

Carnivorous (Writing Sample)

The pavement was a daisy chain of scowling faces; their cracked glares turned towards the low, grey sky. The high street, although by no means empty, was curiously quiet; even the footsteps of the shifting, humpbacked crowd sounded muffled. The air was very cold and very damp. It was a typical English summer.

Sawyer rolled a cigarette between the yellow stumps of his left molars, wrestling with the temptation to light it. If he gave in to the urge, it would be his sixth smoke of the day, bringing him alarmingly close to the deadly double digits that had been prohibited by his doctor. On the other hand, Sawyer knew that if he stayed strong, his success would leave him in a foul mood for the rest of the day. Once the cravings began their assault, there would be no respite for Sawyer. His gnawed fingers would break into an inevitable tap-dance; his stomach would twist itself into a knot and his skull would be ripped in half by migraines. Surely, Sawyer reasoned to himself, he couldn't be expected to perform well under such debilitating circumstances, and if he didn't perform well both his literary agent and his fans would suffer.

Three seconds after Sawyer came to this conclusion a column of smoke was drifting out from a small gap in his lips. Sawyer closed his sunken eyes, bitterly savouring the small wave of guilt and shame that washed over him.

What a perfectly typical English summer for such a perfectly typical Englishman.

Sawyer pulled out his phone and squinted at the screen. It was only half-past-one. He still had over an hour until his interview was scheduled to begin. That left him with plenty of time to get something to eat. He might even find the opportunity to shuffle into one of the local bookshops; Sawyer had looked up the addresses of some very promising candidates on the train. Sawyer returned his gaze to the blank sky, narrowing his dark-blue eyes as a bloated cloud scraped the top of a white block of flats. He resolved to find a restaurant as quickly as possible. The air was full of the promise of rain.

Fortunately for Sawyer, he already knew where to go. In the distance, squashed between a hunched, brown pub and a square black building that looked like some sort of theatre or artisan's drinking den, was a large, squat, pink building. There was a huge, yellow sign, inside of which beamed a cheerful anime-style mascot, with bulging pink eyes and a dazzling, artificial smile. She was holding a massive bowl of steaming ramen in one tangerine hand and flashing a thumbs-up at

the pedestrians shuffling beneath her. As expected, her breasts were enormous. Directly below the mascot's ample bosom dangled a smaller, orange sign, which read: *Yum-Yum's Noodle Bar*.

Sawyer's stomach uncurled itself and gave a little shiver of anticipation. He allowed himself to smile as he took a long drag on his cigarette. Well, why not? It had been a long time since Sawyer had been to *Yum-Yum's*. The noodle bar chain had exploded in popularity in the past decade, with new venues blossoming up and down the New Union. Sawyer turned on his heel and began his short journey to the noodle bar, although he took great care to slow his pace down to little more than a crawl; *Yum-Yum's* didn't allow smoking and Sawyer wanted to enjoy his little stick of vice for as long as possible before he had to stub it out.

Despite his best efforts, in almost no time at all, Sawyer arrived at the entrance to *Yum-Yum's*. His eyes slithered, morosely, in the direction of a little silver bin that had been set up next to a crooked lamp post. Sawyer gave his cigarette one, final, delicious drag, before snuffing it out on the small, square dish that sat on top of the bin. Sawyer turned around and groped for the handle of *Yum-Yum's* front door.

Sawyer couldn't help but catch a glimpse of himself in the glass as he leaned forward. His dark-blue eyes instinctively narrowed, recoiling into slits as they tip-toed over the sag that had crept into his (once-square) jawline and the sheen of sweat that glistened on the left curve of his needlessly prominent forehead. Yes, it couldn't be denied. Sawyer's hairline was now in full retreat. In a few more years it would no longer be worth maintaining; the whole lot would have to go. The day of the egghead was fast approaching. The increasing absence of hair resulted in Sawyer's forehead looking like a balloon that had been overinflated. This, coupled with Sawyer's rotting fangs that protruded from the depths of his grey mouth and the deep caverns into which his eyes had managed to sink, made his sharp, slightly hooked nose appear several times larger than it actually was. Sawyer couldn't deny it. He looked old. Which was a terrible shame because Sawyer didn't *feel* very old, all things considered. He was only thirty-nine, after all.

Recently, people had gotten into the habit of telling Sawyer that forty was the new thirty. In Sawyer's own case, if his reflection was anything to go by, it looked as though forty might just be the new sixty.

Sawyer grunted with disapproval, scratched at the rim of his faded brown hairline, then thrust open the door with a wary shake of his head.

"Table for one?"

“Uh?” Sawyer blinked, resisting the urge to retreat by ten steps. He was face to face with a slender, dark-haired woman, dressed in an orange shirt and a tight, yellow waistcoat. Or, to be more specific, he was chest-to-face with her. This was not out of perversion, or a lack of restraint on Sawyer’s part. The woman was enormous; her chin loomed at least a metre above the rim of Sawyer’s fading hairline. The middle-aged fellow was thrown into a disconcerting shade as the woman tilted her vast, pale face to the left and squinted down at him.

“Table for one?” the woman repeated again. She wasn’t smiling. Her broad lips had been painted the colour of treacle. Sawyer’s surprise at being greeted by the gaudy monolith was quickly replaced by irritation. Whilst Sawyer couldn’t escape the fact that he, undeniably, would only be requiring a table for one, the assumption of the woman that he was going to be eating alone rankled.

“No, actually,” replied Sawyer. “A table for *two*, if you’ve got one available. I’ve got a, ah, friend joining me. She should be here any moment.”

“What’s her name?”

Sawyer faltered. He hadn’t expected a follow-up question. The purple tip of Sawyer’s tongue dabbed at his lower lip. The woman’s massive, black left eyebrow twitched, rising up her pale forehead by about three millimetres. In desperation, Sawyer plucked a random name from the recesses of his thirty-nine year old memory and threw it at the scowling woman.

“Her name’s Rebecca Crawford. Like I said, she should be here soon...”

Sawyer didn’t know why he had told the giant that he was going to be joined by a woman. Who on earth was he trying to impress? Why should he be so anxious to make this slab-faced Amazon believe that he was meeting a woman for lunch, instead of just eating alone? More to the point, he didn’t know what on earth had possessed him to throw out that *specific* female name. It had been a long, long time since he had even seen Rebecca Crawford, let alone spoken to her.

“Follow me, sir.” The woman gave her sleek, black tablet one final tap and twisted around on the spot. Her right arm shot out, stiff as a board, indicating to Sawyer the direction that she intended to go. Then, half-a-second later, she was off, strutting towards a pink, round table that jutted out of the floor, squatting beneath a tattered poster of *Yum-Yum*’s mascot. Sawyer shuffled after her. It was only now that she was on the move that Sawyer noticed the woman’s colossal legs were encased within a pair of startlingly bright, orange trousers, and her swollen feet had been jammed inside a pair of green shoes. The slapping of her feet against *Yum-Yum*’s yellow tiled floor

echoed around the restaurant, bouncing off the grey windows and nauseating, rainbow-tainted ceiling.

“Here you are, sir. Table twelve.” The woman didn’t even glance at Sawyer as he sank into one of the strawberry-red, plastic chairs. She simply plucked a laminated menu off the table’s centre and pressed it into Sawyer’s thin fingers. “Would you like anything to drink?”

“Um, yes. I’ll have a, uh...” Sawyer inwardly cursed the woman. Christ, why was she asking for his drinks already? Was she really that keen to throw him out? Sawyer gave the woman another, overall scan. Something caught Sawyer’s eye that he hadn’t noticed before. It was a small, grey tattoo, poking out from the folds of her shirt’s collar. Even though Sawyer couldn’t make out the whole thing, he knew what it was and, all of a sudden, everything became clear to him. The symbol of the anticarnist’s party: a fiery star, clenched between the jaws of some hidden, faceless beast. The woman’s demeanour now made perfect sense; there are few things as humourless as a radical.

Of course, if Sawyer wanted to receive better treatment from the towering woman, the solution was simple: he only had to tell her his name. To be more precise, he only had to tell her his *pseudonym*. If he did that, why, Sawyer didn’t doubt that the surly giant would roll out the red carpet for him. Indeed, he might even get a free meal out of his second, more recognisable, identity. After all, if it wasn’t for Sawyer, that tattoo, and the party which inspired it, in all likelihood, wouldn’t exist.

Sawyer told the woman that he wanted a bottle of beer. The woman tapped this into her tablet and informed Sawyer that she would return, soon enough, to take his food order. She then performed a semi-pirouette, twisting around on her squeaking heels, before marching back towards *Yum-Yum*’s entrance.

It didn’t take Sawyer very long to decide what he wanted. He almost always ordered the same thing when he went to *Yum-Yum*’s: Miso broth, with a side of gyoza dumplings. Once that was settled and the giant had tapped that onto her tablet. Sawyer pulled out his phone and began scrolling through news articles. Perhaps something might catch his eye that he would be able to drag into his upcoming interview. It was always good for intellectuals, especially intellectuals that wanted to stay marketable, to demonstrate that they very much had their finger on the pulse of things.

Sadly, it didn’t look like there would be much for Sawyer to talk about; the news was full of the usual drivel. There were the usual murmurings of a possible schism within the Anticarnalist

Reform Party and the Labour Party's coalition. Sawyer doubted this would amount to much. The two parties were always getting into spats and had been uneasy bedfellows ever since the early thirties. More scaremongering about Flesh Dens; apparently some teenagers had been caught scoffing a contraband shank and parents were fretting about the rising tide of carnist minors. Well, kids will be kids. Sawyer couldn't understand what the fuss was about. Flesh Dens, whilst obviously barbaric, had been a common scourge for over a decade now. They weren't going anywhere and the sooner the swooning parents and bloviating commentators accepted that, the better it would be for everyone.

Of course, that would never happen. At one point, as a fresh-faced and hot-blooded student, Sawyer had believed in the concept of change. Not any more. Despite the fact that he had personally witnessed and been (partly) responsible for several major social revolutions, by his thirty-ninth year the one thing that Sawyer was absolutely convinced of was that people, at their core, never changed. The fretters would always continue to fret, the workers would always continue to work, the thinkers would always continue to think, the spinners would always continue to spin and, ultimately, life chugged on, crawling towards oblivion. The same sorts of people always ended up in charge, or writing newspapers or hosting podcasts. Yes, the subjects or policies would occasionally change; they'd swapped the boogeyman of Communism for the lingering spectre of the carnists but the *framework* of things, they always remained in place. Not that Sawyer had much reason to complain about this. Not only was he a thinker, but he was a rather successful thinker. If people were nothing more than cogs in the machine then, it couldn't be denied that he was a somewhat important cog. Sawyer accepted this evaluation of things with a grim smile and was only shaken out of his thoughts by the faint whirring sound of his food approaching.

About The Novel

Adrian Sawyer should be a happy man: he's one of the most successful novelists of the twenty-first century; a man whose literary work helped form the bedrock of a revolution responsible for transforming the United Kingdom (now called The New Union) into the world's first official, ethical vegan state. He's rich, admired, and married to a beautiful philosopher; a cultural icon. Unfortunately, Sawyer is haunted by a terrible secret: he (and, seemingly, only he) knows that his novel that helped inspire a political revolution is actually rather mediocre.

Worse than that, as Sawyer launches a tour for his newly published memoirs, he finds himself targeted by a mysterious online conspiracy theorist called The Inquisitor, who claims to have undeniable proof that Sawyer has been eating contraband meat in secret. As Sawyer attempts to

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unmask his digital stalker, he finds himself uncovering terrible secrets about the dark heart of the New Union. Secrets that, if exposed, might lead to another, far more violent revolution, this time targeting men like Sawyer...

Carnivorous is a satirical novel that uses the vision of a post-meat eating society to mock the publishing industry, online conspiracy theorists, political corruption, and the hypocrisy of the wealthy elite, who preach virtues to ordinary men and women that they have no intention of following themselves.

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