



Source: Tim Butcher, 'Missing factor at talks is willpower from all parties', *Telegraph* in *The Age online*, 28/11/07.

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The social life of language is a real ball—forget dowdy. Excitable speech gets all dolled up with eye-catching details and eclectic pieces, goes out on the town and sluts around. Words are using us to talk to themselves in an orgy of foreplay before the bell rings for close of trading. It's all over the traps: apologies and denials, amplifications, distinctions, retractions, refusals. The gossip goes something like this: 'sleazy, dummy-spitting little git', 'twit', 'pompous ass', 'complete drop-kick', 'gutless goose', or 'snivelling grub'*—all delivered with this obligation-free quote: 'Up shit creek without index or concordance, a knock out blow is the best protection.'

What the world needs now is largely known: more complex and interesting human beings, debt solutions that work. Confession is a good investment, providing indemnity at call. As the forger says to Morse, 'People want to marvel. Fake only disappoints when found out'. Appearances are everything. Sincerity is the best disguise, but always remember: secrecy is the best policy. Equivocation works well as a method, as in the recommended answer to the following question: 'Is poetry dead? It's not for everyone.' This is not to gainsay the attraction of declaratives, though they should be counter-intuitive. For example: 'Tall is small here', as the girl at Starbucks explains in a confidential tone. On the other hand, there is always a place for stating the obvious, as in 'Certain environmental problems won't go away,' and offering unwanted advice, like 'Make sure your apartment grows with you' might work in a real fix. Sometimes, of course, you're just completely knackered, metabolically speaking, and then it's all over bar the shouting and no snake-charming skills will save you.

Written on the wind was what? Some kind of promise or prediction? The evening news suspects the worst. The next days are rumoured to bring only frustration, but I'm an optimist, I want to be hopeful, I want to look forward to what might now be possible. I want to make the most of model misbehaviour.

Oh what a feeling! It's all happening at the intersection of rhetoric and reality. I'm running out of words to try to say what's what...

as high as a kite—as drunk as a skunk—as free as a bird—as pretty as a picture—as thick as a brick—as stupid as a painter

I was here

as ugly as sin—as red as a rose—as black as ink—as hot as hell—as cold as ice—as mad as a cut snake

I saw how it was

as nice as pie—as sweet as sugar—as neat as a pin—as wide as the sky—as clear as day—as deep as the deep blue sea

I'm trying to tell you

as dull as ditchwater—as warm as toast—as right as rain—as smooth as silk—as soft as dough—as tough as an old boot

So you'll get the picture

as fit as a fiddle—as full as a goog—as happy as Larry—as rich as Croesus—as poor as a church mouse—as like as two peas in a pod

See what I mean?

as wet as water—as weak as piss—as thick as thieves—as pleased as punch—as nutty as a fruitcake—as snug as a bug in a rug

I'll fill you in on all the details

as rough as guts—as clear as mud—as fickle as fate—as clean as a whistle—as round as a rissole—as plain as the nose on your face

That way you'll understand

as blind as a bat—as deaf as a doornail—as dead as a dodo—as stiff as a board—as bitter as a pill—as sure as night follows day

Exactly what was what

as safe as houses—as mad as a meataxe—as flat as a pancake—as sharp as a tack—as deep as a well—as smooth as a baby's bottom

Just give me the big picture

as light as a feather—as heavy as lead—as easy as pie—as good as new—as greedy as a pig—as crooked as a dog's hind leg

Don't bore me with details

as tight as a drum—as brown as a berry—as bright as a button—as pale as a ghost—as good as done—as sincere as a polyester suit

Details only distract but

as white as a sheet—as red as beetroot—as quiet as a mouse—as flat as a tack—as sick as a dog—as low as a snake's belly

That's how it was

as pissed as a newt—as stubborn as a mule—as tense as a spring—as quick as a flash—as cool as cucumber—as long as a month of Sundays

It was just—as I said

as sound as a bell—as hard as nails—as dry as a bone—as straight as a die—as camp as a row of tents—as smart as a silicon chip

As real as real can be

*All terms of abuse used by former Australian leader of the opposition, Kim Beazly, who was then forced to withdraw them in parliament, though 'snivelling grub' was first used by Tony Abbott (Liberal party minister), then repeated by Julia Gillard (opposition). She was ejected; he wasn't.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anna Gibbs.