

**Brian Griffiths**

**Life Is A Laugh**

**Ruminations on a Platform**

Oops up side your head, say oops up side your head ... oops up ... must get eggs and soap on the way back ... oops ... and ring Sam. I'll do that when I get there. Eggs, soap, Sam – about the pub ... and there was something else. What was it? Something I had to pick up from ... Where was I going? The menders. Groan. No, it was for something exciting, for a party, a costume. Ah – yes, can't wait. Makes waiting harder, excitement. I think it's because it makes the heart beat quicker, more beats per second, which is a greater proportion of your allotted heartbeats per lifetime so, relatively speaking, a minute experienced at, what, eighty beats per second will feel longer than the normal sixty. Ahhh, nice to have a bit of time to think. Can I have more thoughts if I'm excited? Do I think quicker if my pulse is faster because time seems to stre-e-e-e-etch? If I have exciting thoughts will I become exponentially excitable because of the increased density of exciting thoughts I can fit in an apparently longer time? Sam, menders, eggs and soap ... Sam Mendez's eggy soap.

How many people waiting? Two, four, six, seven, nine, ten-eleven-twelve ... dagh, a tour party ... hmmm, about twenty-six. I bet they're all thinking about that woman's outfit. Twenty-six thoughts about her outfit. She must be able to feel the force of that. A blast of attention. It *is* outrageous. She obviously got accidentally locked in a theatre overnight and has to go straight to the office but can't be seen wearing the same thing two days in a row because that would undermine her carefully constructed aura of composure, which she is sure imparts great authority, so she's borrowed a costume that she thinks she can pass off as from her own wardrobe, perhaps with a dress-down Friday kink. She must go to the office dressed as a French maid as if she meant to. That's an exciting challenge. Oh, unless she really is a French maid...

Sam Mendez's soapy leg ... One, two, three, four, five, six; six buttons on that red coat. Nice red coat. Would look better on me though. Two, four, six, eight, nine; nine bags of

lemons. Must be a barman. Or maybe he's going to make cheese by straining lemon juice and milk through a giant pair of tights. Cheesy leggy soup buttons. One, two, three; three mattresses. Must be refurbishing. Or a platform-based hostel, people on mattresses like World War II. And there used to be pubs down here. Sensible. There was that one in Sloane Square, The Hole in the Wall. You could jump off the tube into the pub without touching the platform, they say. But it closed decades ago. Probably a kiosk now, selling samosas and flapjacks and single pieces of fruit for fifty pee. Pubs and tube stations ... er ... The Stepney Green Man, The Hackneyed Wick, The Hole-in-the-Harrow-on-the-Hill, The Seven Sisters' Arms are always open...

Sam Mendez's holy tight button cheese ... Funny things, pub names. Last time I counted there were six hundred and twenty three Red Lions. They're gradually changing their names, though, as the mark of King James is gradually replaced by more contemporary concerns, like slugs and rats and parrots and screams. But then, names in general are funny things. They're like doors to a room that might be totally different each time it's opened. Must ring Sam. Which Sam? Sam who's a laugh down the pub or Sam at work with the petty little beard? Or Sam, wotsit's girlfriend, the dentist, or the Sam at school who dropped the thermometer down the loo and tried to get the mercury out with a magnet. And then there are famous Sams I might feasibly need to ring: Sam Mendez with the cheesy wotsit beard, Sam ooh-ah Pekinpah, Sam in Cheers, Uncle Sam, Sam Fox with the mercurial legs, play it again Sam, Sam I am green eggs and ham ... Sam Fox's cheery legs. Lots of Sams and hams in the Fox and Hounds. One name and a hundred faces, at a Sam convention.

It's all faces and waiting and pacing. No names to faces. Pace the clock-face. Walk the platform length, mark the time and check the pace of the space. A space-race. About face. One, two, three, four, up the ramp, five, six, seven, down the flagpole; hey oop here's a heap; ten, eleven, here comes the panda head. I could probably manage it without touching the ground ... And here she comes, ladies and gentlemen, vaulting over the panda head, steadying herself on the nose there. She'll lose points for that. Great routine though. Great flourishes as she heads for the death slide, over the mattresses. Will she

make it over the caravan though? She's recovering from a nasty thumb injury, but she's recovered well, looking good. She needs to hit that block square on now, she leaps – ahhhh, a double pike – ooh, that was close – but she's done it. Yes she really has done it. She has cleared the caravan and shuffled down the ramp in record time ... The time, what's the time? Time for foxy French maids to leap over cheesy panda thumbs...

Ah, hello. We have lights. Ta dah. Something's about to happen. Maybe a play by some underground street theatre. Hey – maybe that's what's with the French maid. A farce. A cheesy soapy egg opera. Dagh, the train. I'll get the next one. I don't want to miss this...

Well. I'm waiting. There's definitely something about to start. One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Who's putting on a panda play? World Wildlife Fund. Schoolgirls with anthropomorphic animal rucksacks, panda heads and Big Birds full of exercise books. The Black-Eyed Peas and lots of tearful drag queens with smudged mascara. Boxers with two black eyes and a pair of juicy steaks. Will it be dumb happy-sad, savvy sad-happy ... Is it the saddest holiday in the world? Or the most exciting conservationist fairground ride? Romance behind the caravans at the edge of the circus. Think of caravans and feel the grit in the seams of sleeping bags, the hollow clonk of Tupperware on Tupperware, the grass fried on to two juicy steaks. And I've never even been on a caravanning holiday. I just *know* the sensations and they are all there *in* the word. A family of sensations packed into a tiny word. Always gets me right there, it does – families spending precious leisure time in a tiny space on top of one another and flimsy furniture and plastic utensils. People are weird. They mash perfectly good potatoes and collect those little toys you get in Kinder eggs. Eggs. Must remember fox eggs, Sam steaks and what else was it? Collect the potato costume ... um ... Potatoes. Steaks. Eggs. Kinder eggs. Someone spent hours designing Kinder egg toys, making maquettes, conducting feasibility studies. Someone, a whole bunch of people, a committee even, wanted them to be just like that. And then dozens of people spend their days manufacturing them; they probably dream at night about the panda that transforms into a pub. That was one, wasn't it? I had it in the eighties ... Oops up side your head ... Or was it a house that transformed into a smurf? If I remember, I read it somewhere recently,

they make two million Kinder egg toys a day. Let's see now, if there are about six billion people in the world – well, that's six American billions, so that's really six thousand million – then that means there is a new Kinder toy for every ... three million people made every day. If they started production in 1972, I think it was, and, assuming business was a little slower to begin with so it maybe averages out at, say, one and a half million a day to be realistic, then, in thirty five years, which is nearly (let's say three years is around a thousand days), um, around twelve thousand days, then that means there are twenty-four thousand million Kinder egg toys in the world. That's four each. *Four*. Who's got all mine? Someone else must have at least eight. Or maybe a dozen. A dozen eggs, free range smurfs ... and pick up the foxy steak costume ... Ay oop – a train. Is it mine? Where was I ... Soap up side your head, say soap up side your head...