

SNAPSHOT

‘Juning in her garden, Bantayan, 2018’,  
by Caroline Irby

*Someone Else’s Mother* is the story of two families: that of British photographer Caroline Irby and that of her nanny Juning, who left her four children in the Philippines in 1977 to find work abroad. She ended up staying in London for nearly three decades, and Irby’s thoughtful photo essay explores the impact of a mother’s departure through family albums and new portraits, as well as conversations with Juning and her now grown-up children.

For Irby, the journey is bittersweet. “As an adult and a mother myself, the notion that Juning lived apart from her children for three decades is painful to imagine,” she writes. Yet the pair’s own relationship clearly transcended its transactional origins, and the connection she forms with her quasi “siblings” leads to a more complex picture of separation and inequality.

Chris Allnutt

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Rishi Sunak: cometh the hour, cometh the brand

Jo Ellison  
Trending



Imagine David and Goliath. We’re the slingshot,” reads the blurb for The Clerkenwell Brothers, the London-based creative agency co-founded in 2016 by siblings Cass and Nick Horowitz. With a roster of clients that include a beetroot crisp manufacturer and the vegan cake brand Oggs, whose magic ingredient derives from chickpea water, their mission statement sounds like fairly average bluster in the business of disruption. But it adds a certain frisson to the narrative when you realise that Cass Horowitz has spent the past three months placing his slingshot into the hands of the chancellor of the exchequer.

Appointed in April by the Tory strategist Dominic Cummings, Horowitz has been charged with transforming Rishi Sunak’s public image among young, digital-friendly voters, mostly via social media posts featuring pithy political slogans in catchy graphic fonts. It’s helped to affirm Sunak’s public appearance as a bright-eyed youngster — independent, responsible and cool-headed under pressure. So far the efforts have been rewarded. Throughout the course of the pandemic, in which the leadership has staggered, smiling Sunak has emerged as odds-on favourite to be next in Number 10.

To be fair, Sunak is a gift of a branding opportunity. Suave, trim, with a Trudeau-esque barnet and the ability to pull off a hoodie with some degree of charm, the 40-year-old politician has an easy glamour that even a quite advanced search on Google images can do little to confound. Blessed with almost zero visibility before his appointment, Sunak has quickly cultivated a sartorial signature — inky suiting, super-narrow tie, foreshortened trousers — that befits

a modern leader. While other members of the cabinet appear fusty, frayed and frantic, Sunak glides among them looking like a Disney prince.

Of course, as pointed out by this paper, Sunak’s popularity of late has owed much to his new role in playing Covid Santa Claus, skipping through the dales of economic meltdown while dispensing billions in rescue packages, kickstarter handouts and — this week — cheaper meals.

Presumably Sunak has plucked the cash he is showering upon us from the secret orchard of money trees wherein he gets his headshots done: dozens of stage-managed social-media posts that

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find him striding through verdant backdrops, eyes evading the camera, face towards the sun. This week’s announcement that he was bailing out the arts industry with “a world-leading £1.57bn rescue package” was accompanied by a picture of the chancellor looking Puckish in a blurry sylvan glade. The words “we stand together” were typed in neon pink across his forehead, while his handwritten signature was stamped in the bottom of the frame.

Even for those familiar with brand Sunak, it was a little disconcerting. At first, I thought he might be the lead in one of those Sunday-evening films starring a British dame discovering a secret passion for ballroom dancing. Someone else suggested that he recalled an award-winning vintner behind a new artisanal wine.

Yet, despite the good-guy persona, I find something slightly jarring in the tone of Sunak’s brand. He may prefer the Princess Diana coy-eye for the camera, but he’s still pretty comfortable suggesting every big decision has been accomplished entirely on his own. In particular, the ever-ready Sunak signature reminds me of Donald Trump waving his nib about while signing executive orders. It’s a bravura bit of showboating from a politician who is not actually running a campaign. Or is he? As many have observed this week, Sunak’s prime ministerial ambitions are becoming more transparent by the day.

Or perhaps the signature is simply a phenomena of modern politicking? In the US, Joe Biden has finally started ramping up a campaign on social media that also puts his name on legislation and policy he plans to pass. It’s a tactic designed to feel more personal: with this digital signature, one’s name becomes one’s bond.

But you would think that putting your name so boldly on all financial policy during a period of mass unemployment and instability might be foolhardy for Sunak, the man most accountable if his kickstarter fails to sail. It makes me wonder who exactly is dispensing the advice that’s guiding him? Building such a powerful cult of personality might be a product of youthful chutzpah, but Sunak’s confidence might be a mis-step in a convoluted game.

Boris Johnson meanwhile, has been strangely dormant on the front bench as his young protégé steps up. But beware the slumberer. Brand Sunak is growing ever more powerful. But who is David, who the slingshot, and who Goliath here?

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In praise of chippiness

Janan Ganesh

Citizen of nowhere



A new book about an old thing: the sack of Rome. Few records survive of the Visigoth culprit Alaric (well, if you will destroy a literate culture . . .) but the historian Douglas Boin knows enough to clear up some misapprehensions.

*Alaric the Goth* is not about a grunting primitive from the soggy forests. No, this is a Latin-speaker who longs for nothing so much as to be Roman. He fights for the emperor but to no great thanks. He is tantalised with imperial postings that are eventually denied him. Even mid-siege, he is open to being bought off with high office. One snub too many, and he and his mob show the Eternal City to be fleeting.

The book strains for relevance (Alaric is a “talented immigrant”) but it understands what drives personal success far better than modern treatises on management and self-help. That is, it understands the power of an inferiority complex. What the English call “chippiness” is as potent a source of motivation as exists in life. And the least celebrated. At close quarters, I have seen it drive lots of unremarkable people to the apex of electoral politics and business. I have then seen the same careers — most credulously in business — written up as feats of “passion”, “optimism” and a “desire to change things”.

The modern view seems to be that success flows from our virtues. It is there in the bookshelves that creak under volumes of Oprah-ish life advice. It is there in the internet’s gooey trove of motivational videos. The trouble is

that success also flows from our sourness and resentment. That ambition is often a dark thing — negative energy put to good use — goes under-discussed in a culture otherwise obsessed with how winners win.

The strange thing is that vivid case studies are all around us. And over us. Today’s ruling populists are eerily Alaric-like. If liberal elites were half as sly as billed, they would have defanged their enemies long ago with the equivalent of Roman citizenship. Manhattan’s salons would have welcomed in Donald Trump, the better

Inferiority complexes have driven unremarkable people to the apex of politics and business

to soothe his bridge-and-tunnel grievances. A seat in parliament, which Nigel Farage has sought seven times, an almost heart-rending number, would have been brokered for him across some Islingtonian dining table.

No doubt there is more to populism than the hurt feelings of a few social also-rans. The modern creed was more or less shaped by the French shopkeeper Pierre Poujade, who did not pine by the doormat for society invitations. It is just that its most successful exponents of late are nothing like him. What drives them can seem more personal than doctrinal.

Politics has always known the type —

Richard Nixon founded an underdog fraternity at college — but it is even more prevalent in business. Put about by *The Social Network*, the embittered-wallflower theory of what drives Mark Zuckerberg is probably too much. It is hard to spend time in and around tech, though, without meeting people who waited through school and university to become popular. Great wealth, rather than public office, is their means of redress. But redress is what it is.

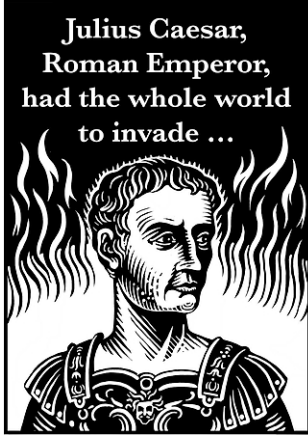
As the examples accumulate, still the industry devoted to life advice tends to gloss over the uses of resentment. To that extent, it misleads. The “traits of successful people”, if compiled honestly, has to go beyond the righteous virtues. As a personal feature, chippiness is unattractive. As a source of energy, it is irreplaceable. Those who learn to harness it will always bestride public and private life.

I don’t write any of this with analytic distance. It was chippiness that pushed me as a younger person and the gradual loss of it that promises to slow me down. In a sense, the improvement of my character is deleterious for my career. To be at ease with one’s place in the world is a wonderful thing, but also inhibiting. Of all the highest-flyers I have encountered up close, precisely one, David Cameron, has seemed entirely free of any social resentment whatever. In the end, perhaps a bit more of the stuff might have focused the mind. An “Outsider’s History” is how Boin describes his book about Alaric. History is seldom anyone else’s.

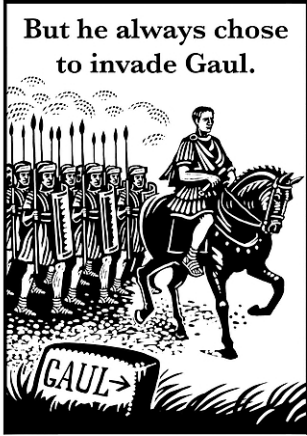
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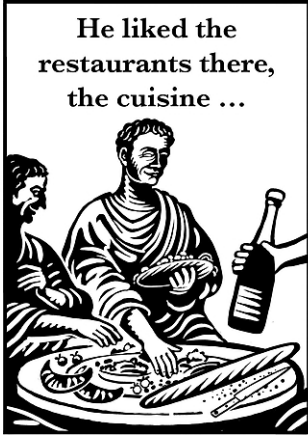
Tiny Tales by Alexander McCall Smith Illustrated by Gavin McIntosh



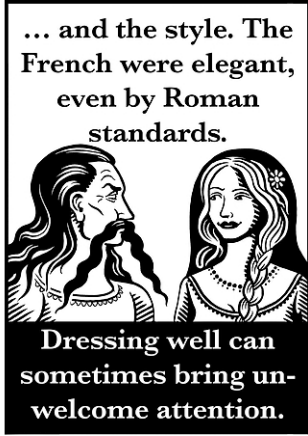
Julius Caesar, Roman Emperor, had the whole world to invade ...



But he always chose to invade Gaul.



He liked the restaurants there, the cuisine ...



... and the style. The French were elegant, even by Roman standards.

Dressing well can sometimes bring unwelcome attention.

Chess solution 2375 1 e6! Qc1+ (if Qxg3? 2 Rxd8 mate) 2 Kh2 Rxd4 3 e7! Qc8 3 Qe5! Rh4+ 4 Kg3 and Black resigned faced with the double threat Qg7 mate and e8Q+. 1.Rc5 and 1.hxg6 are slower wins



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