

## *The Distal Segment*

### **Uncle Robert Knows Best**

(In which moths write in with their problems, and our resident Agony Lepidopterist, Uncle Robert, offers the benefit of his hard-won wisdom).

Dear Uncle Robert,  
Here's the thing:  
These silver streaks across my wing!  
I wish they didn't glow so brightly;  
I think they're garish and unsightly  
And also, if the truth be told,  
I'm sure they're making me look old.  
I didn't have them as a looper,  
Nor when I was a fresh young pupa;  
It's only as a full imago  
I've suffered this unlovely cargo.  
So please advise me, Doctor Rob,  
I need a thorough forewing job:  
Is there a way to have them dyed  
Or can I buy a streakicide?  
I'll take them any other colour:  
Though preferably something duller,  
Something more understated, darker,  
Yours,  
Miss Chalastra Aristarcha.

*My dear Chalastra,*  
*Here's two words*  
*You ought to ponder: HUNGRY BIRDS!*  
*I'm sure you wrote that fine epistle*  
*Not from an artichoke or thistle*  
*But rather, as it would appear,*  
*From some tall grove of Cyathea.*  
*Consider this: what could be wronger*  
*Than living in a fern (or ponga)*  
*Amidst pale fronds like silvery sparks*  
*While wearing clothes like Helen Clark's?*  
*It makes no sense. Let me enlarge:*  
*The subject here is CAMOUFLAGE.*  
*Where is the point in looking young,*

*Fresh as a spring that's not yet sprung,  
All unbeset by greys and wrinkles,  
New as the dew the starlight sprinkles,  
Making yourself more lovely, thinner,  
And ending up a Fantail's dinner?  
Your silver stripes are what you need  
To disappoint that birdly greed;  
So please, for heaven's sake, stay wide  
Of Vidal Sassoon's Streakicide:  
Remember as you run life's medley  
All forms of dy(e)ing can be deadly.*

Uncle Robert



Chalastra aristarcha

***Chalastra aristarcha* (Geometridae: Ennominae)**

This exquisite species is fairly common in North Island forests, where it is beautifully camouflaged amongst the fronds of the silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*) on which its larva feeds. The subtlety and sheer romance of the moth are well reflected in the Latin name, which literally translated means.....actually, I think it loses something in the translation.

Dear Uncle Robert,  
Please don't laugh:  
I feel like some reverse giraffe.  
You see, my thorax, head, antennae  
Are modest and compact as any,  
Which would be fine- it's just a pity  
My abdomen is like Sky City.  
If I were longer in the wing,  
I'd cover up the dreadful thing;  
In fact, I've tried the worst contortions  
To change my relative proportions;  
I've worked myself into a lather:  
But still it sticks out that much farther.  
I try to look relaxed, informal-  
It doesn't work; I don't feel normal  
Knowing that everyone can see  
My excess masculinity.  
Could you provide me with instructions  
On who does abdomen reductions?  
It doesn't have to cost a song:  
I've been too long for far too long.  
Yours, from a Tunnel known as Homer,  
Thomas the Ten-Inch Tatosoma.

*Dear Thomas,*  
*This is mere neurosis!*  
*Here is my basic diagnosis:*  
*You have, like Big Ears, friend of Noddy,*  
*An image problem with your body.*  
*To staunch your soul's internal bleeding,*  
*I recommend a little reading.*  
*In Darwin's 'Origin of Species'*  
*You'll find diverse and helpful pieces*  
*On so-called 'sexual selection',*  
*Where females form a predilection*  
*For some adornment of the male:*  
*In your case, Thomas, it's your tail!*  
*You simply need to realize*  
*That in the biased compound eyes*  
*Of luscious female Tatosomae*  
*Your length spells not 'Oh yuk!' but 'Oh my!'*  
*And so, you've nothing left to lose:*  
*Go forth at once and proudly use*  
*Your end for its intended end,*  
*My excellent extensile friend,*  
*And soon I guarantee you'll be*

*World famous in New Zealand, the  
Trichopterygine Casanova  
Who sired a hundred thousand ova,  
Whose progeny Tatosomatic  
Will boast of body-parts dramatic,  
Whom female moths will widely rate  
As Tom the Extra-Elongate!*

*That's plenty of advice from me.  
I'm off to have my ginseng tea.*

*Uncle Robert*



*Tatosoma tipulata*

***Tatosoma tipulata* (Geometridae: Larentiinae)**

This lovely creature is generally distributed throughout the green expanses of New Zealand, where it is beautifully camouflaged almost everywhere. The caterpillar feeds on totara, kamahi, beech and other such dainty morsels. Note the excessively long abdomen of the male moth (pictured): this is doubtless an example of sexual selection, and is irresistible to the female, who has an abdomen of normal length. The splendour and sheer magic of the moth are hardly done justice by the Latin name, which literally translated means “Long body like crane-fly”.

Dr Robert Hoare, December 2004

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