

Planet-Shaped Horse

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Luke Kennard

ISBN: 978-0-9565514-5-0

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First published January 2011 by:

Nine Arches Press

Great Central Studios

92 Lower Hillmorton Rd

Rugby

Warwickshire

CV21 3TF

www.ninearchespress.com

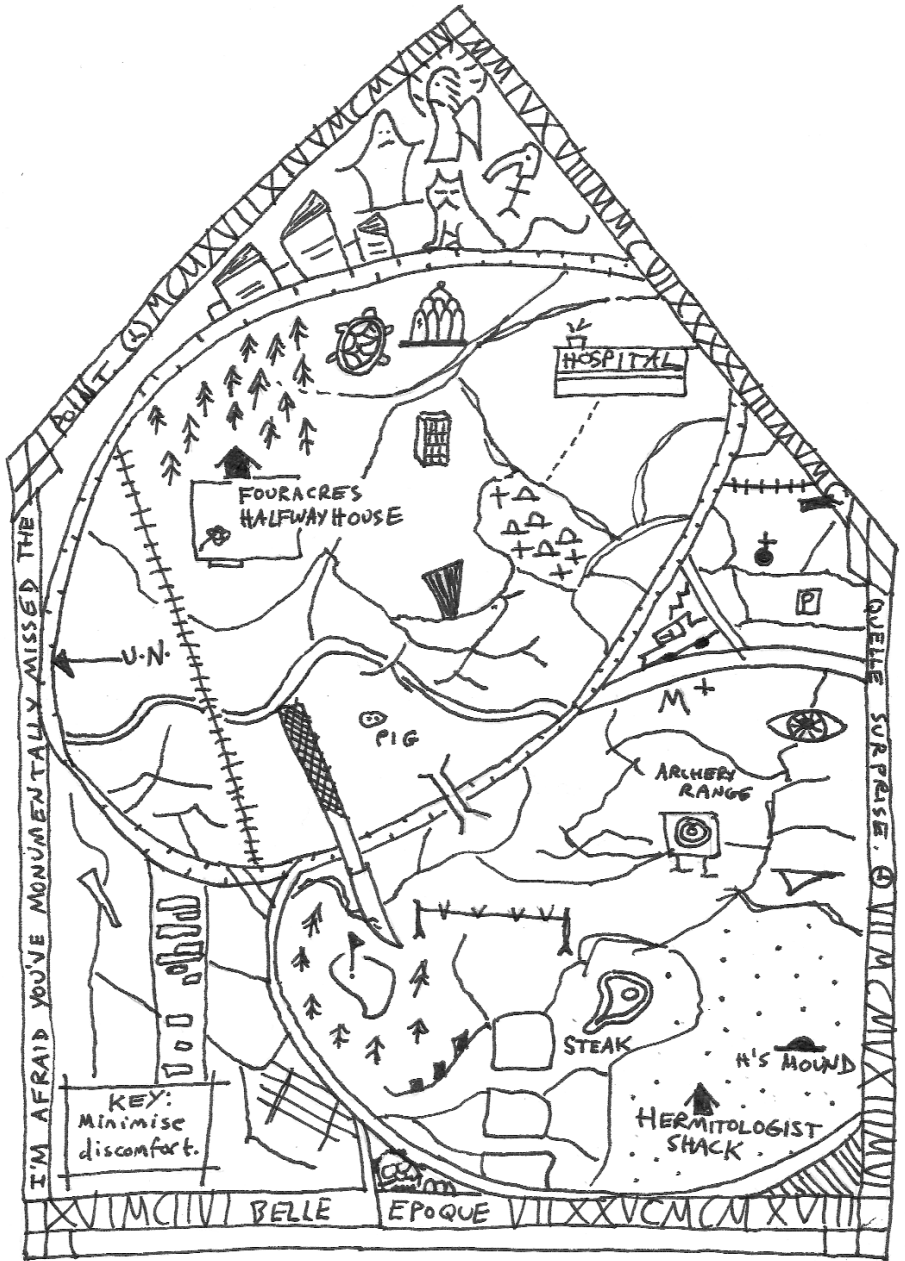
Made in the Midlands

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Nine
Arches
Press



The monks praised a brother to Antony. Antony went to him and tested him to see if he could endure being insulted. When he saw that he could not bear it, he said to him, 'You are like a house with a highly decorated outside, but burglars have stolen all the furniture by the back door.'

– The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, 254 AD

OOH, ANOTHER BOOK

YOU MUST BE VERY PROUD

TIME-LINE

[Not relevant.]

CASE NOTES:

Client 1764 now voluntary in-patient in locked Ward 3. Trialled on _____. No noticeable improvement. Trialled on _____. Reports some improvement. Trialled on _____. Questions very nature of improvement, objective reality. Trialled on _____. Reports "curious god-like feeling". Trialled on _____ and _____. Reports nothing. Trialled on _____. Client displays basic conversation and little excitement. Publishes first collection of short stories with Charlie Horse Books. Contact editor of Charlie Horse Books. Explain this very dangerous re: state of client's mind, feeds into delusions, etc. Editor becomes demonstrative: client is "unique and extraordinary talent"; client is "visionary, actually"; we are "fucking thought police." Explain editor we are not thought police. Client danger to self, others. Client already sees self as 'author'. Having book out only exacerbates aberration. And for what? Does book even sell? Editor hangs up. Client trialled on _____. Able to concentrate kitchen exercise. Able to concentrate washing and dressing exercise. Able to concentrate jigsaw puzzle of Magritte's Le fils de l'homme. Client recommended for remedial care at Fouracres Halfway House.

OH, YOU DON'T AGREE?

I don't want to sound like a prophet,
but last night I found over twenty things in Revelation
that could be metaphors for the internet.

I'm going to pretend I overheard that in *Pret A Manger*,
a pretty young mother said it to her baby son.
She ate a beef and watercress sandwich.

She said many beautiful and terrible things.
The smile of the ducks on his pram was beautiful
and terrible. All children are psychic.

I'm drinking this new red coffee, but then I swallow,
hard. There is no red coffee. It doesn't exist.
Her long black coat is a tundra in profile. She turns

on me like a security camera. She offers her hand.
'I'm Miranda,' she says. 'This is Simon.'
'You're going to be hearing a lot about yourself on the radio.

We're here to make sure it's all great!
House like a dozen bookshelves fished out of a canal.
House like a stranger's Christmas. The baby says,

'It's always sad in the alcoholic wing
when they wake up screaming,
'I saw Hell in a tomato! I saw Hell in a tomato!'"

I too have seen Hell in a tomato.

101 STATE-SANCTIONED PRACTICAL JOKES

Today they carpeted the inside of my piano.
It sounds like an old couple kicking over a jumble sale.

I bite into a tomato and when I look at it
it looks exactly like the mouth which bit it.

'Don't play with your tomato,' says Simon.
I laugh. The activist is being interviewed.

A writer or a fishstick, says the radio, *it's up to you*.
I have always hated the activist, but now I don't know.

Maybe you can't drive around in 'Being Really Well Read',
honking at pretty girls as they totter between clubs;

maybe you can't admire the muscle definition
of intellectual rigour in a full-length mirror, but...

We are starting to see the activist's point:
that we, too, are cowards and bullies.

When the activist gets home he climbs
into a sachet of preserving agent.

When the activist shoots us in the stomach
we curl around the bullets like cats.

IN THE NAME OF THE REAL

On my way back from Miranda and the gazebo
(she refuses to meet on the veranda for obvious reasons)

I felt suitably chastened. It was as if I'd spent eight years
training with a master puppeteer who only uses a certain,

slightly lousy puppet called 'Cloth Bag'; a cloth bag.
Ritual shores up a defence against this:

witness how the silliest pastimes name everything.
In golf even having a drink with people you don't really like

once the golf is over has a name: It is called the 19th Hole.
And why stop there? Your drive home could be the 20th hole.

Arguing with your wife because you spend all of your free time
playing golf: The 21st Hole. Everything else

in your life from that moment on could be a Hole.
Until your own death: the 48,644th Hole.

'You're just jealous because I'm the only one God's speaking to right now,'
Says Simon, looking up from *Golfer* magazine.

'And I'm what? Drunk at 7am? Just come right out and say it, Simon.'
'I have.' 'Don't hold back or anything.' 'I'm not.'

MINK FARM

Simon, I'm going to break the horizon over your head like a porcelain
baguette.

The house is a toy box from the old country – I mean the bad one.

My cat, Security Camera, knows every evil spirit by name.

A grey, beatific weekend; writers call requesting back-up.

‘Trouble with poetry: the incandescent weirdoes who hate you
make up at least 10-20% of your audience, which is quite a market share.

Small wonder most of us got sick of it and opened the mink farm.’

The minks are little misused apostrophes of teeth and cruelty.

I'd invite you to stay for dinner, but the only food in the house is an egg-shell
with a sad face drawn on shakily in biro and some old mustard powder.

I think there's some bread in the... Oh. I must have eaten it.

The other people in my house check themselves out of bed like books.

I had little footnote numbers tattooed by my scars, 1 through 17.

Please refer to my “ass” or “butt” for full explanation.