



**Oh, Mother
by Stevie Heaven**

¿

I wish my mother had taken a workshop in revelation. I'm not sure she even practised in front of a mirror first. She just walked into the kitchen and pulled a rabbit out of the hat.

'Surprise!'

Δ

Three months expire on some other continent until Elias misses/remembers me. (Okay Mr Semantics: *the idea of me*, if you want to be pernicky.) Whatever the case, he goes full showbiz. He persuades his agent to persuade the TV company to persuade the finance department to pay for our environmentally unfriendly reunion. 'I marvel at your timing,' I tell him through a phone, trying on flight socks.

¿

Even the therapist says, 'Well I didn't expect *this*.'

You and me both, sister.

i

ET the dog shits in some de-grassed, imitation-Chernobyl zone of the park.

This pram-owner catches up to me.

'Children have to walk around here, you know,' she pants, red-faced and breathless, wheeling us all to a stop.

She plants her arms on her hips and nods back at No Man's Land.

'People like you disgust me,' she says. 'You can't just leave that there.'

'Listen lady,' I say. 'I've been forced to rearrange my concerns. I'm currently at peace with doggy doo.'

i

Now that nothing makes any sense, I go pick up the travel money and a pair of union-inducing shoes that just might make my legs look longer.

Like any sane-minded woman would do.

↔

First things, first

1. Spew on the spot, or make it to the john.
2. Take up smoking again (apply gusto!).
3. Panic attacks borderlining cardiac arrest.
4. Visit doctor for benzodiazepines, beta blockers and a shrug.
5. Leave the country and play make believe.

Δ

I've been here for three minutes and we're already having an argument.

Elias, my boyfriend without a valid driver's licence, wants a convertible, but it's an extra \$300 and I don't see the point.

What I am most concerned with is having to make right turns on a red light and what the hell I should do when I meet her. (Simper? Curtsey? Look bored?)

He's making a case from under this Panama hat and has his arms folded over belly, with a pair of chewed Ray-Bans sticking out from his visible hand.

'How often do you get to drive a Mercedes for God's sake?'

I sit on my suitcase, time-zoned.

'Fine,' I say.

i

One day, I wake up in the morning and see a drift of pigs flying through the sky.

It's that kind of year.

¿

'I don't understand,' I say, with my arms folded, chewing my lip.

My head is shaking.

She is turned sideways, darting glances at me and then the doorway.

'I know this must be something of a shock,' she says.

'Uh-uh, no mum,' I say, the taste of blood on my tongue. '*Shock* does not cover this.'

⇒

Next things, next.

6. Wade into the sea fully-clothed, not to drown, but to feel.
7. Screw someone you don't know. (Or, why not, someone you do?)
8. Nightmare the apocalypse, in new and awful ways, every sleep you take.
9. Lie on the floor staring at an Artex ceiling nubble for hours.
10. Get flu because, hey, rock bottom is flexible.

△

It's his ex-girlfriend's digs, this madhouse, high in the hills: with security gates, Mexican maids and a fridge containing things like edible flowers from Whole Foods. Edible flowers! Her manager, Suze, tells us that X insisted on going in the store herself, which of course entails autographs and photographs and a fuss. 'It would have taken me five minutes,' she says, pointedly. I'm only half-listening though, because, standing on her hand-hewn Jerusalem Gold kitchen flagstones – dripping with honeyed light - I can see what he saw and/or sees in her. I'll add it to the list of bugaboos.

△

Elias has told me a lot about my problems. I don't have enough chutzpah is the main one. Unlike him, oh he is full of braggadocio, swagger and ideas. (He is hung like a donkey.)

¿

I'll say this: since my life turned into The Truman Show, it might be best to join the Amish faith.

Really go back to basics.

Δ

Now she's goddess-floating towards me with a glass of ambrosia. She phosphoresces. She morning-stars.

I haven't slept for 30 hours, I have a lot on my mind.

A burden I add to by watching this thing about this dude who got eaten by a bear.

i

On the plane over, with a jet-setter's smile, I tell the guy sitting next to me that I'm staying with a friend.

It's a loose interpretation.

Who cares? I'm already 1,897 miles away from reality. (And yes, nit-picker: three doubles into the drinks' trolley.)

The route map shows me we are near Greenland, sweet relief. The way things are going I wouldn't fancy my chances over Bermuda, say.

Even though I hate flying and my doctor has to prescribe me minimum 5mg doses of Valium to even get to the airport, for once I'm happy hanging around up here, between worlds.

¿

What fucking thing can I drop, snort or shoot to get away from this conversation?

Δ

Before this and that, he had once been a successful TV guy.

Once, he looked a lot like Johnny Depp around the gills. Now he catalogues desirable objects and takes jobs that are beneath him on-screen.

'You don't need to be jealous,' he was saying now, flicking dials on his camera.

I was picking up her Oscar in my left hand. (They are heavy.)

i

Passport.

Driver's licence.

Proud photo in wallet.

Monopoly money.

Book-as-escape-hatch.

Exorcise gear.

All present and correct.

¿

'Who's sick?' I say, terrified.

My mother says: 'Oh no, nothing like that.'

Then she adds: 'But it's a tricky one.'

Δ

Here's what to do then. Let loose on La La Land!

i

When I'm not masquerading as a chauffeur, I'm also a mother.

He calls her 'The Midget' and tells me kids need ruling by an iron fist in a steel glove.

(It's a joke). She's not here, of course.

Δ

I am in a hot tub with X at her weekend house in Malibu Beach.

Somehow, I got down to my bikini next to her and her lean-limbed, fawn coloured friends who are also dreamboat perfect. The Pacific Ocean is sparkling sapphire and life doesn't really get in around the edges. I want to pee but I'll do it in the tub before I flash this lot again, so maybe I'll never be able to get out. We are drinking fizzing glasses of wine (me, competitively). I have my sunglasses on to blur out the panic in the headlights. Meanwhile, a babe with Bambi eyes is explaining costume designing a movie to me.

Their stories involve people normalised into 'Matty' and 'Harv' when really they are first names on a screen credit.

The whole thing is ridiculous.

What I do is teach English to refugees in a council building and drive my daughter to school and play dates.

Although Elias has told me about this.

'You should really tell people something more, rather than stop at *that*,' he says, with an emphasis I don't like.

i

I can only make an Old Fashioned last for seven minutes however hard I try.

Δ

Movie palace, sidewalk snake, demi-mall, bar.

Overweight Batman, souvenir shop, diva mural, spa.

Scientologists, tour bus, Phil Collins as pavement star.

Museum, fake Jesus, meth head, patrol car.

ι

In a moment like this, deoxyribonucleic acid actually becomes a lot more important than you might otherwise think.

i

At the tiny pond, it is me and the fish fry, which is to say a mother/daughter team.

We swim tedious rounds through the silt and the algae, the dirt and the murk.

I'm fighting a three second memory span, so I've been here forever.

One day, a vision! In a daze and dash of radiating colour - a sheet of mango orange, a glow of preternatural lavender, a clutch of red stripes - an exotic prize fish dives in and takes a bow. The water is alive: it sparkles, it winks, it blows, it parts.

He is a Candy Basslet from the Caribbean coast of Curacao. This fish has class, he has character!

Well, he introduces me to the Clarion Angelfish and the Wrought Iron Butterflyfish and the Platinum Arowana. He takes me to the turquoise watered tropics and the sludge clears off my eyes.

That darn pond never looks the same again.

Δ

I maze the streets in my Mercedes, dizzy, turning right on reds.

West Hollywood is nothing but lights. I am a June bug spinning into the flash and the shine.

Tiny squares of never-ending city bloom. And we turn and we turn.

Neon burger joints, epileptic billboards, bedazzled girls, bar. Comedy club, Jewish deli, parking lot, gym. 7-11, tattoo parlour, FedEx stop, liquor store. Cut-price gas station, noodle bar, coffee stop, bank. Lambent hotel, car wash, razzle-dazzle strip joint. Burnt palms, blazing nightclub, pharmacy, bar.

'Put your foot down,' says the man with no licence.

'I'm trying,' I say.

Attention-seeking, deflecting and competing problems: all at a premium.

I found out recently that my mother has CVID, which is not AIDS, but ballpark.

Chronic Variable Immune Deficiency. It is a rare genetic disease. She is the one in 25,000. Mad cow disease-free Americans send her blood plasma donations twice a month. She's thrilled!

'I always knew there was something wrong with me,' she says. 'I told you.'

I say, 'I'm not disagreeing.'

Δ

'Yaw, yaw, yaw,' says a blonde who looks like Tupperware with eyelashes.

'At least it's upfront,' I say to myself. 'No secrets here.'

⇔

The medical occult.

Autoimmune phenomena.

Dermatologic manifestations.

Necrotising granulomas.

Malignancies.

She's paranormal. Which I knew anyway.

Δ

I cruise up Sunset strip. Everyone is high or hustling.

A few bit-parts roll up to the Chateau Marmont.

Some badass in an SUV-weed-fug plays hip hop to the stop lights.

A junkie sways and shouts.

Tiny tourists time-waste the sidewalk.

i

She's threatening to make me an orphan with this hospital drama she's in.

Everywhere I go, there is a limelight issue.

Can I focus on my own bewilderments yet, please?

Δ

'It's a wonder any pictures ever get made in this heat,' I try, for something to say,
blinking out on air conditioning.

X has made a salad with the edible flowers and some fish. No end to talents. Chilled
white wine. Mexican card game.

'I can't even remember my own name, let alone a script,' I clarify.

She gives me a kind smile. Unmistakeable je ne sais quoi rolling off her. Star quality,
etcetera.

¿

We're in my garden where I'm perspiring a new flower bed into the curved shape of a moving snake.

'Can you say something?' She asks.

'This is the moon and we're the first ones here.'

She sighs. 'You don't grow up thinking of how best to put your future children in therapy, you know.'

'You can go now, if you like,' I tell her, wiping some mud into my forehead pores.

'I had to cope with this unattended, you know,' she says. 'It was no romance movie.'

She starts to cry. 'Lonesome springs to mind.'

'Jesus God, mum.'

Δ

When he is working, I notice he refers to himself as 'the talent'.

Δ

'What did you do today?' I ask, using the Academy Award winning phone to seek out the little one, across the Atlantic. 'I hope you've been taking advantage of my absence to refuse all greens and stay up 'til midnight.'

Through the glass door I can see them sitting in the other room, yammering in Hollywooze. There are some others there too and a pack of little dogs made of strange shapes – barrels and bones and circles.

'Nanna is having a lie down again,' she says. 'Oh and I made you a present.'

'Can't wait,' I say, with a shiv in my gullet. 'One more thing to look forward to, after seeing you.'

¿

In here there is a huge mirror made out of driftwood, a pair of William Morris curtains in royal blue, a cream corduroy sofa to seat six people and a laughing copper Buddha on the mantelpiece.

Oh, and a colossal big elephant. Let's not forget that.

i

Can you imagine naming a baby 'Dennis'?

Well someone could because he turned up on my birth certificate. Next to the word 'father'.

Δ

The boyfriend points out that *my* daughter just showed up out of nowhere – ta-da! – so exactly how do I know how it feels to be waiting around, trying to catch a break? Ever the empath.

i

'All I can tell you is truth is stranger than fiction, and other clichés,' I tell myself, alone for once in the car.

'It's definitely not acceptable behaviour,' I add, meeting my own eyes in the rear-view mirror. Glassy, with tear-streaked cheeks.

'I mean, by whose standards would that be okay?'

△

Now a tanned drunk man with the hair of a wizard is shouting at me in the middle of a shopping avenue. 'Gee baby, you're breakin' my heart!'

I'm wearing a black tulip dress and a closh hat in defiance of optimism, buoyancy and upbeat Californians.

i

Her tiny hands stroke my hair out of my tears. She smells of orange juice and baby shampoo.

'Why did Nanna tell you a lie?' She asks, frowning.

'No answer for you,' I say.

We lie side by side for the rest of the night, heart valves threatening to explode.

△

Let's be clear. He's not one bit from here, but he's lived in the City of Angels, the Big Apple and – leftfield- the Old Pueblo. He does the same thing in Blighty: cherry picks a location with promise. There's things I can learn.

I'm eleven years younger, which may say something about 'us'.

ζ

I'm three when Dennis hands the baton over to Ed.

'You can call him dad if you like, Stevie,' says my mother.

The word is like Kryptonite.

i

The first time I ever heard someone say it, I was eleven.

Joanie's dad was a psychologist maybe. She was a year older and wore a bra. She sneered at me because she knew about things.

'I've got an Electra Complex,' she told me one day.

'What's that?' I asked.

'It's when you love your father and want to kill your mother,' she said. 'It's a mental condition.'

I kicked some dirt with my shoe.

'Why have you got that?'

She smirked.

'Because my mother's a cunt.'

Δ

I attempt a run, in Lycra. Shacking up with Wonder Woman has focused the mind.

Outside the compound, there are no people anywhere, just massive gates and

fences and hybrids purring along the tarmac. The pavements only exist after a fashion and I worry I might get arrested for being an intruder. Plus, there is too much hill in the Hills. I give up and slope back to the house, lie by the pool, guess who the neighbours are, try to read *The Mandarins*.

i

A visit to the Fatherland goes like this.

In his studio, 156 pairs of painted tits (give or take).

Through the open door, Dennis and Elias are nodding and rubbing their chins and pointing and talking Art.

'Can you tell them apart?' I enquire of the cat, lying sniper style on the corridor floor and flicking its tail.

'I'm just going to go and lie in the road and wait for a truck to come by,' I call. 'If you could send what's left of me back to England and play unbearably loud

Diamanda Galás on a loop at my funeral, that would be great.'

I go and smoke a cigarette by the tree that I've been smoking cigarettes by since I was 13.

i

'Just that maybe volunteering with some AIDS' orphans would give you some perspective?' Some bright spark suggests.

Δ

X booked this one-hour's-notice table at The Ivy. The reason it's embarrassing is because the waiters got us instead: a clear disappointment.

My self-proclaimed benefactor is leaning back in his chair, showcasing his torso around which a Liberty print shirt strains; in his third hour of daytime drinking.

'It's pretty clear from all angles what I'm bringing to the party.'

He waves his arm across the rose-petal decorated terrace in demonstration.

'Look around Stevie,' he says, reaching the lesson.

'I get that I'm older than you and have led an unusual life, which means you're spending time with a lot of people in circles you're not really used to moving in, but still...'

I'm shlurping on a globe artichoke, soaked in melted butter, festooning grease spots across my holiday shirt. It's the sort of place in which no woman has ever ordered this dish before. It's a fat roll on a plate. Plainly a menu ruse to weed out the tourists.

'It's not just about money, it's also about attitude, about game-raising.'

He elevates a \$30 glass of something to his lips and stares at me.

△

In my head, I've started calling him by his third syllable.

△

'I read this thing about how Patti Smith used to jerk off to her own photo,' I drop casually, stealing a sideways' glance to Dr-Freud his reaction.

(For the record: *impressed*.)

I found a narcissist's checklist in a weekend supplement. The warning signs are all there.

è

At her Dennis wedding, my mum was a teenager in a powder blue mini skirt, on platform shoes, with a homemade afro and a grin like the Cheshire cat.

He was her not-quite-eleven-years-older art teacher.

I have no gift for drawing, or painting, or perspective.

'That talent skipped a generation,' I tell my friends.

Three times a year, I'm packed off to the airport with a tag around my neck to fly the 500 miles north to where he has long lived in unsuccessful reclusive isolation from visiting children.

i

There's a before.

He is captaining the kitchen, in braces, wearing desert boots and bicycle clips, hair damp from the rain, shirtsleeves rolled up, windows steaming against the weather and the heat, chopping garlic, furious concentration, pouring me wine (a Sancerre), lobster ready for death, loading king prawns on spears, producing samphire from a saddlebag, Garnet Mimms through the speakers, plants, taxidermy, yellow tequila all battling for counter space: an adventurer at home, a gap between worlds, a finger against cheek, a meal of love.

Δ

My new shoes have not drawn the lines at bunions. I have blisters now too.

i

And also this:

'You're the greatest,' he likes to say.

Who else lists my talents so succinctly? I'm not immune.

ι

Along these lines.

'Your dad,' she says. 'It's about your dad.'

'Okay,' I say initially.

'It's hard to know how to explain...' she trails off.

The sunlight streaming in across the counter means I can't see her eyes when I look up.

'What are you talking about, Mum?'

She moves an inch and her face is sea sick and drawn like a sail.

'I just think you'd better sit down.'

Tornado-style: all remaining oxygen sucks itself out of the room.

¿

It's at times like this I think of Joanie.

i

'The toothbrush', I tell myself, mid-matriarchal revenge fantasy. 'I'll rub it around the toilet bowl, before I laxative lace the cat and hide all the teabags in the attic.'

Total coping mechanism annihilation, I think, viciously.

Δ

We are in a bar, but don't ask me where. It's like Pandora's box, this table we are at.

Everyone is in The Business. Everything is 'awesome' or will be soon.

They do all possess undeniably great teeth.

'England doesn't believe in dentistry,' I explain sadly, on my fifth highball.

¿

The postie is open-mouthed, frozen in the middle of the street: children's party game style. Sheila from number 54, on her gardening mat, looks bug-eyed at us. We are not following normal procedure for a morning walk along Adastra Avenue. Not even a dog in tow.

'You're mad as a box of frogs!' I am shouting in exclamation marks. 'Off your rocker!
Bat-shit crazy!'

It's not the way to talk to your mother. But there you go.

'You don't know what it was like,' she is saying, sticking to her story.

'How about a sorry?'

She shakes her head.

'What are you looking at?' I yell at the audience.

Δ

It's not city, it's desert in disguise. Endless, everywhere, expanding.

The night is clogged in dust: ambushed by a volcanic stalker sun. In the dark, carried down on a scent of hibiscus, star jasmine, agapanthus, abstract nouns – money and glory – free themselves from the hills, score through the heat in technicolour, birds-of-paradise, like million-dollar flowering cacti.

i

'Hippy damage'. That's what Leonie calls it.

I've been lentil-soup-dog-pose-crystal-dowse-magic-beaned into existence.

The 1970s. Jesus.

i

What my mother doesn't know:

It's a multi-billion-gazillion dollar global industry.

It's creationism.

Δ

Selma

Cynthia

Ashcroft

Betty

Poinsettia

Ozeta

Norma

De Longpre

I'm playing mnemonics with the street signs, saving them up for later. Voyaging up Lexington, sailing down North Fairfax, crossing over Santa Monica Boulevard.

¿

'Hey mum,' I say. 'Ideas on why Dennis stopped signing "Dad" on my cards?'

Δ

In this burrito shrine we stop at, there is a listless teenager shuffling around behind a steel bean morgue eyeballing a range of queueing men with guts. He is giving back cents and directing people to hot sauce and corners. My kind of refuge.

'We need to talk,' I mention to Elias.

'Ruining this vacation,' he feeds back.

In silence, we eat one chimichanga, three shrimp tacos and a quesadilla.

△

'So what's the worst part of being you?' I ask, emboldened by proximity.

X is eating a Coke Float, surely Cali-contraband, but maybe it's the only thing she's had all week.

I can only hope.

¿

'Two years,' I explain. 'I'm not sure I can speak to you for at least two years. I'm having a strong reaction to this scene and its contents.'

Mother is flicking her index fingernail against the fleshy part of her thumb, and muttering something inaudible.

'What is that you say?' I ask. 'The clock starts pretty soon.'

'Miracle,' she says. 'You were my miracle.'

Complicated, indeed.

△

I can hear cicadas filling up the puff, gassing on the zephyr, riffing in the whirl, and
the night breathes out damp and concupiscent, a wanton city sigh.

Mountain lions and coyote move pad and claw and, right now sugar, I'm the
sweetest slice of cherry pie.

Sign-seeing.

I can see the sign.

Tracing some path, tiptoeing up Mulholland Drive.

△

Hellyeahbaby.

Xanax to be my American drug of choice.

↔

Note to self

Kernelled out with grief.

Hollow with ache.

Life-saved by small girl.

I am not what I thought.

△

Rows of two-foot high blondes with names like Marisol, Nicki and Mary-Ellen stare at me, blank-eyed and bored.

'We need to get a present for the Midget,' he had told her. 'Ideas?'

'Definitely an American Girl,' X had instructed.

So, here we are.

I am \$100 lighter and trying to imagine the kid bothering to get out of a tree for this.

Could I be a worse parent? Oh. Yes. Silly me. Good to have a reference point.

I have some dime store candy as a back-up plan.

i

I check out my own personal Adonis' browsing history. What he likes to look over is women (what he and his friends call *chicks*) all trussed up like meat joints for a slow cook lunch. Foodstuff. I once found a drawer full of ex-girlfriend pics too. X is not the only one with the title. Stockings and suspenders feature heavily. It's a bit Mary Poppins.

¿

'What in tarnation?'

I realise that at any one point a minimum of 17 people knew the truth.

'That's *my* information,' I tell my wine glass.

Δ

Actually, Elias and his predilections and X and her inimitable assets are not even making a dent. This is how I know how far gone I am. Huzza!

Not that she would (!), but even if they did, I wouldn't care: I've got bigger fish to fry these days.

i

There are nipple tassels and 1950s rolled hair which help to make it vintage-arty-hip. Call it burlesque, and it's kooky. Sigh.

I shut that window down and continue to explore my own mess.

i

Elias has a lot of admirers. Which means he has four (unpaid) assistants and a lot of coffee dates to keep up with.

Δ

'Just then, Jeff, the famous balding actor, famous for his tattooed rebel roles and loose-fitting Italian suits, walks by,' murmurs Ann Magnuson in my ear.

I'm listening to Bongwater's *Nick Cave Dolls* and jamming along Hollywood Boulevard alone.

Unparalleled happiness.

¿

We are at opposing ends of the living room.

'I wanted a baby so badly, wanted you,' mother says. 'It was just...Dennis...wasn't...couldn't. Times were different then.'

She's pleading: 'You don't understand what it was like.'

Let's be clear, I haven't been a baby for 29 years.

And she never mentions Dennis by name. Not since the divorce papers.

I stare at her, trying to get her words to form a sentence with an actual conclusion to it.

Δ

I am stretched out on a tastefully cushioned sun lounger in the middle of an exotic plant display. With nothing else to do, I am wondering who I am. SPF 50 spins the wheel on Gaelic.

And where do freckles come from in the world? Armed with those.

Next to me, Elias is smirking at film reviews in the New Yorker and gripping a Cuban cigar between his lips like an ageing gangster.

'Can you stop that?' I ask him, under my breath.

Δ

He's going to have to go, I realise. Too many father figures for one person.

ι

This is what she says.

'We asked Laurie to be your donor.'

My *what?*

Laurie is a dead carpenter/friend of the family.

And my mother is a brood mare.

i

Major Emperor's-New-Clothes-Syndrome.

Call it what you want, ladies and gentlemen, but whichever way you slice the cake, a 'donor' of sperm-that-turns-to-child is still a parent, you ethic-less, dictionary-shy, science-bereft luddites.

Nurture shmurture.

Gotta get your curly hair and mean streak from somewhere, Lucy Lou.

ι

Worse than keys-in-a-bowl parties.

Δ

I'm getting out of the four-poster bed. Elias is keeping his opinions quiet, sleeping.

'Could be I've misjudged him,' I suggest to a mirror in the shower, focussing on all fixable problems.

Downstairs, I count 32 bottles of half-used, out-of-date, sun protection lotions next to a running machine, a sombrero hat and a back door that won't lock.

I'd be worrying about No Name Maddox, me.

ζ

Leonie is one of my friends, (praise be for those).

Her cornflower blue eyes widen and she unsheaths a cigarette as she leans in for the money shot.

'Not a bloody bird baster, tell me at least it was a shag?'

I'm half lying across the table in a red wine shlosh, one eye closed down by a pulsing pain, but braving it through the next bottle.

'This is what I'm told,' I say to her neck.

'I thought that was an old wives' tale,' Leonie says, in between plumes of smoke.

'Good God. You couldn't make it up.'

I say: 'Apparently, according to my mother, you could.'

i

Dennis sends me a text.

‘Always wondered when your mother would tell you. Aren’t you lucky to have three dads?’

Or maybe four, I add, thinking of Elias, counting luck.

Δ

Elias has important other stuff to do in Tinseltown, but someone needs to check the cat is still alive.

‘Yup,’ I say.

‘Only, curving those flower beds was an *editorial* decision, so I should have been involved,’ he says, with not a trace of a smile. ‘I can remind you again.’

‘Despite the bloat, it would be super great to be you,’ I say. ‘Maybe for a day, or maybe forever.’

‘Just lay off the furniture,’ he says, eyeing up the taxi queue, looking at the clock.

‘See you in two months then.’

i

I am at the airport, texting Leonie from a pharma fugue.

If I focus on ongoing intangibles, I might make it home without a plane crash.

‘Land of the rose: 20,000 babies A YEAR get farmed into existence using strangers’ spunk,’ I type. ‘An army of pre-abandoned foetuses.’

A few minutes on: ‘Hey Stevie. 3am here!’

'Also sperm 'donors' get paid £35 a pop,' I continue. 'And does no one remember cute little babies later grow up into adult humans with the already-honed capacity for existential crisis? Extra help not needed.'

No reply.

i

Parent. Dad. Father.

All dirty words on the donated gametes scene!

⇒

Google, no-one likes a know-it-all!

'This sort of unresolved crisis leaves individuals struggling to "find themselves",' says my computer screen. 'They often seem to have no idea who or what they are, where they belong, or where they want to go.'

'They may withdraw from normal life, not taking action or acting as they usually would at work, in their marriage or at school, or be unable to make defining choices about the future.'

And who awarded you a legitimate medical degree, you state-the-obvious amateur psychologist robo-shitbag?

Δ

Maybe it's the weather. I'll admit that I am growing to depend on some pharmaceutical friends.

i

Leonie welcomes me home.

'Does it matter in which manner you don't acquire a father?'

My nose is nodding emphatically.

'Seems to be something of a problem,' I answer. 'Disacquirement issue.'

i

Writing in an online forum.

'Home-cooked, turkey baster-based child conceived with the milt of a family friend,' I submit, in the profile details' section.

'The Wild West of baby making,' I clarify, at the frontier. 'I am Franken-baby.'

ζ

Oh, Mother!

