

A PICTURE OF ZOE

Liam Stewart

I've got a picture of Zoe. I've still kept it after a year. It's a drawing by the Artist, and there he is now, near where I'm sitting, still sketching away trying to make a living.

The old lady approved of Zoe the first minute she saw her. It was the look of her for a start, all bright and clean on the grimy street, with the blonde hair bouncing about like a shampoo advert. I could see that look in the old lady's eyes when she met us going to her work that day. They're roaming over the details, impressed, storing them up for later reference: the spotless creamy coat, the shiny mauve high heels (not too high), the matching shoulder-bag and the black skirt made of that good quality material. And when Zoe opened her mouth, that was it! The old lady's over the moon! Zoe's well-spoken. The Bearsden accent set the seal on what the old lady saw as a very nice little package.

The old lady herself has always had this thing about talking properly: saying 'you' instead of 'yous', things like that. She's not that good at it herself, but she admires folk that can do it. It's all because she thinks she's a cut above this area. She even wears chiffon scarves and puts on red nail polish to go out to her cleaning job. Glamour girl at 48. It's a bit pathetic, if you could see it.

When I got back home to the scheme that night, she's sitting by the fire in her dressing-gown, drinking coffee and puffing a fag, still smirking to herself even though it's a sad picture on the telly.

'My! That's a nice girl, son!' she says, taking a sip of her coffee and winking at me. 'Where did you meet her?'

She knew it must have been somewhere good. Not the bus queue or the social security or the chippie or anywhere in this dump, with the boarded-up houses and the packs of scabby dogs marauding through the closes and over the waste ground. Oh no!

She could see at a glance Zoe had never picked her way through this terrain.

Zoe was a college girl. Dunky had this girlfriend that was training to be a teacher, and Zoe was her pal. So one night Zoe and me met up along with Dunky and the girlfriend. That was how it all started, a sort of blind date. I was told afterwards that she thought I was a nice-looking boy. Actually, she wasn't the first to hold this opinion and, I have to admit, apart from everything else about her, she had her curves in the right places. So the old animal attraction was there all right. But it struck me pretty soon that, for somebody who was going to be a teacher, Zoe knew less about the real world than the old lady's budgie. Everything was 'gorgeous' (with the head cocked on one side) or 'awful' (with the eyes aghast).

For me, it was a bit of a laugh at first going out with somebody who talked like Zoe. To the mates, when they found out about it, it was me going out with a pure snob. I often wondered what Zoe was thinking about those first few times we went out. It was hard to know. If I looked at her quickly, before she had time to flick on the old smile, and caught her in one of those quizzical glances she thought I didn't notice, it looked as though she regarded me as from another species, one of the lower orders who might give her some useful material for one of her school projects.

And God! Was she out of touch! I don't know where she usually went, but sometimes when I was out with her she seemed to be looking about herself as if she thought there was Apaches up every close. And her mouth was pursed so tight you would have thought there was something putrid in the atmosphere.

That's the way it looked that first time at The Happy Moon Chinese restaurant in the Dumbarton Road. I thought I better play a strong card as an opener – a good night out, a good meal. I had been to this particular grub shop before, with Dunky and Tam, and it had not been too bad at all.

Well, as soon as I step over the threshold with Zoe I can see it isn't such a high-class establishment as it seemed the last time. After drifting along the street breathing in Zoe's perfume, the smell of stale fat is too noticeable. Zoe's eyes are darting about as if I've brought her to an opium den in Hong Kong, and though

she makes a big effort to keep nattering and flashing the old teeth, I can see she's ill at ease in such shabby surroundings. She takes in the shortcomings of the place and so do I: the carpet worn in patches through to the backing, the yellow stains like big suns on the table-cloth and, next to the kitchen door on the green flock wallpaper, a big mark that looks like a blotch of blood or where somebody has flung a plate of something they weren't satisfied with. It's dimly lit right enough, but the only other customers are an old couple who look like a pair of dossers and keep staring over at us out of their shadowy corner.

But it was what happened when we were in the middle of our dinner (quite a nice wee chicken chow mein that I think she was even beginning to enjoy) that really put the tin-lid on it. This drunk guy staggers in, unnoticed as it happens, and sinks down at the table next to us. I can see Zoe stiffening and leaning away from him. The guy's head's rolling about, but somehow or other he manages to convey his order, and a minute later a bowl of chicken noodle soup (the burn-the-mouth kind we've just had) is plunked down in front of him, with the flowery china spoon. But by this time he has begun to nod off to sleep. His arms have slipped down over the sides of his chair and his head is sagging down towards his chicken noodle. Down he goes till his nose makes contact with the soup. It scalds him enough to jerk him a foot up and almost open his heavy lids. Then he droops down again, the nose dips into the chicken noodle and he jerks up again. And so it goes on, like one of those pecking toys or as if there's a spring in his spine. By this time he has an audience. It's an entertainment to the old pair chomping away in their corner, and the waiter and manager are standing watching, arms folded, jabbering away in Chinese. The upward jerks are reduced to about four inches now, whether because the guy's sinking into a deeper sleep or his nose is getting acclimatized, I don't know. But the Chinese boys obviously see a danger that the soup might get spilled or our pecking friend might get drowned, so the manager strides over and whips the bowl out from under the guy's nose. He shakes him for about twenty seconds and then shoves a bill into his hand, jabbering away the whole time. Obviously he's telling him to cough up for the soup and then get out. The guy

slumps back in his chair, holding the bill out at arm's length, trying to read it through his drunken stupor.

In his state it might as well be in Cantonese, but vaguely the aggro of the situation begins to dawn on him and he goes into a Clint Eastwood act. He crumples the bill and drops it on the floor, trying to stare at The Happy Moon boys the whole time. Then he points his finger at the manager.

'You're at it,' he says slowly, '... I've been oot in India.'

There's no answer to that. You have to laugh. But, Christ, the manager dives straight into the argument and the waiter backs him up. This is not India, they're shouting, and quoting him the price of chickens and the upkeep of The Happy Moon and asking him when he was in India anyway.

However, the chicken noodle guy then decides to be magnanimous. He holds up his hand, dismissing the argument, and heaves himself on to his feet, just about cowping the table in the process. He's standing there rocking about as if he's on a ship, digging deep into the pockets of his baggy blue suit. They're scrabbling about picking up sauce bottles and straightening the table.

'Right, now,' he asks contemptuously, counting the pile of change he's dug out, 'how much is your soup?'

But it transpires he hasn't got enough, so they waive the bill and start huckling him out the door. This could have been a very bad move because the guy breaks free and starts to swear at them. But at the last minute they have the sense to hold back and let him do a dusting-off routine and tell them, as he stumbles out the door, that he'll never eat in The Happy Moon again and neither will his friends and he'll ruin them. They're clearing his table when the door swings open again and he steps back in. I knew it.

'Your soup was shitey, anyhow!' he says, gives them the V-sign and falls back through the door.

It's a riveting scene. I keep my eyes on the door for a couple of seconds to see if he'll do another encore, and then I look at Zoe. Her eyes are wide.

'How awful!' she says. 'That poor man looked as though he could have done with a bowl of soup.'

Poor man! A bowl of soup! Christ! The guy looked as if he'd been pouring booze down his throat the whole day. But I can see an expression on Zoe's face that tells me she really thinks it was a distasteful incident. So, at the bus stop, I say to her that I am sorry that her evening had been spoiled.

'Oh don't be silly, Gerry!' she says, giving me a peck on the cheek. 'Really! It was a lovely meal,' and she flashes the smile, maybe just a bit less bright than usual.

That was Zoe – Queen of the Bearsden soup-kitchen. But the trouble was, and Glasgow being what it is, when she was out with me she came much closer to the unwashed orders than any meals-on-wheels Bearsden lady might ever have desired. No car you see. It had to be buses and walking in the city streets, and going to much lower-class places than it seemed she was used to.

So the next time we ventured out for something to eat, I decided to take her somewhere in the centre of the town. As usual, she says she's easy where we go, so I suggest The South Pacific. It's quite a good eating shop, a cut above the usual Wimpy Bar type places and it's licensed. It's self-service right enough, but the haddock and chips is always good and they give you a big helping. Everything's going very smoothly in fact, until we come into contact with the Artist. This is an old guy who always carries a drawing-pad about with him and a row of pencils in the top pocket of his jacket. He gives you that impression somehow of a boy who gambled at one time, but never quite made it. He's always unshaven and he wears a soft, brown hat with greasy stains on the brim. There's one or two places in the town where he's allowed to come into your company and ask if you want a charcoal sketch of yourself for a pound. The South Pacific is one of these places. Now, I had seen him doing his routine before, but, of course, had always given him the knock-back myself, never having had a pound to spare. But anyway, he's there that day and he homes in on me and Zoe and, of course, it's Zoe he wants to sketch. So she gives him the smile and we say go ahead.

He's rabbiting away the whole time as he does the sketch with what looks like an ordinary school pencil with the Green Cross

Code on it. Then he comes with the line, 'Now what colour are your eyes, my dear?', looking into Zoe's eyes. 'Ah yes, a lovely blue,' he says, taking out his blue pencil and colouring in the eyes. He does the same with his red one for the lips. Seeing it upside down, I'm not impressed, and when he hands it over I can see, and I'm no art critic, that it's a joke – something maybe a kid of seven would do. He's just drawn an oval in a hard line, added basic eye, nose and mouth shapes, scribbled on a few squiggles for the hair and then coloured in the eyes and lips, and that's it. It's humanoid. It could be anybody.

'Do you not see yourself like that, dear? Well, there you are. That's the way the Artist sees you.'

His patter's terrible. I feel like telling him to get lost, but Zoe might think I'm too tight to pay the pound so I give him it. Zoe smiles and thanks him. The Artist tips his greasy hat and slides out the seat to look for some other sucker. I turn and see Zoe looking down her nose at the paper in her hand, as if she thinks it's an insult.

'It's not really very good,' I say casually, 'you don't have to keep it.'

'Oh no! It's lovely, Gerry! Really! Honest! It was really sweet of you to pay for it.' She puts it away carefully in her bag.

And that's the way it went on. Whenever Zoe and me walked through the town, we seemed to draw these people like magnets: the tramps and the winos and the hard-luck merchants. Zoe would rummage in the mauve handbag and out would come the purse and she would flash the old smile and give them the hand-out, like one of those ladies in the old days giving alms to the needy. It was a bit embarrassing, to tell you the truth. However, we still went out together. There was still the animal attraction, as I said, though, mind you, things were going a bit slow in that direction and I wasn't sure why. One thing that was always on my mind was that she had never invited me out to the Bearsden homestead, which I thought might have been a better bet than the scheme with the old lady sitting smoking at the fire.

One night, after we had been going out for about two months, I had a dream about Zoe – one of those erotic dreams. It was nice at first. You know the kind. The two of us splashing about naked

underneath a waterfall in a beautiful sunny hollow – Walt Disney for adults. Then we're getting dressed and I overhear her saying on the phone (this is back in the beach-house or the log cabin or somewhere), 'I can't speak now, Nigel. I'm still with the tramp.' I'm blazing mad and just about to confront her . . . and that's all I remember of the dream.

A dream always makes you think. It gives you a strange feeling. I'm sitting toasting my toes by the fire and sipping my coffee. It's waterfalls outside and I don't want to go. I just want to sit here and try to think about the dream and see how it feels.

'Remember you've got to sign on,' the old lady says from the other side of the fire, waking me out of my day-dream. 'Are you still going out with that nice girl, son?' she asks, taking a big drag on her fag. 'When are you going to bring her home for her tea?'

She's winking again. I mutter something and scuttle through to the bedroom to get dressed. Bring her here? Oh no! I've had enough of Zoe's hollow smiles at me and my patch. Bringing her home to the old lady's fawning patter just would not do. No way. I can imagine the old lady curtsying or something and skelping the chair with a duster before Zoe put her bum on it.

What with that dream that wouldn't stop going round in my head, and the grey rain drizzling down all day and something funny in Zoe's voice on the phone last night, I wasn't looking forward to seeing her that night. I was to meet her outside the Odeon at eight, so I decided to have a couple of drinks first – just to get out of the rain and stay away from the old lady.

I drift into Lauder's in Sauchiehall Street at about six. As usual it's mobbed, vibrating with the juke-box. There's nobody I know so it's pleasant enough to stand at the bar, letting the bitter taste of a pint of Guinness soothe my worries, relaxing in the anonymity of the crowd. It engulfs you – the noise, the colours, the smell of the drink and the perfume. I get another pint of Guinness and find a corner to sit and read my paper. We're getting Jim Reeves from the old juke-box now – 'You're the only good thing'.

The customary perusal of the Situations Vacant: sales reps mostly. 'Do you want to make 25,000 a year? You can if you're the right sort of bloke.'

I know I'm the wrong sort, so I fold the paper over to the crossword. This is one big aspect of the problem, of course, me being unemployed and going out with Zoe, the doctor's daughter. I'm sure it's got a lot to do with me not getting anywhere near Bearsden. Can you imagine me sitting in the Bearsden lounge, sipping the Martini, when the old boy strolls in from the golf-course. 'Well, Zoe, so this is the young man who's been entertaining you these last few weeks. Pleased to meet you, my boy. What profession are you hoping to enter yourself?'

I'm not making much of the crossword, so I sink another pint and throw a whisky down after it. Well, there you are. What's green and gets you drunk? Chartreuse? Crème de Menthe? No, a giro. Actually, the drink's beginning to warm me up a bit. That funny feeling from the dream is beginning to die away. I'm getting it straight in my mind what I want to say to Zoe. I'm finally going to tell her straight. I'm not getting aggressive. I don't get aggressive with drink, just philosophical. Things fall into perspective. 'Right, Zoe. What's your game? Let's put our cards on the table. I'm not good enough for your posh pals. Am I right? Admit it. I'm really just another tramp to you, a suitable case for treatment from the soup-kitchen of the heart. A bit of interesting slumming for you? Well, it's no deal, honey. No way. You can't treat this boy like dirt. Pride's my middle name. I've always said it. Take me as you find me or leave me alone. That's the way I live. Always have, always will.

God, it's 8.25! I've never been late for Zoe before!

Well, so what? I drain the last brown, bitter dregs of my Guinness. Let her wait for once. Who the hell does she think she is anyway? I step out of the warm, boozy atmosphere into the grey, pissing rain. It's coming down heavy now. I feel like diving back into the pub, but I turn up my collar and hurry across the road and just about bump into somebody coming round the corner out of Renfield Street. I'm trying to step round him, and Christ! – he's standing there in the rain greeting me. I look up. It figures. It's Dr Kichecky (or Nochecky as he's known). I haven't run into him for months, but whenever you do you can't get past him. He's this old black guy that looks and sounds a bit like Paul Robeson (an old singer my granda used to listen to), but he's a

down-and-out who taps you every time he meets you. He goes through the palaver of introducing himself and telling you his cheque hasn't come through and taking your name and address to send what he owes on to you. The story goes that at one time he was a brilliant surgeon till a tragic accident happened. He sewed somebody up with the scalpel still inside them or something and then, through the disgrace, he went down the hill with the drink. It sounds like a Dr Kildare script to me. He has that look of a lifetime loser. Anyway, that's his existence now, padding about the city in an old navy raincoat and his shoes tied round with string and always carrying the same old, cracked, black attaché case.

It's a bit of a joke, bumping into him when I'm on my way to meet Zoe. I shove ten pence into his hand and try to get past him.

But the notebook's out and he's barring my way with, 'Now where shall I send the money when my cheque comes through?'

'Send it to Oxfam!' I shout, and as I turn away I catch a glimpse of his notebook, crammed with pencil-written names and addresses and amounts. And, God above us, there it is, sticking out a mile at the bottom of the grubby page: Zoe's name. I crane round to see it. He snaps the book shut, but it was there definitely: Zoe's name and address and, next to it, 'amount - two pounds'.

'You've done it now!' I whisper at him, menacingly.

'What . . . what do you mean?'

'Zoe! That's what. You're in her power now, one of her debtors. If that cheque doesn't come through at last . . . God help you.'

I walk away from him, laughing out loud, and he stands staring after me as if I'm nuts.

The rain's torrential now. People are scattering off the street into doorways. And there's Zoe, standing in the door of the Odeon waiting for me, her next customer. She's wearing the creamy coat and the mauve shoes with the matching bag, and she's looking at her watch as I square my shoulders and walk up to her. She seems a bit worried, but as soon as she sees me she turns on the smile which, however, falters a bit as I stumble over the kerb.

'Gerry,' she says, knitting her brows and looking at me in that patronizing way, as if I've come out in my true down-and-out colours at last, 'are you drunk?' I'm standing there, swaying slightly, but smiling through the rain and trying to act casual.

'(Maybe we'd better go and get you something to eat so you can sober up,' she says, and the Bearsden accent sounds so thick you could cut it with a knife.

'Sober up? What do you mean? I've only had a couple of drinks. Christ! You think I was like that guy in The Happy Moon. Forget it! Let's go in and see the picture.'

'We've missed about twenty minutes of it now,' she says, glancing at her watch.

'Ach well, who cares? They're always slow at the beginning, anyhow. You can pick up the threads as we go along. Come on.'

I take her by the elbow and we step towards the foyer, but she stops. She's looking down, her lips pursed.

'Look, Gerry, I don't think I would enjoy the film now. Perhaps we could see it another night. Why can't we just go for a hamburger or something?'

I step back from her.

'Oh you wouldn't enjoy it, eh? The odour of the alcohol would spoil the pleasure of the Odeon? How awful! Let's go and sort Gerry out first. Stick his head in the horse trough and maybe get him shaved and deloused as well.'

It's all coming out now. All the stuff that was gathering in me in the pub.

Zoe's never heard me speaking like this before. She's looking at me, wide-eyed, and glancing about as if she could do with some help in such strange circumstances.

'That's not very fair, Gerry. After all, you're half an hour late and it's not my fault -'

'Half an hour late! Christ!' I turn my eyes up to the roof and give full vent to the sarcasm. 'Oh how awful! Oh what a big crime! Half an hour late for the hand-out. It's like trying to make your signing on time: "Right, just wait till the queue's through. Now then, explain why you're late. We may have to lapse your payments for this, you know. We have other people to attend to and we can't just run this office to suit you." Come on, Zoe. Get

your head out the buttercups. This is the real world!

'Gerry, what's the matter?' It's an urgent whisper, and there's a pained look in her face. 'Why are you being so aggressive?'

'Aggressive? Who's being aggressive? This is me trying to get you to come clean. Admit the truth. See the facts for what they are. I've let it all wash over me for too long. Well, that's it. I've had a bellyful. I'm putting up with no more indignities!'

It was a good word. I spat it out.

'Indignities? What on earth do you mean, Gerry? What are you talking about?' She's really wide-eyed now and there's a line in the middle of her forehead.

'Oh don't give us that! What do you think I've got, skin or an elephant's hide? I'm not daft, you know. I can see what you're doing. Every time you venture out of Bearsden it's a visit to the slums, an expedition to study the natives. You bring your bag of coloured beads and hand them out if we say something nice. Oh, they're good chaps really, these people, if you know how to treat them right.'

'Gerry, please -'

'Oh don't give me any more of your crap! That's the way you've treated me all along. Just the same as the rest. Just another tramp you're taking an interest in: a donation to Oxfam, a night out with Gerry. Does it all go in the diary at night? Good works done among the lower orders today: pictures with Gerry (required detoxification first); two pounds to Dr Nochecky, an old dilapidated Negro who reminded me of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.'

'How did you know -'

'Oh we've got a network, you know. The subculture. We're all one big tribe in this city, the lower orders. We report back at night too, pool all the takings, everything we get off the white bwanas.'

I'm in full swing now. Pouring it all out like vomit. Zoe looks stunned.

'Gerry, I don't know how you can say all this,' she says, shaking her head. She sighs and hesitates then, turning up the collar of her coat, she says briskly, 'Anyway, I think I'd better go home now. Goodnight!' and ducks out into the rain.

'It's true. That's how I can say it,' I yell, striding after her. 'It's all been a big freak show to you, hasn't it? Everybody you met

when you were with me . . . the old lady, the whole lot. You couldn't wait to make an expedition to the scheme. Never mind if the smell would have made you puke. Your curiosity would have got you there.'

Zoe has stopped. We're facing each other in the pouring rain.

'Oh yes, and what about Gerry all this time? Invite Gerry out to Bearsden? Bloody Bearsden! No way! He might dirty the avenues. Don't take your work home with you. Just visit them in their own patch and observe them. As if we were a bunch of bloody savages!'

And then, I remember, Zoe looks at me as she's never done before.

Her face is white and she's staring hard at me, but saying nothing. It's as if she's seeing me for the first time. I can't think of anything else to say and Zoe just stands there not bothering about the rain.

When she finally speaks, it's almost a whisper.

'How can you be so cruel?' She pauses as if she might get an answer. 'I never invited you out to my house because I felt absolutely certain you wouldn't want to come.' She pauses again, but I still can't think of anything to say. 'If you stop to think of it for one moment, you'll realize that I've never once suggested anywhere we went. Never once. And I've always thought that was the best arrangement. Whatever made you happy was always good enough for me. And any time you've looked unhappy, I've always thought it was me that was doing something wrong, though I've never known what.' It's still the same whisper, but her voice is shaky now. 'As for your mother, I thought she was a delightful person. I would have liked to have met her again. How horrible of you to suggest I was looking down on her! How could you think that? But what's worse is that all this time . . . all the time you've been going out with me, you've had this awful, poisoned idea of me in your head, and you've never said anything about it. It makes me feel so sad, I . . . and all the time, I've been just so pleased to be with you - maybe a bit uneasy sometimes, no wonder, I see now - but really very pleased to be going out with you, and . . . Oh, Gerry, how could you be so cruel and so . . . so unfair?'

Her lip's quivering. 'Wait a minute, Zoe . . .'

'No, I won't wait,' she says, stepping away from me as if she's suddenly discovered I've got rabies. 'I'm going home now and I never want to see you again.'

God! Tears are running down her face!

'Zoe . . .' I move towards her, but she turns and walks away.

She turns back. 'Here! I don't want to keep anything you ever gave me!'

She's opening her bag. Christ! What's coming? I never gave her anything. She throws it at my feet in the rain. It's the folded up picture the Artist did of her. She runs off down into the bright lights and noise of Renfield Street, hunched up, her hands stuck in her coat pockets.

'Zoe! . . . Zoe!' I'm shouting, lurching down the road after her, the Artist's picture clutched in my hand. I collide with somebody running with his head down through the bucketing rain. I stagger on. Zoe's jumping on a bus at the lights – not her bus – any bus to get away from me!

'Zoe! . . . Zoe!' The lights have changed and I'm running full belt as the bus revs away. I'm almost there. I'm reaching for the bar just as the driver shuts the door. I trip and fall into the path of a car gathering speed behind the bus. There's a screech of brakes like a cry of alarm and a scream from the pavement, and I roll over into the gutter as Zoe's bus disappears down the road out of sight.

I'm on my hands and knees watching it. An old couple are shuffling past, arm in arm.

'A young fella the worse for drink, Isa,' comments the old guy without looking at me.

I limp away back up through the sodden city and end up in a corner in some nondescript, old man's boozer, I don't know where, drinking the last of my week's money.

The next morning hit me on the head like a ton of cold water. My guts contracted every time an image from the night before came to the surface. I stuck my head in the pan and put my fingers down my throat and spewed. It must have been a bad pint, I told the old lady. 'Well, you will drink,' she says.

If this was one of those *True Romance* stories or something

out of the *Jackie*, I would tell you how the truth about Zoe now emerged like suppressed evidence after a rigged trial. It would all come out with a rush: how Zoe had never been out with a boy before me; how her father was a drunkard who used to batter Zoe and her mother; how he's now offsky down to England, leaving their lives in ruins after they've been virtual prisoners in the Bearsden bungalow for years; how Zoe rebuilds their lives, tending the mother, who's now a physical and mental wreck, with constant loving care; how they've got hardly a penny to live on; how Zoe meets a boy she thinks is wonderful because he takes her to restaurants and gets her portrait done and so on; how I realize I've thrown away a pearl, but it's too late now, or is it?

As you'll know, life's never really like that, but, as the days went by it came home to me that what I actually knew about Zoe you could have written on the back of a stamp. And then one day when I met Dunky and the girlfriend and I started hearing things about Zoe that sounded as if they might just have a vague resemblance to that *True Romance* story, I made an excuse and hurried away, shuddering, in case the whole thing would come true.

There were many phone calls to Zoe, but she didn't want to know. Her old lady answered in a clipped tone: Zoe was not available. Or the phone was put down as soon as I spoke. She couldn't even bear to speak to me. I was unforgivable. I even wrote, but she didn't reply. It was dead, the whole thing. I've never seen Zoe since.

So here I am, a year later, back in The South Pacific hoping for what, I don't know. The Artist is plying his trade with a baldy, middle-aged guy who looks like a shabby office clerk out for his lunch-break. He's forking chips into his mouth and reading his paper, while the Artist sketches.

'Now, what colour are your eyes, sir?'

'Bloodshot.'

A moment's nervous hesitation of the Artist's fingers over the pencil pocket. 'Oh, don't say that,' he says, pulling out the blue and finishing the sketch.

'That's nothing like me,' says the clerk, glancing up from his

Daily Express. 'It's more like Humpty Dumpty with a moustache, for God's sake.'

'Well, that's the way the Artist sees you.'

'Here! Scram!' The clerk pushes fifty pence across the table. The Artist tips his hat and departs with his money.

The drawing falls over the edge of the table and floats down on to the floor. The old clerk goes back to his dinner and his paper.