

The Man in the Tan Shoes

By Andrew McKenna

That first day when I woke, the walls vibrated. A heart attack. A dream. A boat. The sea. Drizzle. A man in a boat. Lying.

A rowboat on rough water. Through steam and a dehydration headache I became aware of a persistent throb. An engine.

I sat up, opened the window.

Sticks Street was dark except for pools of yellow glare under irregularly-spaced lampposts.

—a car below big maybe a four-wheel-drive black or dark blue by the streetlight a man sitting behind the wheel gazing across the road an arm draped out the window—

I saw all that at a glance, without a breath. No air, no wind, just heat, a miasma, a dripping effluvium.

My gaze followed the man's to the duplex opposite, behind the palms. His arm swung parenthetically out the door. A woman rolled out the gate.

The man revved his engine. The woman crossed the road and handed something to him. Envelope, letter, recipe, plans, who could tell? She was thin and by the streetlight her face was lined. She wore shorts and a singlet top. And wheels—she had on roller skates. Her hair was long, brown, wet. Insects buzzed by her but she seemed not to notice. The man handed



something to her. At the far end of the road a further set of headlights appeared and approached. The man and woman followed those lights with their faces as the car U-turned, pulled in a few metres behind them.

The 4 a.m. jet roared above. I looked for lights in the sky and when I returned my gaze the black car was rolling away and the woman wheeling to the driver's side of the second car. The same business. An exchange of envelopes, a word, a rev

The heat and damp swirled as I stepped out of the shade of the palms. At 7 a.m. it was a thick gruel, like Satan had left the door to Hades open. This morning he'd cooked a stew of diesel and mouldy leaves and roadkill.

of the engine.

The second car left, and the woman retreated to the shadows. I watched the street for a bit then lay down.

The bustards had started in the patch of jungle down the road.

I slapped mosquitoes until the alarm went off. Someone had left the window open.

*

My neighbour Nicky, in her 70s with puckered lips and her eyebrows plucked into an expression of permanent surprise, spoke to me.

“Did you hear the planes this morning, Bevan?” she said as I tipped coffee grounds onto the garden.

“I heard one,” I said, looking over her fence.

“Oh, there's going to be a lot more,” she said.

“Tourists?”

“Pardon?”

“More tourists?” I said.

She bit her lower lip.

“I suppose there's always more of them. No, it's this export thing.”

“Export thing?”

“Sugar, molasses. I found it quite interesting.

Surprising.”

I looked at her eyebrows. “I bet you did.”

“Pardon?”

“No, it is a surprise.”

“That's what I heard. One of those ‘-stan’ countries. Can't get enough apparently.”

“Molasses?”

“Golden syrup. Also, treacle.”

“Seriously?”

“It was on the news.”

“What do they use it for?”

“Hmm?” She was bending over a shrub and seemed to be picking something off it. Squeezing insects and dropping them onto the dirt. Green ants, caterpillars, who could tell?

“What do they use the stuff for?”

“Stuff?”

“The molasses. Treacle.”

“Some new industry. So they said.”

I told her see you later and walked to the bus. The heat and damp swirled as I stepped out of the shade of the palms. At 7 a.m. it was a thick gruel, like Satan had left the door to Hades open. This morning he'd cooked a stew of diesel and mouldy leaves and roadkill. The shirt clung to my back and I spanked midges against my arms while I waited.

The sky was clear blue, interrupted by black on the horizon where a cruise ship waited. Diaphoretic gusts rattled the cane stalks behind me.

A cane toad grinned from the road, its brains a puddle on the hot wet bitumen next to its empty eye socket, its arms reaching forward. Fat shiny green flies clustered around it.

A storm might be coming, but who could tell?

The bus appeared around the corner.

Treacle for Kurdistan.

Well.

What do you know.

*

I forgot about that for a time. A week or two, maybe three. I spent my free time wiping sweat from my upper lip and scratching midge bites. Eight or nine had developed into fine red welts.

The incidents had almost faded to a dream when one late Friday night/early Saturday morning I sat up in a state of nervous excitement after a shriek pealed long down the dark street.

I was sweating and it took me a moment to orient. I looked out. A light burned in the duplex across the way but all was quiet. The shriek came again and I realised it was the bustards. I checked my watch: 2.30.

A faint light appeared down the road coming towards me. The woman on roller skates appeared out of the black mephitic, her phone in front of her, the torch lighting her way.

She was talking to someone on speaker. I heard their tinny voice but couldn't understand what they were saying.

Then she rolled past.

"No no no no no. I'm not going to pay that, no one will. You'll have to come down . . ."

She turned into the driveway, trailed by a stream of insects. Loud voices followed shortly, some argument, then a man repeating a word that sounded like "mudlark," over and over until it turned into a song, followed by giggling.

A phone rang. The voices stopped.

A car rolled down the street and pulled up outside the property in the light of a streetlamp, honked its horn long and loud. I checked my watch again.

"Hurry up, you donkeys," a woman's voice called from the vehicle. As if it were the middle of the day.

The woman rolled out and handed the driver a package.

My watch read 2.37.

Something was stuck at the back of my throat, or my nasal passage, and I sniffed and coughed trying to dislodge it.

The air was still now but for the high whirr of crickets. Faces turned toward me from the street. I ducked and crawled to the bathroom, closing doors behind me. There I hawked like a hillbilly and brought up a cockroach. It was wet and sticky and waved its legs feebly at me.

I called that incident the Roller Skate incident. I could have called it the Cockroach incident, but

I was taught to put your attention on where it needs to be. Focus on the positive.

After the roller skate there followed the Zimmer Frame incident (four people, one on a Zimmer frame who sat and watched the street when the others went in), the Burnham Wood Doth Come to Dunsinane incident (three people in a slow procession carrying banana fronds in front of them, pausing every now and then to look up and down the drabby road, arriving for the exchange and then retreating the same way), and the Cowboys on Shetland Ponies incident (don't ask). As you might have guessed the incidents were becoming more frequent, less . . . something.

I slept less.

*

On the road into town that next morning on the bus, as every morning now, sleek silver tankers queued at the airport gates: semi-trailers, B-doubles.

Behind the high cyclone fence of the airport I'd never seen so many transport jets queued up. Arabic script on their tails; jumbos with hoses dangling from their bellies, looking like skinny penises. I couldn't resist the comparison. I didn't know there were so many planes in the world.

In the hangars and on the tarmac, on the grass at the side waiting with their engines whirring, in the air, they took off one after the other, bloated dragonflies sucking up the golden nectar of the

canefields from cylindrical silver semis.

What my neighbour saw on the news was happening before my eyes.

Mosquitoes whined. I waved them away, irritated, then slapped hard at two that landed on the bus window.

With a frightening creak the whole window came unstuck, fell out, and shattered on the road below. Hot air poured in.

The driver pulled over, lifted himself out of his seat, and marched up to me with a heavy sigh, small, rat-like eyes locked onto me. Hot wet steam blew in the hole where the window had been.

"Right you, off."

He jerked his thumb at the door.

"But—" I said.

He shook his head.

I walked out. Passengers laughed.

There was no shade on the side of the highway and I trudged to the nearest stop and checked the timetable. No more buses this morning. I would walk.

I knew what I had to do. Hack the head off the serpent. Destroy it.

It was urgent.

I would call Crimestoppers.

As soon as I got home tonight.

*

I called that night after dinner. Cicadas or crickets did their noisy thing and black billows of cloud

The cruise ship was still out there. I wondered what they were saying, doing, what they could see. Had they seen the Shetland ponies?

twisted and rolled out at sea, blurring the lines between water and sky. I could just see clouds over the palms opposite.

I had to look. In fact, I eagerly awaited my return home at the end of the day, to throw off my shoes and tie and squint out the window. My day job was not onerous. I did nothing that I could talk about here.

The cruise ship was still out there. I wondered what they were saying, doing, what they could see. Had they seen the Shetland ponies?

It was my eighteenth call and this time they put me through to Natalie. I had spoken with her once before and found her nice.

“Hello, do you have a crime to report?”

I quoted the number from my previous calls.

“Just bear with me while I pull up the file.”

There came a long pause then I heard her talking to someone else. I scratched absently at the sticky jackfruit residue on my fingers and lips.

“Hello again,” she sounded cheery. “Is it Bevan?”

“Yes.”

Bevan Coplethewaigh was the name I chose for Crimestoppers. They’d no idea who I really was. It was foolproof. The spelling would totally confound them. Coplethwaite was my real name. You see the difference in spelling? No one

would ever suspect.

“Do you have a crime to report?”

“Yes, I do.”

“What is that, Mr Coplethwaight?”

I felt some residue of jackfruit on my upper lip and licked it. It must have been fresher than I thought because my tongue stuck. It wouldn’t budge, even when I prised two fingers up there and flicked them around, wobbled the tongue. It had been a nice fresh fruit and I ate the whole thing.

“Hang od,” I said, “I’ll yust hoot oo od heaker hone.”

I put the phone down and pressed speaker, but my tongue was still stuck. I couldn’t budge it.

“Mr Coplethewaigh? Sir? Are you there?”

“Iyes,” I said. “Ay wus od walrus kaze yask nighn. Deegig a dug’s.”

“Sir? Are you all right?”

“Air aah ge kolice? I’d cawed zebenteeg times now.”

She hung up.

*

One ought not live under oppression, I told myself. I would fight this.

After breakfast I was tipping coffee onto the

garden and Nicky called out.

“What’s happening in the Copplethwaite Kingdom today?”

“Shhh,” I said.

“Pardon?”

“Don’t use my name.”

“Oh, sorry Bevan. Why?”

“I use a different spelling for the police.”

“What?”

“Never mind. I have to go. I don’t know where I’m going but I have a bus to catch. I do this every day. I’ve no idea. I don’t work. Someone’s controlling me. I know who. They’re making me do absurd things. I catch the bus and then I come back. It’s like a hiatus hernia, nothing happens and it’s bulging and it hurts.”

“Oh,” she said. “Well, have a good day.”

*

Bevan opened the back gate, closed it behind him and walked towards his stop. He kicked a stone down the road.

“That was out of line, Bevan,” I said.

He stopped and looked up.

“That’s good, coming from you.”

“What?”

“Yeah. Good. From you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You! Huh. You’re a hypocrite. You. Bullshitter number one.”

“You’re making things up now,” I said.

“Don’t make me laugh,” Bevan said. “Oh

please don’t make me laugh! I could laugh till I shit. Making things up? How about the guy hanging his arm parenthetically out the car door. Really? And the cowboys on Shetland ponies? You said—you said, don’t ask, or something. That’s because you made that up, but you didn’t have a backstory. There were no guys on Shetland ponies. You’re a fantasist.”

“No I’m not. There was a logical—”

“And the jackfruit? What the hell? Do you want the police to arrest the dealers across the road or not? And you said I called Crimestoppers eighteen times or something. I never did that. You just made it up. And don’t start me on the Copplethwaite/Copplethwaight business. You really think I’m that stupid? You’re nothing but a frigging sadist and a liar.”

“It’s called fiction, Bevan, and you’re way out of line.”

“What about the relentless mosquitoes, and the welts? Do I have to have them?”

“It’s what you get in the tropics.”

“You could have put me in Hobart. Anchorage.”

“You don’t have a say in it.”

“I do! I’m your main character! You need me.”

A bus lurched around the corner, travelling at speed. The driver, recently released from prison, was necking vodka from a bottle in a brown paper bag.

He saw a man standing in the middle of the road staring at the clouds, seemingly talking to the

sky. He slammed his foot to the floor.

The bus roared forward and smashed into Copplethwaite. As Bevan went under the wheels, the driver swerved and slammed on the brake pedal, smiling as he triturated our hero into the bitumen.

When the paramedics arrived, one of them vomited.

*

Bevan waited at the bus stop, slapping at a cloud of mosquitoes around his head.

“Well, it could be worse,” I said cheerfully as the bus pulled carefully around the corner.

He jumped to his feet. “No, no it couldn’t,” he yelled. “You can’t do this to me. This is garbage! You can’t.”

“Yes I can,” I said.

“And triturate? *Triturate?* What the hell. It just doesn’t end.”

He paused a moment, as if to think, as the bus approached.

“And, I seem to remember a bit about the devil’s porridge of—of—diesel and roadkill, too.”

“And your point is?”

“It’s overblown.”

“What?”

“And that other word. Mephitis? It’s such bullshit.”

“Don’t talk to me like that.”

“You don’t know how to write. A ‘dripping

effluvium’. It’s totally laughable. You sound like a thesaurus. With legs. Have you even got legs?”

“Who do you think you are? You’re just a figment—”

The bus pulled to a stop in a cloud of hot fumes and the door swung open.

“I know who I am. You? Do you know what you are? A self-righteous prick.”

“Don’t talk to me like that.”

“Says who? God?”

“Get on the bus.”

“Fuck you! I’m not getting on the bus.”

Bevan got on the bus.

“I feel like I’m being frogmarched onto the bus,” he said. “I don’t want this. I’m not doing anything else you tell me to. Ever.”

“Yes you are.”

“No I’m not. And—and Bevan? Who calls their characters Bevan?”

He stood in the doorway of the bus.

“It sounds like I’m a smelly adolescent who lives in a bedsit and doesn’t wash his arse. ‘Bevan who lives in a bedsit and doesn’t wash his arse.’ There you go.”

“What?”

“Title for your crappy story.”

“You’re way out of line, Bevan.”

“Out of control. That’s me. And that neighbour? She’s in her seventies and creeps up on me when she’s not pulling roaches off her roses. Who does that? Couldn’t you have given me a decent neighbour? Someone I could talk to properly, fall in love with? Who does that?”

“The new neighbour’s moved in already.”

“Really? So soon? What about deceased estate, real estate agents, settlement period?”

“Beauty of fiction, my friend. You’ll like her.”

“I do. I’m in charge.”

“No, you’re not. And—and mephitis? I can’t get over that. What sort of a word is that?”

The door swished closed behind him. He looked at the passengers.

They were zombie school children.

“Fresh meat!” one of them screamed.

*

As the bus nosed into town Bevan noted with renewed interest hundreds of silver tankers outside the airport delivering treacle, golden syrup, molasses, sugar.

“I’ll write that down,” he said. “It’s really piqued my interest. I must talk to Nicky about it tonight.”

The wet season was close, but it didn’t put a stop to the activity at the airport. If anything, it was busier. Transport aircraft took off every five minutes, filling the air with an uninterrupted thunderous rumble as they disappeared into the rolling sky.

“It’s really fascinating. And—and look at the heaving black clouds. We might be in for a cyclone. A really big storm, perhaps. Rain and flood—”

“Don’t lay it on too thick,” I said.

“What? What now?”

“Careful what you say. Give the game away and I can kill you off as easily as swatting a midge.”

“I’m just trying to be helpful. Anyway, you know I’m indispensable.”

“No you’re not. No one in this story is indispensable. Your neighbour Nicky?”

“Yeah?”

“Eaten by a crocodile this afternoon.”

“Oh man, you can’t do that.”

“I just did. You didn’t like her anyway.”

“Yeah, but you didn’t have to . . . you know.”

“The new neighbour’s moved in already.”

“Really? So soon? What about deceased estate, real estate agents, settlement period?”

“Beauty of fiction, my friend. You’ll like her.”

“Why?”

“She reads. She sunbathes.”

*

The rain was beating down as Bevan ran from the stop to his office tower that morning. He was curious to find out about his work.

“I’m curious to find out about my work,” he

said as he dodged a truck.

He stepped into the lift and the doors were about to close when a leg clothed in a tan leather boot and tight faded jeans thrust itself between the closing doors. Bevan had seen the man who owned the leg before and had taken an irrational dislike to him.

He hated his boots, his tight jeans, the whorls of tattoos peeking out on his throat above his collar, his striped shirts. Especially he hated the e-cigarettes he had seen the man vaping when he was talking on his phone outside of the building. But most of all Bevan loathed his tan leather boots. They were lightly scuffed and screamed *phony!* to Bevan.

The man watched him.

“You look familiar,” he said.

“Maybe,” Bevan said. “That might be. I’m on television.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, newsreading,” Bevan said.

“Nah, I don’t think so. You’re not the type.”

“Type? What type did you expect?”

“I dunno. I just can’t see you on the news.”

“Why not?”

“You don’t look like a newsreader.”

“What do I look like, in your opinion?”

The man thought for a moment and stared straight ahead as he answered.

“You look like a guy who lives in a bedsit and doesn’t wash his arse.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah.”

Bevan was quiet for a moment.

“I’m on the news all right.”

“Which news?”

“Nicky and Bev’s breakfast news. Channel Go Fuck Yourself.”

“Aah.”

There was a short silence and the man pulled out his vape as the lift creaked.

“No, I’m pulling your leg,” Bevan said. “I’m a neurosurgeon. Work at the hospital. Fortieth floor.”

“Yeah?”

“Yep. I removed your brain the other day.”

“You did?”

“I replaced it with a cane toad.”

The man ran his hand uneasily over a long, fresh purple scar on his scalp.

“You mean you replaced my brain with a cane toad’s brain?” The man scratched his ear.

“No,” Bevan said. “No. You got the whole toad. Can’t you feel it?”

“Not really sure.”

“I’ll give you a post-operative consultation now if you like. Any symptoms?”

“I’ve had some strange dreams since my operation. I’ve been watching insects with . . . renewed interest.”

Bevan sighed loudly.

The lift passed Level 21 then ground to a halt between floors. The Out of Order light flashed.

“I hate you!” Bevan shouted.

“Don’t go off the rails again, Bevan,” I said.

“Who said that?” the man in the tan shoes

asked, looking up.

“What do you mean, don’t go off the rails? Aren’t you in charge?”

“You have a certain degree of autonomy.”

“Tell me what I’m doing in this office tower stuck in a lift with this dick of a guy then.”

“He’s not a guy, he’s a plot device.”

“What do you mean, plot device?” the man in the tan shoes asked. He puffed on his e-cigarette, looking around nervously. “I’m not a plot device, I’m a human being.”

“Smoke that thing in here and I’ll jam it down your throat,” Bevan said. “That and your tan shoes.”

“Cool it,” the man said from behind a cloud of vapour. He put the vape away.

“Who are you talking to?”

“The sadist who’s writing this story. I don’t know.”

An hour went by in silence. Bevan watched his own and the man’s reflections in the polished stainless steel of the lift cubicle’s walls where a sweaty condensation gathered. Bevan sat on the floor. The man paced the space.

Finally he leaned one arm into the wall and pushed against it, breathing extravagantly.

“What are you doing?” Bevan said.

“Calisthenics. These exercises incredibly increase your lung capacity.”

Bevan closed his eyes.

“If I vape at the same time, I get double the effect.”

“You vape in here and I will do what I said.”

“Is that a threat?”

“No. I’ve got a crystal ball in my pocket. It’s a forecast of the future. Weather forecast? Heat and rain. Future forecast with you vaping in the lift? Vast discomfort visited upon you. The life you lead. The life you could have led.”

The man fell silent and Bevan, out of the corner of his eye, noted the man was jiggling the vape from hand to hand.

“We have to get out of here,” the man in the tan shoes said.

“Really?”

“Yes. I’d like to think of something but it’s hard with a cane toad in my head. My thoughts are . . . jumpy.”

Just then the Out of Order sign went out and the lift jerked into action. The man drew hard on his vape.

When the lift doors opened on the fortieth floor Bevan ran out yelling.

“The man in the tan shoes has got a bomb! The man in the tan shoes has got a bomb!”

The man in the tan shoes was slumped against the back of the lift, gagging for air, a cloud of vapour blowing from his mouth, two of his front teeth knocked in, the toes of one of his shoes protruding from his mouth.

Bevan had no time to check the fortieth floor; he knew the police would be on the way.

“Wait, I want to check the fortieth floor,” Bevan said.

“No time,” I told him. “The police are coming.”

He found the fire escape and ran all the way to the ground.

Outside the rain was sheeting down and lightning flashed in the sky. He was out of breath. A bus was waiting outside, its door open, and he climbed in.

*

Nicky's yard was transformed when he arrived home. The garden and roses were replaced by a small lap pool surrounded by a smooth concrete path, ideal for sunbathing. A couple of sun lounges sat by the far side of the pool, shaded by an umbrella. A small table had a bucket of ice and a bottle of what looked like champagne. Two perspiring glasses with ice and little umbrellas on top stood on the table. The air on his side of the fence was shady and smelled sweet and he heard a woman's voice inside talking on the phone, sounding lovely and animated. Soft bird calls filled the air. A mango dangled by his ear from a tree he hadn't seen before and he picked and ate it there at his back gate. A car pulled up behind him and he vaguely heard the horn honk, but the mango and the sweetness of the air and a faint view of a beautiful woman behind the sliding door in Nicky's flat took his attention. She appeared to be getting undressed.

In a minute, he guessed, unsure as he stood in the shade of the mango and a frangipani, the air cool and delicious, the glass door would open. He watched as it slid across, and the woman in shorts

and a singlet top emerged.

On roller skates.

Her hair was brown and lank, her face leathery. She smiled when she saw him, and her teeth were black. A pestilential stench emerged from her flat as she skated beside the pool to her front gate and served the customer sitting in a car on the street. Bevan felt his stomach roil and burn as the sky fractured with an intense crack. The rain came down as if someone had turned on a tap in the sky.

He looked up.

Two transport planes directly above collided as he watched, one thrown onto the back of another by the force of the storm.

There came a flash of light, brighter than anything he'd ever seen, as an explosion filled the sky and engulfed three more transports that flew straight into the path of the inferno.

He felt the heat of the blast and ducked, anticipating a shower of debris, but the explosion was swallowed in the vortex of the cyclone. The planes disappeared, vapourised. The air around him vibrated with a ferocity he'd never seen and could never have imagined.

Two hours later the dark was around him and the rain still fell and the flood rose to his windows.

He turned the radio on but only captured snippets through a white noise.

. . . man with a bomb was assaulted in a city elevator . . . seven transport planes disapp . . . drug dealers shift operations across the road . . . taken by four-metre croco .

. . . school children on a city bus . . . police searching for . . .

By eleven that night he decided to climb onto the roof of his flat.

“I’m not gonna do that.”

“Do it, Bevan.”

The flood water in his home was still rising, so he climbed.

The roof gave no relief. The heat was just as intense, the water now lapped at his feet, iridescent insects attacked him through the thick rain, and the rain . . . the rain itself had changed.

It was denser somehow—heavier, stickier.

By the light of one lamppost below, half submerged already, he saw it had changed colour. It was a deep, rich yellow. Golden. It clawed at his clothes, made his fingers heavy and sticky, rolled down his collar. Some ran into his mouth and it was strangely bittersweet. Like . . . golden syrup . . . treacle.

It . . . treacle or syrup . . . flowed down from the sky as if from some immense drizzle stick. Billions of litres packaged and pumped into the cargo holds of transports for Kyrgyzstan or Turkmenistan, now pouring back into the dirty back streets and canefields from whence it came.

He sat on the roof and watched dark shapes swim through the still rising syrup. They slowed and struggled as the water thickened. Maybe in the end even the crocodiles would be preserved in amber.

The flood reached his knees. There was no way off the roof. He called for help, but his voice was lost in the maelstrom. The flood rose over

the tops of trees.

The rain eased momentarily, and hail picked up, stinging his face and hands and tinkling on the liquid around him. It was crystalline, golden. Sugar. It fell like a snowstorm, clotting in his hair, tumbling down his neck, into his clothes. Then as quickly as it came, it stopped. Everything was still. Even the crickets were gone. Then the rain started again and the sugar crystals chafed him, his armpits, throat, groin. He groaned.

“No I didn’t, I’m fine!” he said.

“Do what I say,” I said.

“You’re not the boss of me. You’re a windbag. You can’t even write.”

“What?”

“You use big words for the sake of it. This story has no cogency . . . See, I didn’t even say cogency. Your story has no cogency—point.”

“Just play the game, Bevan,” I said. “It’ll be over soon.”

“Play along. Don’t complain.”

“You’ve got it.”

The flood rose higher. Bevan clung to the TV aerial.

Down the end of Sticks Street—he could have called it Sticks River just as easily—a rowboat appeared.

The person rowing made powerful headway through the churning waves towards him.

As the boat drew close he saw a man in tight jeans and a striped shirt lying on the floor of the boat, coins over his eyes. One tan shoe was on his foot, the other bare.

“Climb in,” called the rower, the woman with lank hair and a lined face. She wore shorts and a singlet top. Roller skates were on her feet.

Bevan thought for a moment, spat treacle. It dripped from his chin and hair.

“Where are you going?” he called.

“Where?” she cried back.

The flood was up to his waist and the boat drew close, bobbing up and down. He clung to the aerial as it started to bend.

“Yes. Where?”

“Does it matter?” she yelled above the noise. The boat pitched perilously on a stray wave.

The man in the tan shoe lying in the boat lifted the coins off his eyes, sat up, and looked at Bevan.

“The life you lead,” he gestured at Bevan, “the life you could have led,” and he gesticulated into the diaphoretic mephitis beyond.

Bevan wiped his mouth and climbed into the boat. The man handed him a china cup and saucer. On the cup was a picture of a woman dancing. The caption read: *I'll be your sugar daddy.*

“You can bail,” the man said.

Image: [“Pouring the molasses”](#) (CC BY 2.0) by [Chris Waits](#)