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Lizard

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Extract

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Plane.

In the early medieval times, perhaps the seventh century, the monks inhabiting the monasteries of Iona and Lindisfarne believed that a snake was reborn when it shed its skin, like the myth of the phoenix reborn from its ashes. Like my new calf. Reborn. A new me, or an old me in a new package.

I had packed and was off to the airport (bus, etc.).

It should all be relatively uneventful.

I decided not to say goodbye to my flat-mates. I was setting off for a new start, a month-spanned new start, but a different atmosphere, nevertheless. It came at a good time, because nothing good could happen with the state I was in. The change of climate was not to meet new boys and girls, because essentially, *I don't sleep with people; it's not what I do.* I needed some change to slake my nomadic needs.

I'd had very little sleep and hadn't heard anything from the lady whose children I was to keep. I didn't even know her name. I had no idea where to go once I'd got to the island. I wore the black trousers that I'd turned down yesterday, but I noticed a rip was beginning to appear over my backside, from the pockets.

I'm as in love with my bum as I am with my boobs. My bum, it sort of juts out. Not like a pier. More like, you know, a pair of toy drums from a kids' shop. They say I'm pear-shaped but I think it's wonderful.

I love taking the bus to the big town. I know it's the same route every time, and everyone takes it really quite often and lightly, but each time I take it something tells me it is only the beginning of a long journey. Of course, that is untrue. Passengers go the same number of miles in the same bus. Nevertheless, each time, it is surprising to see the same sights along the way – the giant metal fence at eye level because it's seen from the top of a double-decker bus, and the strange hobo land, with caravans and corrugated iron roofs on top of make-shift huts, like from a geography book page about shanty towns on the outskirts of urban agglomerations.

My packing was equally make-shift.

Travel light, I thought, but I still had lots of food in my room, so I packed it all up. I put everything in my room into suitcases, which I then planned to leave in my room (even my duvet once I'd had a nap) so that on the off chance that I wouldn't come back for a while, no one would touch my things.

Why do I make such a big deal out of travelling? I took a 25-litre rucksack with me. Scarce but sufficient.

'Throw okay, alright lovely, click click', words that I force myself to say every time I change country, because of the motions my tongue has to make for the change in language. My mouth moved to these words as I fretted about the airport.

Finding the gate was like following the white rabbit, taking the red pill and answering a sphinx's riddle. Signposts, buses, long spindly corridors and rolling carpets didn't work, like everything was conspiring for me to miss my flight. Though,

this time, I had my ticket.

Taking a plane is an easy business, at least that's how the companies make you think, but inescapable memories of when it all went wrong linger, at every check-in, at every fake marble tile, on every floor.

That time.

You missed the plane, because you got to the airport with only the receipt of the ticket. You shoved the reservation under a string of noses and they kept sending you to different queues until it became urgent, so you cried at people and cut queues and then the plane left without you.

You rang the family from a public phone and gave them its number. It kept buzzing. It looked like an office in a little corner of the airport. You asked for the price of a new ticket, there and then. (You went away to dither about whether you should purchase it. By the time you got back, the ticket was a third of the price more.)

Having no semblance of faith in luggage areas, as they lose things, you foolishly hung on to your rucksack. You checked it through the hand luggage, and it was small enough. And the bottles were small enough, except your prissy face-wash that you idiotically sent off for, once every two months, via snail-mail that you paid every time, willingly. This security lady picked the bottle up and put it in the bin. She was as prig and cool about it as if she were separating wheat from the chaff. You protested, and you were ignored. You had no tears left after the ticket ordeal, and now there was no time to barter properly.

I was tired. That was the problem.

I shouldn't have had that nap last night, or else I'd be pepping

today.

I fell asleep in the boarding room.

I was woken up by an airhostess moludging my shoulder with the back of her hand. She was blond, with short hair past her ears, wearing those outfits that border between attractive and disturbing. I opened my eyes. She looked older up close than far away, like forty-five, a year gained for every centimetre she came closer. She tapped me pertly on the shoulder and asked,

'Miss Young? It is time to board!'

'Oh, oh, oh,' I retorted, 'I am sorry.'

Simultaneously, there was the boarding room speaker saying,

'Would Ms E. Young please proceed to the airplane Q 01 I Z 3.'

And they'd pronounce each letter and number in a different pitch. I always find that hilarious, and they end on a high-pitch like they need to carry on saying more computer-generated monosyllables. These past days everyone seemed to know my name, but I guess the computer knew I was here, because I'd checked in.

I'd brought along a few of my old children's books, not ones that I loved and did not want to part with, because they were far too battered to give as a gift. After Jonas had left, I'd wrapped *Old Bear Tales*, and a good one, *A Night at the Zoo*, in various shades of blotting paper.

When I was seven, we moved house and wouldn't stop moving house from that point on. I hated getting rid of all those