

Long Paddock

KEN BOLTON

*Some photos for Gabe, in London,
and a photo for Yuri, newly arrived*

Hi Gabe, some photos, muchacho! – *What,
no gravy?* True, there should be a lot
to say – it having been so long. (And I should, should I, begin
“Dear Gabe”? – But, to announce ‘nothing’,
I think my ‘famous’ ‘light’ ‘tone’.) *And what*

is it, you say, with the format – ‘verse’? I know, but
I’ve begun now! I imagine your cheery head
& suited figure making its way
(your way) to the tube, mornings – *week* days.
Or, weekends, I have you casually tread

to a coffee shop & read the paper.
Would you do that? You might. Were you
ever the paper-reading type
as a twenty year old? Black? or white
coffee now? I imagine you

older – &, *so*, much like me. Ha ha!
– kidding. Well: the urge to talk
to you *as you are, now*. I think
more highly of you than of me, think
of you, in that green jumper, see you walk

into a coffee shop, in Islington –
one *I* went to. (The great jumper
with the stripes.) Of course, for you it’s ‘Life’.
(I guess you can’t, every day, be up.) It’s nice
tho, to have you there – an ideal figure

trawling across London, like those
small motorized cameras NASA
lands – on the surface of Mars, the moon,
or Jupiter – & information zooms
down to us, & we see the terrain as a

wind-up truck might. The unknown familiar.

“Not quite”? We imagine you there –
where we’ve *been* at least – & re-live this
safely, here. You may some days wish
you weren’t in London – were elsewhere –

or not cut off: a lonely Russian cosmonaut,
carefully applying gaffer tape
to some leaking pipe, calculating
the chances of survival, in
the aging *Mir* station – winding the tape,

picturing a home ... & wife & kids
he’ll never see, he feels. Is it
like that, ever? I hope not. Note to self: *Is this*
a CHEERY letter, or a DOWNER? It’s
meant to be fun to read – & fit

to bursting with marvellous images
of home – of here. So you can forget
Ivan, in his revolving tin can
(with his gaffer tape & slowly falling tear), &
check these photos out I’ve sent –

Your Mum & sister, in a pose
& setting that will bring the space,
the light of the back room, back for you.
I think it resembles *intimiste* views
like Vuillard’s or Fairfield Porter: taste,

the luxury of domestic time
ticking by, the figures – female
always – close together, almost
blended with wall, carpet, a host
of detail – resolved, as *style* –

showing people of taste being artless.
Cath & Anna looking together
at a design magazine, submerged almost
in the lounge, feet up, both
heads close; there’s dappled light, & the

composition is fabulously angled –
elbows, corner of the lounge, the scarf
around Cath that covers her chin &
says Paris 1888 – or nineteen-ten,
Vuillard’s moment rather than Lautrec’s. Half

the picture’s charm is the complication
of the light – angled Winter sun

through leaves & lattice-work, the room
reflected again in the glass, the room
appearing twice, though one

is all we 'see', the repetition registering
as bounded comfort; the two
heads echo each other as well,
close together, in near profile,
the two similar brows (the two

pairs of eyes, or sight lines, converging
where the Banana's hand points).
I love it: I love Cath's straight back
the Lautrecy scarf, its red reflected back
onto her cheek so that it anoints

the skin, a softening, mini
'atmosphere', the delicate bones above:
eye, cheek, brow, the intense, regarding
attention, sharp against her speaking
daughter's coat, the smooth youth of Anna's skin. I love

the eyebrows – graphic when you notice them.
(When focus is pulled so close
they are darting marks, like the goldfish
in the Matisse picture of – is it –
maquette & fish – &, if you look, just

above her head is that little wooden statue
you brought back, from Bali, *the law
of the excluded middle* I always
called it, a thinking figure, it spends its days
there looking over them, your

two 'grils'. Carved from wood it sits with one
hand holding its head, thinking, wondering,
wondering what happened to its lower torso
(its gimmick & its riddle) – nice though
to see it there above them, bleached, blonded – pondering

with them, the mysteries of interior design –
considering Anna's opinion (just expressed),
wondering what will be Cath's reply.
You like? And see, in this one, Pola's blue-ice eye
as she rounds in front of the yellow bar, white chest,

black-lined white ears, her Siberian husky face,
a glamorous skunk; the polka-dotted bar,
lemon-coloured – the Kokoschka above,
syphons & fan: elements that strive

to fly apart at Poli's entrance yet are

wonderfully balanced – square picture-shapes
to right & left, rectangles of bar & chair
sliding towards picture's edge, the bar-top things, line
of CDs – vertical of the suspended paper light,
continued in Pola's face, where

the dramatic downward line reappears –
the black stripe down her white muzzle,
the black nose, white leg against the dark floor
& shadow (maybe where the best confusion of all
lies – *visually*, not conceptually confusing: no puzzle

really, but terrific)? See – all this
could be yours. Come back. Come back some
day anyway – or contemplate it. That's what
these photos are for – for drawing warmth from,
Ivan – *Gabe*. (Dumb Joke, go! *your work is done!*)

I hope you're not pondering 'the spiritual
gaffer tape' right now – or ever, much –
but are maybe having the coffee I envisaged,
reading this, looking at the photos, pleased
to get them & my news – which I summarize, um, 'thus':

The weather has finally gotten cold,
so Adelaide *looks* great but with
a European gravitas –
clouded skies – silver grey – overcast,
but with light behind – that probably makes it

not so sullen as I imagine
a German winter sky is. I think it
looks great, & the Springtime light today brings to it lends
a sober severity, pitiless &
dry eyed – responses, I know, tied to Spring

all over the planet. I think of parks –
the beautiful mist in Hampstead Heath
the squirrels, the redder, ruddier
kind in New York's Central Park, scurriers
from bin to drunk, drunk to bin. Here, it's possums greet

you, as you walk, late, across the park –
from the Exeter – or *used* to – now
they greet others. *I* see them, instead, walking
Pola at nights in *Heywood* Park. She stalking
them – so they don't, as a rule, allow

us so close. Occasionally

I see one staring down wide-eyed
from a tree, rounded ears, curling tail,
while Pola barks & stands, her own tail
wagging encouragingly, hind

legs trembling, front paws on the tree, or
one of them free, held politely,
interrogatively. COME DOWN! she barks. The park
at the end of King William Street. Hyde Park.

You remember? At night it is especially

magical because the trees rise
into blackness – & disappear,
as though they have no end: enchanted,
story-book-like. Scale is altered.

Anything – dog, a couple – that appears

looks small & hallucinatory,
in the dark beneath those trees, lit
from beside by the street lights.
Sound is muffled & quiet, absorbed by
the wood & grass & leaves, which form a thick

layer underfoot. To crunch quietly across. Cath & I are flat out –
she because she's coming your way
in a month & must get programs
taped in advance, a book launched, readings done, &
money made – before she's off. Monday

& Sunday are our two days free.
(Today she buys her ticket.) I'm busy
writing articles I don't want to write
& applying for grants that I would like
to get if they didn't always so meanly

halve them. But *some* money buys *some* time.

So that is good. And you heard I got
the commission to write a book on
Michelle Nikou – fun, if I can
start before complaining begins – start

to write, I mean (– before *my* complaints begin). Deadline
December.

A month or two after that
I plan to knock *The Circus* over –
which I've been trying to end forever –
with all its characters – acrobats,

strongmen, ballerinas, horses, the

maintenance man & foreman, elephant
that sings & philosophizes,
the ticket-seller's ongoing crisis
of confidence, a malevolent

magician – or merely dangerous-*seeming* –
or so I intended. All of them.
(Mrs Lautone, smokin' & drinkin',
come out of retirement, pitching in
with her old rival – wife of her once boyfriend –

to start a new act, on which they take
shifts – *Fortune Teller, Madame Strega*;
the worried owner; the young man, coming off
drugs; the part-Chinese girl.) A month
or two might see them off & vaguer

as yet nebulous plans for things
taken up. Michael-in-Sydney – Michael
& Di, whom you must know but I don't know
how much you've seen of them – there's no dough
in it, much, but he has said he'll

do the drawings. He's done some. They look
Neat-O. May have finished more by now.
It's a favour, so I don't like
to ask how it goes. They might
be done! I'll find out.

Anna's birthday tomorrow. Twenty.
It's funny living with her. She's so
pretty you often feel you're in some lame but
cute TV series: the adventures that
the young girl has – & we're the standard to-

ken Dad & Mum, with Paddo the boyfriend –
setting for her innocence &
optimism & bright wit. An innocuous
storyline. Though Anna is the reverse
of shallow. But sunny days now, mostly, &

good times. Plus work! Lectures to go to,
essays to write. I'll be helping with
the next one – Germany & Japan.
Luckily I just read stuff on Weimar, can
find articles in the *TLS* to shift

discussion along, faster, or differently than
the textbooks. The other thing – speaking
of books – I'm putting out four new

Little Esthers & have been stymied: how to do
the covers? Or was till Yuri keyed me in

to the new technology. Photo-Shop. Old tech to you.

But I had lagged behind. (Progress.) Saw
Jude today! But we both passed, talking
to others. I don't know if he saw me.

Cath sees Andrea & Allie, or

did once recently. Not the others. The girl

Cath bought her ticket from today
reminded me of Nelly (whose name
I could only ever remember by saying *Whoa Nelly!*) – same
skin type & gestures. This girl may

have been more out-going: Nelly was
'darker' somehow in her personality.
Tom arrives this week, with Bec, over
to see everyone. For fun? or a closer
look than that – an inventory ...

of his sisters (& me, & Anna, & nieces
& nephews). So we'll see him. You'll
see him too, I wouldn't wonder.
They'll be coming your way sooner or later
surely, if Yuri is. How cool

I wonder, will that be? *Weird to be addressed*
like this, isn't it – so rhetorical, as if
you woke to hear your name serenaded
from somewhere – the guitar strummed
&, sure enough, an idiot outside in funny clothes (which

corresponds to the style *here* – is it
a style?) is acting tunefull. It's *you* they're speaking to,
but you can't interrupt – & when
you look, they appear not even
to be seeing – staring past you

to some spot beyond your head or
shoulder.) *You read this on the tube.*
But you're seen having coffee – which doesn't
compute. Still, to be on the train, a dozen
images of home in your mind's eye, who'd

complain? The thing to do is, ring
home, say hi to whoever's there,
adjust our picture of you in London,
what you're up to, what you've seen, &
hint at troubles, well, *if* there

are any: touch base with the beloved,
let them hear your voice; hear Cath's laugh,
Anna's "cool" & "excellent" – does she
say that anymore? Speak to me:

I'll endeavour to say something smart

... & you never know. Hey! and here's
Yuri's picture – the enlarged one – with him
& Cath, sleeping, her head rested on his ribs,
in not-quite-uniform shade – & beyond this
the enormous, almost empty park – a thin

populating cast of figures. I see
two definitely. It is such a calm scene.
Yuri's eyes, I think, are open:
the sort of photo you might keep forever, think of often,
remember her good sense & care, & dream

of who you were then, what she wanted for you.
Cheers to you both.

Ken