

## Stories for ONE-TWO...

### Introduction

Dear Oskar,

I can't sleep at nights. No matter how exhausted I might be, my mind won't rest. Instead of falling asleep I feel the most awake I could possibly be. My mind seems more sensitive than at any other time. It feels like everything that exists in the world is trying to cram itself into my head all at once.

I replay things that happened earlier that evening, or years in the past. I meticulously plan what I'm going to do tomorrow and in 20 years time. I think about what time it is in the different parts of the world and what people are doing in Tokyo, Ramallah, Washington, Sao Paulo, Basra, Bombay, Rome. I rehearse conversations I'll never have, get angry with people for things they haven't done yet. I begin letters, novels, songs, DIY projects. Learn languages, get in touch with old girlfriends, reprimand world leaders, thank my parents, read Proust, leave my job, choose a religion and have faith in it, stop drinking, carve wood, play guitar, travel to China, clear up that rash, paint, get told off at school, have sex, loose weight, move to London, understand market forces, buy environmentally friendly nappies, learn to live with Colin, learn to live without staying up all night, relive that holiday by the sea, talk to Martians, feel sick, die and make you all sorry, move to the countryside, meet more people, understand more...

Somehow I have to try and block all this out, find a way of switching it off.

I bury my head in the pillow,

concentrate on the black behind my eyelids,

listen to music or people talking on the radio,

or, most successfully, count.

Not sheep or clouds but just numbers – just numbers themselves – just one and then two, three and four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven...

## Radio

When I was nine I was given a portable radio for my birthday. I used to lie under the covers every night with the blue plastic speaker pressed up against my ear and tune through all the different stations. I listened on long wave so I could hear programmes in different languages with unusual sounding music. I remember the strange feeling in my stomach as I began to realise how big the world was – how many people there were in it. But at the same time I felt somehow reassured, connected. Just before the end of the dial, if the weather was good, you could pick up the signals from the satellites as they orbited the earth.

## Bingo Story

Sometimes I like to play bingo. But not in one of those massive Mecca places. My favourite bingo place is in the back of an amusement arcade on Argyle Street. There's never more than seven or eight people playing at any one time and most people play alone.

It can be a bit embarrassing. I'm usually the youngest there by a long way. I sometimes feel like an impostor, as though I might be there ironically but then I remember how much I like it and it's ok.

The thing about bingo that I like is that it's a very straightforward game that deals in facts. There's no room for interpretation or flare. It's just a question of competently following a simple procedure. The caller gives you some information in the form of a colour and a number, you process that information and, if appropriate, make a mark on the paper with a pen. Eventually, given the right combination of numbers called out and numbers on the paper, someone wins. That's the attraction of bingo, it's a simple repetitive game that is based on pure chance and is therefore democratic. There's no real question of being good at it.

I like watching the old people winning and losing and I like the voice of the bingo caller.

They pipe it out onto the street so you can hear it whenever you walk past the arcade. She has this way of calling the numbers out. She sort of sings them. She makes them into a song.

## Car Journey

The one place I'm absolutely guaranteed to fall asleep is in a car. This is especially, though not exclusively true if; I'm not driving, we're on the motorway, I'm sat in the back listening to the muffled sound of a conversation from the front seats, or the radio is playing quietly.

I think this has to do with when I was young and I used to suffer from travel sickness. I was ok on short journeys near my home but dreaded any trips we might make over long distances and at high speeds. My body seemed to find them unnatural. I think this reached a low point when my dad decided to take us on a driving holiday across France.

The only way to stop the sick feeling was to try to sleep. To close my eyes and concentrate on the motion of the car and the sound of my parents' voices.

## Airport Story

My girlfriend Rachel has been spending more and more time at the airport. It started when she offered to collect some of my work colleagues arriving from abroad. While she was waiting for them she watched the different friends and relatives meeting each other in arrivals.

Even though she didn't know the people, she said she felt moved by what she saw. She said that by witnessing the unending flow of people into and out of arrivals she was able to glimpse a snapshot of all the different relationships there are in the world, all the different stories, and in some way feel connected with them.

My colleagues arrived and she brought them home.

On subsequent occasions she would arrive at the airport much earlier than necessary just to be able to watch the people there. Now she doesn't even bother with the excuse of picking people up. She goes there most weekends and just stands by the barrier in arrivals watching the expectant faces of people emerging from the sliding doors.

She sometimes takes a sign to hold up with the name of a made-up company written on the front so as not to look too weird.

## Aliens Story

Apparently when they come they'll look like us.

That's the latest theory.

Because; in order to have evolved into a life-form that's able to travel through space and visit us they'll probably have roughly the same sort of genetic make up as we have and most likely breathe more or less the same sort of stuff as we do.

So actually all those films that people thought were stupid with the aliens that were basically human but with maybe slightly longer arms or thinner heads or just a different way of walking - apparently they were right after all. Out of all the millions of different forms that they might take, they'll look a bit like us.

Personally I think this is a good thing. I think it means there's more chance of us getting along. Maybe we'll have some things in common.

The other thing is we'll communicate using numbers. They're transmitting numbers to them now. That's because numbers are the real universal language. Numbers most accurately describe the things they refer to. Numbers don't lie. There's no room for misunderstanding with numbers. They mean what they say.

I can't wait for the day to come. Can't wait to meet one. I don't know why but I think I'm really going to like them.

## Silence Story

Sometimes I think it would be better if you didn't have to say anything.

This bit's O.K. I quite enjoy this bit. I wish it could last longer. It's when the talking starts that it goes wrong.

At this point we could still be anybody. Any name, any occupation, any family background, any sense of humour, any sexual preference, any attitude to any subject. Any two of all the people in the world with any two stories to tell. At this point the potential relationships we might have are infinite. This might be the first night of a life-long love affair or the first and last five minutes we'll ever spend together. Maybe I'll say that one thing that spurs him on to writing the novel he's never quite got 'round to. Perhaps he's the long lost brother I never knew I had. Maybe we'll have forgotten ever meeting before the night is over.

But from the first word being spoken those limitless possibilities start to disappear. Word by word I'll become me and you'll become you. From infinity to one and two.

## Anthropological Story

The French word for three, 'trois', is understood by linguists to be etymologically connected to the word 'très' meaning very or most. This connection is thought to stem from the pre-historic era when, as language developed, early man felt the need for a means of expressing one-ness and even two-ness, but no greater amount, which was simply expressed as many or lots.

Anthropologists studying the Taladsay tribe in Papua New Guinea encountered a similar phenomenon. The tribe, thought to have been cut off from any contact with outside society until its discovery in the 1950's, enjoyed a life of such simplicity that they only had need of a numeric system which consisted of three words; one, two and lots.

We have more numbers today than at any previous point in our existence. With the aid of computers scientists are now able to count up to numbers of previously inconceivable magnitude as well as discovering more and more numbers that exist inbetween the traditional cardinal numbers of one, two, three, etc. This reflects our desire to express concepts of increasing complexity with a greater level of accuracy.

If you were to attempt to write down the biggest number known to man at the rate of a number a second it would take you seven hundred and twenty nine years and would require a writing surface the size of .....

## Sea story

Every year I take my holidays by the sea. I like to sit by the shore and look out over the water. I prefer to visit places where there are no out-lying islands. Nothing but an expanse of ocean between me and the next continent.

My parents brought me to the sea-side as a child. I remember paddling at the water's edge, walking along the beech and eating ice-cream from the shop on the front. The shop sold sea-flavoured ice cream. It was a chemical blue colour and didn't taste of anything in particular but even so I bought one every day we were there. Sea-flavoured ice cream – I liked the idea.

