

Story for performance #48  
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Source: Donal Macintyre, 'Jewish settlers praying for miracle to stop Gaza pull-out', *The Independent online*, 07/08/05.

Tags: [literature](#), [security](#)

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A practical man. Reads in the bathroom. With his trousers rolled. With his chin up (not cocked, raised). With his index finger anticipating the next page, a steady flow of oncoming pages. With his toes curled, resting on synthetic sheep skin. With his glasses dangling from a piece of red string.

He reads Darwin and Marx; he grows a moustache on his twelfth birthday and never looks back; he feeds the meter; he gargles (though never in public); he swims twice a week, early morning, less congestion; he goes to bed late; he wakes up early (off to the pool, he mutters); he brings it in for an oil check; he tips the base amount (if that; to tip over what is expected would be scandalous); he keeps a (scientific) journal; he mows the lawn every ten days; he masticates, never swallows (bad for one's digestion).

The practical man is perfectly oblivious to his immediate surroundings. He sees things in definite, concrete terms. He is a man of science. Logic and reason make his life palatable. He is calculating in every transaction he makes (verbal exchanges, lifeless rallies on the squash court, purchases at the ticket window of his favourite cinema). Both feet remain firmly planted (the practical man wears Hush Puppy loafers). There is very little room for spontaneity, and no room at all for poetry. 'Plato was right,' he utters, 'the poets should be banished from the republic.' I see nothing practical in poetry, he thinks. He measures out his life in coffee spoons and waits on the subway platform with an air of calm (both hands clasped), with measured breath (clean shaven), with eyes fixed directly in front of him (hard, chiselled features).

On the train he reads the business section and (almost) finishes his morning crossword. He reads, speaks, thinks, listens, breathes, walks, and sleeps in one language (one flighty, flimsy, pedestrian, perfectly practical language), his mother tongue. There is sense and logic in these words he musters. (M-U-S-T-A-R-D!: seven across.) With his trousers still rolled he makes his way to a café where

he orders mild coffee and a croissant. He sees the symmetrical lines on the floor in mathematical equations, in finely-measured maxims. He sips his coffee and waits, for something, someone, anything.

Then someone enters left. A beret-wearing, portly type. Woody Allen glasses (no red string on his person). He carries with him a book (thermodynamics, possibly chemical engineering...), a dull green(ish) book with missing pages and a faint smell of longing.

How does one read a book with missing pages, he asks. The book in question, still a dull(ish) green, is full of poetry and promise. He reads. Not in the bathroom, in the hearth. The ends of his trousers caress the floor. His gait, winning and cool. His smile, warm and inviting. He opens his book (page 214), and reads a poem with a funny name.

*Kubla Khan.*

These words dance in a parade of light. The room breathes. The poet's delivery is smooth silk, trancelike. The practical man, having long forgotten how to engage his imagination wanders through the hallways of lost youth, the curiosity of childhood having slipped out of his trousers long ago. Nothing. Black. A practical man always discards impractical things. Imagination is a last refuge for the practical man, relegated to his unconscious mind (something of which he's heard of, second—or third-hand). Impractical at best, the imagination is about as useful as... (here the word eludes him)...

The poem is chaos (a word he understands because a definition can be found, broken down, and compartmentalized) and he escapes to the mad flow of hysteria of the city square. With gum on his shoe. With dandruff in his hair. With tears staining his cheeks. Practical, but unnecessary he thinks.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ian Reilly.*