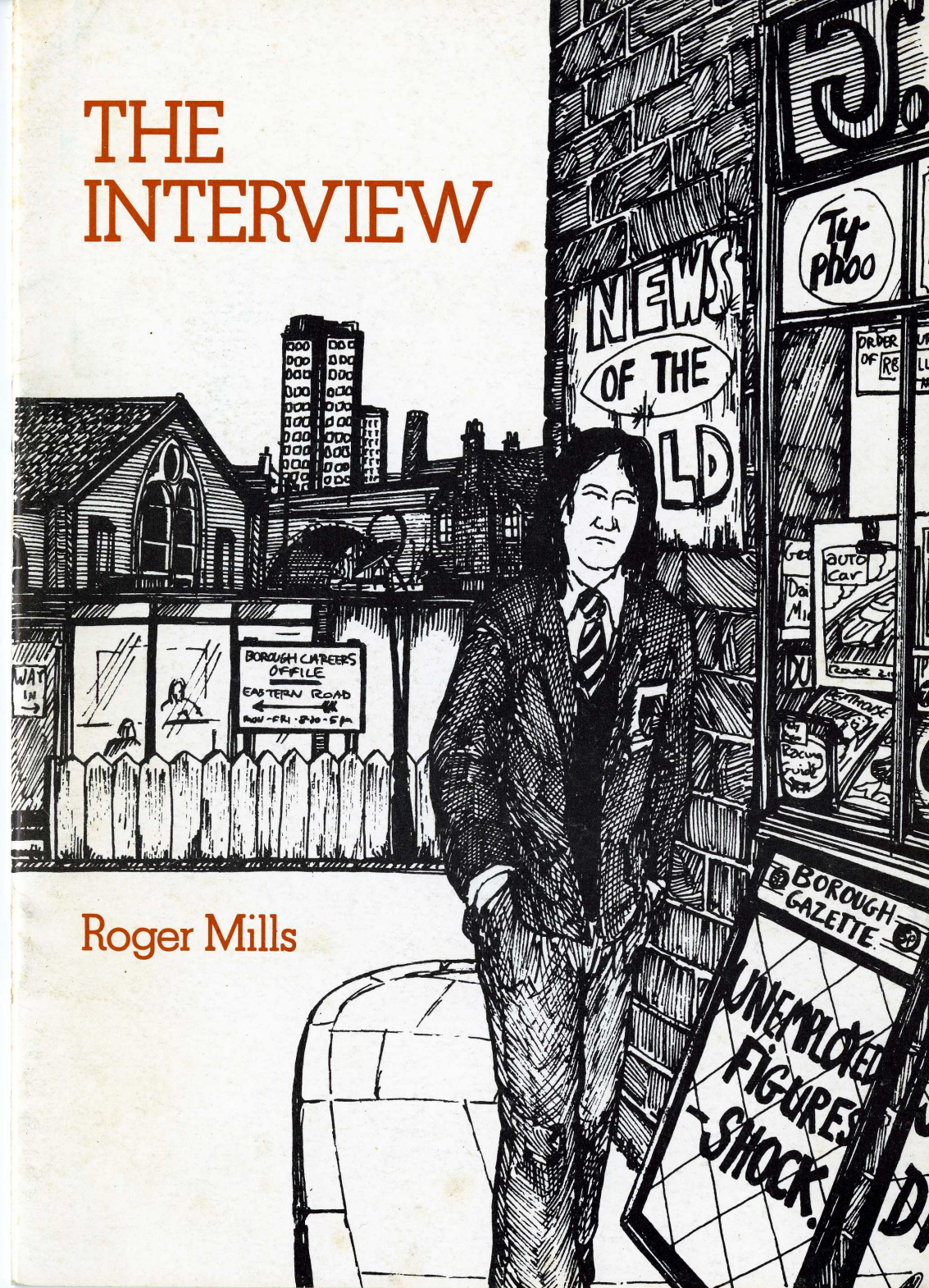


THE INTERVIEW

Roger Mills



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Roger Mills

Borough Careers Office
Easton Walk
London NE8

Mr. Davies tells me that you are
leaving school this summer and need
help in finding employment. I shall be
pleased to see you here on Tuesday 22nd
June. If this is inconvenient or if
you do not need further help, perhaps
you will write in advance.

Yours sincerely,

P.P. G. Jackson

G. Jackson
Careers Officer.

No, it wasn't inconvenient.
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**Borough Careers Office
Easton Walk
London NE8**

Dear Roger,

17 June

Mr. Davies tells me that you are
leaving school this summer and may need
help in finding employment. I shall be
pleased to see you here on Tuesday 22nd
June. If this is inconvenient or if
you do not need any further help, perhaps
you could let me know in advance.

Yours sincerely,

P.P. B. Jackson

G. Jackson
Careers Officer.

No, it wasn't inconvenient.

The Borough careers office
was in Easton Walk,
a short, shabby road off the High Street,
hidden behind the Salvation Army
and a Bingo house.

It is a one storey pre-fab
that must look like a house of cards
to a strong wind.

"PULL," the door said.

I did.

Once I was inside,
the door slammed shut,
and cut off the sound of the traffic.

A thin young man with a beard
was on the telephone.

He pointed to a chair by his desk
and I sat in it.

He went on talking
and took no notice of me.

It was a fine day,
and very hot.

The air was thick and tacky
and girls picked lazily at typewriters.

A door opened behind me.

Someone said goodbye,
the doors flapped
and let in the racket from the street
for a moment.

A bald man in a grey suit
came to the young man's desk
and went through the bottom drawer.

The young man hung up the phone
and asked me who I had come to see.

"Mr G. Jackson," I told him.

"Oh, that's him down there," he said.

The bald head came up
and the red chubby face
smiled over the 'IN' tray.

"Hang on a bit, old son," he said.

"I've got a customer in there already."

He tilted his head
towards an open door behind me.
It had his name on it.

"Won't be long," he promised.

He hadn't found what he was looking for,
but he bounded back to his room.

The young man with the beard
waved his hand at the waiting room.

I went in.

There were two people there,
a black boy and his girl,
both with Afro hair styles.

The room was mostly glass
and the sun was frying us.

I didn't say anything.

Now and again

the black youth mumbled to his girl-friend.

I bet he didn't get the job he wanted.

Posters on the wall
steered you towards the army and navy.
It was one way out.

I picked up a book:
"SCHOOL LEAVER'S HANDBOOK".

I opened it at page one.

"THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT OFFICER.

You met the Youth Employment Officer
in school.

They like you to think of them as friends,
and are always ready
to help you find the right job."

It didn't say
they would find you the job
you really wanted.



I saw a heading,
"INTERVIEWS AND LETTERS
OF APPLICATION".

This is what it said.

"When to an interview you go,
Dress carefully, but without show.
Arrive in time, don't chew or smoke.
Or else they'll choose the other bloke."

Suddenly G. Jackson appeared at the door
and whispered my name.

I threw the booklet to the table,
but missed.

I heard it slap to the floor
as I followed him to his office.

The carpet was thick and the walls clean.
G. Jackson opened a file with my name on
and began to talk.
Outside the window
two girls in hot pants
were hipping down the road.

I heard him say
"... and you are still not sure
about a job."
He looked up with a smile.

As if it was a big effort,
G. Jackson lit up a cigarette.

No. 6. tipped.
I wondered if he was going to offer me one.
He didn't.

"I saw you last year, didn't I, Roger?"
He had.
That time, I had told him
I wanted to be a journalist,
and he laughed in my face.
He waved a bit of paper at me.
"On this form,
you gave me your C.S.E. subjects."
I nodded.



"Now, you've had the results."
I nodded again.
"Could I have them, please?"

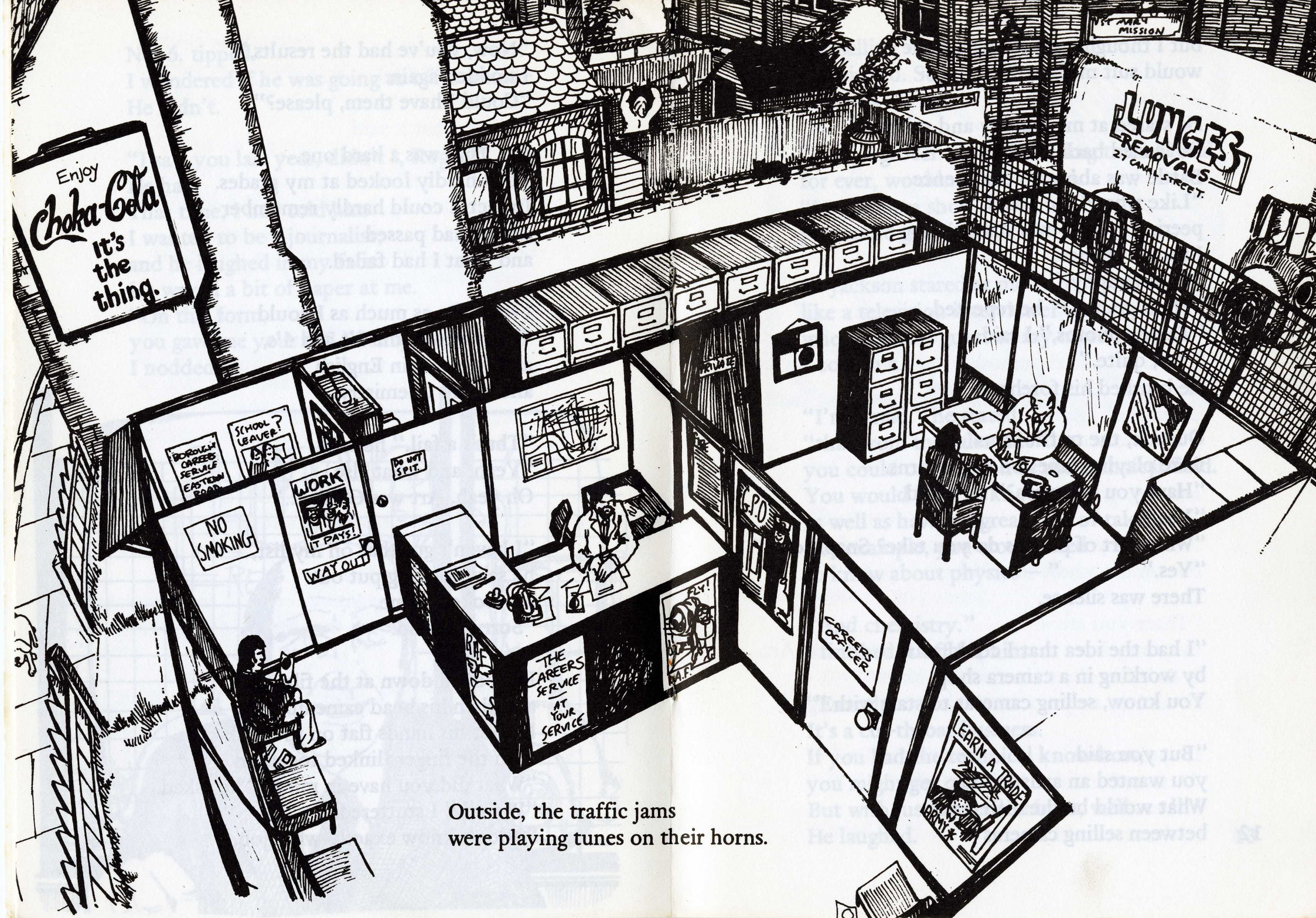
Oh. That was a hard one.
I had hardly looked at my grades.
In fact, I could hardly remember
what I had passed
and what I had failed.

I told him as much as I could.
There were some 3's and 4's,
and I got a 2 in English
and a 6 in Chemistry.

"That's a fail," he said.
"Yeah, and what else —
Oh yeah, Art was Grade 2."

"I haven't got that on my list,"
he said, looking put out.
He looked at me.
"Sorry," I said.

He looked down at the file again,
and then his head came up.
He put his hands flat on the desk
with the fingers linked together.
"What did you have in mind?" he asked.
"W-well," I stuttered.
"I don't know exactly what job,



Outside, the traffic jams
were playing tunes on their horns.

but I thought something artistic would suit me best."

He stared at me blankly and sniffed.

He leaned back in his chair.

Battle was about to commence.

"Like what?" he asked, peering crossly over his glasses.

I took a chance.

"Photography?"

"Photography?" he repeated.

"Taking photos," I said.

"Yes, quite."

He brushed his forehead.

Outside, the traffic jams were playing tunes on their horns.

"Have you a camera?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What sort of photos do you take? Snapshots?"

"Yes."

There was silence.

"I had the idea that I could start by working in a camera shop.

You know, selling cameras to start with."

"But you said

you wanted an artistic job.

What would be the difference

between selling cameras

and selling — say, tins of food?"

He grinned. So did I.

This was a trap.

"Well, a grocer would be selling tins of food for ever, wouldn't he?" I said.

"In a camera shop you could get higher."

G. Jackson stared at me like a television interviewer who wants his guest to say more.

I couldn't.

"I'm afraid," he stated, "that from the sales side you could only get on in the technical field. You would have to know a lot as well as having a great deal of talent. For example, you would need to know about physics — "

"And chemistry."

I finished it off for him.

"Exactly.

It's a cut-throat business.

If you had the technical know-how, you might get on.

But with just an artistic bent, well ... "

He laughed.

G. Jackson closed my file with the flat of his hand, as if to say, "tough".

"Well, it was just a thought," I said.

"The whole art field, you see . . ."

He stopped, and began again on a new tack.

"It's supply and demand, old son. Too many people demanding jobs and not enough jobs to go round. Hundreds and thousands leave art school each year and even they can't find jobs."

He paused again.

"Your teachers," he said.

"Your art teachers at school, are they good?"

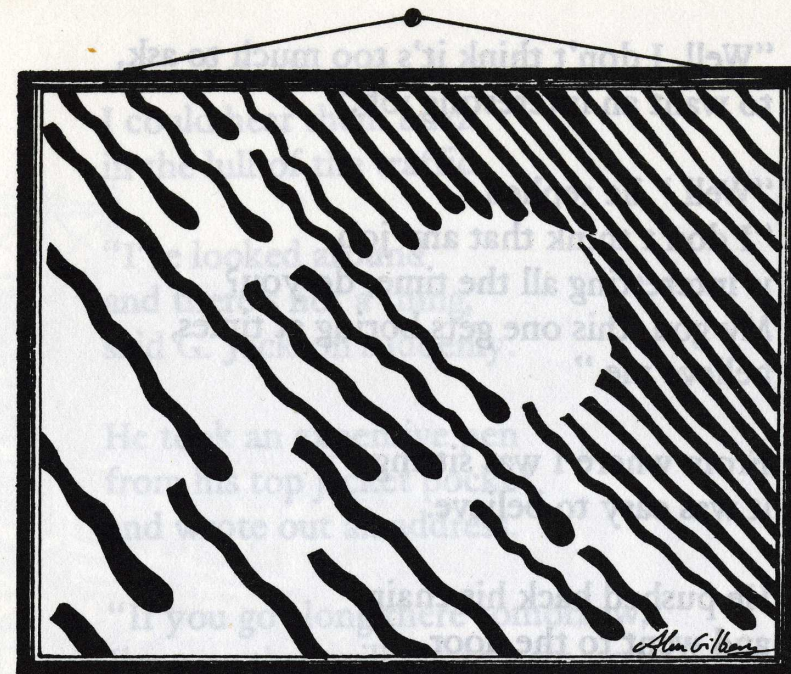
"They vary a lot, but on the whole they are."

"There you are — they may have wanted jobs in Commercial Art. It isn't like the railways, you know. Even they may not have been good enough."

He pointed to a painting on the wall.

"A friend of mine painted that, but even he couldn't get a job

in the art world.



I mean, even I have 'O' level art, but I wouldn't base a career on that."

The telephones rang. He had won the round. He was glad the bell had rung while he was ahead.

When the call ended, I got the first word in before he could begin.

"What you were saying, in fact, is that my choice is limited."

"Quite."

"Well, I don't think it's too much to ask,
to want an interesting job."

"Well," he replied,
"I don't think that any job
is interesting all the time, do you?
My god, this one gets boring at times,
believe me."

From where I was sitting,
it was easy to believe.

He pushed back his chair
and went to the door.
"I'll tell you what," he said,
"I'll take a look
and see what's on the books this week.
We don't get many jobs in art.
I may have to send you to our city branch.
They get more of that sort of thing."
He opened the door,
and stepped out.

I heard him say
to the young man with the beard,
"He wants an artistic job."

There was a noise
that might have been a laugh.

16 Above me, two flies were flitting

around the lampshade.
I could hear them buzz
in the lull of the traffic.

"I've looked around
and there's not a thing,"
said G. Jackson suddenly.

He took an expensive pen
from his top jacket pocket
and wrote out an address.

"If you go along there tomorrow,
I'm sure they will try to help you
as much as I have.
Advertising jobs —
it's not my department, old son.
I'm sure they will be more use to you."

He was beginning to bluster.
He hadn't been able to make me take
a job in a metal box factory,
and I had held my ground.

And that was it.
I thanked him and shook his hand
and was out in the street again.

Not a hostile or unhelpful place really.
But at sixteen
they wash their hands of you.

17



You are in the grown-up world then.

It was hot outside,
but not so stuffy.

Maybe there were others,
friends or relations,
who might know of a job.

I did not have to rely
on the Careers Office.

I was not helpless.

18 I wondered which bus to catch home.

Other new adult readers

The Good Old Bad Old Days: An elderly woman, Lil Smith, remembers a typical Saturday of her childhood in working class East London. Her story is told with warmth and humour. 30p paperback.

George and the Bus: The story of what happens one day when George decides not to go to the factory and stays on the bus. He rediscovers the countryside and memories of his childhood, and asks himself a lot of questions. Illustrated with line drawings. 35p paperback.

Please note: Any of these books may be obtained in sets of 10 for £3 a set including postage.

We always welcome readers' comments on these books and suggestions for new topics. These should be addressed to Ken Worhole, Centreprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.

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"The Interview" is the third in a series of large print reading books for new adult readers. The books are written by working people from their own experiences.

In this short story, Roger Mills describes some of the problems involved in leaving school and finding a job – or choosing a career. Roger Mills is now 22 years old and works in an office which designs leaflets and posters. He is a very active member of the Basement Writers, a group of working class writers who meet every week in Stepney. He is also involved in the work of Centerprise in his free time.

Alan Gilbey, who did the drawings for this book, also lives in East London, and is a member of the Basement Writers. Alan, who is 18, also writes and is just about to have a book of poems published.

30p

