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BOOK STUFF

'You might be locked in a world not of your own making ... but you still have a claim on how it is shaped. You still have responsibilities.'

Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father* (1995)

Poem of the week

Posted on Twitter as homework submitted by a pupil back in school after lockdown. If a kid really wrote this, is it a depressing expression of failed education or a brilliant spoof?

Why is school a fmg?
It is inoing and it is boring
and the techers are enoing.
Work is boring.
Wy is school a thing?
Reading is trash.

Puzzlers

- Is something boring because of it or because of you?
- If all religions were banned would there be more or less war in the world?
- Can dogs have a sense of humour?
- If scientists could create a new species of animal purely for testing medicines on, should they do it?
- IS MARMITE NICE – YES OR NO?

Degrees of isolation?

Believe it or not, there's a whole experimental science of isolation and people have volunteered to isolate themselves for weeks and weeks in extreme conditions without outside noise or light: deep in underground caves; specially-built underground bunkers; tiny one-person cubicles. For some the effects were terrible. One person described being in a state of 'perpetual grogginess' and finally emerging 'like a half-crazed, disjointed marionette'. And many subjects have reported extraordinary sounds that fill the silence:

'My clothes creak, scrape and rustle with every breath. The muscles of the cheeks and eyelids rumble; if I happen to move my teeth, the noise seems terrific. I hear a loud and terrible roaring in my head; of course I know it is merely the noise of the blood rushing through the arteries in my ears...but I can readily imagine that I possess an antiquated clockwork and that, when I think, I can hear the wheels go round.'

Figure it out

A man is totally dressed in black: black shoes, socks, trousers, coat, gloves and ski mask. He is walking down a back street with all the street lamps off. A black car is coming towards him with its headlights off but somehow manages to stop in time. How did the driver see the man?



Writers and their detectives

1. Who said of her detective: 'Why did I ever invent this detestable, bombastic, tiresome little creature? Eternally straightening things, eternally boasting, eternally twitching his moustache and tilting his egg-shaped head?'
2. Who said of his character: 'I don't like him that much; I'm in total control of him. I'm the only person in the world he's scared of. [Note: after 24 books the writer has recently passed his detective on to his brother Andrew Grant to continue writing about]
3. The author of *Stone Cold Trouble* said of his character: 'Ex-con Zaq Khan and his best friend Jags are drawn from me and my friends. I grew up in Ealing and hung out a lot in Southall...Even though Zaq is done for a violent crime, he's the main character and I wanted people to root for him and empathise with him. It was about allowing the reader to see that he's not a bad person and he has a moral code; he wants to do the right thing.' Who's the author?
4. Ann Cleeves said of her Shetland Island series: 'I knew I was only going to do eight books because there are only 23,000 people who live on the islands. You can't kill them all.' Who is the detective?
5. What writer wrote to his mother: 'I'm thinking of slaying him...winding him up for good'? [Note: The author tried but was forced to bring his detective back to life]

Currents

Gary drank single malt in the night, out on the porch that leaned toward the ocean. His mother, distracted, had shut off the floodlights and he did not protest against the dark.

Before that, his mother Josey tucked in her two shivering twelve-year-old granddaughters. 'I want you both to go swimming first thing tomorrow. Can't have two seals like you afraid of the water.'

Before that, one of the girls held the hand of a wordless Filipino boy. His was the first boy's hand she'd ever held. They were watching the paramedics lift the boy's dead brother into an ambulance.

At this time, the other girl heaved over a toilet in the cabana.

Before that, the girl who would feel nauseated watched as the drowned boy's hand slid off the stretcher and bounced along the porch rail. Nobody placed the hand back on the stretcher, and it bounced and dragged and bounced.

Before that, Gary saw the brown hair sink and resurface as the body bobbed. At first he mistook it for seaweed.

Before that, thirty-five people, including Gary and the two girls, formed a human chain and trolled the waters for the body of a Filipino boy. The boy had gone under twenty minutes earlier, and never come back up.

Before that, a lifeguard sprinted up the beach, shouting for volunteers. The two girls, resting lightly on their sandy bodyboards, stood up to help.

Before that, a Filipino boy pulled on the torpid lifeguard's ankle and gestured desperately at the waves. My brother, he said.

Before that, a simple summer day.

Hannah Bottomy

ANSWERS

Figure it out: it's daytime

Writers and their detectives

2. Lee Child about Jack Reacher
4. Jimmy Perez

1. Agatha Christie on Hercule Poirot
3. Amer Anwar
5. Arthur Conan Doyle on Sherlock Holmes

