

With 27

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weird insight

you wear clouds inside out
and the rain is a crystal
it falls
it melts
into the concrete

you're trying to drop again
the librarian is cleaning up next to you
she looks like a she-wolf
and there are cameras everywhere

wear the sun black
and the moon green
you could give the night an STD
use foul language
tell him
you're a waste of time

your fingers hurt
your back is sore
you've been crying all day
and smiling at the kids on the news
half-eaten by a bomb

you are welcome
to another piece of sky
you are welcome to forge it
eat it
die in it.

The Spindle

- Speak nothing of blind meaning.
- Look out for a stranger {soon seen as a friend}.
- Take no superstition to chance
- Focus of breath. Sense her falling.
- And always remember to look up.

Her Body;

Like the skeletal webs of a silver leaf
Sketched beneath her shawl
 her skirt shall soon be torn
 by teeth undressing whispers
 along her neck.

Come see her sitting on a ledge,
 outside her door
 Singing to herself in a silent
 but stunning nervousness

♪ along a smoke-lit street,
 across the Cornish coastline
 flakes of flame
fall before
 an Autumn sun

Sinking spindles from her eyes
 alight tonight
weeping soon **Smiling**
 forever changing time

She feels suffocated by urgency.

And a season is shifting all around her:

She is calling someone over

Someone to undress her

Myself, I find her lonely.

A holiness of vulnerability,

without a serpent stare of vanity.

But snared into this certainty

that I will bring her blindly into me

Again. *And never again.*

Some Fridges (Can Be So Intolerant)

The cigarette packet looked at him accusingly. He ignored it. He was fed up to the back teeth with having to justify his every action to bloody inanimate objects. Why wouldn't they leave him alone?

Only this morning, he'd had to explain to the electric toothbrush that he wouldn't be home too late, promise the washing up liquid that he would give it a squeeze at some point in the next day or two and then, to cap it all, the fridge had demanded – yes, demanded – that he read it the first chapter of the new Zadie Smith before bedtime if it came in the post.

'Yes' he had heard himself saying, 'yes I will be home before seven, I will do some washing up at some point this evening and – YES – I will read the Zadie Smith as long as the letterbox doesn't have yet another tantrum and refuse to open when the postman calls, like last week.'

He put on his coat, which was silent as it was still sulking about not being taken on the walk in the country on Sunday that 'everyone else went on' (its words, but it knew it was far too hot for coats) and dashed down the steps and away from the house before anything else had the chance to try and make his life a misery. Again.

The parking meter nearest his house said 'That was a bit mean' as he walked by and he considered telling it to 'Fuck off' but he didn't want them all to go on and on and on, all the way to work, so he simply ignored it. Luckily, he didn't see it stick its tongue out at the back of his head as he passed, otherwise he would have wasted another twenty minutes trying to bludgeon an apology from it.

Nearing the office, he lit a last cigarette and slowed down in order to arrive at the door at exactly the moment that the cigarette was finished. As he walked, he, the lighter and the accusing cigarette packet had a lively discussion about the morning's news – could it really be true that Mrs May and Mr Farage had jointly owned and managed the only strip-joint in Penge in the 1980s?

Cigarette packet thought it sounded extremely unlikely but the other two were certain that it must be exactly as reported.

The working day seemed to fly by, he enjoyed his work and his equipment was unusually co-operative. He was working on a new corporate bedroom design for Travelodge and even his 2B pencil thought his overall style and direction was ‘on the button.’ Yes, it was certainly a good day.

Back home by 6.30pm, his tea was cooked and he was in front of the television by 7.00. (Both hob and toaster were unable to restrain some criticism – he had indeed had beans on toast for three days in a row now – but they both knew that they shouldn’t go too far for two reasons: first, because they knew that he really enjoyed beans on toast and second, because they both knew that he couldn’t cook anything else, even when the oven or microwave read him recipes or instructions).

Tea finished, he was just dosing as Alex Jones welcomed him to *The One Show*: ‘Tonight, we ask: “Shouldn’t we have more respect for our tyres when they are too worn to be roadworthy?” We speak to just such a tyre that was shamelessly thrown into the Manchester Ship Canal when it’s car failed an MOT. She now leads a campaign to rehome old tyres in specially built compounds in the countryside. Stay with us as we take you on this surprising and heart-warming journey into the life of old tyres.’

He was drifting off once more when a voice from the kitchen brought him back to full consciousness:

‘Oi. Oi you out there, come in here, I want to talk to you.’ It was fridge calling him. He went out to the kitchen, as requested.

‘Yes?’

‘Did that book come today? I heard the letterbox clack. Something came.’

‘Afraid not – just some bills and stuff. It’ll be here tomorrow.’

‘Well, I’m bored. Read me something?’

‘I guess we could carry on with *The Master and Margarita* although not everybody liked it.’

‘Yeah’ said fridge. ‘S’better than nothing.’

He read well – he’d had plenty of practice – but not everyone could stay awake: the plate rack uttered little snuffles and the

bread-bin snored loudly enough for several of the plates to giggle uncontrollably. 'Shush' he said 'You'll spoil it for the others.'

He turned the page: 'Cat said...' the sentence began. Fridge let out a loud 'Humph!' waking everyone.

'What bollocks!' he exclaimed. 'A talking cat! Tosh! I can't listen to that!'

St Mary's Church, Penzance
or
How I came to love 'The Drama'

In those days
(Before the fire)
The altar
Towered
Twenty feet
Thirty feet
(and in my memory,
fifty feet)
Above
The floor of the sanctuary.

A white centrepiece
The backdrop to the altar
Rose in a blinding, scalloped triangle.
On either side:
Penzance
In the 'Newlyn' style
Ernest Procter
1886 to 1935.
To the left,
The dome of Market House
To the right
The church itself
And
Flying above it all
Six angels
Three north, three south,
Blowing trumpets.
Thin, sinuous, trumpets

Baroque trumpets
Fanfaring 'Good News'
All across the town.

Below
But not oblivious

Father Sargisson
Transformed,
Transmogrified
Into Jesus himself.

Take.

Eat.

Voice dropped
Almost a whisper
For you and you alone.
Constrained,
And then volume again as he
Pushed the narrative forward.
'And when he had...'

Every Sunday.
Without fail.

So Corinthians 1
Chapter 11, Verses 23
24 and 25
Were my teacher
'Here is a lesson in drama'
All you need to know
But it needed

A good interpreter,
A man with a feel
For a story
To make it live,
To make it alive.
To put it into your head
Where it has stayed
For fifty years or more

Red

She was red
haired and bad tempered.
Fists clenched
dripping tap blood
ink spilled
love.

Some like it hot
Mexican restaurant heat
wave. In December
she stood
out in
snow.

Cherry cheeks swollen
with crimson peaks
from unwrapped treats
dated 14th of
February.

He gave her a rose
said it matched her
lips. She bit
down on them
cried Wolf-
Gang.

She liked the way
coke made her feel
all fizzed up
tasting the happiness.

Santa took her
off his list
she hadn't written
him since
1996.

The devils in the
details but
she refuses
to give out her
number anymore.

Left a note
on his mirror
scarlet red letter
'don't call me
baby.'

bloodshot eyes
she cried
sold her
diamond
but kept her
ruby.

Screaming Stone

Suddenly, its mighty hand reached to grasp my head. It was going to crush it, like a man would crush a grape. I was no match for its size, its strength or its tenacity. My only advantage over this witless giant was my speed and intelligence. I deftly dodged its grapple and fell to the floor; rolling to the side, I managed to regain my footing. It simply turned to look at me, like a rotating doll's head, its mouth was slightly ajar, and its eyes were hollow sockets. Instinctively, and with little time to waste, I tumbled towards a door and rushed inside, bolting it behind me. I heard the faint *thunk* of its feet hitting my marble floor, and fast approaching me. I had no time to barricade the door, so I sprinted down the corridor. Rows of doors litter each side, yet I knew that all were locked, and that they contain nothing but dusty furniture.

I heard a sound like a boulder slamming against a tree. It took three, exact, methodical punches to the turn the door into nought but sawdust and splinters. The golem charged through it. I continued sprinting, as fast as I could muster, but still it hunted me down. At the end of the corridor, there was a stairwell, much like a tower turret, that I could fit through, but my pursuer could not and I reached it just in time, to see it curling its great stone arm around the stairwell in an attempt to grab me. There was no way that heap of hulking stone could follow me, it would have to find an alternate route. Though I couldn't stay in there either; it destroyed the door and would have no qualms destroying the stairwell either. This thing wanted me dead, by any means necessary. Ascending the stairs is my only option.

The only sounds I heard then were the pounding of my heart and the quickness of my breath. I could not exit this isolated place through the front door. It would catch me with ease across the excessively large lawn. I continued at a steady pace, running would have alerted it to my presence, and I need my stamina for in case it does find me. My plan was to reach the roof, so that perhaps I could scale down the front of the mansion and be away before it descends the stairs in pursuit.

I reached an unused yet unlocked room. Behind me was the hardwood door I just came through, to my side was a simpler, smaller wooden door and ahead of me was a rather elegant door with symbols of trees and ivy carved into its face. In this complex web of corridors and rooms I was on the east side. The central stairs, where that loutish mountain had to ascend, are an age away. The mansion was massive. It would take it days to search every room for me; it'll be impossible to find me in time. Taking heart in this I casually open the elegant door.

An earth-wrenching CRASH broke me from my fantasy. Splinters, dust, rubble and drywall filled the air as the silent assailant stood in the midst of the chaos. Reacting like a rabbit I shot through the door. In my haste I forgot to close it behind me. I sprinted so hard that I could feel my shins develop splints with every step, yet still I pressed on. It seemed like I could outrun it but its stride was twice my own, and there was still a third of the corridor to go. The rhythmic slams of its feet were getting closer and louder. I could feel its breathless face mere inches from the back of my head. In a split second decision I crashed through a nearby locked door, which shattered instantly, probably from the neglect. I readjusted my plan and clambered out a nearby window, the pursuing horror not far behind.

Upwards I climbed, ignoring the piercing sound of stone fingers penetrating the decrepit old mansion. It was climbing, but not at a pace that matched my deft and skilled scrambling. Finally, I reached the top and ascended over the upmost point of the mansion and slid down the filthy shingles to the front flat roof. Preparing to climb down, I finally turn to behold my relentless pursuer. It stood on the point I had only just passed, its sheer size and weight crushing the roof and splintering the wooden supports. It was a golem, a stone servant modelled like a man, designed to be a servant, and endowed with the strength beyond any mortal. Its task is always carried out, and its task was to kill the thief. Clumsily, it descended to the flat of the roof where I was, I had no time to orient myself correctly. I decided vehemently, I will die on my own terms, not this abomination's.

Seemingly unaware of my intent, it made a foolish error and quickened its pace to reach me. Suddenly, the roof gave way and I and it found ourselves falling. I grasped immediately onto a broken beam, and held on like a baby possum to its mother. I looked at it fall. Its empty eye sockets seemed to lock onto me and its mouth was wide open in a silent scream. I noticed it had a chance to save itself too, it could've grabbed a metal girder, pulled itself up and continued the chase. I would have been defenceless. Instead, its last action was to grasp at the air, in a futile gesture to capture me, as if it was unaware of the distance. Falling three stories, straight through the middle of the central stairs, it smashed against the marble floor, leaving only paper scraps and stone rubble.

Tell Tall Tails

Tales are long
yes
sometimes
well
every time
sleep-stories are not
an agenda
truth be told.
Tails are short.
Not nearly
half as interesting
no chauvinistic knights
in bucket-shining
glory.
Nope.
No flag waving.
Flowing,
swaying
breeze of déjà vu.
A lovely
jubbly
neat little package
named childhood.
Neat.
Neatness tells of
something swept
away.
Something dead;
a fantasy killing
itself.
Dragons have tails
and tales are

things that are made
 real
 and unreal.
Question how you crawled
 from your day,
jaws, opening skulls,
 dropping in elation, frustration?
 Home video,
 the real story...
 It feels cheap,
 cheated.
That's not how we
 remembered the tale.

The Ant Farm

'Fancy anurra round?'

'Ye no had enough?'

'Well ah cannae go hame yet. Ahm in the fuckin' doghouse, amn't ah?'

'Christ, Angie ragin' again?'

'Aye.'

'Wit did ye even dae?'

'Ah telt 'er aff fur spennin' ma money on shite.'

'Wit, drink?'

'Naw.'

'Jesus, drugs?'

'Naw, naw, nothin' like that.'

'Wit then?'

'Well, she bought the wean an ant farm.'

'A wit?'

'An ant farm.'

'The fuck she dae that fir?'

'Reckoned it'd learn 'im tae be responsible.'

'An' did it?'

'Naw.'

'Naw?'

'Naw.'

'How naw?'

'They aw died.'

'The wean no feed them?'

'Naw. Ah telt Angie he widnae be interested but when 'er mind's set oan an idea, she disnae listen, ye ken?'

'Och, aye... So wit, they jis' ran oot o' food an' that wis that?'

'Naw. They jis' kept oan watchin' the wean an' waitin' fur 'im tae feed 'em, up against the glass giein' 'im pure scunnered looks, like. An' aifter a couple o' days ah reckon they wisid up that 'e wisnae gonnnae feed 'em, so they started growin' their own.'

‘Wit d’ye mean?’

‘They started growin’ crops, like. Tiny wee cabbages an’ barley an’ aw.’

‘Wit they dae that fir?’

‘Well, they wanted tae be self-sufficient.’

‘Och, we all dae.’

‘Aye. An’ aifter a while they worked oot that the mair crops they could turn o’er, the mair food they’d have, so they started tae mechanise the farmin’ process.’

‘Makes sense.’

‘Aye. That’s when the wean thought tae mention it tae me. ‘Cause the wee motors were keepin’ ’im wauken oan school nights.’

‘An’ ye put an end tae them?’

‘Naw, naw. See, these big, commercial harvesters started springin’ up like fuckin’ mad. Ye couldnae see hauf the glass box fir the fumes.

‘Jesus.’

‘Aye. Plenty o’ ants wurny too chuffed aboot that. They were aifter wantin’ to grow the auld way, you ken? Jis’ plantin’ the seeds wi’ their hauns. ‘Some o’ them were even aifter sabotagin’ the equipment, stickin’ tatties up exhaust pipes an’ aw. It wisnae a good example fir the wean.’

‘Naw?’

‘Naw. Ye remember that fuckin’ Rangers-Hibs game last season?’

‘Aye?’

‘It wis like that. Aw tear gas an’ horses an’ riot polis. ‘Fore ah kent it, ’t wis The Troubles aw o’er again.’

‘Wit, the ants wanted a united Ireland?’

‘Naw, I mean there were wee dirt tunnels collapsin’ fae pipe bombs on a daily basis. Angie paid the windscreen repair folk tae come an’ reinforce the box an’ aw.’

‘Premier windcreens?’

‘Naw.’

‘Ah’d’ve goan tae Premier. Better value for money, ah reckon.’

'Aye, mibbe. The glass oan the box held up jis' fine in any case.'

'Held up against wit, though?'

'Couldnae tell ye whither 't wis the government or the rebels, but the ants got a hold o' a dirty bomb sometime in the night, an' when we aw woke up the poor wee cunts were deid.'

'Away an' fuck.'

'Aye. Wan o' the tractors wis still burnin' in the mornin'. It set aff the feekin' smoke alarm.'

'Wis the wean upset?'

'The wean? Naw, he disnae even like ants.'

'He disnae?'

'Naw, he fuckin' hates 'em. But when Angie gets an idea in 'er heid she's no gonnae listen tae reason.'

'Ye should tell 'er that.'

'Ah did. That's why ahm in the doghouse.'

[untitled]

She talked about how
life is so much more than words
and then I knew

A Life Sentence

I am aware of the whispering voices as they flutter around me. Voices I recognise, yet I'm unable to decipher what each of them are saying as they blend into a single muffled sound. The sterile smell of the hospital greets my sensitive nostrils. Hospitals have a distinct odour, I found, over the many times I have frequented the crunchy beds. Not quite a bleach or disinfectant, but clean none the same. My eyes struggle to open, as if they have been forever sealed like a sarcophagus, depriving me of one last look at the loved ones waiting to say their final goodbyes; that is why they are here. A vile entity within my bowel has eaten me alive, but it is no more than I deserve. The powerful drugs fed intravenously through a small plastic tube and into the back of my hand masks the unbearable pain just enough to stop the tears.

My dignity has been involuntarily removed as young ladies care for my every need. I know it is their chosen profession, their life choice, but it is not mine. I did not request to be this shrivelled bag of bones that they attempt to make as comfortable as they can in these darkest of my days. At the beckoning of a button they come running, unsure of what they will be greeted by in this pile of crumpled sheets. There is no honour in stubbornly dragging out your final breath, but they insist on making me suffer instead of allowing me to slip away peacefully. If I stop breathing they will ventilate me. If my heart holds up a little white flag and surrenders it is ignored, and beaten back by volts of electricity until it thumps again. I am almost ready to defeat the age of advanced medicine and a world that is alien to me with its computer technology, but there is one more thing I must do before I am able rest in peace. A burden is a terrible thing to carry through life, which is temporary, but taking it with you to the grave, is eternal.

With effort, I flicker my eyes, the lashes tickle as they touch before opening. At first everything is a blur. Bright white lights make me want to shield my eyes, but I am too weak to defend myself against the raging glare. 'Turn the lights down.' I hear a

gentle voice whisper near the foot of the bed. It is not a voice familiar to me, a new nurse maybe, but one who has recognised my predicament with the light. As the light dims I realise I have been straining my neck to lift my head from the pillow, and as I relax it sinks into its softness. I allow my eyes to roam and see several pitiful faces staring back at me, expectantly. My three children. Oh how I still adore them as if they were babes perched upon my younger knee. I am proud of them. My two boys, grown up, fathers and grandfathers themselves try to put on a brave face, but I know them too well and they will shed their tears when the time comes. My girl, my precious little baby girl, even with a head of grey hair she will always be my angel. Unlike the boys, she cannot hold back the tears as they roll freely down the creases of her cheeks before dripping onto the crisp white sheets. Everything is white in hospital, sterile.

‘Hello, dad,’ she says, her voice almost cracking before she finishes. I feel her squeeze my hand as I let out a slow breath and offer her a flimsy smile. It is mirrored immediately, if slightly forced. I hear the boys speak, almost interrupting one another as I feel a hand sweep across my head, while another gently rubs the forearm draped across my shrunken belly.

With every breath, that sterile smell slips up my nose. I know this is the last thing I will ever smell and it saddens me.

My eyes open wide, and my sight is not what it once was, but it is enough to see what I need to see... my loved ones. All except my precious wife, whom we shed many tears for over a decade ago, and whom I will meet again soon.

‘My children, my gorgeous children. I want you to know how much I love you, and how very proud I am of each of you.’ Again I smile as my eyes steer to each one in turn, yet so hard to keep my sadness within.

‘Shhhh.’ My little angel whispers back, pressing a finger to my dry lip.

‘Thank you sweetheart,’ I croak back. ‘But there is something that has weighed heavily on my shoulders since all before you were born. A confession I must make before you here on this

bed.’ The words don’t come easily and it takes time for them to roll off my parched tongue, but never the less, come they do. I still feel the touch from each of them as I relax and concentrate on every word.

It’s hot, very hot, and the afternoon sun is relentless as it threatens to cook us alive, blistering our skin before we are aware of its potency. There’s no sunscreen on the front line to protect us from burning, and our cotton shirts are soaked with sweat. In the evening when they dry out, they go hard and crusty because of the salt and it feels like sandpaper brushing against our tender skin, but there is little choice as the nightly chill allows us no grace of being comfortable.

The ground is baked and flawed with cracks that expand by the day and form trenches almost deep enough for us to take cover from the shells that land here daily from the German artillery. The high pitched whistles of the mortars are the first indication our day is going from bad to worse. Our ears are finely tuned to these banshees that scream in our direction, and we instinctively dive into the nearest shell scrape, which is nothing more than a square three-foot hole dug in the ground, taking scabs off our already skinned limbs as we land.

Plumes of dust erupt turning the air into brown fog as the mortars from the Gerry front explode around us. A call of “Gas, Gas, Gas” is heard from another shell scrape. The fog creates confusion and could easily be mistaken for gas. I close my eyes and hold my breath whilst fumbling around my waist for my gas mask. Blind, but composed, I find what I am groping for and pull it free from its carry sack with urgency and slip it over my head, breathing out heavily and completely emptying my lungs. My mouth is just as dry as the dehydrated landscape, but I will live for the time being. The grit on my tongue will have to stay where it is and roll around until the all clear sounds; annoying, but nothing more.

Lifting my head above the protection of dried earth parapet to try and make any sense of what is going on and waiting for the

all clear to remove these wretched masks. The heat is unbearable enough without having to slowly suffocate. A damp mist appears on the inside of the lenses and begins to restrict my view. I can see very little and wait for someone to call a false alarm, but instead I hear something much more fearsome. A low growl at first, followed by muffled shouting as it draws closer. I have heard this before, many times, and I immediately stand up and leap over the parapet, my grazed skin suddenly numb. A hasty look from side to side and I see my brothers doing the same, dragging more of our brothers screaming in agony and covered in blood, but they did not look as if they were choking. Only clutching at limbs no longer there, or holding their intestines within their cavity. The groans behind us were quickening.

I pause for a moment and glance behind, just in time to see the Tiger tank burst through the dirty haze. A flash of orange spurts from its turret as it fires with rage at my brethren while they retreat. Voices bellow from all directions, I am circled by screams, orders and begging of men wanting to live, but some, mainly the wounded call out for their mothers. It is these that chill me and cause me to hesitate once more and I see an image of my own mother standing off in the distance, leaning forward and beckoning me to go to her. I am about to lunge towards her when everything goes silent.

Indistinguishable sounds rattle against my ear drums before I can open my eyes. I am not dead, but my head gyrates and refuses to quit. Raising my hand to my face I gently brush away the dust which shrouds it and slowly open my eyes and try to spit chunks of earth from my mouth, which causes me to gag and wretch, regurgitating what little contents are in my stomach over my exposed chest. I panic briefly as I realise my gas mask has been removed and I probe frantically for it.

'You do not need that, it was not a gas attack,' the voice whispered, but an accent was clearly evident, if slightly hindered under a gurgle.

I turned my head sharply to the left and a shooting pain shot across my brow. I had been blown back into my shell scrape and

must have been knocked unconscious, but for how long I do not know. Lying next to me was a dust covered figure, the grey of his uniform barely visible. I try to scurry back, and my hands hastily reaching for a weapon of sorts, my rifle was no longer near me, probably buried under a mound of baked earth. With my back pressed against the wall of my protective hole, I could go no further and my eyes refused to withdraw from the German who shared my sanctuary. He did not move.

The sounds become clearer as my senses return me to the present, and reality. The heavy groan of tank engines are still audible, but moving away, presumably towards our line. Still screams of pain do not allow for silence around this arid land.

Still fixated on the figure a mere few feet away we make eye contact for the first time.

‘You thought it was a gas attack, it was not,’ the German repeats.

The German soldier spoke very calmly without moving towards me. His rifle was clenched within his grasp and lay across his chest. Stereotypical blonde hair covered his head, but under the dust it was almost camouflaged. It was hard to pinpoint an age, but an assumption would put him in his late twenties. He must have noticed me looking at his rifle as he glanced down at his chest and pushed it away. It would have been so easy for him to raise it, point and fire, but yet he did not. Maybe he was out of ammunition, but he would have been heavily armed at the beginning of the attack. Why had he not shot me?

‘I took your gas mask off so you could breathe better,’ he said, letting out a dry cough.

I paused for a moment trying to comprehend what he had just admitted. ‘Why?’

‘Because it is bad enough trying to breathe in this heat as it is, without that terrible thing on. So I removed it for you.’

I was dumbfounded by his integrity, but also his grasp of the English language. Although an accent was heavily pronounced, his English was excellent. ‘I mean why would you try and save me?’ Perplexed by this enemy soldier, I began to feel at ease

around him, and surely had he wanted to have killed me he would have done it by now.

'Your English is very good,' was all I could think of saying, still stunned by his kindness.

'Thank you. I studied at Cambridge a few years before the war,' he informed me.

'Thank... thank you for not shooting me.' I said.

'I was following the tank, from as far back as I could. I saw you get blown up and fall back into your little hole here. I thought you were dead already, but I saw you still breathing so removed your mask and laid you down here. As I was helping you was when I felt something hit me.'

Until this point I hadn't noticed him pressing his left hand against his side, I was too preoccupied with my own survival. The dust around his wound was turning dark as blood pumped in a steady rhythm. This fellow soldier had no interest in killing me, and although I had been knocked unconscious he has showed me nothing but compassion. The blend of guns firing, explosions and screaming had all but wandered off. It was just this German soldier and I.

Scrambling to my hands and knees I crawled over to him and looked around the shell scrape for something to help stop his bleeding. My dirty shirt was strewn across the floor of the hole. Gathering it up, I scrunched it into a tight ball and pressed it against his wound. He winced and let out a gasp of pain between closed lips. Nothing more was said for a few minutes as I tried to stop the bleeding, but it was useless and kept pouring. My shirt was now nothing more than a soaked rag and my hands sheathed in his blood. I looked at his face, which had since faded from a red to a pale white with a blue tinge to his lips. I shook my head from side to side, but he merely smiled in return. It must have been a British bullet that struck him, but yet he harboured no anger towards me.

'Come here,' he whispered. It had become an effort for him to talk, but he persevered. With his right hand he beckoned me to sit beside him. I did as he requested. He was the enemy, but

still a soldier and a man. Reaching inside his coat pocket he pulled out a purse and opened it. I noticed a little cash in it, but nothing of much monetary value. He produced a black and white picture. A very pretty dark haired woman stood behind three children, a boy and two girls, the eldest looked no more than five years in age and the youngest barely walking. 'My wife and children,' he said, caressing the picture and smearing it with his blood. 'I love them so much and it breaks my heart to know I will never see them again, and they will never know their Papa.'

Tears pooled in his eyes before spilling over like a minuscule stream and creating dark tracks down his dusty face. 'What's your name?' I asked him.

He looked at me puzzled, although I know he understood the question. In the few minutes we had been together a bond had been created. This was not how it was supposed to be. He and his friends had killed many of my friends, but yet myself and my friends were no better as we had done the same. War is a wretched beast conjured from the minds of those who never see the true horrors of its pathetic nature.

'Hans, Hans Neuer.'

'I'm John, John Martin,' I said, offering him my hand and we shook. I guess this made us officially friends. I looked at his now sunken eyes and knew he did not have long left, as he shifted his weight to try and get more comfortable. His pain looked to be almost unbearable now as his teeth clenched and a drop of blood appeared from the side of his mouth and dribbled down his chin.

'John,' he whispered. 'Please, I beg you for two things?'

Looking down at this fellow soldier, who was now my friend, I answered with a solemn smile. 'Of course.' Although I had only known him for a few minutes something unexplainable had happened, for this brief time the war was forgotten, there was no hatred, only compassion of two soldiers thrust to a point where neither wanted to be.

Reaching to his neck he tugged at the name tags, which broke free easily and placed them in my open hand. His name

tags were not the only item as the chain was fed through a gold ring.

‘My wedding ring,’ he declared.

I was unable to speak as I understood what he was asking before the words were uttered. Then raising the photo to his face he gave it a gentle kiss before putting it with the ring and name tags in the palm of my hand.

‘Please... I do not want my wife to have someone I do not know tell her how her husband died, how her children’s father was a coward who could not fire a weapon to end another’s life. Just tell her that I love them all very much and my last thoughts were of them.’

‘I will. Once the war is over I will find them for you.’

‘Thank you, my friend,’ he whispered with a smile. ‘Just one more thing?’

‘Anything.’ How could I refuse to do something for a man, a friend, who will never experience any of life’s pleasures again? He will never hold his wife’s hand and never kiss his children good night.

He fought for every breath, as if he was now slowly suffocating. He looked at the rifle he had tossed aside and then back at me. Nothing more had to be said. Yes, he was dying, but there was no dignity in him fighting for every breath and dragging out the agonising inevitable. It was his last wish. Had it been the other way around, I would hope he would have the strength he was asking me to conjure up at this very moment? Gathering up his rifle, I paused for a moment when I felt a tug at the barrel. Hans pulled me towards him and placed the barrel near his forehead.

‘Please,’ he begged through bubbles gathering around his mouth.

I squeezed the trigger.

Before I opened my eyes I could feel the tears rolling from the corners and making my pillow damp. Once again the sterile smell returned and lingered like a fraud around this contaminated

body, but it was better than the dusty smog that had only a few moments ago smothered me. I could still feel each individual touch from my precious children as I opened my eyes.

‘I’m so sorry you went through that, Dad,’ said my eldest boy.

I merely smiled at him. ‘Please... in the cupboard,’ I said, pointing at the minimalistic cupboard in which they expected you to keep all your worldly possessions while staying in hospital. I lacked the strength to watch, but heard as he rustled around in my belongings. Belongings I would not require much longer. I heard him stop and sigh. He passed me the name tags and gold ring.

‘I thought you had given it back to Hans wife?’

‘I couldn’t. I lacked the courage.’ I admitted.

‘But you shot him?’

‘And how could I face his wife with dignity knowing I had killed her husband and her children’s father. I could not. Now I have lived with the shame for nearly seven decades. How could he face your mother had he done the same to me? But I honestly believe he would have done, out of respect and friendship. I did not murder him, but killed him none the less. And now I look at you all, my beloved children, who I’ve been so lucky to hold and kiss good night, for that I feel so guilty. As I would put you all to bed, I often thought of Hans.’ I sucked in a breath, but it was shallow and barely sufficient.

‘You mustn’t blame yourself, Dad,’ my little girl said through progressively harder tears.

‘Please, you are all stronger than I. Find the courage I could not, and meet his family and return these things?’ I saw them look at one another and nod in agreement.

‘We will, Dad. We promise,’ my youngest son answered, wiping tears from red eyes.

Almost seventy years had passed since that hot day in a dust hole. I am here in this sterile environment, but my tortured soul has been tainted for all these years, hopefully my confession has gone some way to its cleansing.

‘Thank you. I love you all so much.’ I look around the room one final time at all the painful faces. There is one more that wasn’t there before, a familiar face. As I draw my final breath, the figure beckons to me. Hans smiles. My weakness is forgiven and I am at peace.

[Untitled]

She says my name;
and each time, it's like she's saying,
'You Are Not Invisible'.

A Birthday Present

‘Mon then an’ open it, like. I wannae see the look oan yer face.’

‘...It’s a syringe.’

‘Aye!’

‘It’s a fuckin’ syringe.’

‘It’s pure hilarious, right?’

‘Ye wit?’

‘It’s funny.’

‘It’s a fuckin’ syringe.’

‘Aye.’

‘It’s no even clean.’

‘Aye, that’s wit’s funny.’

‘Right.’

‘Yer no laughin’.’

‘Aye, well ye got me a used syringe fir ma birthday.’

‘Aw fir fuck’s sake, if ah’d bought it fir some urra cunt ye’d ah bin greetin’ wi’ laughter.’

‘Ye bought it?’

‘Ye wit?’

‘Ye said ye bought it.’

‘Aye?’

‘Why’d ye *buy* a fuckin’ used syringe?’

‘Christ, ahm no gonnæ jis’ pick it oot the gutter, am ah? It’s a fuckin’ birthday present.’

‘Who the fuck sells used fuckin’ syringes?’

‘Ye wit?’

‘Ahm askin’ who the fuck sells used syringes?’

‘Aw, ye ken, some cunt oafy eBay. Ahm telt ’e uses ’em hisself.’

‘Ye bought me a syringe oafy a junkie, then?’

‘Ah’d call ’im an entrepreneur.’

‘Ye wit?’

‘Well ’e’s found his market, hasn’t ’e?’

‘Yer fuckin’ unbelievable, ye ken that?’

'Wit? How?'

'Christ, ah dinnae ken, mibbe how'd ye find this cunt on eBay?'

'How'd ah find 'im? Christ, ah've bin goan' tae 'im fir fuckin' years the noo. Ye ken Grant Adair's syringe? That's wan o' his.'

'Ye bought a syringe fir Grant Adair an aw?'

'Aye, wit's it tae ye?'

'His wee brother had a fuckin' overdose, ya eejit.'

'Aye, that's wit's funny.'

'We're talkin' 'boot Grant Adair. Are ye fuckin' wrang in the heid?'

'Naw, how?'

'He's a fuckin' mad cunt, like. He ran wi' the UDA.'

'Aw... Right...'

'An' you sent 'im a fuckin' used syringe.'

'Aye...'

'How lang syne wis this?'

'Ah sent it last week. Ah wis o'er in Belfast fir 'is actual birthday.'

'Last fuckin' week? Yer days are gonnae be numbered fae the noo.'

'...Aye?'

'Aye, 'fraid so, pal.'

'Jesus... Ah dinnae think ahm ready to die...'

'Och, well there's fuck all ye can dae about it the noo... Fancy a dram o' whisky?'

'Aye... Aye, might as well.'

'The Macallan?'

'Aye, the Macallan.'

'Sláinte.'

'Sláinte.'

'Ah best gie ye yer birthday present the noo an aw. Ye ne'er ken when Grant Adair's gonnae come a-knockin'.'

'...It's a used syringe.'

'Aye, it's funny, in'it?'

Flat Glory

I knew a story of a man. A man who plucked every blade of grass from his lawn – one by one.

The day had only just begun, morning light cracked open the dull sheet of brown smog sky.

He ate the toast – pain, burnt.

Tightened the knot of his tie.

Left the house.

The man managed only one step onto the patio. Now he was frozen in the sun. The bustling grass stood high; higher than his feet, higher than his shins. It felt as if these green fingers were pushing all the way into his eyeballs, scratching. He fell to his knees, elbows buckled, he laid flat on his chest. Surrounded by grass, a thick, lonely forest. He stayed prostrate before the canyons of green, the strands jostled under his human breath.

A sharp anger rose through him; crystals of glass floating through his blood streams. He stretched out that shaking arm and pinched the base of a single blade. Fingers were live wires, mouth quivering. He shut his eyes and pulled. The tear of dry mud, wispy white roots dangling down. He observed in awe. A laugh grew from his belly. Warm, warm laughter. He pushed himself back to his knees, still laughing raucously.

He grasped another blade. He pulled. Hysterical, the man drunk with relief.

On the second day, he woke with his face pressed against the dew-dripped lawn. He coughed and brushed the ants from this arm.

Back to work.

Pinch every blade individually, pull with gentle precision.

The sun came plummeting back to earth. The man tried to stand, jellified legs couldn't support him. His sore knees crashed against hard ground.

He saw his progress: a crescent of cropped green arched around him. A proud swell tickled his stone throat. Coughing again, he began to crawl to a small watering can. He fixed his mouth around the rusty spout and tipped, greedily gulping the stagnant rain water. With his elbows, he dragged himself back to the shaved arch of green and plucked eagerly under the budding moonlight.

The fifth day brought the rain. The man shivered under the relentless beating water. Wet grass stuck to his body at a thousand different angles. The mud was darkening his skin. Yet he continued to pluck and pluck with those pale lilac fingers.

He looked over his shoulder, behind him was perfection.
Short, brilliantly even.

Not one blade stood boastful or proud above the rest.

He continued the crawl, all the way to the final corner.

The light was dying; sun lazily threw its last rays. The man was resting his chin against the sodden ground, staring intently at that last standing blade. The body quivered in fear, nerves arresting. Feeling somewhere halfway between tears and laughter. A cold sweat. His fingers dragged his arms along the ground as he ran his fingertips along its flat glory. The perfect point that was beginning to curl upon its own weight. Now look up to the flat sky, over the flat house, flat fence, the flat car. He felt his smooth flat skin.

He yanked the blade from life and crushed it in his blistered, red palm.

And a million tensions spilled from his body. A new smile tore apart his lips. He uncurled the fist. The world blended into darkness. A sound of heartbeat. A sound of thunder. The sound of a devil dog chewing through concrete. They all played from his brain, out of his ears. The man fell unconscious in that cold night.

On the eighth day, the ambulances came.

Roaring sirens through the brown morning fog.

They wrapped up the man in a metal sheet. They pinched his cheeks together, shook his head. Flashlights shone into pried-open eyes, and those iris's rolled.

They lifted the stretcher. His head titled to the side, thick drool rolling from those lips. He saw the tall grass fighting for light, brushing the ankles of the paramedics. It scorched his blue skin with a ferocious laugh. The man screamed and thrashed. Vomiting as he shook. The paramedics laid him on the concrete slabs and held him down. The grass between the cracks scratched his cheek. He choked and spat. He shut those eyes. And that's how it ends.

The Blame Game

I've got a split-seam heart,
the stitches tired and loose.
My wife says it's 'nothing that can't be fixed',
downing her 4th G and T because
unlike us, G and T still mixes.

I spend my nights on the couch,
with Bukowski and Marlboro Reds,
bending my back to be alone.
I've got springs ripping my fabric skin,
and my fractured frame is collapsing,
I fear I might be imploding.

My seasons are returning,
like thoughts of ex-lovers I stained,
who may have held a better fate.

There's beauty in the thunder,
but I lost it in the lightning.

My eyes know this flat,
like they know how her lips curved around her third tooth.
From the dead daisies above the sink,
to our love suffocating in photographs,
from long before June.

A collage on the fridge;
our first dance at our wedding,
a kiss on the cheek at my 29th,
and in the middle,
her big, pregnant belly.

I would press my ear against
her thunder tummy.

Listen to the rumble,
swallow the promise.

The second bedroom on the right;
a homemade infant paradise.
Sunrise painted on the East-facing wall,
sunset on the West,
a galaxy on the ceiling.
Star-blessed sleep.

Heart complications killed her,
our love died too.
We buried it in cement engraved:

June, two days old

Lightning never strikes twice,
but we died in round one.

Welcome to
the blame game.

Bad posture baby

Darling let me swing from your
jungle-gym limbs,
let me dive into your depths
undiscovered, underneath.

All of the layers beneath your clothes,
strip them away.
All the untouched skin and unseen
marks,
all the things you have hidden
since you were little.

The parts of you thought to only be
loved by you,
let them be loved by me.

All the faults your mother told you
to hide,
your shoulder rolls backwards
to straighten your back.
Slouch into me,
let your body curve naturally.

And I will hold you tighter
to let you know your worth is
not measured
by how tall you can force yourself
to stand
to please your mother.

And all the things you tuck in
and hide away,

don't suck your breath in
but let it burst out of your mouth
and into mine.

Because darling, I think you are fine

And if you find your eyes in the mirror
looking at all your spaces in-between
just remember I saw you bare
before I saw you naked.

And I came to you and
cupped your cheek
and that clear blue
held nowhere for you to
hide,
because as you swam
in my eyes
I saw everything, darling.

Before you even knew
my middle name,
or told me you felt the same,

I knew everything, darling.

Love Song of the Malpaís

Let us lay beneath stars that cities cannot find, let our legs
entwine like vines
and let us breathe each other's breath like rockpool brine.
Let us lay where only chindis rove, where I can trace your shape
on weathered rock by the bluegreen light of a camping stove,
where mountain cats can come and see, where thunderhawks
sweep the west wind east and the sand on our skin is lost to
the breeze,
where nightbirds sing of salt and earth, where grasshoppers drone,
where we can curl ourselves beneath blankets of stone
till the tectonic plates fuse to our bones,
where even coyotes do not seek, where nothing stands and
nothing speaks.
Let us lay then, you and I, where molten rock runs in rivers till
it dries,
the two of us spread together like an inkblot framed against
the sky.
Let us lay together and watch the eons pass us by like dragonflies.

Thumbelina pt 2

Thumbelina, where are you? Will I find you inside? May I peek through the curtains tonight?

All I ever wanted.

To be lead along your love, broken from your body; loved forever so lonely. Back beneath the fable forest, in a sea of sun stream gleams; golden stings behind these stillborn blue dreams of light. Stepping lean between desire paths of rootless ways;

So long we've rambled on these stone cobbled days; days of destitution, days of endless days.

Find me Thumbelina. Become this hosted heart, hung from her halo, abandoned by fear and flourished in flowers of sheer frigid prostitution; bluffed by virgin romance in bibles of tears. Let us lay our scattered leaves of laureled lust beneath our thousand year friendship, and bring all blossoms to flourish a family; a friend: a civilisation: an education:

a new religion, written nailed and wept
in a new constitution;

patriotism paraded in saintly power; purged like an ivy vein up my slow decaying tower of passion; a new revolution; a new seed for solution;

a need to see you: believe in you: come through with you: become you: become me and leave nothing but a green growing grace, grieving golden tears at the closing gates of the Garden of Eden.

I need you Thumbelina. Awaken.

May I protect you?

Protect you so sorely and suffocate your beauty like a shell skin shield above the stoop arch of your tortoise hunchback.

Thumbelina, Eve of Birth, may I sail beneath this shadowed skirt; sealed across the rose of Sharon; protected by an imperfect

childhood, and sold like stones on park street corners. And behind the lipstick stained window cages of Soho Street, I can meet you once again for another session of touching support.

Fables and folklores; faith between meaning, fact ever-more deceiving; let beauty become the dynasty of delirious obscenities; our blasphemous minds; our morals of law; passion, I am sure, Thumbelina, places peace between prayers and preaching's of institutionalised behaviour, straining stains of sin. Oh Thumbelina, where did you begin?

On Father's powdered table?

On Mother's lines of lipstick mirrors?

Am I the only soldier still alive? Still am I the only priest who purged his faith between your middle mouth lights of long luminous nights. So cold it is, to sit beside these shadows of the fire; freezing friendly smiles, played like puppets on a wire; so loved for so little long, little timing to the beat, the chill beneath the heat of a candle-hearts defeat to the wind. Thumbelina, let me feel the rose skin flesh of your thighs. The freedom of fingers against fainting breath.

How many more 'sorrys' exchanged for certificates of sin?

What sorry for what sin?

How can I believe that you happened? How can they see what was said, left and sung?

Do you see how far I've come?

Do you see how far I am lost?

I once had a friend, Thumbelina; a friend in school.

How he carefully loved me. Inviting me like family to live in a friendship and a fellowship of childhood ends; ending each line with 'I don't mind. It's up to you'. How he perfectly timed

each Saturday morning with an invitation calling me away from boyhood boredoms of Mamma and Papa's rigid and ready routines. I'd wait like a lonely pony in lowland fields, too far for a manger, too silent for a stranger to seek and give shelter to keep afar from Findus Factories fields; rising happiness with each horizon ablaze. I grew bored of him. And soon I hid from him. He never found me. Each day passes and each town and friendship never seems to last longer than a smile.

But I saw him the other day, Thumbelina. He was an old man carrying his trousers in a bag, his bare pale legs like wishbones fed to a vulture, sprawling: looking for a charity store to exchange some modesty.

How pathetic he looked. How tragic he strolled. How dirty I felt to watch this middle aged hunchback, once called friend, pushing his trolley through the twin town graveyard.

I stood smoking at the side of the road.

See the monkey on top of the tree, standing and scouting, shouting down towards the fish, the cow, the chicken and the pig, for their so-seemed stupidity, soon quickly believed, as hands, legs and labour never leave the ground. A fool is what a fool takes untasted by truth. But truth is the sound of a baboon dragging knuckles across dust; not the turn of books and bibles and scriptures spat from tongues tied in trauma.

Oh Thumbelina, find me. I've broken down.

What I Gave to My Mother

Mum touches the skin on her stomach
stretched and creased
She hides it and says
'You did that to me.
You and your brothers.'

I look to the early greys in her hair,
the loose skin under her eyes
and wonder what else I've done

I look to her laughter lines,
close my eye and hope
that we can be blamed
for one or two

he's my therapist

it never really mattered in the end
 that as i walked past him, i was the body of sand he could not love
who's that?

oh he's just my therapist, the therapist i'm fucking
 and he fucks inside my head
 and puts me in a duvet, hands me cornflakes, puts simpsons
 on the TV set and tells me to be quiet
 to be quiet
 and in return i won't kill myself tonight

and as i walk past him
 my feet flake away
 and my spine knots itself into a pretzel
 he nibbles on the syllables of my bones
 he appears on the bookshelves
 he concludes my heart is a library
 and comes to squat between the pages of my eyes
 and i just cry
 and i just cry

he hands me tissues and a malteser bar
 and my tears wet my body of sand
 and he buckets me
 act 4 again, no suck me, act 12
 and my face is a sandcastle
 that when you climb into it,
 crumbles

and i crumble
who's that?
 oh he's my therapist just my therapist
 and he sits and rolls me cigarettes

and lets me drop acid in his bathroom
and he sits and slurs his words
when i am top of him

 i was the lip of the wave that wouldn't rush up to him
but ran away
and ran away

 and i was the buddy that lay on his table
and a body of broken promises
and a crumbling art
 and a dying lamb
just biting my nails until sunrise

who's that?
oh he's just my therapist
are you ok?
yes

What's on Your Mind?

Roald Dahl was wrong. Good thoughts are not enough. I am ugly, I am gross. My forehead is too wide and too high and covered in red angry spots. Why are they so angry, are they protesting on my behalf? My ears stick out through my lank, thin, greasy, lifeless, mud brown hair, they are too big and at completely the wrong angle. They look like I am being nosy, earwiggling. Steve would shout, 'Where's Noddy?' and 'Here comes Big Ears!'

My nose, I suppose, is ok, on its own, but with my almost non-existent lips directly south of my snout, it is well and truly shown up as the overly angular ski slope that it is. It's greasy too, on the T zone; I have a greasy T zone. I googled it, this is very common and actually very good for you, the over-active sebaceous gland secretes oils to protect your skin. What is it doing? My spots don't need protecting, they need eradicating, is it just giving them a drink of oil? See, I told you I was gross. Is that a normal thing to say? My skin is giving my spots a drink of oil? I mean it's hard because I just don't know. I've never seen anyone's Facebook status as anything like that, just beautiful interesting things. Things that other people do. I don't do Facebook updates, but I might, when I've done it.

I see online you can have skin laser surgery at a dermatologist where customer satisfaction is their number one priority. Three thousand pound is a bit steep isn't it? The testimonials are great but the before and after pictures are annoying. It annoys me that they think you're stupid, in the before pictures they are wearing glasses and looking miserable as sin, hair scraped back in a scrunchie. In the after one, no glasses, less spots and she's smiling her head off. Hair down and bouncy new curls and nice make-up. Makes you think the surgery can't be all that good if they have to employ all these extra tactics. I mean how can laser skin surgery make your eyesight better? Mrs Featherstone thirty seven from Wakefield in Barnsley said it's changed her life though *and* that she's never been happier, so there's something to think about isn't there?

I also have what's called a lazy eye, I think that's unfair, it's not so much lazy as slow, apparently. If they had covered my conscientious hard working eye up for a few months when I was little, the slovenly eye wouldn't have had any choice but to speed its lazy ass up, and it would have subsequently caught up. Maybe the doctors looked at the rest of my face and thought 'What's the point?' Steve sometimes used to call me Bog eyed Bob.

Apart from the huge gap in the middle, my teeth are okay. Madonna has a huge gap in her teeth. Madonna has a twenty-year-old boyfriend and Madonna is fifty-seven; I googled it, there are literally millions and trillions of photos of Madonna on the internet, I feel like I know her; Madonna needs to put some clothes on and act her age. I suppose when you're Madonna, you can do what you want, especially where boyfriends and adoption is concerned.

If I was to be generous, I would say I have a lovely figure, from the back I look quite nice. I overheard Steve say to Rowan at school that I was a double bagger, to be fair he wasn't exactly lowering his voice. A double bagger is when you have a nice body so someone would shag you if they were pushed, but you are so ugly you need two bags over your head, just in case the first one comes off. I googled it.

Kill Bill is my favourite film; Uma Thurman is the most beautiful woman on the planet, and there are literally thousands and millions of pictures of her on the internet. She would have almost definitely been the super cool girl at school, in all her pictures, every single one, she looks cool. Tarrantino cast her well. She is the queen of beautiful people; she is the best Beatrix Kiddo; there could have been no other actress on the planet could have done it better.

I have been practicing my Uma Thurman in the mirror: 'And when I get there, I am gonna Kill Bill!' God, why does he have to be called Steve? He ruins everything! 'And when I get there, I am gonna squeeze Steve' doesn't work does it? I'm not gonna squeeze him, I'm gonna kill him and I'm going to watch until he breathes his last breath, I'm gonna film it because (A) I want to

see if you can see the exact moment his soul leaves his body, and (B) I'm very interested in this type of thing. On YouTube you can see videos of angels caught on camera on hospital security footage. They're definitely authentic because the patient always comes around after, even if they had been in a coma, every time an angel shows up, a full recovery is made shortly after.

I'm not psycho or anything, I've just been weighing up my options, and to live in this world, in this day and age with my double bagger face, well, it's not gonna be good for me is it? We've got Facebook profiles, Snapchat, Twitter, Grinder, Instagram, Tinder, YouTube everywhere you go, on telly and films, billboards, magazines on every advert you watch, everyone is perfectly perfect; smooth skin, perky boobs, thigh gaps, perfect eyebrows, long legs, perfect silky hair. *Now*, you got to paint your toes as well, you can wear toe rings; now your toes have got to be beautiful. I saw on the internet the other day that people are now bleaching their assholes, I mean, come on, who's inspecting that? It was a link on the same page as *Ten Worst Celebrity Cosmetic Surgery Fails*. Even beautiful people are having beauty enhancement procedures. If the beautiful people can't cope with their looks, what chance do I have?

Everybody's got over a thousand friends and they all love each other, and they all love being beautiful together in the beautiful bars and clubs and restaurants they go together, where everybody is beautiful and everyone laughs because their lives are so beautiful in every way. Then come the happy wedding photos, everybody is so happy and beautiful, wow look at the beautiful children, they will almost certainly grow up to be beautiful and have beautiful friends. Oh look here they are being beautiful on the beach, on holiday, starting school, at Halloween being beautifully dressed up with beautifully carved pumpkins, lovely bonfire night get-togethers with fireworks and sparklers, you're not the only ones you know, everybody's doing it, except me.

At Christmas they're so happy because they are the most beautiful family and Christmas is about families and the more beautiful the happier you will be in your matching Christmas

jumpers. Yes, I've seen your matching jumpers, you think I wouldn't look at your pictures, you want me to look at your pictures, you know you do, you ignore me in Tesco's, but you want me to look at your pictures. Easter egg hunts, running marathons for cancer, out for dinner with your husbands, your friends all beautiful. Beautiful barbecues.

I heard someone say they were sick of barbecues. I would never be sick of a barbecue. I've never been invited to a barbecue. What would you wear to a barbecue? Something light, fun, sunny and casual I should imagine. Something that says 'Hi I'm me, nice to meet you. I'm the kind of girl that gets invited to barbecues.'

It's not what's on the inside when you're talking about guests for barbecues. Nobody wants me there, with my face putting everyone off their chicken wings So I've decided to check out. Where's the only place you can avoid social media in 2016? I googled it; it is prison.

I am gonna kill Steve and I am gonna change my Facebook status to *I have killed Steve!* He is such a dick; why couldn't he have been called Bill?

In prison there are lots of ugly women, I've seen it in the films and on the telly. In prison you have to share with someone and you become best friends. I will have a friend for the first time ever, I wonder what she will be like, will she be Chinese? I've always wanted a Chinese friend. They seem very loyal and trustworthy and they have dignity. I will have to google cunnilingus, maybe there is a how to YouTube video?

Depending on how the murdering of Steve video comes out I may or may not upload it to YouTube. I mean would I call it *Murdering Steve*, or *Watching a Soul Leave the Body Video*? Also I worry that this might make me look insane; I don't want to end up in the loony bin. I don't want my new best friend to be mental. I googled *Do Mental People Make Good Friends*, just loads of memes of old ladies getting drunk came up. I could have friends when I'm old if I kill Steve and go to prison. I bet I'll be out by the time I'm an old lady, even if they lock me up for forty

years. My cellmate can come and live with me and we can get drunk together like the ladies in the memes.

I need to find out where he lives first. I'm sure that won't be hard. I need to be more resourceful like Beatrix Kiddo. I don't have a Pussy Wagon, I've got my Nissan Micra, and will it be big enough to put his body in? Do I need to put his body in? If I want to go straight to prison, I may as well just get caught red handed. I wonder how much he will bleed? He made my nose bleed once, threw a cricket ball at my snout. 'Sorry big ears!'

I wonder if you can get Kill Bill jumpsuits? Yes, you can, I googled it. Eleanor Fries Party Supplies £129.99. That is a lot but I reckon it's got to be done; it will be the last outfit I wear before I am in prison clothes for a long, long time. Eleanor Fries, do you suppose she changed her name to rhyme with supplies? I wonder if Eleanor is an up and coming criminal. Perhaps she poisons her husband because he snores and she hasn't had an orgasm for thirty years. We could end up in the same cell together, cunnilingussing when we've ran out of things to say. I bet she's got some great stories though about parties she has supplied, maybe even some with celebrities in. I think I could like someone who changed their name to rhyme with their chosen career. I think I could like someone who murdered their annoying snory husband. I could change my name to Barbara Miller, the Crazy Steve Killer.

I always wanted to be a vet or a dog groomer or something. Animals are nice, they don't give a shit about what you look like, they just care that you are kind. Are you rubbing my belly? Fabulous, I'll love you back, simple! Not, actually, your eyes are wonky and your hair lacks volume and lustre, would you mind awfully fucking off?

I could have been called Hazel Gooner the doggie groomer. Or Carly Rhett the local vet. Kristen Taylor the Lion Tamer. Or Meryl-Anne Creeper the Friendly Zoo Keeper. I want to be called Mrs Steven William's, but he has blocked me out of his life for good.

Depression: A Guide

Before depression was fully understood, it was known as *melancholia* – or sadness. Then, they realised it is so much more than that. It is never just the sadness.

Mental illnesses were attributed to *demonic possession* and exorcism techniques were used such as *beatings, restraint, and starvation* designed to drive the demons out of the afflicted person's body. Just in case they weren't already hurting enough – to combat the *pain*, they inflicted more.

Signs and symptoms of depression include:

Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness

Your beautiful mother will be brushing her hair, reaching *up* with both arms, smiling at you as you sit on her bed, watching. You will be about to tell her about a book you're reading at school that you think maybe she would like. But then her arms will fall. And she will cry.

Because it is *too much*.

Appetite or weight changes

She promises she will eat tomorrow. And you'll want so badly to believe her.

Sleep changes

Some days you will find her. She'll fall asleep in the clean laundry pile, so sound and peaceful that you'll sit down there and watch her for a while. Other days, she will scream until she wakes, she will lash out and throw anything she can grab that is close by to her because she is so confused and scared. She will scream until she is red in the face and sore. And then apologize and beg you to please forgive her.

Anger or irritability

Your father will lash out but only because he is hurting. He replays the sound of your laughter in his head whenever he can. He loves you so much but won't be home a lot because he can't bear to think that maybe he is ruining you.

Your mother will scream all the time, unannounced, while she drives you to school. Her screams are alive. You will feel their agony. They will scare you and hurt you all at the same time. You'll ask her to please stop but she never will so your eldest sister will pull you into the back seat and tell you to cover your ears and close your eyes. You'll want to help her so much; to take away whatever it is that makes her need to scream until she hurts. But you won't know how. So you'll get out of the car and wave goodbye at the school gate, trying to memorize the way the back of her head looks as she drives away from you.

Reckless behaviour

He will hurt her and she will laugh. She will look over to you and your sisters who are cramped into the corner of the room, cuddling each other. She will speak to you through a kind of laughter you've not heard before, she'll say: "Look girls! Look what daddy did to mummy!" She will carry on laughing and you will try to laugh with her so that she is not alone but it won't feel right.

Self-loathing

He will try hard to believe it when you say you need him. You were always going to be the last thing on his mind before he did it. He won't leave a note but he'll leave you some books on the sofa and your mother's necklace on his bed. You won't need an apology from him; he is already forgiven.

2012

Candy floss kisses under the Ferris wheel,
I welcomed the summer with open arms
and optimism that shined brighter
than any sunray
that danced through the ocean waves.

Drinking red wine from a carton –
because we weren't allowed glass.
I suppose they only meant bottles
but I didn't get the memo,
as I carried shattered pieces of myself around for months.

*"This is my year.
It's never going to get any better than this,
this is forever."*

Heavy eyelids weighed you down
more than the burden you refused to carry,
as I willingly inhaled the poison
of your second-hand sentiments.
Recycled over and over,
did we all become blurred
through your red stained eyes?

People passed through
and not much was exchanged –
minus joints, spit and meaningless conversation.
I spent my summer kissing with stale breath,
and sleeping in smoky rooms
with the other shadows.
It wasn't hard to impress
when nobody could remember what they had done

the day before,
everything became the truth.

The beach didn't seem warm anymore
when my head was cold and foggy,
I couldn't feel the sun as I smoked burning ash.
When did we stop collecting pebbles
that we thought looked pretty,
and start collecting pieces of memories
we could barely put together?

We were sixteen years old
and the world was our oyster,
but the ocean had dried up.
I put all your things in a box
and I watched the flames,
they burned a sickly yellow.
It reminded me of the colour of your skin
when you were too stoned to move.

We said we'd all be friends forever,
turns out forever only lasted all of that summer.

Amelodic Melodica

for Daniel Dale Johnston: Hi, how are you?

It's completely wrong in every sense, which is why it works. A few *clinks*, *clunks* and *crackles*... then the tape rolls. It begins in a thank you poem, for all lack of daytime consequence, visitations from an angel for condolence by night. Confusion, aware of the dream of love, in a twisted and wicked little world such as this.

To a big business monkey, everything's to be taken seriously. Cheeseburger cashier smile to a toy keyboard or some kind of melodica organ. Block beaten chords, more percussive than melodious, wild with desire. The irrepressible need to contribute the unique beauty of one's self, or *selves*, to be forgotten with the rest – no matter how *weird* you are!

This is a pig: it goes *oink!*

Hi, how are you? More probingly asked, this time. Then... lucky stars in your eyes, reaching out, walking the cow. How did we get to this, and *why*? Instrumental moment whistling alongside us with a tune, a blown-around-in-circles chorus. Should we care, or *fear*? Such profound catastrophe, a beautiful dying soundtrack.

Bling! then *bling!* One note, somehow simultaneously, amelodic and atonal. A blurred face in the mirror, just as you catch it, it's gone.

A falling progression, dark melancholic mood. Despair came knocking, said nothing, spoke volumes. The spinning room comes on so sudden, the slowdown, the mechanical drone switching to ominous *tick-tocks* booming from an old haunted grandfather clock. Ghostly foes, that aren't really there, living forever.

Woo-hoo! I'm only twenty-two... There it is! Peaking channel distortion, or the dictaphone just can't handle it. A nervous love.

Hi-how-are-you? Windy drunken double-track a cappella on rotting flesh, stamping feet, slapping thighs. Get yourself

together, positive *up*-feeling *whoop-whoop!* Running water and a human voice, always on the run, but *why* and from *what?* Stop-start jerk, hang-chord, maybe...

Fuzzy old sung-over record, rushing at times, cramming in as many syllables as possible, and drawing out some for up to four or five places. Liquid dream, makes me happy to pronounce that word, in whatever way I please. Kicking out, marching the stage. The ghost with nowhere to go-wo. A desperate man, so empty of such a great chunk. Jazz-hand showcase, Hollywood ending. A sad and sorry state of affairs, colourless sky to a blind man.

Hey Joe, don't make it worse than it already is. Marvellous resounding piano chords again, a nervous love triumphant. Sid, work it out – how now always passes. George and his chores, elevated to heaven from their slums. The stars we share, twinkle, twinkle, and fade.

And *she!*... she called pest control! With the boots of an artist's medium. I thought you were lying too. A she-got-sprayed solo.

A *ladies-and-gentlemen!* over old bluesy sax. Here he is... D.D.J! Thank you. A listen-folks-croon-summary of songs so far, ballroom dinner dances and long summers. Keep punching Joe, I heard someone say – my family confession. They kicked his heavy heart and chest, giving and getting love. The disgrace being to punch without reason, so keep punching then.

A *ye-haw* drumroll, a ding-dong piano, dun-dun flicker, cartoon character gremlins and no more pushing Joe around. A back-seat-of-the-bus hum, blowing raspberries, no glory in pain. He sure knows how to be angry.

Poorly feigned girls' voices, screeching. A political retraction and a TV documentary. There endeth the lesson. A final cut-and-shut medley, of all that transpired in an instant and is forgotten. He doesn't want to play anymore, sorry.

Mars and Angels

Mars is a quiet place. Nothing really makes a sound. Not in a peaceful way however, it sounds like death. It makes me anxious at night. You hear your own heartbeat, your breath, your clashing eyelids; creaking bones. You hear it louder, and louder, until it sounds like a blunt chainsaw tearing into the side of your skull. Then you scream, grasp the bedsheets and feel the cold sweat drip off your face.

I get up, rub a towel against my face and look into the mirror. I start to hum a little song to myself; a song I've been humming for a while. It has these nice, mellow jazz tones that vibrate my throat – reminiscent of Chet Baker or Bill Evans – I call it: *Midnight on Mars*.

It's a beautiful little piece. My best composition to date if I do say so myself. The reflection looks at me tiredly.

'Cheer up you miserable old bastard!' I say.

He laughs, so do I.

He looks at me, I look at him, I see the fear in his eyes. The beaten posture. Ashes of a man. Defeated by the flames of silence.

'You'll be alright, Buddy. It's not so hard here once you get used to it.'

I smile, he smiles. I put my hand on the glass.

Our palms press together. I feel him, warm and near. I wipe my face on the towel again.

'Goodnight now.'

'Goodnight now.'

The mornings are bright usually, like earth. These dehydrated breakfasts are not that bad. I take my time. It's a nice sound – well, it's a sound. First you have the whistle and whirl of the preparator. Then the sound of escaping steam. The clanking of forks; cutting of meat, potatoes. The chew. The swallow. The ever-loving gulp. I forget to taste. It's almost overwhelming listening to *all* these sounds at once. But it's exciting at the same

time, it reminds you that there is sound somewhere, different sounds, strange sounds. There's still real music somewhere. Life somewhere. And that makes all the years of silence ok.

It never moves. Nothing moves. Nothing ever moves. The crimson deserts, the mountains and craters. Nothing moves. Static land. It's not until you look out on this scorched abyss that you realise the motion of earth. You never noticed how wonderfully dizzying the world was. Out the windows you saw the birds fly, the leaves flutter and flail; lights tinkle. Clouds breaking up in white splashes of brooding grey and black. Life was dancing for you. *Life was dancing for you!* But you never noticed. Not until now. The clouds here don't dance. They mock me. A soulless clone to tease me, remind me what I used to have, who I used to be. The rocks never move. They're stuck there. Stuck here. Stuck here. Never move again. *Move. Please something move. Anything, a boulder, a pebble. Please, move. Please.*

Please.

My suit is dry and dusty; I can see my own eyes as I fasten the helmet; *Hello old friend.* The air compressor has an interesting sound, but after that its silent again. You can't even hear your feet crunch against the ground. Just breath. The sun is always even and flat. Thick blanket of yellow against the red stone. I kick the dust. Watch the movements. I jump, feel myself flying, feet hit the ground. Again. Again. I laugh to myself. I clamber to my knees. Use my finger to trace lines in the dust. Patterns are like sounds. Always unique. Reminds you of things, places, people. I feel like I'm swimming as I swerve my fingertips in circular swings against the ground. I stay on the floor a while. Look at the empty sky. *Only your eyes will ever see a sky this empty.*

There's nothing as lonely as knowing you're the only one to be looking up at the sky you're under.

Something just moved. Something else. I'm not alone anymore. I feel something move; just out of sight. A presence. Life hiding

behind the air. It's not God. God is just one, this is all around, like angels. It started out slow, feeling heat down the back of your neck, buzzing finger tips. Then you feel it in your breath, it feels like a drip of cold water in a warm pool. Your thickest veins tingle, a hundred arms cradle you. Then you're not alone. You have made contact; you are not alone. The silence is heavy and thick like fog. It holds you to the ground. I stay for hours, weeks. Pinned to the floor, but not alone.

The first thing to go was crying then singing. Then I stopped masturbating, stopped dreaming, stopped sleeping, stopped walking, stopped eating. The last thing to go was laughter. And then I was done, my body is done. My mind dimming down slowly; the flesh will catch up. Soon. But until then at least I'm not alone. How could I be alone whilst a thousand angels dance through the Godless silence.

I was dead now, my mind was just wearing down. My corpse was laying on the cold floor, I could no longer see the dull grey roof. My memories were splattered in a mosaic of colour. Sounds of laughter, crying, heartbeats, music. I could see everything at once. My parents feeding me mashed potato, my daughter's birth, my wedding, my wife. *My wife, my daughter* – they swirled above me. They took me by the hand and we flew, through every memory, every smile, every heartbreak, everything. I could *see* everything, and I lived it again forever. I was with them, flying. I feel the warmth of my mother's hand the last time I held it in the hospital. I feel the glory in my chest after punching Nick Jessop in the nose outside school. The tickling of my daughter's hair against my neck. The sickness of seeing your first dead body. How my leg tingled when she touched my thigh. I taste the air after a summer storm. I can remember kissing her for the first and last time. I feel it all at once, *over and over*.

The memory I most cherish. The one I visit most. Painted on my brain, tattooed in front of it all. The darkness through the window. The shaking. Safety belt digging into my shoulders. Small screens blink. Stuttering engine. I feel myself

fall backwards. Then it rises. I see it for the first time. Thick endless blue, weavings of green and brown, all wrapped in a fog of powder white.

I saw the tiny globe that held everything I'd ever known. Every grain of love and hate. Every man, woman and child, dead and alive, all rooted to this pebble I could crush with my fingertips.

The engine shook again, the earth got smaller. Pulling away forever. Smaller than a pea now. It would be a sparkle soon, then a flicker, then, nothing. I tried to pull out of my chair. I tried to scream. Go back. Go back. I need to go back.

The spacecraft tilted and yawed, earth slipping out of view. I could do nothing but watch it sink away.

I was dead. My mind was finally catching up. Little paths of memory began to cut off, like lights going out in a dark corridor. I'm above it all now. My wife, my daughter; claspings to the feathers of my wings. Details were fading behind empty green gardens. We flew through colours and sounds, no need for faces. The boundaries of my bones crumbled. The angels lifted my body, the pain in my stomach floated away just as dust shakes from a carpet. Music shone from the golden bugles, silver horns, the sound of god. It lay over the Martian wasteland like thick honey, liquoring the flat silence. I didn't know where I was going, follow the music. Dance the dance of the angels.

My heart stopped.

peevish

the moon looks sick,
 why don't you go on over and nurse it back to health
back to full moon
 back to full contour
 back to full lashes and kissable lips hm?

i am begging you to look like a friend
 but you make me scared
like a rainbow turns itself into a pretzel
like a sky that drugs itself on amphetamines
 you frighten me
 whiplash of the tongue on my feelings
 you know i'm messed up too
 so update me you say, update

some gods are just jealous.
 some of them weren't born to make mistakes
not like you and me
 no more social media for you and me
and some goddesses are sent to earth for being too pretty
 i write to cope with banishment out of my ex's heart

and you want to know heartbreak?
 well be declared a father then fake the pregnancy
 well be married but really you signed divorce papers
 the counsellor is knocking at my walls
and i drove your car into the lake.

i know i smoke cigars
 i know i do bad things
 but you're just peevish
and i am sweet.

Seas Were Made to Be Sailed Across

You look a lot like
patriotism.

When your blood boils down to it,
you're all
altar-boy back bone mixed with
pub-performing pride.
Velvet carpets never looked so appealing.
Your 'dream-bigger' stage.

Growing has to happen sometime,
and seas were made to be sailed across but
water tastes better from home-built taps.
August always used to be best
but these days,
March and April won't stop bickering for your attention.

You admit, it couldn't be better than this,
but Irish blood will always miss
the sugar,
the sweetness.

So I know you'll go back
look into the glass
filled with black.
Rain is only worth it if it's willing to lash
and you'll drown in it,
with a content smile,
aging lines placed
delicately either side.

Because this soil you're sinking in
tastes like
your dad's leftovers
of your mum's cooking
and the sweet shop they ran
next to the front room.

Sweet Tooth

I can hear you Wispa,
words flicker in my ear of
space.

Time Out.

I'm thinking if Mars were to Breakaway,
and the Milkyway got lonely,
would the North Starburst?
We'd be there to see the Galaxy Ripple,
count Flying Saucers as they triple
in size.

Wham!

Dream over,
I snapped back to reality,
finally I relate to M&M's words.
Though my legs had turned to Jelly,
Baby was left in the corner.
So I Twirl for you,
in jeans and a Polo,
you don't mind that
dresses are a no-go
for me.

You swoon a 'Hubba Bubba' out
and we collapse into bed until
well After Eight PM.
Fate is some Matchmaker,
because our love is a Double Decker bus,
two layers of light and laughter
with so many stories to tell.

This ride's worth far more than a Daim,
it is priceless.

You refuse to touch a Peanut,
Buttercups make you nostalgic
of playground games in the sun
that would Flake your skin.

One night,
you drank so much rosé,
I swear you had Wine Gums.
You told me my smile is enough of a Boost
to cure any hangover,
just not that one.

Your wisdom tooth is Crunchie,
so you suck on gum,
and refuse to Chewit.
I reckon you need more calcium,
I'll buy you a cow and I'll Milka.
I'll do anything
to keep you,
a Marvellous Creation.

With you, my dear,
I am a
happy
Happy Hippo.

When the world went bang

When the world went bang not everyone noticed. For a small group living on the island of Niihau in the Hawaiian archipelago this monumental event was little more than a brief disturbance in their reality field. They experienced no grief or sense of loss at the change in the earth's radioactive levels nor did the wave of heat or terrific winds disturb them any more than any other natural phenomena they had encountered in the past.

The community was formed in the late nineteen sixties by a woman calling herself Starlight. She claimed to have found a way to transcend her physical body and exist within the fifth dimension for ever increasing periods of time. At her home in Portland, Oregon she quickly built a following amongst those who had been turned on to the possibilities of multi-dimensional living, through the psychedelic scene that was already well established in nineteen sixty-nine. She was invited to Niihau, by the Robinson family who, through hearing her talk, were intrigued by her message, and offered her land to build a community there.

All physical contact ceased with the external world as soon as the community was established. All ascendants were instructed to contact their families, to be honest about their intentions and to let them know that they would never see them again in physical form. All ascendants were, however, encouraged to make visits to their families in the fourth dimension, to let them know that they were well and to spread messages of peace and wellbeing through dream visitations.

The early days were spent meditating and teaching in the Hindu practice of Prana, tapping into the life force energy that runs through all living and inanimate objects. Starlight never grew tired, constantly calling upon the limitless available energy of the cosmos. She had chosen her community well and all that were initially invited stayed and became the first generation of ascendants. As the years went by people were still enjoying the delights of the third dimensional physical body and so future

travellers were born. These succeeding generations were born into a higher vibrational belief system and were immediately resident within the fourth dimension.

The children were left to fantasise and engage with their imaginations almost entirely. No preference was given to any established reality. The children existed where ever they chose to exist, with play being the primary teacher. Meditation and yoga were taught from birth by the adults who, whenever the children came for comfort or reassurance, would take themselves and the child on a journey 'toward the within', through breath, sound and movement.

The members of Starlight's community knew everything of the trials of late twentieth century living, although by existing on another plane they could observe what was happening without feeling emotion toward the plight of the lower vibrational orders. Neither was any judgement made on any participants. Whether they were seeking to expand their power through greed, or compliant in their ignorance to what was happening around them. All, in the eyes of Starlight, were on their individual journeys and those that listened to their deeper selves would make moves toward transcending. Those who ignored or chose to block out any messages they received would stay locked into the third dimension and sealed their fate with the physical world accordingly. Both choices were respected and held as equally valid as the community existed beyond the realms of right and wrong, choosing instead to see all as: 'is'.

Before the third dimensional version of the earth was depopulated, connection had been fully established between other groups around the world who had chosen to ascend previous to the final stages of destruction. Groups in the Andes, the Himalayas, the Hebrides, Iceland and the Faroes all came to be with the oneness. Aboriginal tribes in Australia, the Amazon and Polynesia, all who understood the nature of transcending, are now together as one, to seek to exist beyond the earth until such a time as the earth has regenerated sufficiently to support third dimensional life forces once more. A state of suspended

animation within the depths of the fifth dimension has become the safe space of humanity's existence. When humanity returns it shall live beyond duality and return to a notion of an Eden devoid of division.

The nuclear winter of humanity's folly shall forever be seen from this point on as a necessary step in human kinds evolution to a time of collective heightened consciousness. There is nothing to fear only choices to be made.

A Moment, Please

this moment
not a moment
but a fracture, a lone
light caught dancing

seconds
extracted, dripped
into magnification

a bubble of happening

narrative paused
dogmatic drama
soothed

no fixed point
pivot
or plot

just air
bone

now breathe

