Why is one person famous while another is stuck on benefits?
How do you find the perfect partner?
Life is a competitive game, but a lot is still down to the random factor...

These transgressive shorts on random topics include *Blurb* - the prequel to Jeff Noon's forthcoming novel *Nymphomation* - along with new fiction from Alistair Gentry, Vicky Grut, Steve Aylett and others.
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With extreme nonchalance the woman placed her champagne flute on the buffet table. Her camouflage plastic kimono contrasted sharply with her bald head and the glass rings piercing her septum. She bent her knees as if checking her fishnet stockings, and picked something up from the floor.

I can see her, but no one else does. My observation corner is the best spot in this large, animated room. I can see without being seen. The ideal, really. Especially at a party like this one.

Quickly she brings her fingers close to her lips. She throws a glance across the packed hall.

I can see she is nervous.

She opens her mouth and eats her salmon paté canapé.

«The collision with planet Earth is expected to take place in a few hours. The satellite is travelling at the speed of 300 metres a second towards one of the most populated areas of London, roughly West 10 and West 11. Do not panic. Follow the instructions of your local Emergency Evacuation Plan advisor and nobody will be hurt. Every step is being taken to minimise impact on landing. High Density Defence Rockets have been programmed to intercept the satellite, disintegrating it and dispersing its fragments in the atmosphere. I repeat, there is no reason to panic, everything is under control.

«Live monodvision coverage of the event will commence on this channel after the consumer advice break. Join us then.»

This morning, when Bee looked at herself in the bathroom mirror, she noticed a slightly dark spot on her back. Nothing alarming. Nothing more than a shadow, but still quite visible, it neatly defined a portion of her skin. A transversal stripe, a couple of inches wide, curved and asymmetric, reminding Bee vaguely of a
serpent. She tried to scrape it off with a generous dose of soap. She retrieved a pumice stone that had lived untouched in a corner of the bath-tub for as long as she could remember, almost part of the décor, and scratched at her skin.

But even the stone could not get rid of that unusual, frankly disturbing, shadow.

It was late, Bee had to run to the art college where she worked, so she postponed the matter for later investigation.

Unzipping her rubberised overall (from a market stall that specialised in old AstroWear gear from space explorations of the nineties), Bee remembered the mark. Now, every single student in the life drawing class would see it. Some student might interrogate her about the strange shadow on her body. After all, as their life model her job was to be stared at and analysed in every detail. Her body could not avoid the two dozen nosy eyes waiting for her to strip, because, whatever it was on her back, it was unmistakably growing.

By this point half her back was covered by shadowy stripes, all approximately of the same size and the same snake-like shape.

I know what she picked up from the floor. And I know also that she ate it with pleasure. Like a gourmet, I would say. I know well the joyful enjoyment of tasting (especially when you least expect it) your favourite delicacy. The mouth waters, the eyes shine, if you were a dog you would be lolling your tongue over the floor. When the papillae are invaded by the unmistakable taste of crunchy bits melting with juicy filling it is like floating into a heavenly instant of complete fulfilment. That is what she experienced. The bald woman, I mean.

Few of you so far, I keep repeating to myself. Few of you so far. But more, many more to come, I am sure. It was predicted centuries ago, it was prophesied and written down in those ancient dusty papers that no one uses any more, kept in the City General

Library. It has been dreamt of, it has been feared.
And now, just now, it is happening.

«As we speak, no human victims have been recorded. The satellite collided last night at 3.17am hitting the main building of a deserted tube station. The impact created a crater 20 metres in diameter, no more than 5 metres deep. A local entrepreneur has already sought permission to build a water-sports centre in this natural swimming pool. Again, we repeat, no victims reported. The emergency has ceased and life is back to normal. Thank you for being with us. That is all for now, good afternoon.»

The nurse looked at Bee with motherly eyes and then she spoke in a soft whisper. Yes, the doctor could see her this morning. If she just took a seat, it would be a matter of minutes. While Bee browsed the websites of the Disabled Today Review, her mind wandered in circles, puzzled by the mutation taking place in her body.
Strangely enough, she was not worried at all. Rather the opposite, she would have said. Inside of her, somewhere, something thrilling was happening.
The doctor was swift, inexpressive and
obviously bored. He diagnosed stress and gave Bee the number of a Healing Centre called Wipe Your Vibe (run by his sister-in-law).

Bee went home and disposed herself in observation of the next change. She decided that whatever was happening to her it was something to be proud of.

From my observation corner I can spot the movements of most of the guests. Now they are approaching the long table where dinner will be served in a moment. I still can see the bald woman. She is talking animatedly with a man dressed in white who is sipping from a bright green drink. Celery juice, I suppose, giggling to myself.

It is dinner time now. I crawl back into the corner where those succulent pastry crumbs I gathered before are waiting for me. Moving my anterior legs I make a tiny ball out of them, and finally, I start to eat.

Bee is ready to go out. She is wearing a specially made outfit tonight, as this is a very special evening. Her shiny black catsuit makes her body look stunning, and she is aware of it. Another glance over her shoulder at the mirror: perfect. Cutting the back off her catsuit worked brilliantly. The black stripes covering her back are impressively beautiful; the mark of the mutant. The image reflected in the mirror is that of a hybrid creature, someone or something in between human and animal. After all, this is going to be the future, isn’t it?

Since the satellite collision, more and more people have begun to experience changes in their appearance. Nothing serious. Just details, some feelers here, a pair of wings there. Or, as in Bee’s case, a mimetic coverage, similar to the pattern of a zebra.

Glancing for the last time at the mirror, Bee goes outside, stops a cab and half an hour later makes her gorgeous debut at the annual dinner party of the Entomological Food Society.