

to do with film-making, but that, here, is like trying to find a ball bearing on Brighton beach, a white man in Southall, an operative payphone in central London.

Well, I've learnt the trick with the UB40 people is to show willing. As long as you turn up at the job centre every couple of weeks, with all the other bozos and apply for a few things then your fortnightly girocheque is assured. Twenty-nine pounds forty-five pence. Enough to exist, buy a record now and then, a shirt from the Salvation Army, luxuries like corn plasters and occasionally a new toothbrush.

Part two of the trick is to go for jobs that you'll never get. I excelled myself in this field today. Bashed in an application for a "Community Liason Officer," Lambeth Borough Council. Set yourself up as a bullseye for the darkies. "Hello, here I am. Molotov cocktails and half-bricks this way." Follow the blue lights to the place of execution.

The smarmy graduate behind the desk said, "And how exactly do you think a fine arts degree qualifies you for this responsible position?". Exactly, exactly, it doesn't. You see I've never had a job because I don't want one. Put that in your mortar board and smoke it.

Even better, I worked my way through a five page application for the Diplomatic Service. Filed straight in the bin I should think. Still, as I said before, the trick is to show willing, at least for a couple of hours now and again, then retire to bedsit land and kill time bouncing from bed to window to record-player to bookcase to bathroom to bed, like a ball-bearing lost in a maze.

Mrs. Rossiter has her electric weed-trimmer going. Sounds like a walrus being machine gunned. Well, it's time to consult the record collection. I project an afternoon of oblivion with the headphones on ten. Lose my mind in the subtle strains of "World Class Wrecking Crew," then a dose of "Toddy Tee and Mixt Master Spade," then "Buzzadelic," maybe if I feel like it some "Super Lover Cee and Casanova Rudd," then "Krazy Dee," "Busy Bee," "Easy E," "Ultramagnetic MC's," a change of mood with "Enoch Special K Scratchmaster Fuzzbox," then "MC Cool Rock and MC Chazby," then maybe some "King Tree," "DJ Slice," "JJ Fad," "Ice Cube," "MC Hammer," by which time I'll be ready to savour the chords of "Napalm Death" and "Bolt-Thrower."

III

Well, my peregrinations are slightly more extensive than I have suggested. You see I divide my time between my grotto of rap here and a dark room in the basement that I have claimed as my own.



This is where I meet my friend Barbara. Art, the state of the world, music and Mrs. Rossiter are among the things we discuss, dissect, subject to scrutiny. Our conversations are a smidgen one-sided and tend to go like this:

Me: Well, I've finally decided, difficult choice though it may be, to buy the "MC's of Rap" album rather than the "Sonarphonics" twelve inch. What do you think?

Barbara: (Silence)

Me: That's what I'll do because if I get both then muesli will be out of the question for the week.

Barbara: (Silence)

So it goes on. Sometimes the deep freeze down here switches in and I interpret it as a hum of assent but mostly Barbara is phlegmatic on all subjects. Alcohol and strange pills make her more talkative but my budget does not allow much room for these.

A composite of styles is how I'd describe Barbara, a sort of dangerous collage. A pink silk dress, cream gloves, elbow length, a jaunty black hat, full red lips and to touch off the outfit, an old pair of cardboard 3D glasses.

There she stands, on one leg, arms crossed, clasping a plastic pink flamingo. Barbara seldom moves, though occasionally the brim of her hat flutters in the draft that blasts its way through a gap in the window frame. Some days I ponder over a new project, like if I were to acquire a wardrobe of near reds and greens would I, presumably in three dimensions, be more attractive to her cardboard framed gaze. Would she break her vow of silence?

Mrs. Elphick, my landlady, I have to thank for my friend. Some might call Mrs Elphick a hoarder. The basement here is choc-a-bloc with malfunctioning domestic hardware, like old fridges, their white plastic tinged green with mould, TV sets stripped of their values, trunks full of unwearable clothes, standard lamps, a huge radiogram, Fats Domino records and so on and on.

An old tailor's dummy, dressed in random selections from the Elphick collection with an electric lamp jammed in its neck, draped over with an old curtain, with the appropriate features added, the velvet lips and the alluring red and green gaze beneath someone's old funeral hat. This is Barbara, Barbara my friend.

The Louvre Case — 2nd Prize

The author tells us that this is a story intended for children but as is the case with all good children's stories, it's equally interesting to adult readers.

Something funny is going on in the Louvre. Famous paintings are losing parts of their composition, a jug of wine here, an apple there and coins from the Money-lender's hands. Why is the Mona Lisa looking more radiant than usual? Inspector Jaques Lechercheur has a bundle of clues and as he sorts them all out, the reader is exposed to a whimsical folkloric tale that weaves in and out of the Louvre's galleries, in and out of famous paintings, some of which are alive. This is an amusing mystery romp set in an exotic locale that will fascinate young readers and educate them at the same time. When the characters from famous paintings start talking to the Inspector and the Louvre crew, the story sails up and away into a charming realm.

Second prize — Short stories

The Louvre Case

by Larissa Klein

Note: story is intended for children

One day very early in the morning, the famous French private investigator Jacques Lechercheur found himself in front of a still life painting in the Louvre. While he ordinarily liked to go to the museum as often as possible, today he was there to investigate a case so bizarre that you'd never believe it as long as you live.

With a magnifying glass in hand, Jacques looked at the painting from up close and then from afar, and finally he concluded that a red apple and a bottle of good white wine had been stolen from it. In their place was nothing but the white surface of the canvas. The head curator, who was terribly boggled about all this, looked at Jacques as Jacques looked at the painting. Neither said a word; they were both in fact very worried and the head curator couldn't stop thinking about what would happen when the public would arrive in just two hours. As for Jacques, for the first time in his long career he was totally perplexed, not knowing where to begin. After studying the painting for at least a quarter of an hour,

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