the foreword for May Allan's
FIRST (and most definitely NOT last) book!!!

I've known May for several years now... and ... what a character!!! What can I say about this book... except, enjoy life through the eyes of this extraordinary character, with her
incredible wit.

Enjoy the following series of highly cynical short stories of
fact and fiction.

A movie once said, "Life is like a box of chocolates... you never know WHAT you're gonna get"... well, welcome to the wonderful world of May Allan, London resident, aged 87, intrepid Hampstead Pond explorer and great grandmother.

Vanessa



The real me



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Forward

Short Stories

The Enigma

Introduction

The Wall

Feeling of Silence

The Pond

The Eavesdropper

An Amusing Incident

I Wish I'd Done it Differently

The Happy Hour

The Evacuee

A Recollection of Childhood

Wartime Letter to my Mum

The Illusion

Wistful

Memories are Made of This

The Clock

A Xmas Story

My Kitchen

Occasional Pieces

Observations

Odd Odes

Short Story



THE ENIGMA

She was already seated on the bus, when I was practically catapulted into her lap as the driver pulled away. She gave me a sweet smile, accepting my apology- her mouth turned up at the corners and the crinkly lines around her eyes suggesting humour.

I was seated opposite her and since it seemed we were both on a long journey, I was able – unobtrusively - to observe her. She fortunately - was lost in her own thoughts and was oblivious of my close scrutiny. Here was somebody I felt I'd like to know- elegant and tastefully dressed- everything about her neat and orderly, from the top of her fashionable hat to her neatly polished shoes. A total antithesis of myself - everything – it seemed- under control. Yet, I noticed how her hands played nervously in her lap, her fingers intertwining as though her thoughts were conveying themselves to her hands, creating panic. I was intrigued, outwardly, so calm. I looked back at her face - she was miles away and her expression had taken on a look of anxiety. I began to wonder about her? Was she on her way to meet a lover? Scared her husband may find out? - A hospital appointment perhaps? My imagination was working overtime.

We had reached the terminus. She turned, once again, giving me that sweet smile and alighted from the bus. I watched her move across the road to a waiting Rolls-Royce. The man, short, fat and bald, smoking a cigar, fingers like sausages, hands covered in gold rings - ushered her unceremoniously into the

car... and as they drove off, I caught a glimpse of her face. It was no longer smiling. Husband! Minder! I'll never know... but of one thing I'm sure, he couldn't possibly have been a lover!!!

Can you recognise any of these people?



Introduction

‘The Wall’ says Anne, when choosing our project for next the week. As it was very foggy, I was staying with my mother overnight. “I’ll think about it in the morning”, I mused, as I climbed into bed, gently dozing off. When suddenly, as though somebody had pushed a button, I was wide awake, activated by the thought of walls – brick walls, stone walls, steel walls, prison walls, castle walls, Roman walls, the Berlin Wall. Last, but not least, the four walls within which I was captive.

I looked at my watch. “This is ridiculous”, I thought. “I must try to get some sleep”. Not content with listing them, I began building one brick by bloody brick, slapping on cement, slicing off the excess with a trowel. I was becoming an expert bricklayer. By this time, I had envisaged a body (bloodied and torn). In all probability, Anne’s bricked up behind my work of art – an old fireplace perhaps. This was turning into a nightmare! Another glance at the watch, 5am. I was beginning to climb the walls – enough is enough, as I found the answer – the walls of Jericho – and as I slipped mercifully into unconsciousness, all the walls came tumbling down.

THE WALL

His hands, with their restricted movement, felt the cold damp wall behind him. It offered him no succour. He pressed against it, feeling the rough brick - its solidity giving him no comfort. He could no longer think beyond this moment. His brain numb... and what would be the point?

The morning was misty, damp and cold. The sky leaden and grey- a perfect day, he thought cynically. He heard a plane droning overhead - escaping to some sunny corner of the Earth. How wonderful. His thoughts flying, when the command came. The shot rang out. He slumped. The Wall – implacable, ran red....

FEELING OF SILENCE

Deidre awoke with great anticipation- jumped out of bed and on went the cassette player. A shrieking cacophony of sound reverberated through the house, competing with the roar of the traffic. Deidre lived on a main road. She barely heard her Mother screaming up the stairs “Turn that bloody row off”.

She was going with her friend Beryl, who had recently acquired a second hand car. They were off to the country, to a pop festival and her mind was on what she would wear. She rummaged through her wardrobe and found a rather crumpled mini skirt and a pair of black patterned tights. “I’ll look real sexy in them,” she thought, as her Mother screamed yet again to announce breakfast was on the table. She swayed down the stairs, snapping her fingers to the music. Her mother, tired and bad tempered, thrust the already congealing breakfast under her nose... but nothing could spoil her light hearted mood, as she gaily splattered tomato sauce on her plate and consumed the sausage, bacon and egg... then flew up to her room, to prepare herself for the trip. Mini skirt, flimsy top, black tights, and stiletto heels - she was ready for anything!

Beryl duly arrived in her somewhat battered car. Deidre waved a casual farewell to her mother and climbed into the passenger seat. They shouted excited comments to one another, but neither could hear what the other was saying, due to the decibels of the car radio.

Beryl had been driving for sometime - the small towns flashing by. Deidre was getting really excited! They began to see green fields, the odd sheep, horses... “How far is it now Beryl?” she said. Beryl consulted the map. She’d had very little driving experience and the only bit of green she’d known was Hampstead Heath, and as for map reading, she was confused, to put it mildly. “I thought I had it all worked out Deidre, but I think I must have taken a wrong turn”. “Let me have a look,” said Deidre importantly, but she had to admit failure. She was as confused as Beryl. By this time, it was getting dark and they had been driving aimlessly and were far from any habitation. Suddenly, there was a loud bang. The car shuddered to a halt. “Oh my God, we’ve conked out” said Beryl. “So what do we do now?” moans Deidre. “Have to get help - I think I’ve got a torch and I remember passing a garage a few miles back – but I can’t walk in these shoes”, she whines. “Then stay in the car” snaps Beryl, losing her patience. “Alright then, I will, but don’t be long”, she said defiantly. Beryl departed, leaving Deidre seated in the car. “Lock the doors when I’ve gone.” Deidre sat for awhile. “Thank God I brought my walkman” she thought, placing the earphones over her head. It wasn’t long before the batteries ran out - it seemed ages since Beryl had left. She became restless and claustrophobic. “I have to get out of this car”. She opened the door – it was pitch black- nothing moved. She called Beryl’s name, without much expectation. She really wanted to hear something - even if it was just the sound of her own voice.

The night closed round her - the feeling of silence enveloping, suffocating ominous. It was then she started screaming!

The Pond

I was a stranger to the city (and unused to the noise and busy traffic) set out to explore and find a spot where I could feel a sense of peace and time to think. Whilst walking along an unfamiliar path, I found the trees becoming more frequent... and even the air felt fresher.

My feet took me uphill and towards what looked like a green horizon and on entering, found I was in a place called Parliament Hill Fields. My path took me past several ponds inhabited by a variety of ducks, sheltered by overhanging willows - whose long green tresses gently dipped in the water. I stopped momentarily, drinking in the serenity of it all, then continued walking up past the ponds and came across a narrow lane - which cried out for further exploration. It was very muddy, lined with masses of thick nettles and wild flowers growing in profusion. Walking down several yards of this lane, I happened upon a sign which said "Ladies Pond". The gate was open - an invitation to enter. I walked down the path and came upon another world - surrounded and guarded by trees at the top. A lush meadow, leading down to the water's edge, frilled by gently waving reeds. As I reached the end, I was greeted with the words, "Have you come for a swim? I'm Pat, the Lifeguard here." Little did I know this was to be my haven for the next 30 years, swimming summer and winter, and loving every minute of it.



● Breaking the ice is a frequent pre-requisite for winter swimmers at the Kenwood women's pond but this January 1 the temperature rose to an almost sultry 44 degrees.

Among those braving the waters were May Allan (pictured) and the oldest member of the Association of Users of Kenwood Pond for Women, a 73-year-old who first swam there in 1926.

The chairwoman of the association, Olive P. who lives in Eldon Grove, Hampstead, said: "It's pleasant but not exactly warm. When I was three of us swimming were grandmothers."

The pond, which is used by some 40 women round, has recently been mudded out to combat siltation and is now twice its former depth.

Courtesy of the Ham & High

The Eavesdropper

I was to say, the least distinctly annoyed. I had made numerous attempts, at regular intervals, to contact a friend in order to cancel a previous arrangement. The phone was constantly engaged and I was convinced that nobody could be chatting that long - particularly at peak period. Even my garrulous friend – “It must be out of order”. I thought I’ll make one last attempt - dialled the number again. There was no ringing at the other end, but lo and behold, I’d made a connection and without warning was launched into the following conversation between two distinctly unfamiliar voices:

She: - “I told you not to ring me at work”

He: - “I have to speak to you”

She: - “I told you, I’m not coming out with you”

He: - “I said I won’t be home tonight... told her I’d be working late”

She: - “How long do you think she’ll fall for that?”

He: - “It won’t be for long, I promise you”

She: - “My God, I’ve heard it all before... What are you going to do...? Bump her off?”

There was a pregnant pause and I held my breath - I was a captive audience. I couldn’t have replaced the receiver, if my life

depended on it. My own call had completely lost it's urgency in the face of this bit of eavesdropping.

I was unashamed and the conversation continued, in much the same vein. He begging her - ridiculing and accusing him of being emotionally blackmailed. As for myself, my thoughts were off at a tangent. What should I do? Break in on the conversation? Was this poor woman in danger of her life? – Was he desperate enough to dispose of her? My imagination was running riot! I had to make a decision, when he suddenly said – “OK, I won't let her interfere in my life anymore. Will you please agree to come out with me if I take you home and introduce you to my mother? ...”

An Amusing Incident

It is raining, and if you can imagine the all too familiar scene - the bus queue, where people have been standing for the best part of an hour, waiting for that elusive transportation. A meeting ground, where the ever hopeful passengers have time to air their grievances and political views. Women struggling with their numerous Sainsbury's bags of shopping, mothers with their young children, tired of waiting and starting to grizzle... then the would-be orator who has inside information on the nefarious activities of the local council and proceeds to list them. While a man (unaware of the sheet of plastic swirling round his legs) and the stout middle aged lady snatching it up and placing it firmly in an already overflowing rubbish bin and announcing "Camden was never like this years ago" - the man was oblivious.

At this stage, I am not only wet, but decidedly depressed. The bus finally arrives and we all crowd on - packed like sardines. Our man dumps his enormous body on the staircase - defying anybody to go up or down, passing the time picking his nose and belching - "How sophisticated", I thought. My attention then, straying to a woman, fighting her way to the exit and swinging from her shoulder one of these trendy umbrellas with a ducks head for a handle- as she nears the door - risking life and limb. Our man on the stairs simultaneously opens his huge jaws to yawn. Our ducks head slips from her shoulder and neatly disappears inside his cavern of a mouth. Would that I had a

camera at this point. Our man choking and swearing at this poor woman trying to extricate this wretched duck – she, apologetic and red with embarrassment, the rest of the passengers rocking with laughter, including myself - poetic justice I thought!

I Wish I'd Done it Differently

I wish I'd done it differently

It's therapy, they said.

I started off with Mr. Cook

And wished I'd stayed in bed.

We won't dwell on Mr. Cook

But on to Betty Jones

A lovely Welsh instructor

Who listened to my moans,

Next, an intensive course with "Gordons"

Then up to Ross-on-Wye

Residential this one

You can't say I didn't try.

Back to dear old London

And on to B.S.M.

I mean, up and down to Camden Town

From 12 to 1PM.

J.J. was my tutor; a gay young man was he

Always stopping for a smoke or just to have a pee.

I wish I'd done it differently, the driving test I mean

Failed countless times at Barnet, twice at Palmers Green.

No success at Hendon Centre, the Grand Finale at Wood Green

So, having failed ELEVEN TIMES, I finally made the scene.

But I wish I'd done it differently

And learnt to drive at Sweet Sixteen!!!!

The Happy Hour

The happy hour! The darkest hour before the dawn! No, Adrienne has chosen for us the rush hour - where man's inhumanity to man takes precedence. Attempting to gain access on a bus in the peak period-push push push- "I was first!" - "Get to the back of the queue" - "Every man for himself" - "You want equality you stand"... and so on and so on. The school disgorged of its pupils, push an old lady on a stick to one side. The driver trying, ineffectually, to quell the stampede of noisy gum chewing, sweet sucking, can popping uniformed girls, requested by a passenger to "Quieten down". "Up yours", came the quick retort. I know the feminine movement has made great strides, but what has happened to the female in the process?

My knowledge of the rush hour is very limited but what I've observed on this torturous form of travel, has been bodies crammed to capacity like sardines, the would-be groper trying to take advantage of the situation, the intense, unhappy travel worn faces - no smiles here, as the eyes dart furtively up and down, seeking a possible vacant seat. A female senior citizen, strap hanging and glaring balefully at a young man beautifully turned out - legs crossed elegantly - giving the impression, with a supercilious expression that this wasn't his normal mode of travel. What happened to that lovely old fashioned word gallantry? Is it to disappear from our already diminishing vocabulary, where the four lettered word seems to describe almost

everything- particularly by the young. Could this be the darkest hour before the dawn? Well I'm forever the optimist- So here's to the Happy Hour.



Sign of the Times!

The Evacuee

I remember even now - after all these years – it was 1939. I was twelve, evacuated with an infant's school, to take care of my young brother of five. We were all ushered onto the train, complete with identity labels and gas masks. We had only travelled a few miles, when we heard a low humming sound overhead. The presence of a couple of buzz bombs, fortunately we weren't the target.

Arriving safely at a little village hall in Hertfordshire to be fostered for the duration of the war by – and we hope kindly, disposed villagers. It didn't seem long before most of the children had been chosen and just as I was wondering who was to pick us, I heard a gruff voice boom out "I'll take those two". I looked up in dismay to be confronted by this tall, rather imposing figure and felt very intimidated and confused, as this person was dressed in an open necked shirt, tailored slacks and looking very masculine. She was introduced as "Miss Parsons" and the eyes that gazed down at me were cold and grey and protuberant, topped by a head of equally grey and beautifully waved Eton cropped hair. She wasn't unkind but obviously had had no dealings with children. She was extremely brusque in her manner and impatiently ushered us into her little car and we're henceforth known as "her evacuees" and we were to address her as "Miss Parsons".

On arrival at her cottage, we were introduced to her companion, “Miss Pierce”, who dismissed us totally. Miss Parsons only concession to us was to appear looking formidable in a thick woollen dressing gown, to perform her only culinary art-porridge, thick and stodgy, laced with golden syrup “Good stuff” she’d say. “Set you up for the day”, which was just as well, as I don’t recall having any other substantial food. She also condescended to sit with us each morning, to share this “gourmet” meal. I used to hear snatches of conversation, accompanied by loud guffaws of laughter. One instance, I heard her say to Miss P, “Don’t bother to put out the butter; I’m sure the little blighters won’t know the difference!” – How wrong she was! My mother was a cook and visited us with homemade cakes. In the week, she would quite happily hand them round to her guests.

Another rule was that we weren’t allowed to use their toilet, since it had no chain and was chemically cleansed. So, Miss P had the brilliant idea of acquiring a female carpenter to dig a channel in her orchard, buried a coffin-like wooden covered seat and set it over the ditch, so one could use it as a loo. This was fine, until my mother was forced to use it and being quite plump, got fixed and we had to ease her out – very embarrassing!

In the week she would visit the pub and play darts with the locals – she loved that. The weekends, you would see her smartly turned out in a grey suit, adding to the greyness of her appearance, thus completing the ensemble – this was to travel up

to London on business in her car. The local children would gather round and comment “Look, that man’s wearing a skirt!”

Years later, my husband and I visited “Miss Parson” in her cottage. Her partner had long gone and she was now a frail old lady, all alone - sad and grateful for any visitors.



A Recollection of Childhood

Every week, I remember having to take the accumulator to the shop to be recharged for the radio to work which, was quite heavy and had to be handled with care since it was full of acid. The man in the boot repair shop used to do it. I always remember him because he was tall dark and handsome.

Then there was the chemist shop, with its tall glass decanters full of deep green, red and blue liquids, elegantly poised on the top shelves as if they didn't belong in this dark dingy shop. There was almost a sinister feel about it.

Then, into the Dairy where Mrs Mash a tiny woman who reigned supreme behind her bacon slicer. She barely reached the counter, but was always immaculate in her snowy white overall topped by chafed red cheeks and her grey hair coiled round in a bun on the top of her head slicing up the ham catching each piece with great panache

Those were the days.

Wartime Letter to my Mum

Dear Mum,

Felt so miserable when you and Dad left for home. It was so lovely to be taken out to tea – the dried eggs on toast seemed like a feast. How I hate going back to the Chappins. You've no idea what she's like – no humour or compassion. I'm sure she only took John and me to exercise her powers. Her poor husband is terrified of her. I dropped a plate - quite accidentally the other day - and she had a fit of hysterical crying. It was one of her best set she said. Meanwhile, Mr. Chappin came in from the reservoir, "Potted a brace of coots", he said, dumping their limp bodies on the table - their poor necks dangling over the edge, ignoring this. Then, she proceeded to gain his sympathy by relating the story of the plate.

Yesterday, I asked if I could wash my hair. I can't remember when I last had a shampoo. She gave in, very begrudgingly. I don't think she believes in it - looking at her sparse hair and scalp ingrained with dirty patches. I couldn't believe my eyes as I looked in the mirror - at the tangle of hair, it was so blonde. Must try and get her to let me do it more often. When I think of the days I had to attend the village school, I remember that lovely pink bobbly suit you knitted for me... well; it gradually turned into a dirty grey. She wouldn't let me wash it and I'm sure it was beginning to smell.

The weather is really icy. I took John to the reservoir - it was frozen over and we were having a lovely time sliding on the ice. Then he fell into a pool of water and wet his pants. I knew how cross she would be, so I sneaked him up to the bedroom so she wouldn't find out. John thought it was a huge joke – but then, he's so young.

One of the things I enjoy most is setting off in the early morning on my bike whizzing down the country lanes, passing wild flowers growing in profusion by the wayside and rabbits greeting the morning sun, ears and noses twitching, alert to every sound. It feels wonderful to be alive and, by the way, I can ride with no hands! But, I do hope it won't be long before we can come home. I think I'd rather take my chances with the air raids than spend the last weeks with "Mrs. C".

Please come here and visit us again soon. Miss you.

Love May

The Illusion

It was a day like any other, when it seemed to Jane, as she stood at the sink, gazing out of the window. David, since his retirement, had taken up his old hobby of building model railways with old historical villages in the background. This gave him more scope for his artistic abilities and he was working on such a project now, having discovered in an ancient book from the historical society, a lovely old print of a beautiful early century village and was very excited about it and couldn't wait to make a start.

Jane was very pleased, as she hadn't seen him so animated for a long time, as he had gone through a period of depression – a male menopause. She thought the idea of getting older and collecting his pension wasn't something which appealed to him. She smiled to herself. He was such a boy at heart and he was never a 20th Century man. He'd cleared the spare room and made her promise not to enter it, until he'd finished. She played along with him and kept her word - she'd never entered the room since the day he'd started on his project. She had been daydreaming and it was her busy shopping day. She finished tidying up, got herself ready, said a hurried goodbye to David, saying she "Wouldn't be long" and let herself out of the flat. Having completed her shopping couldn't wait to get back for the longed for cup of tea with David... and leisurely chat - which they enjoyed and was part of their daily routine. She arrived at the

front door and inserted the key and wasn't surprised there was no sound in the flat, as David was probably planning a new project, so she proceeded to fill the kettle, laid the tray with fresh cakes she'd baked that morning, made the tea, left it to brew - while she gave David a shout, "Tea's ready love", - no reply. She left it for a few minutes, busying herself with a few small tasks. Ten minutes had elapsed - no David. The silence suddenly became ominous and she realised she hadn't heard a sound in the flat, since her return. She tapped apprehensively at the door 'David', she said softly. Nothing- She opened the door slowly, not knowing why, but feeling as if her heart was being squeezed, her breath caught in her throat. She looked around the room, as if in a trance. There was no sign of David - but in front of her was the most exquisite interior of a medieval mansion and standing near the door, beckoning with a welcoming smile on his face - encapsulated forever - David. A scream rising in her throat - she lost consciousness.

Wistful

Stephen was scowling- his usual expression- when having to do battle with his Mother for something he wanted. His Father had long gone, “Chasing a young starlet across the Atlantic” his Mother always said, without stating categorically. He had an important job in Television, never had any time for Stephen or shown any interest - this was reciprocal - although he was sent a monthly allowance, a guilty conscience no doubt. His Mother did TV commercials - which is how they met. His Father, having a much lowlier position at the time- climbing the ladder from secretaries to starlets, was his measure of success.

Stephen only remembered the quarrels - these he recalled very clearly, since he would be given money to go out and spend while they raved and ranted around the house. Memories of his Mother were also very scant; since he was very small he was left to his own devices. His Mother, when she wasn't working, was always shopping for clothes or making luncheon appointments with her trendy friends. The constant fear of missing out, and desperate attempts to keep on top of the competition. She discouraged any affection, since it might muss her hair or spoil her makeup.

Stephen was so bored - he wanted a bike so he could take off away from the house. He was working himself up into a temper tantrum, when he heard his mother enter the house, “Hi Stevie, mother's home”. He cringed - how he hated her calling him that. “Big deal” he muttered, his temper rising-“What's this then?”

Is my big boy in a bad mood?" ignoring the warning signs. "If you must know, I want a bike". "It's too expensive darling", (she was not one of life's big spenders). "So what's expensive?". "It means, my beloved, I don't have the money at the moment". "But you are always working, you must have the money". "Let's drop the subject shall we?"- "If you won't buy one I shall do something awful." She faltered for a moment, remembering his last escapade, when he was brought home by the police. "Don't be silly darling, lets go and watch the video I've brought home especially for you " "I don't want to, I'm going out". He stamped out of the house, slamming the door behind him and returned some hours later to discover his mother was already in bed. Getting himself a coke from the fridge, he decided to watch the late night movie – starving and stuffing himself with crisps, till he fell asleep.

The next morning, Stephen discovered his mother had already left for work. Late for school, he thinks who cares, boring subjects, boring teachers. He decides instead, to tinker on his latest acquisition - wheedled out of his mother - the computer. He ran through all of his games and found his attention waning. Then, gazing idly out of the window, he hears a screech of brakes - thinking he may see some blood, rushes out. The car had already driven off and lying there gazing up at him, two appealing brown eyes pleading for help. Something happened to Stephen. Suddenly he felt an affinity with this little animal. He gently lifted the small thin body in his arms and carried it into the

house. School forgotten, he busied himself, finding something comfortable for the little creature to lie on. Stroking him and murmuring in soft tones “I think I’ll call you Wistful” and waited for his mother’s arrival. He had to get on the right side of her - probably miss his weekly treat at McDonalds - but perhaps not. Cooking was not one of his mother’s talents – besides which, she never had the time.

What seemed like an eternity, he heard the key in the door. “Hi mum”, he said pleasantly. Mother, taken aback - this was a new approach from little Stevie. He gave her a kiss. Her first reaction, “O.K, what is it this time, I told you?” - its O.K. mum, forget it but I do want a favour”. Mother, really intrigued, “Well, what is it darling?” Becoming impatient and wanting to put her feet up, he took her into the kitchen to meet his new friend and to explain what happened. “A dog, you want to keep this animal?” He interrupted, “It won’t cost you anything... I will take care of him out of my allowance”. “Out of the question!” she said. “Dirty, smelly thing... I wouldn’t have it in the house”. Something snapped inside the boy momentarily. Tears fell softly on to the dog. He felt something for the first time - something he couldn’t put into words... emotion? The moment passed. “O.K, if I can’t keep the dog, I want that bike. “He gazed down once more at the dog. The soft brown eyes were shut. Wistful had died quietly in his arms, thus relieving him of any responsibility. He proceeded to place the dog on the blanket he had caringly found minutes before. Why did he feel this sudden emptiness, as though for one

moment he'd held something fragile in his grasp? Could it be love? What was love? Something he'd never known, and yet, he shrugged his mind already on the new bike and boy would he take off.

Memories Are Made of This

It was one of those frosty mornings, with the threat of snow. I was returning from shopping, my fingers practically dropping off with the cold. Had almost reached my house and was bending down to rest my bags for the moment, when I happened to glance through next doors front garden and through the winter foliage was met with two enormous green eyes blinking sleepily up at me. She looked frozen! I think I was acquainted with most of the cats in the neighbourhood but this little tabby was a new one on me. She drew herself up to her full height and began to rub herself against my legs. She began to cry and those eyes - almost hypnotic - willing me to take her in. I was hooked.

Several hours later, there she was, quite at home by the fire, washing a delicate paw after a substantial meal, when my husband, Doug, arrived home from work. She gave him the same treatment, but before she could seduce him completely, he said, "You know, you can't keep her. She may belong to somebody." I reluctantly agreed and took her down, placing her in the garden where I had found her.

The following evening, we were expecting friends and were having quite a heavy fall of snow. I went down to answer the bell... and there, sitting between our friends, like an expectant guest, was little Green Eyes. That clinched it. Nobody would leave their pet out on a night like this, so in she came, that, was the beginning.

She had been with us several days, having wormed her way into our affections, when one evening she started to fall about. We were all extremely worried and took her to the vet, only to discover she was pregnant - obviously the reason she had been abandoned. This created great anticipation in the Allan household. Preparations were underway to see she had every comfort. Robert, my son and Doug made her a little house out of cardboard boxes, even covering them with a piece of leftover brick paper and several old blankets were placed inside to ensure she was warm enough. You'd have thought she was visiting royalty. We already had a cat called Jinx who wasn't taking too kindly to all the fuss and completely ignored Green Eyes, who, despite her condition, was quite prepared to flirt with him... and then there was my Mother's cat, Satchmo, who was quite old in years. He viewed the situation with utter boredom, since his time was cut out trying to prevent Cherie, the poodle from attempting to seduce him at every opportunity. She would continually jump on his back and Satchmo would sit there, cross-eyed and contemptuous, and great resignation in the hope that one day the penny would drop.

Everything was geared for the grand arrival and conveniently at the weekend, we heard a scratching at the bedroom door. When I opened it, there was Green Eyes, blinking up at me, proudly announcing the birth of her three little offspring, all curled up in their little house. Two tabbies and a little black one. She came

over and sat purring loudly, just watching us admiring them. It was such a happy moment.

From the time they were born, they gave us so much pleasure, always clean. Robert made them a little train from Meccano and he would pull them about in it - which they loved - and in the mornings he would let them loose into our bedroom, where they would all jump crab-like, up the bed and hang from the flex of the bedside lights... and in general, have a whale of a time. We took quite a few movies of them - which we have to this day. The sad time came, however, when we had to find homes for them... but I must admit it was one of the happiest experiences of our lives.

The Clock

Her only concession to time was a cheap functional wristwatch and a timepiece attached to the cooker, and here she was about to be presented after 20 years service a reluctant recipient of a gift of a carriage clock to remind her of the inexorable ticking away of time. She had been persuaded much against her will warned them that she would be unable to accept this unwanted gift with any degree of graciousness.

The more she thought about the presentation the more obsessively aggressive she became. How dare they decide what their employees should delight in receiving had any of the recipients been consulted! I'm sure many of them would rather have had something else to remind them of their long service, certainly not the passing of time, a small radio for instance, a book token even a premium bond. She smiled to herself thinking in the unlikely event of being offered perhaps a weekend in Paris but that of course would be stretching ones imagination too far or was it? Brushing her thoughts aside she continued getting ready for the big event.

She arrived at the hall where the presentation was about to be held. The stage was set - the raised dais where seated were these presenters looking like members of an inquisition - tight little PO like Hats with matching tight little insincere smiles.

A polite sporadic clapping accompanied her walk to the platform. She proceeded up the three small steps where she spied in the centre of the table, the object of her hate. The feeling seemed to be reciprocal. The clock appeared to stare back with equal malevolence. This wasn't going to be easy, but she felt confident. She was duly introduced to the audience who looked as bored as she was the chief presenter began her speech mouthing the usual platitudes trotted out for this particular occasion – her thoughts understandably. A million miles away – she came back to the present with a jolt – realised the speech had reached finality. The big moment had arrived. 'Here goes', she thought, 'please don't let me have to utter a word'. The presenter turned to face her picking up the clock, as she did so she and the clock were face to face. She took a deep breath and concentrated staring at the clock thinking, 'let battle commence'. The silence seemed endless, and then suddenly the clock seemed to swell in size the face took on a purple hue the ticking became louder and louder – the sound of the clock filled the whole room.

There were many conflicting accounts of what really happened at the presentation. But one thing was certain; there was a lot of embarrassment much to her amusement. While they were picking up the remains of the clock from the floor, most people thought the presenter had tripped over a loose floor board; another stated obviously an overactive imagination that the clock had literally leaped out of her hands. She sat gazing around enjoying the view

from a street cafe in Paris when a familiar figure approached looking surprised, “darling, fancy meeting you here”

“Haven’t seen you since we attended the ‘Mind over Matter’ class. Waste of money of course”. She just smiled listening to strains of ‘Just in Time’.

A Xmas Story

Seated at the breakfast table, Robert glanced up from his paper, surveying his wife over the top of his glasses. Remarking casually, "I see Xmas is rearing its ugly head again". "Yes dear, another family gathering I suppose." "Yes dear... and we've only got a week... any chance that gorgon of a Mother of yours might be spending it in the Outer Hebrides?" Susan's mother was very proud of her Scottish ancestry and took every opportunity to mention the fact (as Robert remarked, with monotonous regularity), but resigned for the moment to the inevitable Xmas, went back to his paper.

Susan was such a soft touch, he thought. and gazed at her fondly, as she went about her tasks. Susan busied herself that week, cooking and shopping and spending far more than was necessary, overreacting to the feverish nightmare which loomed larger than ever this year, since they had moved into a bigger house which meant that, not only would her mother be staying, she had agreed to have her mother's younger sister and her two teenage offspring. Her mother and the sister had both been widowed, more or less at the same time, which had created some sort of bond between them, despite the fact they had nothing in common.

Robert had no family and having endured Susan's, over several horrendous Xmas's, rather wished she hadn't either, but for some masochistic reason, she seemed to enjoy having

them. The dreaded day dawned for Robert, “Happy Xmas darling”, said Susan. He merely grunted and turned over. It was barely dawn, as she arose, but she needed to put the turkey on, as it was enormous and she was always scared there wouldn’t be enough. She took Robert up a cup of tea. He sat up in bed, looking very disgruntled. “Come on darling, don’t be an old grouch”. He gazed out of the window; it was damp, wet and grey. Like me, he thought and said to Susan; somewhat aggrieved “Whatever happened to those lovely white Xmas we used to know?”, as if it was Susan’s fault. She disappeared quickly, assessing his mood and not wanting to hear him start on her family yet again, feeling guilty enough, as it was inflicting her family on Robert every year, but hadn’t the courage to say no. By the time Robert was ready to enter the Xmas spirit, Susan had the house squeaky clean, dinner underway and everywhere decorated with tinsel and holly, then into the kitchen, to make the last minute preparations.

The doorbell rang, persistent and demanding, “Mother” she thought, apprehensively, never knowing what role her Mother would be adopting, but was soon to find out, as she swept imperiously through to the kitchen. “Susan darling, Ca! Va!?” “Ah! French upper crust” thought Susan and smiled to herself. Mother never waited for an answer. “Susan, darling, you’re not trotting out the old turkey again are you dear? I thought we might have had French Cuisine this year?” Mother had been on a package tour to France way back in the summer. In

the meantime, Robert had quietly appeared at the bottom of the stairs, heard the comment and said “Why, Susan darling, I’m sure you can find a packet of frozen frogs legs in the fridge. She can have it for a starter... and didn’t we order a case of assorted French wines? - whilst you’re looking, I’ll pour Mother-in-law a sherry which I think she purchased from Safeway’s last year for us”. Susan gave him a look which would have set her jellies in seconds. Mother-in-law was about to reply, when another ring came at the door. “Saved by the bell”, thought Robert wryly. He answered it to be greeted by Phyllis, Mother-in-law’s sister and in tow were Marcus and Isabel, her two teenage monsters. Phyllis lived in the shadow of her dominant sister, so the only way to get attention was to adopt the bad health syndrome - never well - complained about everything, from headaches downwards. “A pain in the arse?” asked Robert crudely, one day. She just sniffed - choosing to ignore the comment.

Susan, in the meantime, was placing the presents under the tree, noting there was nothing for her from Robert. Tears pricked her eyes, surely he couldn’t have forgotten? In the meantime, Robert had disappeared into the study and began furiously writing and on completion relaxed in his chair. If he was about to change this Xmas ritual, now was the time. He smiled to himself and joined the family downstairs. It was like being in an aviary, everybody talking at once, Mother-in-law’s voice booming out over the rest, Phyllis, cataloguing her complaints to whoever would listen, Marcus and Isabel - making derogatory remarks

about everything, and arguing over what TV they should have on - sport or pop music? Robert quietly removed the plug-“Sorry kids, no TV till after dinner”.

Susan proceeded to lay the table and get the family seated. Robert, at the head of the table, started carving the turkey, while Susan handed round vegetables. “Not too much turkey for me”, whined Phyllis. “My stomach you know?” “Susan dear, you decided not to use my French recipe for the stuffing - same old sage and onion”. “I prefer sage and onion”, Robert cut in, seeing Susan’s hurt look. “No greens for me” - from Marcus. “Good for your spots”, snaps Mother-in-law. “I put cream on my spots”, Marcus replied, in an attempt to be witty. “Only one potato for me” - from Isabel, “Have to watch my weight”. “Why, you’re practically anorexic now dear” remarked Mother-in-law. Same dreary conversation thought Robert - how Susan tolerates it every year. Fortunately, the rest of the meal was just a clatter of knives and forks. Marcus and Isabel finished first, impatient to get to the presents.

Banquet over; table a wreck, Robert joined Susan in the kitchen to help her clear up. Anything was preferable than having to communicate with that menagerie. “I want you to join me in the study; I have something I would like to talk to you about”. His voice was very serious and Susan was intrigued. Robert was in a strange mood. “OK”, she said and they reluctantly joined the others. “Quiet everyone, before opening the presents; I have a request to make. Will you please leave the ones from me till last,

as I have an errand to do”? He caught Susan’s eye and beckoned her out of the room. The others immersed, didn’t notice their absence. Robert dragged her into the study, gave her a long hard kiss, “You poor darling, here’s my present to you and I don’t want you placing any obstacles in the way”. He handed her an envelope. Susan, curious, opened it quickly. Inside was a reservation for two at a south coast hotel for the remainder of the Xmas Holiday. She flung her arms around him. “I’d thought you’d forgotten, but what did you mean about the presents?” “Well”, said Robert, as she quickly packed a suitcase. “I have given them something to think about. Phyllis will open hers, and find a medicine chest, complete with an assortment of pills for every conceivable complaint with a message – ‘Best of Health for 1990’. Marcus will find several board games, since I’ve totally disconnected the TV. Isabel, a huge mirror, since she spends all her time in it... and for your dear Mother, a crash course in French and a Cordon Bleu Cookery Book, so she can try out her French Cuisine on the family, in our absence. We shall be leaving a note in the hall, which I penned before dinner, giving them full instructions. I’m sick and tired of you being a servant to that bunch of -----. Susan put a finger on his lips and giggled “I’d love to be able to see their reactions and left to their own devices” she said, as they crept downstairs and quietly shut the front door behind them. “I love you Robert” she said, as they drove off into the night.

My Kitchen

It was 1946, things were still tough and not an ideal period to get married and set up home (no, I was not pregnant) but definitely unprepared for “THE KITCHEN”. I was only 18.

My only adventure into culinary arts was to heat a tin of baked beans adding water!! Nevertheless, I was very young and prepared to have a go. My first kitchen was in furnished accommodation in Muswell Hill. Unable to purchase or rent a cooker, I had to conjure up meals on a small grill. This wasn't helped by the fact I had no sink and had to climb a flight of stairs to renew the water supply.

My two outstanding memories of this kitchen was blood, sweat, tears, trying to perfect my pastry which, however hard I tried it always seemed to resemble concrete – and about as heavy! I used to spend hours over it and it wasn't till months later I learned the success is in the speed and lightness of the mixing. I was also a great one for stews, throw everything into a pot and hey presto! We were having stews with monotonous regularity until one night my dear patient husband decided he'd had enough. He quietly removed the saucepan – which was full. The loo at that moment was engaged so he took it up to the bathroom and proceeded to empty it down the sink. Unfortunately there was too much stew and not enough sink to accommodate it and it proceeded to follow him out of the bathroom in a steady stream

resulting in one of our first little dramas; time to draw a veil over that experience and on to the next.

Times were still difficult, but we were lucky enough to move into my mother's maisonette, having the top flat, still no sink, but unfurnished and pleasant. A Kitchen we could eat in and look out of the window onto grass and trees. We even had a resident sparrow we called 'Mr. Fitch' who would pay us daily visits and share our meals and was polite enough to call when we'd finished and peck through the leftovers. I had become quiet and adept cook by this time and became really adventurous in trying new recipes to titillate the palate of my husband and son and was even excited when I had a sink plumbed in, a full sized cooker and, wait for it, a fridge! They were happy times until they started pulling the houses down. We had to be re-housed by the council and my 3rd kitchen you could not swing a cat around. My husband made it as pleasant as possible, removing the heavy sprung door and replacing it with a stable door in two parts so I could participate in conversation with friends whilst cooking. I now have my sink, cooker and fridge, but sadly no one to cook for.

Recollections from the year 1946

Occasio

Piec

S.

Little Voice

Come out little voice, I know you're down there, lurking in the shadows, I don't know where. Come out little voice; don't languish down there, wallowing in the depths of despair. Come out little voice, shriek and shout of rage and pain, don't cover it up in a jocular vein. Make it round and full and clear, making sure that we all hear - really hear and maybe in time you'll conquer that fear. Come out little voice, be loud and strong- forget that old sad song of yesteryear.

My voice, tiny and insignificant, wanting to say so much and not quite knowing how- wanting to speak words of wisdom, humour, so much laughter needed and what joy to have succeeded in creating and hearing great belly laughs, knowing for a brief moment people have forgotten their fears, current problems, health, what a panacea! Meanwhile, I struggle on in my own small way, hoping that tiny voice emerges into a full throated song, since my voice wants to laugh and shout, spreading smiles like a litter lout.

To Die For?

I stand here naked – my soul showing what fragments of life have led me to this moment. I am not extra ordinary but must admit not a ‘pop in the pub’ type to discuss football results with the lads although not averse to the odd drink – but usually at home with friends listening to jazz. My home was my haven, my wife my sanity. I also admit to preferring women’s company. They seem to have a wider landscape of interests, whereas a lot of men of my acquaintance are so pompous. How I loved to prick that bubble. But I digress. I try to conjure up the bitter sweet moments of my life, my marriage, the disasters of which there were so many, the laughter in spite of them, the jumbled jigsaw of events, the discovery. Don’t dwell on that - I can’t sort them out. I keep coming back to the mundane; it is that which keeps me from going insane, prevents the pain from overwhelming me. I remember when she brought in the stray cat. It had 3 little kittens. We called one ‘Nelson’. He had a bad eye which she put drops in. I fled from the room as I couldn’t bear to watch - silly really.

I loved my wife dearly so when did it begin? I don’t want to remember she suffered for a year, begging me, & begging me. I finally put an end to that suffering. It took 2 minutes. I stand here now accused of murder.

Images by Candlelight

John stretched, rubbed his eyes, relaxed luxuriously in this chair it had been a long day – he mused. He was drifting – day dreaming when suddenly the quiet of the early evening was shattered by a piercing ear splitting noise. He felt himself languidly drifting to the window to discover the source of the sound – looking skywards. He was amazed to see what seemed like mammoth birds – black stiffed winged - shooting through the clouds, too many to count, and below along countless ribbons of roads – metal objects on four wheels with what seemed like huge weighted eyes moving steadily one behind the other to eternity. He seemed so aware of the noise – sounds he had never believed possible – his footsteps – since he had decided to leave the house – had taken him to a large building with light every where and was once again drawn irresistibly to the noise emanating from within.

He passed through the door and the sight which met his eyes was unbelievable. People – mostly young – and very queerly dressed were gyrating in a semi somnambulant fashion to the most repulsive unmusical sounds he had ever heard and flashing light which were giving him a headache – he came out breathing deeply – people mostly young lolling about holding up walls which appeared to have strange writing scrawls all over them

He hadn't been outside for long then another sound – a wailing this time sounding like a creature in pain – it was another of

theses strange metal objects with a flaring light on top –
screched to a standstill as two men clad differently to the young
people he had previously seen. Things began to blur – sounds
began to fade as he came out of his reverie with a start his candle
spluttering – he lit a fresh candle. I must finish my entry he
thought and in his diary he wrote.

21st August 1712

Today I had a glimpse of hell!!

He'Loo!

Me! I never 'ave any trouble drifting orf to sleep. I doze orf at the drop of an 'at. It's like this, I'm up at 5 O'clock in the morning to get to the city – I'm an office cleaner yo' see. So by the time I gets 'ome puts me feet up makes a cuppa and turns on the tele, I'm off - me 'ead starts nodding even when I'm reading the paper over dinner and many's the time I've dozed 'orf and even had a little dream – when somebody – I won't mention any names – starts bending my ear. Well to get back to me story, when we're working, – like, – we don't 'ave a lot of time to chat – know what I mean? But, I must 'ave me 10 min break so I can disappear for a quick fag and a sit down 'cos, I've got a bit of arfritis in me knees – so, I goes and gets meself comfortable where I know I won't be disturbed. The next thing I know somebody's breaking the door open and a voice says “you alright love?” It's a bloody policeman! There am I, me knickers round me ankles, me 'ead resting on the cistern sitting on the loo. This 'as got to b a dream I thought - but no - it wasn't. When I sees me friend Ada, 'my God,' she says, 'I thought you must have been mugged on the way home last night' I called at your flat this morning and you weren't there. I rang the police.

'Thanks a bunch' I said with friends like you – who need enemies!

Observo

S

As she watched him

Leave the room

Her mood turned to marmalade

And other sweet things

Happy jazz orchestrated in her head

Started her feet tapping

She was elevated – light and

Weightless

A free spirit – she was flying

Spreading her wings – a beautiful white

Bird

Then a shot - wings speckled.

Red

Caught in the light

In downward decent

Key in the lock

He had returned.

§

Oh heart, heavy and oppressed

Where is the joy you once

Possessed

Whatever happened to romance? Is it just illusory?

A fleeting glance.

Oh heart, so full of sadness

Where is the love – the kiss, the caress?

Where once was tenderness

Oh heart that should be

Feeling joyful

Just feels pain of loss

With little gain



Thinking of bogs

The stink of dogs

And lovely golden turds

Heaps of dung and pongs unsung

And flying shit from birds



An Expectancy of a Xmas Card

The tension here is growing, as Christmas

comes once more.

To see what sort of home made card gets pushed

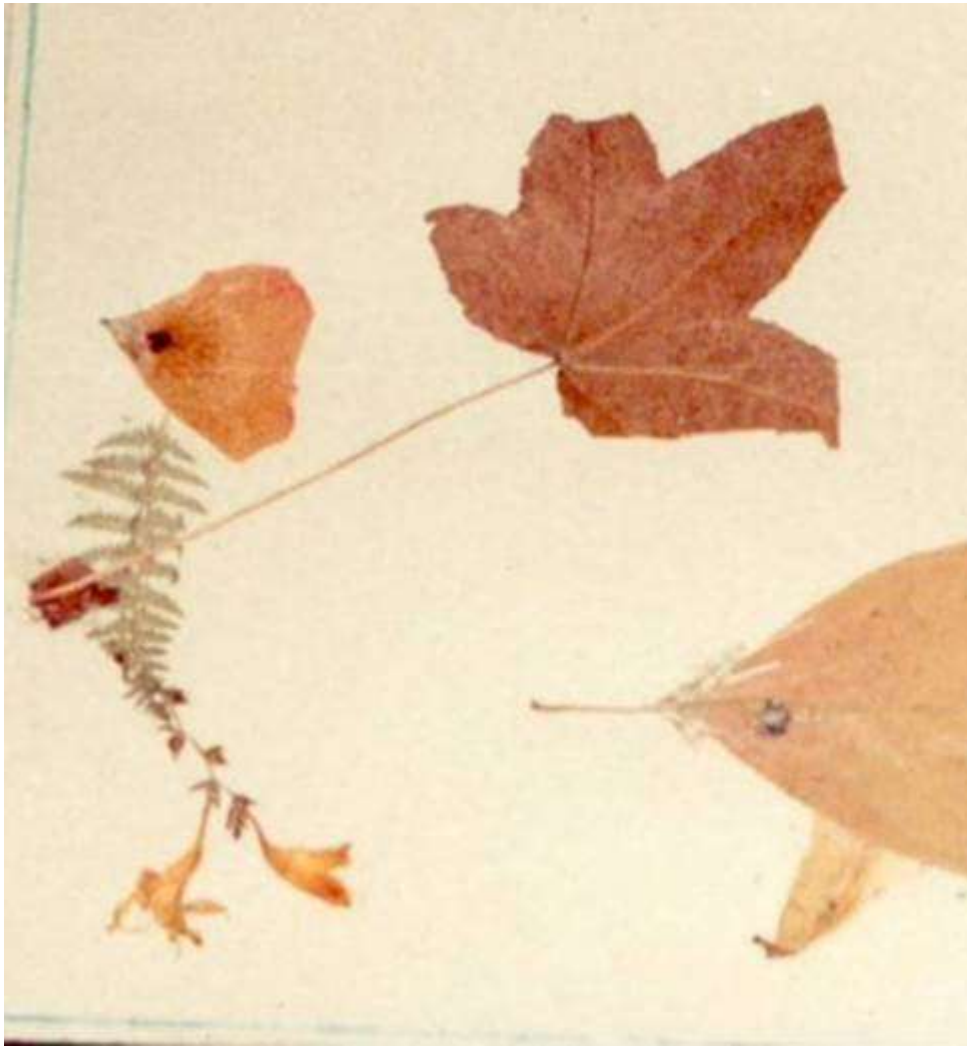
through our front door.

What will the theme be this year?

Odd peanut shells and weeds

With a happy yuletide greeting

Picked out in sunflower seeds.



Perhaps you've made a fir tree
From last week's old plaice fillet
With bran flakes falling all around
And berries made of millet.

But whatever card you send us, will please,

And, that's the truth,

As long as it is not adorned

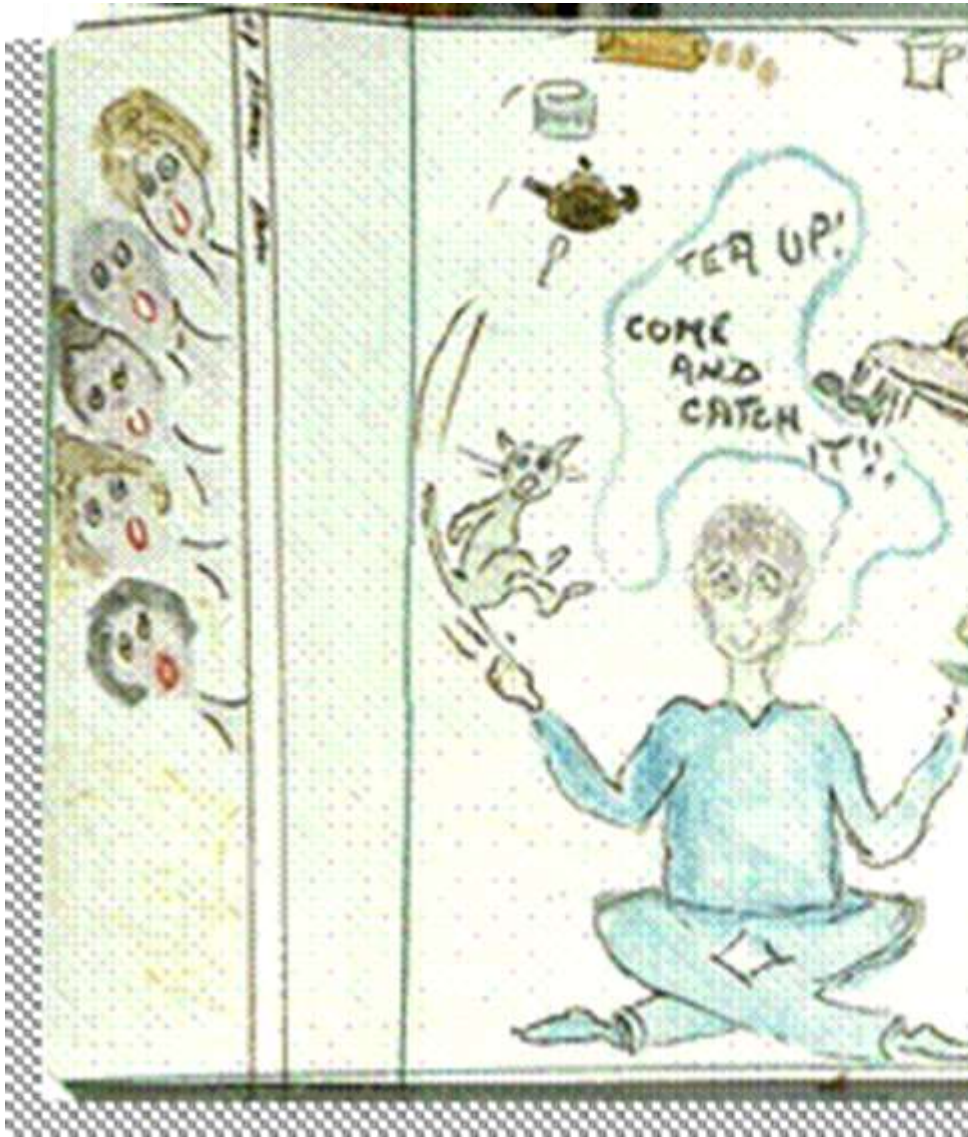
With Dougie's old front tooth!!!

Written by my friend Sheila



Odd *O*

S



The day Claire got carried away with her clever juggling act,

Up went cups & saucers galore

Up went everything not nailed to the floor

Then heads popped out of the changing room

They couldn't believe their eyes – as 'ZOOM'
Went 'pushy' first on the list despite her desperate cries, then
Came sailing through the air
Poor old 'Greeny' asleep in her chair
Our resident robin, a wily old bird
Escaped her skills by dropping a turd!



One feels words cannot explain

The pain a spiteful tongue

Reveals

One attempt at reconciliation

Met with contempt and

Retaliation

An empty silence remains and

Nobody gains



I had to eat my words

Now I bite my tongue

When waxing lyrical with songs

Unsung

Putting my foot in it,

With the greatest of ease

So, would you say I suffered from

foot and mouth disease?



If only I had listened

To what you had

To say

If only I had listened

Would you have

Gone away

If only I had listened

Would you have been

So cold

Your silence was so

Final

So your story went

Untold

If only I had listened

The words you

Wrote,

Read

If only I had listened

Would you now be dead?



They seek you here

They seek you there

The bore will seek you

Everywhere

There's no escape

Try as you may

They're ubiquitous

Iniquitous

Never far enough away

To ignore

Our biggest enemy,

The Bore



My middle name is muddle

My flat is just a mess

I really just can't find a thing

So I must confess

Time is of the essence

When searching for my keys

My specs have just

Gone missing

And now I am on my knees

Covered in cats hairs and

She's madly scratching

God I'm sure she must have fleas

Finally got myself off the floor when lo and behold...

I finally found the door



Brand new

On the market

No problem to park it

The flip lid

Mini machine

Guaranteed to get

Clothes clean

With all round

Vision

And Fingertip control

With great precision

It reaches its goal

But there is

A teensy weensy

Little quirk

Afraid the bloody thing

Don't work.

§

For old times' sake

For all the laughter

And the Fun

Of lying baking in

The sun

Gorging ourselves, fit to bust

Then finally ashes to ashes,

Dust to dust.



I live alone

No mobile

Phone

I don't find

It hard

With no

Credit card

But I'm still

Alive

How do I survive...?



Aunt May's

Terse

Verse

Advice Column

Give

Early Training

Make it Snappy

Thus

Avoiding

Crappy

Nappy

P.S. Warm the Pot for Baby's Bot...



Cynical Moi?