

We could call up Marilyn Monroe

How delightful to be able to call someone from the past, send a cab round for Vermeer say, bring him in for a few questions such as *you know the map on the wall on one of your last pictures*, was that your idea or did you have a sponsor who wanted it, and how do you like being back among the living for the day, the encounter would open up there and then, and pretty quickly a deal would be made, that would only be fair, a few questions in exchange for well, you name it, another look at the sky after all this time, a walk in the woods, the sight of a radiant smile on a face of astonishing beauty, yes, we could call up Marilyn Monroe or Julius Caesar, fly them in, apologise for the confusions, the flabbergasting bewilderment of air travel cars trains the internet the strange smells in the air the absence of silence the altered sounds of the language even the upheavals in fashion and make it up to them immediately *telling the truth and avoiding rash promises* before asking what it was like for them, back then, losing their virginities, nursing a child, chatting to Mozart, we'll be allowing each celebrity to pass on one tip drawn from what they learned in their lives, what did you do to have a good time, what was it like, and grandfather of mine, what was it like in China, I know you were there *how did you live in Cardiff when your mind still contained China*, I went to other places you saw, Valparaiso for example, a ghost of yours moved about the hillside over the harbour but the rest, wait, Julius Caesar's tip has just come in, it's being translated, this is like breaking news, he says *The obstacle is the way*, in return for his tip questions have been traded and in the end he has asked to meet Marilyn Monroe, his translator relays with a smirk *I always like to push things*, Shakespeare meanwhile has asked for a faster route to be set down for between Southwark and Stratford, not Stratford in London but on Avon, Marilyn meanwhile has asked to left alone, preferably after being taken back to her hotel, Bertolt Brecht has come

in too, again being translated, but it turns out he said this enough times before, *It's all right to hesitate if you then go ahead*, prompting Julius Caesar to suggest Bertolt have a flagon of wine poured over his head, there it goes, a woman in blue writing a letter has stepped out of her painting, carefully avoiding brushing against Vermeer as she passes, to mop Bertolt's hair and what little can still be dried, while Vermeer himself has turned to the milkmaid canvas beside him and asked the maid to pour it out over again, the umpteenth time this morning, so he can paint in a line of *seventeenth-century milk*, while the attempt to get Elvis has foundered, he can't come over just now, he's all shook up not to be able to make it, never mind because here comes the Sun King now, stepping out of his Uber having noticed straight away someone must have ripped all the mirrors off everywhere, what use is a place without mirrors he wants to know, was that person Spanish he's asking *delightful to summon someone from the past, yes, but there's no controlling these people*, Julius wants him to shut up, saying it's no good framing a question in a way that is patently stupid, now David Hockney is stepping in offering them both a Gauloise, untipped, ah Johannes he's saying, having just seen Vermeer coming out of the hastily erected loo, they shake hands, the Sun King lights up and splutters, now mother of mine, you were good at midwifery, I'd like to know if, at those coffee mornings, you ever once referred back to your midwifery days, what happened to them, I expect you yourself might have had a question or two for Henry the Eighth, who couldn't be got hold of by the way, God knows where he's gone, Marilyn meanwhile has asked to go to Dublin for the day, partly to see how the streets square with the action in Ulysses, and if James Joyce happens to be there she'd be glad to meet him for a martini, she's heard House Dublin in Leeson Street is a nice quiet place to meet, it's expected Aer Lingus will find her a seat, she'd prefer a window, saying *Well I hardly want to go down the aisle again just yet do I*, elsewhere things are getting a little heated, Johannes and David are discussing Michelangelo *and the difficulties in painting ceilings* while the Sun King,

overhearing, has been translated as saying *Who the fuck's that*, and the woman in blue who was writing the letter has dashed over from Bertolt to try and save the carpet from the scorch marks still smoldering, left by a Gauloise, it seems the drink poured over Bertolt Brecht contains some nasty berry juice, she is asking for Florence Nightingale to be sent over right away and this time the response doesn't need translating, it's the same as before, Florence has said she'll drop everything and be right there, her cab has enough room for Catherine the Great and Virginia Woolf so they're coming too, Boudica will make her own way independently, Elvis is re-thinking *it's getting late mind you*, there, the all-important clock has struck, and when—one layer of clothes too many—she works out how to free herself from the revolving doors—Shakespeare's running over to help—well if it isn't Cinderella, and she's decided to call it a day.