

Vivienne Plumb

The Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge.

I hate places with names  
like *Cafe Bleu*.  
I thought I saw a  
*Vegan Bar and Gaming Lounge*,  
my mistake, it was *Vegas*.  
Clubs with names like *Hot Chilli*  
are trying to tell us  
that we will have a good time.  
The birds were singing  
as I crossed the dusky bridge,  
in the park the damp leaves  
were as big as my hands,  
they had fallen into corpse  
shaped piles, the carriage  
lamps were lit.

I hate places with names  
like *The Olde Tavern*,  
or *Aunty Val-Mae's Country Kitchen*,  
there's generally a hair  
in the scones, or the drink  
is poured with little generosity.  
When I rose to depart  
there were leaves like hands  
all around me.  
In the hotel I woke in the  
obsequious dark, not knowing  
where I am, where I was,  
not knowing.

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## Far Too Grand.

There was this noise  
as I fell asleep,  
the noise was me  
thinking of you.  
This thought sounds like  
a tree branch scraping  
and rubbing against  
the roof.  
It is distant raucous laughter  
spilling down from  
the top road.

I woke and smelt  
cigarette smoke  
outside my open window.

It was so still and warm,  
cigarettes,  
and the smell of jasmine and fresh cut grass.

Whoever it was  
kept smoking.

In the picture on the wall  
the doll is holding  
out her hand to the parrot.  
She is telling her story,  
and let me tell you,  
her hat is far too grand.

*The Alternative Plan.*

Plan A: leave town. Plan B: stay in town but move to another part where no one knows you. Plan C: stay in the old apartment in the old part of town. Plan D: stay in the old apartment and in the old job. Plan E: look for a flatmate. Plan F: look for a new job. Plan G: change apartments, within the same building. Plan H: stay in the old apartment in the same part of town, don't change your job and refuse to look for a flatmate. Plan I: go to Cuba (this plan requires an injection of money to activate it). Plan J: think of another plan. Plan K: get facial surgery (finance dependant). Plan L: dye your hair. Plan M: go out wearing a variety of hats. Plan N: stay indoors. Plan O: become a recluse. Plan P: become a recluse and stay in the same apartment and in the same part of town and in the same job. Plan Q: never say never. Plan R: this is something to do with running. Plan S: this must be swimming. Plan T: swimming every day and long walks in the weekend. Plan U: with your hair dyed. Plan V: and wearing a variety of hats. Plan W: become a recluse in the same apartment and in the same part of town but walk every Saturday in disguise and swim once a week (not in disguise). Plan X: change nothing. Plan Y: do not walk, run, or swim, but stay in the same mankey apartment in

the same scodey part of town, flogging yourself in the same boring job, and dream of Cuba. Plan Z: begin your plan for next year.

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*The Primate Keeper.*

The zoo was situated on the south side of the town. Every day Trevor hosed out the chimpanzee cage after letting all the chimps outside into the larger enclosure. He enjoyed his job looking after the chimps and baboons. He lived in a two-bedroomed semi-detached with his brother, Lyle, who looked after the seals and otters. When girls found out what he did they always asked questions about the monkeys. *Primates*, corrected Trevor. *Primates*.

Trevor said the *monkeys* are actually primates. He was out on a date with Laraine. She had begun to ask him questions about his job, which was head keeper of the chimpanzees and baboons. Do they just do their business out in the open? Laraine asked. Trevor turned away. He disliked listening to comments like that. Chimpanzees have the intelligence of a six-year-old human, he told her. That's what I mean, said Laraine.

Trevor was sick of people slagging off the primates. One morning he arrived earlier than usual at the zoo. He painted a large red and white sign that he hung on the fence of the chimpanzee enclosure. The chimps were interested and came to have a look. Maybe Trevor was making a new game for them. That afternoon the zoo director called Trevor into his office. The sign was leaning against the office wall. It read, *Smarter than Most Humans*. Trevor was encouraged to take his holidays immediately rather than wait for the summer, when he usually went camping around the Sounds with his brother, Lyle, who looked after the seals and otters.

*The Cinematic Experience.*

In the movies men and women on bicycles in the spring always means sex. If he takes his hat off, he is either being polite, or he means to stay. If she takes her shoes off, it's either sex or a comedy. A cat will indicate a tedious story-line. Something is about to happen. Like a fish-bone caught in its throat. The appearance of a kitten is the same. But worse. The removal of clothes will indicate either sex or a hospital scene. Or possibly sex in a hospital. Hospitals are a big clue that someone will die, unless it is a comedy. A walk in the park is never that straightforward. Children are used in the script to hear voices, see ghosts, become lost, scream, or to tapdance. Babies ditto, but double all of the above.

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*Nefarious.*

When we drive up in the hired silver Hyundai there's a single man parked by the river in a red Cortina. And Al says, maybe that's the guy I met when I was fly fishing here the other day. And he checks his little black address book that is the size of one of those lilliputian copies of Shakespeare's plays published by Tuttle's Watchpocket Series. His name was Tony Bajowski, says Al. And I say, that's not Tony Bajowski that some serial fucking killer in a red Cortina and he's just put half the body in the river. And Al says, that's only if you were living in the United States. He still believes that New Zealand is some peaceful sheep keeping cow mooing country full of friendly fly fishermen. But I stay quiet, sitting on the rocks the colour of dry bones by the Ruamahanga River, and I write my notes, swatting the midges whenever they rest on my words.

The man in the red Cortina gets out of the front and moves to the back seat. What is he doing in the back? I ask Al. He's eating crackers, he replies. He's hiding the evidence, I say. The Ruamahunga rushes by, going all manner of places in the fastest possible time. The sun begins to set at one end of the river and a chill comes up off the cold hard earth. Al has walked so far he has become an unidentified lone angler in the distance. A little model figurine in an old museum diorama.

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*Old Food.*

There have been plans afoot to ban *doggy bags*. We all know that if you are dining at a restaurant and simply cannot finish all the food you have ordered, it is easy to ask for it to be placed in a *doggy bag*. In other words, a bag or plastic container that you can take home. The hospitality industry has secretly deplored the use of doggy bags. The Hotels and Restaurants Association are now claiming they are a health hazard. A Medical Officer of Health for this region, Babs Chudwip, said she knew a bag ban would not be well received, but they were prepared to risk people's ire in return for customer safety. *It's a dirty messy habit*, said Babs. *It's disgusting. People eat these things for breakfast the next morning.*

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