**Engaging with the memory**

*A note is needed for this piece, perhaps. One of the assignments of our writing group was, using a 'stream of consciousness' technique, to write as someone who is not in their normal state of mind – ill in bed, drunk, suffering from senile dementia or perhaps just very sleepy. The character has an appointment somewhere but cannot remember what it is.*

It doesn't really matter. An ant was crawling on my mouse so I shook it off and squashed it. That's not what doesn't matter; but it was probably important for her. All ants are female, aren’t they? Can't remember, but she probably had an important thing to do or somewhere she should be at. They have an ordered society, ants. Unlike me.

I have to be somewhere, or something. It's a niggle in my mind. Shut my eyes. Doctor? No, it’s impossible to make an appointment with new covid variants popping up all over the place. What’s the next one to be, epsilon? - which also means ‘end’. Is it pasta – do I need spaghetti? That's it. I think it was pasta – maybe not.

It used to come in tins, spaghetti. Alphabet shaped, or with sausages. Or was that with beans? Whatever, put me off sausages for all time - don't even like Lincoln sausages. But it doesn't really matter. Bacon butties is what I go for. When did I last have a *real* one like those made in the van on the Crawley Manor estate, just down from the airport. Rather fetching, she was, the van girl. I hated the days when the fat pug-faced man with his never-washed apron was cooking.

There was another one in a layby just before you got onto the Gatwick M3 slip road. Thought of trying it a few times, but I was always going somewhere – like now, I’m sure I have to be somewhere, or do something. I used to enjoy the colours of the sloping fields bordering the M3, changing with the seasons. Nearly had an accident when they turned wonderfully blue. Couldn't have been a success, flax, because the following year it was corn again. Maybe they were growing it to enrich the soil, or something equally Turnip Townshend-like. There's another thing I hate; turnips, unless roasted with Christmas dinner. What were those springy things called that dropped in loops down the stairs? Had one for Christmas when I was about five.

I got into a whole load of trouble when I dismantled the clockwork train engine before anyone else had opened their stockings. God, how many Christmases ago was that? Come to think of it, it was probably a year or two after I got the green and yellow plastic recorder that Dad broke in half and threw on the Christmas morning fire because I said, “I can't get all my fingers on all the holes”. No-such-word, “can’t”, he said. Was that a lesson in grammar, or a lesson in life? Like when Mum said I should always use only two leaves of loo paper and I went for years with soiled pants, when she actually meant that I should double up the sheets because she’d changed from Bronco to Andrex. Dad embarrassed her when he asked rather loudly, in the shop, “Is that the paper your fingers go through?”

We didn't eat pasta in those days because it hadn't been invented – well, that's what I thought when it finally arrived in our house. It wasn’t that it wasn’t available; maybe it was just that it didn’t grow too well in the garden and Dad always liked to use home-grown stuff (ha ha!) – blame Richard Dimbleby for that idea. Here’s the [link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXvou6RcWzM) in case you want to see it. Lots of things hadn't been invented. I thought that the cinema was like the faded poster on the side of the village shop that advocated a glass and a half of milk, except in my mind there were lots of them moving in succession to make a movie. Posters, that is, not milk. I tried to replicate that in my junior school using several of the wall blackboards to draw a series of cowboy and Indian pictures telling a story of a gunfight. The cowboys won. Everyone else had drawn neat rows of the alphabet. But teacher left the drawings up until Parents’ Day to show how progressive the school was. No praise there then.

There's another bloody ant. Ah, pasta – or doctor. Oh, I forgot. Can't make doctor appointments at the moment, but it doesn't really matter. What is it that doesn't really matter that’s nagging away between my ears? Something does matter. If I could remember who told me what matters, maybe I could remember what it was.

I wasn't very good at ‘S’s’ and my ‘R’s’ weren’t brilliant either. The ‘W’s’ were OK but I got the ruler across the knuckles if I filled the page with W’s. Miss Axworthy, that was her name; and I was happy she got a new name when she got married, but I don't remember it. She didn’t use the ruler so much after she got married. In my sister’s memoir she says that Miss Axworthy threatened to take me home with her and I wouldn’t like it because she kicked in bed, but I don’t remember her saying that. Or doing so.

At my proper school Mr Boret, my English and history teacher even though he was French Canadian, cleaned his ears with an endless supply of matchsticks he kept in his waistcoat pocket. He put the used ones in the other pocket. Mr Barber my maths teacher had the worst case of nasal congestion in living memory. Mr Roberts (RE and geography) was round, pink and, I now suspect, batted for the other side; I never listened to his geography class because he was monotonously boring, didn’t know the subject and I hated his watery grey eyes with which he would fix us a look, momentarily too long. Anyway, I always read the lessons in advance; he threw me out of class for being a clever dick. I thought being clever was the idea of school. Mr Drain taught English literature and once became so incensed with me for repeatedly reading “pouch” instead of “pocket” that he threw me out of the door so hard the door slammed shut while I was still in the room. He was a bit angry. Damn dyslexia. But, in my defence, the image in the book was of a yokel with a pouch strapped to his waist. No pockets. Mr Edgar (headmaster) got so carried away when I’d left my geometry kit at home that he gave me nine of the best; either he had lost track of counting or was enjoying the moment. He smoked hand rolled fags in class that smelled somewhat herby. I recognise the smell now.

Herb's! Yes, that's it!

I have to pick some herbs for the pasta I'm supposed to be cooking – I made a note of that yesterday, somewhere.