

# The Stain that Broke the Myth

A novel.

Life is a rich tapestry - anon.





**They did a Painting Every Fucking Morning –  
A Two Minute Introduction**

The most important thing to remember as you read this not-a-travelogue is that the two Davids you will meet on this romp, find themselves to be extremely funny. And when they rope you in to edit their not-a-memoir until five-thirty in the morning you definitely feel like you could have traveled through the countryside with them. Let this novel be the stain that broke the myth. Following is a candid tale of survival. And also mucking around in Europe. And a little bit of painting as well. Enjoy their charming wit as much as they did

Riordan Berry -19 November 2011



**FRANCE**



## **Paris**

Spooner arrives in Paris, meets with David C and Sarah. Crab baguette debacle. Flying through streets of Paris on a bicycle. Sarah loses her phone. David S was proud of himself for cycling through the streets, but hadn't realised that the goal was to find Sarah's phone. We meet up with our new friend from the hostel whose name starts with M, that's right her name is Madeleine Sorrenson. We are Facebook friends. The four of us look around the streets of Paris and decide on Chinese food or 'Chinois' food for dinner. David S and Sarah find a funny picture on a sugar cube packet. It might have been a prawn that looked like a penis or a croissant that looked like one or something that looked like daddy written on it. Was it sugar daddy? David S kept it in his wallet for a while but has since lost it.

David S was offered a bike by Stella. Anna her sister refused as it was too unsafe. David S was smug about how couldn't have fit three bikes on the train.

We were going to start the journey from Montpellier and had planned to stay at a friend of David C's house, Sandrine. In the year two thousand, David C lived in an apartment with a couple of French people in Chalk Farm, London. He and Sandrine had shared a room. Sandrine had visited him back in Brisbane once later on. After very little contact over the years, David decided to facebook her again when they were about to leave for the cycling trip. By chance, she was living in the town of Montpelier, which was where they had decided they would begin their journey. David called Sandrine from Paris and let her know they would be arriving the next day. She worked at the airport, and would be on duty until quite late, so they planned to arrive in the evening some time.

## **Montpellier**

Another hilarious series of mishaps ensued. We caught a train to Montpellier but were disallowed on it because of the bikes. A man stopped us as we tried to enter, saying 'You can't take bikes on, but you can take packages on'. Having missed this train, the travelers then spent a hurried hour changing their tickets (paying extra) followed by a desperate search for cardboard bike boxes. It was also a Sunday and post office was closed and the travelers were unfamiliar with the local area. David S was denied being given a cardboard box by cleaner, who had a number of them on a trolley. David C rides through the streets with a large bike box under his arm, that was also balanced on his handlebars. He makes quite a sight, and it is not fun. Sarah and David S meanwhile, have found a couple of boxes, which they cobble together around Sarah's partly disassembled bike. This is done using a lot of packing tape.

A comedy of errors takes place as we drag our packed bikes on to the carriage, past the passengers. We take the end seats on the train, and try several different ways of cramming the boxed bikes into the end luggage compartment. A little like Tetris, with less fun, and with lots of silent spectators. Also, without the possibility of it fitting in the end. One of the packages hung out from a corner of the baggage rack, one wheel over a man's shoulder, and the other sitting on David C's lap. Another emanated the L-block and stuck out awkwardly, sitting in the aisle. We breathed a sigh of uncertain relief when the game was done. There was a lot nervous giggling, and high amounts

of stress; the other passengers apparently didn't appreciate the real life Tetris going on. They responded very silently. David S was having a rest and woke up and saw a conductor going through doing their first rounds. She looked in, raised her eyebrows and had a look of utter dismay. She did not like Tetris either. David S was like 'Oops!' and pretended he didn't notice her.

He remembers a long boring conversation going on with himself and Sarah. David C was having one of his silent hypochondria attacks. David S made eyes with a pretty Parisian woman who looked Turkish. She gave him a very cold stare. The inspector came in to check our tickets and chastised us like naughty school children for bringing two large objects with us. The train wasn't a chaotic South- East Asian style train; it was a sophisticated affair, with business types possibly travelling to work in other cities. The people who commuted on this train spoke in hushed tones, if at all. After a long discussion, the inspector told the travelers not to do it 'next time'. They wholeheartedly agreed. David S replied, 'There won't be a next time'. To that the attractive Turkish lady cracked and laughed. David S had broken through her icy exterior. This was one of the pre-eminent examples of David S's charm powers with the French. It also felt like a lot of the other passengers eased off in their initial harsh assessment. They could see that we weren't being deliberately annoying, here were simply a trio of comedic buffoons. Also, the 'Next time' catch phrase was born. This was repeated through the journey incessantly every time we were cautioned against doing something wrong. On a later trip to find food down the carriages, we realised that there was a much more convenient baggage storage area.

Arrived in Montpellier. Caught a tram.

Waited at the station for Sandrine's friend Nabil.

Shown around Montpellier. We had a felafal with french fries with Nabil.

Saw some reggae. Shook hands with a green man on the street. Danced a bit in an underground cellar. It was really, really old and smelt mouldy and damp, but it was cool. We liked Montpellier. We had an icy reception from his soon to be ex-girlfriend. Nabil seemed to have been through the ringer, and wasn't able to explain in English that he was going through a break up. We stored a half full bottle of Nabil's freely offered wine in Sarah's bag, pushing the cork half in. This proved to be most unwise as it later fell out, damaging some of Sarah's belongings and wetting her passport. These were later laid out like an art installation on Sandrine's formica counter.

Slept at Sandrine's. Had a coffee the next morning at a beach. Had 'pain au chocolat'. We watched a child eating dirt while Sandrine and Sarah smoked some cigarettes and Spooner patted an energetic dog.

Sandrine explained how in France they put rich people next to poor people, through planned housing. She seemed to delight in living above wealth.

As David S did not have one, Sandrine bequeathed him a bicycle recovered from her in-laws shed. This is St Dauphines birth, a momentous occasion. Shredded duck in a jar and olives and gherkins and chips and some beers.



Ate a spiral sausage and some bow tie pasta. Delicious. The travelers say goodbye to Sandrine and her delightful son.

David Spooner. Delightful Sun.

David Creed. Delightful child.

Sandrine took a nice photo of us, about to undergo the journey. And this became the cover of this book. David C was proudly wearing his "Vote 1 Kevin Rudd" shirt, David S was proudly wearing his "Wynnum on the Bay" shirt, and Sarah was wearing something cool she bought in Paris.

They loaded up their bikes and David C used David S's 'Jesus Loves You' belt to strap his bag on the back of his bike. David S struggled to make some kind of weirdo contraption to attach his smaller backpack to his larger backpack. This made him look like a turtle. Sarah Sarah had double panniers, and a heavy backpack to boot. They looked slightly overloaded. Sandrine was laughing a lot at their piles of baggage and suggested that perhaps they might want to abandon some small items along the way.

David C makes his first raid of a garbage bin. David S made lots of comments about how this was the perfect place to raid bins as it was made up of many rich jerks who lived by the seaside. David C found a plastic orange and magenta ladies bag and used it as his backpack, replacing his canvas tote bag that had instantly torn. This was about two kilometers down the road from Sandrine's apartment. They also found lots of bloody tissues in a large cardboard box and a basket that they tried to attach to the front of Sarah's bike. It fell off.

Rode along. It was kind of relaxing. David S and Sarah took a slow pace and David C went ahead for some private time.

They stopped at a merry-go-round by the sea to have some snacks.

We rode past a innumerable apartment blocks which were 60's style. They looked like Lego.

We stopped at McDonalds for coffee.

A strange sight: a crazy man on a bike being chased by a car. The next day he is seen feeding horses.

There are real live flamingoes living in the Camargue. We saw them. They live next to a petrol station. Sarah bought some cigarette papers.

### **Grande Motte**

Big castle next to a salt factory. Pretty. Inside the castle walls, it plays out like a 'How to learn French' video, with plenty of bonjours thrown in for good measure.

### **Arles**

What did Vincent van Gogh see in Arles? Perhaps we will never know. He was, however, heavily promoted throughout the town.

The travelers do their long overdue laundry in a Laundromat. A local Laundromat Junky offers to provide safekeeping for the travelers luggage and bikes. He tries to convey that they are not allowed inside the Laundromat. We say no thank you and then laugh in his face. Has anyone ever fallen for this clever trick?

Sarah had her first major tantrum. She wanted a meal!

### **Ikea Witches (Fos Der Mer)**

*(Ed. Sarah wrote most of this part. Weird.)*

We rode south, and the travelers were fairly happy to escape Arles. Our spirits were quite high and we wanted to cover a lot of ground, and so we did. Spooner was super hesitant and very scared because he saw a rather ambiguous sign, a bicycle with either a black or red ring around it. Ignoring his caution, the intrepid three continued onto what turned out to be a major arterial highway. Motorists began to yell at us and motioned for us to get off of the road.

We'd been cycling for a long time along a flat road with many mosquitoes accompanying us. We had been cycling through rice paddies, which was really low and boggy marshland, that is typical of areas near the coast. We eventually saw some wind generators on the horizon, and thought we kept seeing towns in the distance. Our hopes were high, and there were many signs along the way, which we suspected signified a city, but to our dismay, we had been travelling towards the industrial port. We eventually went up a hill where we passed the aforementioned wind generators, and came across a weird canal that looked like a weird army base, and it had weird aqueducts and a ship. As we looked down the causeway, we could see the windmills lining the manmade canal. The Davids went to the toilet and saw millions of Escargot.

Leaving the canal behind us, we rode down a hill, and the wind streamed through our hair making it furl. We saw an unending sprawl of industrial wasteland ahead. The Davids came across a submerged dead sheep and reflected on their mortality once again. Ding Ding. Ding. We kept riding through said industrial wasteland, and only the occasional car passed us, as well as a few overloaded Carrefour trucks. As it darkened, the cars eventually disappeared and we were only being passed by trucks. There was lots of plastic flotsam like tyres and bits of reflectors on the side of the road - motorvehicle debris. It felt like nobody had ever been through there, at least not on bike like us. Their cars separated them from the reality of the place.

We saw trucks parked on the side of the road, and at that point it became really eerie, as though they were just abandoned trucks, but there could have been someone inside – we just didn't know. On the plus side, the flatness of the wide-open expanse had meant we'd covered a lot of territory. We were zooming along. At Saint Louis De Rhone there was a fork in the road, and the three perilous troopers chose to take the dark path. This resulted in them being stuck on a traffic island on top of a hill that overlooked more road to the right, and an Ikea factory to the left (which David Spooner remarked they should sleep in until Sarah pointed out that it was a factory,

dick head). Abominable trucks traveled fast as hell, entering from a blind spot at a curve in the road, so the travelers had no idea when a devil-truck would come speeding past, nor what direction they came in. They deliberated over setting up the tent on the traffic island, so we walked the length of it, checking out what our options on the island were - to see what the traffic island offered as a tourist destination. There was an offroad part of the traffic island, which turned into a dump with bracken, scrap metal, wire, broken glass, and car cadavers and a small part of campable gravel. Sarah pulled out her camera and had the idea to use the camera as a telescopic lens to read signs, due to low visibility in the area.

There was a definite feeling of dread mixed with hilarious mania on the mysterious island. The many possible outcomes of camping on the island were often brought up in conversation – being stabbed by truckers, being raped, being run over by trucks, meeting Optimus Prime, being the topic of the morning radio discussion on the laws of camping and bike riding on highways in France. The ordeal lasted for about an hour, yet group discussion won in the end, and a decision was made to ‘make a run for it’. A descent was made into the abyss i.e. the right of the island, which was a curvy road. This was a calculated risk, as they weren’t sure if the road led onto the highway, but it seemed the best course of action. They eventually ended up at a derelict factory, about twelve at night. David Spooner didn’t have lights for his bike at this stage, so they assumed the normal order – David Creed in front with his oracular spectacular, Spooner in the middle with his dark beast, and Sarah behind, feeling as though some ‘thing’ would grab her from behind and kill her. This is not an understatement. This was FUCKING SCARY. But fun. But FUCKING SCARY! But fucking fun.

The Gods must have smiled on us as we were not run over by trucks. The road did lead down to the highway but we had timed it perfectly so that at that particular moment we were not sharing the road with trucks. We cycled along a little bit further on flat road and chose to take a right turn, we thought it might lead away from the highway. We moved down a gravelly road, we were so hungry by this point but there really wasn’t any sign of anyone being around. The road led us to another derelict factory. There were train tracks and an abandoned rusty tractor. David C remembers looking past the train tracks and seeing a dark path that led to a forest. Something that we forget to mention before was the world was scheduled to end that day. It was said that there was a hidden message in the bible- some dude had translated it in a DaVinci code like manner that the apocalypse was going to occur. We had been talking up this ‘fact’ many days beforehand. Back to the story. We consider sleeping at the said derelict factory until everyone notices a sign that people had in fact been in the area. Words in French had been carefully arranged in white stones. Sarah recalls that the words were made up of some Vs and Zs. We were not able to read the word because in Sarah’s terror she knocked the stones over. We decided at this point in the story not to refer to the stones as pebbles because this sounds like a cute penguin’s name. We could also not understand the words because they were in French. Spooner was slightly annoyed at Sarah because he wanted to find out what the words said and translate them later after photographing them. Sarah said ‘WITCHES’ at this which caused Spooner to be paralysed with fear. We all got the hell out there because fear spread like wild fire through our ranks. We were starving. At one point we got super excited when we saw an Elf service station. It was closed. We were forced to cycle

along the highway. Stopping when trucks passed us by lifting our bikes over the metal barriers and cowering in the weeds. Yelling out 'truck' whenever we saw lights.

### **Fos Sur Mer**

We passed an RBT, getting directions from police along the way. They gave us quite a quizzical look, that is, their glances were quite quizzical. We finally encountered a convenience store. The men behind the counter were very rude. We were just thankful that there was food available and that they were not a coven of witches. For sale at the convenience store was a brand of ice block much like the Australian Super Doopers called 'Pussy'. One of the flavours was chlorophyll, plus they had a pineapple flavour. We asked about any food places that were open because most things for sale in this shop were chips and Red Bull. The man behind the counter said that there was a snack bar nearby. We thought, 'Here we go again!' but gave it a shot.

David S was surrounded by a friendly bunch of local Arabic men. We had begun to notice a pattern in France where people were quite racist towards Arabic people. However, it was Arabic people on our trip who got us out of many a pickle. At the snack bar they made us food, gave Sarah a free can of Coca-Cola, offered the Davids free cans of drink and then chaperoned by letting us follow their car on our bikes to a hotel. We arrived; the hotel was full. Nice car man was shattered at not being able to help. We weaseled our way into hotel across the way at a discount rate. The Little One was very happy.

Stupendous breakfast. Spooner stuffed himself senselessly.

### **Carry Le- Rouet**

On the way to this town we vowed never to get caught out again at night looking for accommodation. Let's not repeat last night. That was terrible.

Spent an entire evening until two am looking for a camping ground. Rode up, back, forth, around, under, over and asunder. Drove ourselves mental and wandered aimlessly around a caravan park. Made the caravan parks door malfunction. Looked on as it opened and closed over and over again. Decided this place was cursed and then continued to circumnavigate the town once again. Le Paradis was the last hotel that we tried. We had even asked policemen for somewhere to stay. They were clueless. The hotelier who ran Le Paradis greeted us from behind the gate as her ginger cat entered back and forth between us. We desperately pleaded for somewhere to stay. Sarah pronounced that she was just too tired and that we would have to camp on the footpath. Spooner exploded in a blind rage. The hotelier before this said that there were no rooms, that the camp sites were eight kilometers away. Spooner said that was not far, considering how far they had traveled. Sarah said it was and she had a good point, but Spooner was having one of his stubborn moods.

It was scary riding through the forested hills at two am. Partygoers, (or possibly serial killers) voices could be heard on the beach. The camping ground that we found eventually was where we met Sabine (see Marseille).

## **Marseille**

We liked Marseille as it had the right amount of gritty pretty.

Couch surfed and ate Foie Gras at Sabine and Toto's house. Learnt about Dance Contact, and about Yoghurt. When you don't know the words for a song in English, you repeat all the words you know in English, even if they don't make sense together. For example, you may not be able to remember a Brian Adams song: 'It was the summer of 69. It was a helicopter. Something would last for monkey, for monkey, yeah!' This is Yoghurt.

Toto helped us to purchase art supplies.

David Spooner still does not have a helmet.

## **Cassis**

There is mountain on the way out of Marseille. This is in the Tour de France. David S almost had an accident with a car, by confusing himself about the direction of traffic. David S and David C rode ahead and waited for the Little One, taking photographs while they waited.

Toto and Sabine met us at the next camp. We stayed in Les Chigales, and ate mussels with French Fries and learnt about 'the stain that broke the myth'. There was a man all in white, a ridiculous Riviera trashbag. David S said that he would love to accidentally destroy this mans pristine white ensemble by accidentally dropping a saucepan of bolognaise or possibly beetroot on him. Sabine and Toto replied that in French there was a saying that translated in English as 'the stain that broke the myth' and referred to the point at which a momentous myth is unraveled by something as small as a stain. We like this.

Before we had met up with Sabine and Toto, we sat on the pavement, like gypsies and ate a lunch-like meal. (Many French people had warned us to stay away from Gypsies. At one stage, we dodged a Gypsy festival. The whole town had stayed away by leaving town for the duration of the festival. We overtook a man driving a horse and cart to or from the festival.)

## **Sanary**

A woman sells cherries from the side of the road. Across from her another woman sells cherries. The sun is sweltering. The travelers are becoming more daring in their cycling. They make a sprint one at a time to dodge trucks on the narrow streets. Many dead snakes can be seen on the road. They get confused as to which way to go. Arguments blow up and subside and then blow up once again. They stop under a cool tree and eat dates and almonds.

It feels disempowering to have something wrong with your bike.

They race down a huge mountain and it feels exhilarating. Something goes terribly wrong and St Dauphine stops working. The gears fuse up or the brakes or something

like that. The three try in vain to get it back into action but realise that they are out of their depth somewhat and the whole thing becomes mightily disheartening. Ahhhhh!!!! Work bike, why won't you work! Noooooooooo!!!!!! We are on a bike path next to a supermarket. There have been a number of wedding processions going past. The revelers scream out lewd things to us in French. We are cranky and utterly sun scorched by this time. Sarah and David C enter a bowling alley and visit their lavatory.

Two people appear in front of us. Ophelie and Antoine. They have been shopping and have witnessed our plight from the road. Antoine brings some tools along with his brilliant mind and sets to fixing St Dauphine in two seconds flat... very quickly. The couple offers the trio a place to stay for the evening. The trio politely decline at first, but the couple insist and say that the road ahead is treacherous at this time of day and that we should give up our politeness and be more pragmatic. They don't mind having us. We agree and decide to go shopping and have a swim before meeting them at their house.

We swim at the beach with Dorian Gray. A man arrived in his hatchback and looks just like someone who could play Dorian Gray in a film.

The trio then follow the mud map the couple made for them to their house. David S thinks he sees Johnny Depp drive past, dressed as captain Jack Sparrow in a convertible. The Cannes Film Festival has just been on.

The trio arrive at what can only be described as an idyllic mansion with loads of French charm. It belonged to Antoine's Family. His grandfather was deceased and his grandmother was in a nursing home, having reached over one hundred. The couple had been staying at the house at caretakers during the summer months.

Antoine was a practical minded pharmacist who enjoyed the outdoors and extreme sports such as rock climbing, specifically in the late afternoon.

Ophelie was a free spirited red headed, yoga loving, scuba diving dance contact enthusiast.

After we left, Antoine took Ophelie scuba diving as a belated birthday present.

We had an omelette for dinner, tied our bikes to olive trees out the front. Spooner cautioned Sarah against swearing too much in the company of strangers.

### **Le Pradet 22/5**

Le Pradet was the site of the first painting. We entered Le Pradet separately. David S had another flat tyre and caught the bus from Toulon to Le Pradet. After a long negotiation, the bus driver allowed one bike on to the bus, as the tyre was flat. David and Sarah rode bikes and met Dave at the bus stop.

On the bus, Dave S met a large African woman who invited him to stay at her house. She commented that cyclists were very fit. She pointed to Dave's strong muscles and made a comparison with her giant tuckshop arms. She pointed to her rosary beads

and said, 'Stay with me', indicating that she would look after Dave. Meanwhile, as she was talking, a Chinese guy kept looking back. He'd offered Dave a seat earlier, which Dave had declined. He was drinking either Dr Pepper or Coke.

David C and Sarah are riding through a park, and windy roads, up hills and down. It begins to faintly rain, and David worries about the supplies.

Back on the bus, the lady leaves. She has a massive white pimple on her face, tempting David to reach over and squeeze it. Al was a student from Beijing who was on exchange who helped David to get off at the right stop. He was very helpful and kind, just like the African lady was. He told David that his sister lived in Sydney. Eventually, he said, 'I'm getting off at Le Pradet too'. David felt guilty for being suspicious, however this is a natural response when travelling. Al kept asking how David was going to contact his friend. David said, 'I have no mobile, I'll just run into them'. This is all being said in sign language.

David C and Sarah have not been able to find the 'piste' or cycling track which apparently joins Toulon and Le Pradet, instead, finding a circuitous route, which taxes them. The journey is about ten-fifteen kilometres.

David S and Al get off the bus. It starts to rain. The Chinese man is very concerned about how David is going to find his friends. He asks if they have a mobile. David says, yes and I have their mobile number. He gives David a phone card. The bus driver screams as he drives away that he's getting off at the wrong stop. However, Al assures David that it is ok. David crosses the road to avoid some cigarette smoking badass teen coolkids.

A little later, David C and Sarah cycle along that way and meet up with Dave. There is motorbike helmet on the ground next to some trash. David S has, however, acquired a helmet by this stage.

Looking for a campsite, the three run into Al (of phone card generosity). Sarah asks him his name and he opens up. At first he had been acting nervous. He is a better one-on-one person. He leaves and an old man, possibly the devil, backs out of his drive way. David Spooner notices that his number plate has 666, the number plate of the devil on it. The devil is quite helpful. David C speaks to him in French. David S gesticulates wildly. The man points us in a different direction to a closer campsite.

David and David walk for food. They bypass a rather picturesque McDonalds with a mountain and sunset in the background. David C is desperate for beer. Worst case scenario, McDonalds would have it, but they chance a bakery that does, and which is closing soon. An attractive older lady in the bakery offers them some free food – pizza bread, some with anchovies, possibly they were Focaccias. Spooner encourages them both to eat one on the way home and they do. David C almost felt like crying at the lady's kindness, because it was really appreciated. People turned out to be quite generous.

Sarah is having a rest, reading, writing in her diary. It is approaching dusk. David and David set off in pursuit of a snail farm. This takes them down some typical French countryside and past some more countryside. They see a half bat half owl creature,

but only via a silhouette. (Silhouette is a French word). They run into a couple in post coitus, wearing terry toweling. Woman is smoking, they are friendly enough, but taken by surprise. They have a potentially vicious dog. David S reassures David C about dogs once again, and gives a run down on dog psychology once more. David C tries to show no fear. David S keeps reminding him that we are the boss and not the other way around. Dogs are our four-legged servants.

It continues to darken. We keep walking and approach the snail farm, both urinating on the way. Possibly establishing our territory vis-a-vis the dog. We find the snail farm, but it's closed. There is a massive dog at the house. David S notices this but keeps it to himself and suggests they leave.

DC – Dog Coward

DS – Dog Seducer

They head in the direction of SW (Sarah Werkmeister, not South West).

When we return Sarah has been canoodling with a snow-white cat. The cat was in the tent with her. It had snuck up on her as she was reading and/or writing in her journal.

The campsite was quite pleasant and run by a friendly French man who had mostly blonde grey hair and wore glasses. There was a ping-pong table and some hire bikes outside his office. Barbeques were available for hire. At this stage we were fantasising about cooking our own food or even just boiling our own water.

The day that David S got the next flat tyre was a Sunday. This proved tricky for the travelers as many shops in France and throughout a lot of Europe for that matter are closed on Sundays and Mondays. This left us isolated from many modern conveniences such as sporting goods stores but not even from bakeries.

The campsite was not very heavily populated. There were a couple of caravans scattered throughout and one tent with people in their twenties or so. The rest of the nomads were retirees.

There was a swimming pool that was quite alluring, however we never got a chance to swim in it as we were occupied with getting David S's bicycle back in working order. This involved a trip for Sarah and David C back to the Super Marche not far down the road. David S stayed back and guarded the paintings and the campsite. He started reading the 'Wind Up Bird Chronicles' by Haruki Murakami. He had bought it at Canberra airport earlier that year while on an art residency and still had not read it up until this point. David C who had been expelling extra weight the entire journey was beginning to set his attention on the big fat heavy Murakami book. At one stage he suggested David S tear the pages out as he read them. David S was aghast with this suggestion. He thought it a barbaric idea and resisted at all costs. To this day he owns the book. The book became a fun companion along the way, similar to Shirley McClaines backpack in the Camino (See footnote- David S apparently talked about this ad nauseum).

Sarah W and David C have taken the wheel of David S's bike. The man who ran the campsite mentioned that my bike was a Talbot. A good bike but they were no longer



made because the people who used to work in the factory had gone on strike too many times. Industrial action killed the company.

In the car park of the Grande Super Marche David and Sarah attempted to change the tube however the tube was too long.

Back at the campsite David S is visited by the snow white cat once again. He pats it and discovers a large scab on its head. He stops patting it and washes his hands.

David C heads off on a heroic journey back to Toulon and sends Sarah back to the campsite. David S runs down to a bakery and has a ham baguette, an espresso and takes back a chocky croissant for Sarah. The place he buys it from is floor to ceiling magenta and his lunch is served on a magenta tray. The lady who serves him tries to talk to him and a bunch of girls giggle at the interaction. He gets one extra croissant to take back for himself too. Sarah Sarah and DS both complain about how hot it is.

David C finds the bike path back to Toulon that had eluded him and Sarah on the way to Le Pradet. David C sees a Frenchman walking down the street with a freshly purchased bike tube in his hand. Not believing his luck he asks the man where he purchased his tube from. He sends him in the direction of a French megastore. He takes his faithfully copied down tyre measurements on a piece of paper into the store and some cashiers help him to get the correct Michelin brand tube and two new tyres. With one tyre on each shoulder he cycles back to Le Pradet.

We had been looking at one particular couple in the campsite out of interest. They had a very elaborate set up, very nice and looked like they had all the modern conveniences such as a TV and cat proofing. They were a couple of stark contrasts ala Laurel and Hardie. The usual speculations abounded about how they might make love. The woman was a stick and the man was a wrecking ball. The husband sunned himself on a deck chair as his wife toiled away inside the caravan. The man told us a story in French about how him and his wife traveled to the campsite. He was a French bureaucrat who was now retired. His wife still worked, so he had driven to the campsite, towing his caravan and his wife had taken the train. While it had taken him days to get there his wife had finished off the working week and had gotten there super duper quickly on the fast train. He turned out to be a very congenial man who tried his best despite the language barrier to help us on our way with directions. He had a look at our map and offered his suggestions on the more beautiful and less scenic of the routes. We wondered how to pronounce a particular city or town that was coming up. It started with H (find out how to spell- hyeres?????). It ended up being pronounced as YEAH! This was funny...yeah. We got plenty of mileage out of this joke as we set off that afternoon towards Yeah.

We moved our camp out into the front car park and busied ourselves setting about the complex process of packing our belongings onto our bikes and sewing our two new paintings onto our bikes. David S put his on the front and David C sewed his onto the back of his backpack. The sewing was most likely done by David S as this calmed his frazzled nerves.

\*\*\*\*\*- Discuss the paintings- tissue that had stuck to the paintings and won't come off- the scuff marks-

David S thought his painting was like that done by a child- the first of his many critiques of himself as a poor man's Ken Done. When David C painted his painting everything felt right and he had left his self-criticism back in Brisbane. He was perfect.

We felt free as we cycled along a bike track. We had had quite a stop over and our spirits were heightened at the prospects of continuing on. David S was buoyant about his fixed up Saint. He even commented on how his brakes were working better. We had one more mishap before we left the campsite. We lost part of a bicycle pump. It was quite frustrating to not be able to pump David S's tyres. Luckily the man who ran the campsite had a spare pump. We felt like a trio of alley cats hanging around a fish shop. It seemed like we were never going to leave and we didn't want to overstay our welcome since the campsite manager had been so helpful.

## **Cavalaire-sur-Mer**

### **Mimosa – Death Adder Beach**

We entered roadrunner territory. France began to look like the Wild West. Red rocky cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. So it wasn't exactly like Road Runner territory but it was like Warner Bros world maybe...by the Gold Coast. One of those log ride things. There was a train track next to the road. We imagined that there were lots of death-like adders in the red hills. We rode past a number of their squashed brothers and sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles, friends, snake doctors, bakers and so on. There were lots of dead snakes.

DS - Dead Snakes

DC - Dead Cyclist

The heat was fairly oppressive. We wanted to be blown away by the amazing views we were experiencing but the narrow road, motorcycles racing past us and other perilous factors forced us to concentrate like Connect Four competitors. The colour of the sea was aqua, like the colour of Listerine. The mild one, not the one the colour of morning urine. Often we viewed a nice beach below, which was inaccessible as it lay hundreds of feet below us. We could see people enjoying the beaches as we cycled. This added to how sweltering we all felt. Let us emphasise here how scenic and beautiful the scenery was. Wow! Words cannot describe it so please refer the video and/or photographs. The paintings did not really do it justice so don't view them in relation to it. The Davids were not very good at mixing colours that day.

We were famished. We stopped at a convenience store just in time, as they were packing up for a siesta. It was 'lazy hour'. Although we agreed heartily with the sentiment of siesta and often said that there should be one back in Australia as it was a very civilized way of doing things, the travelers still were pretty shirtily when a shop presented itself closed and they could not eat or drink. Also, they had nowhere to practice siestas as they were without accommodation during the day light hours. It was a scorcher this day, ouch. David C and Sarah went inside to buy food and drinks. David C tried in vain to convince David S to enjoy an interesting new food. David S

possesses a very complex palate, however that day he did not feel so inclined to eat rabbit offal. (*Ed. This is where it becomes travelogue-ish for a little bit.*) Plus, their funds were steadily dwindling. Instead they bought a bounty of bread, cured meats, an avocado, cheese, a tin of beans. Sarah bought a punnet of vivid red tomatoes. Outside of the shop it was cool, as the shop owner had hosed down the concrete. David S stared at a postcard stand and the collection of pool/beach toys for sale.

The trio set off to look for somewhere idyllic to rest and eat. After all the places they had seen so far along the way it is not surprising that they had high expectations. What followed was sweaty torment – not fun and not pretty. They settled for settling (*Ed. I kept that in on purpose lol*) on a footpath with a reasonable amount of shade. Although the sea was seen next to us, it was obscured by a brick fence, chain link fence, cacti and gaudy seaside mansions. There was a rather spectacular cactus in front of them. It may have had spectacular yellow flowers on it. Spectacular. This was followed by a really good lunch, certainly one of the more filling meals of the trip. They ate their meals, (Sarah possibly saving some for later) and then the drowsy, lethargic weather reduced them to spreading out, over the footpath in a doze. A pedestrian walked past them, stepping on to the road so that they could pass by.

A little later we sought out a more pleasant place to escape the sun. It was like a weird eurotrash haunt. Something like a beach resort. There was a bar with a restaurant attached. Tourists were sunning themselves in deck chairs, or attached to the bar, drinking alcohol. There were some ladies on the beach who looked up at us with daggers. Some men were playing cards. There was a shaded tin shed attached to the bar, and we decided that this looked more suitable for us dirty travelers. There were no other guests in this area. David S was really worried about trailing sand into the shed, but we made a base around one of the tables. We tied the bikes together against a pole, next to the table. We ordered a few espressos. The man who served us was ‘alright’. Sarah thought he was cute but the Davids thought of him as a little bit snooty.

Sarah had a couple of coffees and then a had a wine at the end. She began writing a letter to her friend Lee. It was very romantic. David and David went for a swim in the beautiful clear water. The freshness of the water was bracing. It was quite deep. We got a bit of deep fear. We’re used to there being waves but there were no waves here. It felt uneasy, like something could snatch us up. So, we paddled a little closer to the shore. We got out, no need for a towel. We went back to Sarah to collect our painting materials and left Sarah still writing, and drinking a wine. Sarah remembers thinking that it was fucking hot and she wanted a can of coke really bad.

David and David meanwhile scoped out the surroundings, looking for a place to paint, but needing somewhere shady to do it. They walked along the beach, eventually finding a spot right up close to cliffs with a minimal amount of shade. The view presented itself as beach umbrellas, rocks, water and a swimming couple of Eurotrash. At one stage during the painting, a really nice lady came up and asked us what we were doing. She was a painter and was very complimentary about our pursuit of capturing landscapes en plein air. She didn’t really speak any English though, and some of the terms she used were difficult to figure out. You can see that this painting was one of the ones done when we still only had half a palette (we had the cool colours, but not the warm). We couldn’t really make purple properly, and it was

difficult to capture the beach umbrellas, which were green, blue and white stripes. The sun was setting really rapidly, so there were colourful reflections in the waves. Spooner was wracked with insecurity about his painting, and threatened to destroy it. This was partly because he had done such a good job with the Saint Tropez painting, and was disappointed to take a backwards step. He left David C, as he finished his painting early (he always does. David C always takes too long). David C was left to photograph the scene (See the RULES of painting). David S went back to talk to Sarah, and they had a small heart to heart. Sarah confided to David that she was thinking about visiting Xico in Portugal, which would mean leaving the cycling trip. She was unsure though.

A little bit later in the carpark, while packing our bags on our bikes and sewing the paintings we watched some elderly people being sold animal parts from the boot of a car. There were horns taken from various animals. David S struggled in the background with brown cotton. Sarah went over to take a photo of the horns. The ladies tried to convince Sarah that the animals were willing participants in their de-horning. They were selling the horns to a lady who owned a ski resort or hotel, and who needed some decorations for her guest rooms. The deal appeared shady, as it was taking place by a marina, in a carpark. Sarah posed for a photo with the antlers above her head. She looked like a Satyr, a forest faun, an imp, an elvish thief. Suddenly, everyone wanted to have their photo taken with dead animal products attached to their head. We discussed how great it would be to attach horns to the front of our handlebars, but also how they would prove to be a deadly hazard if we were to fall the wrong way. Perhaps this incident contributed to our ongoing desire to see a live deer.

Then we went and started cycling again.

Often when we arrived in a new town, a young French boy on a bike would do a wheelie in front of us as a way of greeting. There were regional variations.

### **Beach Fight**

Sarah and David Sat down under a flag pole to partake in a pleasant conversation about things and they reached a cordial agreement by having a mature and frank discussion.

We slept in fear on the beach.

When we woke up, Sarah took a panorama of photos down by the shoreline. She ate some pizza which had been saved from the night before.

### **St Tropez – No Tan Lines Pavement Song 24/5?? Maybe not right- texta bleed.**

*(Ed. St Tropez actually happened before Mimosa. Such is the nature of these things.)*  
This painting was painted under gum trees. We had built up St Tropez quite a lot as there is a song called 'No Tan Lines' by Pavement

Deviances anticipated  
Triple-X or at least R-rated  
San Tropez, the middle of May

There's no tan lines tonight  
No tan lines tonight,

But trench it, rev it  
It's time to share spit  
in the sauna, we'll become close  
with ya, oh yeah!

Princess with a cold killer instinct  
Winked at me from across the ice rink  
Pleather uppers soft for the spins  
But she gives it away without a rest

Language buried her in the motherland  
Language barrier in the Pathan grain  
Yeah, oh yeah!

You will be my candy striper  
Junior Leaguer, bedpan wiper  
Convalescent enema essence  
I live to be gray, I live to be gray!

The line that goes 'St Tropez, the middle of May' seemed to fit seamlessly, however the travelers just missed making it there by the middle of May. It was close enough and St Tropez proved to be a monolithic tourist trap filled with rich jerks and expensive sandwiches. The streets were crammed full of people buying Bvlgari products, a fashion brand that Sarah happened to know all about. One of the high end fashion brands. St Tropez proved the mantra that no matter how much money one possesses you cannot purchase taste. Sarah describes St Tropez to this day as a disenfranchised whore of a beast. It was very hot that day so to St Tropez's benefit we were not in the most festive of moods. We pushed our way through the city, bought some food and beverages and tried in desperation to seek some higher ground so as to find some better perspective and escape the hoards. We wanted to feel regal. While we were waiting for our sandwiches to be made we had to push ourselves close to the walls as massive expensive cars bullied their way ponderously through the tiny streets. We made many loud pronouncements to each other about how the world would be different if we all had bikes. We were utterly disgusted. People should be getting out of our way, not the other way round. What a topsy-turvy world it is.

### **St Raphael**

We took the non-traffic heavy route to St Raphael. Sarah was against it. It was a more hilly route to be sure.

On the way to St Raphael, they stayed at a greasy little farmers farm campsite. He charged us extra. We went for a late night trek to McDonalds which was in the next

town. On the way we saw a dead mole. We were going to take a photo of it, but decided against this, so as to respect the dead. David S wishes in retrospect that we did. This felt like a dangerous journey, especially on the way back. At McDonalds, they stuffed themselves. McDonalds is the place to be seen in France. The country of contradictions.

St Raphael:

David S can only really recall waiting outside the supermarket for David C and Sarah, and then buying batteries for his light. David C remembers being disallowed to use a toilet in a coffee shop, which left him wounded because of the tone used.

They all took a shit at McDonalds.

We ate on the edge of a garden bed.

### **Cannes**

Cannes is a dump; a racist haunt. The Davids are desperate to find an internet café. We ask a garçon whether he knows of any internet cafes and he replies that we should just go to a McDonald's and use our laptops. Internet cafes are for Arabs!

We find the internet café, staffed by friendly Arabic people.

### **Antibes**

Goodbye Sarah

### **Nice**

Hello Sarah again and goodbye Sarah again.

David Spooner's brakes broke riding down that hill along the water as you enter the Port of Nice. This was our second time entering the city, as we somehow got lost and went in a circle. David S did a poo at a shopping centre, after buying paint supplies. It was our kind of painting supply shop. Dirt cheap, and novelty sized canvasses. Fixed up David S's bike, and went on with renewed vigour. David S was especially proud again of St Dauphine. David C knew that it wouldn't be long before they came across another hill and he would hear a story about how lucky it was that St Dauphine had a new set of brakes. David S was quite concerned about safety and rightly so. But took the biggest gamble out of all the cyclists as his bike came out of a random shed.

### **The Four M's**

#### **Monte Carlo and Monaco**

Would you like a Monte Carlo with your coffee?

By the time David and David (without Sarah anymore) entered Monaco, they were dirty, sweaty, and looked fairly eccentric as they had paintings tied to their bikes and

gigantic baggage. By chance, it was the time of the Monte Carlo Grand Prix. Of course it was. Every time you go through Monte Carlo it is the Grand Prix.

Barbaric opulence- David S recalls that Sarah mentioned this in a book that she had read on the trip or prior to the trip.

**Menton 27/5 (highest point- Swedish man living in Norway and some times living in France or something like that).**

### **Menton and the Mountain.**

Entering Menton was exhilarating, rushing down a long mountains decline after it felt we had been climbing for so long. David C remembers the breeze on his face. As we were flying down the mountain David C looked up towards his upper left at a ramshackle Art Deco apartment and made eye contact with a woman who was leaning out of a window, shutters on each side of her as if she was waiting to cheer us on, as if we were World War Two soldiers entering a city in order to liberate. From memory she waved a handkerchief at us and smiled. David S remembers her with slightly greasy looking blondish brown hair, wearing a white and blue striped singlet. David C and David S both agreed wholeheartedly that she was most likely a prostitute. We laughed a lot because the lady was genuinely excited at seeing us zoom down the mountain and it must have been a bit of a release for someone not to look at us like we were complete lunatics.

We came to a crossroads and looked for a sign pointing to a campsite but nothing was forthcoming. Instead of looking for a campsite immediately we decided to address some of our pressing bodily needs such as urination and a growing hunger for food, not prostitutes. David S was delighted to discover a Belgian style chippery. The proprietor sold just chips in a range of sizes. David C remembers him also serving some oddly shaped fried paraphernalia which looked fairly inedible. His chips were his strong point. An elderly man sat in the corner of his shop enjoying an afternoon drink. David S recalls it being some sort of orange liqueur on ice in an amber coloured round glass. David S found the proprietor quite handsome. David C suspected this and while David S was ordering attempted to take a sneaky photo through the window. This backfired the flash of the camera trespassed into the shop and the proprietor's head swiveled right at the wrong moment to see who was taking the photo. David C sunk back into the street. David C waited while the man fried their chips, still outside. A grandfather brought his grandchild in and ordered some chips, maybe a pizza or a burger. It is a little unclear. David S ordered some orange soft drinks and they sat outside and enjoyed the shady street. They were ordered by a woman, most likely the proprietor's mother to move their bikes from the gate that they had parked it in front of.

David C had had a nice conversation with an elderly man. David S remembers that David C was quite affected by him but David C doesn't really remember much about him now. He was accompanied by something such as a walking stick or frame. He might have made some comment about our journey. David S suspects that the conversation most likely happened in French and it was about how far we had traveled. At this point David C felt quite depleted. The chips were a welcome carbo load for the travelers. Some drunkards were next to walk along the street. At first we

felt a little on the scared side but this soon subsided as we realised that the men weren't very good at walking. We now remember that David C remembered that David C asked for directions from the kindly elderly man. He gave David C directions up to a certain point but said that it would be too confusing to give him any more and once we got to a certain point we should ask for more. David C's general impression of his clothing was darkness.

David S recalls urinating in the bushes near a BP petrol station, a roundabout and possibly an overpass. We pissed next to an olive green bush. There was construction in the area and David S recalls possibly thistles. Cars continued to pass as we passed water. We paid close attention to the colour of our urine. It was for the most part always clear as we forced two litre bottles of water down our gullets whenever we could. Dehydration scared us as we were exerting ourselves all the time and had a constant craving for the bittersweet delights of the espresso.

The Davids headed off towards Menton and once again were quite perplexed as to the whereabouts of a campsite. They asked some locals for some directions and were pleasantly surprised when they replied in English because they were English. They lived in Menton, English expatriates with a sense of humour and good knowledge of the area. They had a daughter with them. They sent us to the top of a hill and it was still confusing as it was windy. What is left? What is right? What is straight... when you are on a windy road. Plus they were exhausted and the prospect of climbing another hill did not delight them. Plus, the English couple did have a sense of humour and they had commented on how steep the incline was that we were to climb. Were we part of some elaborate hoax that began in Montpellier? David S recalls at this point a television show in the eighties hosted by Leonard Nimoy where paranormal things would be investigated. One episode had them searching for the Loch Ness monster. Someone had suspended a line of tyres half in and out of the water. A clever trick!

Finally we saw a sign pointing to a campsite, which gave us the validation we were looking for. On the way up the mountain towards the campsite they passed a number of petite residential dwellings. There were beautiful cacti often with yellow or pink flowers. Many of the houses had a cute little deck on the back with a million dollar or Euro or whatever currency you choose view. The street was lined with substantial fences. We stopped and asked a man if we had far to go and he motioned to keep climbing further. We had to walk our bikes up as it became too steep. At this point we would like to pause and stress how steep the hill/mountain was. It was very steep. We cannot stress it enough. It looked like one of these: / ignore the colon but perhaps you can combine the forward slash and colon to make an expression emoticon that expresses just how steep this mountain was. We shall call it a mountain from this point forth. Not a person alive would be able to climb this mountain on bicycle. It was at this point that the two Davids realised the mystical journey that they were on. We passed plenty of excellent potential paintings. Every time we turned a corner we thought we were nearing the top, and then the mountain would trick us and we were not and then more walking, more grueling walking of our bikes in the hot evening/afternoon sun.

Eventually we came to one of those barrier things, one of those red and white striped extendable barrier things for vehicles. Arm barrier things. It was in a down position.



There was a toll booth and a fairly full camping ground with predominantly khaki colours and yellow insignia, and an occasional splash of navy blue. The Davids were very concerned about not having a place to camp as they had just traveled recently through the Monte Carlo Grand Prix. Holy shit! We were at the end of our tether. We had no more cycling in us for that day (we had a wasabi necklace). There was some difficulty in finding the office. The hours of operation sign said that it was now closed as when you are traveling in Europe in the warmer months a vexing thing happens. It appears as if it is three or four in the afternoon but really is it 9 or ten at night. Holy mackerel, having spent the last few hours of the day excitedly making more ground it had also taken us well past the hours of operation. This led to an awkward conversation about whether or not to pitch a tent without paying. Spooner was, as per usual, in favour of civility and good manners. He suggested that they wait outside the empty office until that changed, until something happened. They knocked and yelled and waited and David C was getting quite crotchety. 'Let's just pitch a tent somewhere, anywhere' he said. David S replied 'What about the rules of propriety'.

Eventually a woman arrived carrying a bunch of baby Chihuahua. At this point the Davids struggled with how to spell Chihuahua. The canines could have fitted into a tea cup. The woman who ran the campsite was very easy going and said that there was space enough for us, even with all the extra visitors for the Grand Prix. This is another illustration of the principle of perfect campsite almost materialising before our eyes. We chose a prime site overlooking the town of Menton. There were views of the sea and it only cost 11 Euro each- one of the cheapest campsites in one of the most affluent areas. Go figure! There were a number of interesting companions as the campsite was crowded with visitors for the grand prix. To our left a man was pumping an inflatable air mattress while his bitch face girlfriend watched on in reposed boredom and anticipation. This was to continue for at least an hour. It was comical.

Speaking of inflatable devices the camp on our right had a blown-up naked black woman anchored to their camp head quarters. The Davids took immediate offence. The fairer sex portrayed like this did not impress them. What boorish company we must be in. Loutish louts consuming alcohol during the sunlit hours. The men later on turned out to be nice guys from the Netherlands, although Spooner had to suppress his homosexuality in their presence. A conversation ensued about chicks and them being hot and chicks and having chick genitalia and such. Spooner stood back and nodded in agreeance and felt supremely uncomfortable. The men spoke of the cycling paradise in the Netherlands, from where they had come hither. Generally flat and populated by bike path people and tulip folk. They had to be back at work the next morning. From the plane, straight back to work in their office jobs. Lol!!! The Davids also had a few uncomfortable conversations about cars. David C made a dreadful faux pas by confusing the Lamborghini nearby with a Ferrari or perhaps vice versa. David C was almost at the stage of giving Spooners homo game away. Spooner kept pretending to look lustily at the blown up woman hanging from the tree. This should confuse them, he thought, while all he could really think about were naked men. Not these men, but the more fey variety. At this campsite there were an unusual mix of rich and poor.

This painting was done from the highest residential peak in all of Menton.

“What to paint?” The Davids said to each other as they awoke the next morning. We were at the top of the mountain, or so we thought by how far up we appeared at the campsite. We bid the campsite manager woman farewell while she cradled her Chihuahua babies. Travelling up the mountain a little bit more, we were surprised that there was more mountain and could not settle on a place to start painting from. There were great views everywhere but most places were very steep. On one side we could see the town of Menton below us and the entire coast along that way, on the other side we could see into Italy. We watched a man parking his car. David S may have made some sort of snide comment about ‘What’s he doing?’ and ‘What a silly place to park. You’re in our way, blocking our precious view in your big jerk car!’ The man got out of his car. A tall man in his early to mid sixties with snow-white hair and beard. A little later David C saw the man again walking up a path above the travelers. David C’s curiosity was piqued and he yelled out to the man in the style of Fantastic Four books. ‘Hey mister, what ya up to up there?’ They had a brief conversation and it turned out that the man spoke excellent English because David C first addressed the man in French. David C asked him if he could recommend a nice place for the travelers to paint. He said ‘I happen to be a Norwegian man who lives in Sweden. I often visit France and am building a house at the top of this mountain, which happens to be the highest residential peak in all of Menton. I got rid of the ruins and am in the process of laying the foundations. Would you like to paint from my summit? It is the best view in Menton after all.’

The Davids put aside their serial killer suspicions and followed the oil tycoon or perhaps a relative of Santa, someone rich they surmised. They wheeled their bikes off road to a certain point where the man said that their bikes would be fine. David S in a surprising twist was more concerned for the bikes at this point. David C ever the custodian of cultural treasures was willing to take a gamble and leaves the bikes and masterpieces behind.

A portion of mountain was only accessible by climbing. The ground had become very gravelly and sandy. It was still quite a distance until the man announced that this was the very top. The Davids thought as they ascended, that there was not a whole lot of difference between the view from where they left their bikes to the one in which they had climbed to. David S thought that the man would have to chop a few of the pesky trees away too if he was going to get the optimum view. He did not doubt that the man would do this in good time as he had already leveled a ruin. The man took off his shirt, ate an apple, and proceeded to use a ground leveler leaving the two painters in peace to paint. They painted their masterpiece, made their way back down the mountain and bid the now bright pink rich man goodbye and thanked him for his generosity in sharing his view.

Prior to crossing the border we stopped to get supplies.

### **An Intermission of Sorts**

While we cross the border, perhaps it’s time to reflect on some of the differences between France and Italy. One thing that we noticed immediately in Italy was the amount of rubbish lining the streets. We noticed this because it created an obstacle for us on our bikes. We would often have to dodge plastic bottles and other. The Italians were accepting of all states of deterioration. For example, we saw ruins almost

immediately, which we surmised dated back to the time of the Ancient Romans. David C thought that the Italians were sexier than the French, however David Spooner was drawn more to the French, especially Parisians; especially long eyelashes, green eyes, and tanned skin. (*Ed. Clearly DS got what he wanted \*snark\**) The French were more proper, and would always say hello, whereas the Italians seemed to take longer to warm to us, but then, when they did, watch out, they were really hot. The French respond much better to mime, perhaps because of the rich tradition of mime in the country. Also, David S felt that his charms worked better on the French than the Italians. David C (even though he spoke French) felt the opposite. Sometimes when David C started a conversation in French with the French, people would then address David S in a torrent of language that he didn't understand. He would respond accordingly with mime.

When we got to the border, we took a nice photo of the Mediterranean as we thought it was pretty. The blue of the water matched the blue of David S's bike St Daupine and David C's eyes. When we got to the border it consisted of a run down (ruin) of a passport office. No one has to get stamps on their passport any more, because of the European Union. This added to the unceremoniousness of passing through. We stopped our bikes next to the passport control, and the blue sign with Italy written on it and a circle of stars. We took turns at photographing each other, trying to get the circle of stars in the background. We felt an emptiness not dissimilar to Boxing Day. No one was there to notice our triumphant arrival in Italy. We got back on our bikes and kept riding.

**ITALY**

## **Cervo 28/5**

We left our mark on the ground here. The first slightly significant church we saw we painted. It was up a little bit of a hill above the ocean. People moved sleepily past us in the heat. David C rifled through a box full of rubbish for clothes. There was a Brazil top. It looked ok but David S cautioned against it and in the end the clothes were used to wipe paint off brushes and a spill of turpentine on the ground.

Look up in Cervo and you see cacti and bougainvilleas. David C thought we made the church look like a circus. David S thought they made it look like the Eagles Hotel California Cover. Particularly David C's painting. There is some nice blue negative space on the right side of David S' painting. It originally had a povo angel that David C thought should be obliterated. David S agreed and wiped it out. Much better.

There were a wide range of goods for sale in the cafeteria at the next camping ground such as sunglasses, shells, umbrellas, food, alcohol, coffee, snacks. David and David ate a whole chicken between them, a bag of salad greens, three tomatoes and then there was something sweet as well. They gorged themselves on things anyway in a very strange seaside place. They had little swipe tokens to get through to the beach by way of turnstiles. There were no other people around and lots of strangely painted villa, sea shacks. The beach was made up of large round black pebbles. David C went for a swim and then laid down on the pebbles. The pebbles warmed David C up. Later he was wet and cold. David S did not regret his choice not to swim. David C had really laid the pressure on.

David C and David S explored a few of the uninhabited villa sea shack shanties. There were some people nearby in an abandoned building that was in the process of being restored or built or something. It was hard to tell where new things and old things began. Italy was a melting pot for old and new as we have said before, but it really was. Later we explored the abandoned building in an effort to reach a Madonna statue perched atop of a rock in the sea. There were a number of dangerous approaches. David C was determined to get across to the statue and paint it. The perfect subject matter. David S was the voice of reason. He humoured David C to a point. David C was zealous, overly determined, he would not take no for an answer. David S quelled David C's manic state by pretending to consider all the options for reaching the Mary statue, knowing full well that he would not be attempting to reach her that evening. The next day the Davids re-explored the area around the Madonna. The fence that they had considered climbing had spikes on the other side. The steep rock face that we thought lead to Mary really led to the ocean and more jagged rocks.

David Spooner's summary of this incident:

David Creed was summoned the previous evening by a sea siren moonlighting as Madonna. David Creed is straight and could not resist the wily ways of the sea siren. David Spooner on the other hand is not. His gay brain waves blocked the sirens seductive signals. When David Creed thought he saw cowardice emanating from Spooner he was really seeing D.S's same sex lifestyle choices keeping them safe from an ancient sea mariner's peril.

Two interesting things happened at the next town, possibly three.

Number one. We were told by a shopkeeper that we could find all the Madonnas we have ever dreamt of in Genoa. David C kept wanting to paint lame statues. He was still distraught at missing out on Mary.

Number two. We saw some young children smoking and an old woman teasing some teenagers as they tried their first cigarettes. She told us that the Cinque Terra was very beautiful.

Number three, David Spooner's had his bike seat raised. It was wondrous for his aching knees.

### **Genoa – Madonnas 1/6**

An industrial wasteland surrounded the city. David S saw one of those reminder dummies at the side of the road. Where they jog motorists memories by dressing up a dummy in the same clothing as a person who has gone missing from that location. The location being the last location from which they were seen alive. Maybe that's what he saw.

A couple of black cats crossed their paths in a textbook fashion. We attempted to interpret these feline encounters favourably but no amount of interpretation could change the fact that the cats did cross our paths. No!!!!!! We made a treacherous journey to the city of Genoa. The home of pesto and the setting for the novel 'Weaveworld' by Clive Barker which David Spooner kept recalling from his teens years as well as the memories of an evil Mary character. There was some sadness in an information office.

We slept on the floor of an art gallery. It was built in 1100 AD. David had a distressing phone call. We went to an art gallery opening of quirky photos that Sarah would have enjoyed.

There were Madonnas on the corner of almost every building. We painted one late at night. Prostitutes tried to shoo us away from their turf, but we feigned not understanding them. Some guys pretended to do some fishing in the street. What the hell were they doing? We sat on a cold stone step.

Vico Gattaga cnr of something and Sartaugh was the name of the street where we painted our Madonna. Some of the Maddona corners were vacant. The gallery owner whose gallery we stayed at said that an old man had told him once that the prostitutes inhabiting the streets of the city were in fact the missing Madonnas.

Later the Davids get lost in the labyrinth of the old town. They have an excellent meal. Delicious and amazing foccacia.

This was one of our favourite cities.

### **Camp Site Mountain-**

Davidinn dinner and vomiting after drinking Grappa. A nice old dog at the campsite. David S was woken in the tent by David C. He pretended to be asleep and heard David C run out and vomit. David S didn't ask how he was, just went back to sleep. Too tired.

### **Parma (Citadel)/La Tavernelle**

After leaving La Spezia, we headed off through the mountains. This was an amazingly long grueling journey. People kept telling us that the next campsite was only ten kilometres away. Take this ten kilometers, then double it, then times it by three, and then add a few more and this would be a closer approximation. It was dark, and quite late. Easily ten o'clock at night. They discussed whether or not to pitch the tent in the forest a number of times. It's not always easy to do this, though, as all of Europe is colonized/domesticated/built up/civilized plus there was a total camping ban. We were told a number of times that if you get caught you are in massive trouble. Most decent spots were too exposed to the road.

Eventually, we found a town, then a tavern. David C bought some snacks and they had a talk with a keen cyclist who advised that the camping ground was only ten kilometers away. This time it seemed believable. David S was over riding and demanded that they walk at times. When they thought that all hope was lost, they turned a dark corner through the rain and La Tavernelle appeared. We entered as per usual looking like bedraggled bandits. The motherly and saintly owner of La Tavernelle beckoned us inside and offered to make us some food.

The next day she recommended a lovely creek, but cautioned that there had been rain lately and so be extra careful as slipping was a real and present danger in these parts. The pair set off with their plucky attitude and painting equipment. They attempted to descend a steep riverbank as they had spied a fly fisherman down below. David S, yelled out to David, 'You know how you freak out about dogs, well, I am a total chicken when it comes to heights sometimes. And this is one of those times'. So, they scrambled back up, grabbing on to roots and loose rocks. They considered painting the view looking down the road, as this was something that cyclists often spend many hours staring at. But, instead, they found an alternative route down to the creek which was steep, but not breakneck steep. Scratchy branches, slippery grass and mud.

They experienced a moment of intense tranquility as soon as they set foot on the stepping-stones of a babbling stream. There was a giant concrete bridge above them. There was the occasional sound of thunder. They thought that painting under the bridge would protect them. Looking closer at the water, they discovered tadpoles. There was a refreshing coolness in the air. All of a sudden, the fly fisherman, made a speedy exit. Sitting there with the beginnings of a painting, the David's wondered why?

The paintings were coming along perfectly. As rain approached they were surprised that the bridge seemed to offer little protection. It was just too high. Suddenly, blankets of water and wind covered the Davids and they both freaked out. Why didn't the fly fisherman caution us to leave? There's a massive storm about to happen... then it did. Lightning, thunder and torrential rain. The travelers skipped across the rocks of the stream as fast as they could, stuffing things in their pockets and gingerly

carrying their artworks as they were covered in wet oil paint. Then, all preciousness left them. It was a matter of life or death. They had recently lived through the 2010 flooding of their hometown of Brisbane and had a certain level of healthy respect for floodwaters. They scrambled up the mountain. David S's wallet and passport almost fell into the water and they began to transport all precious cargo such as cameras and passports underneath Spooner's waterproof parker. There was no escape from the water. They made it to the top and hid from the storm underneath a rock wall. They scurried up over the wall back onto the road and ran up to a stone shed or something like that. David S noticed a horseshoe hanging the wrong way up. For shame! It is letting all the luck flow out. That is why the sky is pouring rain on us. David C could not tolerate superstition at this point but in a superstitious manner cautioned David S against toying with magical horseshoes. Leave it be.

It should also be noted here that, earlier, on the way to the creek they had found a dead animal. We did photograph it and thought it looked very Blair witch. This broke with our convention of showing utmost respect for the departed fauna of Europe by not photographing them.

On returning they found that their tent was drenched. They spent an enjoyable day and night in a cabin provided by the generous owner and we were able to dry off. Other things that happened during our stay here included; chats with a Dutch couple about cycling and another encounter with a nice person who we had previously cast a damning assessment on.

After Tavernelle, we traveled up mountains, not hills. We saw a grotto; rested under a creepy shed; huddled in the rain under a tarpaulin beside the road; met some friendly trolls who gave us directions; spoke to a country police officer who had a hardness and softness; saw a gigantic slug; rode through some fog; saw a deer (at last); saw two wild boar; got chased by a snow white dog; got ignored by a big black dog; stayed in a log cabin and made friends with a Frank Sinatra-esque sports bar hotel manager and heard from him about how Australia had stolen all the men from the area (see Snowy River Scheme.) Next morning we revisited our friend who had become a nice dad figure. He made us a disgusting dad-like breakfast. Doughy, undercooked croissini, which almost made David S puke his guts up. Good cappuccino though.

### **Parma Portraits – (Laura Parma)- Twin Peaks- the dwarf and charismatic psychopath werewolf beast feeding hostel**

David Spooner first learnt about Parma ham when he went on a Contiki tour in 2004, prior to living in Scotland briefly. The tour guide Rachel gave us a little run down on how parma ham is made. Parmesan also comes from Parma. It is a hard cheese and is good for taking on medieval fantasy journeys as David Spooner has learnt recently. You can also take hard bread and all sorts of sausage. Cured meats are your friends on a big journey. David Creed is always scared of cured meats, almost as much as being scared of dogs. It ties in with his secret hypochondria. So back to Parma ham. Parma ham is made by accident at first. Farmers fed the useless rind of Parmesan cheese to their pigs. Over and over they fed the parmesan scraps and then one day one of the pigs is slaughtered and cooked. Wowsers! This pig tastes great. It has subtle Parmesan notes. I think one day this could really catch on. Perhaps it could even be sold at this



big place that lots of people hang out in. They catch things that are big and metallic and travel through the air somehow. When Sarah was still on the trip she wanted to visit Parma and even suggested abandoning the bike element of the trip and turning the trip in a locomotive journey. A foodie's fantasy. But, it was not to be, and instead David C and David S arrived in Parma, by this stage worn out and ragged. David S was at an emotional breaking point mainly due to the torment of cycling through the Italian Alps, coupled with financial hardship and other hardships. This culminated in a massive Facebook update that went largely unnoticed. Melodrama is a constant companion on the social networking web site and events of real note, things other than 'babies first poo' or 'hubby moving a pile of mulch' tend to fly off the radar.

<insert facebook status update>

Rain dogged us at this stage of the journey like a scary dog that would dog David C. We had been able to, for the most part, stealthily outrun it in the mountains leading to what we thought was the foodie flat palatial paradise of Parma. We arrived in Parma and immediately set to the task of finding a camp site. We were fairly chuffed as we had made it to the city with plenty of daylight to spare. This was an uncommon occurrence on the trip. More than often we would find ourselves in pitch-black darkness danger.

The map that we were going off consisted of a large black dot which represented Parma and a small red triangle almost touching the bottom left hand corner of the black Parma dot, which represented camping, making it no easy task to find our way. The city of Parma however was a cyclists delight. There were a number of different bike paths given colour and numerical coding. David and David thought that this looked wonderous. Wow! We can relax and cycle around Parma at our own leisure, taking in the sites of this flat foodies paradise. The incessant rain put a literal dampener on this idea.

We began to ask passers by about where to find camping. A few people pointed us in the direction of the citadel. We had some trouble finding it but eventually found it. The citadel looked like a magical portal. A bridge went across to it and it was a magnificent set of gates that went over a moat. There were statues of armoured things, big brick wall things, a touch of pink and white in the colour of it, a fairy light pattern set up too which made it even more mystical and we were able to stroll right in. The history was as palpable as the urine smell. David C at this point comments that this sounds a little on the negative side but it was true. The place reeked of stale piss.

Inside the grounds a carnival was being held. We had arrived just as it was coming to close. David S saw some doughnuts and wanted to buy some and eat, on of his many insatiable hunger moments. However, the travelers needed to address their more pressing need of shelter. We cycled aimlessly around the park noticing the preponderance of fitness freaks: joggers, cyclists, roller bladers, gymnasts, dog walkers, face suckers and acrobats.

We talked to many people in the park. They all remembered the camping ground. They said things like, 'maybe it's over there' or 'it's right here, you've come to the right place' or 'let me check my iPhone' or the most damning of the comments 'perhaps that only happens in Summer'. Ahhhhh, curse you Spring time you foul

temptress. At this point the inclemency of the weather had not begun. Prancing parks people were everywhere and signaled to us that it might as well be Summer. So they cycled around the park a few more laps adding to their mounting distress while adding the numbers of the fit elite. The travelers headed north for no particular reason. Perhaps the iPhone man suggested this or this is how we hatched the plan to stay in a hostel.

We followed the green line bike path and eventually found a hotel. The Lamborghini parked in front of it suggested that this was well out of their price. David S thought that it was worth asking inside if there were any lower priced places around. He expected the staff inside to be snooty but he was pleasantly surprised. The woman behind the desk was friendly and helpful. She said that there was a hostel just past a big shopping centre on the left. On the way to finding the hostel we met a man on that path who became very chatty. He began to ask us lots of questions about what we were doing. This was not surprising as the Davids are pretty interesting people. However they suspected his motivations might not be entirely honourable and felt a little hectored.

The man eventually veered off on another track and went to a service station to buy a drink or perhaps commit a crime, we are unsure. After the man left David C commented that he felt a bit of white straight man guilt. The man was black and he didn't like how he felt suspecting him a felon. David S said that sometimes it is good to ask questions back and turn the quizzing back around on the quizzer. David S assured David C that he was not a racist in this instance but a weary traveler in a faraway land merely seeking to protect the precious painting cargo that they were chaperoning. David S at this stage comments on how he like David C's choice of the word 'chaperoning'. What an excellent fancy way of saying 'carrying' it is. Capital! David C at this point points out that the fate of our future exhibition rested on us providing top security for our masterpieces. David S at this point comments that we are breaking down the fourth wall, David C adds 'Writing in four dimensions'.

We continued to cycle down the path and it soon became apparent that there was to be no accommodation down this way. Just a roaring Autostraade. 'Should we go further and see what's ahead?' But the woman at the hotel desk said that the hostel was not far after the shopping centre. 'Should we back track?' These are fairly typical questions that were asked along the journey.

They decided to backtrack. Cycling back the travelers saw a bar across the road. David C decided to stay outside and guard the paintings and David S entered. Possibly because he had designs to sneak in a cheeky croissant and espresso. The surrounds inside were stylish and warm. Deep reds, burgundies, mahoganies and some stools. Parma hams hung from above, bread festooned the shelves and massive jar of pickled eggs greeted David S as he entered and the chattering bells as the door closed behind him. The Parma strangers stared in his direction and David S proceeded to ask the Italian speaking assembly in sign language and in English whether they knew of a place to stay nearby. The barman at this point yelled out loudly 'Deutsch! Deutsch! Deutsch!!!!' and pushed David outside as he then screamed out 'Marco! Marco! Marco!'. David S was pushed in front of an obsequious little bespectacled fatso who evidently spoke German but as luck would have it Marco spoke English too. David S and David C were used to being mistaken for Germans at this point.

<See mistaken identity: GERMAN>

They cobbled together a conversation made up of English, French and German. Marco frequently glances at David and David's legs, which at this stage were quite impressive as they had overcome the Twin Peaks (Le Spezia) to arrive at Parma. David S was picking up on all the homosexual innuendo such as 'Are you too brothers' (eliminating us as brothers and then perhaps working out whether or not we were boyfriends) which was a little silly Marco as we introduced ourselves as being both called David. Marco then proceeded to ask us if we were friends to which we said yes. Marco then got all creepy, well more so, and went on and on about how much he loved Australia. We also had a conversation about the unemployment situation in Italy. Marco was steering the conversation back to himself and the intimate details of our lives. He then went on to talk about his female friend (gay!) from Africa who spoke both French and English fluently. He was so excited about showing David C how well his friend spoke English as it was her first language that he called her up on his mobile. The phone was thrust in David C's ear and an unintelligible conversation ensued. It may not have been entirely gibberish. David C thought that the woman on the other end of phone line just didn't have a clue what was going on. That made three of us. What were Marco's intentions? David S was super suspicious. Marco went on and on about how his friend used to live in Australia. Zippity doo da! This was the point where he mentioned that he was doing it tough and needed a job. How about Australia? How are things there? Good, thank you. David and David managed to weasel out the tiny bit of info about the hostel. This took about thirty minutes too long. They bid the impish Marco farewell and continued back the other way. David S thought that the bar was great and would have loved to sample the food. However the pair resolved never to return as Marco cast a lecherous stench over the entire establishment. Poo wee!!!

The hostel was easily mistaken for an embassy. We almost gave up finding the monolithic concrete super structure. As we entered within its cool concrete walls we passed a seedy looking guy out the front. We were greeted by the personification of charisma - a handsome man in his late 30s to early 40s with a strong grey head of hair, firmly rooted in his scalp. He also sported a handsome beard and a uniform of white. When being greeted by the handsome man the two Davids felt like a special object of his affection and amusement. This was to reoccur every time he said 'hello'. What a congenial fellow he was! A thorough run down of how the hostel worked and many comments about keeping out of the rain were made. We were to learn that this was his daytime proto form. His nighttime metamorphosis was a stark contrast.

*Daytime man:* Eyes light up upon seeing us. Offers us loads of seemingly helpful advice.

*Nighttime man:* Transforms into a troll like computer game playing overlord. Gets angry when you talk to him and do hostel things like asking about the Internet or returning keys.

*Public face of Daytime man:* makes you feel like a national treasure. Prior to entering the hostel the Davids felt like luke warm rubbish. Once the daytime man public's face shone upon them they felt transformed. Like angels on an earthbound mission.

*Behind the scenes face of Daytime man:* Tended to kick his staff around like naughty dogs who were for the most part generally disadvantaged or living with a disability. In previous decades they would have been referred to as freaks. The attractive people who worked with him were of the feminine persuasion and had been hypnotized. We theorized that he liked to employ unattractive men to highlight his own personal beauty.

Public face daytime man inquired as to whether or not we would require breakfast in the morning upon arriving. He went through all the things that were on offer. Fruit, cereal, crossini, breads, orange juice, coffee, tea...a cornucopia of delights. This led to a sleepless night for David Spooner. He remembers being so excited about the prospect of gorging himself on his favourite meal of the day. 'My fast will be broken hard! All the tumult of Parma has come to an end. Hooray, I am saved'. David S thought the man was so helpful that they should also ask him where a good place would be to eat. They had had a good experience in Genoa when they did this <see paradise seafood restaurant>. The public face daytime man sent them in the direction of a restaurant and even scribbled some nonsense on the card. He said 'show them this and they'll take care of you'. Earlier on in the journey David Spooner had made the principled pronouncement that he would never eat the noble horse. David S at this point says that writing a novel must be hard, building suspense and such. You would have had to mention the point about horses being noble much earlier on. David C says 'Yes, dot the t's and cross the eyes' or something like that.

The waitress at the restaurant we ate at that evening placed a meat dish on the travelers table and casually announced 'THIS IS HORSE'. Horse meat tastes something halfway between beef and lamb but not as strong. Not entirely unpleasant, they both agreed. It was a roulade of meat served in a tomato-based sauce. David S pontificated for a moment and then decided to split the horse with David C. His principles on eating the noble horse must have been discarded on the road somewhere like so much heavy luggage. Horse meat was everywhere in Italy. It even makes an appearance in baby food. There's a cute chicken head on one, a cow head and pig head and then a horsey head.

<Insert Horse Meat Recipe>

David S often thought he could smell horse meat cooking while they were riding through the countryside of Italy. David S's mother reminded him that he was the second member of his family after his Grandfather to eat horse. His grandfather and some other men had discovered a horse's head in the snow while they were prisoners of war during world war two and cooked it up in a soup over and over until there was only a snow white skull left. David S thought he knew the smell of horse meat cooking because he smelt a similar smell to the one wafting through the Italian countryside when he was a child. His mother told him that there was a pet food factory below the gateway bridge and when they drove over it that's what they could smell.

After eating horse, they both updated their facebook status. They felt that there a certain shock value to be had when saying they'd just eaten horse in a deadpan manner. An interesting game they liked to play was to ring their bells whenever they

passed horses on their journey. This was only done in the presence of horses, and it was always done. After the horse eating incident this was accompanied by calls of 'Delicious'!

Breakfast was what made us think of Parma as something out of Twin Peaks. We came up with the pun, Laura Parma, as in Laura Palmer, because of the character we met at breakfast. David Spooner was up very early that morning in anticipation of a hearty continental shovel fest. He must have woken David C, for they both went down together, down the two flights of stairs at some early time to beat the crowds. They were alone in the breakfast room, except for a tiny Italian man, stunted by cigarette smoking. He reminded us of the dwarf from Twin Peaks who speaks backwards, and even had the same tone of voice. His job seemed to be to guard the crossini's. We were allocated one each. He also loomed over the table of foods, making us uncomfortable, as he was a twitchy little feller. He paced back and forth meanwhile, watching what we did and what we ate. At intervals he would walk around the corner and come back chewing. We assumed that he was not allowed to eat on duty as 'Behind the scenes daytime man' would probably bash his brains in. So, he would continually walk off and stuff himself. We were the only customers. In order to keep busy, the man continually straightened things and rearranged breakfast items. He was dressed all in white. And had funny glasses. He possessed a comb-over. And would not have reached much more than five foot. He was certainly a funny little guy. And he lifted the David's spirits immensely. Thanks, Palma midget! Also, our spirits needed lifting as the breakfast was not quite as good as David S had built it up. 'Public Face Daytime man' had played a clever trick on us. First horse, and then a second rate breakfast, served by an escaped circus midget.

We spent many hours looking up at the sky, and monitoring the weather. It was raining. David S got cranky at David C as he wanted to paint. We wandered aimlessly around the city of Parma during the day and could not find a suitable place to paint. There were no overhanging ledges anywhere. Instead we found the pit of misery. Underneath the city, stairs led down to ancient catacombs filled with water and rubbish. David Spooner in his monetary misery felt like this place summed up his inner turmoil. David C had quite a task ahead of him to buoy David S's spirits, and bring him back from the miserable catacombs.

We ended up painting the Citadel. It stopped raining for half an hour to allow it. The next day, waterlogged again, we painted each other outside a shopping centre. We were warned not to leave Parma because it was late in the day and because it had been raining. A man with a broken office chair told us that we would never make it to the next city. It was too far. There were dangerous trucks and deer. David S tried to offer the man with the broken office chair an umbrella so as to make him feel better about having a broken office chair. He took it, but begrudgingly.

**Creek outside of Padova- there was another name for the place but cannot remember it.**

Stayed at the house of a nice lady who was married to an ex-military man. Promised to send her a postcard from Brisbane some time.

Riding out of Padova was an exhilarating experience. It felt like we were on the home stretch. They sung the words to the Swan Lager ad and made up new words as well, but not in the style of Yoghurt (See- Yoghurt). They found particular inspiration in the Swan Lager ad featuring Ken Done which goes like this:

They said you'd never make it  
With your colourful ideas  
Mr Done it's too outrageous  
We won't hang that canvas here.

They said you'd never make it.  
When you threw your job away  
It's alright to be creative  
But son, it doesn't pay

They said you'd never make it  
But you finally came through  
For all of you who've made it  
This Swan's made for you

Made for you  
This Swan's made for you  
You made it through  
And this Swan's made for you

(Ken Done turns to the camera with a beer in his hand and gives a cheers, acknowledging the assistance that Swan Lager played in his deserved success. The Swan Lager logo flashes up on the screen.)

### **Venice Hay Stacks- Mestre**

We had done our laundry. The Laundromat was bright orange. Spooner felt like his stomach was comparable to the inside of a washing machine. He was still feeling fragile after his vomiting episode. At the Laundromat there was a lady doing her blankets for her grandchildren. She helped us operate the machines. While our laundry was being done, David C went and bought a sandwich. David S bought some freshly squeezed orange juice, and some green tea as he was still feeling queasy. The establishment was very clean, and the local hangout for senior citizens who wanted to gamble in peace with their scratchcards. David C spent slightly too long deciding what to order and annoyed the lady. I had an orange juice after seeing David Spooners juice.

A bit later there was an incident at an Internet café across the road. The Bangladeshi owner accused David C of not paying for his International Phone call (possibly to the bank). And David S did wonder when he paid for the both of them why it cost so little. He thought it was endearing that the man had a photograph of Mother Theresa behind him and that he had a little daughter. A pity that he didn't possess the charity of Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa is in heaven giving angels unlimited downloads.

We spent a couple of hours looking for an alarm clock.

There was a very interesting street that we happened upon. It seemed like there were a lot of drug deals going on. The police were questioning lots of people. We felt slightly uneasy, like something was simmering underneath. Dave C found his bike shop that sold a bike bag for him to take his bike back to Australia in. He was unsure about the price and thought that we might be able to get one cheaper elsewhere. David S suggested that they get something to eat. They went to a kebab shop and attempted to order some hot chips. This proved to be troublesome. There were various options on the menu. Lots of photos of things next to chips. We attempted use sign language to order 'just' chips. Dave C had a lemonade and Dave S had an espresso and soda water. Unfortunately we were unable to order just chips, even though a friendly man who spoke very good English and Italian tried to help. The kebab shop people just kept looking at us in a perplexed manner and we made do with our beverage break.

Dave C continued his paranoid rampage, looking out the window every second to make sure our bikes were safe and sound. The drug-dealing park was directly across the road from the kebab shop. The friendly translator man made some useless small talk about Australia or something like that or possibly something about cycling but we were too tired to strike up much of a conversation. It was probably something about whether or not we were from Melbourne. Yawn!!! Dave C decided that he was sick of looking for bike shops and he would settle for the bike bag being sold across the road for 75 Euro and peace of mind. Dave S asked to buy some food in an Asian Grocer.

He went in and chose a packet of potato chips, not enough to satiate the chip craving but a start. All of a sudden a man came in to the shop and threatened the lady behind the counter with a stick. He was very scary and had crazed eyes. It was possibly the first time David S had seen a man brandishing a stick in this manner. He did not know what to do and felt like a silly little boy. The shop attendant held her own and yelled at the man back twice as loud. She was a picture of pure fury. David S pretended to be paying some extra special attention to his potato chip selection and wondered what courageous thing he could do. There was an older man in the store too. David assumed this was the attendant's father. He cowered in much the same way that David S did. The attendant's friend then joined in. The two women shouted even more loudly at the stick man and pushed him out the door with their verbal tirade. David S had no idea what they were saying in Italian. After the man was outside David S commented in English as he bought the potato chips that he thought the woman was 'super tough'. She smiled sweetly and brushed it off as an everyday occurrence, some days twice per day - the man had been in earlier that day and was making up some story about the shop short changing him. David C was oblivious to the drama that had just occurred inside. David C had a moment wondering what he would have done inside under the circumstances. He didn't have to do anything because the woman had it all covered.

The stain that broke the myth. (See 'The Stain that Broke the Myth')

When Monet was painting haystacks, I wonder if there were many homeless people around? We had been riding around aimlessly on our bikes, looking for somewhere to paint. It was a hot day. David S was in one of his emotional moods. We went under a train area. The problem was that Mestre is fucking ugly. There was a train station, an ugly Biological research lab, a fish canning factory - all unsatisfactory subjects for

painting. We were sick of gritty and wanted pretty. David C was obstinate and in one of his annoying determined moods. David S agreed to paint, but David S put the stipulation that they must paint soon (and eat). One of David S's many eating requests. We went to the supermarket to get something to eat. We were pretty busting and ran down the side of the supermarket and pissed, basically in public. School was out.

David C was wearing his football flood socks at knee height, had green shorts with bicycle grease smeared on them, and a cycling shirt made of sweat and a jaunty yellow scarf. The security guards inside the supermarket may have been talking about him in Italian. There were no alarm clocks in the shop.

We went around the corner, and after a couple of fails found a small alarm clock with colorful numbers. There was a talkative kid in a spider man shirt outside. Spooner had a sign language conversation about spider man. The kid thought he was interesting because he could not talk properly (speak Italian). David C had a conversation with the lady in the shop about the reliability of the alarm clock.

Coming up is a particular instance of a stain that broke a myth: The myth of Monet's haystacks. While looking for a subject matter for a painting they rounded a corner and saw some haystacks. The haystacks were located beside a freeway. It was decided that they would paint these. There were haystacks on both sides of the road. We sat down in a shady spot. We had learnt the hard way previously about painting in the sun (see Mantova Misery). There was a creek nearby or something like a creek, obscured by tall weeds and reeds. Behind the greenery was what looked like a haunted house. We decided that we would not venture inside and we inspected the haystacks closer. Behind one was a soiled mattress rolled up like one of the hay bales and a mushroom pink rug. This was added to the painting that we did. It's hard to see in our colourful creations but the homeless persons home is there. The stain is included. Monet left details such as these out... how remiss!

Every time David S would see a haystack he would tell the story about how the local farmers would destroy the haystacks out of spite when he (Monet) tried to paint them. Technically what we painted was hay rolls and not haystacks but you get the drift.

It began to spit as we sewed the hay roll paintings onto our bikes/back packs. The rain began to get heavier and David C began to worry again how the paintings would fare. They decided to wait under a tree until the rain subsided somewhat. It did a little bit. There was an athletics track across the road. We merged on the highway and set off towards the camping grounds. People on foot that we passed were receiving a drenching. We stayed under a tree on the other side of the road for not too long and then made the dash to get back to the campsite. David C thought at this point, that it would be a shame to be killed in a cycling accident at this late stage in the journey.

David C and David S cycle along for a time on the busy roadway. They then came upon possibly the largest roundabout they had encountered on the trip. David C knew that this was his time to take leadership for David S's kryptonite was the dreaded roundabout. David C always felt calm upon entering a roundabout as if he was entering a safe womb like environment where vehicles slowed down and looked after him. When David S entered a roundabout, however, he felt like he was being put



inside a Laundromat washing machine with Imelda Marcos' shoe collection. David C's kryptonite was driving next to trucks. He often used to career off the road every time a truck passed by too closely. Whereas Spooner would sometimes get cranky and say 'don't freak out!'.

It was pouring rain. We entered the roundabout and the going wasn't smooth at first. Cars were hurtling past and we actually stopped half way around as the rain was getting heavier. Visibility was low. We were so close to our campsite. We needed to find a break in the traffic. This memory is getting confused with other memories of dangerous traffic. In the end we crossed the road and jumped on to the safety of the island. We didn't ride. We wheeled our bikes while running across.

(Note: Mum and Dad at the campsite.)

Riding around.

### **Mantova Misery – Venice campsite last minute bike paintings.**

The campsite where we stayed outside of Mestre and close to Venice was in-between two car yards. The night that we arrived at the campsite <insert story about Venice Journey across the bridge and the real Venice> there was a music festival on next to it. We had to dodge quite a few pedestrians on our way past it. We were concerned that there wasn't going to be room for us at the campsite because of the festival. The campsite people were more concerned about the noise of the festival and its proximity to our tent. They gave us a site down the far end of the camping grounds that was barricaded off with some fluoro caution tape. We decided to leave this tape in place because it gave us an air of danger and encouraged people not to mess with us. We had come a long way and looked quite rugged at this late stage in our trip.

There was a canal behind our site and what looked like a field of corn growing. David S thought, well it is in-between two car yards but it is also on the side of being picturesque. The next day, the Davids awoke and in the light of day were able to take more notice of their surroundings. The canal was festooned/decorated with large dead fish. It looked like they had been dead for a while, possibly killed by the sound of the music festival or the urine of festival folk.

Not all of the guests at the camping grounds were from the festival. There were plenty of kayakers. They sat at big tables and had communal dinners together. It was uncertain where they came from. Dave C thought they could have been Swiss. There was an old woman with tattoos that Dave S thought could have been Dutch. There was a boating festival going on in Venice when we visited. It might have been them racing. There was an orchestra playing at the race. They played crowd pleasers such as the theme from Star Wars. The kayakers were early risers and a little too much on the wholesome side for our liking.

Having dinner at the restaurant- the girl and boy wait staff who on the first night appeared quite mature and sophisticated and later when they were wearing their pajamas looked very young. KID WAITERS – the chubby little girl- who sampled the meals- my chips were quite late- she was noticeable chewing- eating as they brought our meals to us. Grappa was served at the end of the first nights meals just before

Spooner spewed. The young waiter had no idea about how to measure grappa. Dave could have got a whole tumbler if he wanted but in the end settled for half a large glass. Perhaps this is why David S vomited- when Grappa is drunk no one has a chance- someone on the trip must vomit.

Painted hours before we got on the plane. We awoke at four in the morning. Painted them at one am. Dave C dabbed them with paper towels and we held them under hand dryers and used the hair dryer in the bathroom to try to dry them. This was a delicate operation as people were often walking in on us as we went about our comedy of errors. Who would have thought there would be so many early risers? However there was a great radio station or just piped music playing 24/7. Italy was stuck in the eighties music wise. This led to us missing our bus and almost missing our plane.

<insert story about running out of money, catching a taxi- dismantling Dave's bike, abandoning St Dauphine- calling a taxi from the Hilton or somewhere else- taxi had to do a crazy big detour to pick up Spooner from the side of the rd>

### **Reunion with Sarah**

Sarah felt extremely worn down by the Davids' constant re-iteration that she was a fuckwit. They also didn't trust her sense of direction. Sarah trusted the sun. David and David trusted each other. However Sarah and the Davids were in a different hemisphere. David S thought that the directions were different there.

At the reunion of Sarah and the Davids in Paris – at the lovely Stella's house (where Sarah had been baking Austrian treats, going for long walks with Stella and encouraging her to start her own café. Stella and Sarah had entered a small bookshop near Bastille and Sarah had found a book which featured her old workplace which she deeply regrets leaving as she believes that cheesemaking really would have *made* her. While discussing food and interior design, the bookshop owner overheard their conversation and offered Stella to do a popup café over the summer in the back of the bookshop. Stella complied and had a great, albeit hard working summer), the three greeted each other and regaled tales of their separate journeys. They made comments about each others appearance and commented on the way that they had changed – Sarah was extremely tanned (like a true Euro in summer), and both the Davids were sporting similar beards, and had appeared to merge into one person, with very large calf muscles.

David Creed and Sarah went to the Metro station and caught trains to the airport. They waited an anxious while at the train station while unintelligible announcements in French caused passengers to grumble every five minutes. The arrival of a train was pushed back at every announcement, possibly due to another French strike. The two waited for about an hour on the platform for the train to come. They switched trains and were finally airport bound.

At arrival at the airport, they had their passports checked and approached the Air France counter. Sarah was maddened when her two bags that she had been strapping together during her flights around Europe (which was fine every time – even with stinges like Ryanair), were not classified as one bag, hence incurring an extra charge. Sarah exchanged heated verbs with the woman and her manager, and was finally

allowed to put the two bags in a plastic bag, which the manager had provided. Sarah smoked too many cigarettes in the smoking room where an attractive businessman and lots of French bogans (affectionately name 'eurogans' by herself), had convened over the one common good. David drank too much coffee. Sarah was reading a book on banned foods around the world – such foods include Cocoa (which is widely chewed in Bolivia), Absinthe, Poppy Seeds and Chewing Gum.

David was reading Sarah's copy of Paul Auster's *Leviathan* – a book that Sarah had been reading throughout her trip. It was a strange book to read, as Sarah had seen the work of Sophie Calle at the Venice Biennale a few years back, and one of the characters in *Leviathan* is based on Sophie Calle. Sarah was reading the book on a train from Venice to Kufstein, where she made eyes with the most handsome man that she had ever seen, and the two were sitting in a train carriage with a homeless woman with a dog – she wasn't allowed to have the dog on the train. The handsome man got off the train in the town that Sarah's father was born in, and she became paranoid that she could have been, although highly unlikely, related to this handsome man. She also went to see the Anish Kapoor work at Monumenta in Paris, and the title of the work was *Leviathan*. Both thoroughly enjoyed the book. David later recommended a Paul Auster book as a book for David Spooner's book club, which was a much better recommendation than his previous recommendation of *Horns*, written by the son of Steven King, demonstrating less craft than aforementioned Auster.

David enjoyed a movie marathon on the plane, watching numerous movies which are now forgotten. He remembers that he was able to watch the second half of 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo', thus closing a chapter that had been opened during the first leg of the trip on the plane from Australia to France. This left him severely jetlagged on his arrival back in Brisbane. As he gets older, David enjoys plane travel more and more than previously, seeing it as a window of relaxation in an otherwise hectic life. Sarah and David had some discussions on the plane, although spent much of the time in their own thoughts or engrossed in their own movie. At one point they tried to watch a movie together, by pressing play at precisely the same time. This movie was not particularly interesting and they both ended up finding something more appealing to watch. They were both really tired, perhaps drifting in and out of sleep more than they realised. There was a changeover in Singapore. Sarah had a welcome cigarette break although there was not much time for this. An earlier French strike at the airport by French airport staff had delayed the plane.

Jay, Sarah's lovely flatmate greeted them at the airport in Brisbane. This was a spontaneous and unexpected, but welcome surprise. They warmly greeted him. David C had previously considered riding back home from the airport on his bicycle, and was glad not to have to follow through with this. Sarah and David let Jay in on some of the stories from the trip which were spilling forth from their lips, and on their arrival home, Sarah played her violin with her housemate Max along to the ditty 'Shady Grove', and David went to West End and had a coffee – he found the coffee to be of a better standard than most that he had encountered at the 'source'. They were fulfilled.

David Spooner spent 17 hours in the low cost carrier terminal in Kuala Lumpur airport. He tried to sleep on the tile floor. Flies buzzed about and he befriended a horse trainer surfer who had been travelling with his German girlfriend.

David Spooner was met at the Cooloongatta Airport by the Zoe Twins, the King of Patricks and the mystical Riordan Berry.

David and David wrote a novel about their trip overseas (see 'The Stain That Broke The Myth').

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