

Selected Writings

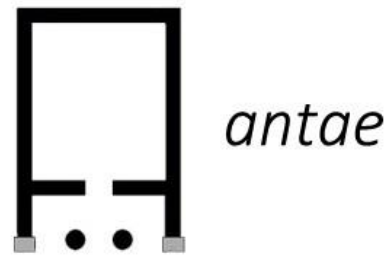
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antae, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jun., 2020), 84-119

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antae (ISSN 2523-2126) is an international refereed journal aimed at exploring current issues and debates within English Studies, with a particular interest in literature, criticism, and their various contemporary interfaces. Set up in 2013 by postgraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Malta, it welcomes submissions situated across the interdisciplinary spaces provided by diverse forms and expressions within narrative, poetry, theatre, literary theory, cultural criticism, media studies, digital cultures, philosophy, and language studies. Creative writing and book reviews are also encouraged submissions.

More than animals

silent you invite molestation
a mutual pleasure
no names no history

eternal now this moment

of what

we are all animals you say
as we fight for sensation

seem to find satisfaction

no real meeting

I could message to say
we are more than animals

no reply

the samphire plants, water-logged,

separate, edible, some metaphor
for love, perhaps, until, with vengeance
it rained

and we drove back
talking about companionship,
not sexual love, thinking that a spasm
for young men, -

and such a waste, I felt,
that faltering frenzy to find fruit,

not caring where it should fall.

Freedom: but not so simple
the pleasures of sex -

yet we are all animals,
embellish it which way you will,
with prayer or poetry,
sonnet-symmetry,
or such-like sonority - it comes
to the same thing:

that we are
reproduction engines, no more than
blown dandelions, octopus-enchancement,
mantis that lost its head, the wild rut:
how they go on,

and on,
led by the nose, driven
mad for so little reward, it seems.

Being human, we call this
desire, quotidian and fatal,
momentary and lasting -

it breaks
apart and makes into one
the incredulous heirs
of copulation,
sunning their wings, or soon enough,
licking their wounds.

Ars Fingendi

Synopsis: The end of the first decade of the sixteenth century. Michelangelo is in his studio with his young model, Luca. Today he wants to make sketches for the naked men on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, then for the sculpture of David. He is awaiting marble from the quarry to start the sculpture. Luca is cold and hungry. Brother Thomas arrives with a letter that informs the artist that the marble he is expecting will not be available as the quarry has been closed by Father David on health and safety grounds.

The Pope arrives. He has put Father David up to this so that Michelangelo will finish his tomb. Michelangelo points to their agreement that he should complete the ceiling before returning to the tomb. Father David enters to forbid that too, on the same grounds. Michelangelo has no option, therefore, but to return to work on the tomb. But first Luca, Thomas, and he will go and have the breakfast that he promised Luca.

Characters

- MICH** *Michelangelo, the artist, mid- to late thirties, energetic and irascible.*
- LUCA** *His model, late teens, playful and irreverent.*
- THOM** *Brother Thomas, early twenties, training to be a priest, good-natured but rather naïve.*
- POPE** *Julius II, late sixties, manipulative, single-minded about his tomb.*
- DAVID** *Father David, mid-thirties, a bureaucrat, health and safety and decency, but does the Pope's bidding, self-important and arrogant.*

Papal retinue, as large as there are available actors, or if none, he comes in alone.

Scene

Michelangelo's studio. It depends on resources how it is furnished. What is needed is an easel, a small bed, and two chairs. The easel is upstage centre, at a slight angle, its back facing the bed. The bed is upstage right, at an angle, parallel with the easel. The entrance is stage left. Luca is sitting at the bottom of the bed, looking aimless.

Enter Michelangelo

- MICH** I'm glad to see you're up before I got here, Luca. Take your clothes off.
- LUCA** It's cold. Do we have to do it so soon? Couldn't we have something to eat and drink first? I haven't had a proper meal for ages.
- MICH** It's what I pay you for, winter or summer. Come on. Get undressed.
- LUCA** All right. But I haven't had any breakfast. Not even a drink. I'm starving.
- MICH** I'll get you something to eat when we've finished. It won't take long. I want you naked. If we do it quickly you shouldn't get too cold.

- LUCA *Undressing.* Why do you never have this place heated? I'm freezing.
- MICH Well, just take your pants off for now then. You can pull your shirt up. I just want to concentrate on your bottom for the moment.
- LUCA That's what they all say. So what are we doing today?
- MICH Sketches. The Ignudi. You're an angel again. Fallen or about to fall.
- LUCA Not more bloody nudies! How many naked blokes are you doing?
- MICH I'm not *doing* naked blokes. 'm painting nude male figures. Twenty, in groups of four. And you are the model for them all. You will be famous. We shall both be famous long after we're gone. And your beautiful body will be admired by generations of worshippers long after it has turned to dust and your name is forgotten.
- LUCA Much good that'll do me! I know that sort of worship. I've seen those cardinals nosing around statues of young, naked guys, prancing before and behind, eyes bulging, cassocks bulging too. You should see the way they leer at me. Can't take their eyes off of me, some of them.
- MICH Be quiet Luca, I will not have the Church disrespected. Not by you anyway. I'm a good Catholic. And they would leave me alone, at least until the Pope has got what he wants from me. But you, they would chew you up and spit you out. Before breakfast.
- LUCA I've had that done a few times already. And talking of breakfast—
- MICH You don't want to get on the wrong side of those Church officials.
- LUCA I think quite a few of them have got on the wrong side of me.
- MICH What you do in your own time, and with your own body, is up to you. I pay you to model for me and that's all I want. Now, sit at the top of the bed. *He points.* On the edge. With your bum slightly towards me.
- Luca sits on the edge of the bed, such that he is not fully visible to the audience and what takes place is described rather than seen by them. Nothing should be obscene.*
- MICH Sit facing away from me. Left leg on the floor, bent at the knee, that's it. Now lift your right leg up, bend it, and put your right foot under your left knee. No, not that like that. Let me show you. You look like a circus contortionist. Stop fidgeting. Sit still.
- He goes over and adjusts Luca's legs as he wants them.*
- LUCA Do you like playing with my legs? You can do more for the right money.

MICH Don't be daft. You're the principal model of a great artist, not a tart.

LUCA If you say so. What are you doing to me now?

MICH I'm pushing you back a bit, that's it, now twist round to the right so that I get a good view of your buttocks from the easel. That's it. Hold it there.

LUCA What d'you want me to hold? I'll hold anything if the price is right.

MICH Keep still. Lean forward slightly. I just want a bit more of your bum.

LUCA Be my guest. You wouldn't be the first.

MICH Luca, just stop that sort of talk. We are creating a work of art here.

LUCA Is that what it's called? People would queue up to buy postcards of me.

MICH Can you just bring your cock slightly forward, please. I want it just visible, peeping out between your legs. Like a little snout.

LUCA Help yourself. You can put it in the right place if you want.

MICH No, I leave it to you. A bit more. Not quite so mischievously please.

LUCA Is this right? Good job it's so cold. Or I might have a hard on. I hope this won't take too long. I'm getting cramp and my tummy's rumbling. I'm surprised you can't hear it. There, it's like a thunderclap.

MICH *Going back to the easel.* As long as that's the only sort of clap. Yes, that's good. I'll just do a quick sketch, sit still please. And concentrate.

LUCA I'm definitely going to get cramp. In both legs. Concentrate on what?

MICH I don't know. Your grandmother. The Blessed Virgin.

LUCA I'd prefer John the Baptist. When can we go for breakfast?

MICH I'll do this sketch. Then I want your buttocks from a different angle.

LUCA What's new!

MICH For my statue of David. I'm doing some sketches till the marble arrives from the quarry. I can see him now. Looking thoughtfully at Goliath.

LUCA I'm ravenous. Will it take long? Am I to be David, then?

MICH Your buttocks are. Stand here, back towards me. Flex your muscles.

LUCA People pay good money for that. And then can we have breakfast?

Enter Brother Thomas with a letter.

THOM Sorry if I'm interrupting something. I'll just wait outside.

MICH Brother Thomas! Morning. Come in please. We've been working on the Ignudi. And I'm just doing a quick sketch of David.

LUCA His bum, anyway. That's me, in case you didn't know.

THOM *Giving the letter.* I have a letter for you. I'll leave to your work.

MICH Thank you. You don't need to go. Luca, put your pants on now.

LUCA Do I have to? I'm comfortable now, and my pants itch.

MICH I thought you were cold. *He points to the pants on the floor by the bed.*

LUCA I've got warm of all sudden. *He pulls them on slowly, sits on the bed, waves to Thomas to come and sit beside him. Thomas comes over.*

THOM Can I wait and see you working then? I've never seen an artist at work.

MICH Yes, as long as you both keep quiet and don't get in the way. *He opens the letter and reads it to himself.*

LUCA What are you up to, Tommy, anything interesting going on?

THOM Usual. Running errands for Cardinals.

LUCA That's one way of putting it, I suppose.

THOM You've a dirty mind, Luca. Interesting pose, that. Don't you get stiff?

LUCA No. Some of the priests do though.

THOM I'm not surprised. It is somewhat lascivious.

LUCA Lassivius? You're always using big words. What does it mean?

THOM Lecherous, libidinous, lubricious, licentious.

LUCA *Shrugging.* Still no idea what you mean.

THOM I bet. Horny. At least, people will feel that way when they look at you.

LUCA Thank you. It feeds me. Usually. Which reminds me. *He shouts out.* Master, you promised me some breakfast.

Michelangelo is still reading, shaking his head.

- LUCA I'm working to rule. I'm not posing till I've had something to eat.
- MICH *Tearing his hair, obviously really angry* They've shut the quarry at Pietrasanta. They've shut the bloody quarry. Bastards! I'll kill them.
- LUCA He'll go into one of his poetical rants now. He'll really lose his marbles. Get it? Lose his marbles. Never mind.
- THOM He seems very overwrought. Does he often get like this?
- MICH *Stomping about, enraged.* Baffling bureaucrats bungle and belabour my business, they bore me, they break me, they bind me, they beat me, obfuscation and obloquy, I am beset by bastards.
- LUCA That's alliteration. You did some on me just now.
- THOM I know what alliteration is. You make it sound like a spell.
- LUCA He does it on me all the time. When he's worked up. He can do magic.
- THOM I'm training for the priesthood. They forbid magic.
- LUCA I expect they do. Do they alliterate a lot? Did you notice, I did it then.
- THOM We study word-power. It's called rhetoric. Alliteration is such a device.
- LUCA I knew it was a trick. I didn't know it was a vice. But then if all the priests do it, I suppose it must be. They seem to enjoy a bit of vice.
- THOM Please don't cast aspersions on my brethren.
- LUCA I wouldn't touch them with a barge pole, let alone cast any spurtings on them. Look, he'll go into a trance now. Start spouting poetry. He reads me some of his poems sometimes. If he's a bit drunk. Really sloppy and sentimental. They are addressed to you.
- THOM To me? Really? I hardly know him. Flattering though.
- LUCA No, not to you you. And not to me neither. Just *a* you. He's never tried anything on with me. His poems are filthy, like his paintings. I like them, they sound nice, though I don't understand them. He gets very worked up. Mournful voice. Lots of heavy breathing.
- THOM Passion, that's what it is. Inspiration. An echo of divine breath.
- LUCA If you say so. I often hear heavy breathing. I know what it means.
- MICH *Walking round in a bit of daze.* My favourite quarry! My favourite stone! The best marble. Just the right touch, abstract sensuality, ephemeral desire

imprisoned in rock, essential form, invisible and ethereal, waiting to be released from recalcitrant substance.

LUCA You all right boss? Keep cool. You promised me breakfast by the way. Wouldn't that cheer you up? It would me.

THOM Who's the letter from? I was asked to deliver it by the Pope himself.

MICH One Father David. Well, he's no David. On behalf of a Cardinal Bellezza. An ironic name. He obviously knows nothing about beauty.

THOM Father David advises the Cardinal on health and safety.

MICH Health and safety. What's that got to do with me? I'm an artist!

THOM The Vatican is worried about the well-being of the people it employs.

MICH That's a change. Does it think there might be a peasants' revolt?

THOM No, more in the spirit of the gospel, I think, looking after people.

MICH Bollocks. When did the Church start looking after people, not things?

THOM They are also tasked with eliminating indecency.

MICH Oh well, there go most of the Vatican's works of art.

LUCA Mr Artist, Sir, what about my breakfast?

MICH Luca, you are quite incorrigible.

LUCA Never been that. I've been corrigible more than you've had breakfasts. Talking of which—

THOM He means you are uneducable, irredeemable, unreformable.

LUCA They're certainly training you well with the long words.

THOM He's saying you always put your appetite before everything else.

LUCA Nothing wrong with my appetite. *Shouts.* My appetite wants breakfast!

MICH Will you two stop prattling please. I need to think.

LUCA I need to eat.

MICH This David—

THOM Father David—

MICH —a Cardinal's side-kick, jack-in-office, lickspittle jobsworth in some new department whose function is to see that Cardinals have something to do other than look at sculptures with bare bums and breasts and give jobs to priests who won't do parish work because it means talking to people. Father David. Father indeed! I bet he could barely father a dormouse. I will put his face all over my next sculpted fig-leaf.

THOM They are also looking at working practices.

MICH Or not working practices, in my case.

THOM So what does the letter actually say?

LUCA Can't we discuss this over a nice, hot breakfast and some wine?

MICH You read it out—I shall just explode.

LUCA Breakfast?

MICH and THOM Shut up!

THOM *Reads.* An inspection has been carried out at Carrara which shows that quarrying marble is an unsafe activity and must be stopped forthwith until a full risk assessment has been carried out. Our attention was alerted following a number of fatalities. Furthermore, no engineering calculations have been done on the capacity of the pulleys.

Michelangelo takes the letter back, crushes it in his hand and kicks it over the floor.

MICH That snooping creep of an arse-licker has gone up to Pietrasanta and simply condemned it without any possibility of a reprieve.

LUCA Can we have a reprieve, please, by way of a cooked breakfast?

MICH David will have to wait to be released into the world of illusion. My sculpture, not that jumped-up cretin. I will have to leave it for now and carry on with the Sistine Chapel ceiling, though it does hurt my back.

LUCA That's where I come in with my bare bum. Can we please have—

MICH All right, Luca, we'll go and have breakfast.

A fanfare sounds, announcing the imminent arrival of the Pope.

MICH Sorry, Luca, it looks as if breakfast will have to wait a little longer. The Pope is visiting. He's always nagging about his tomb. I expect that's why he's visiting. I hate it. Tombs don't interest me, only flesh, before it becomes grass or dust, of course.

LUCA I know the feeling. Flesh interests me too. Hot and steaming.

Enter the Pope with entourage, if any. Father David hides by the door, but in view of the audience. Thomas takes a chair, places it centre stage, kneels, and kisses the Pope's ring. The Pope looks round the room disdainfully, scowls at Luca, and settles himself on the seat, which he clearly finds uncomfortable. Michelangelo picks up the crushed letter, walks up to the Pope, pushes it onto his cheek. The Pope flinches.

- MICH I suppose you put him up to this. It must be your doing that I am now prevented from getting any marble at all!
- POPE *Sneezes.* Why do you never clean your room, or at least clean the floor occasionally? We seem to be up to our ankles in dust. *Sneezes again.* We will send in from our servants to sweep the floor .
- MICH No need. Luca is paid to do that.
- LUCA I'm on strike. Part of the deal is that meals are included.
- POPE You are right. I did it so that you would return to my tomb and finish it. I am tired and need to rest. You have not been near it for months.
- MICH *Unable to say Papa, swallows the word, which comes out as Puppy.* That's true. *He bows and it obviously hurts when he straightens up.*
- POPE So what is stopping you?
- MICH We agreed that once I'd finished the ceiling I would return to your tomb. I am on God's middle finger, the nail, to be precise, actually, a very small part of the nail, but every detail must be correct, I am doing it a nice shade of pink, subtle and subdued—
- LUCA As for his nudies, not another look at my arse till I'm properly fed. As was agreed. Per, pro and propter. As lawyers say. Latin for agreement.
- POPE *Frowning.* Who has the impertinence to interrupt our colloquy?
- LUCA I am his model, Your Godfulness. I supply the bums. Only not until I've had my breakfast. Which he promised me hours ago.
- POPE What an extraordinary creature, Michelangelo. Where on earth did you find him? He's like something you might find in Revelations.
- THOM *Softly, pulling Luca back.* Be quiet, he'll have you excommunicated.
- LUCA Like the singers? I'm not letting anyone near my balls.
- MICH That'll be a first, Luca!
- POPE Maybe we should burn you at the stake, you young hooligan.
- LUCA Steak? That's more like it.

MICH Forgive his nonsense, Your whatsitness. He's a poor orphan, without any family, found in the gutter, to whom I have given employment.

POPE On the basis of what attributes?

LUCA Look at the chapel ceiling. The nudies. That's me. My bum, actually.

MICH If you allow, therefore, I will get to work there straightaway.

LUCA Not till we've had some breakfast!

Enter Father David in a headlong rush.

DAVID Stop! It is not allowed! Please forgive the intrusion, Holy Father. I'm still waiting for the calculations as to the exact load which the scaffold will bear. How do I know anyone will be safe up there?

MICH So, you are the instigator of all this ridiculous obstruction?

DAVID Just doing my job. Following regulations.

MICH And which regulations would these be?

DAVID Laid down by the highest authority. I have the support of the complete administrative unit of the Holy See, led by the Roman Curia including the Secretariats, Curial Congregations, Pontifical Councils and Commissions, tribunals, and other offices... too numerous to mention.

MICH Were the regulations specifically promulgated by the Almighty?

DAVID According to His Holiness. They are ex cathedra.

MICH How can He be bothered with such mundane matters. I'd have thought He'd be far too busy creating universes to care about this.

DAVID He delegates to the Pope, who delegates to us officials

MICH *With his face almost touching the Pope's.* Is this part of your infallibility then? Isn't there a bit of a conflict of interest here?

POPE *Shrugs and raises his arms.* God speaks. What can I do about it?

DAVID I am a Special Commissioner charged with ensuring safety in the workplace and a proper respect for the proprieties in all public undertakings. Including official works of art.

MICH I don't see any real connection between those two spheres of activity.

DAVID Laxity in one sphere leads to laxity in all.

LUCA *To Thomas.* Why is he talking about laxatives?

The Pope glares at him. Thomas puts a finger to his lips.

MICH First of all, I have been doing it for years, painting the ceiling, on my back, a few inches below it. I've sculpted marble several yards off the ground. I've swung in a harness face to face with high walls. I do not care about your petty rules. And finally, and conclusively, it is *my life, my body, my risk*, and I can do as I will with my own.

Father David backs away and stands gaping like a stranded fish.

MICH I have no interest in your bungling, baffling, bullying bureaucratisation!

POPE Perhaps we can expedite the risk assessment and, who knows. in due course everything may be back on track. You can then continue to lie on your back painting God's finger and bits of naked bodies to your heart's content. And you will be able to take possession of your marble.

MICH What exactly is *due course*?

POPE *Sotto voce.* How long will it take you to finish the tomb?

DAVID *Faintly.* In addition, your work is immodest, you have too many bare, uncovered, naked protuberances visible all over the ceiling.

LUCA Careful, Mister, some of them protruding instances belong to me.

The Pope studiously ignores Luca.

POPE The human form is a divine idea (I say is, because creation continues to the end of time). That idea becomes conception, transformed into flesh when He created Adam and Eve out of dust, when each of us is born, and in the incarnation of his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Standing up, he adopts a performing stance and starts to preach.* Et Verbum Dei Caro Factum Est...

LUCA Even His Holiness the Pope goes on about bums being fucked!

The Pope glares at him but carries on.

THOM *Aside to Luca.* You'll get into trouble if you carry on like this.

LUCA It depends what you mean by trouble.

MICH Shush! *He wags his finger at Luca and makes a slitting throat gesture.*

POPE And the Word became flesh. Human beings are therefore essentially dust, but with a divine spark that animates them. When we die, the earthly, human part returns to dust and that part of us is no more. But the heavenly spark, which has been yearning always for the Creator, searches for and finds Him and is

reunited with Him in eternity. There is nothing intrinsically evil about the human body. Any evil is in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is the heart of creation. Always beating. Take note. I have spoken. *Sits down.*

LUCA *Applauding loudly.* This dude really knows his stuff! It puts me in the clear! Anyone looking at me is sinning. Not me. Great speech!

POPE *Somewhat stiffly.* Thank you. I'm glad it made an impression on you.

MICH So where does this leave all my artistic efforts?

POPE *Smiling weakly.* We shall have some Cardinals look into it.

MICH Even more Cardinals poking their noses into things.

LUCA Not just their noses, I can tell you. They are great pokers in.

POPE Meanwhile, all work on the ceiling is put on hold. For the time being.

MICH How long will that be?

POPE That depends on Father David here. What do you say, Father David?

DAVID *Kisses his hand.* Your Holiness. I am at your service and will in all things respect and obey your will.

POPE *To Michelangelo, trying to be jovial.* It means you are suspended from being suspended from the ceiling,

MICH I never was. I was on a raised platform.

DAVID In terms of health and safety there is no difference.

POPE So. *He nods.* The tomb then, get to it.

Both Michelangelo and Luca make plosive sounds with their lips.

POPE Did somebody say something?

Without waiting for an answer he leaves, followed by any retinue and Father David.

MICH I'll sculpt flamboyant genitals that sprout from ears of the apostles.

LUCA But breakfast first. Please. I've waited so long. You promised.

MICH Yes, Luca, you are right. You have been patient. Let us attend to the needs of the flesh. While it lasts. It will soon enough be grass. *Going back to the easel.* I just want to do a couple more lines on this sketch.

LUCA You can't draw me till I've had something to eat and drink.

- THOM Can I ask you about the Sistine Chapel roof?
- MICH It's actually the ceiling. But go on, what d'you want to know?
- THOM Sorry, ceiling. I'm puzzled by all the acorns you've painted. I don't understand the symbolic references.
- LUCA They're bellends.
- THOM Bell ends?
- LUCA The round bit at the end of your cock.
- THOM *Shocked.* The glans penis? Really? Isn't that a bit obscene for a religious painting! And a bit too obvious!
- LUCA You didn't get it, so how is it obvious?
- MICH Take no notice of Luca, Thomas, he has a one-track mind and sees sex in everything. If I said "rovere", what would you think of?
- THOM Oak.
- MICH What are the fruits of the oak?
- THOM Acorns.
- MICH The Pope's family name is Della Rovere, of the oak.
- LUCA Not as obvious as little willies. Let's go to Giordano's. They do an all-day breakfast. Eat as much as you want.
- MICH You too, Thomas, come along. Breakfast's on me.
- THOM Thank you.
- MICH Breakfast with *two* good looking, young men will make a welcome change. I don't often have that pleasure. Plenty of time for the tomb after that. You can tell me about your desires. To be a priest, I mean.
- LUCA Come on then. Let's get going. I could eat a horse. And after all that fuss we need to get pissed.
- MICH Some of my best poetry has been written when I'm drunk.
- LUCA Really. I wouldn't have noticed.
- THOM I hope you're not drunk when you're painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling.
- MICH No, sober as a Cardinal.



LUCA Now that would really screw up health and safety.

Exeunt, all laughing.

You Are Certain Who You Are

Synopsis: Dave and Joe have been friends for about four years. They do not live together but Dave stays at Joe's flat at the weekend and at other times. Dave works part of the week away from home. He is not expected back till tomorrow. Joe has hooked up with Seb on an internet site and they have just had sex. They are now having a cup of tea before Seb leaves.

Seb hasn't put his shoes on when there is the sound of a key in the door of the apartment and the door opening and shutting. Dave has left work a day early and is calling in to say hello. Joe and Seb are embarrassed and attempt to bluff it out, but Dave confronts them both. Seb leaves with apologies. Joe is really upset and frightened and asks what Dave is going to do. They talk about their relationship and Dave says he knows Joe is having casual sex and he does not really mind after all.

Characters

JOE *Dave's friend, mid to late forties. Slightly timid and insecure, he seems a little afraid of Dave.*

DAVE *Joe's friend, early to mid-forties. Smart, confident and assured in manner, he sometimes seems to bully or overawe Joe.*

SEB *Someone Joe has met through a dating site. Late twenties/early thirties, married and very anxious at being caught in this situation.*

Scene

Joe's sitting room. Lived in, if not actually untidy. Sofa, two armchairs, a folded-down table. Not much in the way of pictures and ornaments but a lot of books and papers scattered about. Seb is sitting on the sofa. Joe has just offered him a cup of tea.

SEB I hope I didn't spoil it for you.

JOE How d'you mean?

SEB Coming so quickly.

JOE No worries. I could tell you were excited. You fucked my mouth soon after I sucked your cock. There was no stopping you.

SEB I've not got that much experience. I go for months without looking at the site and then I get this sort of itch that has to be scratched.

JOE You're not feeling bad are you. Ashamed of this?

SEB No, nothing like that. No, I enjoyed it. I'm just sorry if it was a bit one-sided. Not sure what you got out of it.

JOE It was ok. It was a turn on to see you getting so excited. I thought I was going to choke. But you were so carried away I knew you would cum quickly. And I was right. You suddenly shed a huge load.

SEB The moment you touched by bumhole I just exploded. Couldn't stop myself. It was like a volcano.

JOE I know. I could feel the contractions. I could certainly hear you. It was the most enormous roar I've ever heard. I tasted your cum before swallowing it. It was warm. And sweet. Like honey. But bitter too.

SEB I've never had an orgasm like that before.

JOE Well, I guess, I should take that as a compliment.

Pause

SEB How would you feel about meeting regularly? I'm quite busy and it wouldn't be often but you seem a nice guy and it was... fun.

JOE I don't mind. Get to know each other and what we like. Trust and respect... and all that...

SEB I'm not looking for a relationship. Just some occasional fun.

JOE Sure. Just fun.

Pause.

JOE Are you married?

SEB Yes. You?

JOE Divorced a few years ago. It was amicable enough. We just ran out of steam. We're still friends!

SEB That's good.

JOE What about you? Are things ok with your wife?

SEB She's my best friend. I would never want to split up. But we don't have sex anymore.

JOE Have you kids?

SEB Still at school. That more than anything keeps me and the wife together.

JOE Yes. It often does.

SEB You any kids?

JOE They're grown up now. The elder is working. The younger at University.

SEB Do you see them?

JOE Occasionally, Christmas, maybe birthdays. They have their own lives.

SEB Do they know about your sexuality?

JOE I'm not even sure that I know about my sexuality, to be honest.

SEB What are you, gay, bi... how d'you—

JOE I don't really. I mean I don't see myself as anything and I don't know what I am. Still feeling my way, if you see what I mean.

SEB Sure. So you've no girlfriend?

JOE No. I've women friends, but nothing sexual.

SEB So you're alone?

JOE I've got friends.

SEB I don't mean that.

JOE *Shrugs.*

SEB Nobody special?

JOE I'm not sure. Not really. In the relationship sense.

SEB Not sure?

JOE I'm not sure what it is...

SEB Friend with benefits? Fuckbuddy...?

JOE We met on the site. For sex, obviously. We met a couple more times. The sex stopped, but he wouldn't let me go. He soon sort of took me over. Called me his partner. Introduced me to his children.

SEB He's married then?

JOE No, divorced. Quite a while. He certainly calls himself a gay man.

Pause

SEB What sort of relationship is it then?

JOE It isn't a sexual relationship. He stays here at weekends and other times occasionally. I've only one bed. But nothing happens. Neither of us is interested. Not a sexual relationship. I wouldn't call him my partner... and yet he controls me.

SEB Controls you? How do you mean?

JOE People having casual sex don't usually delve deeply like this.

SEB I'm sorry. I thought you wanted to talk.

JOE It's ok. I do want to talk, as long as you're interested?

SEB Sure. I find it interesting.

Pause.

SEB So what's the control?

JOE From time to time I look on the site. And occasionally I meet someone for sex. He seems to know all about it. He drops hints. Names. Places. Sometimes he's more upfront and tells me my car was seen in a certain place. Or that a private detective has been following me on behalf of the wife of a married man I've met. There was an occasion when I drove quite a distance in the dark, January, it was, and met a man in some god-forsaken place. Suddenly, before we'd even started, he rushed off and I was left stranded, no directions, no idea how to find the road. I got completely stuck in mud and had to walk to a pub a mile away. There were two workmen there about to have their dinner. They came down to dig me out but couldn't. In the end the barman called someone with a four by four. I paid him £20 to pull me out of the mire. Back at the pub I gave the workmen a tenner each and bought everyone a drink. It was an expensive evening. And the car was filthy. But Dave seemed to know all about it. I kept asking him why and he said he had friends everywhere who report to him. This was miles from anywhere, out in the wilds. I just couldn't believe that he had that sort of spy system in operation wherever I went. I began to feel very menaced and paranoid. As though I were being constantly watched. In a way I felt as though I was being controlled and abused.

SEB I'd say you were.

JOE Sometimes I get really depressed, hemmed in like a prisoner.

SEB Have you ever tried to talk to him about how you feel?

JOE He's not interested. He just seemed to want to show me that he knows all about me, that he has a network of friends who seem to spend all their time spying on me and reporting back to him. He calls them his spies. He says he has a private detective following me.

SEB Surely, it's not likely that he's running some sort of spy network?

- JOE He seems to have had sex with everybody.
- SEB Everybody?
- JOE You should walk through town with him. Hardly a person hasn't been to his house, as he puts it. Most of them married, I gather. He uses the same word for all them, "my ex". That's not what I mean by an ex, there has to be more to it than an occasional meet for casual sex.
- SEB Has he had more serious or lasting relationships?
- JOE I think so, but he doesn't say much about it. He just bombards me with who's been to his house, from the postman to the carpet layer, the plumber or the electrician.
- SEB That sort of opportunistic sexual encounter doesn't sound as though it would become a spy network.
- JOE He says he knows I'm on the site as "the boys" tell him.
- SEB It doesn't sound all that good. For a relationship. He seems to be getting at you all the time. He must be really insecure, constantly trying to manipulate you by making you believe you are being watched all the time. Creepy! Frightening you. It's definitely control.
- JOE These days that can be a defence to murder.
- SEB You aren't going to kill him?
- JOE No, of course not. But it gets to me.
- SEB I'm not surprised. It doesn't seem very trusting.
- JOE I've looked at his phone when he's asleep and I've seen that he chats with men about sex. But how can I complain if I do exactly the same. It just takes the wind out of my sails. And I don't like spying anyway.
- SEB If you look at his phone then he probably looks at yours. Maybe he gets some of his information from there.
- JOE When I try to talk to him about it, I never get a straight answer.
- SEB You need to sort it out. It doesn't sound at all healthy.
- JOE But I feel he is vulnerable. He needs me. I feel sorry for him. I do have care and concern for him. Somehow or other I'm particularly touched by his whole-hearted determination to be happy.
- SEB Don't most people have that?

- JOE Not in my experience. Most people seem to want to be disappointed and disgruntled and feel they haven't been treated fairly.
- SEB They still want to be happy.
- JOE There's a difference between stimulation or excitement and happiness or joy.
- SEB I suppose so. Isn't happiness just the absence of unhappiness?
- JOE I don't know. I think sexual desire is based on wanting to possess somebody or take something from them. Love and affection are based on letting that person go. I'm sure that they can go together if you're lucky. There are lots of happy couples who love each other till death do them part. I'm not denigrating marriage or true sexual passion based on love, but for me they are quite different things. And if they go together there is usually mayhem.
- Pause.*
- SEB Are you a teacher?
- JOE Sort of.
- SEB Philosophy?
- JOE In a way.
- SEB What do you do?
- JOE I'm a lecturer. In law—here at the University.
- SEB You're a lawyer then?
- JOE Yes.
- SEB Solicitor?
- JOE Yes, but I'm not brave enough to practise, where nothing comes out as it should according to the law books. My study is entirely theoretical.
- SEB That's pretty cool.
- JOE What do you do?
- SEB I'm just a care assistant.
- JOE No *just* about it. It's as important as any other job.
- SEB I don't think so. It's boring, the same thing over and over again.

JOE That's caring for you!

SEB Yes. It gets stressful sometimes.

JOE You could always change.

SEB I don't have any qualifications. I hated school.

JOE You could get some.

Pause.

SEB I need to go really. I've got to visit my Dad.

JOE Well, it's been nice talking to you. And we had some fun.

SEB Well, I did. Sorry it was so quick.

JOE It was fine. And the chat over a cuppa was good.

SEB It's none of my business, but I do think you should sort this out with that guy. You talk about care and concern, but it doesn't seem he's showing that to you, saying he has a spy network at his command.

JOE He says he's so well known that people tell him everything.

SEB I think he's having you on, you know. Has he mentioned any of his spies by name?

JOE Only one name keeps coming up. Someone called Jordan. Apparently he monitors my every move. He told Dave all about the incident when the car got stuck in the mud.

SEB Did he indeed? That's interesting.

JOE How is it interesting?

SEB Do you keep a diary?

JOE I have a small pocket diary.

SEB Is that all?

JOE I do keep a record of who I meet and what it was like. A sort of sex journal. I know it sounds weird. It's just to remind me how unsatisfactory it usually is.

SEB Does your partner know that?

JOE That it's unsatisfactory? I don't know.

SEB No, about the record?

JOE I showed it to him once a long time ago. Before we were serious.

SEB Is it hidden?

JOE No, I keep it in my desk.

SEB So that incident in the mud, did you write about it?

JOE Yes, it was quite a scary evening. For a while I didn't know what I was going to do. Looking back, it was sort of an adventure.

SEB I think we've found out who Jordan is?

JOE Who?

SEB Your sex journal. He's quite a sense of humour calling the spy Jordan with the same initial as Journal. Or maybe the J just stands for Joe.

JOE I never thought of that.

SEB It makes more sense than some all-seeing, all-knowing spy reporting to him all the time... *Looks at his watch.* I must go. My dad'll be expecting me. Maybe we could meet again?

JOE Yes. I'd like that.

They move towards each other and give each other a hug.

SEB Where are my shoes?

JOE I think you left them in the bedroom. I'll get them.

At that moment there is the sound of a key turning in the door, the door opening and then shutting. From the corridor Dave shouts.

DAVE It's only me.

Dave enters. He looks at Seb, who looks acutely uncomfortable.

DAVE Who are you?

SEB I'm a friend of Joe's.

Joe enters with the shoes, trying to look nonchalant.

JOE You two have met then?

DAVE Not really. He says he's a friend of yours.

JOE You must've heard me talk about him. Seb. He's one of my students. Mature students.

DAVE Do your students always leave their shoes in the bedroom?

Joe and Seb are speechless and just look lost.

DAVE Sit down, both of you. Let's find out what's going on?

JOE Nothing. Seb came by for a coffee and to discuss an assignment.

DAVE Is that right, Seb?

SEB Yes. I needed some help.

DAVE And what is the subject of the assignment?

SEB *Stammers something that sounds like "law".*

DAVE Something about law?

SEB Yes, it was about law.

JOE It was actually about frustration in the law of contract.

DAVE I didn't ask you, Joe. So, Seb, tell me about frustration. In the law of contract, of course.

There is silence. Joe and Seb shift about uneasily.

DAVE Or you can tell me about any sort of frustration.

JOE It means something quite specific in contract law.

DAVE It means something quite specific in sex too. *To Seb,* Did you meet on Grindr?

SEB No.

DAVE The thing is, Seb, if that's your real name, I'm a gay man and I know what goes on. There's no need to pretend to me.

SEB I'm sorry. I think I'd better go.

DAVE Not yet.

Seb squirms.

SEB I don't do this very often.

DAVE You must be married then.

- SEB Yes. With kids. You're not going to tell my wife, are you?
- DAVE Of course not, what point would there be in that.
- SEB I thought you might be angry.
- DAVE I'm not angry. I'm sorry you've been put on the spot like this. It must have freaked you out.
- SEB Yes. It did.
- DAVE Well, don't worry. No harm done. I hope you enjoyed your afternoon session.
- SEB I'm sorry again. I hope you'll be all right, Joe.
- DAVE Why shouldn't Joe be all right?
- SEB I've got to see my Dad. He's expecting me. I'll leave the both of you to sort it out.
- DAVE Have you agreed to meet again?
- SEB No.
- JOE We never got that far. I'll see you out, Seb.

They leave together. Sound of the door opening and shutting. Joe comes back, very defensive.

- JOE What are you going to do? Please, this was just a bit of fun. Can you forgive me? It meant nothing.

Dave is quiet.

- JOE I feel awful.

Pause

- JOE Can't you say something?

- DAVE Could I have a coffee?

- JOE I'll make you one.

He turns to leave for the kitchen. Then turns back.

- JOE Why did you come round today?

- DAVE My work was finished so I decided to come home.

JOE But why did you come round just now? Did you know I would be with somebody.

DAVE Of course I did. I know you're on Grindr and I know you meet. I know who you meet and when.

JOE How d'you know?

DAVE The boys tell me. They report everything to me.

JOE What boys?

Dave does not reply.

JOE I'll go and make you a coffee.

He goes into the kitchen. Dave takes out his mobile phone and looks at it while Joe is making the coffee. Joe comes back with a mug.

JOE Here you are.

DAVE Thank you.

JOE Do you want anything else?

DAVE Not at the moment, thank you.

Pause.

JOE So you say you knew I was meeting someone here today?

DAVE I know everything that's going on. I knew you were meeting Seb.

JOE Your spies?

DAVE If you like.

JOE You know I have seen you on another site? A different name, but I recognised your tattoos.

DAVE That was before I met you and I no longer have the password.

JOE It said you had been on an hour before.

DAVE Not me. Someone impersonating me.

JOE Why do we have to have all this pretence?

DAVE Who's pretending? I've nothing to hide.

- JOE The thing is, Dave, you're the person I care about. But we don't have a sexual relationship, we haven't done for a long time. I really don't mind at all about your having sex with other men. What I don't like, and what makes me anxious and depressed, is the lack of honesty about this whole thing. And I find it particularly oppressive that you seem to have people stalking me.
- Pause.*
- DAVE Don't stop.
- JOE You caught me red handed today. There is absolutely nothing I can say. I can't even admit it. It was obvious.
- DAVE You could have chosen someone a bit more attractive. I might have joined in then.
- JOE Why are you making fun of me? And why have you tortured me for so long with all this business of people reporting my every movement to you? It wasn't particularly kind or affectionate.
- DAVE You remember, we started out having casual sex. It can lead anywhere.
- JOE I don't get a feeling of anything permanent from it.
- DAVE I didn't want to lose you.
- JOE You'd a funny way of showing it. Surely, I have always been kind and affectionate to you. How on earth could you possibly doubt that I care about you.
- DAVE I don't anymore. I mean, I don't doubt it. I know that I have had a lot more experience than you. And I can't deny that it was exciting. But I've a low sex drive now because of the medication I take for my prostate and I'm not interested in sex.
- JOE As I said, I don't care if you are. I just don't want any more of this spy stuff. I don't want any more dishonesty.
- DAVE I know now that you're still looking for excitement, that's all. Nothing more.
- JOE I guess. It's just the novelty. I'm not looking for anything that could possibly threaten you and me.
- DAVE And I don't see it as a threat in any way. You aren't going to leave me for Seb. Or all the other Sebs. I have to accept what you're looking for.
- JOE Just a bit of fun.
- DAVE Yes, I can see that's all it is. Not that you'll get much of it with casual sex.

JOE You did!

DAVE Not really, you know. I wanted someone to share trips and outings. To be around without always playing silly buggers. To be there when I wanted. Not to be alone.

JOE Surely, that's what you get from me?

DAVE Yes. So far.

JOE So there's no change?

DAVE Not on my part.

JOE And there never was a Jordan?

DAVE I didn't say that.

JOE You made Jordan up to make me feel anxious. You were looking at my diary to see what I was up to. Probably looking at my phone too.

DAVE Oh, Jordan was real enough.

JOE I don't believe you.

DAVE He was feeding me information about you all the time.

JOE Which you actually got from my diary.

DAVE Once I learnt to read that scrawl.

JOE So you admit that Jordan isn't a real person at all.

DAVE Jordan is real enough.

JOE Did he spy on me?

DAVE Somehow or other you rang him once by mistake. You must have got his number off the site.

JOE Yes, you're right. I did ring him. He was at the same weightwatchers meeting that I'd dropped you off at. He said you told him you had a partner and showed him my photograph. He recognised me from my photo on the site. I begged him to tell you nothing.

DAVE Of course you did.

JOE Jordan was really you, wasn't it? You were on the other site as Jordan and were a bit surprised when I contacted you. So you decided to string me along. With the combination of my casual sex record and the number you used as

Jordan you were able to make me feel watched and to control me. And I simply fell for it every time.

DAVE Jordan gave me access to your secret desires.

JOE Why did they have to be secret?

DAVE Because that's what you chose.

JOE You're baffling me.

DAVE Anyway, Jordan shouldn't bother you any further.

JOE Why?

DAVE Because he's no longer able to feed me any information.

JOE Why not?

DAVE He's gone to live in Yorkshire.

JOE That's a cop out. Since Jordan is a combination of both you and me how could he have gone to live in Yorkshire?

DAVE I don't know. He just did. I don't hear from him anymore.

JOE So no more Jordan.

DAVE No more Jordan.

JOE Then I can go on having casual sex?

DAVE If that's what you want.

JOE I don't know if it's what I want. Well, yes, I do want it, but it always disappoints.

DAVE Did Seb?

JOE He was a decent guy. Constrained by his life. Restricted in what he can do. He got very excited. It was all over very quickly. He came almost at once. I didn't have an orgasm. He didn't touch me.

DAVE Well, invite him here again.

JOE You wouldn't mind?

DAVE I could always join in.

JOE You told me that in threesomes, one person always feels left out.

DAVE That's true.

JOE Well, if you are serious. But I thought you were off sex?

DAVE I am. But I could always watch you. You need to find out who you really are.

JOE I won't get that from casual sex.

DAVE It's not really you. Or me for that matter.

JOE So, you are certain who you are?

DAVE I believe so.

JOE Well, I'm not so sure. I'll go on exploring. For the time being. You ok with that?

DAVE Up to you. If that's what you want.

JOE I don't know what I want.

Pause.

JOE You know what you want, though, don't you?

DAVE Oh yes.