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## DEATH OF A TYPOGRAPHER

Nick Gadd

MARTIN KERN has a special sensitivity to fonts, a skill that he uses to solve typographical crimes. When a local printer is found dead in his workshop, his body in the shape of an X, Martin and his co-investigator, journalist Lucy Tan, are drawn into a mystery that is stranger than anything they have encountered before. Someone is leaving typographical clues at the scenes of a series of murders.

All the trails lead back to Pieter van Floopstraten, a Dutch design genius who disappeared without trace in the 1970s, and who has since been engaged in a mystical scheme to create the world's most perfect font, which is concealed in locations around the globe. But is he really the killer, and how are the crimes connected to his secret font?

The main plot of the novel unfolds in Melbourne, while interleaved chapters set variously in a Tibetan monastery, on the plains of Peru, in London, Naples and Amsterdam, gradually reveal the story of Floopstraten in flashback. Other characters include a noir-style private font investigator, a typographical monk from the Renaissance, a Dutch prog rock group named I Am A Dolphin, and a collective of Italian typo-terrorists.

This novel takes the reader into the arcane world of typographers and their typefaces, of symbols, swashes and glyphs, where the difference between a serif and sans serif could mean life or death.

*'You might start thinking Jasper Fforde has hit a new high, but Nick Gadd's brilliant blend of humour, mystery and, yes, typography is all his own. A compelling read, whether or not you know your Comic Sans from your Zapf Dingbats.'*

– NICK EARLS

# AN ISLAND IN THE LAKE

Bruce Nash

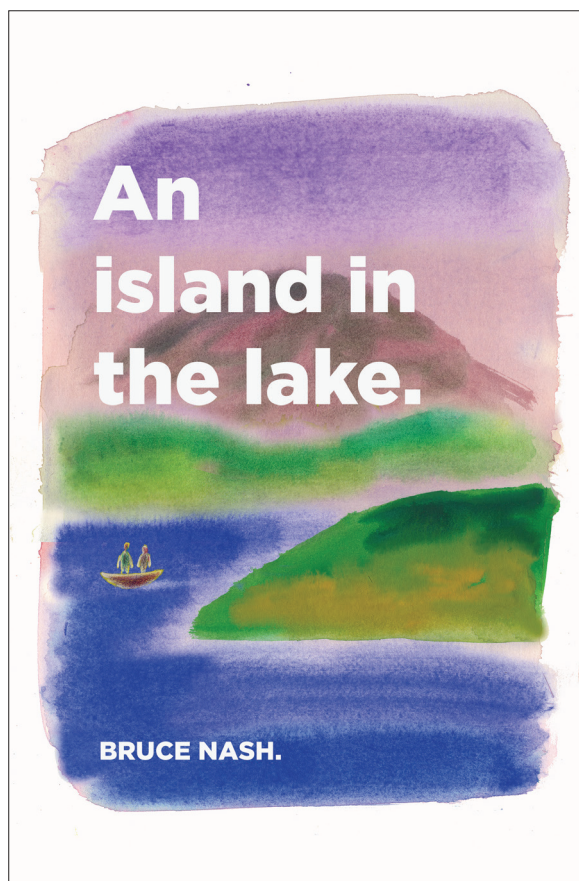
Pat and Ruth Beckett have retired from Sydney to the sublime landscape of the far south coast. To their garden, to their books, to their island in the lake.

They want no part of the madness of Harbourside Grammar, monstrous celebrity billionaire Buckets Barrington, or the sinister Magnareach Corporation.

But the madness wants a part of them.

Can great books, small black ducks, perfectly formed compost and proper placement of the apostrophe be enough to defend their paradise?

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Pat Beckett had read much about beauty. He had even taught about beauty, had insisted to the young that its truths lay deeper than fashion or celebrity and that it had a claim on their attention at least as deserving as fun or wealth or success or even the eternal values trumpeted in the Harbourside Grammar prospectus.

But it wasn't until his late fifties when Pat discovered the far south coast of New South Wales and decided to leave Sydney and retire to the shores of Wallaga Lake that beauty really became his own guiding principle. His meat and drink. The thing he refused to live without.

The all but unspoilt beauty of the area was a revelation to him. Its extravagance, its profligacy, was almost absurd. It was laid on so thick, so much more beautiful than it needed to be. Everywhere you turned, there it was; when you thought you could hardly take any more beauty, it laid on some more.

The coastal landscape, all empty beach and sapphire swell, spotted gum forest and rolling pasture bejewelled with pristine tidal lakes poured like mercury into the folds; all of it made a gentle mockery of rival claims to one's attentions. Even the little lakeside enclave just outside the village of Bermagui, where Pat and Ruth made what they swore would be their final home, was named Beauty Point.

It was the country of the Yuin people, and it was very old

as well as beautiful. Wallaga Lake itself was a low shadow sea just behind the sea, teeming with life laid over ancient shell-beds; crumbled middens along its bushy edges rising above the mats of sea-grass. And Gulaga, big and clear and double-bosomed against the sky or draped in her long possum-cloak of cloud, was mother to it all and carried within her the endless dream of its creation.

If all this beauty was a kind of dream-cloak, it was stitched through with birdsong. The birds were never silent, their endless conversation as miraculous as the thousand diamond points of light moving across the surface of the lake. As constant as the sound of surf from Camel Rock Beach that Pat could hear all day long in his garden and all through the nights he shared with Ruth in their upstairs bedroom above the breathing dark.

Pat and Ruth had vowed to descend together into bird-watching, and one of their routine walks was to the observation hide built into the wetlands sanctuary just behind the dunes. There in the crowded swamp of banksia and melaleuca they concealed themselves and watched through the narrow viewing slit of the rough timber shelter as a whole world was brought to them in letter-box-format panorama. Tiny honeyeaters trembled the branches before their eyes, some too fast and close to see. The air itself seemed to flit and flutter. In

the middle distance where the paperbarks stood pale in dark water, egrets and cormorants and swamphens went about their business. Black swans pedalled their dreamy, old-world grace. White-bellied sea eagles circled overhead.

Pat and Ruth might watch for hours. Observe was hardly the word. Hide was the word. They hid in silence, side by side. Invisible together, like happy spies.

Looking at things together was what Pat and Ruth did a great deal now, and loved doing. Looking at their garden. Looking at the things they'd planted becoming wonderful, different things. Looking at the sky, looking at the lake, looking at Gulaga looking back at them.

Drinking tea together in their garden, looking through the trees. Part of their view included the deserted grounds of an old caravan park with its scatter of derelict cabins adjoining their back fence. In the Christmas holidays or Easter, a campervan of grey nomads or backpackers might ignore the No Entry sign and set up by the lake shore, lighting a campfire at the water's edge. Pat and Ruth could hardly begrudge them. They enjoyed the celebratoriness of it, and the way it conjured up times gone when the Yuin might have hosted seasonal shellfish and flathead feasts for gatherings of people from far-flung, different dreamings.

There was an island in the lake. It was a very small island and it was not a long paddle from where he put his kayak into the water, but Pat Beckett knew he would never set foot on its shell-rubbly shore or touch the gnarled trees that grew there. Access to the island was restricted and although he wasn't sure if this meant it was actually forbidden, he felt that it should be.

The island, he had been told, was of such significance to the Yuin people of Wallaga Lake that it had been one of the country's first gazetted sacred sites. He knew it was associated with the story of an elder, Merriman, who lived there in the company of his moojingarl, a black duck named Umbarra who could foresee events. Umbarra would warn Merriman of danger by wild flapping and splashing in the lake water.

Pat Beckett knew the part of the story which told of Merriman being warned by Umbarra that enemies were approaching from far away, intent on doing battle with the Wallaga people. He had heard how Merriman took the advice of the black duck and concealed the women and children in a safe place before directing the struggle against the attackers, and he knew that Merriman was said to have put up a fierce fight with spear and boomerang and even at one point transformed himself into a whirlwind. What he did not know for certain after managing to track down only

conflicting fragments of the story, was whether Merriman and his Wallaga people had ultimately triumphed in the battle or been overcome by the intruders. But whenever he paddled past the island he could feel its long-held silence and the sense there of something endlessly, enduringly stubborn.

Adrian Welmsley's classroom that year was Pat Beckett's old classroom. Pat had never been one to furnish and personalise his teaching space the way some did, the ones who were committed to creating what they called a welcoming and supportive learning environment. He'd put a bookcase and an old armchair in a corner behind the door, but in truth that was more about him feeling at home than anyone else. Apart from that he vaguely recalled an old money-plant in a pot by the front desk, and above the chalkboard a framed print of the Bodley Head portrait of Shakespeare which Pat himself had inherited and kept on the wall for no particular reason except that it was already on the wall. If it had been a portrait of the queen he would probably have left it there as well. He doubted that Adrian would have retained the pot plant or portrait or armchair, and certainly not the bookcase. Doubtless he would have installed numerous computers and scanners and multi-media projectors and assorted digital data doodads, although since Pat had never been back to see it he couldn't say for sure, and wouldn't have known what he was looking at anyway.

Whatever Adrian Welmsley's classroom looked like, it was there that they found him one morning, hanging. It was the cleaner who discovered him, well before classes began, and Adrian had already been dead for hours. The poor cleaner screamed and ran, of course, and the School Administration Team's first decision was that the body should not be cut down until the police arrived. So it twisted from the ceiling fan for another hour or so while students were cordoned off from the area and the news began its bushfire spread through the school population. Poor Adrian.

And poor Breeze Barrington. At first no-one registered the detail that Breeze was unusually absent from school that stunned and whispery Monday. Then whoever went to investigate Adrian's bachelor unit found there on the laundry floor a pile of bloodstained clothes. A girl's uniform from Harbourside Grammar, complete with Prefect's badge. Breeze Barrington's.

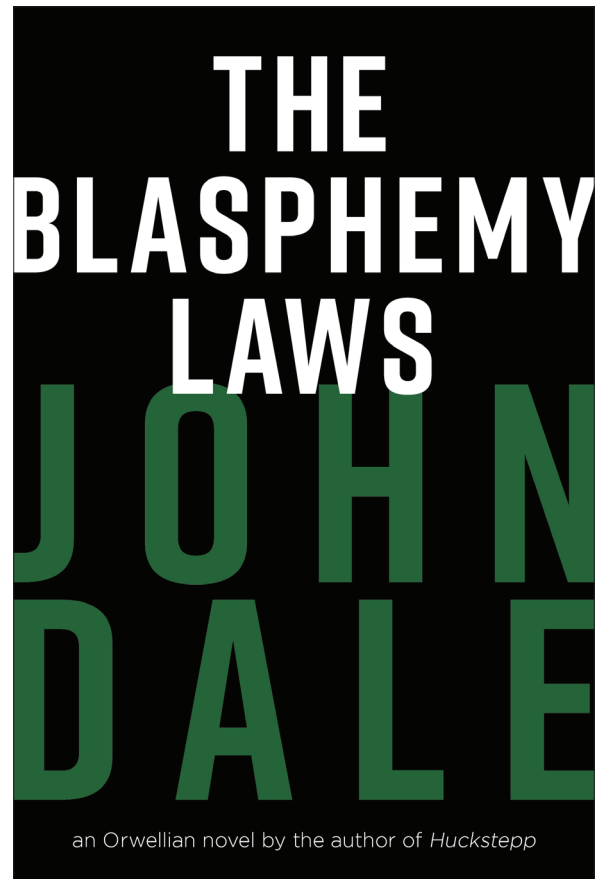
The bushfire exploded. Murder-suicide. Ongoing police investigation. Awful, irresistible scandal and publicity catastrophe for Harbourside Grammar. And tragedy, of course, however you looked at it. And a profound shock for Pat Beckett.

# THE BLASPHEMY LAWS

John Dale

It's October 2048 and an Islamist political Party has swept to power in Britain's general elections. Overnight the country is transformed by the introduction of the blasphemy laws. An Australian history teacher who lost his wife and daughter in a terror attack arrives in London to make contact with the leader of the Resistance. When he becomes involved with a homeless young woman, he discovers the possibility of a new life for both of them far from the dangers of the new London.

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He found himself in a noisy, crowded place, which he realized was the Tube station. There were unwashed men milling around the entrance, and women with sores on their faces sheltering inside. He dragged his airport bag between an old man and an old woman who were counting out used cigarette butts from a glass jar. The old man wore a navy suit that was greasy and impregnated with dirt and a bowler hat pushed back from very white hair: he might have been a retired stockbroker except his face was smeared with soot and he stank of alcohol. It was still possible to buy cheap alcohol from the few public houses in London that remained open although the penalties for being intoxicated in public were severe. As he passed, the old man looked up at him as if in recognition and muttered, 'We should never have trusted them.'

It was dangerous to speak like this even here in the underground. Lifting his bag, he hurried down the stairs. Something scuttled across the path in front of him. An enormous brown rat. Squealing, it raced to join a swarm of smaller rats that had discovered a box of discarded chicken bones beneath a bench. Since the dismissal of health inspectors at Smithfield and Billingsgate markets, the city's ancient sewer system and its underground were infested. He could see the enormous rat scratching its scabby ears with

a toenail not ten metres away from where two men were kneeling on a patterned rug.

Picked out in elegant carved lettering on the walls of the tube station, it was just possible for him to read the Party's successful electoral slogan:

'Keeping Britain Safe'.

For some time, he stood gazing stupidly at the tube wall, repeating those three words under his breath. What he couldn't comprehend was how the British people had capitulated. How they had watched as entire cities across the Midlands were transformed.

For the ordinary Londoner did it matter now who held the reins of power? For each day was a struggle, especially with thousands of pilgrims streaming across the channel. It was a matter of slogging through any job you could find, fighting for a place on the Tube, praying five times a day, visiting the mosque to hear the local imam preaching about paradise. The Party had developed the perfect system of control for it could promise everything in the next life—and deliver nothing in this one.

He had been waiting for half an hour and no train had arrived, despite a series of announcements in accents he didn't

understand. Now lights flashed on the board and an ear-piercing voice promised a train within five minutes but twenty more minutes passed and nothing stirred. Finally, there was a rush of air and a screech of metal which sent the rats scattering and a train arrived so crammed with people that when the doors opened all he could see was a dense wall of arms and legs and elbows and shoulders and heads pointing this way and that. He squirmed his way into a carriage. Soon he was halfway in, but the doors were blocked by his bag and voices were yelling at him to let the train go. He wriggled sideways, and with a violent tug managed to secure his bag between his legs. For a moment, it felt as though he were being squeezed to a pulp between elbows, backpacks and hips, but then he found himself pressed awkwardly against a woman. She was much younger than him, in her early twenties, with creamy English skin. Strands of dark hair were visible underneath the safety scarf she wore as a sign of religious observance.

She was staring in front of her at an image of a malnourished toddler on a faded poster: *Feed a Swedish child today!* Despite the proximity of their bodies, she refused to acknowledge his presence and continued to stare at the poster as if she were memorizing the location where the public could donate canned food and blankets. He was so close that he could smell her skin. When the train jolted she steadied herself by clutching at the vertical rail and the tip of her finger brushed the knuckles of his hand.

He glanced around. If she was alone on this train, it was possible she was a spy. Perhaps she wasn't married although she was at least twenty, and too old to be single. The Party encouraged women to marry early and offered generous tax and housing incentives for women to have at least three children, and preferably five. Ironically it was women and, above all young women, who had in the beginning been the most fervent supporters of the Islamic Party of Great Britain: the promoters of obedience and orthodoxy. They had worked the booths and formed the Women's Interfaith and Friendship Societies. Nowadays you no longer found unaccompanied women riding the tube. Sexual assaults had occurred on the Piccadilly and Central Lines. It was prudent for young women to dress appropriately. Many of them found the Party's modesty clothing, particularly the safety scarf and face veil, empowering. But this young woman gave him the impression of being different.

Once when the train lurched forward she gave him a quick sidelong glance, which seemed to pierce right into him and for a moment filled him with fear. The idea came to him that she might be an agent of the Ministry of Internal

Security. Or the IIS—the feared Islamic Intelligence Services. Given her gender, that was unlikely. Still, he continued to feel uneasy, while their bodies remained so close to each other on the train.

The train stopped at Mile End and he elbowed his way through the doors. The lift wasn't working and he hauled his bag up the grimy stairs. He wished he had spoken to that young woman. It had been a long while since he'd known female companionship. At the top of the stairs the crowd pushed and shoved through the broken turnstiles. No officials came out to check tickets. The clock on the wall had stopped at 12.

Out on the street he checked the map on his pocket screen. When he looked up he saw her across the road striding with her head down in her long green and black manteau. She glanced back at the station entrance—at him, he thought—before she disappeared down a side street. Even if she was a spy he was intrigued. He felt drawn to follow her, but he'd heard rumours about devout women who trapped unsuspecting foreign males into adulterous relationships and then blackmailed them by threatening to denounce them to the authorities.

Was it possible she was his contact? She looked too young and surely she would have alerted him unless she, too, was under surveillance. He had liked something about her from the moment he saw her, but he suspected she was working for the enemy.

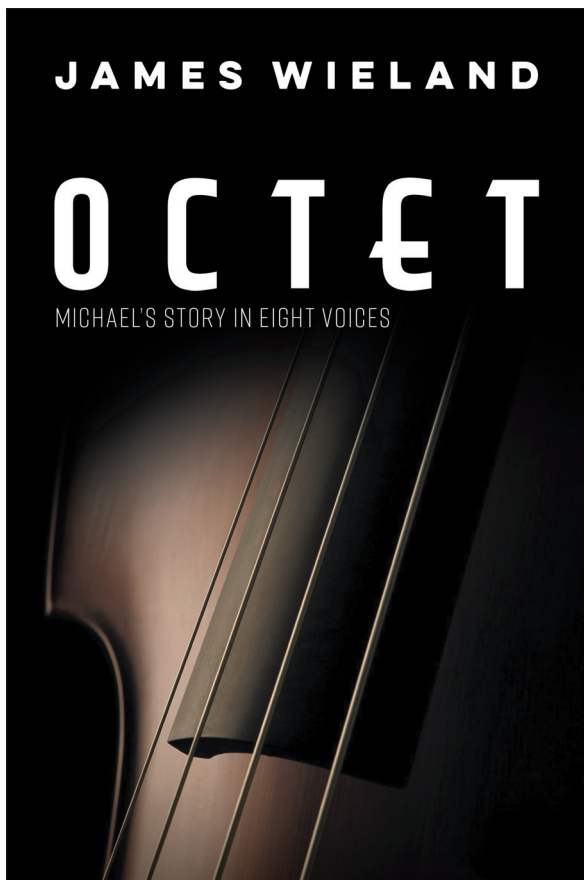
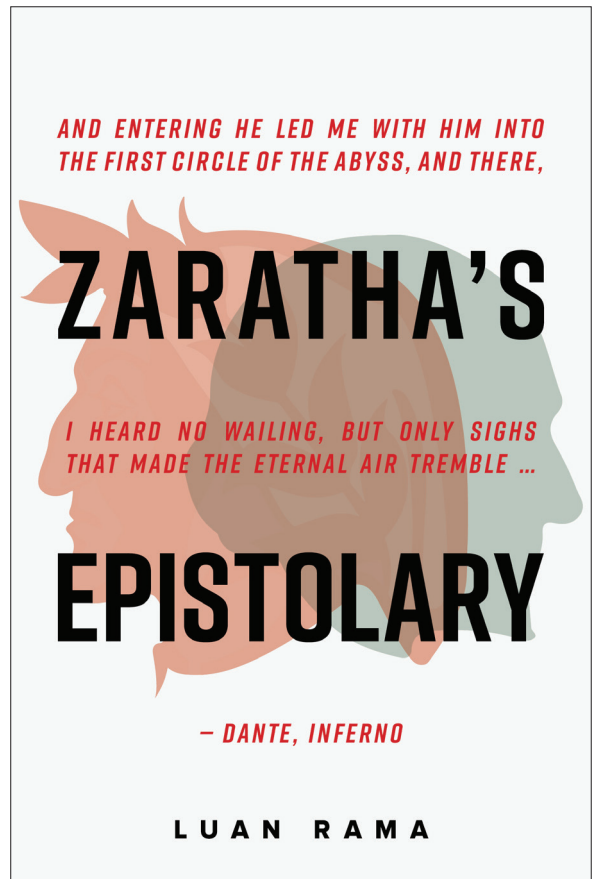
# ZARATHA'S EPISTOLARY

Luan Rama

Translated by Miranda Xhilaga

Frederik Çoba, an Albanian intellectual, a Latinist who dreams of a modern, democratic Albania, is arrested and convicted for his political views and imprisoned on an isolated island off the Adriatic coast. While there among others denied freedom and facing an abyss of violence, he decides to translate the 'Inferno', the first section of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. In his letters to his wife, he paints a heart-wrenching picture of the life as a political prisoner and speaks of his passion in translating 'Hell'. It takes his wife a year to get permission to visit him, but the regime's henchmen have been there first. What happened to Dante's translator?

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## OCTET

MICHAEL'S STORY IN EIGHT VOICES

James Wieland

'Michael O'Connell is dead!' Spanning the week of his burial, from his obituary to the wake, eight characters whose lives – some intimately, some more obliquely – have intersected his, slowly open up the carefully constructed compartments of his very private, very financially successful, life, even as they reveal themselves. A luminous story of disclosure and concealment, of love and its opposites explored in their various tones and shades, and of those who embrace life's alternatives and those who deny them, *Octet's* canvas is broad, spreading from the Wicklow Stud in the southern hinterland of New South Wales to the battlefields of New Guinea, from the ballet stages of Europe to the business world in London, from Edinburgh to Sydney, in a timespan which reaches from the Second World War to the turn of the century.

Why did Michael make the gift of the cello?

Format: Paperback AVAILABLE NOW  
ISBN: 978-1-925801-30-9 Price: \$29.95

# Death of a Typographer

‘A call on the typeshoe’

“OK, I suppose you’re right,” Martin said. “I guess we have to bring in Monty Virgola.”

Lucy frowned. “Who’s Monty Virgola?”

“Only the best typeshoe in the city.”

“What on earth is a typeshoe?”

“A private investigator who works typography cases. A typeshoe works the streets, gets downand dirty with font hustlers and type junkies. Monty has connections and font smarts that normal mortals just don’t have. If we’re going to find this font, Monty’s the only one who can help.”

The words ‘normal mortals’ brought a flicker to the corner of Lucy’s mouth, but all she said was: “Sounds promising. Let’s pay a call on the typeshoe.”

—

The melancholy strains of a saxophone grew louder as Lucy and Martin followed the music along a corridor to a wooden door, on which was a name plate in a classic 1930s typeface, the kind you might see on the credits of a black and white film. The sign read:

**MONTY VIRGOLA, A.A.T.I.  
PRIVATE TYPE INVESTIGATION. FONT CRIME.  
NO DIVORCE WORK.**

“What’s A.A.T.I.?” Lucy said.

“Australian Association of Type Investigators. Monty’s the president. And the only member, as far as I know.”

Light fell through slatted blinds into a brown wood-panelled office. A ceiling fan rotated wheezily, and a stopped clock on the wall dozed at 4.37. A trilby hat perched atop a hat stand. A figure was sitting, back to the door, feet on the desk, a saxophone to its lips.

“Hello, Monty,” Martin said.

The chair spun around and its occupant surveyed them. “Well, I’ll be damned. Martin Kern. Sapiens, Kurt Modern, Bohemia Bold.”

“Spot on, Monty.”

Monty grinned. “I never forget a face or a font.”

Lucy now saw that Monty Virgola was a woman. Dressed in a dapper pinstriped suit, she had short dark hair adorned with a silver flash. Monty jumped off the chair, put out her arms, and she and Martin shared a hug. “It’s been a

long time,” she said. Her voice was deep, with a New York accent. She glanced at Lucy. “Who’s the dame?”

“Lucy Tan.” Lucy put her hand out. Monty shook it. “You’re cute, Miss Tan. Pull up a chair, both of you.”

They sat. Monty leaned forward and tapped Martin’s knee briskly. “Before we get down to business, what are you working on, Kern? Anything new?”

This was not an invitation to talk about Martin’s general design practice, which was of no concern to Monty. Only one subject interested her: fonts.

“I’m tinkering with a few ideas, yeah,” Martin said.

“Hand drawn?”

“Of course.”

“Glad to hear it. I can’t stand the new stuff I see. Some kid gets a MacBook, suddenly they’re a typographer. I don’t think so.”

Martin smiled. Same old Monty. “How’s business?”

“Busier than ever. I’ve never known the streets so thick with criminal types. Letters so ugly they’d make your eyes bleed.” Monty shook her head with a sigh at the depravity of humanity. “But what can I do for you two lovely people?”

Martin said, “We need you to find a font.”

Monty frowned. “A simple missing font case? That’s bread and butter work. Any number of two-bit typeshoes out there could help you with that. You don’t need me.” She reached for the saxophone again.

Martin gripped her arm. “We need the best, Monty. At least hear me out, then decide if you’ll take the case.”

“OK, OK – since it’s you.” Monty laid the saxophone aside. “What you got?”

“This.” Martin put his hand in his pocket, and held out the slug of type. Monty took it, gave it a cursory glance, then a closer look. She spun her chair around, reached for a jeweller’s magnifying glass which she screwed into her eye, then bent over to inspect the type. She sat up slowly, with a long low whistle. “Holy Joanna, is this what I think it is?”

Martin nodded.

“Where did you find this baby?”

“In Tom Cremington’s workshop.”

“I heard about Cremmo. It’s a damn shame.” Monty shook her head in wonder. “But I never suspected this. I gotta hand it to you, Kern. It’s not every day someone walks into my office with a piece of Floopstraten’s secret font.”

– from *Death of a Typographer*, a novel by Nick Gadd

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