

There Must Be More to Life Than This



Maru Rojas

That day I was Freddie Mercury, but I don't own a guitar so I played the air instead. With my hip-shaking and my perma-tan the crowd loves me. As they roar incessantly I have the time of my life. The shopkeeper refuses to play Brian May, just hands me back my change. "Have a nice day, Mr. Mercury", he says and turns around to serve Brenda, my next-door neighbour.

It was a day like any other.

As I leave the shop, he claps twice then half-extends his arms, palms facing out. I guess he never learnt how to rock, man.

I'm walking to the station when I see her standing on her usual corner, performing to perfection the job she's getting paid to do. Her mini-dress and exposed flesh defy the chill in the spring air and I admire her persistence. I could be that woman, except she's holding a sign that reads *Burger King open as usual*. Next to her, a guy holds a sign that offers air-guitar lessons. Perhaps one day I'll pluck up the courage to learn for real, but for now I'm content to carry on being Freddie Mercury, hoping no-one notices when I mistake D for G on my air-guitar. I just wish I had my Brian May, but that day I'd split up with my boyfriend so I was pretty much alone.

As I get on the tube, I see a couple walking along together, holding hands. Stumbling along like the floor is made of cotton candy. He's wearing an orange suit and is holding a fast food paper bag in his hand. As they stumble along I hear him say

Hey babe, when are we gonna go out and be sick together?

She giggles and looks flattered as she pulls her dress down, which of course is too short because it's after 4pm on a Thursday.

I would, on a day like this, usually have something to read, but as I was being Freddie I dropped my books in the shop so I could rock, a decision I now regret. Instead I start reading the ads; there is something about a man with erectile dysfunction that reminds me of a book I've been reading.

In this book the main character is also a writer, except he's living a life of extremes, sleeping with prostitutes all the time. I don't mind the prostitutes. After all it is Paris, but he's constantly referring to the women as his cunts and I'm not sure how I feel about that. I'd rather carry on being Freddie.

Man, he could write!

I was thinking all this when I notice a boy; he is sitting on his own with his little sister. He can't be more than 9 or 10 years old. I look around for his mum but the boy keeps looking at me. I'm thinking maybe he knows who I am and I'm about to start rocking the place with my sexy facial hair and my crazy hips when he lifts one butt cheek from the seat and lets out a big fart. It's so loud I can hear it over the train running and the smooth Caribbean woman reading the tube announcements. His little sister inhales deeply and carries on jumping up and down in her seat, she doesn't seem to mind. He looks at me with a look so intense that I know what he's waiting for. It's as though he knows the laws of physics, he studied the reach and dispersion of gas particles and has carefully calculated how long it will take for the smell to hit me square in the face. I try not to breathe in, but I was never good at swimming so I can only hold my breath for ten seconds or so. The smell is so potent my eyes start

watering even before I breathe in and I have to move seats, humiliated and self-conscious of my adulthood, wishing I could reciprocate but my insides no longer follow my desires. And so I watch as he laughs widely with his evil boyish laugh.

A normal day, it is. It isn't the best of times nor the worst of times, it isn't the age of freedom nor the age of restraint, it isn't the epoch of belief, nor the epoch of incredulity.

And then, as quickly as I'd left, I'm on my way back. What happens in between is of no importance. For all you need to know is that this story, like so many others, is based entirely on actual events. And no events happen when I'm on my own.

I am no longer Freddie Mercury, I found it too exhausting to have a bouffant and sexy facial hair and it's pretty tough on the fingertips too, playing air-guitar. But I still have time to stop at the shop, where a Polish man with a thick accent is impatiently asking the shopkeeper *Red wine, is sweet, yes?*

Is full bodied - mean is sweet, yes?

I've known the shopkeeper for 4 years now. He's always polite but he never smiles. I call him Pradesh-with-the-angry-looking-wife.

Pradesh takes the bottle and examines it carefully.

Full bodied, cherries, chocolate bouquet, long finish. Yes, yes, this is sweet. Yes, sweet, yes.

I pay for my things and imagine how implausible it would be to record everyone's conversations, so I could write about them later. Maybe then, I wouldn't have to pretend to be anyone else, maybe then someone would publish my writing and definitely then, I would still have a boyfriend. But I don't think George Orwell would approve.

As I said, it had turned out to be a normal day. And no, I still don't know the colour of the sky.