

BOLT FROM THE BLUE

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Fitzcarraldo Editions

7 OCT 92

Mum

I wake up early at the moment and can't get back to sleep.
Lie there in the dark, thinking.

Several times recently about my childhood. Remembering how calm you were in a crisis. When I fell into a bank of nettles in the Norfolk dunes one baking summer's day and stung myself all over. On our holiday, in a caravan site.

Do you remember?

And me feeling sick in the coach on the way down to London, our first time on the M1, and you forcing the driver to stop on the hard shoulder and let me out for a breather.

All the sympathy and caring sent haywire by your angry eruptions at the drop of a hat.

Incidentally, I'm really pleased I speak with a Brummie twang. I usen't to be, when I first went to St Martin's. Got myself in a state about the dismissive assumptions by art-snobs. Which is everyone in the commercial art world, just about.

Seven years later I'm happy to hear the sounds I make. Pleased I didn't snuff them out in embarrassment.

With love

Lynn

25 JAN 93

Mum

Have you come across Morton's Dot-to-Dot postcards?

Lynn xx

[Sent her Paul Morton's postcard *Thatcher Therapy*.

Dot-to-Dot Puzzle No. 1, with instructions on the reverse: 'Thatcher Therapy. Take a broad, black, water-based felt-tip pen and follow the dots until Mrs Thatcher's face is obliterated. Wipe clean and it's ready for the next go. In no time at all you'll be looking forward to starting the day with fresh vigour.' Printed and published by Morton at his Hot Frog Graphics in Yorkshire.]

Dear Lynn

You chose that postcard on purpose, knowing how much I admire Mrs Thatcher!

Good laugh all the same.

She might be a bossy old bag but at least she speaks straight. I always know what she means. And quite often agree with her. Definitely about looking after the pennies. Family thrift, that kind of thing.

What about the threat to the climate, one of your sacred cows? Mrs Thatcher's right on side with that.

Doesn't fit so well with her work these days for Philip Morris, the tobacco people, I'll give you that!

I like getting your postcards. The postie winks at me when I answer the door on a postcard morning.

Love

Mum

P.S. Don't forget: I have NEVER voted Tory in my life, and never will.

18 MAR 93

Mum

'With due respect', 'if the truth be told', 'all things

considered', 'I have to say', 'frankly', and so on and so on. Whenever I hear phrases like this on the radio, I know I'm about to be lied to.

I've my suspicions even about the pseudo-innocent 'So ...'!

'To be honest...' implies, to me, that the remark about to follow is so marginally true as to be basically false! Every remark without this preface can presumably be taken as, at best, dubious? By intention or unknowingly. Makes little difference.

The other day a Tory MP claimed in a by-election programme on Radio 4: 'Chances are, if you vote for us England will win the World Cup and your daughter will marry a millionaire.'

Honestly!

No joke even if it is a joke.

I forgot to say a while back that, like your dad, Landy's dad was a working man. Built tunnels. Badly injured in the 1970s when a roof collapsed and has never been able to work since.

That's not funny either.

Love, Lynn

Don't be silly, love. Those clichés don't mean anything. They're just what everyone says. Without thinking.

M xx

[Mum wrote this on a Janet de Wagt postcard titled *Women are called birds because of the worms they pick up*, a drawing by the New Zealand artist who lived at the time in England, printed by the Tyneside Free Press Workshop.]

30 MAR 93

Mum

So it's great for everyone to go around saying what they don't mean? On the radio, in parliament, at school?

OK, I'll stop. Dead end!!

L xx

[Written on *Situationist Postcard No. 2* published by Exitstencil Press, designed by Gee Vaucher, female founder and lead singer of the anarcho-punk band Crass. A photomontage of a starving child served on a silver platter by a waiter to wealthy guests seated at a restaurant table.]

23 MAY 93

Mum

Things aren't easy, at the moment.

I've been selected for several group shows, and dealers are sniffing around. Reckoned I'd get by.

And I am, financially.

It's me. I'm the problem. My brain has collapsed. Into sponge. Moss.

Been reading the book *No Author Better Served*, of letters between Samuel Beckett and his American theatre director Alan Schneider, in one of which Beckett wrote: 'Not an idea in my head for new work of any kind – but then there never was.'

Ditto.

Double ditto, given the fact that when they did come Beckett's ideas were hundreds of times better than mine ever will be.

'Get a dog', you say. 'Have a baby'. I wish you'd stop making such ridiculous suggestions.

Please Mum.

Don't worry, I'll turn the corner.

With love

Lynn X

2 JUNE 93

Mum

Stroke of luck.

Not being in the swing, I hadn't heard about the studio-gallery set up by two young artists down Bethnal Green Road, close to Brick Lane. Until I happened to pick up – can't remember where, maybe at The Barley Mow – a copy of *Purple Prose*, with an article on them.

Walked straight over.

There they both were, sitting at a table making things.

I bought a white T-shirt with the hand-painted slogan in black capital letters HAVE YOU WANKED ON ME YET.

They're just doing what they do, not being 'artists'. It's great. In their *Purple Prose* interview one of the women said: 'We don't have a plan, we are the plan. I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing.'

I'll keep an eye out for those two, that's for sure.

Love from Lynn

—
Dear Lynn

Sounds to me as if you're bang at the centre of things. No art-wanking in Birmingham!

Suppose they'll settle down soon enough to the standard slog.

Might as well enjoy themselves while they can.

Long live grants. And their dads probably slip them a fiver or two now and again.

Is it all girls, or are there boy artists in the mix too?

Rather you than me.

With love

Mum

18 JUNE 93

Mum

Yeah, I think women are taking the lead these days, to some extent.

The men tend to be more conventional.

You're wrong about money from the dads, though, in this case. The father of one drives a taxi-cab and the other is married to a different woman from her mother!

When I was at the Brick Lane place three artist-friends of theirs dropped by. They were chatting about dealers and selling and stuff, and I overheard one of the two women say: 'I don't care how. All I want is to be rich and famous.'

'Give us a break, please,' one of the blokes responded, frowning in disbelief.

You never know. Determination gets you a long way.

I noted down from a Doris Lessing book: 'It's my belief that talent is plentiful, and that what is lacking is staying power.'

Off for a swim. Might try the London Fields Lido. Beautiful afternoon, and it's an outside pool.

Maybe it's no longer open? Saw something about it somewhere. Must check.

See you.

Love, Lynn

6 JULY 93

Mum

Susan's turning up with more and more things for me to box.

Yesterday it was a sandpainting she had picked up somewhere. Stylised teepee collage formed of different coloured sands 'collected from the deserts and mountains of the southwestern United States'. She's called it *PLIGHT (Plite)*, with an elaborate text pasted onto the inside of the lid.

I get the feeling Susan prefers to work alone, doing without studio assistants. She's warm and generous, but I tread carefully.

Don't blame her. I don't think I could ever co-direct a film. Need to do everything myself. Write the script, find locations, set the lights, hold the camera, edit the film, compose the credits.

Difficult enough managing the occasional actor, I find.

Would really like to do the acting too!

You run your own life, Mum. Maybe I caught the independence bug from you?

Dad seems to be a lazy, bloody ... What do I know? Haven't seen him since I was two and a half!

Let him go. Move on and let it go. That's what I must tell myself.

Love

Lynn

—
Dear Lynn

*You mentioning your dad made me think of mine. As I often do.
As you know.*

It was he who arranged for my singing lessons, in Thetford, when I was sixteen. After the school told him I had a special voice.

He used to drive me over on a Sunday morning, his day off, and wait outside in the car, chain-smoking.

My teacher was blind.

I remember the dead leaves and litter blowing in the porch of her ground floor flat. No front step. And stumbling after her in darkness down a long passage when she answered the door.

Then her teaching room full of light, facing the yard. Which she couldn't see, of course.

The lessons were cut short by dad's death.

You're right, I never did learn to read music.

There's a lot I can't do.

Love

Mother

1 AUG 93

Dear Mum

That's sad about the singing. Without your dad I guess there'd have been no way for your mum to find the money to continue the lessons.

Coincidence that yesterday I went to something called the Fête Worse Than Death. I can see that for you there couldn't have been, at the time, a fate worse than your father's death. Must've affected everything

This FTWD was a street day-event put on by artists in Shoreditch. Planned now to be annual. The best bit about it was that almost all the participants, and the audience as well, knew each other. Us bystanders were involved in the act, our responses part of the show. Although there were maybe fifty stalls set out on both sides of the street, it was really intimate. Like a party at home.

Young artists performing with and for each other.
A few of my St Martin's lot were in the crowd. It was good to catch up.

Sarah S. and Georgie actually had stalls. With a bunch of the ex-Goldsmiths crew also doing their number. That Damien Hirst had a pitch. Stall set out with loads of tubes of paint, squares of cardboard and a turntable. His new thing: making spin paintings for a quid each. Hirst and Fairhurst, his studio-mate, were dressed and made-up as circus clowns, elaborately face-painted by big Leigh Bowery, the punk jeweller. For an extra 50p they exposed themselves, showed off their striped cocks and spotted balls!

Not for me, though. Too pally, in the end. A closed shop. Compston, the young man running it, has great energy but is quite a toff. Scent of swastika about the logo and retro line in waistcoats.

Got a good name for his outfit: Factual Nonsense.

Here's a typical FN slogan: 'So drop a flippin' stitch or two, pick up a piece and uplift your splendid soul.' Not bad, I have to admit!

Love

Lynn x

P.S. I'll try and mention names less. Doesn't matter who they are, whether publicly known or not. Will concentrate on what they do.

11 SEPT 93

Mum

I've been doing a lot of drawing. Comes out kind of weird but friends encourage me to go on with it.

This is one of the best, in my view.

What does it remind you of?

Love

Lynn

[This note and the folded drawing were still in the stiff brown envelope in which I had posted them.]

Dear Lynn,

Odd, as you say. Got something, though. I'm not qualified to say what it has but, as you asked my opinion, I'd say it looks skilful. I mean, it can't be easy to draw like that, realistic and sort of abstract at the same time.

Mind you, I can't see many people with your talent wanting to use it quite like this!

I'll ask your Aunt Betty what she sees in it.

Do you mind if I show Charmian too? I met her last year. She's a catering assistant at the National Exhibition Centre. We get on.

Won't take it to the pub, I promise!

Love

Mum

29 OCT 93

Mum

Tom, my old tutor at St Martin's, got in touch with a bunch of us to arrange to meet up at *House*, off Bow Road. It's a 'masterpiece', he says. Crap word. Fantastic artwork.

Difficult to describe. Won't try. You'll have to wait till there're photographs.

Even then you won't get the texture of the thing. Or feel

the threat of inside-outside, of wondering quite where you are.

I had to escape across the park to the canal and down the towpath for half a mile to stop myself going a bit crazy. It was partly that I felt disappointed in myself, stabs of fear that I'm getting nowhere with my work. The artist is only two years older than me and she's done this monumental piece!

Think positively for me, please!

Love

Lynn X

P.S. See, no names!

Dear Lynn

It's probably not a good idea to make comparisons. We never know what's going to happen, or which is the right direction.

And I'm not completely ignorant, I do know her name! Rachel Whiteread's doing great right now but in ten years' time could be ... I don't know ... knocked sideways by the death of her kids, say, in a car accident. With her driving, and escaping injury! Don't be so dramatic. You're on your own path.

I can tell, I'm your mother.

You're the most strong-willed, independent creature on the planet.

From Sparkhill, anyway!

Must be a good few others like you in London, stands to reason. Whiteread for one.

I've never even begun to do the things I wanted to, yet I still have fun.

Chin up,

Love

M XX

22 NOV 93

M

How's it going?

L xx

[Wrote this on a 1920s postcard of Niagara Falls, with rings and bangles I had cut out from an Argos catalogue and collaged at the base of the waterfall. Someone had told me that thousands of couples get engaged every year on the walkway above the drop, exchanging rings, most of which might as well be thrown straight into the void.]

Dear Lynn

Yeab, I'm doing all right, considering.

I'm more-or-less manager of The Blind Traveller on the four nights I work there.

The man of the moment is OK too. So far!

I'm haunted by pictures of that poor black woman, her pretty son murdered at the bus stop by a gang of thugs. Also, those little boys killing another little boy, beside the railway. Can't get my head around any of it, even now, months later.

Not sure why it gets to me. I'm not the maternal type. I don't think. Suppose it's because the TV and papers hit us over the head with these sorts of stories. You're expected to feel outraged even when you aren't.

Whose fault is it when youths and kids behave like that?

The government. And the public education system, I'd say.

Simpler for them to blame the mothers.

It's not right, though.

Love

M XX