

Correcting Picasso (Docklands)

The second thing that happened was his noticing that the woman looked very much like Andrea's mother, although he could not recall ever having met Andrea's mother. The woman was comforting the child. The snotty snivelling ugly little child. The same child that had run up to his bed shouting "Daddy!" Telling the child he must be at the wrong bed was the first thing he had done. And why Andrea's mother? Andrea was history. Andrea was wild. Too wild. A girl that just wanted to have fun. And they had. But he was now at an age when he wanted more than endless partying. Had she not told her mother?



"My poor dear."

Andi's mother was calling him her poor dear. Why?

Something must have happened. He tried to remember.

A doctor appeared and asked him if he knew who he was.

"Jez Crumb," he replied with some effort. "I am a fine arts student at Goldsmiths College."

He could hear Andi's mother gasp or weep or something.

"It is not unusual for there to be some amnesia in cases like this," the doctor assured her.

"But look at him. He doesn't recognise me."

Jez was puzzled by the woman's hysteria. It was not what he would have expected from the mother of an ex-girlfriend.

"Don't worry Mrs Crumb, it will almost certainly pass." The doctor reassured.

"Mrs Crumb?" Jez shouted. "You're not my mother!"

The mention of her so noticeably silenced his companions for a respectful period that Jez knew did it not bode well for the state of his old sick mother's health.

Then the woman spoke.

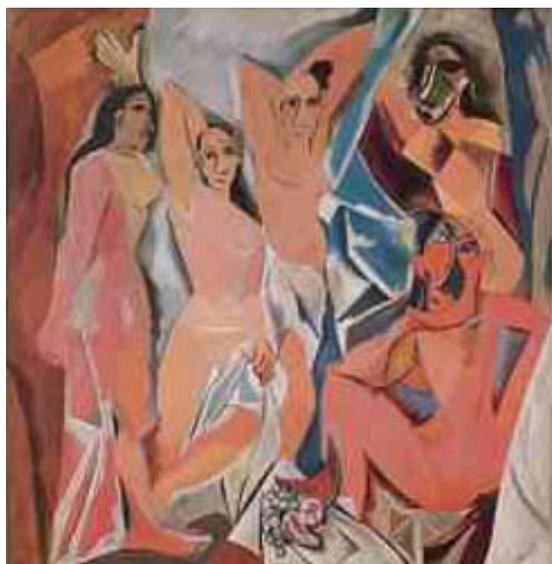
"It's me, Andrea, your wife, and this is Josh, your son."

He panicked. He considered the unlikelihood, that, even in the unlikely event that he ever - even by an unfortunate accident - fathered a real sprog, he would name it Josh. This was his last thought before gratefully regaining unconsciousness.

"God I hate waiting, I'm bored, I could do with a drink."

"Act your age Jeremy." she scolded.

How could he stop thinking of her as the mother of one of his friends when she called him Jeremy? Not that he had never fancied any of his friends' mothers. But he had never considered marrying one.



They were waiting for the cab. He looked at her. This Andrea. This apparent wife of his. He'd known her only too briefly as firm and athletic - pushing the boundaries of taste, challenging accepted rules of colour co-ordination. Dazzling, jangling and drenched in scent. This Andrea, this drooping stretch-marked, varicose, menopausal Andrea was now his wife. Now her jewellery was subtle, her make-up: pearly nails, dewy lips, glaringly understated - acutely barely noticeable.

She had been wild. She had been cute. Cute - like spelling her name with an 'i' dotted with a smiley face. Cute: Garfield posters on her wall and fluffy toys on her pillow cute. Cute but still wild. Too wild. Glittering and lacy and shiny and

horny and wild. She'd made him wild. The wild jealousy of the cheated
Too wild. She'd had to go.

"Give Josh back his Game Boy."

The child was pulling at her skirt and snivelling. The rheumy child now seemed to be leaking a frenzy of mucus. Jez returned the Game Boy if only to restrain the grizzling child's fluids. Jez had noticed something more fascinating.

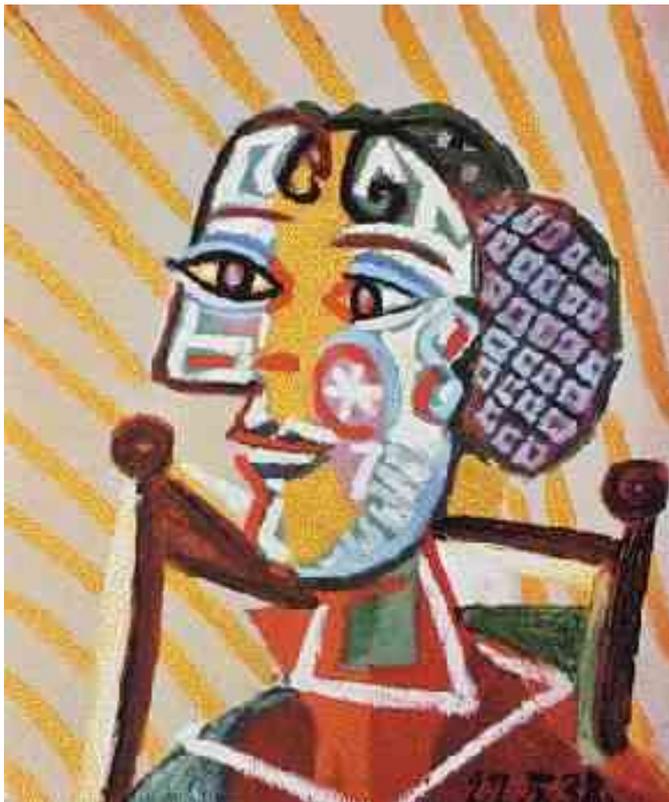
"I'll phone to see where the cab is."

"Oh let me, please. Oh let me have a go." he pleaded, reaching for the mobile phone.

"No, I'll do it." she insisted. He recognised the final word.

She certainly looked well heeled; one of them must be making money.

"What do I do for a living?" he enquired.



"You alter classic works of art."

"And how do I do that?" he asked with a certain trepidation.

"On your computer. You apply something you call a clarity filter to 'Impressionists' and you correct Picasso."

"I what!"

"You correct Picasso: you put the noses back in the centre of the faces. And you bring old classics into the DVD age. Posters and screen savers to cheer up the dullest of offices."

He had no idea what a DVD or screen saver was. He could have asked but then the moment would have been lost to say: "Like Monet for nothing?"

"You may mock, but 'Monet for Nothing' sold well, as did 'Manet Hands...' and 'Whistler while you Work'."

"So that is what became of me." He declared with a note of bitterness. So this was dumbing down. He had read about such, back on the ward. Back on the ward when the only paper left on the trolley was 'The Telegraph'. Back on the ward - wallowing in sumptuous indolence, cocooned by Newham General where the life he had woken to was not so very different to the life he remembered. The much-mentioned sweeping changes in the NHS had apparently failed to change entrenched ideas of what constituted suitable hospital décor. The real world was probably going to be more of a challenge. He had been warned.

"So what happened?" he asked.

"So where do I start?"

"You can start by explaining why you slept with my best friend."

"That was a long time ago and we agreed to forget about it."

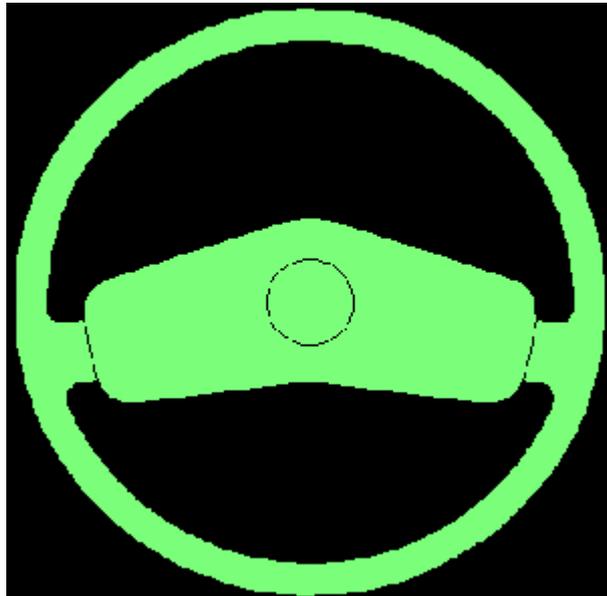
"How do I know that? I've only got your word... I loved you."

"You still do."

"I hope so."

He rushed to take the front seat. He could not find within him any wish to sit with the old lady and the snot factory. She acquiesced, evidently no stranger to bad behaviour.

She asked the cab driver to take them to Shepherds Bush. There was at least some comfort in knowing that he lived in the Bush.



How old were they? They dressed old. No longer a question of the way to look at it: the glass really was half empty... at least.

She was wearing a blouse. A BLOUSE for God's sake. The blouse seemed to be colour co-ordinated with her smart jacket, and skirt. Her tights were beige and her shoes sensible. What the hell had she done to herself? Her hair like sculptured Brillo. Why had she let it happen? Why had she let herself go like this? What was so wrong with the battered leather, the Clash T-shirt, the Doc Martens that had so perfectly complimented her fishnets? He could picture evening at home. The comfy 'cardis' the quilted housecoats, winceyette nighties. His hoped that there was at last something decent on TV. And she had bought his clothes for him. And he was wearing beige.

The car amazed him. He could see it was a Ford, but what kind? He asked the driver.

"Focus."

"I only asked."

"No, It's a Ford Focus."

"Couldn't you have bought me some jeans?" he shouted to the back seat as he played with the electric windows.

"You don't have any jeans that still fit you."

"Well, did you have to get beige?" he sneered. "Look, she's making me wear beige." he shouted at the driver.

"Beige is the new black." The driver declaimed.

Jez laughed. He remembered that comedy was the new rock'n'roll.

"Can we have the radio on?"

"Do you want Virgin, Heart, Kiss, Xfm, Classic, Jazz FM, Radio 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 Live?"

Bewildered by choice he asked for Radio 1.

A female DJ was being lewd, talking about her previous night on the piss and her current hangover, fluffing her lines and blaming her ineptitude on the time of the month. He stared at the radio. He was almost shocked.

"She sounds like a bit of a live wire."

"Who, Sara Cox?" the driver asked, "lovely girl, picked her up once."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I've had 'em all: Judge Jules, Danny Rampling, even that Westwood, though I hear he now prefers to travel in an ambulance." he laughed knowingly. Jez gaped unknowing and asked. "You must have met some interesting people." "Yeah, been there, done that, got the T-shirt."

Jez laughed. The driver looked perplexed. No one laughed at his tired humour anymore.

Jez was perplexed by the driver's attitude. Then he realised what was happening. He resolved not to laugh at anything else in case it was something he had heard before.



Someone was getting Jiggy with it and mumbling poetry over a familiar tune. Newsreaders were talking about GMOs, 'spin doctors' and Euros. Fulham in the Premier league. QPR losing to Wycombe Wanderers!!! Memorial to Diana. 'Beijing' seemed now to be the capital of China. It was like living in the Jabberwocky. The music was like a multiple car crash, like someone throwing cathode ray tubes out of a tenth story window, more volume in one small area than his instincts told him was possible, everything louder than everything else.

Jingles and station IDs followed by blasts of sound and people talking fast-fast-fast: quick-fire information with no discernible value followed ironically by music that expressed three ideas in as many minutes. Endless repetition of one beat, one block-rocking, Ruckerfeller Skanking beat. One riff and one shouted phrase. Kraftwerk's 'Transeurope Express' derailed and crashing into the buffers.

"A bit in your face." The cab driver observed loudly.
Jez was starting to love this guy's succinct turns of phrase.

The driver hesitated on the roundabout and then with a look along the A13 that was more 'to be seen' than to see he announced he would be taking the Docklands route and took the turn for the Woolwich Ferry.



It was a grey day. A heavy concrete sky weighed down. That kind of day when all that isn't grey reflects the greyness of all that is. Morning in London. All around was water, cranes, demolition and development. Up on Silvertown Way looking out over the docks, now a water sports centre, he noted rows of derricks with no chains or hooks standing like death's pet grey flamingos, guarding ghostly deserted wharves.

"What is that!"

Apparently there had been a millennium and ahead was a dome to prove it.

"Wow!" he shouted.

"Waste of money," the driver grunted, "if you ask me."

He hadn't but he did ask whose money.

"Money from the lottery."

"I don't imagine we do the lottery," he said getting the hang of the kind of person he was. He liked it all even if the architects apparently had still not discovered colour.

Elevated roads and railways cut swathes through the murk: the visible moisture, where once clapped-out Granadas were abandoned as crooks ran off into disused warehouses and the Sweeney in hot pursuit crashed through walls of empty packing crates. The scale of the buildings impressed him. The outrageousness of it though, failed to alarm him - which alarmed him. Everything was only slightly new to him. Not quite a surprise, only almost unfamiliar.



He somehow knew he had seen it before, though when he tried to remember, what he remembered was mostly nothing. An unavoidable and immovable nothing that clouded the foreground of his memory. He had recently seen things, heard things and touched things, the remembrance of which he knew were lurking somewhere inside that nothing. He was certain that his 'remembering nothing' was wholly unlike how it must feel to not remember anything.

Docklands. Cyberspace. Virtual Reality: What a world to have suddenly found himself in. Though it was a pity that the price he had paid was to suddenly find himself middle-aged.

Then came a tunnel. Jez assumed it must lead under the river but why?

"Where does this go?" He asked

"Wapping." - "A shortcut to Wapping. Oh brave new world!"

But it was not the Wapping of Alf Garnet. The road both wide and clear of traffic jams, it passed by so quickly that the only impression it left was one of themed bars and petrol stations.

In London you pay for your brief accelerations. If not by the speed camera then just by the inevitable hold up. Gaining on the swings and losing on the roundabouts, contra-flows and gyratory systems, snarled up with all the others made angry by traffic calming. To the tourist the lights at Tower Hill could mean longer to marvel at the tower. Londoners watch the lights, ride the clutch, drum on the steering wheel and curse. Jez was enjoying the scene, the disharmony of architectural styles: a glass hemisphere over the water by the gothic bridge and the modern battleship. And everywhere suits. Suits with mobile phones and suits with women inside. Suits with black tights - how could that distraction be sensible in a workplace.



"Have they moved the Tate?" Jez asked noticing the familiar sugar makers name on an unfamiliar building.

"No that's Tate Modern." his wife explained.

"Hurrumph," the driver hurrumphed. "Loada crap if you ask me." though no one had. "My boy keeps his appendix in a jar. I've told him to offer it to that Saatchi geezer for a few grand. Maybe throw in a few gherkins as well."

Jez looked at the window and reflected, pleased to be in an era when art was a topic for cab driver discussion.

The sight of the London Eye threw him. It was like the surroundings had shrunk. He applauded the frivolity of a giant Ferris wheel. It gave him hope that the new grown ups were, in ways that mattered, not like the old ones.

Amidst all the newness and the curiously familiar strangeness he had barely noticed the ache in his left hip. Then he did.

"Ow, I've got a pain in my hip." he whinged. "I thought they said there was no damage other than the concussion."

"That will be your sciatica." - "Well shouldn't I take something?"

"You don't need to, you've learnt to live with it."

She smiled a smile both compassionate and ironic. He could have loved it there and then had it not been for the wrinkles and crows-feet it brought to light. Her face had become less confrontational and he knew he would come to find it attractive. But he still wasn't happy with her.

"And look at this jacket!" He returned to his main bone of contention, "Look at it - tweed!"

"OOOh suits you sir." The driver observed. Jez recognised the reference but only briefly. He could hear Andrea, in the adult way, stifling a laugh, whilst the brat over-laughed to prove he was in on the joke. Jez wasted time considering whether or not to laugh. His indecision cost him. He knew it was a catch phrase from a recent programme or advert, and not of the driver's invention. He knew that knowing this was important. But he was slow to react and it slipped away before he could associate it with anything: where he was, who he was with. He needed to grasp something, to hold on to an object or idea, some kind of

Proustian cake the smell of which would bring it all flooding back. He knew it was possible, as to the best of his knowledge (Monty Python aside), he knew nothing of Proust.

A giant tower of blue water stood sentinel to the approach to the Bush. He loved it. Even the sun had started to shine or was the relief to be back in the west so strong as to brighten the view from within. And no suits. The Bush people seemed to wear tracksuits and training shoes with conviction, almost like they had to. Casual clothing, mobile phones, a public toilet converted into a pool hall and the evident return of the Shepherds Bush Empire after all those years of 'Wogan'. His kind of place.

"The first thing I am going to do when I get in is put on a pair of jeans and a T shirt."

"You haven't been listening. You don't own a pair of jeans, not even at home." She sounded like his mother. He spotted a jeans shop.

"Stop the car!" he shouted.

The car stopped on Goldhawk Road.

He took a T-shirt from the carousel obstructing the doorway, then squeezed his way into the half-light. He scanned the rails for something other than combat trousers. In an apparently seldom-visited corner he happened upon a solitary rack of blue denim. With the surly impetuosity he felt was still his right, in full view, he changed into the clothes he was about to purchase. The shop assistant seemed less phased by his behaviour than he was with her facial adornments. They looked to him like chromium zits.

He took the notes from his wallet. Old crumpled notes. Pictures of Elgar and Dickens, "Dickens - the new Shakespeare." he observed.

"Whatever." she sneered in the manner of a waitress in an American sit-com. Neither understanding nor bothered by not understanding. It was then that he

spotted the poster. He recognised it as almost a Picasso. Almost 'Marie-Thérèse leaning on One Elbow'. He wondered who would do such a thing. He then realised that it was him. He was briefly overcome by shame. He then remembered doing it and the shame abated. He remembered why he did it: to provide for his child and the wife he loved now as much as he had on their wedding day. And, he felt proud. Then he remembered everything and he had much to be proud of. He was the Jeremy Crumb, pioneer of the technique known as Image Deconvolution using the MemSys 5 package for PC. He was the one who had made "Dejeuner sur L'herbe" look photo-real. He was the one who made the cubists more spherical. He was the one who gave Manet's Olympia a post-coital glow and sold a million posters. He was the one who had prepared Van Gogh's Sunflowers ready for its appearance on a Princess Diana memorial mug.

Then he found he was missing a certain familiar discomfort, a mild inconvenience: a chafing collar, a slightly cumbersome jacket and the leg itch of flannel trousers. And he wanted to go home.

Correcting Picasso

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