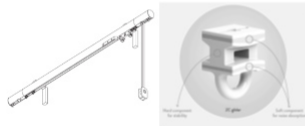


Shove writing 2024



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Crossed wires

Elizabeth and Caroline Shove

My name is Kevin and I work in a call centre on the outskirts of Wolverhampton. I have been here for over six months, which is way longer than most of my colleagues. I have comfortable earphones, a nice red chair and two foot pedals. I use the left one to initiate the 'waiting music' and the right one to cut callers off whenever I want. We get free tea and coffee on tap.

I usually deal with hospital appointments. Someone from the centre pieces information together from the consultants who do hip and knee replacements and from the anaesthetists who work with them. The centre manages the waiting list and can slide people up and down at will. When they've finished playing with the sequence it is my job to email an agreed time and date and tell patients they can just give me a call if the appointment is in the least bit inconvenient. It's all about putting the customer first.

If someone wants to change their allotted date they have to wait for option 5, which is usually last on the list. Sometimes the call comes to me, but if I'm busy, pressing '5' takes callers back to option 1: a dead-end loop from which there is no escape. When someone does get through, I am sweet as pie. 'Of course, of course, no problem, there are always cancellations, just hold on a moment, I'll see if I can slot you in'. I play a bit of waiting music and promise that I'll send an email right away. I am expert in managing these situations. One strategy is to send appointment details to GPs who retired a long time ago, or to email addresses in the sky. Just one wrong digit makes all the difference. After days and sometimes weeks with no news, the caller eventually phones again. I am effusive with my apologies. 'I'm so sorry, I'm afraid you are too late, that slot has gone.' And that's it: they have to go back to the hospital and start all over again.

I sit next to my colleague, Nehil. Some days she works for the probate service. Some days it is HMRC. Sometimes we play games to alleviate the pressure of our job. If we didn't laugh, we'd cry.

One of our games is called 'crossed wires'. It works like this. Nehil passes me the details of someone who is applying for probate and I write back about their hip operation. In exchange, Nehil picks someone from my data base and sends them one of her standard letters. We use our official addresses - all communications are monitored for training and security purposes - but nobody seems to notice or to care. In any case, Kevin and Nehil are not our real names. No one, but no one, would be so silly as to identify themselves correctly. And never with an actual surname.

We make careful notes on the logs, and these are handed over to colleagues who take over when we are off. Once we have crossed a few wires, we wait a while before checking to see what muddles have ensued.

I got a call the other day from someone who was suspicious: were they really phoning the NHS or was it some kind of scam? We get these more and more – and AI doesn't help at all. Sometimes I get calls for Nehil and she gets some for me. Whichever way it goes, we have to run through our security checks and when the wires are crossed, this never works. Date of birth. Mother's maiden name. Name of first school or favourite pet. We just shrug and add a note to the file: 'security failed.'

Our training manual explains how to apologise in ten different languages – we are always super polite. The long introductory message reminds callers to treat us with respect. Abuse will not be tolerated – and it is true: if we have any bother, the foot pedal comes into use right away.

The best part of the 'crossed wires' game is when we unscramble the confusion that we have unleashed. The sound of receding panic is audible. Our callers are *so grateful* when we help them out and patiently work through what must have happened. We promise, faithfully, to escalate their case, and we pretend we have the authority to do so. We can spend ten minutes or more on this kind of calm and comforting talk. That's ten minutes less on someone who has a problem about a date.

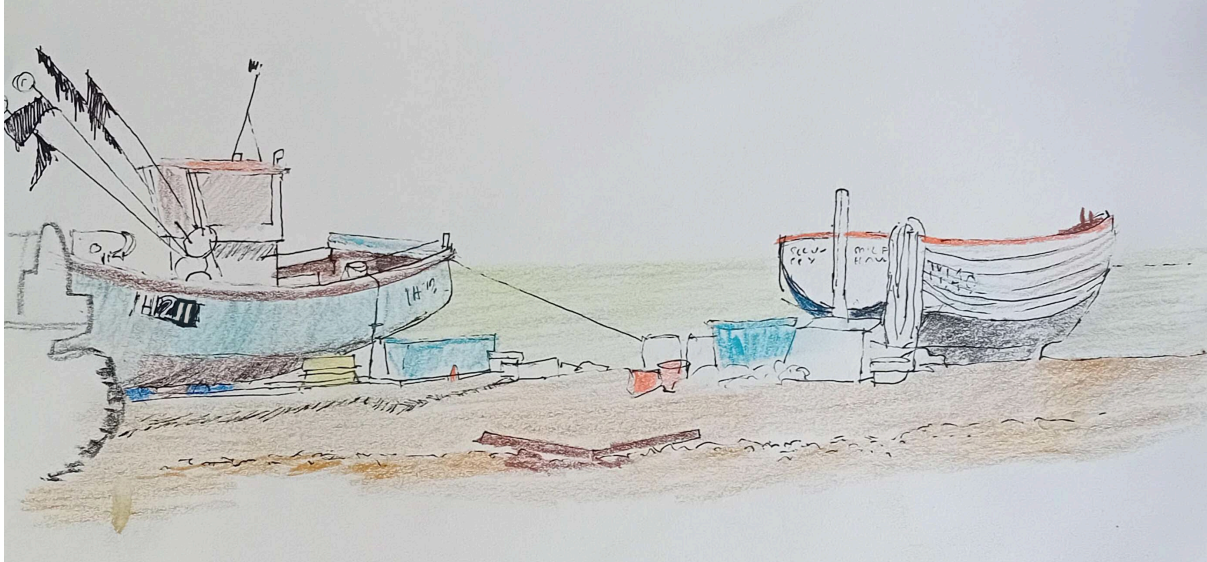
I know this is not a very nice game to play. Some people might say it is downright immoral. But think about it. Think about us and our job. How else are we going to get through the day. Come to that, how does anyone get through the day?



Blue moon

Elizabeth Shove and Caroline Shove

Fishing vessel for sale, IH211. Built in 1992. 10 metres. Name: Blue moon. One previous owner. Good service history. Nets, pots and line included. Price on application. Call Noel.



Pete and Amy's van scrunched on the loose gravel. Pete jumped out. 'You must be Noel'.

Noel looked at the sandy haired youth. 'Yep, that's me. You are early'.

Pete: 'It's an easy drive up from Basildon and we love coming here don't we Amy'.

Amy nodded in agreement.

Noel pointed to the top of the shingle bank: that's her, 'Blue Moon'. I've been fishing here all my life, and my father before me. She needs a bit of TLC but she's reliable. I had the engine overhauled maybe four years ago, and the winches are in good condition.

I'd keep going if I could. It breaks my heart to sell her, but no one in the family wants to take her on. It's hard work. No two ways about it. Up at 3am and out in all weathers, and there isn't much shelter, you're open to the elements in that boat. Then there is the paperwork. I've seen it all, regulations, quotas, limits on what can be landed at different times of year. If the rules say the catch has to be cut by 50% next week, that's it, big trawlers, and us longshore fishermen, everyone is treated the same. It's just not right. And the price of fuel. I don't want to put you off, but fishing is not what it was.

Pete grinned: 'don't worry, you can't put us off. We've done all the research and we're certain we can make a go of it. Amy's in marketing and this way of fishing is really sustainable. I've got a degree in engineering, so I'll be fine with the mechanics. And we both love the sea, don't we Amy'.

Amy nodded again.

After inspecting the boat in a biting cold wind, Pete and Amy made an offer: cash up front. As Pete reached forward to shake on the deal he noticed that Noel had two fingers missing on his right hand.

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A few months later.. Pete and Amy are settling into their new life. Thankfully, the summer weather has been kind and although the catch was not quite what they'd hoped, they've learned a lot. They know how to launch their boat and haul it back, and they know where Noel laid his crab pots. The other fishermen keep their distance, but they've had no complaints.

They've mastered the marine radio communication system, and they've become accustomed to the boat's lights dancing on the glittering sea. It is true, it is hard work, but they had no illusions about that. They are starting to understand the movements of the tides and to appreciate the underwater world on which their livelihood depends.

Pete: 'Let's go out tomorrow Amy. It's a full moon and 'fish finder' says the chances of a good catch are high'.

Amy: 'I don't believe 'fish finder' any more. Last time we followed its advice we came back with almost nothing.'

Pete: 'Ah, come on Amy, you know how the moon and the tides work together. It will be great'.

They rose before daybreak and repeated their familiar routine. They didn't see any one else getting ready, but they had their work cut out. They launched the 'Blue Moon' and the engine came to life, as it always did. A mile out, Amy checked the radio. There was nothing. No other boats at all. That was strange, what with the fish finder report and all. Where were they all? Pete shrugged and together they hauled in the first drift net of the night. It was heavy.

Fish flapped and slithered all over the floor, but there was something else. They'd caught a greenish-brownish lump about a metre long. Suddenly the lump sprang to life. Pete stepped back as the creature lunged towards him. He tried to push it away, but it went for his hand. It snapped and snapped again and then, in all the confusion, it opened what must be wings and flew off.

Pete nursed his bruised fingers. Thank goodness for those knife-proof gloves. Amy was as white as a sheet. Neither of them had ever seen such a monster before. That was it. They packed up and headed straight back to the shore. They sold their catch in less than an hour and went home in silence.

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The next day Pete and Amy didn't go out to sea. They went to the boat, as usual, but spent the time checking the gear and mending the holes in their net.

At around mid-day, Dobby, who owned the boat next to theirs, came into shore. They watched as 'The Valiant', was winched up to its usual place. Once Dobby had unloaded his cargo of crab and Dover sole he came over to see them. Curious.

Dobby. 'So you were out last night then?'

Pete. 'Yes, it was a full moon'

Dobby. 'I know. It was a blue moon. We get them every three years or thereabouts. None of us goes out on a blue moon, not since Noel ran into trouble. Did no one tell you that?'

Amy. 'What kind of trouble'

Dobby: 'Noel says he landed a sea dragon that bit his fingers off and flew away. He says it had cloven feet, and scales and rows of gleaming white teeth. I'm not superstitious, but Noel is a good man and

he swears this monster attacked him on a blue moon, not the last one, but the one before that. Poor Noel. He's not been the same since.



None of us wants to get bit by a dragon so we stay home and give that one night a miss. But you? You went out.. did anything happen?

Pete looked at Amy and Amy looked at Pete. Then Amy spoke. 'No. It was just fine. We landed a good few kilos of sea bass and came back early.'

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Fishing vessel for sale, IH211. Built in 1992. 10 metres. Name: Blue moon. Two previous owners. Good service history. Nets, pots and line included. Price on application. Call Pete.

Something lost or found

Elizabeth Shove

75 Woodside Road

I poured myself a cup of coffee. The kitchen window looked out on the narrow yard at the back Granny's house. I had known the place since I was a child but now that it was mine, I'd decided to make some improvements. I'm good with tools and if things had worked out differently, I might have been a joiner. It was raining outside and although it wasn't the most urgent job on my list, I decided to remove the hardboard that had been pinned over the back of the door. In the 1960s a simple painted surface meant less cleaning and someone, maybe Grandpa Arthur, had covered up the Victorian panelling.

I gently prised the hardboard away and as I did so, a letter, a postcard and a crumpled advert for a pizza delivery service fell out. Instead of passing through the door and dropping on to the mat below, these items must have slipped down the side of the letterbox and got lost in the void.

The card and the letter were both addressed to Granny – Mrs Alice Brown, 75 Woodside Road. The pizza delivery leaflet announced a special offer for Christmas 1987. On the front of the postcard there was a picture of a beach. I turned the card over and studied the back. The postmark was Hunstanton, 12 August 1973. The spidery writing sloped to the left.

Dear Mum, I'm having a lovely time with Freddie and Angela. It has been raining a lot. We saw a seal yesterday. Love Frank.

Wow! The card was from dad. He'd obviously been sent to the seaside with some other children. I checked the date again. He'd have been just 13. Dad was now in a care home about two miles away. I visited him every week but these days he didn't recognise anyone, not even me. He called all the nurses Susan, imagining that mum was still alive and that she was looking after him. How things change.



I put the postcard down on the table and turned to the faded yellow envelope. The postmark was smudged and there was no date on the letter inside, but this is what it said.

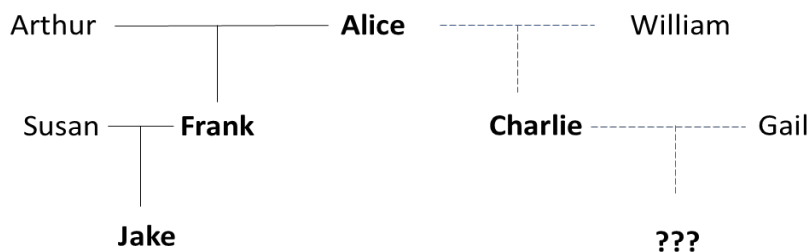
Dear Alice

I promised I would not write, but I have to tell you about Charlie. He got married last year and moved a few miles away, just outside Belfast. He and Gail - that's his wife - are expecting a child! Charlie has no idea that Jenny is not his real mother but whenever I look at him, I am reminded of you, of our time together, and of the sacrifice you made. I thought you should know - we are going to be grandparents.

Yours, as ever, William.

I was mystified. Who were these people? I read the letter again. There was no mistake about it. Granny had a secret son called Charlie. This Charlie's father was called William. That meant dad was not an only child after all, he had a half-brother in Ireland. What had happened? What was the sacrifice that Alice had made? As these questions bubbled up it dawned on me that that there was a branch of my family tree that I knew nothing about.

If I was right, the letter referred to an uncle and a cousin I'd never heard of before. I did a quick sketch.



This was a lot to take in. Granny's will had been clear. 75 Woodside Road was left to her 'surviving grandchildren' – but what if that wasn't just me? I studied the envelope again. It was impossible to read the date or to tell where the letter had been posted.

I looked around the house: my house. What if some stranger had a legitimate claim to it?

It was then that I remembered that the letter had never arrived. Granny never knew I was not her only grandchild. By now, William was almost certainly dead. If he was still alive, my new-found uncle, Charlie, probably never learned about his real mother, Alice, and in any case, he wouldn't know about her will or what it said. If I got rid of the evidence that was in front of me, no one would be the wiser. I tore up the envelope, the letter and my sketch and put the shreds in the compost.

I made space for the empty coffee cup in the dishwasher and got some pliers to remove the remaining pins that were still in the door.

That was years ago. Sometimes I wonder about that letter. What if I'd sold the house and someone else had found it? What if it had not got stuck in the first place? Come to that, if William had been true to his word, the letter wouldn't have existed. I never tried to find my long-lost cousin in Ireland, and as far as I know, he, or she, hasn't tried to find me either. Sometimes I wonder about that as well, but not for long: as Granny used to say, its best to let sleeping dogs lie.

A snake in the grass

Elizabeth Shove

'Look, over there. At the edge of the path just by that tuft of heather. Can you see it?'. Adam swung the huge camera around on its camouflaged tripod. They'd been out on the heath for four days now and this was the first sign of reptilian life.

The subject had decided to take a snooze in exactly the right location. The audio sensors were pinned to a tree close by. Adam put his headphones on and waited. He picked up the faintest sound of coils and scales adjusting in the hot sun. He trained the camera on the snake and admired the distinctive black and white markings. A large male adder in the prime of life.

It was such a nice day I went to my favourite spot. Damn. It's them. I hissed gently. Just as I was getting comfortable. I flicked my tongue again, oscillating it to test the air, yes - definitely their smell - no doubt about it. Adam and his bossy producer, Eve. They know to be quiet, but it is easy to detect them and all their fancy TV gear. Invading our privacy.

They've been around for something like four days, and no one knows what to do. Should we put on a show and get it over with? Should we carry on as normal? Or should we keep out of the way? Trevor, who lives the other side of the heath said he could pop over and we could pretend to fight over the chance to mate. We'd do our standard snake dance, and that would be that. With luck, Adam would then pack up and leave us in peace.

I took a deep breath. The air filled the long thin lungs that run down the length of my body. I drew in my ribs and grumpily slithered out of sight.

Eve came over to the camera. 'Did you get it?' She asked. 'That one is sure to be back: it looks like a favourite spot.' The next day it rained heavily, and again the day after that as well. Finally, the sun came out, the temperature rose, and Adam returned to the sandy path at the edge of the heath. Shortly after noon, there was slight movement in the grass.



I knew he'd be back. I'd had a word with Trevor and Vicky we'd agreed to play a trick. We'd tempt him for a day or two and then treat him to a fake snake dance. We'd make it look like Trevor and I were fighting over Vicky. No one would know we were just fooling around. Serve him right for disturbing our patch.

Adam's note book:

Thursday, 6am. Went back to the woods and set the camera up by the sandy path at the edge of the heather. Nothing happened. 12.18 – a large male adder appeared and made for the resting place. I let the camera roll. 14.06. A female appeared, and then disappeared.

No more action for the rest of the day.

Friday. A female came into view 15.04. Disappeared 15.07

Eve left for London. Adam knew she was anxious. She had not planned for so many days filming and unless they got some really good footage in the next day or so, they'd have nothing to show. Adam didn't share her obsession with viewing figures and budgets. True it took time, and true it was unpredictable, but for Adam that was the price you had to pay if you wanted to show the natural world as it really was.

We waited for Adam to arrive. Now that Eve has gone, he doesn't get here so early. Once he settled in, we decided it was time to make our move. Vicky came out first and pretended to doze. A few moments later I appeared and flicked my tongue over her scales. She stifled a giggle. We carried on like this for a while, pretending to be courting. We could smell Adam's sweat.

Eventually Trevor slithered into view. Vicky and I turned, guiltily, as if we'd been caught in the act. I raised my head and advanced towards the fake intruder. Trevor didn't back off. We were ready to dance. We wound ourselves around each other and embarked on what looked like a trial of strength. Vicky watched in admiration. Trev and I wrestled on, grinning as only snakes know how. That's enough, I hissed. And I slunk away leaving the two of them alone.

Adam was ecstatic. He called Eve right away. 'Yes, I got two of them fighting for the female. The shots are superb, the light was excellent, and the males did battle in a patch of open ground. They couldn't have done better if they'd tried. It was perfect. Exactly what we wanted!'

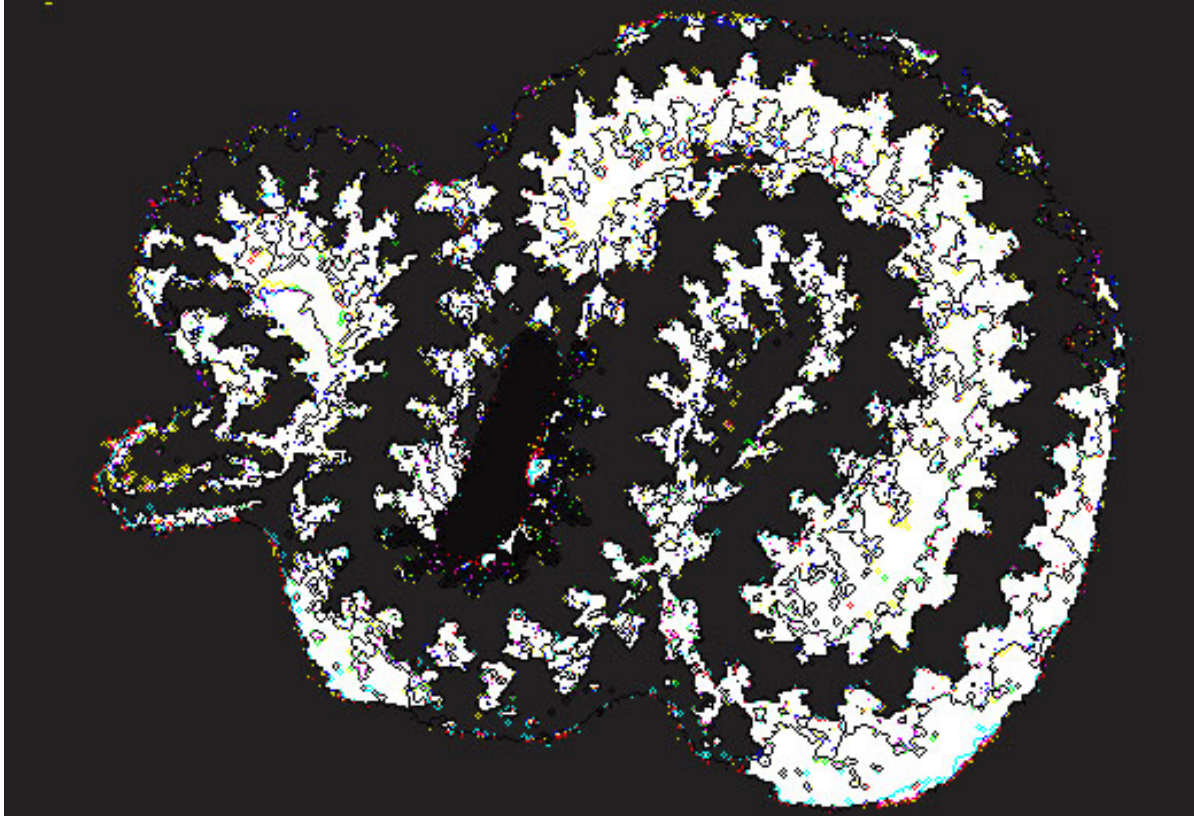
That night, in the hotel room, Adam checked the sound recording. 'Psst, Vicky, lie still, he's watching'. Then a female voice: 'I can't lie still, behave yourself, you are tickling me something rotten'. The male replied: 'Trev will be here in a moment, if you laugh your coils will tighten up. We've got to make it look natural'. A moment later the male spoke again. 'Ah, Trev, great to see you. Perfect timing.' The female had a definite lisp. 'Over to you two now and don't forget we need a good show: act as if you were on TV'. There was some background noise and then: 'Cheerio Trev. Thanks for coming over. And Vicky, that was superb. You deserve an Oscar. I'm sure they'll clear off now. Catch up with you soon.'

The video was perfectly synchronised with the audio. If the sensors had caught the snakes talking and if they were to be believed, they'd put on the whole performance for his benefit. There was nothing authentic about it at all.

What now? Should he tell Eve that they'd been duped by a trio of crafty snakes? He knew she wouldn't care. They had the images in the can, and that's all that mattered for the audience figures she craved.

Adam sat back on the uncomfortable hotel chair and gazed at the standard-issue art on the Travel Lodge wall. It was a huge, tinted photograph of an apple tree laden with fruit. That wasn't real either.

He hissed in annoyance. Nothing, but nothing, was what it seemed.



Flower power

Elizabeth Shove

The screens on the control centre console were an eerie green, glowing in the darkened room. I settled in for my shift. After about an hour, a small red warning light came on at the corner of plot 78. I checked the data for that cell. Electrical fault code 4592. 'Trickle of power leaking to earth'. Everyone else was away for the holiday week-end so I had no option, I'd have to deal with this myself.

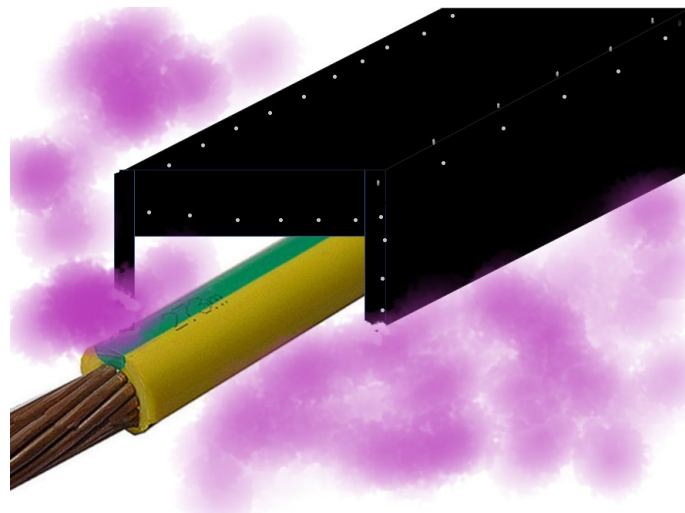
It took a while to get all the gear on, the mask and protective suit, but you can't be too careful these days. The fault code was automatically linked to the workshop and by the time I was ready to go, the new module was waiting for me at the dispatch counter.

The biodirector steered me through the fields to plot 78. It would be easy enough to disconnect an individual flower and replace it, but something about the message made me uneasy. 'Trickle of power leaking to earth'.

It was against the rules to poke about, but who would know? And in any case, I was curious. It didn't take long to find the faulty plant. It was a standard model violet, 10 pv-petals that fed power directly into the wiring net below. There was an additional tracker that turned the flower's daily motion into useful energy.

I unplugged the defective unit and studied the connections – they all looked good. I slotted the new module into place and checked the remote control: the warning light was off. Job done. But something held me back. What did it mean, 'leak to earth'?

I checked the monitors. No one was around. It didn't take much to prise the mat of powerplants out of the tray. I looked at the infrastructure below. In and amongst the galvanised metal trunking there was an extra channel, covered with a black plastic strip. I bent down and unclipped the hooks that held it in place. Inside there was a green and yellow cable. I never imagined I'd see an 'old earth wire' for real, but that's what it was. I put the cover back and carefully replaced the solar flowers.



It looked like someone from the powerless class had infiltrated the plant and was sending electricity over the border. To be sure, I'd need to trace the wire back to source and find the transmitter, but that was risky.

Back in the control room I thought about my discovery. If I was right, some of our flower power was being siphoned off by the powerless communities who lived on the other side of the fence. I sipped my coffee slowly. According to the manual, I should beam a message to the boss. She would send in the border force and the old earth wire would be ripped out straight away. But I hesitated. My ancestors came from old earth and without my great grandmother's quick thinking I'd have been one of the powerless myself. What if I still had relatives living in the dark: why should I deny them this little trickle of energy?

I double checked the monitors. There was no trace of interference. At around midnight Emeric buzzed himself in, ready for the next stint. As I was packing up, he winked at me and whispered 'Vive la resistance'. And then, still out of range of the surveillance system, 'Thanks for fixing 4592. I didn't know you were on our side.'

I stared at him in shock. Emeric! My brain cells fused. I never thought he'd be a saboteur. Come to that, I'd never thought of myself that way either. But he was right, this simple act of deception changed my life.

I joined forces with Emeric and his colleagues and the rest is history. The flower power revolution happened just a few months later. The electric fence that separated old and new earth was torn down and the antiquated class system was overthrown. Power to the people!



Behind the curtain

Elizabeth Shove

I turned over and groaned inwardly. It was 6.30 am, Monday, and still dark. I had been woken, as usual, by the sound of Mrs Brandt opening her curtains. This happens every morning, and I should be used to it by now, but it always sets me on edge. The Brandts live in the apartment below and Mrs Brandt has a routine that is as regular as clockwork. It doesn't bother my wife Sonia at all, but I can distinguish between a dozen different types of clattering. Some mornings Mrs Brandt makes an energetic crashing sound, throwing the curtains back as if she's already angry. Other times it is just a quick parting of the fabric but even then, I hear the rings rattling along the pole. The only time I get any peace is when the Brandts visit their daughter in Austria for two weeks in July.

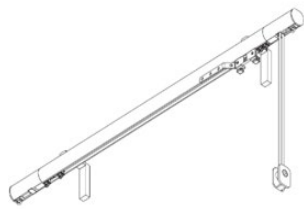
I don't need to be up for another half an hour, but once I hear the curtains go, that's it, I'm awake. On this particular morning I lay back on the pillows and thought about the week ahead. I work at an aluminium extrusion plant, just half a mile down the road. Unlike my colleagues on the factory floor, I have an office job and a fancy title: Director of Marketing, Alexander P. Weber. My role is to find new uses for aluminium section. It's not what I was trained for, but now the war is over I have a lot of freedom, and there are many new materials to work with.





I need to rewrite the company's mission statement and come up with some new slogans: aluminium can revolutionise your day, small steps make a big difference, life is good when things run smoothly, or maybe something snappier, If you can, Al Can? I mulled over the options. If there was one thing that would improve *my* life it would be to sleep a little longer in the morning. What if the Brandts could open their curtains and greet the day in silence? What if their curtains travelled quietly along a well-designed track?

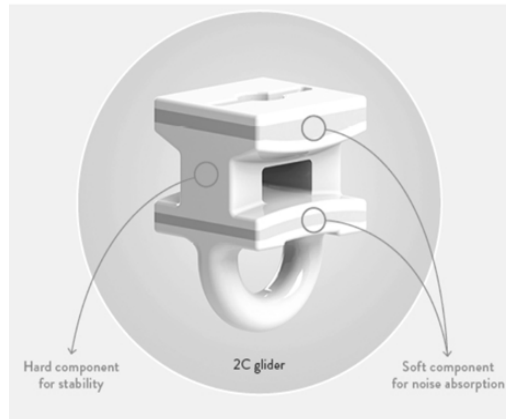
By then it really was time to get up. Sonia was in the kitchen, stirring the porridge. She looked up: 'Breakfast is almost ready' she said, 'and the coffee is on the table'. Sometimes she treats me like the child she never had. I knew, before I spoke, that she'd dismiss my idea out of hand, but I carried on anyway. 'What about silent curtains? Wouldn't that improve peoples' lives?' Sonia turned around and smiled indulgently. 'What do you mean' she said. 'I mean if we didn't hear the Brandts opening their curtains every morning, we'd get a better night's sleep'. Sonia put the bowl of steaming porridge down on the table. 'Alex, you come up with such crazy suggestions. Just forget about the Brandts'.

Sonia was right more often than I care to admit but this time I was on to something. If I could produce a silent curtain, using some combination of our aluminium track and one of these new plastics, we'd make a fortune, I was sure of it.

I parked my bicycle in the basement and went up to my office on the third floor. I shut the door so that I could work undisturbed. By mid-day I had sketched a prototype and made a few enquiries. Nylon gliders seemed to be an option. I usually keep my thoughts to myself, but this time I was so excited that I decided to show Klaus what I'd come up with.



	SG 6063 Overlap arm
	SG 6065 End stop
	SG 6106 Profile
	SG 6141 Clamping piece



Klaus is my boss. He is a shrewd businessman and he knows his way around the world. He studied the sheaf of sketches that I laid out on the table. ‘That’s clever Alex, very clever’ he said. I let him keep the drawings to take a closer look.

Well, that was the last we saw of Klaus. From what I’ve learned, it took him no time at all to patent my idea, do a deal with our managing director and come up with a name for his new company, ‘Silent Gliss’. Klaus moved back to his home town of Bern and as they say, the rest is history. Thankfully the Brandts upgraded their curtain track just a few years later, and although Sonia and I made no money from my invention, we sleep well and we sleep longer than we did before.

p.s. this is fiction!

A tricky situation

The cast:

Nigel – Michael Shove

Colin – Elizabeth Shove

Sam – Elizabeth Shove

Waiter – Elizabeth Shove

Denise – Caroline Shove

Sue – Caroline shove

Nigel, the new dean

Colin, the head of department

Sam, the young deputy head of department

Denise, the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Denise: I was thinking, we should celebrate the end of term. We could invite the dean. With all the rumours about cuts and redundancies, it could be a smart move.

Colin: I doubt Nigel can be bribed with a plate of scampi and chips.

Denise: I was thinking more like the Stables.

Colin: Oooh, posh. But we don't have an entertaining budget. It's our own money on the line.

Denise: I've got a voucher – bring four, pay for three.

Colin: OK, so the leadership team, you, me, Sam and Nigel - inclusive and exclusive at the same time! Brilliant.

Denise: We'd obviously pay for Nigel and we can cover some of Sam's bill. He's not on a high wage.

Colin: Very generous of you Denise.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Email to Sam

Hi Sam

Colin has suggested the leadership team go out for dinner next Thursday. The Dean will be coming. It's at the Stables. Don't worry about the cost, if you contribute £20 Colin and I will cover the rest of the bill. 8pm sharp.

Denise

Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Email to Denise

Dear Denise

Thank you so much for the invitation. I'd be delighted to join you, and thanks for offering to help with the bill.

Sam

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Denise: I thought you could sit here. I'll go next to Nigel. I've invited Sam for 8.00 so that gives us half an hour to impress the Dean before Sam arrives.

Colin: impress him?

Denise: show we are indispensable, no redundancies here!

Colin: er, I'm not sure...

Denise: Nigel, great to see you! Do take a seat, no, no, here. We are only waiting for Sam. He's always late.

Waiter. Would you like any drinks while you wait? Madam?

Denise: Prosecco please

Colin: Tonic water for me

Nigel: A pint of bitter

Denise: So you've been Dean for nearly a year now. How is it going?

Nigel: It's a difficult time, what with the redundancies and all.

Colin: I was just about to tell Denise...

Denise: Ah, Sam. You found the place ok?

Sam: Yes, fine. Sorry, I thought I was early.

Nigel: Good to see you again Sam and thanks for your support last week.

Denise: Oh, so you've met before?

Nigel: Oh yes, Sam was deputising for Colin at the Head of Department meeting when we decided.

Denise: Sam, is finding his feet, aren't you. Do you know Nigel, Sam is the first in his family to get any kind of higher education, that's right isn't it.

Sam: yes, born on the wrong side of the tracks.

Denise: We'll get on to the future of the faculty, but first, what interests does everyone have outside work. Colin?

Colin: I like reading – history, mostly books on the Irish famine

Denise: and you Nigel?

Nigel: well since I've moved up here, I'd say birdwatching.

Sam: birdwatching? Where do you go?

Nigel: usually to the marshes, sometimes at dawn

Sam: do you have binoculars or a telescope?

Nigel: I've got an ATX spotting scope

Sam: ok, I've got an old pair of optimax binoculars

Nigel: so you are a birdwatcher too?

Sam: yes, I used to go out with my dad.

Nigel: I saw a marsh harrier the other week

Sam: Yes, they've been nesting out there for four years now. Did you hear the bittern.

Nigel: No, I didn't even know they were there

Sam: I could take you there...

Denise: When Martin and I were on honeymoon in Mauritius we saw a dido, diving for fish.

Sam: a what?

Beep, beep, beep

Nigel: Ah, sorry, it's a call from my wife. I'll just pop out to the lobby. Won't be a moment.

Sue: Checking in at 8.45, as agreed. How is it going?

Nigel: As bad as expected but I found out that Sam is a birdwatcher too! He knows so much about the area, it's fantastic. He's offered to take me out to the marshes.

Sue: And the dreadful Denise?

Nigel: Dreadful! I checked her record before I came out. She thwarted Sam's promotion.

Ghastly. Colin and Sam know she's first for the chop, but she seems oblivious. I'll be out of here in half an hour.

Denise: All ok?

Nigel: yes, it was just Sue fussing about something or another. Oh, thanks Colin, yes, fill it up, one more for the road. Now where were we?

Denise: Colin and I thought you might tell us a bit about your strategic vision ...

Nigel: Ah, yes, the redundancies. the department heads approved the policy last week so we can move forward. It will be tough, but it has to be done.

Colin: I have a meeting with those affected tomorrow,

Denise: yes, I'll be there too, as Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

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Colin: Sorry folks, it's time I was making tracks..

Nigel: me too. Denise, thank you so much for the invitation and good luck for the future.

Denise: The future?...

Sam: I'll be out on Sunday morning, down by the river. 6.30 if you want to join me.

Nigel: It's a date. Bye all.

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Denise: What a good evening and nice to walk home afterwards. You turn off at Green Road don't you?

Sam: yes, that's right, just a bit further on.

Denise: I'm not sure what Nigel meant by the future, but sometimes these people talk in riddles. I expect you found the occasion a bit intimidating, having to sit opposite the dean? I remember my first posh dinner out: I didn't know which knife and fork to use or where to put the napkin. When I was your age a visit to the Stables would have been like a trip to the moon.

Sam: I'm impressed he owns an ATX spotting scope.

Denise: A what?

Sam: An ATX spotting scope.

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Sam: We are downwind, and the spoonbills will be coming out to feed any time now.

Nigel: that's amazing, look, look, there they are!

Sam: sssh, be quiet

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Nigel: Thank you all for coming to this exceptional meeting of the whole department. I've kept the redundancies to the absolute minimum and there is only one person moving on. I'm so sorry Denise. Thank you for all your hard work over the years.

Car boot sale find

‘Come on, get up, we need to be there early if we’re to get any bargains’.

They didn’t need any more stuff, but Kim and Bob had got into the habit of going to the car boot sale on a Sunday morning. Kim enjoyed the smell of mashed grass, and the sight of people sitting in deck chairs, surrounded by the contents of their lives. Garages, lofts, house clearance, who knows where these things come from, and who knows where they go to.

Bob and Kim parked in their favourite spot.

Most of the sellers had unpacked and were waiting for the morning rush. There was a quiet sense of anticipation. The dealers had already swept through, snapping up the few items of any value. The rest of the morning lay ahead. Kim knew a lot of the sellers by sight, and a few by name.

Half-way round, Kim called Bob over. ‘Look, an old camping gaz stove, still in its box’. The box included a manual with a picture of a happy family having a picnic at the back of a car.

Bob picked up the stove and inspected it. Bluet, from around 1970. Pierceable cartridge, which was missing. It looked a bit corroded and there was no way of knowing if it worked. The seller didn’t know either – it was in her parents’ shed, that’s all she knew.

Kim: ‘Oh well, we don’t need a camping stove anyway’.

Bob agreed, but he was intrigued.

The method was simple. You put the cylinder in the bottom and screwed the burner on top. But if you couldn’t get hold of those cylinders, the burner was useless. The cylinder was held in place at the bottom by a plastic disc. By now that was almost certainly brittle. If that went, the whole thing was dead. In any case, who would want something with such a heavy steel body: too much weight to carry, and why would you take it in the car? No one went ‘touring’ these days, not with motorways and sat navs.

Bob and Kim moved on.

Four stalls later, Bob was rummaging in a cardboard box of miscellaneous items. At the bottom was a paper covered tube: three old gaz cylinders. They were almost certainly the right size for the bluet stove. Now that was interesting. If he put these pieces together, he might be getting somewhere. ‘Kim, come over here.’

Without the burner the cartridges were of little value. Bob handed over two quid, picked up the tube of cylinders, and went back to get the stove.

To his dismay, an elderly man in a green Barbour jacket was about to put the stove in an old shopping basket. ‘Wait’ said Bob, ‘Wait there – I was going to buy that’. ‘Too late’ said the man in the green jacket. But Bob was not deterred. ‘No, hang on, I can offer you a good price’.

So that’s how the bidding war began. A small crowd gathered to watch.

Bob: ‘Ten’.

Man in the green jacket: ‘No’.

Bob: ‘Ok, fifteen then. You can’t get the cylinders these days’.

Man in the green jacket: 'No, I said no, and in any case, what's that you've got in your hand?'. Bob looked down at the cylinders. The crowd laughed. Bob could feel sweat forming at the back of his neck. He *had* to get that stove.

At thirty pounds, the man in the green jacket finally gave way: he'd only paid a fiver for the stove and to be honest his camping days were over. Bob, who was caught up in the thrill of the moment, handed over the money and got the burner he now so urgently desired.

Kim was sceptical. 'What did you do that for?' she asked as they drove home. Bob was still ecstatic. 'We've got a stove that works and for less than the cost of a new one: what's wrong with that? If I hadn't got the stove, we'd have ended up with a set of gaz cylinders that we couldn't use.'

Back in the garage, Bob fitted one of the cylinders into the base of the stove and lit it. The stove burned well, for about five minutes. Bob tried to light it again, but again there was just a tiny flame: barely enough to cook a slice of bacon. 'Damn' he said to himself 'it must be the valve'. Ruefully, he packed the stove back in its box and stowed it away. What an idiot he'd been!

Bob and Kim lived to a ripe old age, and when they died, the task of clearing out the house fell to Chris, their youngest son. When Chris finally got to the garage, he found the stove with a cylinder fitted and ready to go. He tried it, and it lit but it didn't have much power. Perhaps there was no gaz left, or perhaps the jet was blocked? Chris rummaged around for something to use to clean the jet. He knew this was a daft project. The whole thing should just go in the skip and in any case, there was so much more to do, but still he went on. Finally, he found a thin bit of wire and scratched around the tiny hole. It was hard to see what he was doing and impossible to wiggle the wire into jet. Chris gave the stove one last try before moving on, and to his amazement and delight it roared into life.

He put the old bluet aside. He'd take it home for Gail and the kids. Maybe one day they'd go on an adventure like the family in the picture.



Moving

Elizabeth Shove

I had booked LR22 for the weekend. My plan was to head towards Port Stanley and then turn off into the rough. It was a bit cold for camping, but I had good equipment, and I was looking forward to getting out of the contractors' huts for a couple of nights. I love the independence of these solo adventures and for a day or two, my time is my own. It's not that I dislike my colleagues, but I prefer my own company. We are thrown together on site, living away from home for months on end. Everyone knows their job, and I respect their expertise, but I'm not part of their world, nor am I part of the camaraderie they share.

On a whim, I decided to take a short cut. Why drive all the way round on the gravel road when I had the use of a Landrover? There was a track that would cut off the corner and save me two miles at least. I can tell you now, that was a mistake.

We'd not gone far, LR22 and I, when she lurched to the left. Not knowing the terrain I had stuck to the obvious route but in a flash all forward movement ceased. The ground level and the floor level of the Landrover virtually coincided. I got out into the ankle-deep ooze: maybe I could back her out. I climbed into the driver's seat and put her in reverse. No good. If anything, the floor just got closer to the ground.

We carry long planks of wood in case we get stuck and if I jacked her up a bit, I should be able to get the timbers under the wheels. But when I went to fetch the planks, they weren't there. I should have checked before I set off. I'd look stupid if I had to walk back to the huts for help. I could hear them now 'Do you remember when John got LR22 stuck in the mud less than half a mile from home! And no timbers with him either.' But what else could I do. With four strong men we should get her out. No problem.

When I opened the hut door, Alan was making tea and chatting to Phil. Dave and Mike were sitting in the red plastic chairs. Phil turned round. 'We thought you'd gone off for the week-end?'

'Well the thing is, the Landrover fell into a hole and I can't get her out. Any chance you could give me a hand, I just need a bit of a push. It shouldn't take long'. Alan laughed. 'What do you mean, she fell into a hole .. who was driving?' All of them liked a challenge and if it was at my expense so much the better. 'Where are you?' Alan asked. I replied: 'Just up by the perimeter fence on the track that cuts across on the north side'. 'OK, wait there'.

I waited while the four of them put on their jackets and boots. I found some timbers in the back of another Landrover parked up in the yard, and we set off. As we approached, we could see LR22 leaning at an awkward angle. There was more laughter. 'That's quite some hole' said Alan. Phil was a bit more serious. 'This isn't as easy as you said. We can try pushing, but the ground is soft. There is nothing much to bite on to. We might need another vehicle and maybe a winch.'

'Ach no', said Alan, 'we can push her out. If we all come round the front and push, and if John has her in reverse, I reckon we can do it.' Mike went round the side to take another look. The mud came up to the front axle. It didn't look good. 'I think Phil is right', said Mike. 'We can't do this on our own.'

Dave had been quiet up to now. He was probably the most thoughtful of the four. 'What if we dug a track through the soft ground on the left, then she'd have a bit more grip. You've got a shovel in

there haven't you?' I climbed into the back and went through all the stuff: 'I'm sure I've got one somewhere'. 'Never mind', said Phil, 'I'll run back to the huts'.

We stood around, waiting for Phil. After a while he returned with a shovel and with Richard and Pete, as well. They were senior engineers, just out for a week or two. 'Hi there John, we heard you'd had a spot of bother with the Landy!' Richard, who always had his camera with him, stood back to take a picture of the scene.



Phil handed Mike the shovel and he began to dig. 'Watch she doesn't roll', said Dave. Phil looked askance. 'There's no way she's going to roll with the suction on the other wheels. Like I said, we need another Landrover to tow her out'. Alan stood by with his hands in his pockets. 'We can't do that - it's Saturday and the keys are in the office. Everything will be shut until Monday. I'm sure we can push her out, especially now we've got Richard and Pete to help as well'.

'No way!' said Pete. 'Richard is wearing his best wellies He can't get them muddy.' Richard laughed. But it was a tricky situation: should they dig, should they wait for Monday, or should they all try to push?

Dave and I went round to check on the trench. Mike was sweating and swearing under his breath. The mud just kept flowing back. Dave said 'It's no good we are going to need some matting as well. I might be wrong, but I think we've got some behind the bins at the back of the metal shed. No point digging any more Mike, let's go back and see what we can find.'

It was another forty minutes before Dave and Mike came back and by that time everyone was cold. It wasn't fun anymore, but no one walked away. They were in it together. When the matting was in place behind the back wheels everyone came round to the front. The mud tugged at their boots. It had started to drizzle. Alan was now in charge. 'When I say 'go' push as hard as you can'. 'Ready', ... and he looked up at me for the signal, 'Ready, go'.

They pushed. LR22 moved, just an inch or two, but she moved. 'Yes!' yelled Alan. 'She's moving' 'Keep pushing'. The back tyres began to grip, and the timbers sank, but they held. 'Yes!'. The mud

sprayed everywhere until the front wheel found solid ground. There was a huge cheer as I reversed onto the main track.

Elated and splattered with filth, the men trudged back to the huts. I turned LR22 around and headed back to the safety of the gravel track. OK, so it was raining now, but it might clear up later. I knew I'd be the butt of their jokes, but never mind that, I was free. I set off on the open road. The weekend still lay ahead.

Broken Glasses

Elizabeth Shove

Jake Flinders, student number: 870361

Media Studies, Year 1. Oakley College, Autumn 2025.

Battleship Potemkin, Eisenstein, 1925. Having seen the clip of the Odessa steps discuss it with your friends, then write down your impressions. Did you enjoy it? If so, which parts impressed you most? If not, what was it that failed to capture your attention?

The rest of the page was blank. A 3,000 word assignment, due on October 24th no later than 4pm. The trees outside my study bedroom were decidedly autumnal. I could see people in the park below, enjoying the last of the sunshine. If I didn't have this essay to write, I'd be out there too.

I know my parents are worried. 'Media Studies at Oakley college, where's that going to get him?' A few weeks into the course I'm wondering if they are right. Why am I supposed to study a film that was made a hundred years ago about a massacre of civilians by Tsarist troops in 1905? Who cares? Who knows what the rebels wanted or why they were being shot? In any case, Odessa is in Ukraine.

The tutor was enthusiastic: 'Watch the famous Odessa Steps sequence and you will see what editing is about!' Time stands still. Movements are unstoppable. Images of innocence and violence follow in quick succession. The robotic soldiers cut through the crowd. The face of the woman wearing the pince-nez shines with courage as she tries to stop the troops. A moment later she is aghast, her hair is dishevelled. Her jaw is bloodied. The Cossack's arm is raised. Did he hit her or was she shot? Blood spurts from her right eye. Her shattered glasses hang awry. The soldiers march on.



Grudgingly, I clicked the link to see the clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMWMq4AEyJU>

To my amazement I was captivated. The advance, the diagonals, the cuts and the shots, a few frames at most. The baby carriage teetering on the steps, the ruthless advance. The terror. I couldn't believe six minutes of silent black and white film could have such effect.

I turned back to the assignment. I don't have any friends, so I'd have to skip that bit. Did I enjoy the clip? What kind of question was that? How could anyone enjoy watching a massacre? Come to that, how could anyone be bored? It wasn't one moment or another that impressed me: it was the effect of the whole that took me by surprise.

If that's what 'montage' meant, there was no point in thinking about the impact of individual parts. Without the cutting to and fro, we'd have no sense of shattered illusions. We'd see broken glasses, but not the essence of brutality. Now I had my theme. I'd challenge the premise of the essay topic based on my new-found understanding of Eisenstein's method. I hesitated for a moment: perhaps I should take a more predictable approach. But no, I decided to stick to my guns: I wasn't being wilfully awkward - I had a point to make.

A few weeks later our work was returned. The response was not what I expected. B- 'An interesting approach and a good attempt, but you don't address the set question. The task was to explain which *parts* of the clip impressed you most.'

My parents were right. Oakley College was not a great place to start, but the raw injustice of the tutor's comments and the experience of watching the Odessa Steps spurred me on. It *was the effect of the whole* that counted.

I retired last year. Over the course of my long career, I won prizes for my editing technique, and I worked with some of the most famous film directors of our time. Enthusiastic followers claim that I led the way in modern cinematic montage. Others are sceptical, detecting Eisenstein's influence in all my work. To be honest, these critics have a point. It is true, I have had some success but at the end of the day, nothing, but nothing, matches the power of that flickering black-and-white sequence from 1925.