

## THE DARK SIDE OF SUNSHINE

Would you dumb down to fit in?

Simon escapes the ridiculous Riverside University of London by exchanging with its American partner – the University of Sunshine Bayside, only to wake up to the wokest of woke colleges. Virtues are punished as vices, conformity trumps originality, and minds are melded – one falsehood at a time. Being good at his job is his first mistake. In election year, politicians, terrorists, spies, publicists, journalists, and bluffers compete to make an example of him in their fight for a new global society.

The professor is about to be taken to school...

BRUCE OLIVER NEWSOME teaches at the University of San Diego. He has held standing faculty positions at the University of Pennsylvania, University of California Berkeley, and the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Bruce earned a doctoral degree in International and Strategic Studies, a masters degree in Political Science, and a bachelors with honors in War Studies. He is the author of more than a dozen books in history and social science. He advocates for science and free speech on YouTube and Twitter as the “Risky Scientists.” Bruce is a proud citizen of both Britain and America, and is fluent in both languages. As an academic, he often considered registering his sense of humor as a disability. He thought the same of his objectivity. As a male, his preferred pronoun is “he.”



# *The Dark Side of Sunshine*

**a social and political satire**

**by**

**Bruce Oliver Newsome**

PERSEUBLISHING

The Dark Side of Sunshine  
A social and political satire

by Bruce Oliver Newsome, Ph.D.  
[www.BruceNewsome.com](http://www.BruceNewsome.com)

Find bonus chapters, photographs, and videos at:  
[www.patreon.com/bruceolivernewsome](http://www.patreon.com/bruceolivernewsome)

Published by: Perseublishing, PO Box 181802, Coronado,  
California 92178, United States of America

Copyright © 2020 Bruce Oliver Newsome, Ph.D.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

FIC052000     FICTION / Satire  
FIC016000     FICTION / Humorous / General  
FUP             FICTION / Satirical fiction and parodies

1st hardback edition

ISBN: 978-1-951171-12-4

Cover image by Petr Kratochvil (<https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=8636&picture=statue-on-college>)

## Chapters

1. Riverside	7	36. Thanksgiving	277
2. Riverside's Director	15	37. Last class	289
3. London home	21	38. RRR	295
4. Jimmy Pons	27	39. Exam week	301
5. Jimmy's swagger	31	40. Deluge	307
6. The Cottage	37	41. Cruise	317
7. Joe Karolides	43	42. Regime change	323
8. Reception	47	43. Investiture	333
9. Asian Relations	57		
10. Smart Sisters	65		
11. Guest lecturer	73		
12. Gatsby	79		
13. USOP	87		
14. The Hidden Chef	95		
15. Berk	105		
16. Creative Grading	111		
17. Art Deco talk	117		
18. Extremism	125		
19. FBI CT	133		
20. Optimists Club	141		
21. ICE	149		
22. Anti-fed hero	157		
23. Publicity	163		
24. Yannis	171		
25. FBI CI	183		
26. Marcus and Arjun	189		
27. Halloween	197		
28. Protests	209		
29. CVE	215		
30. History Society	225		
31. Election	235		
32. The Chase	243		
33. Emergency	253		
34. Scapegoat	259		
35. Fact and Fiction	269		



## 1. Riverside

“Sinner! What murder and mayhem are you conspiring? You war-monger!”

Simon braced for the slap on the back, but could not arrest the hot flush that lifted the hair on his head. He turned into Ricky Docker’s face – a web of purple capillaries straining against the skin, close and above, large and saggy. Simon smoothed his hair, continued the motion, pointed unconvincingly at the window, and inhaled, but his eyes stuck on the foggy, rainy view.

“And, furthermore, I don’t know what sort of impression you’re trying to make, pondering the outside. Everybody can see you! And closing your office door. Nobody can see you! A new lecturer in international relations should be less interested in the world, more interested in his department. As for your interests – conflict! You’re so conflictual! Frankly, I think your only hope is to defect to my domain. Everybody knows I’m a good person, because I do human rights.”

Simon wondered why he never sensed Ricky’s approach, but his mind was busy, and when his mind was busy he resented outer stimuli and inner feelings. He refocused through the window on the countless little impacts upon the river. The rest of London was washed without color or perspective. Simon struggled to re-imagine the warm breeze from sun-kissed slopes, when a wave of humidity hit him from the radiator. Injury lingered on his back, while Ricky continued in a self-satisfied mix of joviality and menace.

“Where were you yesterday?”

“I was researching.”

“Impossible – I didn’t see you.”

“I was in the archives.”

“How pretentious! As if that talk about rigor and objectivity isn’t suspicious enough! And, furthermore, the archives are free! What about your research grant? How is the department

supposed to pay its overhead if you lecturers don't submit their research grants?"

Simon deliberated earnestly, but Professor Docker advanced again.

"You missed the meeting about countering extremism on campus."

"I didn't know!"

"Well, we told the government you were there, because we put you in the proposal – because you're conflictual."

"Oh, thank you."

"And, furthermore, try spending less time with our other junior colleague. She's a girl – she told me. Try to be less heterocentric. We can reach only one conclusion. Of course, I'm only saying all this for your own good, because I'm a good person."

Ricky drew breath and extracted a hip flask from the pocket of his greasy, hairy jacket. "Come on – it's time for elevenses. You can justify yourself there."

The Riverside University of London, in a surprisingly old-fashioned way, had a Senior Common Room – what the Americans would call a "faculty lounge," Simon excitedly reminded himself, although he could not remember how he knew that.

One table was besieged by impatient elders. Their youngsters hurried to arrange a dented stainless-steel urn of tea, a vacuum flask of milk, a dirty basket carrying packets of sugar, a rusty platter of biscuits, and a stack of crazed white plates.

Ricky Docker strode into the throng as if it had gathered in his honor. He was one of those misshapen, variegated old bluffers that every university department seems to have. He saw himself as the life of the party but expected to be treated as a serious academic. He ranked as full professor, and attended every day, but never seemed to teach. On the outside of his office, he posted a long resumé of his career, which included twenty years as chair of the Senior Common Room, chair of an "international



conference” in Paris two decades ago, visiting lectureships at unfamiliar foreign universities, and editorship of “a highly regarded” series of publications, but he himself authored no books. His resumé concluded: “He has an international reputation as a scholar and has been an inspiration to students for over 30 years.” Alongside this yellowing piece of paper, he posted lewd cartoons from obscure satirical magazines.

Simon habitually walked to the opposite wall, to the “pigeonholes” (in the old-fashioned parlance that still prevailed). Pigeonholes were assigned in alphabetical order, so each pigeonhole shifted whenever teaching staff changed, once a month or so. Simon went searching for the letters “S.I.N.R.,” which were pressed into a piece of sticky-backed plastic by a hand-held machine that was still going strong, like the lady who wielded it, since the 1980s.

Sleepy, self-assured eyes passed in front of Simon, then stopped, expressionless, but uncomfortably close. Simon knew to speak first.

“Good morning, Joan.”

“Hello Simon.”

She paused long enough for him to feel compelled to speak again. “I thought we had a date in the archives...”

“You have a letter.”

“Oh.”

Her silence provoked him further.

“Thank you, Joan.”

“No worries, Simon.”

“Are you well?”

“I am brilliant.”

“How was the conference on feminist international relations theory?”

“There’s nothing more empowering than a room full of people who agree with you.”

“I’m jealous.”

“You should consider changing your focus. It’s entirely inclusive. Of course, a man can never be a feminist because he’s never experienced sexism, but you know what I mean because you and I are young, and everybody else here is so old they’re bigots.”

Joan ambled to the tea urn, smiled generally, and was invited to go first.

Simon held in two hands an envelope that was unmistakably foreign in design. The letter’s unfamiliar typesetting occupied his mind longer than the realization of the paragraph that mattered.

“I say! I’ve been accepted!”

Nobody paid any attention.

“I’m going to America.”

The silence was deafening.

Professor Sir Barry Liddell pushed out of the scrum, stirring a cup of tea slowly, his elbows stuck out like sharp handles on the sides of a lumpy teapot. “I do America,” he said quietly.

Dorian Floorman straightened in his chair indignantly, then addressed the ceiling: “Well, as everyone knows, I wrote the leading book on the special relationship. That should give you everything you need to know.” He waited a few seconds without response, then sought Simon’s gaze: “It’s in the bookstore: ‘The Anglo-American Relationship Through the Next Millennium.’”

“As a Scot, I find that offensive,” came a shrill voice from the outlying chairs.

“As a Celt, I agree,” said another.

Dorian Floorman rose higher: “I’ve said many times that the second edition will be called ‘The British-American Relationship!’”

“It should be called ‘European-American Relationship,’” said a voice behind Simon. “You nationalist dinosaur.”

Ricky Docker paused in front of Dorian Floorman’s chair, stirring his tea with the mouth of his flask: “F.Y.I: change the title, pretend it’s a new book.” He tapped the side of his nose,

and nodded curtly.

Professor Sir Barry Liddell had not moved: “You can’t go to America. Your job is to teach.”

Simon held up the letter: “It’s a teaching exchange. I was invited to apply.”

“No, you weren’t.”

“Everybody was invited – the email...”

“That was not for lecturers. It was for professors.”

“It was sent to everybody,” Simon insisted, with childish despair.

Ricky Docker looked startled: “Of course, I was far too busy with invitations from outside the colonies.”

A faltering voice emerged from the chairs facing the window: “It’s quite right that a lecturer of international relations should dabble in some international relationship himself – err, or herself, as the case may be...”

“Them-self,” added someone, helpfully.

“Indeed, err, themselves, by teaching internationally, even if it is America.”

A shrill voice interrupted. “Why would anyone want to go to America? It has no culture.”

“Oh, you don’t want to go to America! They don’t have any public healthcare! I had the most awful experience in New York last year.”

Simon turned with genuine interest: “Why? What happened?”

“The doctor saw me the very same day! I wasn’t ready for that!”

“I see.”

Professor Sir Barry Liddell pondered his next move. He liked to drink his tea facing the entrance, from what he called “a strategic position.” Sir Barry loved the semantic frame “strategy.” He would exclaim the term, while his usually lethargic body spasmed from his right shoulder, as if he were swinging a scythe: “Napoleon knew that he would need to defeat Britain or lose the war. That, ladies and gentlemen, was his

STRATEGY!...Hitler knew that he would need to defeat Britain or lose the war. To win the war – that was Churchill’s STRATEGY!... Tony Blair won his first wars because he took my advice on STRATEGY!...Tony Blair lost his other wars against my advice on STRATEGY!”

Once, Simon happened to be visiting the library when it was the backdrop to a televised interview, marking the anniversary of the end of some war or other: Simon could never decipher which, because, for fifteen minutes, Barry Liddell mumbled in his usual way, looking downwards, frowning, sometimes reaching for a book so that he could read out what he had written better. The only statement that was broadcast was his animated conclusion: “That is the essence of STRATEGY!” The journalist made up the rest, with the preface: “The eminent Professor Sir Barry Liddell believes that...”

Now, Sir Barry was looking downwards as he stirred his tea, frowning, his untrimmed eyebrows sticking upwards and outwards, the big ears glowing in front of the strip lights, a few wisps of hair reaching for each other atop his head. That pose had seemed inspiring and prototypical at the annual conference on “Lessons from Past Grand Strategies for Future Change,” but the same pose lost its mystique among the disinterested members of the Senior Common Room.

Suddenly, Sir Barry looked up with triumph. “As the head of Department, I need to approve everything.”

“It was sent from the Director’s office.”

“You shouldn’t take any notice of him.”

“His email said the university would fund a temporary replacement.”

Docker could not contain himself. “Oh! Nobody can argue with that.”

Sir Barry waited for Docker to complete his rushed departure, then sat down facing the scrum: “You shouldn’t go. You’ll regret it.” He stirred his tea and looked at the door again. “If you are

STRATEGIC, you could come and go as you please, like Ricky Dicker, once you're promoted to professor, of course, say, 30 years from now. In 15 years, you might make Senior Lecturer, like Dorian Floorman. That is the essence of STRATEGY."

Dorian Floorman sat up energetically again: "You'll find America very difficult. Very few people understand America. But if you understand the special relationship..." Floorman stopped speaking, nodding to himself, waiting for a response that never came. "Of course, if their department is run by a Roosevelt, you'll need to be a Churchill, but if it's run by a Bush, you'll need to be a Blair." He nodded at the ceiling, and bit on a biscuit.

"Of course," said Sir Barry acidly, "I told Tony that myself, before your book was published."

Dorian Floorman was suddenly unrestrained. "What young Simon needs is a department of liberal institutionalists who naturally co-operate across borders."

"He needs rational liberal institutionalists, who know that the British know better. At least, the Americans know me that way."

"Let's assume that the department is full of institutionalists..."

"Let's assume that the department is rational..."

"You cannot reduce institutions to unitary actors!"

"It's an assumption."

"A bad assumption!"

"Let's imagine you're on a desert island..."

"Oh, not this again!"

"I'll assume that you would model everybody on the island – their motivations, skills, and assets."

"Of course."

"Why? Just assume that everybody rationally works as one. And assume they have a boat."

Floorman and Liddell reprised their argument, while the shrill voices took their opportunity.

"You can't teach Americans – they're dogmatic!"

“They steal our best academics.”

“They take our failed academics.”

“They steal our foreign academics.”

“That’s imperialism!”

“Exactly! Americans are racist.”

“And they’re foreign.”

“You don’t want to teach racists!”

“You can’t join the Great Satan!”

Simon exclaimed in desperation: “It’s Sunshine University!”

The shrill voices restarted in a lower octave: “Ooh! That’s a wonderful university!”

“I made my first pilgrimage in 1967.”

“Did you know, the city is a nuclear-free zone?”

“That’s why it gave birth to free speech!”

“The first free speech by foreigners, anyway.”

Joan passed close in front of Simon, gazing languidly into his eyes: “Don’t worry Simon. It can’t be as foreign as a British university.”

## 2. Riverside's Director

Neil Daly prided himself as a sociable academic, the face of the university, someone who could mix easily in the private and the public sectors, a welcoming face between awkward academics and bullish donors. Every morning, as he was driven past “The Dear Leader of the Holy Socialist People’s Republic School of Business,” he would look up at the words carved in stone above the grand entrance and say to himself, “That’s as good as my name up there.”

That was a reminder to call Sharon to expect him in five minutes. The best part of his day started once the car turned between the School for Human and Social Agendas (formerly known as Humanities and Social Sciences) and the Centralized Collaboration Cottage (formerly known as the Director’s Tower). He liked to hear the car door open, while he was gathering his coat and newspaper. He liked to slide sideways between the car and the loading dock. He liked to race the security guard to the service lift. He liked to hear the frantic jingle of the keys that unlocked the button to the top floor. He liked to take the time to thank the guard with proletarian familiarity, before hurrying off along the quiet, dim corridor to the bright, open doorway.

“Good morning, Director Daly,” said Sharon, with the pressed lips that experienced visitors realized as a smile. She exchanged a cup and saucer for his coat and newspaper.

“Thank you, Sharon. What would I do without the world’s best co-executive assistant for egalitarian excellence?”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly,” said Sharon, keeping her lips pressed together. She hung his coat, placed the rolled-up newspaper in the bin, then opened the door connecting their offices.

Behind her, he sipped his tea, raised the biscuit from the saucer, and gazed out of the window above her desk. He sighed. “You know, Sharon, if only everybody spent every morning reading

that newspaper from front to back, the world would be a harmonious place.”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly,” said Sharon, looking into the corridor, watching a wispy ball of hair and dust drift ever closer to the threshold, sometimes falling back, but coming more than going, like a nervous rat, until it rolled behind the filing cabinet with newfound confidence.

Neil Daly sighed again. “It takes regular engagement with the news of the world, in entirety, every day, to remind us to check our privileges and keep ourselves humble!” He took a deep breath, nodded, smiled, and bit gently on his lower lip. He placed the cup on her desk, put the last piece of biscuit in his mouth, brushed the crumbs off his lapel, and walked into his office.

She closed the door behind her, then stood looking out of the window above his desk. As he struggled with his seat, he returned to his theme. “Not just any newspaper, of course, but a newspaper with a conscience, with a mission. There’s no enlightenment in objective reporting.”

He took hold of the computer’s monitor with both hands and shuffled his chair closer. “A newspaper that reports not just the news, but the arts too. That rubbish from an upturned bin that won the Churner Prize last year taught me more about the tragedy of modern urban life than any scientific study.”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly.”

“It’s not just the visual and performing arts. I read the book reviews first, so I know what to think before I read the book.” He stuck his head out like a tortoise and stabbed at the keyboard. “People just don’t realize how early my day starts, long before I get to their emails. Why, I’m already reading the newspaper when the car comes for me at eight-thirty! At the coffee shop, I finish every page, as long as it takes – not just the business pages, mind you, but the sports pages too, so I can hold a conversation with the most uneducated member of staff. I don’t turn on my phone until I’m in the car. Then I take my elevenses early just to be sure



to get to their damned emails by ten-thirty.” He squinted at the clock on the wall behind him. “What does that say?”

“Ten-thirty-eight.”

“There you go! I’ve been at it for more than two hours already.” He looked up at her attentively. “Perhaps you could make that known, Sharon.”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly.”

He continued to look at her: “The whole story of self-less dedication, from eight-thirty, mind you.”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly.”

He turned back to the computer, deleting emails with noisy slaps and taps that prompted Sharon to take up her notepad and write: “Order computer peripherals.”

“Good girl! Write it down – the whole story, mind you! Don’t forget to note the time I spend on email – before the lunch meetings. Then I spend all my lunchtime talking up this university – sometimes late into the evening. I don’t get a lunch break like everybody else. I bet they don’t realize that,” he said, stabbing the keyboard with particular emphasis on the final word.

Sharon wrote down: “Finance director: shift hospitality budget into marketing.”

“Don’t forget to remind everybody that the deal in the desert took me three days of hard negotiating, not counting two days on the Dear Leader’s yacht just to get there, and another two days back, a day in Corfu each way, and a tourist flight with no first-class seats. And I had to spend all day on the following Monday just deleting emails.”

Sharon drew an arrow from “finance director” to the next line: “Shift Corfu from travel to outreach.”

He looked up again. “I wasn’t aware that his son was going to be admitted. You can remind everybody of that too.”

Sharon wrote down: “Admissions Office: training in reputational risk.”

She clasped her notebook in front of her waist: “Director Daly,

that reminds me. The Dear Leader's Son has written to you again personally, asking for a teaching position, noting that some of the other doctoral students in his year continued into teaching positions."

If ever a tortoise could look moody, Neil Daly would give the best impression. He stopped stabbing, but said nothing.

Sharon continued: "He added that he was sure the International Criminal Court would drop charges against a teacher at such an enlightened university. But just in case, he requested that you allow him to teach by video link. He says he can't trust a former imperialist and slave-trading nation to comply with international law."

"Please remind the Dear Son that since the Dear Leader was overthrown, this university had to return the Dear Leader's Foundation for International Charity, Trade, and Teaching."

Sharon wrote: "Cut teaching positions in Liberal Studies."

Neil Daly started to stab again. "All these academics can do is send emails, wasting my time. Do they know how much money I could be bringing in to this university if I wasn't doing this?"

Sharon wrote: "Remove Director's email address from weekly newsletter." Then she spoke: "I could take over your account again."

"No, Sharon! Donors expect their correspondence to remain private and confidential."

Neil Daly stuck his neck out further and squinted. "What should I make of this? 'Dear Director Daly, Professor Sir Barry Liddell sends his regards, and requests that you confirm that the exchange teaching offer does not apply to...' Sharon, what does this acronym mean? S-I-N-R."

"It must be a name. See? The pronunciation is bracketed afterwards – 'Sinner?'"

"Oh no! That looks foreign – so foreign, it's missing vowels, and its pronunciation needs to be bracketed! That's the worst kind of foreign! We all know that code: 'Don't piss off this one,

walking lawsuit for racial discrimination.’ Well, not on my watch! I’ve got another year to go, so screw you, whoever sent this! Who sent this?”

Sharon moved closer and read out: “Richard Docker, call me Ricky, I hate Richard. We met at the all-faiths Christmas Party.’”

“Did we?”

“I can check.”

“Oh, I get it now! Barry Liddell made a nobody do it, that’s how bad this is! So Barry thinks he’s going to make me deny this opportunity to a litigious foreigner, because I wouldn’t read the email properly, I’d just reply, ‘Oh sure, Barry, whatever you say Barry. You advised the prime-minister, Barry. The prime minister asked you to write the official history of his wars, Barry. The prime minister asked you to prove the legality of his wars, Barry. The prime minister appointed you to the public inquiry into his wars, Barry.’ Well, Barry Liddell didn’t count on my eagle eyes this time, did he, Sharon?”

“That’s an idea, Director Daly.”

“Sharon, I’ve got an idea! You get hold of the Inter-University Exchange Council; and you order them to get this foreigner out to whatever damned university he wants, as quickly as possible.”

“Or ‘she,’ Director Daly.”

“You’re right! It could be a woman! What if it’s transgender? The email doesn’t even specify the gender – that means it’s transgender! Could this day get any worse?” He clutched the monitor with both hands and looked at Sharon desperately. “Give it a travel fund, excuse it from teaching for a year after return, just get it out of here, Sharon!”

“Yes, Director Daly. Forward the email to me. I’ll email Ricky to tell him that his email came to me while you were out and after the decision had been made, then I’ll call the Exchange Council to confirm the travel.”

“Oh, Sharon! You have a heart as big as mine.”



### 3. London home

Mr. and Mrs. Hart had inherited the house from one of their parents. Simon did not want to appear nosy, but suspected that Mrs. Hart had grown up in it.

Mrs. Hart liked the family to sit together for breakfast, except she would excuse herself early to clean the room around them. Then she would work her way through the hall and the kitchen to the window overlooking the garden, where she would sit with a mug of tea, pondering what she would do with the little lawn and its three borders once the weather brightened.

Mr. Hart liked to remain at the head of the dining table, looking out on the street, spreading papers all over the surface. Every few seconds, he would shift suddenly in the creaky chair, letting out a puff or a sigh, adjusting his enormous glasses from the front of his nose to the back, or vice versa, and knocking the curtain of flab under his chin with the back of his hand. Eventually, with a flurry, he would gather everything up into a battered briefcase that was once branded as “diplomatic.” In the hall, he would struggle to attain a coat and umbrella with childish ineptness, while calling out urgently, “Darling! Darling!” as if gathering his wife to escape the apocalypse. “I must go darling! I really must go, otherwise I’ll be late.” She would come quickly, but otherwise calmly. They would kiss two or three times, then he would turn away from her saying, “I am so sorry, darling, I must go, I have so much to do.” Simon understood that Mr. Hart worked in insurance, and had once been wealthy and fancy-free, but pandemics and lockdowns had wiped out his company’s reserves. Now he was managing risk for a minor hauler. Mrs. Hart would wish him a lovely day, close the door gently behind him, and return to the window by the garden.

They were older parents with just one child. Simon called her Jennifer. They called her Jenny Wren. On sunny weekends, she sat in the garden with lemon juice in her hair, but fretted

about damage. She was the most earnest teenager that Simon had ever met. Her greatest adventure to date was the daily commute to school, yet Simon saw little of her. She often took dinner at a schoolfriend's home. At home, she said little, but listened gratefully. She went to bed early. She got up later than her mother wanted, and often left the front door ajar, while she rushed to catch the same train as her friends. Mrs. Hart was always the most urgent and anxious about the journey.

Simon did not need to leave for work so early, but after a little reading and writing in his room, he would feel guilty to be denying Mrs. Hart the full pleasures of the house. Upon guilt, he would leave quickly, with little to gather – having stored most of what he needed in his office. Simon liked to time his return thirty minutes before the scheduled dinner, lest he disturb her preparations. If he needed anything from his room during the day, his dilemmas were painful. If he could not avoid it, he would telephone her on some other pretext, before warning her that he would be picking something up “in about an hour.” He always sensed that she was pleased to be told, but disappointed anyway. She was frightfully well spoken, and often seemed to be poised to lead a government ministry or a financial department, but Simon saw her only at home.

Dinner was always a pantomime, which Simon at first found entertaining, but soon wished to accelerate. Mr. Hart had suffered a heart attack some months before Simon took a room, and was under medical instructions to avoid dairy products, but he liked bread and butter with every meal. He would slice off some butter, while Mrs. Hart said, “Darling! Think of your cholesterol.” Mr. Hart would retort, “Oh, Darling! It's just a little piece. Look! Look how small it is!” He would spread it with artistic relish, and eat it with less care. “Eat some more vegetables, darling,” Mrs. Hart would counsel. Mr. Hart would comply, before lubricating them with butter, when Mrs. Hart would lean forward with anguish, and hiss, “That's really enough, darling, you don't

need that,” or some variation thereof. Mrs. Hart’s responses were quite varied, but Mr. Hart’s script was predictable, down to the theatrical delivery. Simon initially played along by laughing gently, until he realized that Mrs. Hart fixated with stifled panic, as if Mr. Hart would fall off his chair at the next mouthful. Once his fingers were empty, she would deflate in her chair, having eaten little, leaning on one buttock, with her arms folded and a strained expression. This was the most emotional he ever saw her. Simon wondered why she did not remove butter from the table before dinner, but everything seemed to have its place.

Simon often wondered whether he was the last person in London with a traditional boarding arrangement. His friends had split into groups to search for houses in the outer zones, or apartments in the inner zones. All would sign a lease, then fight over who got the master bedroom at the back of the building. The front room would normally be reserved in common, except sometimes one person slept on the couch and paid a reduced share of the rent. In converting houses into apartments, landlords might convert every room into a bedroom, except a tiny kitchen and tinier bathroom, over which half a dozen people would fight every morning. Sometimes, Simon visited friends sharing a room – men he knew on the same rugby team, men who fretted about what to do if a girl suddenly wanted to come home, men who would take sleeping bags to the common room so that a mate could be alone with his girlfriend – on expectation that the mate would return the favor. They all dreamed of meeting a girl who had inherited a home or could afford the mortgage without tenants. In the morning, these bleary men would arise from a chaos of fabrics, sports equipment, and detergents, put on expensive suits and ties, and commute to work indistinguishable from those who owned mansions.

Mr. and Mrs. Hart were the last homeowners on Crimson Street. The other houses had been converted to flats by private landlords or purchased by the council for provision to hard shirking

families. Mrs. Hart saw contractors replacing windows, heaters, roofs, or doors, whenever the safety standards or risk managers rotated. Those same contractors would give quotes that she could not afford. Sometimes Simon wondered if her regular perusals of the garden were really musings on how she could keep the house going.

Simon thanked himself that he had chosen academia over commerce. He was poorer in salary, but richer in time, so he could choose to commute, shop, and seek healthcare when his friends could not. Simon lived in London because he had grown up in the countryside watching his elders commute for longer days than farmers worked in summertime. He often said, with knowing pretension, that he thought that an academic should live within the same community as his students. It was a fashionable thing to say; he had said it when he was interviewed; and he was sure it had helped.

He was sure of it when a letter arrived from the Inter-University Exchange Council, confirming his appointment at the University of Sunshine, with a generous travel fund. He had not realized that a travel fund was available, but most university communications are obtuse.

He wanted to think ahead – realistically and openly. Yet he found himself regressing to fantasies that preceded his doctorate: ivory towers, cloisters, vows of silence, tall libraries, punting, communal dining, solving equations with chalk in hand, discovering a scrap of paper in an archive like the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle, heroically focusing all one's mental power on an unsolved theory, a good-natured debate with respected friends, the pondering of distant horizons, and realizations in the bath.

He informed his parents, but neither his achievements nor their aging had mellowed their investment in the heir over the spare. Simon's last task was to persuade Mrs. Hart to pose in the little garden. He put his arm around her far shoulder. She leaned away, clasped her hands, and smiled meekly. Jenny Wren snapped the



photograph. He promised to send a copy.

Only Jenny followed him to the door, silently, until he was outside: "I almost forgot your letters, here. Perhaps, by next year, you will be posting me an invitation to the University of Sunshine!"

On the train, he opened a good luck card of Jenny Wren's own design. Then he opened a formal warning from Sir Barry Liddell: Simon was expected to return after the autumn term to a full teaching load. Sir Barry added, in his own hand: "I know the University of Sunshine very well from my own radical youth; I have a great deal of influence there; and I am often invited back. Our world is a small one."