

DAVE EGGERS
SHORT SHORT STORIES

A Perfect Circle

The fire, behind them in its stone fireplace, is gas-powered but meant to look real, with faux logs and cinders glowing arrhythmically. His name is Ron and he is looking at Mina, his friend, who years ago had an accident — a train jumped and other passengers died — and has been recovering since. Ron is visiting Mina, sitting with her and her grandmother because he visits Mina once a year; it would be more often, but she lives six hours away from Ron and he *is lazy. He is looking at Mina, smiling at her; in many* ways she seems precisely the same as she was when they were young together, when they flirted and drove over hills too fast. He is sitting with her and her grandmother, and her grandmother is talking about how she just had the battery on her pacemaker replaced. While she is talking about this, she taps her sternum, bare under her housedress, and Ron shudders. Ron shudders at certain things: make-up on men, people with horrible burns on their face, and the thought of elderly people having their bodies opened up with knives in hospitals. Then Ron stops shuddering and, while Mina talks, he looks at her. They are sitting in front of the fire, and her grandmother has ceased talking about the pacemaker, and he is looking at Mina, who he once thought he could marry. She looks very much the same, huge eyes, even though her brain doesn't work quite the way it did before the accident; thus she lives at home. Mina is talking animatedly, about a new song she's heard, something involving children and destiny, and Ron is looking at her neck, which has a scar that seems new. He is almost sure that this is not a scar from the train accident — those scars are on her back and legs, and he has seen most of those. So where did this one come from? Mina's grandmother, when Ron was planning his visit with her on the phone, had hinted that Mina had had a hard few months; Ron assumes this involved a fall of some kind. He shudders again. He sits near the fire, very warm and shuddering, close to Mina's scar and her grandmother's pacemaker, and he thinks *the inevitable thoughts: that there is no God, that* there had better not be any kind of God, because he doesn't want someone to blame for all this bullshit.

Dave Eggers's first short story collection, How We Are Hungry, which includes a selection that first appeared on this page, will be published in March by *Hamish Hamilton. For previous Dave Eggers stories,* visit guardian.co.uk/books/shortshortstories

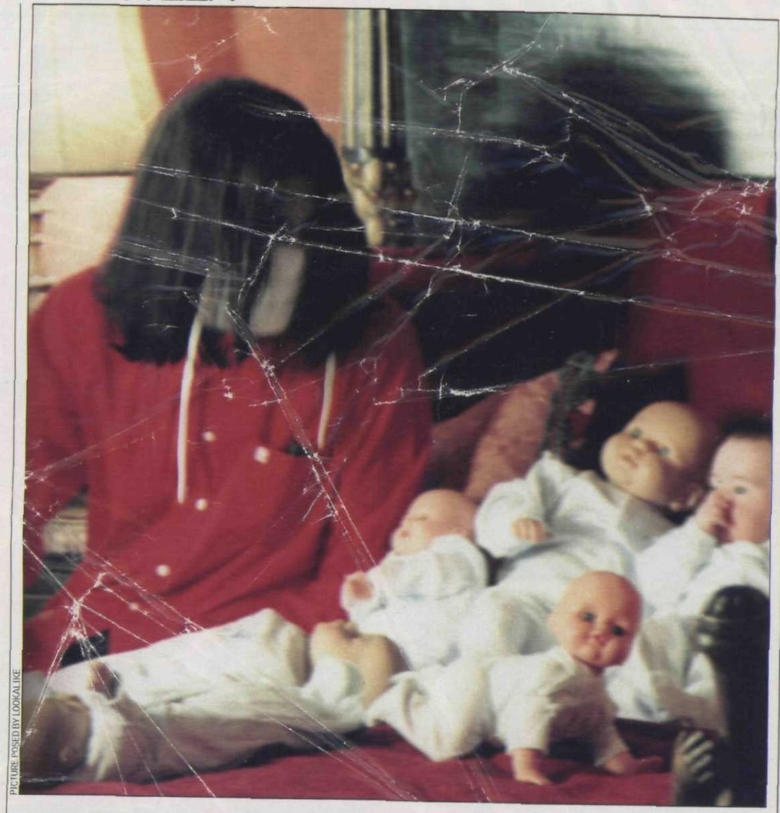
PICTURES WITH MEANING



TIM PHILLIPS ARCHIVE

Lennie James, actor We Are The People My girlfriend saw this image in the Guardian and brought it to my attention. All we know is that it was taken before the first world war, in Aberdeen. Two fishermen walk into a studio in Cosway to have their picture taken. Why? I want to know more about them. I love the way the image has everything and nothing to do with their race. There's the obvious suggestion of homosexuality, but it would be even more interesting if they weren't gay. The whole story is here in this photograph. It's already a movie or a play. There is often a communal understanding that people who look like me didn't arrive here until the 1950s. Images like this remind us of the importance of black people in the history of British society. I've kept this image, and hope some day to tell my own version of its story.

ALISON JACKSON'S PICTURE OF THE WEEK



PICTURE POSED BY LOOKALIKE



ZOE WILLIAMS
IS IT JUST ME OR...

Are young people unfairly maligned *in the binge-drinking debate?*

Last week it emerged that young women have outstripped young men in their quest to drink. That being the case, they've probably outstripped men in their quest to strip as well, but the research doesn't relate. I wouldn't contest for a moment *the contention* that youths like a drink or two; but it seems to me that the only reason your older drinker escapes public censure is that no one ever asks him or her how much he or she habitually has.

A binge drink, after all, is (apparently) three units for a woman, four for a man; this covers just about everybody who drinks and isn't French. Young binge drinkers, however, are easy to spot, since they do it in bars and get very noisy, like in a Bacardi advert. Old binge drinkers go round to each other's houses and have conversations like this: "Is it too early for a glass of wine?" "A glass of wine would be lovely!" "Red or white?" "Whatever you've got open." "I know — why don't I open one of each?" "Splendid!" Casual research would never reveal this boozy netherworld.

If you are a young person, and you feel that you're being treated unfairly, here's what to do: when approached in a drinkerie by a person with a clipboard, answer all questions thus: "You think I'm bad? You should see my dad." That should do it.

18 AUG

11.12.04 IN THIS ISSUE

start
Judy Rumbold **5** Alexander Chancellor, Priscilla Kwateng **7** How to..., Q&A **11** Dear Weekend **12**

features
Giorgio Armani The man behind the sunglasses **14** **Tweet surrender** Simon Hoggart's round robins **24** **The Aids orphans of Mozambique** Photographer Gideon Mendel returns to Africa **30** **Choosing my religion** The lure of Kabbalah **46** **Brando, Pollock and Parker** The US greats: they made it up as they went along, you know **61**

spirit
Fashion and beauty Take your cue from cinema for romance. Plus Inside leg, Shopping life **69** **Wellbeing** Don't get stuffed this Xmas. Plus Joanna Hall, Ask Emma, Does it work? **81** **Relationships** Jon Ronson, Rebecca Atkinson **85** **Pets** The RSPCA's star turns. Plus That's My Pet **87**

space
Home At home with Picasso's muse. Plus To die for, To DIY for, Style slave **91** **Property** Let's move to... Wimborne Minster, Dorset. Plus Snooping around **101** **Garden** Christopher Lloyd is taking stocks. Plus Lia Leendertz **102** **Food and drink** Bring back mutton, says Matthew Fort. Plus Victor Lewis-Smith, Heston Blumenthal **104**

back
Games Pyrgic puzzles, Word play, Quiz **117** Solutions **109** Pictures with meaning. Plus Short short stories by Dave Eggers **118**

Cover photograph by Chris Floyd.