

Call Centre Love Song

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IAN GREGSON



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for Ceri

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The Personals

txt

since yr remve
i hav 2 send

u these
lke sand

letters the c
silences

lke i am def
wanting 2

sign in the dark
scrawl on yr hand

lke smthng
lost frm lve

Call Centre Love Song

I'm edgy now with looming blame.
To fall in love with just a voice!
You asked for me again by name
And boggled my poise like secret vice.

My office runs a strict regime.
Be *this* I'm told, and then I *am* it,
losing myself to please the team.
It's hectic at *Exotic Planet*.

We answer calls. The room is cramped—
too many screens like twitchy pools.
You talk as though you're free, exempt
from all restrictive rules.

I hate myself that I'm compliant:
Eight Reasons For Leaving Your Desk,
and none is loving a client.
You booked our *Scorching Arabesque*:

I pictured you riding a camel
piercing sandstorms in a blue burnous.
We've never met. It isn't normal
to feel your absence in my mouse:

it aches to call you up on screen
and give your name a cyber-face
and show me where and how you've been.
But nothing could erase

the gulf between us made of money.
You whisper your thousands in my ear
which stresses my lack of any,
and niggles my hope like sudden fear

and stiffens my finger on my mouse.
A hundred calls are stuck on hold
all listening to Johann Strauss.
I'm rigidly controlled

as though I'm trapped inside a screen
and made to picture all I'm told
and flicker with scene after scene
then empty like a pane gone cold

as the sun withdraws from its glass;
or like a mobile dropped in a squall
of voices in an underpass
that frailly repeats its lost call.

How I Invented Sex

Something beyond just planting seed,
something in a range of styles,
huge it was, this need.
More an explosion waiting, and our trials
revealed *Cool Sex* could spark it.
Huge it was, the gap in the market.

I spoke one morning to a guinea pig.
She'd waited for this forever:
like being suspended from a peg
and the wet ripples across her running all over
twisting inside out with the big
breeze that was flooding through her as she shook
in answer to the old need, and came unstuck,
hurtling away in the huge weather.

We could supply the lack
like the housewife wanted.

More,

our subjects fill up with fulfilment 'til they leak
out of themselves and out of before
into an after quiet, amazed, only slightly sore.

Thousands found themselves, through my technique,
reborn as virtuosi,
stars of erotic chic.
Others stayed beginners.
We needed losers as well as winners
who make it seem so easy
their feelings feel unique.

So quickly and so much!
And the climb so steep and so dizzy
I looked into myself like vertigo
and flared up like a match.

I cut a record, published a book
and hosted my weekly game show
Can't Fuck, Won't Fuck
to put more millions in the know
and get more millions to compete
and try to enter our élite . . .

I grew so big and armoured with control
and knowing fully how to be,
as though the world's a vast keyhole
and only I
could stroll towards it with the key.

That Change

The autumn afternoon he crawled about that damp pavement—
his second wife relives it now, as often before:

small stones that poked his knees and palms and briefly clung,
the not believing that change like from nowhere a slap—

the change that was taking hold as his lunch-hour lengthened
into hours where an urgent meeting should've been.

She can smell the exhaust where the dark tube breathed on him
and feel the grey-on-grey hard stipple of the paving,

see the mostly curving thin cracks in broken paving,
cracks *between* paving, grown with scuffed moss

at the furthest edge of his first marriage

where his tight routine slackened around his bar table
with its overflowing ashtray and turned-off mobile

and he was thinking of her, his second wife to be
who waits for him in the autumn evening four years later:

How many times must a man be made to realise
as then he must've done—as though he could feel for the first
time

his ankles and knees, his palms and fingers—
what moves in him below his neck?

She can feel the traffic thrum in his fingers and knees,
in the subculture of dogs and ankles,

his second striped and longer tongue licking the cracks,
the gnarled and pitted kerbs, while voices and expressions

broke in waves above his head, dispersing
as he swam through the street towards their new life.

But all around her the darkness deepens and wonders:

Couldn't another change now start in him
out of her reach, so that his knees

fall to his knees, a change like an unsuspected place
surprising his fingers, boggling his eyes?

The Personals

I'll choose two people from this page—
one to want and one to be
all made up from those words, an age
and status, how to look and see
all unlike the who
I must be always being,
an I to fit a You—
send myself like a message:
cerebral but funny, leftish but skiing.

So many characters
in search of a plot,
so many futures waiting to happen
which to me will not—
cultured and wild, a Venus against furs:
such futures, on this page, open
where mine is married, mortgaged, shut—
to know who to want, and what *for*,
searching for Love, or nearest offer,

pose myself like a question
and watch the blond muscular answer—
tall and thirty, open to suggestion—
stroll towards my table
thinking *eco-anxious, sinuous dancer*
thinking *sporty, busty, fun*,
feeling a wish grow palpable,
doing all I've never done
and seeing the ghost of the possible