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Opening Extract from...

The History of the World in 100 Modern Objects

Middle Class Stuff (and Nonsense!)

Written by Francesca Hornak

Published by Portico

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History of the World in 100 Modern Objects is based on Francesca Hornak's popular column in *The Sunday Times Style Magazine*.

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For Luke and Laura

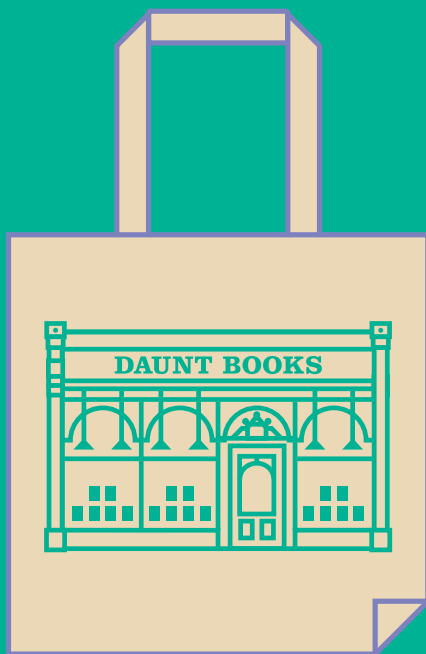
INTRODUCTION

I'm afraid I can't remember a time when I wasn't conscious of products and brands. As a small child in the 1980s I registered the nuances of Barbie versus Sindy, and was keen to be a Start-rite person, not a Clarks person. I even used to hop between Channel 4 and ITV, hunting for ads. At the time I knew I liked the little stories about people's lives and homes. But I imagine my ad-habit also gave me an early sense of our collective aspirations and anxieties. That sounds awful on paper, but it has actually brought me a great deal of fun in my work, not least writing this column for *The Sunday Times Style* magazine.

History Of The World In 100 Modern Objects all began with the Daunt Books bag. I started seeing it constantly – or at least in every Waitrose in London – as if it was the bourgeoisie's new It Bag. None of these Daunt carriers would have described themselves as label junkies, I'm sure. But there they were, clearly pleased to be a Daunt Books sort of person. The Brompton bike, KitchenAid mixer and Sophie the Giraffe were all in my sights from the outset, too, although my favourite objects were often those we use without thinking – like the plastic soy sauce fish in takeaway sushi.

As I went on I began linking different stories. There's a wedding at Thudbury Hall that spans three columns, a hipster restaurant called Pork Shop that pops up twice, and a wheelie suitcase that commutes back and forth from the house in 'Jo Malone Candle'. I wrote some columns as pairs, so that Miss Davies in 'Gemstone iPhone Cover' gets her own say in 'E-Vape', and Froufrou Dot the fashion blogger has the last laugh on Georgia Row, a bullying journalist. There are lots of incidental links too – Matt in 'Corner Sofa' is the ex who dumped Kate in 'Extra Large Wineglasses', for example, and Julian who throws the Moroccan pouffe out of his therapist's window is the angry art dealer in 'Joseph Joseph Chopping Boards'. Not surprisingly, the 'world' of the column's title turned out to be rather a small one.

Pinpointing social tribes is one of *Style's* strengths, and I was lucky that readers seemed to enjoy seeing themselves parodied. It made the column very entertaining to write, and I'm grateful to my editors for letting me make up stories, when I was supposed to be a journalist.

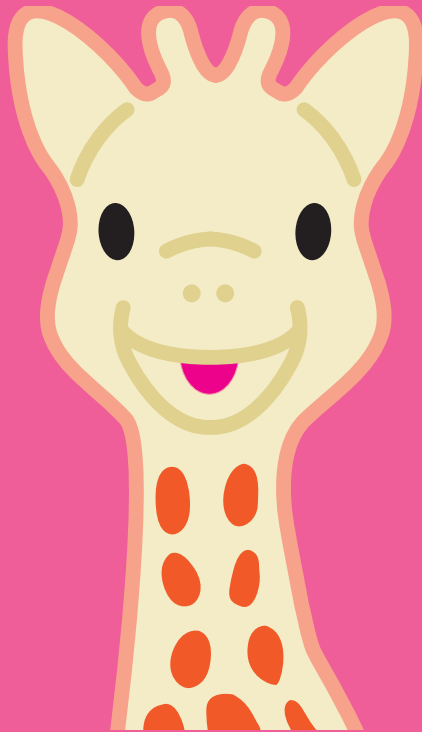


DAUNT BOOKS BAG

Margaret's book club is going to an author reading at Daunt's. It was Linda's idea. Margaret, 66, would rather meet at someone's house and compare grandchildren and Arche shoes, as usual. But she dutifully puts on fuchsia tights, finds her Daunt Bag and leaves her husband a 'daal for one' ready meal, from that brilliant shop COOK.

Linda, who lives near Margaret's friend Sarah in Hampstead, has somehow infiltrated their gang. She always chooses bestsellers from the Richard & Judy Book Club. Last time they all had to read *Elizabeth Is Missing*, and felt depressed that they might be senile. Linda also showed everyone up by cooking an elaborate Ottolenghi stew. Now they all have to cook, when they used to just do nibbles.

The author at Daunt's is a young man called Andrew, best known for his first novel about an autistic cellist. Why must modern books be so gloomy? At least there's wine, though not as cold as she'd like. Linda asks a long question that is really more of a statement. Later, Margaret's husband asks why she bothers with book club, when there are plenty of classics she'd do better to re-read. Margaret can't quite remember. She just knows she likes being a Daunt Books sort of person.



SOPHIE THE GIRAFFE

Jo met Tamsin at NCT. The group gathers weekly at Costa with their three-month-olds, marshalled by Jo's emails, titled 'Playdate and cake!' She arrives first with Archie, chubby with formula and grinning gummily from his Bugaboo throne. Tamsin, a fan of 'baby-wearing', cradles Isla-Rose in an Ergobaby papoose. The child occasionally peers out with alarmed eyes. Both infants clutch Sophie the Giraffe.

Jo follows Gina Ford, and reminds a shattered-looking Tamsin how she got Archie to sleep through at 10 weeks. 'Gina says they need to learn to settle themselves,' she says, head tilted sympathetically. Tamsin gushes that she's just 'too soft' to leave Isla to cry, after reading 'all the research' on the neurological damage it causes. She confides that she co-sleeps to aid bonding, enjoying the horror that flashes over Jo's face.

Jo agrees that 'happy mummy equals happy baby', and that since she 'really needs her sleep', they had to have routine. Tamsin fumbles for a breast to stifle Isla's frantic screams. 'The trouble is Isla's just such a livewire,' she says. 'And so sociable. She's already babbling!' Jo removes Sophie's foot from Archie's nostril. 'Yeah,' she says, beatifically. 'We're lucky this one's so chilled.'

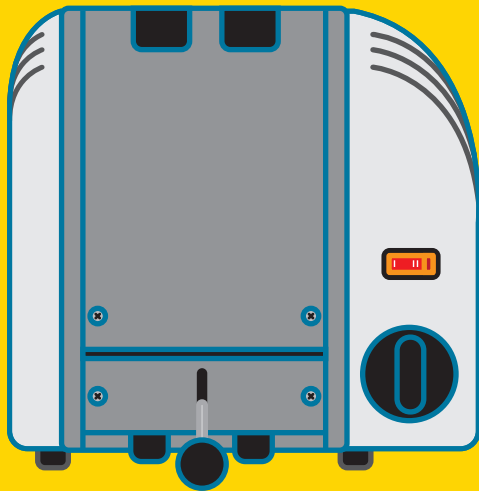


BROMPTON BIKE

Jackie, 48, is a commissioning editor at Channel 4. She recently won an award for *Beeline*, a series on urban beekeeping. Every morning she pulls on her Superdry gilet and cycles in from Kilburn, a Tupperware box of Nigel Slater leftovers in her pannier, Rufus Wainwright or Lou Reed (RIP) in her ears. The Brompton, a present from her civil partner, Emma, is the bollocks.

Jackie met Emma through Emma's ex-husband who, awkwardly, also works at Channel 4. They are constantly invited to dinner parties by couples from Emma's old life who, Jackie suspects, are delighted to show off 'our lesbian friends'. Jackie never expected to be a stepmother, or to leave her peaceful flat in Farringdon. But now she lives in a chaotic semi with Emma's children, Josh, 18, and Lily, 16. Josh complains of oestrogen overload, and refuses Jackie's barley risottos, preferring to cook everything in his George Foreman Lean Mean Grilling Machine. Lily needs nightly assistance with media studies coursework.

They're great kids, but as she cycles home, Jackie often dreams of the day they go to university. She pictures entire evenings watching *Homeland*, over pinot noir and their favourite Divine Fairtrade chocolate. She doesn't realise that neither child will move out until 2025.

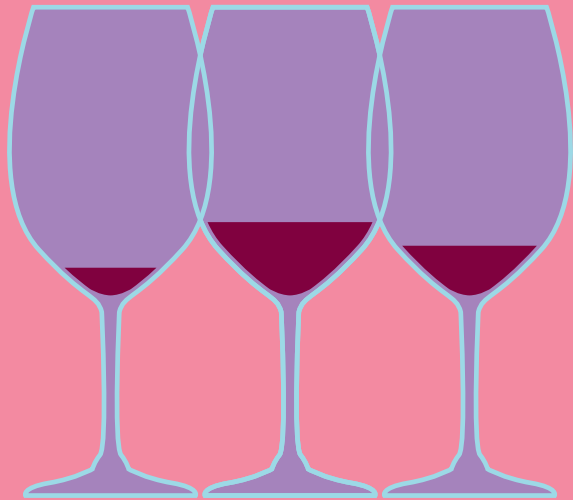


DUALIT TOASTER

Oscar, 14, lives in a big Victorian house in Crouch End. When he gets home from his private boys' school, he slumps on a stool in the island kitchen, WhatsApping with one hand, shoving toast into his mouth with the other. The problem is that Dualit toasters are bare loud, so his dad, Miles, a copywriter, often hears the ticking and comes down from his home office to chat. #fail

Oscar wishes they had Nutella and bagels, like at Zach's house, but his mum, Nicola, buys that wholemeal Cranks shit. It's unfair, because Oscar's the only one who eats bread now anyway. His sister, Ella, 17, genuinely eats nothing, and his parents have got into porridge. Miles went mental when Oscar said porridge was gay. 'Some of our dearest friends are gay, Oscar,' he said. 'Some of yours may be, too.' Oscar made vomiting noises and Ella screamed, because she has an actual phobia of sick. #OCD

When they get too much, Oscar retreats to his room in the loft conversion. Once, Nicola asked if he was looking at 'internet pornography' up there. He hadn't been, until she mentioned it. But mostly he's playing *Call of Duty*, or standing at the mirror pushing all his hair over to one side. #yourmum



EXTRA LARGE WINEGLASSES

Kate's extra large wineglasses live between *Jamie's 30 Minute Meals* and the Keep Calm And Carry On Shopping mugs. Kate lives in an overpriced, mouse-infested flat in Balham, with her friend Mills. On the sofa are Union Jack cushions. In the fridge there is always a bag of wilting rocket, and a bottle of Oxford Landing sauvignon blanc. Audrey Hepburn smiles down from the wall.

Things were going OK for Kate, until she hit 30. She grew up in Hampshire, made lots of friends who looked just like her at Newcastle, and got stuck into PR. But lately, life has turned sour. Every weekend, she's the token single girl at another wedding. Her boobs and bloneness don't seem to have the effect they used to. Worse, her younger, thinner sister Fizzy is engaged.

Mills puts Kate on Mysinglefriend.com, with a profile shot of her laughing in big sunglasses. She goes on dates with men in North Face gilets, and talks about travelling and how she plays netball on Tuesdays. Sometimes, after these dates, she feels she ought to cry. She achieves this by turning on Magic FM, pouring a massive glass and googling Matt, who dumped her at 28 because she was 'perfect, but it was the wrong time'.



PINK HUNTER WELLIES

Aimee, 22, has just graduated in fashion communication. She's visiting her big sister, Danielle, in London, for Lovebox. Aimee is well into her fashion, but it's different down here to back home in Doncaster. Dani's new friends are nice girls, but they don't take care of themselves. They'll not wear heels for a night out, and that Ellie had no make-up on.

Aimee planned her festival look weeks ago. She's wearing a white 'vintage-style' ASOS dress, like Mollie King had on in *Grazia*, a skinny belt, a Topshop fedora and pink Hunter wellies. She's had her brows retinted and a double-dip tan. Lash extensions flap on her eyes like tiny black wings.

Danielle cringed when she saw Aimee's boots. She remembered Ellie once saying that girly Hunters were 'a bit Coleen Rooney', and that fake lashes were 'so *Geordie Shore*'. But Aimee doesn't get it – nobody from back home does.

Arriving at Lovebox, Danielle sees Ellie clock the pink boots and feels herself going the same colour. She has a tense day, half blanking her sister, half snapping at Ellie. Aimee has a great time. She loses everyone and ends up snogging the drummer in Ellie's favourite band. Get in.



WHELIE SUITCASE

Every Sunday, Tim, a chartered surveyor, gets the train from Manningtree to Liverpool Street, leaving his wife, Ally, and kids at the Old Rectory, Suffolk. Tim, 44, works half the week in London, where he rents a bleak studio flat in London Bridge. Despite living out of a wheeled suitcase himself, other passengers' wheeled cases infuriate him. He likes to punish especially slow rollers with a sly kick. Sometimes he is rewarded with a reproachful backwards glance.

After a weekend of Ally's incessant guests and his daughters' Justin Bieber singalongs, the quiet carriage is Tim's sanctuary. He has a private ritual of a G&T and bag of Nobby's Nuts from the buffet car, while reading Robert Ludlum and texting Kim, who he has been shagging since the launch of a new office space in Docklands.

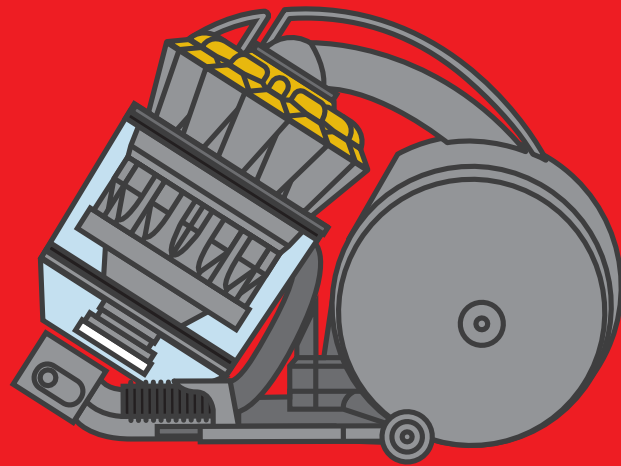
By Thursday, though, the flat always starts to get him down. He finds himself missing Ally's bountiful fridge and fragrant bathrooms, and takes to buying her peonies or Hotel Chocolat truffles in the station on his journey home. Once there, in front of the woodburning stove and *Mad Men*, they congratulate themselves again on moving to the country.



MINI MICRO SCOOTER

Anne, 70, enjoyed one year of retirement before becoming an unofficial childminder to her three-year-old grandson, Noah. With childcare being so dear, this has allowed her daughter-in-law, Chrissie, to return to work. Three mornings a week, Anne drops Noah at nursery, picks him up and entertains him all afternoon with the many garish toys Chrissie has installed in Anne's house. Much as she loves Noah, she wonders if he needs quite so much kit. But ever since she and Chrissie clashed over his name (Anne had worried he'd be teased, though, in fact, there are two other Noahs at nursery), she hasn't dared to question her.

Noah's favourite toy, this Mini Micro Scooter, is not allowed in nursery, so, after dropping him off, Anne has to carry it home. Sometimes, if the streets are empty, she likes to hop on and glide downhill. One day, zipping along the pavement, she skids and bruises her hip quite badly. When Chrissie arrives that evening and notices her limp, Anne claims to have tripped over Noah's new Trunki. It's worth the sore hip to have half the Fisher-Price in her kitchen removed by a contrite Chrissie.

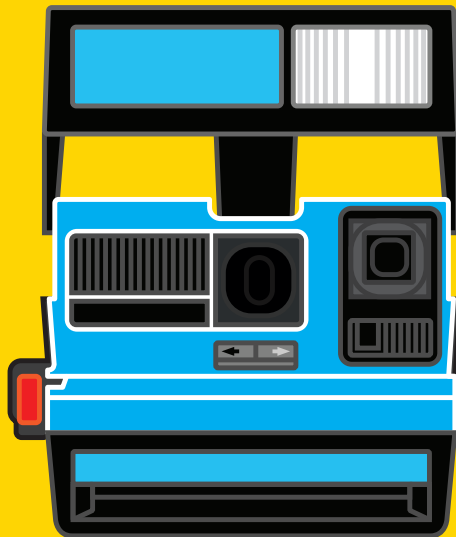


DYSON VACUUM CLEANER

Irina the cleaner is coming. Alison, 51, rushes around, throwing her teenage sons' stuff into heaps and shouting: 'Take your piles upstairs! Tidy your rooms for Irina!' Each week her eldest, Harry, says: 'Why do you clean for the cleaner?' And each week she says: 'Because she's here to clean, not tidy.'

When Irina arrives, Alison speaks to her in a special slow, loud voice, with a slight Russian lilt (Irina is Polish). Afterwards, she stalks round the house, checking what Irina has done wrong. The spatulas are never in the right drawer, and she has to de-hotel the cushions, which Irina over-plumps and lines up behind each other. At Christmas, Alison re-gifts Irina unwanted soap, while Irina brings Lindt chocolate balls and an unintentionally kitsch card. Alison wishes she wouldn't and feels ashamed of only paying her the living wage.

Today, there is a standoff over the Dyson. Irina complains that 'Hoover, he broke.' Alison insists she need only empty the cylinder, presuming Irina is unfamiliar with the nifty 'no bag' mechanism. It's only when they dismantle the Dyson that a used condom emerges, unblocking the hose. Damn Harry. This is why you clean for the cleaner.



POLAROID CAMERA

Fashion blogger Froufrou Dot, 30, mastered her selfie pose years ago – eyes down, pigeon toes, hands grasping the 1990s lunchbox she has made her personal It bag. This was the box that held the ‘weird’ Korean lunches she used to be bullied for at school. Now it has appeared in *Elle*. In your face, bullies.

Froufrou lists her ‘favourite things’ as gingham, eggs benedict, *A Clockwork Orange*, collecting scented erasers, autumn, taxidermy and Helvetica. She was using this camera long before Instagram offered a Polaroid filter, documenting her twenties in a flattering haze. Lately, her blog has really taken off – first she was covered in ASOS magazine, then *Stylist*, and last London Fashion Week, she was front row. Soon after, a minor fake-eyelash brand invites her to be their ambassador. She accepts, after lengthy discussions with blogger friends about ‘selling out’, held over flat whites in Bethnal Green.

Only Froufrou’s mother isn’t happy for her. Why can’t she have a real job? What is a ‘blogger’? Where will it all end? But even she can’t complain when Froufrou gets her own show on Food Network, *Kimchi Kitchen*, making fashion-themed packed lunches.



DOG BALL LAUNCHER

The dog ball launcher is one of Yvonne's favourite doggy toys. It allows her to chuck Skip's ball far enough for her to send a text, before he comes hurtling back. Yvonne, 41, never thought she'd be one of those dog mummies who buys into all the kit. She imagined, with her sensible Yorkshire upbringing, that when she got the dog she has yearned for all her adult life, it would be a big, no-nonsense hound. Then she fell for Skip, a miniature staffy, and now has a flat full of squeaky toys and poo bags in every pocket, and lets Skip snooze on her bed. She used to work so late she had no time for anything else (especially men). These days, she rushes home at six for walkies.

People without dogs don't understand. Especially mothers. Yesterday, a child in the park sneaked up behind her, grabbed the ball launcher and swung it at Skip. The poor animal started barking in terror, but the boy's mother yelled: 'Control your dog!' That really got on Yvonne's wick. She tells her sister Chrissie that night on the phone, who replies in a singsong voice: 'Sure you don't want a baby?'

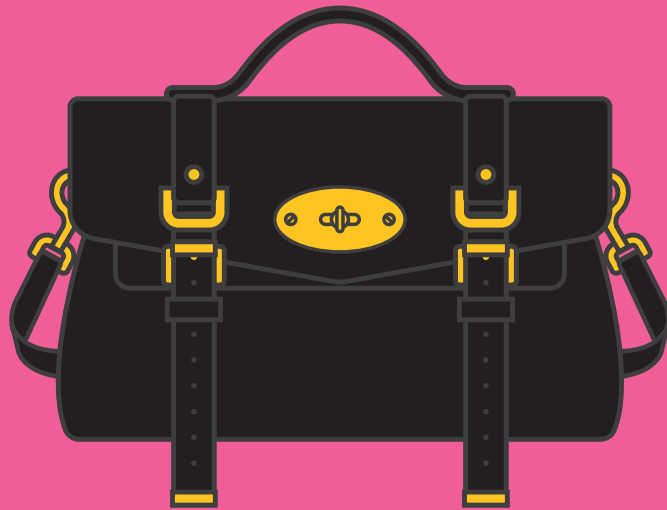


ROLL TOP BATH

‘When Jools, 40, stumbled on a stunning Victorian bath at Lassco, she never expected it to kick-start a new career.’ This is how Jools imagines her story will read some day in a Sunday supplement. The bath had to be shoehorned into the master bedroom, to her husband’s chagrin, since the bathroom was too small. This homage to Babington House hasn’t worked quite so well in Kensal Rise, with Arlo and Rafferty’s non-slip mat and Peppa Pig bath crayons.

Jools returned to work in the music industry when Arlo was nine months, just as her son developed appalling eczema. She tried every cream in Wholefoods, and instructed his nursery that he mustn’t eat dairy, gluten, acidic fruit or supermarket bread. She was desperate. Then a mumsnetter advised hanging organic oats in his bath. Within days, Arlo was like a different child.

Determined to help other mummies, Jools enlisted a friend in the beauty industry to develop pretty muslin poultices for eczema prone skin. The brand is called Arlo’s Oaties, the logo a photo of Arlo peeping over the roll top bath. In its first year, Jools makes a profit of £12. She is still profiled in a Sunday supplement (the one her friend edits), as a ‘mumtrepreneur’.



MULBERRY BAG

Rosie, 23, has been promoted to Junior Account Manager at Bassline PR. She is now trusted to take beauty journalists to The Wolseley, where she talks breathlessly about her client Arlo's Oaties, a new skincare brand. Walking down Bond Street after one such breakfast, she decides to splurge her first pay cheque on a Mulberry Alexa. Feeling invincible, she posts a selfie on Facebook captioned, 'Just went mad in Mulberry!!! Oops!!! YOLO.'

Rosie is a people person, but somehow she hasn't clicked with her line manager Nat. Hoping to please, Rosie replies all to an office-wide email, praising Nat's decision to head an Arlo's Oaties press release 'Oats Amaze'. Nat emails her privately, accusing her of taking credit for the idea. Stunned, Rosie weeps quietly in the loos. Her mum says Nat is threatened.

Worse still, at lunch, Rosie accidentally leaves with Nat's bag (she also has a new Alexa). An unopened text on Nat's phone screen reads: 'She copied your bag??? Single White Female...' Rosie shoves it away, shaking. After work, she manages to exchange her new Alexa for a Bayswater, telling everyone the next day: 'Just thought it was more timeless.' Nat starts plotting Rosie's appraisal.



OVERSIZE ANGLEPOISE

Rising star Rollo Tate, 22, is flat-sitting for director Mike Hollingworth, currently in LA for pilot season. Rollo rather enjoys playing house in Mike's apartment, which is deep in a Hoxton school conversion and dominated by a giant Anglepoise. After drinking Mike's Scotch, he likes to recite Hamlet in its spotlight.

Rollo's break was *Moorhouse*, an ITV drama set on a psychiatric ward. But ever since his character was killed off, he has craved a part to show he's more than a pretty face. His Burberry contract pays well and keeps him on the party circuit, but he's an actor first. *Clean Up* at the Apollo, by new playwright Lottie Byle, is perfect. The cast of three has no props bar a stuffed heron. Rollo ends the play naked.

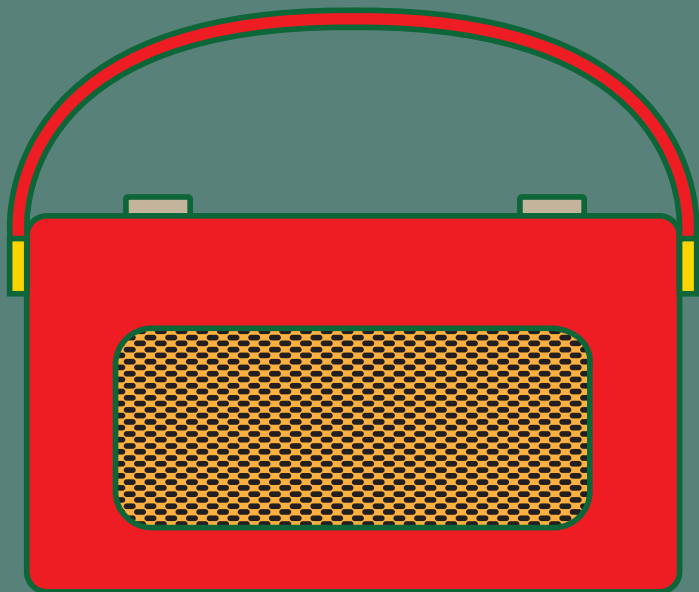
Between rehearsals, Rollo lounges in the French House, extolling the purity of theatre. His entire performance has been stripped back, rehoned. It has been deeply, deeply humbling, and an honour to work with Byle, who is just such a sweetheart. Before the opening night, he takes Mike's Bafta from the loo and practises acceptance speeches, lit by the Anglepoise. It's slightly annoying when all the reviews are about his nude scene.



BABY ON BOARD BADGE

Tara, 36, head girl at St Paul's and now a partner at corporate law firm Cadavar & Dew, is determined to do pregnancy on her terms. She launches a military conception campaign with her new husband, Will, which sees wine, coffee, tight boxers and plastic water bottles banned, and sex scheduled around smiley-face ovulation tests. She visits an acupuncture man recommended in the *FT* to cover all bases, and even forces her BMI over 19 for the first time since Oxford. Before long, she achieves the magic two lines on the test stick.

At first, Tara can't see what the fuss is about. She is confident she will breeze through pregnancy, doing her Kegels and wowing everyone by 'not looking pregnant from behind'. But, at week six, it all unravels. Stomach heaving, nose assaulted by her colleagues' aftershave, she starts wolfing down jacket potatoes instead of her daily Pret salad and nodding off in meetings. By week 14, she succumbs to a Baby on Board badge, so she can get a seat in the crush to Moorgate. Only once she's in the lift with the managing partner does she realise the badge is still on her Max Mara lapel. She still hasn't announced it. Not ideal.



ROBERTS RADIO

Claudia, 45, is a columnist, writing pithy rants for *The Times* from a cramped study in Brighton. Her ex-colleagues gave her this radio for company when she went freelance. It's permanently on Radio 4, so she has inadvertently become a fan of *The Archers*. Claudia does get dressed, but only into yoga trousers and an old, stained cardigan of her husband's. Knuckling down is a daily struggle. There is always washing to unload, or Twitter to stalk (she longs for a follow from Caitlin Moran). Sometimes she just stares out of the window eating oatcakes, for the whole of *Woman's Hour*.

For years, Claudia's special subject was 'not wanting children'. Then, to everyone's surprise, Ava arrived. Thank God she's now at school, so Claudia can procrastinate in peace. Today Claudia's column is pegged to new research on the benefits of 'interactive play' between parents and children. 'Whisper it,' she types, 'but playing with one's child is mind-crushingly boring. Frankly, mothers who find their offspring fascinating need their heads examined.'

She's rather pleased with this dig at a doting mother from Ava's school. Years later, Ava will find the column online. She'll never mention it, but will spend her twenties in therapy.

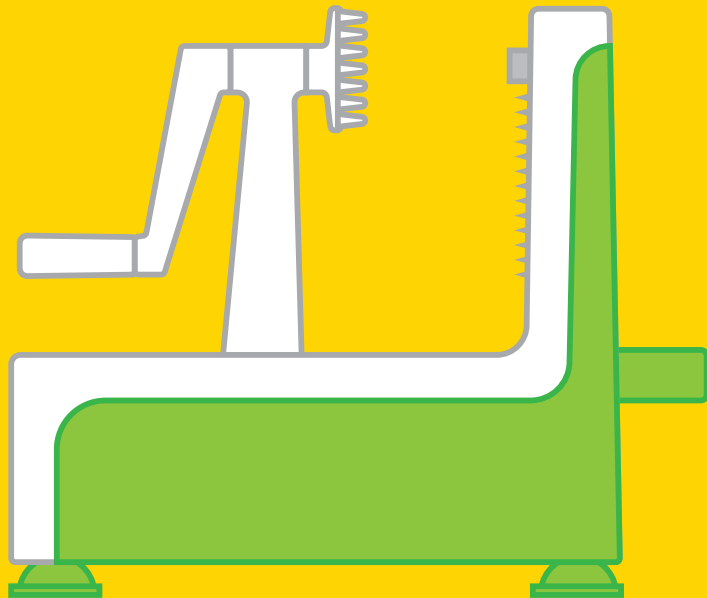


PENGUIN MUG

Ruth, 58, has retired from teaching to Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. Drawn by its literary heritage, she is dismayed by all the media types in Brontë country. She politely requests that they move their MacBook Airs and all-terrain buggies in the Watergate Tearooms. Despite her brisk exterior, unmarried Ruth has a weakness for romantic fiction. She reads it with Heathcliff, her tabby, on her lap and some tepid fennel tea. This Penguin *Wuthering Heights* mug was her housewarming gift to herself.

Ruth often calls Radio 4's *Feedback* and writes curt letters to newspapers. She lies in bed composing these complaints, searching for the arch note she deployed in school reports: 'Sirs, did your 'writer' really mean 'pyjama party', and not 'pyjamas party'? I presume that legs, plural, were present? Ruth Girton MA (Oxon).' Sometimes she receives hurried replies, whose grammar she relishes correcting in response.

Buoyed up by this contact, she takes a creative writing course at the local Arvon centre. Her novel will follow a teacher in 1980s Sheffield. But the tutor is more taken with a 23-year-old Irish boy who uses 'river' as a verb. When Ruth balks at this, the tutor replies: 'Real writers break rules.'



SPIRALIZER

Bea, 46, can't stand her sister-in-law, Erin, an ex-swimwear model turned reflexologist. But she can't see her brother, David, and nephews without her, so she regularly endures Erin's nasal voice and vegan cooking over long lunches. Afterwards Bea always asks her husband: 'What does David see in her?' Her husband always replies pointedly: 'She's happy. That's attractive.'

Today, Erin (who is wearing a ridiculous headband like a medieval damsel) actually brings her spiralizer to the table to give a courgetti demo. Bea's mother is doing her polite face, and saying how interesting it is. Bea says loudly that the spiralizer reminds her of the Play-Doh hairdresser she and David had as children, and she and her brother get hysterical private giggles, and she enjoys Erin looking confused.

After pudding (beet brownies), Erin corners Bea in the blond-wood kitchen. 'I'm sensing a lot of tension from you, Beatrice,' she says. Bea blushes, and protests she is fine. 'I hope so,' whispers Erin, touching her shoulder. Later, examining Erin's moisturisers in the bathroom, Bea spots a bottle of Prozac, labelled Mrs E Taylor. She knows she shouldn't be so pleased, but she can't wait to tell her husband.



E-VAPE

Teaching has been a massive challenge for Jen Davies, 27. People just see the long holidays, not the lesson planning and Ofsted reports and curriculum reforms (cheers for that, Michael Gove). And she still struggles with discipline. After school, holding court at the pub, she likes describing her teenage pupils as 'feral'. But the stress is getting to her. She was smoking 20 a day, so the GP recommended e-cigarettes, along with her SSRIs. Now, an e-vape sits charging by her bed every night. She calls it 'the gift that keeps on giving'.

It's parents' evening. Jen is primed to tell Chloe Hertford's parents some home truths about their 'gifted and talented' child (little cow). She takes a deep breath and explains, politely but assertively, that their daughter must apply herself. To prove her point, she hands over Chloe's iPhone, which she confiscated earlier. But Mr Hertford replies: 'Miss David, with all due respect, surely it's your job to motivate Chloe to apply herself? And she has a phone for her personal safety – as parents, we would appreciate it if you respected that.' He looks pointedly at the e-vape sticking out of her bag. Jen suddenly feels 15 herself.



CROCS

Carol is having trouble with her daughter Abigail, 14. She has started refusing the clothes Carol buys her, even a jazzy pair of red Crocs. When Carol points out that the rest of the family, even Dad, all wear Crocs, Abigail says in a new sarcastic voice: 'My point exactly'. She used to love manning the tea and biscuit table after church, and accompanying Carol's Sunday School worship group on her sax. Now she's always up in her room watching *Game of Thrones*. She looks different too. She has dyed her hair black, though it's come out more purple, and started wearing nasty cheap chokers and plum lipstick. Yesterday she blanked Carol on the High Street. Carol's husband Peter says it's just a phase.

The final straw comes when Abigail thumps downstairs demanding a lift to the station, wearing a black T-shirt that says: 'I'm a lot sexier on the internet.' Peter tells Abigail that the top is inappropriate at her age. She replies that Peter's yellow Crocs are inappropriate at *his* age. Carol loses her temper and says Abigail is behaving like a little tart. Just as well her daughter doesn't know that Carol is self-publishing an erotic eBook.