

BACON BUTTY

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

It all began with a bacon butty.

I was dressed in my only suit (second hand), an ironed white shirt and tie. Determined not to be late, I arrived almost an hour early, so I went into a greasy spoon opposite the offices. That was my first mistake.

My second mistake was ordering a bacon butty. I wasn't hungry and a cup of tea would have done fine, but the smell of frying bacon was irresistible. It was every bit as good as I'd hoped: the bacon was crispy but not burnt and the heat from the meat was melting the butter. I added some brown sauce and took the first delicious bite.

Then some of the brown sauce and melted butter dripped onto my shirt and tie.

I was momentarily glued to the spot, before dashing to the toilet where, with a handful of tissues, I tried to wipe the shirt and tie clean, making the stains worse. I hurried out of the café, leaving that beautiful bacon butty only half-eaten. There wasn't time for me to go home and change, and anyway I didn't have another clean white shirt.

Instead I thought I'd get what I needed from a clothes shop. I found bookies, fast food outlets, a jewellers, a newsagents, a chemist, even a supermarket. But no clothes shops. I tried a few of the ubiquitous charity shops but none of them had shirts in my size. I thought about ditching the white shirt and tie and getting a sweatshirt from one of the charity shops, but I doubted a heavy metal logo would be thought appropriate by the interview panel.

When I checked my watch, I realised I was in danger of being late, so I ran back to the offices, arriving with seconds to spare, out of breath and sweat pouring from me. As I pushed open the

door I realised it wasn't just my feet that had been running, but also my nose and I discovered I had forgotten to bring any tissues with me. No matter how much I sniffed, the mucus continued dripping. In desperation I wiped my nose on my arm, leaving a slug-like smear on my sleeve. The receptionist stared at me like I was something she might have wiped off the soles of her shoes.

I attempted a smile, which just resulted in her raising an eyebrow. “I'm – sniff – here for – sniff – a job – sniff – interview.”

She ignored me for a while, continuing to work on her computer. I repeated myself. Without looking up she said: “I'll be with you shortly”. So I waited. Eventually, she demanded to know my name, checked it against a list and told me to go to the third floor.

“Have I got time to use the toilet?”

She shrugged. “Up to you. But you're late already.”

I sniffed again. “I was on time. It was you kept me waiting.”

“Whatever,” she said. I began to walk away when she called me back. “Here,” she said, handing me a tissue.

I got to the third floor, where I was faced with a corridor and a series of identical looking doors. I'd forgotten to ask which room on the third floor and the receptionist had chosen not to tell me, so I knocked on each door in turn, until someone said: “Come in.”

I opened the door and was faced with a middle-aged man looking at me with bemusement. “You're not what I was expecting,” he said. Before I had chance to respond, he continued: “Oh well, appearances can be deceptive.” He pointed to a computer in the corner. “That's the one that needs fixing. Do it as quick as you can: I have a deadline for this report.”

“I’m not here for that,” I said.

“Well, what are you here for, apart from wasting my time?”

“For the job interview.”

He looked me up and down. “Ha! You’ll never get a job looking like that. Never. Anyway, you’re in the wrong room.” He picked up the phone and was about to dial. I interrupted him: “Where is the right room?”

He sighed loudly. “How would I know: I’ve already got a job, I don’t need to be interviewed.” He picked up the phone again and swivelled his chair so his back was facing me.

I continued knocking on each door until I found the interview room. By this time I was not only dirty and sweaty, I also badly needed to pee. No time for that now.

I was almost half an hour late and faced three people, two men and one woman, all smartly and conservatively dressed and clearly irritated. One of the men asked me why I was late. I began an explanation that involved me getting lost in long sentences that never seemed to end, until he held up his hand, palm facing me, and said: “Enough!” Followed by a lecture on the importance of tidiness, cleanliness and punctuality.

I didn’t think things could get any worse.

They did.

I was in such a state, I couldn’t concentrate and ended up giving the wrong answers to the wrong questions, speaking for too long on some, not long enough on others and sometimes having to ask them to repeat a question. My mouth was so dry I decided to take a sip of water.

I reached for the jug and knocked it over, its contents spilling on the immaculately dressed interview panel. One of the men stood up too quickly, water dripping from his crotch, and banged his hand on the sharp edge of a filing cabinet, causing a nasty looking cut from which blood oozed.

“I’m sorry,” I stammered, “I’m sorry.” In trying to rectify things, I knocked the jug off the table, where it shattered, slivers of glass scattered on the floor.

“Please just go, just go.”

“Does that mean I haven't got the job?” I asked.

His face turned deep purple and he yelled: “Get out! Get out and don't ever come back!”

Once in the corridor, I realised I'd forgotten the way out. I turned left, assuming I would either come to a dead-end or to the stairs and lift.

I was wrong: I came to a door. I pushed it open and stepped through to find I was outside, three storeys up, standing on a metal balcony, with no way down. I turned back, only to see the door shutting and locking me out. It began to rain. I banged on the door, but no-one heard me, so I searched in my pockets for my mobile phone.

Only then did I realise I had left it in the café next to the bacon butty.

That was the moment I decided to become a vegetarian.

Kevin was born in 1951. Worked in factories before going to university as a mature student, since when he has worked in social care and ran a bookshop and restaurant. He's had work published in many outlets, is the author of “No Home In This World” (Fly-On-The-Wall-Press, 2020), was editor of the Highlands LGBT+ magazine “UnDividingLines”, has worked with musicians to create events combining music and storytelling, has a monthly column in the “Press & Journal”, runs writers' workshops and has read his work at many venues.