



## RADIO GAGA Bel Webb

Tony sat on the edge of his bed and bit his nails, chewing what was left of the nail on his left thumb; gnawing at it.

‘Shut up,’ he murmured, knowing they wouldn’t hear him, *couldn’t* hear him, but feeling he should bide his time in case he needed to progress on to shout level.

Catching a mind’s-eye glimpse of himself was enough for him to immediately halt the pneumatic action of side molar against nail. He reluctantly put his hands down by his sides and sat up straight, but, figuring it was impossible to sit up straight *and* keep hands still, feeling weird in a robotic or Calvinist way, he paced the lino’d floor of his tiny kitchenette.

He’d just wanted to get to sleep at a reasonable hour but for yet another night it seemed highly unlikely.

Putting his hands into the pockets of his brown corduroy trousers and lowering his head, he quickly became entranced with his feet as he paced the lino. He meditated on the yellow faces of Bart and Homer, appearing at close regularity on his navy blue socks. He became fascinated with how their faces changed ever so slightly, as he lifted each foot from the lino and placed it down again.

Then he tried shuffling his feet and comparing the effect on his favourite cartoon characters faces, but he concluded that it wasn't the same; no creases occurred on their faces with shuffling. He stopped, as if woken from a trance, and looked up at the plastic wall clock, 12.45am.

'Quarter to one' he said out loud, slightly higher than his previous murmur, but still lower than normal conversation level.

'Quorrr-terr t'one' he repeated, at the same level, his hands still in his pockets. 'Quart-er twon.' He took his gaze away from the clock and took his hands out of his pockets, and petulantly stamped the few steps from kitchenette to the edge of the small double divan.

As soon as he was seated on the edge his eyes fixed right toward the wall; toward the noise.

'Be quiet.' He spoke with obvious irritation, although this time at normal level; polite conversation level, before wringing his hands together and then turning to focus on his pale hands and his gnarled red fingers. He lifted his left index finger to his mouth, chewing not the nail, that was too far gone, but the loose skin at the side of it.

He had told himself time and time again NOT to do it; but it was an old habit, alleviated for a while during a smoking phase.

'Ha.'

The sound escaped from his mouth like a burp in the middle of

an important business meeting. He suddenly saw how ridiculous it was to have gone through his smoking phase at the age of thirty-seven, a phase which started in winter but was extinguished by the spring.

Tony fought to keep his hand down; as if gravity was trying to keep it lodged firmly by his mouth. He looked at a merely glanced at broadsheet folded in half on the carpet by his foot and picked it up.

He focused for just a few seconds on the sound of the thin newspaper as he carefully unfolded it.

‘News-paper,’ he said, lingering on each syllable as he absorbed the front-page news announcing England’s rugby win. In the space of a few seconds he felt glad that England had won, then realised he hated rugby, always had since his schooldays, and then his feelings subsided into indifference.

‘News-pay-per,’ he repeated, turning to page three, never reading the even numbered pages. His eyes darted over the tall page until he came to a small article in the bottom left based on a survey carried out to determine voter apathy amongst the 18-21 student population.

Eighty-four per-cent felt indifferent towards politics.

‘A-path-ie, apa-thee, apache, apaffy, Gadaffi, adaffy, adaffy duck, quack quack.’ He followed the words by making the noise of the duck and then, apathetic towards the newspaper, threw it down onto the floor.

‘Be quiet,’ he said to the wall, raising his voice to what he angrily termed the yap yapping, gab gabbing, blab blabbing. He carried his body backwards across the bed toward the middle where he remained, listening. He heard the words student and apathy, and concluded that his neighbours were discussing the news, unable to clearly define each

word, which he figured made the aggravation worse. He wanted to tell them to either shut up or speak up, he didn't mind which but to hear it and not be able to hear it, unable to follow the conversation, that was the problem, he pondered.

'Eighty-four per-cent,' he said, before adding, 'Aye T Four.'

The low chatter began to feel like a bad toothache. He inhaled deeply and held his breath for ten seconds, whilst staring at the once white ceiling. Exhaling slowly he told himself to keep his erratic focus on the sound of his exhalation, and not the muffled voices.

'SHUT UP!' he shouted, sharper and louder still than his previous attempt. But it made no difference. He asked himself why he could hear their polite conversation level chitchat and why they ignored his shout! But then he asked himself, with his eyes still on the ceiling, what right had he to tell them to shut up, after all they were only talking. The inescapable justice of his last thought hit him accompanied by a dose of futility. He didn't want his reason to be on *their* side. He pounded his arms on the bed, raised them and thumping the mattress in unison.

'SHUT UP – BE QUIET!' he shouted, still louder and loaded with frustration and impatience as he jumped up from the bed and gave the floor a quick stamp with his foot.

'Calm down, calm down,' he told himself, thinking he'd just feel embarrassed the next day if he threw a tantrum. He pushed his hands through his hair and stiffly paced the small area around his bed, and then stopped abruptly. He listened. And still they chattered. *They were STILL chattering away.*

'They could at least acknowledge me, the fucking idiots!' he said, feeling the rage swirling around his body. Snapping, he immediately

jumped on top of his bed and proceeded to pound his fists on the wall.

‘SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT THE FUCK UP, SHUUUUUT UP!’

He got himself into such a rage, his spit covered the wall. The bed, on unreliable castors, separated itself from the abused wall at which point Tony jumped off and leapt to his front door, ready to let loose on his gabbing neighbours.

He didn't see the small pocket radio on the floor by the side of the bed, now revealed to the rest of the room, lying on its side, the tuner fixed to Talk FM.

Tony stood outside his front door and looked around him, and then lifted his head up to the full moon lying in the jet-black sky. He hit his head Homer style with the palm of his hand before returning to his solitary camped blue and white caravan. Alone.

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