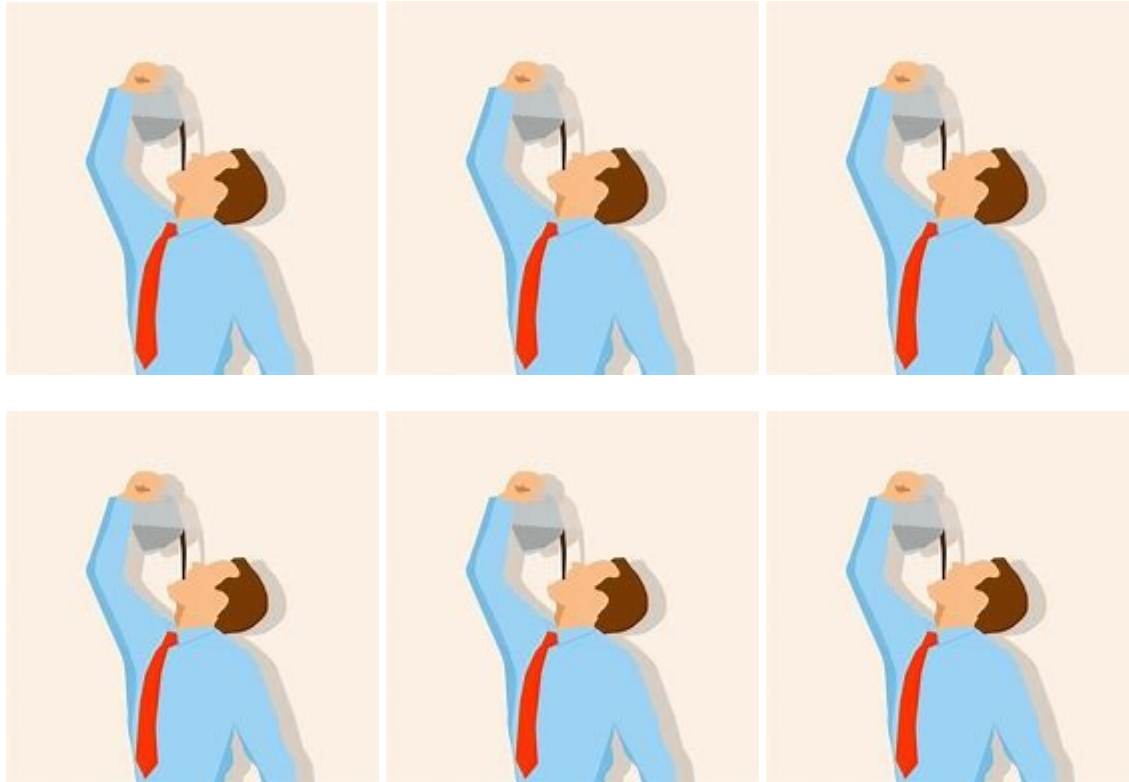


## six coffees with a madman



By

Blossom Hibbert

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Blossom Hibbert's, "six coffees with a madman," is experimental, conceptual, and full of language. That the plot may take time to uncover, if you really want to work at it, is sort of a null and void point – what you experience in the moment of that cup of coffee captures the emotions, vulnerabilities, worries, and fears about this speaker's life, loves, and thoughts. When it comes down to it, this piece plays with our sensibilities, "When you must put your trust in an unreliable, foolish narrator; things become very tricky indeed." Astute indeed. One of the greatest strengths in Hibbert's work is to create this deep sense of ambiguity surrounding the "madman." Not necessarily to be taken literally, the reader sits down and has coffee with our speaker's thoughts, ramblings, insecurities, and sporadic actions enough so that they begin to question who is the madman. The speaker? The*

*author? The stranger? The lover? The reader? There is madness that swirls in our thoughts just as easily as sugar into coffee – sometimes there is enjoyment in that sickly sweetness; other times it may just be best to grab another cup black and start at the beginning. This is a story well worth sitting down with a cup of joe and diving into. Enjoy.*

### **QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)**

The hierarchy of the rich and the poor is something I wish neither to climb up nor slide down. I am happy where I am; in the coffee shop of beginners, sipping beside my blank lover. We don't let society hold us back. We don't let dentists hold us back.

coffee #1

I am having a coffee with a stranger.

(I bought him from a flea market)

He does not eat / drink too much

but has eyes like sharp rock cracks in windows; hungry, wet... and waiting. Inside his hat is where the pigeon's roost, but we are the only two people in the womb that know that. My one-handed companion has so much linear expression he contains far too much

ego.

ergo... (he is)

expression – less

His white collar is the rubbish bin of utopia – meaning it is of course the flaw in a flawless world, thus we return to the crack in the window (we live inside a sycophantic circle of which no one is on the outside)

He is so afraid of gold spoons for they have the capability to take everything he owns away, till he is a drop of ectoplasm within the seafront of desire.

Ask what he wants from you. Ask what he wants - only if you are prepared to hear a rehearsed monologue that makes grown men weep and women's ligaments snap with laughter. All that

hullabaloo is not worth question time with the addicts. Go for a dawn pier walk. You will be much better off that way.

Don't forget to bring a coffee.

Since his death this morning, it has become even more important for him to explain life to me over the steam of blacky ink. Like why

belonging is survival (and)

survival is belonging

It would take a landslide of small, shrivelled brown beans hurtling down Belvoir Street (where we converse) to make us move. I hide him in my bag just in case, but to my horror his eyes stare through the tough white cotton.

Stare.... Why do you stare?

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I order a warm croissant with jam.

I miss him already. To make this all better I sketch him on a napkin using a dulled-out pencil, ripping the friable fabric when I shade in the coat. I imagine nerve endings within the napkin and itch the inside of my elbow till I bleed a bit. When I am finished scratching both skin and tissue, I sit back to look at the masterpiece.

Somehow, he looks as if he is crying a single worm of solitude. I do not sketch again. I now know **far too much**.

The Curse of Knowledge is the passage from infant to adult; I am somewhere along the way. My father's absence lies down on the train tracks and prevents me moving any further. If he were a freelance carpenter, I would ask him to build me a bookcase and single bed.

Oh, and a table for the man in the frame to rest on. But he is neither a father nor a carpenter, so it doesn't matter much. He is just an outline on a train track headed south.

I remove the man from the bag. **Now**, he can only view life through the bars of prison, he is resentful at restriction, and this will never change. I have permanently altered the stranger's outlook. Damn it.

I take the golden spoon from its saucer and hide his eyebrows with it; he is now daring me to care for something small and vulnerable that I usually would like to kill. Croissant crumbs fall out my mouth onto his trench jacket and I commit a multitude of sins to wipe them away – in doing so, my hand slips and his eyebrows reappear. He is deathly angry at me, under all that gold.

I want to tell him of my love for jam red mugs with matching plates and also the gurgle of the last drops of water down the bath plughole. His eyebrows stop me from continuing my list and besides, caffeine is pressing against the infected valves of my heart. No one looks through the peephole before letting it all flood in. It is all **far too late now**.

Caffeine comes rushing in as if the dam has burst. And... who is swimming on the uttermost string of water? Oh...! Oh.

My photo frame man enters the heart chamber commonly known as

The Atrium.

Suddenly that long coat I once admired is stuck to my pulmonary artery, causing undulations in blood pressure. Increasingly unsure of my own self-worth, I wipe the tear off my cheek using the back side of four fingers and my skin shifts off my cheekbone. As if it never rested there with such peace in the first place.

I have had enough excitement to last seven years. I place the man back into the bag with my light head, ignore the stares, then we head out - as explorers of emotion.

Nobody is left to clear the dirty plates away. The landslide got them all yesterday.

coffee #2

We are having another coffee together; not picking up the thread we left off, but putting new sheets on the stripped bed and beginning again. Today is the day for new beginnings. The café we inhabit sits next to a river. The laughing frog and I...

Sip.

(mmm)

I redefine desire when I look at his hand.

In due course, I will write to the papers and let them know of my extraordinary discovery, titled 'redefinition'. I am the best columnist in all the land, I'm actually quite famous (I tell my framed lover this static information).

As I contemplate the burdening fame, my love for the stranger sits in a neat space outlining his grey hand...

I do not touch it for fear of allowing the **tetanus** (which has been chasing me since birth) to get inside. The tetanus freezes your muscles in time, I am aware my photo frame man inherited the *clostridium tetani* when he was first created, so am careful not to upset him with my real lies (he will surely rea-lise).

I am ever so sensitive when it comes to bacteria... I also know he has a heart made of galvanized steel, so it will not be attacked and will never cease to beat inside his tense state. Poor, poor creature... I am so very kind and loving and sweet and sensitive...

If only inland revenue could see me now!

If only the taxman of times tables would walk past our flatland furniture... that'd show him!

They redefined society around three years ago; the death of working class as the driving political force turned us into troglodytes. Turned us into (pre)

socialites.

The hierarchy of the rich and the poor is something I wish neither to climb up nor slide down. I am happy where I am; in the coffee shop of beginners, sipping beside my blank lover. We don't let society hold us back. We don't let dentists hold us back.

Only a million bumble bees would understand the new relationship I have formed with this picture frame man; growing like a tumour on the underside of my brain.

Only anna kavan would understand me now.

And when I reach for his hand, I get exactly what I want. Shoelace tendons and the bone from Sunday roast chicken sticking out.

I get exactly what I want. His hand without all the trimmings.

Mmm.

The river shifts water back and forth, it is moving with eternity. It has been accustomed to change since the triceratops' great tongue licked the salt off the rocks. I am red with jealousy for

this river beside me. I am boiling up with anger... How dare river banks be so used to change that they wake all calm and placid and normal. How **dare** change make me so **afraid**.

All my unborn children have arranged a morning concert that I am late to... I am instead having a streetside coffee with a photo frame and I am running behind the time. Even the bloody clocks have shoes nowadays.

With laces made from dead men's super-digital flexor tendons. Didn't you know?

I drink black coffee rapidly, eyes looking to the sky, and inherit heartburn almost immediately. I begin whispering a prayer to my lord; my paternal sperm creature.

My unborn children will sing me songs of Monmouth and Missy Higgins in a bit. They sing just to make me weep. My unborn children remain nameless because of prostaglandin tablets being eaten like sweeties and codeine for the chaser. I am the mother of the orchestra in the echoing moments before sleep takes over – this is when I am naked, wet, and shaking.

My head is lost within the melody of the soldiers. My neck is lost to the toast accompaniment. My egg is a fairy egg; yolkless, void of life. Not as delicious for breakfast.

I must hurry up and spoil you/ greet you/ taste you. I must hurry up and be the mother you couldn't be (almost too late).

The new definition of desire has been written on the blackboard for the pigeons to read, digest, read and worse... **remember.**

I desire complete unattachment most days. But today, I want to find some rope and tie us up. The pigeons might peck our eyes out, but we won't care – we have **love!**

They will take over soon, you know.

It will be **us** against **them**.

And by '**us**', I mean my deceased coffee companion and the pigeons.

And by '**them**', I mean everything else – elephants, the bubonic plague, mycelium.

I don't have a side.

I am liminal.

The picket line runs up my body and tickles me till I giggle like an infant. I am neither child nor adult.

Remember?

An American lady sits beside us.

We quieten down.

Hotels are ever so i t chhhhy, photo frame (didn't we learn that last night!)

The river complains itself through the gutter of land, I am nonchalant about the water and prove this with a quick whistle. Then I blow my nose on my scarf. Colonisation of the wet land is current and important and something the politicians forget. I love the man in the frame according to how much I owe the tax man.

I can get used to change quicker than it feels. Just right now, it feels I won't adapt and will instead freeze over. Just now, it feels like things are going to last forever. The journey has only begun but it is going to last forever. Unease is a dirty little trick.

Malaise is even worse.

I have aligned my view to the political preferences of sewer rats and realise...

I was            wrong  
                     all along.

The referendum is futile! It will take me seven years to recover from the shock and when the mayor of Monmouth turns my life support off, I can finally exhale a lifetime of dirty rotten sins.

One last request before I go!

A jam red scarf please, for I have been warned certain areas of the underworld are deathly cold.

The American lady says, 'have a lovely one' and I know she means have a lovely death. I share one remaining wisp of thought with my photo framed lover. It is a comparison between dentists and builders.

The dentists use cement for root canal surgeries because it is cheap and creamy.

The builders use cement for telegraph poles because it is grey and sticks well into the gums of pothole streets.

I ask my lover if the streetcleaners can be the toothbrush? But

he died yesterday so doesn't say much anymore. Just waits to be put back in my bag.

I sigh and accept defeat. No one wants my bullshit metaphors.

coffee #3

We have moved across the country, again.

It is half two post meridiem.

Yawn.

Sleeping in a different bed every night proves a challenge from time to time. The bugs in my hair are starting to form a coalition, they are protesting soap. The young, stylish bugs have even set up a Wednesday evening poker night and I am never invited. I pretend I don't care but stand outside the venue, cigarette trembling in my yellow fingers and feigning nonchalance. My eyebrows give the game away (they go there later for a pint of lager. Traitors.)

The one thing that holds this ram shackle café together is lacquered wood and ground coffee and hot water. I've been told there aren't even any rams living here anymore, but I won't believe it. We don't have long for this one - so I got our coffee in blue takeaway cups and when he inevitably doesn't drink his I will be the lucky person - with

Two

coffees.

We are preparing to move once more, and the fragility of location shakes me.



He thinks I have a bad attitude but does not realise I am a child in desperate need for micturition, whispering perverse fantasies under my breath. Do not mistake me for the pope. I will go through a transatlantic personality change once I have urinated, however will not wash my hands because:

1) the bus is due to leave soon (no time)

2) germs are a commodity sold to us by the government to fund soap companies; which are coverups for illicit deals of the Class A Type (feed me, feed me!)

If he loses me (he inevitably will) ...

I will be in Leicester with the rest of the dead men.

The circus invited me to join on the way here because I wore a green knitted hat and had dog poo on my left shoe, but I was running late for the morning coffee so couldn't stop to chat.

Besides, I have a lover to look after now. He is a photo frame and he is my baby.

If he loses me (he never will), I'll be searching for the best croissant in all of this English island I currently inhabit.

Warm bread and breakfast! I demanded a room for two lost inverters where we could remain in bed till early afternoon and then retrieve our rightful toast and eggs. Plentiful logs for the fire please and clean sheets, although not too clean for we will only mess them up. A nice ramshackle to sip inside whilst we admit defeat.

Yawn.

Why do I keep forgetting to call Joni Mitchell she is arguably the most important part in solving this mystery.

God I wish I didn't love him! The only thing holding my torso up is a carrier bag with two holes for my legs and he holds the handles. Sometimes, when he is cruel and bored, he

swiiiiiiiiingss it.

Where is my master?

I miss him with such dedication.

I swallowed my wedding ring and no longer wear a seatbelt whilst I drive to Business Conferences, (which are vital to me), and I even practice my times tables behind the wheel.

I am on my way to the airport so I can sleep properly.

**Baby** I am so exhausted. Your voice is a flash of red within the grey snowstorm outside my cottage windows.

**Baby**

am I old enough to be your wife? your mother? your whore?

I've changed my mind again. I don't want to talk this way anymore.

We have a bus to catch but whilst we can't see it, we are very good at pretending it never existed in the first place. I think they call that the 'Curse of Knowledge'. If we knew what village we were in, we'd surely be better off than the troglodyte who knows nothing. Can I let you in on a secret? I'm beginning to think my photo frame lover is

crazy.

He won't even look me in the eye anymore. I am accustomed to hostility, but this takes the biscuit.

I am the spinster of situations; I am used to the rotten tomato treatment but with him, pretend to be a novice so he won't laugh at me. There is nothing he can send me to make me weep. I am numb like a tree stump on the rotten old coast of Barcelona - that **ghost town**.

All the sad young men wish to get into a cold bed with me tonight and share panicked organic love. I must tell them the picture frame replaces the pillow inside the pillowcase. They might bump their head. They might wonder about the rockpool eyes **staring**.

**Baby**

I am a good and sweet little girl now I don't visit my mother and father anymore. I can get changed all by myself.

The shepherd will be here any minute with his curved stick to fend the men away but for now I let them in one by one, taking control of liberation.

Before Moses comes home.

Before Moses expects his supper of sabbatical lamb. It is his birthday, and he wants only his woman as he first knew her; pure and tearless, utterly dry in nature and skin.

Porous still, of course – always porous and inviting.

How can we turn this final sip of coffee into a sonnet? It is gritty and not warm enough to give me hope.

Who are we to deprive Moses of his instinctual birth right? He often finds it hard to play house and is terribly vague about the love stuff.

The bus left without us, so we must wait for another going somewhere else. I whisper soft words to the mad man in my bag staring at me, I let him know it will be alright.

I am wonderful at looking after the creatures that are small and vulnerable and totally

Insane.

We only keep moving because the crossword puzzle told us to. We only keep moving so the muddy water doesn't settle; God Forbids us to see through water. He hates translucency – as his little lambs, we have been ordered to keep things moving.

At least Lover and I have our morning coffee to rely on. That never changes.

Travelling is keeping us young and beautiful and forever mortified at just how civilised the bugs have become.

On that note, it is probably time we get a move on.

Itch itch.

coffee #4

Here we are again, lover and I.

We woke very early in a hotel room, full of bugs in our stomachs and detritus in our sinuses weighing us down. His knees remained hidden in the trench coat under the blanket, but I knew they ached with age and too much travelling.

(creeeeaaaaak)

We woke with hope in our noses too, and, when I blew into a tissue it was green with dark red splodges all over. Who knew hope looked like blood on a napkin?

A hotel napkin.

We are having another hot hot coffee on the concrete outside the lobby and booking a weekend abroad. I am shivering with the cold, but he pretends not to notice; he is so polite, my travelling lover.

How do you know you are on the right train tracks before you reach your destination? How do you know if you are a good singer? Finally, how do you know you are wearing socks – without looking?

The station is an ending just as much as a beginning. The station has **dementia** and can't remember who you are. Let us navigate all the terrible things together, you and I – let us run away with our hands in our pockets. I wont trip you up this time.

The rain king greets us, so we move inside. Why do you live in my bag? Is it because you are tall and powerful and everything I am not? Somebody eats strawberry yoghurt and watches me converse with my photo frame lover. This café is for the yoghurt outcasts.

How about we stack our fists on top of each other and bash really hard to make a dent in the table, so it remembers us always. So... when the café catches infectious dementia, we can remind him of all the fun we had together.

Why does Joni Mitchell not return my calls? I best call in to the papers with the extraordinary news she has perhaps died and I reckon it was painful and full of vile whispers. Society will weep inside the sycophantic circle.

It is a Sunday morning, so everybody sleeps whilst I scribble.

1) noise of pen on paper

2) radio aching

3) fish tank rejuvenating

4) tock tick, pulsing

I lost my conductor stick and instead use a breadstick.

My quartet doesn't know what to play.

Why is thinking so difficult?

I am a fresh pair of eyes on a hard kitchen chair, lifting my naked feet up because the tiles are cold. Woollen socks are okay in the summer but cold in winter. Why is that?

Drink the black sludge whilst it is hot and put an end to all that burned thinking.

Can I just create more money to fend off the taxman? I write him a poem about etiquette so he can learn a thing or two, I'll post it right now. Poetry is worth a thousand pennies.

Wait... before you go :

Both the station and I have **dementia**. Time won't look me in the eye anymore and I leave home very often without a plan for the day. I just

End            up

coffee #5

Hello again, lover.

We sit in everybody else's favourite seat; the olive green sofa in the morning sunshine of the window. Everybody wants to sit here and 'do' the newspaper, but we are colonising the rich. Go to your stupid poker night; it just gives us more time to steal your favourite seat. The coffee is bad and cold in the bar, tastes sort of like baked beans – but we have taken something from the middle class that cannot be destroyed. A favourite seat...

Ha ha!

Instead of the familiar pinprick night sky, we slept under a ringtone roof so we could finally be alone on our favourite morning with maroon curtains **shut**.

Didn't think we'd be sat in this part of the country, did you? Didn't think the manicured bed would be so comfortable, so warm and inviting.

You have been a bit absent lately, are you alright, my madman?

I miss you when you are gone too long. I've been terribly lonely. Remember what happened to you last time?

Oh, I made a mug of coffee for you but had to throw it into the compost heap because you weren't drinking it quick enough.

My breakfast tasted awful this morning because it wasn't with you.

I understand we are all fighting the battle of the fittest and the hash browns are making my heart strong and legs muscular. That's why I ate it despite the bad taste. I am on both sides of liminal, remember. I even had extra baked beans for 50p, but it tasted like coffee so I slurped the orange down instead of using a spoon. I am the silence after a child hits their head on the breakfast table. I am the silence before the storm.

I am in a buggy being pushed off a cliff. Is my mother sycophantic or sacrificial?

Why is our Lord the lamb of the past, why did we sacrifice him when he was the only hope we had in our old eyebrows? Was he the real victim of tax revenue?

The compost heap's guts are churning, I can hear the peristalsis from here. Keep it down banana skin, some of us are trying to pay the taxman back with words. I am gas and bone and blood and muscle and awake and you are nothing but green brown black sludge. I will always be better than you.

Are you a victim of trade?

The danger of poetry is yet to be discovered... lover be so, **so** careful.

Kavan's warden is after me, along with the preacher of disbelief. Warnings are for fools – of which I am not.

When you must put your trust in an unreliable, foolish narrator; things become very tricky indeed.

entrenched with a lie/ pregnant with truth.

My old friend the wandering blues is back I must build myself a home to show I am not afraid. I must buy wooden hand carved mahogany side tables. And little egg cups.

My heart swells up when I glance upon neatly stacked bricks; we all know exactly what I think.

The taxman returned my letter, unopened. He probably has x-ray vision and knew it did not contain a cheque. Some people are so highly strung, they should really take a break.

We have to go again, to a place that has never seen our foot prints. I hope my feet are big enough and the photo frame doesn't embarrass me in front of the strangers. I hope they are nice in the NewPlace and don't

laugh at me.

I have decided I will leave the mad Lover behind in the NewPlace and continue the journey on my own. I don't tell him this, I keep it a soft secret.

He is just too crazy for me; his ramblings confuse me and make me terrified of pigeons. No one should fear pigeons. Especially not **brave** me.

### coffee #6

Good final morning

finally.

I sit on a wicker chair, my lover placed beside me – rather than facing each other, we sit side by side.

Lover,           **why** does the lord watch me **sin** and **giggle**?

Lover, the walls are closing in and the cowboy I am having a coffee with never learned how to ride a horse. We cannot escape.

Lover, the pigeons are taking over the bags under my eyes are getting heavy and grey and I've started talking to a corpse. The bags beside my bed are packed with important bits.

only mad girls sleep

beside a wicker basket  
of  
clean pigeon bones  
to  
reconstruct her  
friends  
in the  
afterlife.

I have a long way to travel before I can fall asleep, but I am grateful for that. There is nothing I wish to own/catch/steal besides the **OLD** picture frame man; unspoiled by matters of the heart and hot all over with rushed passion. Mmmmmm....

I may have to go away for a long, long time.

What shall I give you to remember me by? How can I make time slip without the sorrow of nervous pitter patter? I will write you love poems and fold them up so small like a stamp, post them into the gutter of galvanized desire just so the rats can humiliate me over and over again. They will stand up on little back feet and laugh at my love poetry.

At least you won't have to.

The raindrops drip onto my nose and coagulate with wet sadness.

The curtain is drawn, it is time to depend on someone else again.

There is so much I have not managed to tell you yet.

(I'm going to join a rock and roll band at lunchtime.)

Someone is curled up beside me on the wicker chair telling me secrets. They are a cashew or a dog... I'm not sure.

I'm not even a poet.

I don't even know Joni Mitchel. Or the inland revenue man. I am a fool, you see. With ginger in my pocket. The taxman is after me; that is true. But he won't accept poems as he would pennies. I never even wrote him that letter for him to return it unopened.



You know (lover /photo frame inhabitant/ cowboy), when I met you for the first time, I realised that I could never meet you for another novel voyage. It is one time only. Now, whenever I see you... I see you in lieu of the way you looked last time.

I can't do timetables and I am not intelligent enough to redefine desire. A famous columnist is not who I am.

Also

Steely dan is here to stay. And?

I am top of the food chain.

The circus didn't want me to join. I begged and begged. They sent **me** away.

I suppose.

I am the

madman.



**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *This piece, 'six coffees with a madman' was written whilst sitting in a café in Leicester, England, on a yellow seat. I had bought a photo frame of a curious looking black and white man, whose expression I couldn't quite pinpoint. Feeling quite moved by him (and feverishly lonesome), I placed him across the table from me, sipped my first flat white.*

*Before I knew it, I'd began writing bizarre letters to him, which soon became about him, and turned into this piece. I wrote it up exactly as I'd pencilled into my notebook, because I thought it had a great conversational rhythm and authenticity to it.*

*By the end of the piece (three coffee's later...) my hand was sore and heart was pumping; I spent the rest of the day wandering around this novel city I'd never been in before, returning to bed late at midnight. All the while, my photo frame man kept me very good company. He now sits on my bedside table!*

*My literary influences are Milan Kundera, Antonia Tabucchi, Fernando Pessoa, Lee Harwood, Ivan Turgenev and, of course, Kerouac.*

*I often write in this style of prose; rambling, soliloquy of consciousness designed to make the reader feel they are having a conversation with me, or thinking about things they wouldn't usually.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** My name is Blossom, I am a twenty three year old Nottingham based UK writer (however, this is chronically changing as I seem to be in perpetual motion when it comes to having a home...!)

I grew up in Sydney, Australia – in a little vegetarian café on the coast, where I first started writing stories about all the people walking past the window. From a young age I've been journalling/ documenting the world around me and have never really stopped. I have a huge interest in the 'little things' like buttons and egg cups. After all, is it not adding together all these small entities that make up bigger things, like houses and worlds...

I moved to Manchester as a teenager, then to London for a bit to try to improve my writing skills. I have since moved to Nottingham, to finish a degree in veterinary medicine oddly enough – something to pay the bills whilst I spend my evenings writing.

I mainly write poetry and prose, but short stories are a recent endeavour of mine.

My friends know they can find me in streetside cafes all morning long, for hours on end – simply writing funny things about the people and life passing me by. This is where I get most of my inspiration to sit and write.