

Platform

On Platform One a businessman's toupée was caught by the wind and blown smack-bang into another commuter's face.

I was opposite on Platform Two when this happened taking a photo of my friend leaving me forever. I did not notice the toupée incident until a month later when I had ordered the photo of my friend to be developed and blown-up into a poster for my wall. You can do that nowadays. In the poster, the ticket stub for the train journey pasted up next to it on my wall, my friend's face is about two inches tall. That is around the same size as a satsuma if you step back about a foot away from the poster and hold up a satsuma. A lime is too small for this exercise.

In magnifying the picture, not only was the figure of my friend leaving me forever made a great deal bigger but the

people beyond were similarly scaled-up.

I was in the process of trying to forget you when I noticed the men and women on Platform One in the background. Seven out of the nine cars that had passed my house that day were red (your favourite colour) and the other two were blue (the colour of your eyes). Earlier in the week I was eating a bowlful of Alphabet Soup and I swear the letters I dragged out that made anagrams of your name tasted sweeter. The woodpigeons were cooing your name outside my window every morning and the fabric conditioner that you use had leaked somehow into the daisies and the dandelions and the crocuses (you are not here any more to remind me that the plural should be *croci*, because you have gone, forever) so the air was heavy and milky with the smell of your laundry. Your laundry was also in the buddleias and pushed about by bumblebees into begonias in the park, clogging up the pansies in the hanging baskets. It was in the daffodils on my garden path, the marigolds on my garden path. My garden path's dead leaves were full of it and so was the snow in the winter. Then it was in the daffodils all over again.

It took a year of standing in front of this poster with satsumas in my hands and your fabric conditioner in the buddleias before I realised the drama that was unfolding behind you in the poster.

I don't remember the day you left forever being particularly windy but according to any toupée-based Beaufort scale it must have been rattling about at quite a bluster. In my photo the toupée has been caught suspended halfway between the two men like a ridiculous Frisbee of hair, or one of those gliding squirrels – a morbidly obese one that is flat with no hands or feet. I have since looked up these flying squirrels: Latin name *Glaucomys volans*, a fact that sends my mind in all sorts of directions. *Glaucomys*, glaucoma, mud in your eye or the wool falling from your eyes, scales lifting from them.

But – the toupée.

I must say I am glad I do not have to worry about wearing one of those. I tried to imagine where the businessman might keep it at home when it was not in use. I think I would make a celebration of it, prop it upon a velvet cushion with tassels or have it balanced on some kind of gilt dais that would rise every morning by my bedside before I began my toilette.

Does he have one toupée for mornings, one for evenings? One for weddings, one for funerals? A Sunday best toupée?

In the poster on my bedroom wall there are some pigeons on Platform One that have puffed themselves up in spring-eagerness to mate. They are eyeing the toupée with a mixture of horror and lust.

Why would this commuter, clearly unwilling to embrace

his baldness, choose a toupée and not a comb-over? Presumably a comb-over requires a long cat-flap of hair if one is to smear it over-and-across your scalp. *Smear* is judgemental language. I should check myself. I wondered whether there was some brand of specific glue for toupées or whether an individual's hairpiece simply required a snug, moulded fit? He must have gone, then, to a fitting. I feel the sides of my own head, cupping my skull's brow and crown and arch and I am not sure whether mine would be a Small, Medium, Large, EXTRA LARGE. Or would it be measured as an A, a B, C, D, Double D, a Gamma Minus? What are the units of head size: cubic inches? Millilitres?

And would one put the fastening glue on the lining of the toupée (do they have linings?) or is it a Velcro system, or sticky-back plastic? It occurred to me that should I ever be strung up upside down by my toes (like the Hanged Man tarot card, or Mussolini) not only might the spare change fall from my pockets but my toupée might fall off. A whole new world of neuroses right there.

I stood back from the poster.

I reasoned that this commuter resented his full and luxuriant beard and dreamt of the day the follicles there would flee his chin, uproot and migrate upward through his flesh and across his scalp.

What was that monkish bit at the back of your head called? Your paate. Pate looks like pâté when written down. That could result in all kinds of bother, I thought to myself, all sorts of hi-jinks and misunderstandings: 'I need a toupée for my prematurely balding pâté.'

I stood back from the poster of you on Platform Two and wondered what else there was being covered up, up and away that I could not make out from my photograph. False hair, false teeth, false eyes in their heads, false legs in their shoes, false train-times on the walls, false words in their mouths. Tattoos doodling fake signs on to skin (does tattooed skin make coloured dust? Could the commuter have tattooed a full head of hair on to his pate and got around the problem that way?). I put down the satsuma and came closer to the poster so that my breath bounced back at me, heavy and grey on against its surface gloss. I ran a finger over the Starbucks-laden women pushing their prams, their mother-and-child faces plugging identical sippy cups. I tried to remember the sounds of that station a year ago. Men and women talking on mobile phones and the mad Voice of God transport-tannoy hallooing from on high with its platform alterations.

The toupéed commuter was mortified. That much was clear from his expression. I could see his face turning

red—the print-resolution of the poster and its attendant pixellation made his face a rhubarb-and-custard swirl of embarrassment.

That bright day on the station in spring I was thinking about you leaving and also of gravity, eyeing my shoelaces' angle to the yellow MIND THE GAP lines and looking at the dull rails and the bright rails on the tracks. I was close to rocking upward on the balls of my feet and pitching forwards. Instead, I took that picture as a bald man blustered a bit on a station. A train pulled in, you hopped aboard, and I went home to a house where the pigeons have only now a year later stopped shouting your name.