



# Stewart Lee

## Chronicle of May's fiasco foretold in a urine stain

It's 8.29am on Friday now and I have to file this column in two hours 31 minutes. I awoke at 6am, to watch the bloody election results coagulate, in a hotel room in Tunbridge Wells, a town so solidly middling it has been twinned with a branch of Carluccio's.

But last Sunday, I had seen Chris Martin from Coldplay coveit before a global TV audience of more than 90 nations with a visible urine stain to the right of his fly. Evidently, a poorly self-milked penis, presumably his own, had made damp contact with the inner side of his trouser.

In the runup to the election, commentators used polls to predict the future. But I felt I had divined something of the unexpected flavour of our forthcoming fate from my own little set of signs and wonders. On Friday of last week, I found a mummified newt beneath a Frisbee in the nook where I store rakes, betokening woe. The following day, I saw Tom Stoppard staring hungrily at soup in Norfolk, prefiguring a light lunch. And on Sunday, I saw Chris Martin from Coldplay, with a urine stain on his trousers.

Mark E Smith of the Fall appeared at Glastonbury in 2015 in apparently urine-soaked slacks, but I believe this was a deliberate piece of stagecraft, designed to provide fans with a comical anecdote, and detractors with confirmation of their prejudices. Such is Smith's commitment to his shaman-clown persona.

Chris Martin from Coldplay's urine stain, however, was all too real, and indeed it was hard to imagine how a liquid so base as urine could mark the garments of a man who seems almost angelic, as if woven from lamb's wool and light.

The stain was an omen, certainly, but what did it mean? Was the urine stain of the Tories going to remain on the Chris Martin from Coldplay's trouser of British politics for some time yet? Or did Chris Martin from Coldplay's spreading urine stain portend a spread of hope and sunshine? Either way, it was all yellow.

Tunbridge Wells. What a strange

place to be on this strange morning. The BBC Today programme's editor, Sarah Sands, former editor of the lying Sunday Telegraph and the horrible London Evening Standard, former deputy editor of the lying Daily Telegraph (Britain's worst newspaper), and consultant editor of the often actionably appalling Daily Mail, was born here, and carries its stain with her, the mark of Cain, invalidating her eternally.

Sands's childhood home is visible from my hotel room window, identified by the vast pulsating eye that sits atop its bat-encircled gothic tower, radiating waves of psychic evil out across Middle England. And yet, at 8.29am, it suddenly seems Britain may yet have deflected these very rays. How did Corbyn achieve his miraculous traction in the face of the concentrated bias of British news media?

Yesterday morning, Thursday, I took a massive diversion from a Wednesday night standup show in Colchester (Leave) via my North London Metropolitan Liberal Elite home to vote in my Labour safe seat, a typically British odyssey involving multiple cancelled trains and a bomb scare in Trafalgar Square, where I understand there are now plans to fill the fourth plinth with an uplifting effigy of Chris Martin from Coldplay in urine-stained trousers.

I arrived at my Tunbridge Wells (Remain) hotel at 5pm. The young woman on reception said she wasn't voting at all as "they" were "all as bad as each other". But they aren't. Boris Johnson, for example, himself a lying columnist for the lying Daily Telegraph, is the worst one of "them" all by some distance.

At 6pm on Thursday night, a world away now, I ate soggy salad and found myself thinking about *The Medusa Touch* (1978), arguably Richard Burton's finest movie, in which he plays a tortured writer of fiction whose ability to imagine terrible disasters convinces him he may actually be willing them into being. Lee Remick plays his psychiatrist. And the newsreader

Gordon Honeycombe is, cruelly, cast as an actual piece of honeycomb named Gordon.

For the last nine months, like Burton's paranoid novelist, I have been selling the same standup routine nightly to audiences, advancing the idea that the secret Tory steering committee always intended Boris Johnson to be leader of the party, and that Theresa May had only been put in place as a kind of palate cleanser, a nasty-tasting mouthwash that you swirl around your gums before being forced to eat actual human shit.

While he himself is doubtless clean as a whistle, Johnson's renewed public appearances these last few weeks have displayed the violently belligerent and incoherent sweatiness that people with cocaine problems

take as a sign that it's time to stop partying and seek help.

And at 7pm on Thursday, remembering Boris rampant and evidently ambitious once more, a frothing jackal circling the expiring wildebeest that is Theresa May, I found myself fearing my own Medusa Touch. Do my jokes make these awful things happen? Who am I? Should I take this minibar corkscrew and trepan my own brain to stop my worst fears becoming reality?

Alone in my Tunbridge Wells hotel room at midnight, snorting a snow drift of uncut Dimbleby in my post-show adrenaline high, a storm raging over the multistorey car park, I wondered what kind of fudge of an *Observer* column I could concoct to file on Friday morning, when everything was uncertain and it now looked like a hung parliament was in the offing. Luckily I had seen a urine stain on Chris Martin from Coldplay's trousers the previous Sunday and imagined writing about that might fill a few hundred words near the start.

Long after midnight, I ate my Marks & Spencer Harissa Spiced Roasted Almonds and weighed up a half-bottle of champagne in the minibar, that I eventually chose to ignore. I was, literally, if not a Champagne Socialist, then at least a Harissa Spiced Almond Anarchist, alone and on the loose in a hotel room in Royal Tunbridge Wells as the arrogant presumptions of the Conservatives turned to tatters. And it felt good.

I have a show tonight in Basingstoke (Leave) and I'm mentally ticking off lines that are invalidated or changed by the shock result, but I expect the audience will be in a state of hysteria. And look at this joyful chaos! Laura Kusensberg looks like her cat just died. It's 11am on Friday and there's apples all over the road. Emily Maifilis is scrabbling around to pick them up. And in a red dress, of all things.

Stewart Lee is touring his new show, *Content Provider*, throughout 2017; see [stewartlee.co.uk](http://stewartlee.co.uk) for details



ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID FOLDVARI

### SNAPSHOTS Wonder women at large

London-based Ghanaian artist Neequaye Drephe Dsane has been busy adorning the capital's walls with large, beautifully painted images of women of African and Caribbean origin as part of his *You Are Enough* series. The 43-year-old street artist aims to inspire and celebrate "amazing women who are not given the visibility they deserve", by utilising the power of a very public art form to shine a light and empower. "Through the paintings and subjects' backstories (visit [drephe.co.uk](http://drephe.co.uk)), I am paying tribute to ordinary women who do extraordinary work for the betterment of their communities and society," he says.

Marcus Barnes



**HOLLY, COMMERCIAL ROAD, SPITALFIELDS** East Londoner Holly used to work in a care home and uses art and spoken word to advocate healing and empowerment.



**MYVANWY, BRICK LANE** Myvanwy, from Shoreditch, runs a cultural PR company and mentors young people.



**MIMI, SOUTHEY STREET, PENGE** Mimi, from Islington, works as a holistic health consultant and is studying to become a counsellor.