

Short stories made by 'conceptually recycling' trash found
on walks using a **Scavenger Coat** full of feely pockets.
Participatory performance by Louise Ashcroft.
Edition 25/08/23

Pocket



Stories



The Glob

A glob of phlegmy ectoplasm is caught in a trap on the beach. We see it from a drone which gradually zooms in for a glistening close-up. The trap has been handmade from a ribbon of sandpaper, presumably so that it is camouflaged to touch and other beyond-human senses. Ensnared here, the conche-sized, overexposed glob is drying out in the dusk-light.

There is a beach party in the cove, and a small crowd of revellers light a fire in a disposable barbecue with aspirations of Burning Man festival. They try to focus on their human expressions of youthful futurism, but their spirits tinge with pathos as the glob melts in the corners of eyes and campfire rays. **“That blob thing won’t survive outside of a host body for long”**, someone whispers, and so a bizarre rescue mission begins. Formless and fragile, the party people are not afraid of this glob, but they’re afraid that its wretchedness may bring out cruel streaks in themselves - peculiar cravings like the pleasure of silver-spooning a tortoise from its shell and spreading it on toast.

The more the party people drink, the more they start to prod the glob: showing off; performatively squealing with delighted disgust; and ‘awwww’-ing in mock sympathy. Prodding leads to pinching and suddenly, predictably, everyone is licking and biting the glob, swallowing it like hen party jelly shots or aristo oyster-gunge. The grateful creature slips down throats and takes hold in their bodies quickly. With none of the drama of a bucket-list hallucinogenic frog experience, it is pragmatically proliferating through every cell of all who imbibe it.

3am. The party people nap on rocks. A hotel with a trillions stars, galaxies, comets. At dawn, everyone skinny-dips... seasoning their hungover beach bods in the salty waves. Those who’d eaten some of that glob the night before find that the water feels silkier than usual, and they can glide through it fast and free, like chattering porpoises, not needing to come up for air for minutes at a time. Some bacteria is good, other bacteria is bad, (so we are told), but the glob is neither bacterial nor willing to be reduced to the overly simplistic binary status of hero or villain. It has only given these humans special amphibious powers in return for corporeal accommodation - A biological business deal oiled by mankind’s fear of rising tides. Domesticated creatures trade their freedom for the security of a host, but sometimes it’s unclear who is the host and who is the parasite. Glob-shots become the internet’s latest wellness craze, and people who’d quit swimming lessons after their bronze badge become as fish-like as Phelps, overnight. The party people farm glob flesh and sell it on Shopify accounts at a fair price - just enough income so they don’t have to work, but can spend their days boat-hopping like ocean troubadours; sharing their gelatinous elixir with every skipper, fisherman and yacht-bound celeb, from Cornwall to California.

Rocket

She lives in a big field in Japan. She's twenty years old in March. She collects bottles, likes stars, does gymnastics and loves doing her Afro hair in fashionable styles. Her name is Sophie but she'd like to be called Jemima. She works as a painter, and her parents want her to focus on painting, but she prefers to try lots of different things like running a part time Sweet Agents (a special estate agents for confectionery), reading comics and supporting The Lionesses. Sophie drinks lemonade, because she senses it'll be useful later. She lives by a river in a big shed which has a huge door with a very hard door handle and a huge crumbling roof. To fix the roof, Sophie must leave home and embark on an odyssey (while she's at it she'll search for more comics because she's run out). She builds a sticky rocket which doesn't need seatbelts because passengers' bums are glued in place. It feels less precarious in the clouds because it sticks to the air. She's brought her dog who likes mushrooms. He is dog-textured on earth but in space becomes plush and squishy, and on Mars he turns cardboardy. Nobody knows why, because they didn't listen in physics class, and because physics is different in space. When Sophie and her dog land on Mars, they find its surface to be made of crinkly Mars Bar wrappers, with pools of sticky ice which the dog loves to eat. There doesn't seem to be any comics here, and it's unlikely that the wrappers or ice will help Sophie fix her crumbling roof back home in Japan. Despite this, she's learning a lot and wants to stay a while. On Mars, the sausages are out of shape and the toothbrushes are too long (perhaps it's something to do with that tale of heaven and hell having long spoons that require people to help their neighbours, or perhaps it's nothing to do with that at all). The aliens here are made of tin, which has a low melting point, hence they wear head braces to stop their faces leaking out into the intergalactic abyss. Sophie meets a family of tin aliens and they go down a slide for no reason. **The slide has no narrative significance, it's just a slide, and that's OK, because slides don't need to mean anything and certainly don't need to be tiresome metaphors.** The dog has dyed his hair now, and there's no reason for that either. Sophie passes the time on Mars by lifting a gym weight with one hand, and wearing a special leather glove on the other hand like an eagle tamer, although there are no birds here and everything's weightless (just as well because one armed weight lifting might have make Sophie lopsided). The tin Martians speak a language that only has one word (the word Mars) but it means whatever you want it to mean depending on the intonation and how you say it. Sophie only speaks French, but the sour lemonade she's brought helps her make expressive faces as a way of communicating, and the Martians teach her their language in return for rhubarb and custard sweets. Accepting that there are no roof fixing materials or comics on Mars, Sophie eventually returns to Japan. Luckily...While she was away in space, it has rained mattresses during typhoon season and the mattresses have covered the roof of Sophie's house so it isn't crumbling any more and she can sit up there with her dog and look up at Mars. Although she hadn't found any new comics on her odyssey, Sophie realised that she'd had so many experiences she could write her own comic. Using a flat bottomed rock as a step, she hops onto her roof each night and writes her own comics (paints the pictures too but only half heartedly, because, much to her parents' dismay, she prefers words). She writes about 'perspective girl', a superhero who literally gets smaller when she gets further away, and she writes about the Gods of fire, wind and water, but most of all she writes about coffee, scooters, and anything she likes.

Ooops

Ssssssharp, jagged, circular eyes awoke with the feeling that this would be the best day ever.

And so, she got to work, delivering her cardboard boxes full of unknown contents.

It didn't matter what was in them (but it mattered that it didn't matter), because people ordered them to get a taste of the kind of randomness that has become endangered in our....

Crash !?£*&%...

She was so excited to get the delivery done, she'd bumped into someone and the box had burst open along with her train of thought, scattering a pile of sticks and suppositions onto the shiny shoes of a tall stranger whose curly hair was still locked in foam rollers which bounced like suspension springs as their bodies collided. Now that the box's contents had been revealed, it no longer contained something unknown and customers would send it back angrily... it would have to be repackaged as something old or something borrowed instead, and redirected to Maids of Honour or Wedding Planners looking for a convenient, on-demand, answer to tradition.

Many couriers would find this disruption to the day plan to be inconvenient, but our protagonist finds meaning in the thrill and anticipation of unknown possibilities, not in the resolution of things. Wanting is better than getting and dreaming is better than succeeding, as far as she is concerned. Bumping into a stranger was the kind of real life material experience that couldn't be replaced with AI or outsourced by corporate efficiency consultants. Bumping into someone, saying sorry and then getting on with the day was the best thing that could have happened today. She didn't need to make a big deal of it, write a book about it or found Serendipity.org to make the ooops moment matter, she just needed to get back on her round and look forward to the next unlikely thing that just might be about to happen.

Paulinda

Her Dad is a fox, her Mum is human itching to be a frog, and Aunty's a whole ecosystem. That's why Paulinda was such a great diplomat.

She could speak lichen, and she chose not to hide it.

Would people judge her, or ostracise her, because they did not really know how to talk to her or where to place her?

Should she present herself in a clearer, more relatable way by choosing one species to conform to?

Paulinda's hair is half green and half orange and she sometimes has claws.

She can simulate the cries of dying rabbits to delight the foxes, or talk fluff with the furies and dispose of coffee cup lids like the humans. Conversation starters.

She sometimes feels lonely because there's nobody quite like her.

Poor Paulinda is mates with everyone but kin with nobody.
Her name is Linda and Paul but she can't decide.
She doesn't need to decide, she's Linda-Paul, Paulinda
...and she grows ears when she gets angry.

Paulinda explores the garden and she chooses not to hide.

Roll up, roll up!

Roll up, roll up, a miniature world unfolds!

He made dioramas of crabs fashioned into little pirates wielding miniature swords.

He crafted sea creature parties, ladybird battle re-enactments and feral dolls houses flaunting thespian fleas.

People travelled for miles to see his spooky creations.

They'll make you bite your hair because you're nervous.

They'll make you bendy like bedbugs.

They'll sink the island in your mind, or your money back.

A lot of promises!

50p for entry but if you can't afford it you can bring a balloon instead, or popcorn, or treasure or an old leather shoe.

Pay what you can and pay what you like.

Roll up, roll up!

Everyone is invited to a tiny party, in a micro mansion with a lighter for a fireplace and beetle antlers on the wall.

Smokey Doctor

His kind of handsomeness is a handsomeness that's drunk on something medical and is chainsmoking on a hospital balcony. Nonchalance amplified by being all too familiar with the medical consequences. Flicking bits of ash down onto Porters and Paramedics.

He's populist like pizza, but divides the crowd like anchovies, and is full of contradictions.

People hate that.

They prefer to know what they're getting into.

But you like that about him.

Hipper than a hip replacement, he's fresh from surgery.

Why do Medics smoke so much and tell such macabre jokes?

You rip off his coping mechanisms and make him a mixtape bandage for the soul.

People are so ready to accuse him of being a hypocrite - as though he's lying, when in fact he's being brutally honest.

You'll never split up, because you'll never meet...

you were both born in the wrong era. He's in the 1950s and you're sooo now.

It makes the love stronger, so they say, when it gets lost or is never found.

Conker Player

Our Player grew up in a clean, sterile environment,

a home where all the furniture was left in the 'sofas direct' branded plastic it had been delivered in, so that it could be wiped down easily should any splash of tea or unwanted emotion threaten the velvet or tassels.

This was perhaps why she was attracted to the decay of the conkers in Autumn - a season she preferred to call 'Fall' because of its implied release from the oppressive formality of vertical stature.

She was the most famous conker player in Frome and had made a small fortune - enough to buy an eco home in the area.

In the French Revolution the militants invented new words for the seasons, because time itself must be overthrown if they were to truly be free.

Conker season was a narrow window. She'd collect the best ones with a rope ladder, and pickle them, bake them, varnish them with clear nail polish or any other space-time defying tactic deemed acceptable by the Olympic guidelines.

Conkers had been a fringe sport for years, but it'd gathered traction lately, and the elite players like ours could make an impressive living from sponsorship, TV deals and prizes for the biggest fights.

Our Player wasn't interested in the Porsches and Michelin starred lifestyles though, she was in it for the mould and mustiness.

She loved conker fights because they were hard to predict and liable to fleck your face with bits of nutty flesh, meaning that they kept one truly in the moment - no cellophane to cover behind.

There is nothing as tragic as a supermarket iceberg lettuce rotting inside its crinkly, transparent shroud.

The words "Only by dying do we live forever" were scratched into the tree bark of Our Player's mind, and she knew that (as Autumn outta) her body could not be preserved with varnish or vinegar. Ageing meant getting closer to becoming everything else in the universe. They called it entropy, but she called it conkers - rehearsing the end of all time one conker at a time - moments of spectacular destruction in seasons of exuberant decay.

Thanks to everyone who collaborated in the process.
