

our own. All countries whose governments should be feared, either due to their malice or their apathy. Pharmaceutical companies from the west tried new drugs on human subjects in Africa, with their ruling class standing idly by or eagerly accepting bribes, such as money, land, or weapons. It's amazing the amount of information a twelve-year old can come by with a laptop, a government broadband and a little determination. But if they made any new discoveries by cutting up the bodies of starving Ethiopians it was, not surprisingly, kept secret. Our condition was written off as an anomaly. A genetic response to life in the information age. The first sign that hundreds of years living with machines were changing humanity. We were mutants, without the cool superpowers.

Science moved on. The spotlight upon us shifted from newspapers and medical

"It's my theory, and I am of course no scientist, that after they'd pushed our buttons for the first seven years to no effect the curiosity was replaced with indifference."

journals to tabloid magazines and theories of paranoia. We were sent from Aliens, from God, from the Future to do... whatever. Some of us were stalked, abused, and there were cases in America where we were shot at. But humanity adapts and even though the frequency at which paranoid theories appeared remained fairly regular, even though some hick preachers denounced us as tools of Satan every year, normal people found other things to fear and things quieted down. All 200 from my school lived to be 20.

The writer in me wants Martin to have been the melodramatic kid with raven-black hair and deep-penetrating eyes who painted his nails black, listened to Ryan Adams and had ten scowls for every smile. But truth is Martin was as outgoing as any of us, maybe even more so. When we went out he wore a t-shirt instead of long-sleeved shirts and often turned our disfiguring feature into a pick-up line or an icebreaker.

"I'm a compliment machine," he'd say "push my button and find out."

Four or five times the girls would push his button and he'd deliver beautiful quotes from Shakespeare, Henry Miller and Keats. Of course, it wasn't so much the words as it was the way he'd deliver them, staring deep into their eyes and, with a mixture of sincerity and mischievousness, tell them what they wanted to hear. It wasn't long before their hands would slip from caressing his plastic and travel downward to hold his hand.

Martin pushed his button on June 21st

2006, the day of his 21st birthday and died instantly. He died of heart failure and the coroner's report stated that the death was too fast for him to have experienced any pain. At the same time news were coming in from all over the world of similar cases. Buttons pushed and instantaneous deaths. I went to four funerals that summer. All people from my school, two of them had been my classmates.

The media coverage boomed once more and scientists returned to our field. Why were we the only ones who could push our button? Again everyone had a theory. It was genetic, they said, like a fingerprint ID. It was psychosomatic, they said, all in our head. There were scientific answers and religious answers. Ideological and psychological answers. We were being judged. We were judging ourselves. We were mutants. We were in-human. We were

more than human. Conspiracy theories re-floated. The government had created us. Aliens had created us. God wanted nothing to do with us.

It was worse than ever. We were outed in television, harassed on the street; newspapers posted our names and addresses in our hometowns. The pressure become too much for many of us and the year we turned 25 there were roughly fifteen thousand left worldwide and 62 of my friends had killed themselves.

See, for most people taking their own lives is a long leap from being depressed. Considering and then planning is often enough to take them out of it. Should I jump? Shoot myself? Drown? Do it with pills and alcohol? A rope or bullets? And if the planning doesn't get you the most terrifying question remains: What if I live? With a little bad luck you could end up paraplegic from jumping off a roof, shoot your jaw off and you can still live. If you hang yourself and someone finds you, you could spend the rest of your life in a nursing home, drooling and shaking from brain damage.

For us, death is painless. A promise of release without any strings attached. It's so easy it terrifies me. For nights I couldn't sleep for fear that I'd accidentally brush my wrist. We live every day with death whispering in our ears: let go. Some days it's difficult. Sometimes weeks go by without me ever thinking about it. But it's always there and I'd be a liar to say, that in moments of weakness, I haven't considered it. Think of a horrible hangover. Think of your worst

New Releases

A Mysterious Affair of Style

Gilbert Adair
Faber and Faber



A *Mysterious Affair of Style* is a gripping and sophisticated jaunt into a glamorous, yet dark and murderous post-war London. As the second novel in the Evadne Mount trilogy, we are re-acquainted with mystery novelist Evadne Mount.

In this thrilling whodunit novel, an actress is poisoned with cyanide on a crowded film set. It is down to the diligent duo to investigate the six suspects and triumph in the search for the actress's murderer.

The chemistry between Evadne and Trubshawe is electric, and the juxtaposition of their characters fits perfectly throughout the novel. The luxurious use of language and the attention to 1940s detail almost outdoes the twists and turns of the plot that keeps the reader in suspense until the shocking, yet satisfying ending neatly sews up what is a fantastic patchwork of mystery, murder and of course, style.

Samantha Noakes

The Careful Use of Compliments

Alexander McCall Smith
Little Brown



Having excelled with his crime sequence and established other series that have proved immensely popular, Alexander McCall Smith has now moved into what appears to be a neglected area of contemporary fiction — the campus novel. Most prominently mined by Kingsley Amis and David Lodge (to name but two), this genre was at its height some years previously, but now appears to be returning to a sense of *vogue*.

Isabel Dalhousie is the editor of the Review of Applied Ethics, a position that, as McCall Smith's publisher suggest, makes "getting through life with a clear conscience" difficult. Adding to the complexity of this is the new arrival in her family, a young baby, as well as the torrid relationship she is embroiled in with the baby's father, 14 years her junior.

Add to this melange, a deeply damaging assault on her career from a colleague and this philosophical investigation seems set to take on a more sinister turn.

Martyn Colebrook