

FLYING

At Bidmouth last week, there was a four soul pile-up. A spokesman for the Astral Plane Flying Association said: "While meditating and encountering out-of-body experiences, four novices got as high as kites, but somewhere just outside of Nirvana, they got their tail ribbons entangled." Luckily none of the victims were seriously injured, all are recovering from superficially bruised alter-egos. The spokesman added: "It's clear that each has issues with the self as in the astral plane there should be no physical obstacles to self-fulfillment."

DOGS

At the Lower Tone dog track, one of the dogs was withdrawn just before race number 7. It is thought that the dog became self-conscious about chasing what was clear to any animal with a semblance of brain-matter, a mere motorised rag doll of a hare, steeped in cheap musk. The owner Bill Fold, not surprised by Kabala Keith's sudden change of heart, said that the dog always was a thinker and it was only recently that he'd been able to drag it away from the bins where it used to read the latest headlines in the discarded newspapers. "I'm sure he thinks he's other than a greyhound; the way he expects me to cook his dinner after races and give up the chair nearest the fire. It's sometimes hard to tell who owns who." Bill quipped.

FOOTBALL

Doug Pork-Scratchings has been seen recently at the shops in his home town. Bless him he's not mastered the Internet yet. He was seen

loading 700 left boots into his 4x4. He intends to use his left exclusively for the rest of the season so he needs plenty, considering the dubious machine-made advertising hoardings football shoes have become. His agent could only negotiate half the ad deal, but it still amounts to a tidy sum for the lad. It will come in handy for his defence in the IGBH trial at court next month.

His golden boot is now exhibit A in the case brought by Doug's victim from last month's Automobile plc Utd's clash with HKIT.tp City. The law suit has taken the gloss off Doug's late equalizer; the freak-kick that snuck under a bewildered goalie who was unable to lift his oversized gloves due to the moss that had formed on them.

TICK RACING

At The Foetid Calf.

The competitors were certainly under the microscope in this intense inaugural Tick Tock Championship hurdle meet.

The event was watched via Web cam by approximately twelve people from thirteen countries around the globe.

After the excitement had died down, the race began but the logistics of the event were shown to be problematic. Even though the course was long: 26 millimetres, the combatants were so evenly matched that there was a stewards' inquiry involving approximately two hundred of the little tykes. Consequently the result will not be known for another two months, but the organisers have said that all winning bets will be inflation linked and that they will pay each-way bets down to 101st place.

The only conclusive thing in the race was the British tick, called *Life Insurance* was placed 2134th. It had run well on soft, rotting flesh before, but in this instance had struggled on the cross-hairs that sometimes stick up in the cold conditions.

The Inconsequential

There's always time for levity

Issue 3

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a devil

THE MAN THAT LOOKED UP (part 3)

He sniffed the air. His brow furrowed. He drew another long, slow breath. The breeze was fragrant with the most deliciously sweet scent of pine. Once more, he closed his eyes and savoured every molecule. Above the noise of the traffic, which by now had reduced considerably, he could hear the delicate hiss, the music of the vast forest that decorated the left bank of the river.

"How have I not noticed that before?" he thought.

"This isn't helping anyone, you know." The Voice had returned, but somehow softer as if not at his elbow, but some distance away. "You realise they're watching you, Veronica and half your workmates, wondering what on Earth you're doing, standing here with your eyes shut sniffing the air."

"Really?" replied Mr Clark, though not at all concerned. "I suppose it must look strange, to some."

"Exactly. So, come on. Veronica wants that meeting about productivity and you've got a mountain of work to shift to meet that service standard," the Voice prompted, growing louder with every word.

"Don't you ever feel that there might be more to life than--" Mr Clark began, "but no. Of course, you're right." Mr Clark blinked open his eyes and looked around him. He was alone.

He set off once more, but this time took only two steps before glimpsing the steeply-rising hills, that appeared abruptly from behind the Bank's stark facade and tumbled in a patchwork of green and yellow and lilac, along the horizon under an azure sky and down, down to meet the ambling, diamond-dappled river at the far end of time. He leaned against the rail, shielding his eyes from the exuberant sun with his free hand, and watched as a cloud's light footprint glided across the fields and hedges, caressing every contour along its path. He followed its effortless climb to the highest point of the largest hill and saw it slip easily over the brow and away.

A softer wind blew and this time brought with it the scent of heather and jasmine and honeysuckle and wild rose. A curious frown appeared on Mr Clark's face as he filtered each fragrance. A moment later it lifted to be replaced by a gentle smile of recognition: "Helen," he sighed.

He traced her image on the inside of his eyelids, lingering over the curve of her cheek, the pertness of her nose, the fullness of her mouth, to ensure that their beauty was captured precisely. He listened intently as his memory replayed their conversation this morning:

"Try not to be late home tonight, darling."

"I'll try, but I've a lot to do. Veronica wants a meeting - damn, where did I put those figures. Ah! There they are - but, yes, I'll try, dear."

"Good. Today should be special."

"Eh! Oh yes, yes, it should. If Veronica likes these calculations I've produced, we'll improve the efficiency ratings at a stroke."

"No. Something a bit more important than that, I think."

"My end of year grade?"

"Now, Adrian. Don't tease!"

He recalled how the hall mirror had reflected his blank expression and how Helen had looked at the floor then proceeded to busy herself with trivial tasks. He remembered how he'd said: "Goodbye, dear," lightly, but did not receive a reply. Finally, he recollected the feeling of his heart turning to lead as he closed the door and heard the gentlest of sobs coming from the open living-room window.

"Are you going in today, or not?" The Voice again.
Silence.

"They'll be out to see what's wrong, any minute now. I think you'd better get in there right away. Say you felt faint or had a sudden attack of nausea. They'll believe you."

"Why shouldn't they?" Mr Clark said.
"Right at this moment it's not too far from the truth."

"Well, then." The Voice paused. "Surely you realise how important today is?"

(continued on page nine)

HUMANLY SPORTS PAGES

A Jaunt Down Memory Lane: from the Chorlton-cum-Hardy Chronicle

Circa. 1908



Mr. Arthur Woodhead, the Chorlton-cum-Hardy 'keeper, and his lifelong friend, Ed The-ball, have finally hung up their playing boots to take up full time jobs as an Occasional Table and a Lectern respectively.

Arthur's years of standing stock-still behind a remarkably successful defensive unit, headed by Ed, primed him and his friend for their new roles as furniture.

"He were a very accommodating husband. His cap alone held silver service and two cake stands on special occasions," said Mamie, his wife. "Although he used to tremble, ever so slightly when covered in Victorian lace. He were allus 'fraid o' the filigree patterns. 'Ad a bad time in swaddlin' as a nipper," she added.

It was local folklore that Arthur had such powers of concentration and was so intense, even during the four-season period when he had only a handful of shots to save, that he was lacquered after every match. 'E 'ad such a lovely finish for those right formal do's.' Mamie recalled proudly.

Arthur's lifelong friend and teammate, Ed (pictured above in his best pose) was always welcome at the local SCES church and lecture theatres. The man-about-town-hall tilt to his cap meant he did stirring work as a lectern. He stood stock still under the noses of some of the dignitaries of the parish, especially when his neck was still stiff after one of those heroic matches wherein he'd single-handedly repulsed the opposition attacks by heading even the most rain-sodden ball at least thirty times.

Ed the biggest centre-half in the game said: "It were nowt for me to do it, I allus learnt sommat from the speakers, unless I fell asleep."

"There were once when a chap talked about all sorts o' psychological stuff, but I remember nowt after he set on talkin' o' hypnotism. I think it were 'is watch dangling down like that that fixed me."

Ed recalled with that charming half-smile of his that wooed the local girls. Ed was a bachelor all his life but never went short of companionship as he was famed throughout the borough for his love of the poetry of Sir Ralph Chatemup. Ed was said to have fainted whenever he met Sir Ralph. Ed had to face the other way once when he was 'lecterning' when Sir Ralph gave a poetry reading to the Ladies Narrative Verse Society in 1907.

Between 1905 and 1909, Arthur kept 102 clean sheets and 112 racing pigeons, conceding only five goals and that his success was down to Ed and the other four defenders: Joseph Wept (the left-back whose hobbies were rat racing, though he rarely beat any of them); Albert Sphere (the right-back who was a strict disciplinarian. He once ordered one of his own players off the field for suggesting that the referee was less than competent); Louis 'Loo' Bend (the left-half who gained his nickname because he was always flush even on Thursdays, before pay day); and last of all, but not least, John Thomas Williams (the stocky right-half and successful speculator. It was rumoured that he was worth over ten thousand pounds when he passed away; due to his stock-market acumen). The club wishes Arthur and Ed good luck in their new careers. They will be sorely missed as after 666 consecutive appearances for Chorlton-cum-Hardy, they were always seen as part of the furniture.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

This Month: My Thoughts

You know, I had them when I left for work this morning because I thought I was late. However...

I remember when...

Accrington Stanley...

This ring on my finger suggests I'm married; to ...

That looks like a bus coming very fast towards me...

Theatre Critic

I was both appalled and thrilled by the innovative series of one word plays at the Criterion Theatre last night.

I couldn't make up my mind whether the opening of *What?*

was too derivative of the old Irish master, Sam Beckett, but I was quickly reassured by the gem of T.W.A.T that played with the idea of acronyms to extend the plot and give those juveniles in the audience a good giggle.

One could not say that it was too long: total running time for 90-plays coming in at one minute-fifty-five due to a costume change between *Help* and *Disingenuousness*, the latter being an acerbic and lengthy piece that tested the patience of the audience with fully five syllables.

Tim Smithereens was majestic in thirty of the performances and Melinda Bing-Pippin was brilliant despite her not having any dialogue. Her silences are a Denchmark of genius.

Little EDITORIAL "Never mind the quantity feel the wit."

Q: Why did the one-armed man cross the road?

A: To get to the second-hand shop!

Q: What does a cow eat for breakfast?

A: Moo-sli!

Q: What's the difference between roast beef and pea soup?

A: You can roast beef!

Q: Why all the corny jokes?

A: To put you in a seasonal mood for Issue 3 of our exclusive little mag, which this month is our bumper Christmas number!

descending into the misty stillness of autumn. What better time to remind ourselves that the season of goodwill is almost in attendance. Eat, drink and be wary, more to borrow, glee's nigh. Yes! In just four standard-length months it'll be Christmas, and to celebrate, we're including in this month's issue our special bumper seasonal pull-out!

We've everything you need to supplement your annual over-indulgence. When you've had enough of that big, fat, bandy-legged bird you picked up at the butcher's, send her back into the kitchen to wash-up and reach for our Christmas special. For the traditionalist, there are jokes, puzzles, fun facts and our original, full-length Christmas story, guaranteed to put you in the festive spirit whatever the time of year.

For those of you with a sugar-free outlook on the Yule, try our updated versions of those traditional Christmas carol classics, telling it like it is behind the fairy lights and baubles.

In addition, of course, you've still got your regular monthly visit to all your young favourites. Catch up with Those Ethics Girls as they ponder another moral question of the day; Mr Adrian Clark's awakening continues, as does Sharkey's, our Great White Tope; matters at The Vitreous Enamel take a turn for the obvious; and our chest is lightened a little more with another Fifth Column rant. And in amongst all that, we've thrown in our usual smattering of odd items (our sixpences in the plum duff!) that we hope will entertain and amuse.

So, pick up, sit back, read and enjoy. As Robert Louis Stevenson said: "There's nothing like a little judicious levity."

Now I know what your first question is going to be and the answer, surprisingly, is yes, my parents were very proud of me. Your second question will probably be along the lines of: how do you keep so young-looking? Sooner or later, though, you'll get round to asking: why a Christmas edition in October?

Well, primarily because my fellow editor and I are not bound by the rules of convention. We thought it might be a scenic diversion from the well-trodden path of conformity.

Secondly, it's October and that means summer is almost over. Most of you will have returned from holiday, packed away your straw donkey and, as we speak, you'll be watching your tan fade from Judith Chalmers orange, to David Dickinson brown, to Michael Jackson white. With the exception of one or two final lurches into the high seventies, the days are getting cooler and

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DEVIL:

"Hello, hiya and bienvenue."

"Just call me B."

"Are you here in London to collect more souls like a demonic philatelist?"

"That's your first cliché; you've only four more before I leave the studio. I, or at least we, never were even in the early days. It's logical that now, when you can get so little mulah for souls on the market (even ebay doesn't accept them on their site anymore), that we should modernise and go for winning hearts and minds of the public. That way they'd be ours but it would be their choice. What we provide now is greater choice."

"How?"

"A great place for devilry is the pseudo-collective. That half-arsed sense of belonging to a random notion of group mentality so well exploited by market research. The govt of Britain is helping in its thrust towards creating morals and ethics based on pure economics that identify groups as economic problems rather than purely moral and ethical deviants. These groups also come in handy as lynch-mobs. Give them bunting to celebrate but make it flexible enough to form a noose at the least encouragement."

"So where is the choice?"

"32-bit colour bunting, mobile wireless networks and e-mail."

"And what's in it for you and your acolytes?"

"The hell of it. Puts yer man in a right quandary it does. What with doing his will and having your own free will. That means he has to accept my existence as a choice made by his creation. Catch 666 or what."

"Thank you B. That's all from me and it's Goodnight Vienna."

Interview ended in a puff of smoke and smell of Sulphur, the newest fragrance for all sexes: *For the Devil in you!*

We're Glad They Said That!

Comment on coastal erosion in Norfolk: "They've left us high and dry."

Ad for Spam: 'For when you could eat a horse!'

Political commentator: "I'm 110% confident."

Letters

Dear Sirs,

I want to know why no matter how vigorous I am with an hoe, the earth only moves in one direction. I wouldn't mind so much but it's always the opposite direction to the one I want it to go in.

Also, when I talk to my plants they never listen; I can tell because they always contract and change colour before I've had

chance. If you can't help I'll have to attend the next edition of *Gardener's Question Time*, and you know what that means? Yours in green,
Bill O. Wrights

Dear Sirs,

I'm really worried about the treatment of Lil in the *Ethics Girls*. It seems unfair to constantly reject all of her culinary

efforts just so the others can take the moral high ground: even Lil has fillings, like the rest of us. Could you pass the enclosed letter and latticed apple pie to her as I want to voice my support for the poor love.

If I see that Mavis, I'll give her a piece of my rock cake; that'll fettle her.

Yours supportively
Mr Biddy Biddy

STARS

Love: If you're single, a lasting relationship is starred. If you're already in one, you've had it.

Work: Promotion is a strong possibility in October; due largely to the position of Uranus last month.

Home: Pluto enters your house from mid-October and will cause no end of damage.

More than 57 varieties but not as full protein as beans.

It should be funny but it isn't. What exactly is the purpose of ruining a perfectly good narrative with a falsified inducement to join in with taped, usually forced and definitely irritatingly repetitive forms of laughter?

Some cans even have a mix - remember the beans and sausage in a can?!- of applause and laughter as if it is spontaneous and discerning.

There are times I could swear the laughs are the same now as they were in the 'fifties and 'sixties, in fact all of the latter half of the 20th century. After all, would we really notice.

Do we, when we watch a comedy programme, suspend our attention on the words, the preamble and the punchlines, to discern whether we've heard that same ridiculously over exuberant cackle before? We seem able to ignore - or is it the manufacturing entertainment industry that ignores us? - the canned laughter so noticing the recycling of such would go unobserved. Not me, I can't ignore such invasive and insulting projects designed to coerce behaviours that justify mass mediocrity, by suggesting laughter - after all it's contagious, like Dengue fever- at some of the most banal and dimly unfunny scripts this specie has ever perpetrated.

Even those 'comedies' that claim to be filmed before a live studio audience are fake. Like situation comedy, light entertainment programmes that purport to comedy through a mix of activities meant to en-

ertain whilst the host spews out inane cliched puns, the coercion to laugh and applaud is still the same. You must have at some point stopped rolling about in the aisles to notice when the camera pans out to show the live audiences, that the responses to the entertainment is significantly less than the canned variety. The deafening hush at times would at least make an honest man, or woman, out of the punning character. Even they must know in their heart of hearts, when they see the audience responding very spasmodically with feeble laugh and embarrassed applause, that the deafening and raucous canned variety is a sham.

Why must this disingenuousness be played out? Especially when it is supposed to be a laughing matter.

To create a healthy balance there should be canned heckling, canned derision, and canned booing. There might be an opportunity to market laughter and applause in a ring-pull can out of vending machines, or even peddle it in recyclable cartons with wing-pull opening so we can introduce it into those corpse conversation moments. You know the times I mean; when we say something and the listener is singularly unimpressed.

Perhaps at political rallies, authentic dissent could be drawn out by using taped ovations. Manufactured laughter and applause as response to infotainment is more serious than you might think. Go on, complain, they want you to; after all, it's only an e-mail or text away. It

has never been easier to dissent, yet the agents get away with something as innocently insidious as persuading us to respond positively to untalented nobodies.

On top of this wholly unnecessary institutionalised deception, some of the ingredients of the cans are so inappropriately used as to actually drown out some of the might-be funny dialogue: counter-productive or what!

Of course, the term canned laughter is an old-fashioned term for what is an audience tape added to the soundtrack, or played in a studio. However, the point is that disregarding the modernity and so-called sophistication of the method, the project is still mass deception. It is to all intents and purposes a peacetime propaganda to promote a cult of personality and elitism that should have no part in an early 21st century so-called mature and highly developed democratic society.

For those marketing types that sell us dummies on DVD, I say they should offer us two products: one with the propagandist tittering and coercive fake response to the material that is more akin to so-called authoritarian regimes, and one without, so that us as so-called free individual citizen, consumers, can make up our own minds as to whether or not the material is funny and or entertaining.

My message to those dismal folk working in the mass deception industry to falsely promote funny is:

CAN IT!



**SHARKEY
THE GREAT WHITE**



Sharkey was famished. "I could even eat a politician." he murmured to himself. It was a month since his last meal. Why? He thought. He could sense flesh, about 200 m away, but his sense of anticipatory anxiety had grown more acute still.

Swimming casually, more dignified than before, Sharkey approached the would-be meal, but, on sight, he manoeuvred (he'd perfected this manoeuvre now) stunned, sickened. The meat was in a metal construction with bars: IT WAS A CAGE! A trap? Why?

Before he could move, the other sharks missed themselves into the cage and down came the door. They were probably going to be on TV now. "What a grizzly prospect." Sharkey mused, before turning tail and putting much water between himself and an appearance on The Discovery Channel.

Feeling somewhat saddened but still ravenous, Sharkey contemplated his appetite some more.

"Why do I eat my fellow creatures? Don't they have a right to a dignified life and even a dignified end? What gives me the right to survive ahead of them? This law of nature makes me feel superior yes, but ultimately isolated and alienated. Just because I've many razor-like teeth and have super sensory powers, it doesn't mean I should exploit others.

With great power comes great responsibility. I must think more about this." He did but over a meal of epic proportions.

THE MAN THAT LOOKED UP (from page two)

"Oh yes! Although I didn't until just a few minutes ago. Up until then I thought that productivity and efficiency were the most important things in the world, nothing else mattered." Mr Clark opened his eyes slowly and turned to face the Bank. Veronica was no longer at the window. "In some circles perhaps they are, but then again, who wants to travel in circles?" Mr Clark allowed himself a brief smile, then continued, "To be productive, but to produce nothing of value: to be efficient, but only in the pursuit of the worthless is meaningless, futile. Far worse than this, however, it destroys the spirit and crushes the soul.

It turns lively, curious, fascinating, loving beings into automata, fit only for manipulating figures instead of stimulating minds. Oh I dare say you think I've gone mad."

The Voice remained silent.

"...but true madness lies with those in their barless prisons who can live in the midst of all this beauty," he gazed about him, almost in awe, "yet see only balance sheets or short-falls."

"Adrian! Adrian! What on Earth's wrong?" Mr Clark turned sharply to see Veronica flitting across the bridge towards him accompanied by a security guard. "Are you in trouble? Do you need help?"

"Ah! Veronica." Mr Clark smiled benevolently. "No, there's no trouble, no trouble at all. Quite the reverse in fact." I

A philosophical sneeze

When the sun shines on a window that stands between dark and light, it transforms its subject into merely a bright surface. We no longer see through to the dark, but only see our most superficial reflection. Anonymous Tosch

Poo Corner

A Democratic Ventriloquist

I hear my voice on the radio every day
In the newspapers I see myself quoted

An expert or two argue for me
As if they both know
That I want peace and happiness

So why do I hear and see
The passing of bucks
From sea to sea
And conflict rocketing

An obscene exchange system
And canisters of hurt and anger
With rolled up dollars deep within?

I'm beginning not to recognise myself
These days

I thought I only hated me

HIGH ALERT

Gentle request, making a tab
Received by a name
And a face I'm supposed to forget
Eyes, alert for once
Dart side to side

Like fresh wheat stalks in a bluster
A heart, leaded chest
Making sure there's no fall-out
These past years and years
And years

And yet, all it would take to cause
A lachrymose leak
Is an unprimed, unambiguous
And beautiful missile,
Or a head-on collision
Of eyes melting the core,
Splitting an atomised cell
Fusion reigns conversely
Yet, once more, those wise
Emergency services avert a disaster:

The all clear sounds;
Now it is OK to look.

The good thing is,
Even though there's snow on the silos,
I can guarantee other such high-
Alert events

Dawn's Early Lights

Dispensing the dead
to feed the fortunate living,
Importing meat for the counter culture
Making lean, successful cuts

Baring the bone that goes to the dogs
Shedding ne'er a profit tear
For the needy and the lame
Wheeling and dealing meretriciously

Inducing the water from the flesh
That it might shrink
On impact with its tormenting pan
Or dish

Beware the fat cat that would devour
Any independent liver
And there, in the dawn's earliest light
It stands, unfurling

The red and white candy
Its stars, those that serve at,
Till the homing of the brave
And those that feel free

To naturalise such butchery

There once was a lad named Aloysius
Whose behaviour was somewhat too vicious
Like a bull at a gate
He just could not wait
At a cliff met his end inauspicious

*

Once was a man from Porthcawl
Went to a bank to make a withdrawal
Though when faced with a cashier
He trembled in fear
And went away with nothing at all

*

Those Daft Soap Suds

Standing outside the Vitreous Enamel was Percy Cution's luxury coach, waiting for the usual guilt-trip, well patronised as it always was and would be, by the residents of the Oval. "Oh, Gawd, it's a self-drive. That means one of us can't have a jar or twenty. Oh, it's all my fault," explained Barb Surplice - the one-time soap queen and nun, ringing her hands and washing clean her tortured soul. "You must do it, 'though I feel terrible about not being able to drive, even though I'll enjoy a drink," retorted Posa Barr

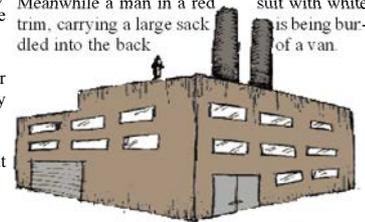


"What about your liver?"
"I'll have it later with some onions."
The next ones to board were the chemical brothers, looking shady and yet oozing charisma as well as scraping their knuckles on the carpeted aisle.
"I see they're all ready here," said Olive Lamp between gritted teeth.
"They've got more to feel guilty about than most," replied Vera. Then she turned to another yellow-looking woman and barked out: "You not coming, Yamac?"
"No, I've got a long lost relative coming to stay indefinitely and he's up to no good, I'll be bound," hissed Lil Cream
"Where's your Sunlight?"
"She's going back to RADA to act out her grief; besides, she 'as nuffink to feel guilty about."
"Is your Rod not coming?"
Nope, 'e's been struck by lightning again. That last storm we 'ad; struck five times 'e were."
"Always were a good conductor."

"Cud 'a been at the Halbert 'All."
"Tragic."
The bus pulled away eventually with a growing murmur of self-reproach drowning out the coughing engine. It was going to be the best yet. None of them saw the trail of oil coming from the underside of the vehicle, and none could anticipate the tragedy that awaited them just outside the studio.
News headline:
BUS 666 CRASHES: AUDIENCE FIGURES SOAR.



Earlier that Christmas Eve:
Sunlight, in her grief turns her misconceived attentions to the other Emin brother and Frew Saga is investigated by the police who believe he may have killed off any interest in the soap. Meanwhile, Charlie Cheek is given an award for best employer of the year; he employed 366 people in the last tax year, on 365 separate occasions. He even employed the same person twice in the same day, not recognising them from morning till afternoon.
"It's a changin' world. " Charlie is fond of saying.
Meanwhile a man in a red suit with white trim, carrying a large sack is being burled into the back of a van.



THOSE ETHICS GIRLS

Mavis: Hello, Lil. Come on in. Ooh, what've you brought us this time?
Lil: Hi, Mavis. Hi, girls. I thought I'd treat you to a double chocolate fudge gâteau with fresh double cream!
Gladys: Wow! That's impressive. You can certainly bake, Lil. Perhaps afterwards, we can all go down to the hospital's cardy..., cardiovask..., er, heart unit and listen to our arteries hardening!
Lil: Very funny! I've included a healthy option.
Gladys: Healthy!?!
Lil: Yeah. There's a strawberry on that bit.
Mavis: If we can get back to business, ladies. Lil, we were just discussing this year's WI Christmas outing.
Lil: Well, how about Julian in the Council's Accounts Department. I know he plays rugby, but I happen to know he's also into musicals and needlepoint. He's deftly hiding something!
Sheila: Not quite the outing we had in mind! I was thinking more of a weekend in Black pool, do a bit of Christmas shopping, see the lights...
Gladys: Edinburgh might be nice. Or we could really push the boat out and book a couple of days in London.
Lil: Blackpool? Edinburgh? London might be okay, but why not think a little bigger? My husband's just booked a week in New York for the two of us, the week before Christmas, in fact.
Mavis: I don't think we'll quite have the budget for New York, Lil!
Gladys: Old York might be a push! There are fifteen of us, you know!
Lil: I wasn't suggesting you all go to New York. It was just an example!
Sheila: A boast you mean! I don't know how you can afford the time or the money. That cleaning business of yours can't pay that well - and who's going to run it?
Lil: My brother-in-law will keep an eye on things. He's in the police force, you know. The staff won't try anything while he's in charge.
Sheila: I was thinking more of who's going to look after the staff if they have any problems.
Lil: Oh, they'll be all right! They're a hardy bunch. Most are in their sixties, but they can still scrub those office blocks at six in the morning. Coincidentally, they've just arranged a little staff trip themselves. Only a day in Skegness, but it'll be nice for them to get away.
Mavis: Bit of a difference, Lil! New York and Skegness.
Gladys: That's the beauty of the minimum wage, Mave! Don't have to pay a penny more if you don't want to.
Lil: Minimum wage! Don't mention that to me! Caused Clive no end of problems. Had to let five of our best workers go just so he could afford to keep the other ten on. It broke Clive's heart, it did.
Gladys: Why? Did he want to get rid of those ten as well?
Lil: What? I mean he regards them all as his little extended family. Do you want some of this cake, anyone?
All: No thanks!
Sheila: So why don't you take your 'extended family' to New York with you?

Lil: We'd love to, but, er...it's more of a second honeymoon, really. Since retiring from the stockbroking business at 38, Clive's managed a real holiday only every other year.
Mavis: A 'real holiday'.
Lil: Yes. You know, a fortnight away somewhere hot, or perhaps, skiing in the Rockies.
Gladys: You poor things.
Lil: Oh, don't worry about us. We could still manage a week away every now and then. Even more so since Clive started the cleaning business with some of his Golden Handshake. Besides, if things get a little tight, Clive just sells a few shares and we're fine again.
Sheila: And what about your employees? What do they do if things 'get a little tight'?
Lil: They can't be doing too badly! They can afford a trip to Skegness!
Gladys: Watch it, Lil! They'll be getting above themselves!
Lil: Look, ladies. We'd love to give our girls a little more each week, but as Clive says, they're lucky to have a job. The Government want us to work 'til we're in our seventies, but there are not many employers willing to take people on at that age. We're giving them a golden opportunity to earn a few pounds for the little luxuries in life.
Gladys: Like a trip to Skegness? Or food?
Lil: Exactly! Er...pardon?
Gladys: Never mind. What would your client's think if they knew how you exploited your workforce?
Lil: Exploited is a bit harsh, isn't it? Anyway, they have nothing but praise for the level of service we provide.
Sheila: That's down to the professionalism and integrity of your cleaners. They still have the dignity to take some pride in their work despite being paid peanuts.
Lil: Our clients aren't interested in how much we pay our staff. Were the cheapest cleaning firm in the area and they're happy to use us for that reason.
Sheila: If that were the only reason, they'd be equally as guilty of exploitation. Perhaps more so, since they are helping to perpetuate the problem. Surely, there's room for morals in business?
Mavis: Choosing a more expensive service provider because you think they look after their workforce may be ethically sound, but does it make financial sense - from a company's or individual's point of view?
Lil: A very good point, Mavis!
Mavis: I mean, how would you know anyway, if they were paying better wages or providing better working conditions? They may just be making larger profits.
Gladys: And taking TWO weeks in New York.
Mavis: And many choose the cheaper option out of necessity. They may sympathise strongly with the poorly paid, but simply don't have the money to go anywhere else.
Lil: Exactly! Whether you're a business or an individual, as Clive says, it's all about minimising your costs. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get to the Post Office and apply for two new passports. Our old ones are full. See you, ladies.
Mavis: 'Bye, Lil. Another cuppa, girls?
Sheila: Please, Mave. And here, take this cake away. It's making me feel quite sick!
Mavis: I understand. I'll go and grab my Garibaldis.