

Simon Faithfull

ACCIDENT BOOK

LAONIC

An Inventory of Falls, Mishaps and Slips

# ACCIDENT BOOK

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**Subject** Simon Faithfull

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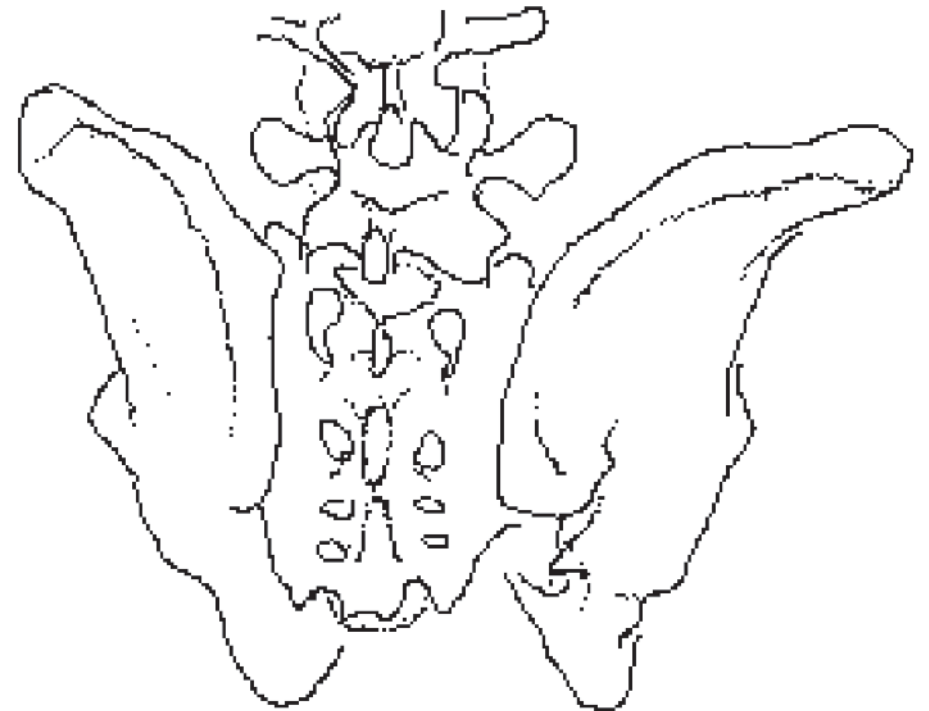
<b>Region</b>	Lower back
<b>Case History</b>	Blue bruise, quickly faded
<b>Treatment</b>	Cup of tea

A friend has moved north out of London in search of space and time.

God being the only landlord with unwanted rooms, he found his empty space in a large post-Methodist chapel. An atheist son of a Buddhist father, my friend delights in his personal programme of deconsecration – drinking in the schoolhouse, fornicating in the vestry and a dog housed in the chapel. Above Brindle’s dog bed hangs a sign – ‘Beware of the God’.

Somehow, though, spaces always assert the ghosts of their previous function. In winter the freezing timbers impose a puritan austerity on the lives of him and his girlfriend. As part of his programme of renovation he’s taking delivery of a lorry-full of insulation. The pile of 8ft by 4ft boards needs moving inside from the churchyard and with a friend I help to shift the mountain. I’m walking backwards through the chapel as we go to place the first load against the wall in the far corner. Seen from the perspective of my friend, as I reach the corner of the enormous room I suddenly disappear – as if God has smote me out of existence. From my perspective, I’m walking backwards and the floor suddenly vanishes – everything becomes dark.

There is a pain in my lower back and I’m looking up through the floorboards at the ceiling and stained glass window of the Victorian chapel. My friend finds me at the bottom of a 5ft hole that Gerry forgot to mention.



<b>Region</b>	Finger
<b>Case History</b>	3 small scars, faded quickly
<b>Treatment</b>	Suck

Sliding through the German landscape on a white I.C.E. train, I reach into my bag for my mobile phone. I packed in a hurry and the contents are a random jumble of stuff assembled for two days in Münster. I push my hand down to the bottom of the vibrating bag and something bites me. I pull my hand out and the tips of my fingers are cut. I hastily put them in my mouth and taste the metal flavour of blood. A young girl sitting opposite is watching me very closely.

After a few minutes (using my left hand) I carefully examine the contents of my bag and find a Gillette Blue II razor. I am still sucking my fingers and the girl is still watching me. When I have finally stopped leaking I can examine my hand. My index, middle and ring finger each have two precise but deep incisions that run in parallel across my fingertips – like tiny railway tracks. The girl is still watching but I resist the urge to show her and stare out of the window instead.



# 26

<b>Region</b>	Gut
<b>Case History</b>	Nothing to report
<b>Treatment</b>	German lessons

A month after moving into my temporary new flat in Friedrichshain I am doing the washing-up with the bottle left behind by my Berlin landlords. I practise my German on the label. It has a picture of a friendly green frog but the images don't seem quite right. I can't decipher everything but I recognize the word 'Fußboden' and realize that I have washed my plates for 5 weeks using floor cleaner.

I feel slightly sick.

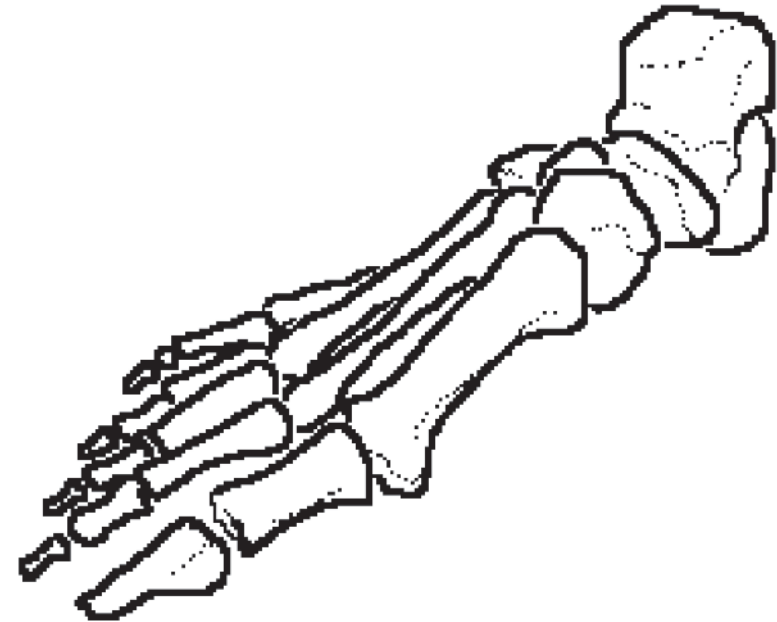


<b>Region</b>	Friendship
<b>Case History</b>	Nothing to report
<b>Treatment</b>	Soothed with reassurance

Friends have a five storey Regency house in Ramsgate – bought when this corner of the island was considered beyond the edge of the world. On the entire planet, the place I sleep best is in the room squeezed between the rafters right at the top of the many flights of steps. A small window at each end from which you can just see the sea, the cry of seagulls on the gutter, the wind rattling the old windows – all of this reminds me of being on the Antarctic Ocean.

When I wake there is a fresh pot of tea, a china cup with saucer and a tiny jug of milk, all resting on a delicate silver tray. Simon was immaculately raised and is irrepressibly proud of his domain. He has many enthusiasms – dogs, birds, self-help books, smoking – but one of his strongest addictions is to the exquisite china that he trawls from Ramsgate’s charity shops.

Eventually I leave my cabin and make my way down to the kitchen five floors below. My eyes are still gluey and my body is not yet properly organized. On the last flight I trip over the end of my sock. I manage not to fall headlong down but the tray crashes to the landing at the bottom. There is a moment’s pause and then two heads appear above each other around the door jam. Underneath, a worried dog looks nervously up the stairs, above, Simon’s face executes a perfect smile.



# 7

<b>Region</b>	Adolescence
<b>Case History</b>	Chilblains quickly faded
<b>Treatment</b>	Repeat prescription

A new girl moves to our village. I'm told by tormentors that she fancies me and naturally I disbelieve them. Time passes and I still refuse to trust the intermediaries but on the 14th of February I receive a card that was delivered by hand.

We arrange to meet in the woods that lie between our two houses. The snow still covers the spaces between trees.

We kiss.

The feel of somebody else's lips is extraordinary. Sliding along a tongue, past my own teeth and into the alien geography of someone else's mouth is the most adrenalin filled journey of my life. Dentistry felt in reverse – from the outside in. My tongue sliding behind her teeth and moving over places where moments before her voice was playing. Two tongues searching a space where 'me' and 'not me' is becoming confused. The smoothness of white porcelain, the textured swellings of tongue. Breathing is negotiated through nostrils squished against cheeks. We are both as quiet as possible – I can hear or feel the faint sigh of her breath against my cheek.

How long has this been happening?

In the distance I can faintly hear my toes complaining. Submerged in the snow, the pain signals sent from my feet have finally made themselves heard above the clamour of my brain.

The next morning the world is different but my toes are red and swollen with chilblains. As a small child this affliction was a feature of every winter. To soothe the pain, my mother used to pluck the lambs' wool snagged on the barbed wire fences and wrap my painful digits in the warming lanolin of unwashed wool.

The next evening I walk to the other end of the village – my heart is stuttering and my toes are secretly wriggling in wool.



# 1

<b>Region</b>	Knee
<b>Case History</b>	Thick scar beneath right patella
<b>Treatment</b>	Soothing words, Dettol, stitches

Running from my brother, I trip on an unseen root. My knee lands on the razor edge of a broken flint that pokes out of the surface of the woodland earth.

In the bathroom my blood drips onto the lino. I must be screaming but I am also fascinated by seeing the inside of myself – the white bacon-like stuff beneath the skin that is revealed whenever my mum cleans away the red.

