



SHORT STORY

# My Lucky Star

by Daniel Atrill

**Do you believe in the stars? I don't mean astronomy, though it is connected but the horoscopes printed in the newspaper which guide us through the day. I believe it all and more. I believe in fate and fortune and good omens and karma's, and all the signs which there to tell us if something good will happen.**

I'll be frank. I look to these things for reassurance. I am not what you would call successful, nor the best looking. My weight, too, is a problem, though I would not want to use any of those big-boned excuses. Oh no. Perhaps then I am more honest than necessary. My height is average, which is not to say that I am. My stars tell me that, but acne and bad breath don't help, and trousers which don't fit properly. Not everyone likes stomachs rolling over belts do they?

You could never say the stars were not accurate. I don't think I've gone a day without having had to me what they predicted. Sometimes it is difficult to see, but you always know when it has happened.

Take last week for example. I pick up the paper, glancing at the nude and flick straight to the horoscopes. I'm a Pisces very sensitive. I like to tease myself a little before getting down to my five lines. I flit through Virgo and Taurus, chuckling when I see how bad things will be for them. "A bad day for finances," I read. "watch out Virgo."

Finally I arrive at Pisces, the fish. "A good day for travel," it begins. Well that was right for a start: I got the bus first thing spot on. The next line was puzzling: "Don't go upsetting anyone." I could hardly see that happening. I might look aggressive, but underneath I am the kindest soul imaginable. Mrs Jones at the end of the block will tell you that. The other day the lift stopped working when somebody urinated in the control panel and I carried her trolley up 3 flights. "Tom, you're an angel," she said, before shutting the door in my face.

As a result I try my hardest all day to avoid conflict. The stars also mention something pleasurable and

"a good day for romance." Well there's always a chance. I once found a penny, picked it up, as is the requirement, and found myself in the company of a beautiful woman. I believed I was in luck, but when I went in for the kill she suddenly had to leave. It's all relative though isn't it? If I managed to meet Cindy Crawford every day then where would be the luck in that?

My bus journey, as it occurred, was to the swimming pool, under the motorway towards Kew. I was taking the Hoppa and as luck would have it the bus arrived at the stop just as I did. I always enjoy the journey and am kept alert by not wanting to miss out on good fortune. One day I found £5 under a seat, which I promptly spent, but had I been asleep I may well have missed it altogether.

At the pool I got changed. I love to swim so I pulled my trunks on quickly. Wednesday mornings is the Job Club outing and there are usually a few nice girls who came along. I haven't worked for six months, not since I got the sack from the baker's. I should have seen it coming though because the Mail had predicted "a change in career plans around July." How foolish not to have realised.

I especially like swimming in the deep end because no one can see me except for my head. One of the younger blokes once said I should change in the Women's because I have breasts. I told him to mind his own business. I knew I could because I was due to be assertive that day.

The pool was crowded, even for during the day, and instead of swimming straight from the shallow end, I walked further along the poolside. With luck I would meet somebody. About halfway however I decided

to get in. I used to jump but the splash was too much so now I lower myself, from sitting, into the water.

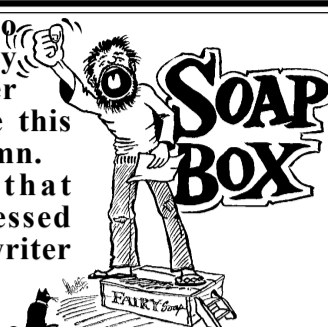
I paused at the edge. Should romance be in the air it was sure to happen here. Around the pale, lapping water I saw all shapes of women. Some were like me, whom I avoided, but others were skinnier and more attractive. Oh God, I thought, please let it be one of them.

Perched there I surveyed the swimming-costumed scene, till guiltily I averted my gaze when the whistle blew. Some kids in the middle had been splashing and larking noisily around. "avoid upsetting anyone," I remembered and tried not to watch when they were told off.

The lifeguard, I noticed, was a woman who wore a shortish skirt. She had a nice face, a strong, commanding jaw and big legs. I believe in true love, wherever it may occur and admired my princess on her white-legged throne until finally she caught me. That, I was afraid, was that. Rumbled I hurried to immerse my blushing self.

It's funny that I can't remember being out for long, but when I came to, the pool was empty. The noise of shouting kids had stopped and I could feel hard-ridged tiles digging into my back. Nearby I heard the voice of a man who was talking medically and in my haze appeared to be an ambulanceman. There was a girl's voice too and as I opened my eyes wider and wiped the water away I realised it was her. "You had a nasty knock," she said, smiling slightly. She was right, my head was sore. "Debbie here saved your life," said the man. I looked back at her and somewhere in my mind I recalled the horoscope. "A good day for romance," it said. For that, I believe it was.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column. Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



## Vandalism

By David Hobbs

**Recent attacks on cemeteries, together with the constant landscape of smashed up bus shelters and graffitied walls have put vandalism back on the agenda in East Finchley.**

"Vandalism" is one of those things that sets most peoples blood boiling. We all know what we think of vandalism, but although there are certain areas of common ground, once one gets down to specifics it gets more complicated.

We tend to think of vandalism in stereotypical terms, classifying those who spray their names on walls, or dump shopping trolleys on the railways lines as vandals. What we should also remember is that vandalism is often something that only affects the one person who finds that his or her life had been disrupted. Perhaps it is because someone snapped off the aerial on the car, pulled up plants in the front garden or aerosoled "Man Utd" on the wall. These are the "acts of vandalism" that are most upsetting to the individuals affected.

If a problem like vandalism is going to be tackled and solutions found it is pointless sitting back and complaining. Any real solution means changing how we think about society and stopping thinking solely of ourselves cocooned in our houses watching the TV. Societies are made by people and if we want a vandalism free society we had better start thinking as a society and not as a collection of disparate individuals.

Obviously, anyone convicted of vandalism should be expected to clean up the mess, or where that is not feasible, a form of community service would not be a bad idea.

Although it does seem like passing the buck, the words "parental responsibility" should actually mean something and making the parents pay for cost of the damage caused by their children might make them more responsible. Whether that will have any long term effect is another matter.

What it comes down to is basic fact that teenagers want to make their own mark and it is a matter of ensuring that they make their mark in a non-destructive way. This means more than complaining or disciplining "vandals", it means helping them to find ways of using their abilities in a constructive way. It is only if we are prepared to do more than merely complain that we will be able to do something about the problem.

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