

Mandy Maxwell (HNC) Glasgow College of Nautical Studies

Inmates

Old Cathy was married to Pat Bonner. She kept him in a frame by her bedside, right next to her rosary beads, her fags and a two litre bottle of Asda's own make Irn Bru. I found out two things about Cathy early on: one, that her fag packet was always empty and two, her juice was always flat. It didn't take me long to realise that her head was just like her fag packet, empty, for display purposes only. And the framed picture that she kept of *her man* by her bedside. I could have bought it on sale at the Barras market for £2.99. But that didn't stop Cathy from her nightly serenades ... 'Paddy, Paddy, oh where are ye Paddy?' Howling like a deranged Juliet all the way down the ward. It was never her Romeo that came, just a pissed-off member of the night watch, always with a little blue Prince Charming in a plastic cup. Aye, well, chemical romance. I never felt more like singing the blues.

Cathy had her faith though and waited every day religiously for a visit from Pat, standing up for her conjugal rights I thought, and under the eyes of the Lord and all. Poor cow, wearing the tights she'd got from Lourdes, the holy ones. She's come back up to the ward in tears, making excuses for a man she'd last seen saving a penalty against Dundee United in the 1985 Scottish Cup final.

Betty was Cathy's friend on the ward, wee burst balloon Betty, all wrinkled and lifeless. She was a constant fixture on the sofa in the TV room, as if with one final high pitched wheeeeeeee she'd danced in a frenzy round the room until the air in her had finally run out and there she'd landed.

Betty lived on a daily diet of daytime television and nicotine. I didn't know what crime against sanity she'd committed to get *committed*, but she'd served six months already when I got there, with no sign of an early release. I thought she was a lifer. As it turned out she was almost on death row. I was sitting one afternoon in the dorm, discussing medication with some of the other inmates, when Betty was wheeled by on her bed, no teeth or tights and wearing nothing nylon. It was the big blue shock for her, a battery recharge.

She came back after her stint at the electric works flickering like a dodgy street light, all nervous and twitching like she was about to short-circuit at any time. I think the white coats thought they'd done a good job on wee Betty, turned her into a right live wire. But they didn't have to sleep in the bed next to her, buzzing away all night.

Then they moved Sharon in, something to do with her and me having the same surname, (thanks Dad). She'd been in a single room under the 72-hour observation guidelines, bestowed upon every new prisoner for their own safety, then let loose on the ward. Our room literally went dark. Sharon was a big girl, with a skinhead and tattooed knuckles that dusted the floor when she walked. This girl made a Neanderthal look like a New

Man and she didn't speak, but communicated in a series of grunts, scowls and hand signals.

I tried to dodge Sharon and the furniture missiles she would frequently launch across the room, at the same time trying not to bump in to wee Betty and be electrocuted or run in to Cathy, who would bless you or damn you to hell, depending on how recently she'd been medicated. It wasn't easy.

The final push came one evening, not long into Sharon's stay, when I was jolted from sleep like a monkey falling from a tree. I came to, in bed in a puddle of sweat, confused and unable to move the left side of my body. I panicked, thinking I'd had a stroke, this hot saliva dripping down the side of my face and mouth. I was about to pull the emergency chord, when the word *LOVE* struck me on the face. It was Sharon's left hand attached to the bulk of her that was pinning me to the mattress. I screamed like a woman being dragged to hell backwards by her hair, threw my fags in Sharon's direction to stall for time and tore out of the room at nuclear speed. (Sorry, darlin', you're just not my type.)

That was the last I saw of Sharon. I heard she took the rejection quite badly and after redesigning the dorm was carted back to the secure unit, jag in the arse.