

Next to Godliness

By

HairyD.com

Hairiness is....
....next to Godliness¹

¹ In a very short dictionary. In fact hairiness is next wheelbarrow in the same dictionary. It only contains four words.

Contents

Sonnets	7
Detective Stories	11
Performance Poetry	27
Sheffield and the Past	35
Life and Death	63
Football	63
General Poetry	87
Fetch the Space Dog	99

Sonnets

The Dream

Where late and early merge into the same
As summer light peaks through the curtains flaw
When dawn and dusk cry out for Morpheus name
Head propped on pillows, hear me gently snore

My body lies a long and lonely I
Yours a coiled yet uncontentious S
And as in endless cotton fields we lie
Together we spell out our happiness

And in the nation of my unmade bed
Your hand upon my naked belly lies
And mine lays soft upon your close cropped head
Another seeks a home between your thighs

But when the sheets are touched by bleach of sun
I wake alone and know that you are gone.

Pride of Lions

We were well met for Footix cockerel blue
And Goleo, his shirt of virgin white
The Kinas with his shift an arbrous hue
But miss as Trix and Flix feign fight and flight

No colours worn, no kit nor shirt to buy
No flags on cars, no meeting at the inn
No standards in the gardens rising high
No huddled masses waiting for the win

So when the warriors pace the foreign field
And when in sunlight battle is the call
No quarter offered, nor the chance to yield
No pride of lions sees them, heroes all.

And so the time will come to choose a side
But choice is dead by cause of lion's pride

What Shall I Call Thee?

What shall I call thee? Love must find a name.
Lost for words yet spoiled for choice and notion
So are you steady, partner, escort, flame,
Or other title label this emotion?
Beloved, dear one, darling intimate
Paramour, old lady, girl friend, sugar.
Darling, baby, sweetheart, dream girl, soul mate.
Or are you my significant other?
Fancy woman, lover, Valentine,
Or dreamboat, bunny cuddles, turtle dove
Sweetie-pie, honeybunch or baby mine.
A Polar Bear or be my lady love?

In the end, it comes to this; no name to call
You are my world, my love, my life, my all.

Saturday Night Sonnet

Although I stand on time, the bus is late.
And as I trip, I fight to find the fare.
I reach the pub at nearly half past eight,
And not so tardy, all the gang are there.
A pint of stout, a pint of landlord's best
In time the faithful friends are all well met
And playing keep up with the droughty rest
My soaking beer mat turns a pulpy wet
The bar sits cosy warm, the beer is cold
Illicit smoking stings my blood red eyes
And when at last the final stories told
There comes a time too short for long goodbyes
Then all that's left's a journey in the cab
And then the feast of chips and mixed kebab

Detective Stories

Five lives

Victim 133 – Tony Baggely

He is leaning against a STOP sign at the corner of the street, his hood pulled over his head, his aging sportswear soiled and torn. People move closer to the wall to avoid him. Tony had every advantage in life including wealthy parents and a public school education.

That was where it all started. Although not a user himself, he had curried favour amongst his peers by purchasing drugs in London. His parents had disowned him and cut him off without a penny and on his release from

Prison he drifted into a twilight underworld. It wasn't long before he grew reliant on the product he had sold to others.

Like many people with his problems, he has gravitated towards the coast, but he has no real idea why. He has been living in a hostel for the last few months, but after an argument with one of the other inmates, he has decided not to return. He has not slept now for two days and has only eaten what he can scrounge. He sees the old man fall in the gutter of a side street, a small dog yapping at his legs and goes over to look. No-one else is around so he quickly dives in and relieves the body of its watch and wallet. Then the paranoia cuts in and he runs and hides behind the kwik-i-save. Secure behind the bottle bank he opens the wallet and finds it contains nearly thirty pounds. With that and the watch, he knows Ziggy will let him have three rocks.

One of the five pound notes feels different in his hands and he rubs it between his fingers

Victim 132 - Earnest Brown

Earnest Brown finds his way to The Ball Inn every dinnertime. His wife died just before he retired and they had planned to move to the coast to be closer to her family. Once the cancer had taken her there seemed little point and what support mechanisms he did have were based around his home and work. Sadly, many of his friends and colleagues had since gone the way of Lil.

He enjoys his trips to The Ball and it gets him out of the house. He has three pints in the form of six halves and watches the racing on TV. He doesn't bet, except with himself and that's fixed and comfortable. He is nattily dressed but always wears a raincoat even in the heat of summer.

Jackie, his Jack Russell is also getting old and whereas she used to run around the pub begging crisps, she now sits on his lap and sips beer from an ashtray. He remembers when he first brought Jackie home. She had been the runt of the litter and her owner, Big Arnie, was threatening to drown her.

"You're not keeping that thing in here," Lilly had said when he first brought the puppy home, but he knew she didn't mean it. It wasn't long before Jackie slept on their bed and loved as the child they had never had.

He buys his last half with a ten pound note and Betty the barmaid gives him a five pound note, some coins and a smile. He notices that she is looking pale.

"You're not looking very well," he says. "You should go home."

Later as he's walking home, he sees a druggie on the corner and decides to take a short cut down Ward Street

Victim 131 – Elizabeth French

When her husband walked out on her, Betty French's life changed for the worst. Bobby, her husband had been her first and only boyfriend and their wedding had been something of a shotgun affair. Despite this, they had seemed happy enough until two days after their daughter's third birthday, Bobby had gone to work and never come home. Forced into bringing up a child that she was neither intellectually or emotionally equipped to deal with, she had done her best and no-one could argue that she had not done a good job. Her family had rallied round and between them they had ensured that Linda, her daughter, her daughter had been given a loving upbringing if not an affluent one. She eventually went to the local university, but now works in London and Betty doesn't see as much of her as she'd like. Linda has also met a young man who Betty neither likes or trusts, but she hopes that isn't going to come between them.

Once Linda had gone, Betty found herself at a loose end and had taken a job in a local pub. She was still a youngish woman and not unattractive.

She was popular with the regulars and efficient with the passing tourist trade. She also liked meeting people, a pleasure she had been forced to forego when bringing up Linda.

She's not fond of Loud Derek, but takes the five pound note and accepts the drink he offers.

She had sacrificed a lot for Linda, but she begrudges her nothing. Since Linda left she has discovered little luxuries like Maltesers and Asti Spumante. Her job affords her these delights and she gets to meet people. She also has a shirt embroidered with the name of the pub and it saves her the decision of what to wear.

She is fond of Earnest and smiles at him as she serves him then gives him his change.

Victim 130 – “Loud” Derek Stevens

He knows he's loud, but he's got a lot to say and people better listen. He's registered disabled and hasn't worked for six years ever since he had that problem with his legs, but he's well enough to find his way to the pub every dinnertime. He parks his car outside the pub because after four or five pints he's needs it to get home. After all, he's registered disabled isn't he?

He's wearing a jacket and tie. Just because he's not working doesn't mean he can let himself go. He's talking about The Nerve Gas Killer who has killed one hundred and twenty eight random people using a deadly nerve gas. The police know how the killer is spreading the poison, but they're not telling. They say they don't want to cause a panic.

“I bet you a fiver he's killed again.,” says a young man stood by the bar in a garish T-shirt. That sounds like a challenge that must be met, he's not going to allow young whipper-snappers to tell him anything. He quickly accepts the bet and asks to see the money. The young man takes a fiver out of his pocket and holds it in front of him. They use teletext to find out if there's been another death. There hasn't been a death for five days and the police are recommending that no-one should accept any gift from someone they don't know. Derek expects an argument with the young man but he hands over the fiver without complaint. Showing his largesse, he uses the note and offers the barmaid a drink.

Victim 129 – Jonathon “Spider” Maitland

Methyl phenyl tetrahydropyridine is a powerful contact neurotoxin. It is absorbed by the skin and finds its way into the blood stream. After two hours, it causes systemic organ failure. One hundred and twenty eight people have died of it in the last month.

Making the drug is not difficult for Spider. He makes methylenedioxy methylamphetamine, lysergic acid diethylamide and desoxyephedrine for a living. His employers call them by their street names ecstasy, acid and crystal meth. His employers think he’s a nerdy weirdo and see themselves as stone killers.

If only they knew.

His methodology is simple. He makes the neurotoxin and coats a five pound note. He then takes a trip somewhere and hands over the fiver. For the next six hours, before the poison evaporates, anyone who touches the note dies.

Although he can drive and owns a car and a motorbike, he uses public transport. This is so there’s no chance of him getting caught on a speeding charge or parking offence. He is long haired but clean shaven and is wearing a Slipknot T-shirt. A lot of people look like him and most people don’t see him. He is careful to avoid CC-TV because he knows how the police work and he’s not making any obvious mistakes. Once the notes gone, he gets to a place of privacy and takes the antidote. He knows he doesn’t have long to do this, but that element of risk is part of the fun.

He then goes home, drops some acid and watches the news to see how many die before the drug evaporates and the note becomes inert. His record so far is eight, in Wigan.

Today, he catches a train to the coast and after playing pinball in an arcade, goes into the nearest pub. He sees the loud man at the bar and knows how he will get rid of the fiver. It makes him smile.

So now it’s back to the train and the antidote. He’s cutting it fine, so when he gets on the train he goes straight to the toilet and fills his syringe. Sadly for him, the train jerks into motion and the needle slips from his hand and shatters on the floor.

He is curiously un-phased by this as he sees what’s left of his life run between the broken glass on the toilet floor. He smiles and roles one last joint.

Mrs. McGinty
and the
Stolen Specs.
A Mrs. McGinty Mystery

Colonel Ephraim Pikeaway took a drink from his tea.

“Well Colonel, what have you got for us today?” said my aunt. As usual she was dressed as the friendly little lady and was pretending to knit. As far as I’m aware, my aunt has never completed a garment, but she keeps a bottle of brown ale in her in her knitting bag in case of emergency. She keeps taking a sip from it when she thinks no-one is looking. Killer, her cat, lay dozing on her lap.

The Colonel worked for a governmental organization who often found work for my aunt and I.

“This is something of a social call, I’m afraid,” he said. “But I’ve got a little mystery for you.”

“Then why are you afraid?”

“Because I’ve already solved it. I take it you heard of the theft of the Lady Bagmore’s spectacles.”

“Oh, yes, it was in all the papers” said my aunt. “But you’ve caught the people who did that and recovered the collection.”

“That’s true, but there was a little problem involved in the case that I’m sure you’ll be interested in.” He took another sip of his tea. “Lady Bagmore is one of the world leading experts on glasses, and I don’t mean the drinking type. “Spectacles were supposedly invented by Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century, but until recently there was no proof that he’d actually made any glasses.

“Last year, a pair of spectacles, apparently built by Bacon and with full provenance, was unearthed. If they are really what they appear to be, they’re worth millions. The glasses and the associated documents were shipped to Lady Bagmore for authentication. They were delivered by security courier, but after he had left, three armed men burst into Bagmore Hall and grabbed the specs as well as much of the Bagmore collection.

“Unfortunately, they had reckoned without Lady Bagmore, who is something of a game old bird. She got hold of an old shotgun and ran after the raiders shooting at them. She nearly blew the leg off one.

“The man we caught was called Billy O’Halloran and he sang like the proverbial canary.”

At this point, my aunt broke wind and blamed it on the cat. On hearing his name, Killer raised his head, but realising what had happened, went quickly back to sleep. Pikeaway ignored this and carried on.

“He told us that they already had a buyer and had negotiated a seven figure sum. They had also contacted someone who specialised in getting people and goods out of the country. He told us the gang was to split up and meet again twenty four hours later at an area of town called The Cliffs.

“This area used to be a busy retail centre and contained many shops including some of the large chain stores.

“But as these large stores have relocated to the out of town malls, the area has become pretty run down.

“One of the larger stores has been broken down into a number of smaller units and these are rented to small specialist retailers.”

“I know the place,” I said. “There used to be a comic shop, a games shop and place that sold dolls houses in there. I used to go regularly.”

“You must have been the only one. When we got there, most of the units were empty and the rest of them were closed. Only two of them were actually open. One of them was a stamp shop, the other sold coins.

“And this is an important part of our little mystery.”

He took another sip of his tea.

“We waited for the two raiders to arrive and watched them go into the store. We decided that we couldn’t leave them in there unobserved for too long as there are too many places to hide and too many exits. The owner of the underground knows this and uses it to help smuggle his clients out.

“When we got in, the raiders were gone.

“We interviewed the two owners of the shops.

“The first was the numismatist called Sandra Mewes. She seemed cheerful enough and very knowledgeable about coins. She showed me a William and Mary farthing from the seventeenth century. She knew all the details, but said it was only worth a couple of quid. There seemed to be very little stock in her store.

“The second was the philatelist Kevin Yeow. He was the exact opposite of Mewes. He’d got loads of stock, but knew nothing about it. He showed me a penny black which he said was nothing special, but told me even the run-of-the-mill ones go for two hundred pounds. I looked it up on the web. A bog standard one is worth less than a fiver.”

“It must be one of these two, we searched the whole place and could find no sign of the two robbers.”

“How do you know it must be one of these two store owners?” asked my aunt.

“Because, as I said earlier, we’ve already solved this case. I also said I thought you’d like this solution. So which of these two is our criminal travel agent?”

The Challenge.

There is a choice of two possible people who arrange for criminals to escape the country.

One is Sarah Mewes, the coin collector who has few or no coins in his shop.

The other is Kevin Yeow, the stamp collector who doesn’t seem to know the value of stamps.

Which one is running an underground railway?

(Answers at the back of the book)

Holmes and Watson Meet Tom Jones

Representative Jasper Witchwad was dead.

The town of Hale on the planet Primus is a gated community for the super rich and the hyper famous. Just to get on the waiting list, a client's bank account must show more than 10^7 credits. The township is surrounded by a force bubble and nothing can get in or out unless it comes through one of two heavily guarded portals.

Jasper Witchwad was one of the few people who could afford to live there. He came from an old family had been left a small fortune in his fathers will. He was Senate Representative for the Blue Party but also he had successful media career.

Witchwad had a fascination with the twentieth century. His house in Hale was full of memorabilia from that century. He specialized in what would now be considered data in its different forms. He had a vast collection of books printed on paper, films recorded on tape and music recorded on vinyl. He had devices for playing all of these.

When the body was found, he was clutching a copy of She's a Lady, a 1971 album by Tom Jones. The album was on vinyl and it looked as if Jasper had made a special effort to remove that particular album from his collection.

The police on Primus decided they needed an expert on the twentieth century and called in Doctor John Holmes and Mr. Sherlock Watson. Doctor Holmes had been born in that century and although no-one knew when Watson had been born, his almost encyclopedic knowledge of everything was seen as an asset.

As Holmes entered the room he noticed a large metal box.

"Do you know what that is?" he said, smiling. "That's a Betamax recorder."

"Called Betamax, because the shape of the tape in the cassette looked like the Greek letter beta," added Watson. "That's our letter B."

They were greeted by Inspector Oolu, an octoped from the planet Oo. He invited the detectives into the room and invited them to look round.

Holmes checked the collections of books and videos while Watson put on a pair of surgical gloves and examined the album.

"I believe you already have a number of suspects," he said to Oolu.

“We have three,” Oolu replied. “The first is a chameleoid life form, a Grine from the planet Orme in the Baledo system. His skin changes its colour to match his background. Comes in handy in this one’s case. He’s a professional nark, he makes his money by selling information to the police. He’s our best grass by a mile.

“That’s how we caught him. When I got here, I spotted him in trying to get out through the gatehouse. Even though he was camouflaged, I still saw him because I’m used to him. He wouldn’t tell me why he was here so we pulled him in. Their species don’t have names as such, being chameleoids, they never look the same way twice so they take titles such as Feels-like-Wool or Smells-Like-Socks. This one’s called Good-To-Touch.

“The second is a shape shifter, a Gassee from Telar in the Photo system. He can change his shape into that of any other person. He only has to have physical contact with them and he can shift into their shape. The Gassees are genetically engineered. They don’t have names only batch numbers, this one’s called A6600. His friends call him 58. Do you know why?”

“In hexadecimal, 58 is the cube root of A6600,” said Watson without hesitation. Oolu shrugged with all eight tentacles and continued.

“He’s well known to us, a sleaze bag journalist who uses his skills to sneak up on unsuspecting celebrities. He paid off one of the gardeners and has been working in his place for a couple of weeks. Gassees have to return to their normal shape every couple of hours and he had to do this while he was waiting to give a statement. He’s clammed up too.”

“The third suspect is Jamie Briggs, a Galamatran from Thrall. He’s a career thief. The Galamatrans are natural teleporters, which means they can move from one place to another just using the power of their minds. When they leave their planet, Galamatrans are supposed to take psionic suppressors to stop them being able to teleport, but Briggs has been laying off the pills. When Witchwad was found dead, he tried to teleport out, but they’d intensified the force dome and he couldn’t get out.

Doctor Holmes had finished searching the shelves and had a question for Oolu.

“Do you know the political affiliations of the suspects? This could be a political assassination.”

“I’ve asked them,” said Oolu. “Good-To-Touch was an active member of the Environmentalists. The Greens believe that big business is destroying the atmosphere of various planets by too many space launches and too much flight. Witchwad often spoke out against these issues in the senate.

“A6600 is a natural conservative, the Blues have policies that support the ostentatious consumption that his life revolves around. Also they’ve provided him with more tales of sleaze than any of the other parties. Recently, however, he was involved in a libel case and Witchwad appeared for the prosecution. 58 lost is case and it cost him big.

“Gus Carnaby is a communist. The people of Trall are always in and out of each others houses and have no concept of personal property. This makes them natural supporters of the Reds. He admits that he had meant to steal from Witchwad but denies murdering him.”

Sherlock Watson still had the record in his hand.

“Well, from what you’ve told me, I think I know who killed Jasper Witchwad.”

The Challenge

So who killed Jasper Witchwad?

Was it the chameleoid Good-To-Touch who used his powers of camouflage to get into his home?

Was it A6600 who could have presented himself as one of Witchward’s friends?

Or was it Gus Carnaby who could just teleport in?

But why was Jasper Witchward clutching a Tom Jones album?

(Answers at the back of the book)

Mrs. McGinty
and the Missing Link.
A Mrs. McGinty Mystery

Alberia is a vaguely pointless country.

It lies between oil rich Qatan to the north and Perilia with its gold mines to the south. Although it has an area of approximately France, it has a population roughly equivalent of the crowd at an MK Dons football match. The nomadic tribesmen that live between Alberia's oases got the short end of the stick when the boundaries were drawn up between the three countries. Its population had been divided between Qatan and Perilia, some moving to the oil in the north, others to the gold in the south.

Many years later, Alberia had fallen under the beady eye of the Hayes Corporation.

They had realised that it was difficult for the people of land locked Perilia to get their gold to the ports of Qatan. They had also realised that if there was a transport infrastructure in Perilia linking the oases, then there were thousands of acres of real estate that could be bought for a couple of beads and the occasional Exocet missile.

They had decided to build a railway line between Qatan and Perilia. The raw materials were readily available and there was an enthusiastic indigenous work force. Once the railway was in, they intended to use it to bring in materials and build airstrips in the desert.

Hayes had organised work teams in Qatan and Perilia. National pride had been intense and both sides had set off determined to have built more of the line before the two ends met.

Qatan was well ahead in the race before disaster struck. A surveyor had come from the Hayes Corporation and found that the Qatan crews had drifted approximately three hundred miles off course.

The Qatani were livid. They claimed that the Hayes Corporation had given them the wrong information. They said Hayes were working with the Perilians.

It was at this point that Hayes had called in Colonel Ephraim Pikeaway. Pikey had got straight to the bottom of the matter. It had turned out there was no conspiracy, just an over enthusiastic engineer who, in his haste to get the job done, had misread his satellite location device.

Secretly, the Hayes Corporation were quite pleased with this outcome. They had been worried that if one of the countries had won, the other would not have allowed the track to be finished.

But now they could call it a draw. The Qatani had built more track, but the Perilians had got further into Alberia. Honour was satisfied.

The Hayes Corporation decided to hold a joining ceremony.

Sleepers were made out of compacted sand (there was a lot of it in the desert) and the tracks were extruded hot (to allow for expansion) from the back of a machine. The rails were then joined to the sleepers by what were effectively nails. The nails came in two sizes, Brads and Tacks.

Brads were the longer nails used to secure the track. Tacks were smaller and used to secure the brads.

To finish the line, Hayes had made a Golden Tack. The President of Perilia and the King of Qatan had agreed to both place hands on the sledge hammer that would be used to drive in the final tack. The tack itself would be made of twenty-four carat gold.

Hayes had three tacks made. One was to be driven into the sleeper during the ceremony and the other two were to be given to the relevant countries.

The ceremony itself went without a hitch, both the king and the president playing their parts perfectly. The problem came when it was time to present the ceremonial tacks.

One of them was missing.

This caused a major problem. It would have been easier if both had been stolen, neither country would have been given a tack. But now there was a single tack, so which country was to get it?

It was at this point that Pikey called me and my aunt in.

We landed in Qatan and Pikey had arranged a special railcar that could get us to Al Huduh, the town where the ceremony had been held.

My aunt moaned all the way there.

“It’s too bloody hot,” she said, despite the air conditioning. “I’m sweating like a rhino with hives. I’m not a sweaty old slag, I’m a slapper in aqueous suspension.”

She broke wind and the air conditioning groaned.

“I makes your knickers stick to your bum,” she added unhelpfully and began to firtle around her nether regions.

By the time we reached Al Huduh she had managed to compose herself properly and was every inch the English Gentlewoman. She had re-arranged her underwear and was carrying herself erect. She carried a small parasol and when the door opened she waited for Colonel Pikeaway to take her hand and help her from the carriage.

“There’s been a development,” said the Colonel eagerly. “We’ve tracked the robbers down to the Street of a Thousand Thieves.

“That was imaginative,” said my aunt

“It’s not called the Street of a Thousand Thieves for nothing. When got there, we followed them into an alley way. We knew it was a dead end and so we let them go in.

“There were three shops on the alley way.”

“There was Abdul A Aneedul’s, a small scale electronics specialist. You know the sort of thing, cheap mp3 players, CD’s, knocked off SatNavs.”

“There was Byron B Blannibos’ which is a carpet shop.”

“Isn’t that a bit stereotypical”

“Who’s telling this story? I’ll tell you something though, he’s got some lovely rugs. I’ve bought a couple to take back to Mrs. Pikeaway.

“The last shop was owned by Cyrus C. Cantano. It’s a...er...private...shop.”

“Did you buy Mrs. Pikeaway anything from there?”

“I was tempted to buy something, but not for Mrs. Pikeaway.”

“So you’ve been into all the shops?”

“Yes, but only for a quick look round. We’re outside our jurisdiction and we don’t have the right to search all of them. We will be allowed to search one shop and only one. So here’s my question, which shop do you think they would pick?”

The Challenge.

So where has the ceremonial nail been hidden?

Was it Abdul A Aneedul’s small scale electronics shop

Was it Byron B Blannibos’ carpet shop.

Or was it Cyrus C. Cantano’s private shop.

To answer the question, you must decide which shop would you put the golden tack in if you wanted it to be hardest to find.

(Answers at the back of the book)

Justifiable Homicide

He holds the piece of paper in his hand. It reads:

*30th April 15.30
You know what to do.
If you lack the courage, then I will act.*

He knows the date and time well. It is the exact moment in 1945 that Adolf Hitler put the barrel of a 7.65mm snub-nosed Mauser to his temple and pulled the trigger. A few minutes earlier, the fuehrer had poisoned his wife of 40 hours with hydrogen cyanide.

He understands what the note means.

He either takes his own life or has it taken from him.

He looks at the grandfather clock whose ticks and tocks have tallied the lives of five generations of his family.

It reads 15.20

He knows the pillbox is safe. It has been searched by his security people. There are no bombs or devices and no hidden assassins. His men left the building at 15.00 with dire warnings not to return and he sealed the door behind them.

He knows his opponent has a strong sense of history and fully expects to be approached by a 7.65mm snub-nosed Mauser, but he also has a strong sense of history and he has a plan.

He purchased the cans of Zyklon B from the same man who sold him Hitler's dagger, a man who claimed to be Goebel's son. At 15.28 he puts on a gas mask and opens the cans. The cans were manufactured by the Dreisler company in 1943, but the gas mask is pure 21st century. He owns a genuine World War II gas mask, but he is taking no risks.

He watches the gas swirl from the cans and knows that anyone still in the pillbox will soon be dead. He picks up Hitler's knife and feels confident that he can finish off any assailant fighting against the effects of the gas.

But no killer bursts from his or her hiding place and at 16.00 he triggers the extractor fans. At 16.30 he takes off the gas mask and pours himself a long whiskey. He silently toasts the grandfather clock that appears to have granted him life. He takes a long swig before realising the whiskey has a slightly acidic taste.

Too late, he smells bitter almonds.

How fitting, he thinks.

And the world turns black.

Performance Poetry

Taken at the Flood

*There is tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood
Leads on to watered down Bovril
And a soggy meat pie.*

I suppose you've seen it's been raining,
There's flooding in Hillsborough park.
The council's got two of each animal
And the Methodists are building an ark.

Most of Wednesday's ground has been flooded
The office, the pitch and the shop.
Leppins Lane's been infested with lobster.
And crabs have took over the Kop.

The grandstand's been damaged by sea fish
The Pru says that they won't them pay out
They say you're not covered for mackerel
And for acts of cod you get nowt.

They've had to bring in some new signings
There's at least one or two that you'll know
There's Marineboy and Man from Atlantis
And a Frenchman that's called Jacques Cousteau

The new kits are totally awful
The aqualung doesn't look right.
They're all wearing trunks and a snorkel
And flippers in blue, black and white.

They shouldn't have swapped Ozzie for Barnie
The marketing men never learn
So now they've got Sidney the Seagull
And Arnie the Antarctic Tern

The one game we've played has been rubbish
I might as well stayed in the pub
There were eight players sent off for diving
And one was brought on as a sub.

I don't want to fail Sheffield Wednesday
But I think that it has to be said
I won't watch them play water polo
So I'm going fishing instead

Murder in the Kitchen

It was dark in the kitchen
And no-one could tell,
That the food in the pantry
Had all been through hell.

The eggs had been beaten,
The spuds were all chipped,
The fish had been battered,
And the cream had been whipped.

But who was the cause
Of this comestible crime?
The alimantal assassin
Must be caught and do time

The pans were all coppers
And so were the pots
The cups took saucers
Through books of mug shots

The peas were all processed
And so was the cheese
The red and the brown sauce
Were given the squeeze

But amidst all the egg shells
All shattered and broke
The smallest of Woks
Lay covered in Yoke

The pot called the kettles
And guidance was sought
The wok must be charged
And then taken to court

The beak was a kettle
The case would be heard
From once cooking chicken
The wok would do bird.

The jury was glasses
And soon they agreed
The wok was the one
Who committed the deed.

“He’s so small,” said the chip pan
Shedding a tear.
“But he’s hard,” said the teapot
Quaking with fear.

“You are wrong,” said Judge Kettle.
“Cause when all’s said and done,
A little hard wok
Never hurt anyone.”

A Shaggy Dog Story

Here is a story
I've told you before,
Of a dark Friday night
Spent on Addlestone Moor,

We were young, we were fit,
We were experts in beer.
And the pubs in the town
Gave us cause to be here.

But we soon were embittered
By the pubs thereabouts.
Public bars seemed like private,
And the inns seemed like outs.

There was one called "The Shortage"
But that had no beer.
And one called "The Moon",
Which had no atmosphere.

We saw that the landord
Was lost in despair
So we asked why "The Moon"
Was so lifeless and bare

"The truth of the matter,"
Moaned our miserable host
"Is my pub is now cursed
By a cur of a ghost

"The events of my tale
Which you may not believe
Took place in this pub
On an All Hallow's Eve

“The pub door flew open
And there on the mat
Stood the lead in my tale
And a dogs tail at that

“For there in my doorway
Believe it or not
Was mongrel with mouth
And he called himself Spot

“He asked for strong liquor
And a chaser of Chum
Then that lap dog lapped up
His Pedigree Rum

“But the bell rang for time
And what do you think
That damned little Shitzu
Would not pay its drink

“It stood at the bar
And demanded its ale
So I took down my knife
And I cut off its tail.

“And so on full moon when
The nights midnight black
Comes the ghost of Old Spot
And he wants his tail back.”

Then the bar became filled
With a dense swirling fog
And there in the door
Was a ghostly old dog.

And we shook as we heard
A cruel ghostly wail
As the spectre of Spot said
“Return me my tail.”

The air turned to ice
As this banshee we heard,
But the host of The Moon
Was not shaken, nor stirred.

“I’m sorry,” he said
As he looked at the mutt
“But I can’t retail spirits
After we’ve shut.”

Sheffield and The Past

My Grandmother's Clock

The clock sits on my Grandmother's wall.
It's carved Cherubim and Seraphim look down upon my play.
The chimes beat out another hour.
Each tick a sensation to be savoured, each tock a challenge to beat
It chimes once for the half hour and when it chimes again, mum and dad
will be here.
The distance between two calls is time enough to play.
I'm allowed to wind it, taking care with each turn of the key not to
overwork its taut spring.
My Grandma says she no longer hears it; it's been so much a part of her
life for so long.

And now the clock sits upon my wall.
Its angelic host blind to my work.
I often neglect to feed it
Letting its aging heart run slow.
I am deaf to its chimes.
There are other sounds to hear.
The ticking goes unheard.
Here, in my living room,
I no longer hear time pass.

Photograph

It's been my Mum and Dad's Golden Wedding Anniversary and I've been scanning the old black and white photographs

- My Dad in monochrome holding a grey trophy.
- A stern faced woman in the battleship dress looks over a giggle of smiling girls
- My Gran in black coat and washed out hat hold a white bundle.
- In their slate suits and dismal dresses, a family sit at the beach under a smoky sky.

And amongst ashen images I suddenly found Red.

There was no colour photography in that charcoal past but for an extra fee, the photographer would use watercolours to enhance a photo. Suddenly, here in a picture of a young couple on their wedding day, there were roses of red and I knew there was more to these images past than my eyes could manage.

I sat and watched my parents view the scans. The recognition and realization of times gone by.

- The silver trophy held by my Dad is the National Youth Cup, won by Sheffield boys for whom he played centre forward.
- The stern faced woman in the purple dress is Mrs. Wilkins, my mum's boss at Twist Drill, a lovely woman who looked after her rosy faced Girls.
- The bundle held by my Gram in the pink blanket against her red coat is me.
- My family are at the seaside for a weekend of pink candy-floss, garish roller coasters, sandy castles and golden fish and chips.

And although my mum's wedding dress is white and my dad's morning suit is black, the sky is blue, the horseshoes gold and the roses are red.

So now I know that although these images are faded and grey, in the minds of those who were there, there's all the colour you need.

You can't go back to Rebels.

Hendrix is standing next to a mountain
And topples it with edge of his guitar
He died for his music and with his death gave the music life
I play along, my guitar as light as air.

After a day of dealing with death
Nurse Sarah dons the war paint and embraces life.
Lucy's sequined basque
Makes me ask what trapeze she's dropped off
Bison upsets the bouncers
With a failed piece of magic
Dawn's arguing with last week's boyfriend
And making eyes at the next.

What was suitable for a nightclub in nineteen seventy-five
Is not suitable for a night club in nineteen eighty-two
And I have made my last walk up the eighty two stairs.

But now it's back,
Promising loud music and live bands
A new Rebels for a new century
But an old atmosphere
For the old crowd.

I walk in and feel alone
Sarah's in the Casbah
Lucy's in the States
And Dawn's at the bar arguing over the price of drinks.

Hendrix grinds out Voodoo Chile for the thousandth time
And my air guitar sits heavy in my hands.
Age and responsibility lay as weights on my empty frets.

I walk down the three stairs and flag a cab.
As I leave, I see Bison walking in and wonder if I should stay.
But the door closes and I know I can't go back.

The Club

It's early in the night and the concert room bar is shuttered so I walk through to the lounge. After a day of carving the names of the dead into one million year old marble, monumental mason, Billy Middleton sits, a solitary figure, at the end of the bar. He likes five or six double gins before he starts serious drinking. He says it settles his stomach. "Ay up, Billy," I say. "It's looking a bit black o'er your mother's." He just nods; he'll be more communicative after he's had the gin. Behind the bar is the steward, Mick Carson. Mick doesn't drink while he's working, but there is an ever present cup of tea on the bar. I buy a pint of Magnet and let another night take its comforting and familiar course.

- The turn battles against the indifference of the early crowd with Andy on the Hammond and Badger on the drums
- Tables filled with glasses are quickly cleared by an army of kids.
- The Offal Bar shifts trays of tripe and trotters
- A crystal silence falls for the bingo, broken only by the euphoria of a shout
- The turn returns to rapturous applause. They'll keep clapping until they've drunk up.

It's the end of the night and it's time for Mick to have a drink. He quickly knocks back a shot of Wood's one hundred proof rum. When he's finished packing up and everyone has gone home, he'll have half a packet of Woodbines and a couple of pints of Wards's, but first there's a job to do.

"Time Gentleman Please," he says.

Then...

"You don't have to go 'ome, but yer can't stay 'ere."

And finally...

"We've 'ad yer money, nah bugger off."

And the happy amnesiacs drift out and weave their way back to rent and rates, bosses and bills.

(The world turns and my hair turns grey.)

The turns and tombola are long since gone and The Club is an Old People's Home.

Today's youth gets its Bread and Circuses on street corners or without leaving the house. Widescreen MTV is a better home for Angels than some bleached baritone and his backing tapes. They're bored with beer and have other lives to live.

And in one of those ironies that show that God has a sense of humour, some of the regulars are now residents of The Club. Billy Middleton's mum died ten years ago, so he sold his tombstone business and bought shares in the home. Mick Carson is no longer as sharp as he once was and his caring family found it fitting to find him sanctuary in the place he once worked.

And in their spiritless rooms, Billy and Mick come to the end of another day. Without anyone to tell him, Billy Middleton wonders if it's a bit black over his mother's and although there's no-one to send home, Mick Carson calls time.

I'm never getting married, me.

Steve says:

"I'm never getting married, me. It's all about the band. Once we get signed, there'll be groupies. There'll be no time for kids."

Tim says:

"I'm not looking for wife. I want some proper little raver. There's got to be a few out there for Timmyboy. Ask ten and you get kicked in the knackers nine times. It's worth it for the tenth."

Mick says

"I can see me meeting somebody, but I'm not getting married. Why tie yourself down? And I don't want kids, it gets in the way of enjoying yourself."

And I say.

"Oh, it will happen to me. Nice job, nice wife, 2.4 children and a stupid looking dog."

Steve's a rock god.

Long hair, Motorhead T-shirt. Plays a twin neck air guitar – twelve string and bass. He sings in a band called Broken Glass and belts out rock classics in pubs where he is a rock and roll star.

Tim's a nerd.

Tall and gangly with wild uncontrollable hair and the merest hint of a beard. He is enthusiastic about everything. He is currently wearing a red shirt and grey safari suit and he is convinced he looks *good*.

Mick's a sportsman

Good looking, dark, squat and muscled, he exudes physical confidence and he's well dressed. He just knows he'll make it as a professional sportsman. He is popular with the laydeez.

And me?

I'm just me.

Steve says:

“I’ve just got a petrol driven lawnmower. It makes short work of that long grass at the bottom of the garden. This rain’s been terrible for my tomatoes.”

Tim says:

“Is that a skirt or a belt? She must be freezing with only that on. If I were her Dad, I wouldn’t let her out like that.”

Mick says:

“They’re making changes at the bank. Our branch looks like it’s going to close. They might make me a manager in Leeds. It’s a promotion, but I don’t fancy the travel.”

And I say

“It’s not changed in here for years. The clientele’s got a bit younger. See you next month.”

Steve works in catering and is married to Sam. His kids are called Jimmy and Robert and they have an old English sheepdog called Lemmy.

Tim is a teacher and is married to Moira. His kids are called Lucinda and Jocasta and they have a Labrador cross called Wiggy.

Mick works in a bank and is married to Kath. His kids are called Brooklyn and Victoria and they have a retired greyhound called Waddle.

And me?

I’m just me.

Passport

My passport is blue and signed by the Queen.
I am a tourist of the past.

An Egg Box is crushed and gone.
Paulden's, Cocaines and Walshes are names on distant stones.
Rebellion no longer occurs above BHS.
Banks are bars and a hospital becomes a home.
The stalls are gone and the scales weigh no more.

But now my passport is brown and I am a European
I am a tourist of the present.

Oak and crystal arches home verdant walkways.
Oceans of millstone flow towards a joyous beach of glass.
Children run from darting spears of light.
A sliver of steel greets denizens of the iron horse
And a pinball promenade takes them to the heart of the town.

My visa to the past has expired.
Hand me my passport to the future.

SYNOP

This is SYNOP

03838 11140 81015 10066 20065 38331 48600 52010 60164 74044
88611

This mass of numbers is today's weather for Beaufort Park, a met office research centre near Reading.

Until the eighties, these codes were received by telex at observing stations up and down the country. Most of these were stations were RAF bases, others were civil airports, coastguard stations and weather centres. It is called an ob, short for observation.

Teams of men and women would convert these numbers into symbols and plot them onto maps. They sat at angled, back-lit desks and used special red and black pens. By Royal Decree of 1792, all documents containing a meteorological record become property of the crown and are archived for all perpetuity. Because of this, the ink had to be of achievable quality, meaning it should last at least one hundred years without fading. Every weather map since the late eighteenth century is stored in The Archive, an air conditioned hanger in Exeter.

Once the maps were plotted, other groups of men and women – mostly men – would then take them and forecast the weather. This gave yet other men and women up and down the country something to talk about.

And talk about it they do. At every breakfast table and on every bus, the changeable nature of the British weather is a prime topic for conversation. The British Isles lie on the boundary between air coming from the North Pole and air coming from the south. This boundary moves up and down the country. One minute we can be in cold wet air from the north, the next warm dry air from the south. It is this that makes the weather difficult to plot and predicting the position of this boundary is secret to successful forecasting. It is its movement that makes the climate such a topic of conversation.

But forecasting *is* important. The oil industry, shipping and flight cannot operate without the forecasts of the Met. Office. There are less critical uses of the product. The village fete is cancelled because of a forecast of poor weather, a road is laid on the forecast of twenty four hours clear and Marks and Spencer stock their shelves on the daily forecast of the Met. Office.

I found The Archive by accident one day. Entry is gained through an air lock and inside its dry cool walls there are millions of weather reports as well as other documents featuring a meteorological record. The Log of the Bounty is there, as well as Scott's diaries and Hitler's plans for the invasion of England. Among the millions of documents I found the anemographs for Norton Aerodrome on 12th December 1940, the night of the Sheffield blitz. The needle jerks every time a bomb hits and after one particularly big bang, someone has written "Wow!" on the record in a neat ornate hand. In this room, there is much for the English to talk about.

The irony is I learned the code to kill it. I learned SYNOP and how to plot an ob, not so I could join the ranks of the plotters, but so that I could teach computers to replace them. No longer is this information plotted by men. Computer generated maps and satellite imagery have replaced the neat, hand-drawn charts. SYNOP is still used to transport the code travels the world in its own ethereal form, but it is no longer received by men and women sat at angled desks. Copper and silicon draft maps of a different kind. Few can read an ob, let alone plot one.

But in an air conditioned hanger in Exeter, the maps remain. Exquisite and clean in crisp Indian ink, the obs lie just waiting to be discovered by someone passing by.

The Ring

In another time and place, we would visit The Ring.

- A pilgrimage to an off-license on Dixon Lane provided the tickets.
- A red Austin A40 provided the transport.
- Kia-ora provided the refreshments
- Red and blue shirts and knitted white ties provided our formal attire
- George Relwiskow provided the bills for the signatures of the gladiators.

And gladiators they were.

Mighty warriors like Kendo Nagasaki, Brian “Goldbelt” Maxine, Johnny St. Claire, Giant Haystacks, Kung Fu, Catweazle, The Royal Brothers and Big Daddy.

I remember:

- The Royals and a red card and a ring filled with rioters leaving Kent Walton incensed by a liquorice torpedo.
- A little old lady with a ten pound lump hammer turned into a stage-bound starfish by an anonymous bouncer after taking Goldbelt’s arm.
- Ringmaster Ken Lazenby, being quizzed on his piles. “Shocking,” he said. “I’m paying to have them done. I’m going private, me.” he declared publicly.
- Picketing West Bar for Kendo’s release. He had refused to remove his mask and was in found in possession of two razor sharp offensive samurai weapons.
- John Cleese slapping the mat and Mrs. Bucket brandishing a brolley, running and screaming at the grapplers.

And scream we did, screeching imagined venom at the Angels and Antichrists in their Wagnerian struggle. All of life was there, a battle between good and evil with two falls, two submissions or one KO to

decide. Emotions were given free rein and through their freedom, we gained release.

Sometimes, the bouts finished early and we would have to wait for our transport elsewhere. We would stay in the Grand Circle and stare at the empty ring, the radiant lights on the scuffed white canvas made vivid by the absence of its champions.

There was a feeling of finality, a knowledge that the ceremony had passed. The ring was empty. It was over. And with this knowledge came a quiet sadness and a feeling of emptiness.

But then our lift turned up and we moved on.

An Interview with Beethoven

- Interviewer : Mr. Beethoven, there is one thing I've always wanted to know. There has always been some controversy surrounding your religious beliefs. Though born into a Roman Catholic family, your work contains pantheistic imagery and pagan symbolism. Haydn considered you an atheist, but your friend and biographer Schindler said you tended towards deism. Which of these statements, if either, truly represents your approach to God or the lack of one?
- Beethoven : WHAT??!!

Little Weed.

Watching daytime TV made me think of other childlike times. A time where we wore balaclavas backwards and became Batman, a time of Delavio and goalie wag.

And there were fixed points.

Eleven o'clock meant a big hand and twelve and a little hand on two. Humpty and Gemima would take us through an arched window to a chocolate factory.

Twelve o'clock was boiled eggs and cakey fingers, beans on toast, flat sausage sandwiches or fish fingers in a breadcake.

And one o'clock would bring the words of wisdom that only Watch With Mother could offer.

"Flip-flop," we were told. "Flip-flop flobbalop."

"Flobalop little weee."

"Oooh Flobalop."

My mum hated it.

"Why can't they talk properly?" she'd say. "It's not setting a good example. I don't want my kids growing up saying 'flip flop flobbalop'." But we did.

Running round the garden flobbalopping and having a little weeee, we enjoyed the naivety of childhood and experienced the joy of just being kids. And from this starting point, I explored the mathematical wonders of the universe, forecast the weather and taught others to see the world around them.

But I learnt to tell the time in Play School, a love of narrative in Pogle's Wood and a joy in the sound of words in that magical garden.

So here I sit, watching daytime TV and knowing that it gives its pre-school disciples a whole new vocabulary. The average four year old knows phrases like Property Developer, Makeover and DNA testing and I wonder if my mother would approve.

So I've just got one thing to say, and that's:

Flobbalop little weee.

And it sounds good.

Coulrophobia

(An exaggerated fear of clowns)

When I was young, I was frightened by cotton wool.

Maybe it was because I associated it with being hurt. A grazed knee (and let's face it, I had plenty of them) would be treated with cotton wool. The old Pyrex bowl under the sink would be filled with water and a cap of Dettol would be added which sent it cloudy. Cotton wool balls would be added to the milky liquid and used to clean the wound. If things were really bad, you might need some Germoline, but otherwise, it was a clean fabric plaster, the type that left grey lines at its edges and your mum had to pull off quickly.

Then I was sent out again to find out if I'd learnt my lesson or whether I needed a further one using the other knee.

I remember dreading the plaster being removed, so maybe I should be frightened by plasters

I think what I was really frightened by was the texture. It felt unnatural and I can remember trying to eat some to see if it tasted like candyfloss. It didn't, and to this day I can remember the feel of it on my tongue.

I learnt from this also. Don't eat cotton wool.

But one thing I do remember about cotton wool, forty years ago, we were never wrapped in it.

Last year I was attending a union conference on the subject of play. The concern was that kids no longer learn through play. One speaker was interrupted by the Chair with an important message.

"Will Mrs. and Mr. Greave please go to the creche where their daughter, Jocasta, has been frightened by a clown."

This tells you anything these two people.

They are at a union conference together and put Mrs. Greaves before Mr. Greaves in all communiqués. They have called their daughter Jocasta.

Their house will have pine floors, ethnic furniture and solar panels.

They will be non-sexist, non-racist, non-homophobic. They will be pro-travellers, pro-immigrants and pro-asylum seekers except when it comes to their daughter going to school with them. Later tonight, they will be sat in the bar, sipping Australian white and discussing the persecution of lesbians in the Ukraine

Jocasta will eat organic sweets and wear Fairtrade clothing. She will not be allowed out of the house without her parents or their Ukranian nanny, Olga. She will play on a see-saw made from renewable pine by the inhabitants a commune in Wales. It never gets more than 15.8cm off the ground and is placed on a rubberised mat. Sharp edges of furniture will be covered in bubble wrap.

So here's the point of my story.

Mr. and Mrs. Greaves will have done everything right, they will have obeyed every modern dictum on the bringing up of their child.

So how come their daughter is frightened by a clown?

Maybe they should be frightened of cotton wool.

Life and Death

Masks

The mask feels tight against his face.

It is made of black leather. Black plastic lenses take the place of eyes and stare blindly from the visage. Zips like scars cover its surface, one forming a mouth with twisted metallic teeth.

It is part of him and, in his moment of need, he is part of it.

It fits as if painted on, the warm leather touching every inch of his skin.

Its seams cut into his cheeks. The small hairs on the back of his neck catch in the teeth of the zip that binds it close to his head.

He is aware of every sensation.

And it feels right.

He is the mask and the mask is him.

This is not a sexual experience. This is something uncommon, something far more intense.

But above all else, it is surrender.

Because the mask has a tube.

Closing the tube cuts off his air supply and deprives his brain of the molecules of oxygen it needs to survive.

Choking is a different experience to others. To him, closing the tube yields the very breath of life to another.

He sits in the changing rooms of the club and sitting here, he knows tonight is special. Within his fetish anonymity, he knows what he must do.

Tonight, he will leave the mask on.

Yes, he thinks to himself. I will catch a bus.

Every night he catches the same bus and stands anonymous, a faceless man in the host of the faceless. For most of the journey, he will look straight ahead, but occasionally he glances left and right to see if anyone is looking at him, to see if anyone else has guessed his guilty little secret.

Of course, they never do, but although no-one stares, he feels the pressure of their eyes upon him. He knows if anyone bothers to look, he is there, looking out from behind his eyes, missing nothing.

But tonight will be different.

He knows tonight, he will be looking out from behind a real, physical mask.

And he knows.

It will be exquisite.

He knows people will stare and that this will be something he will have to deal with.

Will he shrivel and cower, hiding from their gaze?

Will he rage, reveling in the non-conformity, despising their normalcy?

Or will he be content to stare out from behind the dead plastic eyes?

Behind the mask, he smiles in anticipation.

Out of the blue, he realises he is not alone.

He looks up, pleased there is someone else with him, a kindred spirit he can tell what he intends to do.

He feels hands in latex gloves on his shoulders, their touch piquant through the rubber. He feels them pushing him backwards on to the floor and he allows himself to submit. Then, knees are on his chest and he surrenders, becoming excited by the unexpected encounter.

Suddenly, hands are on his mask, closing the tube and sealing the aperture through which he draws his life.

He surrenders to the sensation.

Abruptly, he realises something is wrong

Equally abruptly, he realises his life is ending.

And as the last neurone fires in his brain, he breathes a single word.

Exquisite.

The Thickness of a Glove

Disposable Polychloroprene (Neoprene) Exam Gloves are Chlorinated/Polymer coated with a separate USP Corn Starch Palm coating. They have a thickness of 0.24mm. Withstand contact with Vinchristine for 240s+.

I'm late and she's drinking.

She usually has a glass or two of dry white wine. Today, she's got the bottle and there's less than a glass left.

Her long fingers, the hands of a surgeon, are on the table in front of her. They twine and untwine around the stem of the glass.

I buy more wine than we use a whole dictionary of words to say nothing. We talk about the weather, politics, the demise of Top of the Pops and the health and happiness of our venerable cats. She even indulges me with talk of football.

Then, without preamble, she suddenly says:

"I had a dead man's heart in my hands today. I squeezed and brought him back to life."

Suddenly, I can't find a single word to say anything.

I'm prepared for Tony Blair, the return of the Spice Girls and Dibbler's fascination with Tuna Burgers but the fundamental nature of life is so far out of my territory, it's off the map.

So, in the end, I ask what I want to know.

"What does it feel like?" I ask.

"It's like nothing else."

She drinks some more and then sits in silence, staring at her hands, I can think of nothing to say, so I ask her;

"Does you care?"

She sips her drink and looks straight at me, staring at a point some distance inside my chest.

"I do what I have to do to keep them alive. If that means caring, then I care."

I reach out and touch her hands. They are warm and powdered.

"It's job, a good job, a great job, but still a job. Do you know how many patients I see in a day? I can't *care* for them all.

She looks distractedly at the beer mat as if contains the secret to life itself.

“Don’t get me wrong,” she says. “They’re not just pieces of meat. The gratification of saving a man’s life is like no other, but you can’t save them all. You can’t let yourself get too close.

“But for that one moment, with his very essence in my hand, he was no longer a job.”

She takes her hands from mine and when she speaks, she’s no longer talking to me. She’s telling *me* nothing.

“For the sake of your sanity and the sake of the job, you keep your distance.”

But I know when she lays her hand on a heart, that distance is 0.24mm of Polychloroprene with a Chlorinated/Polymer coating.

Crossing Over

Behind the mask that is her face, she smiles.

She knew it was dangerous to visit the club so soon after the murder, but what could she tell them? She never speaks.

And besides, risk was all part of the thrill.

She moves in silence, stiff and formal, towards the point on the road that everything changes. Little does she know that today the change will be bigger than ever before.

She crouches to pat the dog at her side.

For the last two hours, he has been The Dog, but now he is Bubbles and bounces around the pavement like the puppy he really is. Whilst in The Club, The Dog has played his part to perfection, but out here in the sunshine, he forgets his role. He does not know that he is still The Dog until they cross the road together.

He does not bark, a genetic problem stole tongue before his birth, that is why she chose him.

They approach the kerb.

To the casual observer, she is merely crossing the road, but to those who know, she is carrying out an act far less mundane.

The closer observer will notice that she closes her eyes as she steps off the kerb. Like a child jumping off a diving board, or a suicide leaving the building, the step is easier to take if it is taken in darkness.

Despite her blindness as she makes the step, she always takes great care to make sure the road is clear. The road is lined with recently planted trees which offer some shade to the path but leave the road in sunlight.

She raises a hand to shield her eyes.

This time, her caution is not enough.

Even the closest observer cannot know what crossing the road means to her. Only one person is close enough for that, and he is elsewhere.

Although The Club affords her the strength she needs to stand against a past of abuse, within its walls, she still hides in silence. In crossing the road she leaves behind the world of voiceless pain and joins the world of vocal joy.

Not for the first time in the last few days she thinks about what she has done. In her heart of hearts, she knows what they have done is wrong – very wrong - but in this moment, she refuses to acknowledge this to

herself and tells herself the decision was right. Men like him must be stopped.

Once she is convinced, she steps off the kerb.

She has a ritual as she carries out this act. She turns to the nearest passer-by and says out loud three words.

“We are free.”

Few people hear her and of the few that do, even fewer acknowledge the words.

On this day, however, there is no-one there to hear the words, but she says them anyway and takes the plunge.

Before she opens her eyes, she hears the squealing of tyres so she quickly raises her lids. The sudden early evening sunlight temporarily blinds her, but her head clears and she sees a pale blue Ford Ka accelerating towards her.

Her mind processes the information too slowly and she stands, a rabbit in the headlights and waits to receive a rabbit's fate.

While standing frozen, she realises she recognises the car and the driver, but knows that the two are not normally seen together. For the second time since stepping up to the kerb, she thinks about what she has done, but this time, knows that it was wrong. She attempts to voice these thoughts, but her voice has left her.

It is as if her mind refuses to acknowledge her current situation and goes back to an earlier, happier time, a few seconds before. For her last moments, she concentrates on what it means to cross the road.

The car hits.

Neither victim nor driver could have predicted how far her body will travel and both are surprised to see that she flies to the height of the fledgling trees and lands nearly thirty metres down the road.

Her dog quietly pads up to where she lays on the pavement sits quietly by her side and takes no action when the car pulls up sharply at her side and the door is flung open. He watches calmly as a small red and white card that is thrown towards her lifeless body lands on the road beside her.

And while still basking in the joy of the transition and in complete silence, she dies.

Going Home

He sits in the empty room finishing his coffee and picking at the plaster on the back of his hand. He has always been miserly with his blood and the vein was difficult to find. He shakes his head because he knows the nurse with the syringe will be the first of many.

He flicks through the leaflets on the table and picks up a CD labeled *Giving up for life*. He'd always meant to give up. He had tried regularly and failed.

He spins the CD idly in his hands. *Too late* he thinks, but decides to take it with him, curious as to what it could contain.

He pulls a bus timetable from his pocket to check for the hundredth time that his bus is not due. In his mind the tables of times and routes take on new meaning. Here is something familiar, comprehensible, orderly, *sane*.

He pulls his long, heavy coat round him.

It makes him think of a joke.

Have you got a light, mac?

No, I've got a dark brown overcoat.

He looks at the newspaper with its unfinished crossword and decides to leave it behind. He has had all the news he can take today and completing the crossword somehow seems a pointless exercise.

He decides to wait for the bus elsewhere and makes his way to the covered stop. A small host huddles beneath its Perspex hood, some of them are drawing on cigarettes as if their lives depend on it.

He decides to wait outside the shelter and the damp wind blows a squall of leaves around him as he stands firm against the drizzle. One leaf lands on his lapel and he absent-mindedly picks it up and on impulse, he puts it in his pocket.

He suddenly finds himself home, with no memory of the journey. He turns the key in the lock and lets himself in.

Ginger, the kitten who walked in three months ago, comes bouncing across the light green Axminster and offers him a small ball. The ball contains beads and it rattles as he toe-pokes it across the floor. The kitten pounces and flicks it with its paw through the open kitchen door. He hears the sounds of clattered furniture and joyous *eeks* as the kitten plays.

Who'll feed you? He thinks.

He finds the leaf in his pocket and wonders what has made him keep it. It is just a leaf, faded and fallen, one of millions whose time has come and now lays grounded. He stares at its snowflake veins and the fractal detail of its edges and sees that although it was one of many, it is unique. In the spring it would be replaced one hundredfold and the tree would prosper, ignorant of its loss.

But the reality is this, that under its yellow skin, it is no longer a leaf. It no longer turns sunlight into sugar or carbon dioxide into air. Its end is pre-ordained and soon it will return to the earth from which it came. Suddenly, he realises that he has lost an hour just staring at the leaf. He places it on the top of his TV and lights a cigarette.

Too late, he thinks again.

Happy Ending

He is happy.

He is always happy.

This is not a false happiness, this is truth, bordering on joy.

He exists in a world of light, a simple world where the way things are is a beacon that is forever his guide.

He is not naïve. There is darkness in his world, but he deals with it. He is strong and he has ways and means. That which cannot be dealt with, is merely ignored.

The intercom beeps and he gestures to Sally that he'll get this.

He does not know that if someone else had answered, he would have been asked for by name.

The person on the other end has a gruff, difficult to hear tone, but once it is realised who they are talking to, there is a cough and the voice is suddenly clear.

The voice tells him that someone is at the gate at the back of the lot and they are unable to gain entry. He says this is not a problem, the gate is locked but he has a key. He will walk down and let them in. It is a small thing, he has done it many times before and he is blissfully unaware that this time will be his last.

It is nearly quarter of a mile to the back of the lot, but it is a hot sunny day and the walk gives him a chance to view his stock and keep an eye on some of his more complacent members of staff.

He reaches the gate in the fence and finds no-one there.

He shrugs. This is not the first time this has happened and he fully expects the customer to be at the front of the lot by the time he returns.

A tall mound of tyres stands by the gate and unexpectedly a gloved hand reaches round and gestures towards him. Curiosity gets the better of him and he allows the hand to guide him. He follows it round the tower.

On the muddy ground are scattered a number of red and white cards.

He picks one up and sees a blood red kiss on the pure white card

He hates to see anything so untidy and begins to pick up the snowfall of cards.

What is going on? He asks himself, still blissfully unaware of the danger he is in.

Then the tyres topple.

He knows instinctively how heavy tyres are and braces himself against the falling pitch black wall. He is unprepared for how much damage this weight of rubber can cause.

He feels his legs break.

Instantly, shock cuts in and he is transported to cotton wool land. He makes no effort to move.

He sees a slim figure dressed all in black move towards him. It is holding a pole. Through his pain, he imagines a young Darth Vader and absently wonders why the Light Sabre does not glow. Closer examination of the figure shows that it wears a ski mask and carries a length of scaffolding.

He thinks nothing of it, the details are largely irrelevant.

He's more worried about how the tyres have fallen on him. He does not consider that they might have been pushed. That kind of thing does not happen in his world.

He sees the length of scaffolding moving towards his face and knows that something is very definitely wrong.

The last thought that goes through his mind is Someone needs some training in health and safety.

And the world goes black.

Football

Saturday, 6 October, 2001

It's England versus Greece

We draw, it a summer in Korea with Brazil and Argentina, we lose, it's a winter's trip to the Balkans and battle against the Ukraine.

It's the last minute and it's 2-1.

But we have a chance, a free kick on the edge of the box

John says he isn't interested and sits in the corner, a solitary gnome, clutching his pint and pretending to read his newspaper.

The pub is packed.

Oceans of white crossed with blood red scars.

The old enemy watch through a miracle of modern technology writ large.

Everyone stands, panther tense, ready to strike.

Lunatics jockey for position so we climb the seats to be above them, our eyes unwilling to miss even a single glance.

The camera moves to his face.

He is blank, he is calm, he is in The Zone.

He strikes the ball and for a moment there is silence.

Someone mouths the word "shit" and the world explodes

Beer becomes rain, beer mats become fireworks.

We scream, we dance, we hug, we kiss.

On the screen we are aped by the crowd and stars past and present become instant lovers.

This is The Moment.

This is what it means.

This is why we watch football and football's coming home.

And over in the corner, John drops his Times.

The Whisper

She glides across the room.
Upright legs
Hidden by a floor length robe
Of midnight silk

She smiles, quicklime teeth
Framed by a golden waterfall
And a ray of moonlight
Floods my startled face

She lightly touches my arm
Completing a circuit
That staggers me
Yet makes me whole

Her crimson lips
Brush my roseate cheeks
And she whispers in my ear.
“I can make all your dreams come true.”

And I say:

“you mean the one where i’m fighting my way through the rain forests of the amazon and i encounter a tribe of pygmies who guard the fountain of youth but let me drink too much so that when i return to britain i’m only eight years old so I can dedicate my life to football, become an internationally famous footballer and steer sheffield wednesday to the european cup final in 2037 finally receiving the cup from president of the world, chris waddle?”

And she looks at me beatifically

Then whispers

“No, not that one.”

Plastic

7th October 2006, England 0 – Macedonia 0
24th March 2007, Israel 0 – England 0

We should not be here.

He smiles, plastic teeth flashing.
His words, *We cannot lose*.
The plastic pitch, real but false
As false as hope.

A flick on.
A volley.
And it's a GOOOAAAALLLLLL!!!!!!

A false decision.
Not a foul.
Not a booking.
Not a penalty.
But a goal.

Then. Saved.
Then. Not.

The atmosphere,
Now flatter than the beer,
The plastic bends,
Then breaks.

A whistle blows unheard.
It is lost.
And with it, a summer of hopes.

17th October 2007, Russia 2 - England 0

Ten Thousand Names for Rain

The Inuit are a nomadic race who live beyond the Arctic Circle. Because it plays such an important part in their life, they are said to have ten thousand words for snow. The Wednesday are a less nomadic tribe that live in a different part of the world.

Smizzle

The damp combination of rain and drizzle that gives a tram full of fans their distinctive smell. Also know as that rain that gets you wet.

Facefull

Horizontal rain that manages, against the laws of physics, to blow straight up the South Stand. Usually happens when you're wearing glasses and guarantees you see about as much of the match as David Blunkett with cataracts.

Icytab

Freezing rain that turns ears from friendly organs of hearing into lumps of frozen hate. Usually found in a dull December match against Hartlepool.

Maunge

Combination of weak drizzle with the occasional large raindrop. Usually found after eighty-five turgid minutes under an overcast sky in a 2-0 away defeat. It is just wet enough to be annoying and it feels like even the rain can't be bothered.

Drench

The complete and utter downpour that leaves you damp down to the kecks. Usually found at away matches when you're not undercover. No matter how many you're winning by, you still feel utterly miserable and know there's a long journey home in moist pants.

Gloop

The single big drop of rain that falls off the Cantilever stand just as you're leaving. It hits you in the middle of the head and leaves you feeling soaked. Usually found after a dull 0-0 draw.

Joydrop

The pouring rain that bathes the true fan after a goal. There is a goal mouth scramble, the ball comes loose and the lanky centre back spansks it into the top corner. Fists clenched, you raise your hands and look to the heavens. And are doused in Joydrops.

The Fall

He brought continental artistry and outrageous flair
He did things with a ball never seen before or since.
He produced the impossible making the crowd wonder if they had truly
seen what occurred.

He takes on one.

The ball comes from behind him, but he flicks up his heel and the ball
flies over his shoulder and over the head of the defender. He knows
where it's going to land and he's already on his way there.

He takes on two.

He controls the ball with the sole of his boot. It flies behind him, but the
backspin means it stops dead two paces to his rear. It takes the defender
off guard and he slips away and flicks the ball on.

He takes on three.

The third defender stands proud, unwilling to cry uncle. A nutmeg, and
the Italian is running on goal.

But he is flawed.

A red shirt rudely challenged and it's handbags at dawn.

Once again, his actions surprise and I see something previously unseen
and wonder if my eyes can lie.

The impossible happens, and a man in black falls.

He takes one step back.

I see in his past words screamed at a linesman, and a second yellow
ensuring a Christmas in Italy. I see in his future a salute and a
declaration of hate.

He takes two steps back.

The push will cost him eleven struggles and the price of a car, but it will
cost us far more.

Then he stumbles.

And with his fall, I know we are fallen.

Referee!!!!??

We take our seats and I hear you tell me.
“It’s about time we ‘ad a decent referee”

Then:

- Deon Burton is ten feet offside, but the flag stays down.
He’s through on goal, but shoots wide.
- Tommy Spurr kicks the ball against an opponent, but the ball rebounds off him before it goes out. The linesman doesn’t see it and we get the throw.
Spurr takes it quickly, but gives the ball away.
- Efin Sodje clumsily fouls an opponent, but his late stamp goes unnoticed by the official. The crowd boos the fallen foe for over-reacting and Sodje stays on.
He is substituted five minutes later.
- It’s clumsy, not nasty, but Lee Bullen knows he’s the last defender and is already on his way.
The penalty is straight down the middle, but Grant dives left.
- Their centre forward is clearly onside when the ball is kicked but the assistant flags.
The decision the decision is met with sarcastic cheers.

It’s Dad’s flask and the bogs.

You feel the need to remind us all.

“See what ah mean?” you cry, demanding provenance for your arcane knowledge. “We ant ad a good ref all year.”

Then:

- The ball comes into the box, Deon Burton has his back to goal, but he traps it well and kills it dead. He turns and shoots...
- After a hotly disputed free kick, the ball is put into the box, players squabble and it swings loose. Tommy Spurr hangs back and picks his spot...
- Sodje rises swan like from a lake of shirts and with bleached fuzz flicks the ball towards the top corner...
- A long kick and they are through, but Lee Grant narrows the angle and makes himself big. He dives the right way and palms the ball into touch.

After our best result this year,
And for the thirtieth time this season
You tell me all you can.

“That’s the crappiest referee we’ve had all year.”

Neil Warnock often blamed officials for a poor result.
I can see why.

Ode to a Seat Long Gone.

You sit there, legs akimbo
Staring blankly at the goal.
Like beached and bloated walrus,
Like a toad without a hole

And for all of ninety minutes
You just don't give it a rest
You've made the beauty ugly
With the hate that's in your chest

You there spitting venom
And even if we win
The thing that keeps you on their back's
The colour of their skin

The other bigots back you.
And I know you're thinking that
The crowd's all laughing *with* you
But I know they're laughing *at*.

You blubber and you bluster
As you slander and berate
I can't say that I loath you
It's your hatred that I hate

We all have skills to offer
Where can you see that more
Than when his colour's blue and white
And you've just seen him score?

And so I try to tell you
As you search to start a brawl,
That the only race that matters
Is the race to win the ball.

You say I just don't get it
But I'll tell you this as true
Behind those inbred piggy eyes
The only get is you.

What's Your Favourite Song?

Forever in my mind
Is a seventeenth Boxing Day
But I won't fight
Now, or for evermore

The referee's parents
Are joined by God.
And the sin of Onan
Is the least of his wrongs

Our gangly midfielder
Smokes nothing at all, actually
And a monkey on the back
Can only slow the feet.

I don't care about Leeds
Or want anyone out
If it's my choice, I'll look
On the bright side of life.

There's pride and there's passion
But never hate.
We rise above
We are Wednesday.

Sing what you sing
Hate what you hate
Love what you love
Be what you are

But when they walk out
In Blue and White
When the whistle blows
Understand

No violence
No prejudice
Just togetherness
We are what we are

They are Wednesday
We are Wednesday.
The petition is simple
Join us.

So...
What's *your* favourite song?

*Come and have drink with us
We'll drink you to a frenzy,
We all come from Sheffield
And we're called Sheffield Wednesday.*

Na Na Na Na *etc.*

Pig Derbies

Here's a funny story. It may not be true, but it is true that I remember it. It features an interview on TV between two train drivers.

It was on the day of the first serious derby match between Wednesday and United for many years (we had faced each other in the Zenith Data Systems Cup, but that's another story) and both interviewees were having to miss the match because they would be driving the train to London. One was an Owl, the other a Blade. The interviewer asked the Blade who he thought would win.

"I hate to say it," said the Blade. "but I think the pigs are going to shade it, 1-0 perhaps"

"Who are you calling a pig?" said the Owl.

"You," said the Blade

"No, you're a pig," said the Owl

"No, you're a pig."

"No, you're a pig."

They kept saying this over and over again, getting more and more irate with each iteration. The interviewer just stood there holding his microphone, goggle eyed and perplexed with the sound of imagined laughter from behind the camera.

I believe that this led to fans of other clubs referring to the Wednesday/United matches as "Pig Derbies".

Tribalism is part of watching football. If you're standing at the side of a cold field with 30,000 other people, mob psychology is bound to play a part. As soon as this comes into play, our-dads-bigger-than-your-dad is always going to lead to friction between two tribes bound by close proximity to the pitch.

This is one of the basic things about tribalism. If a tribe doesn't believe it's better than it's neighbours, if it cannot defend itself at all costs, especially at the cost of other tribes, then it dies out. It's natural selection on a cultural scale.

But this does not make it right. This is no excuse for unreasoned hatred. Animosity is never funny and should not be given the provenance of laughter, so why do I say this is a funny story?

The fact is this.

The two men on the train were stuck together for the three hours it takes to the capital. They would repeat the mantra all the way there.

And all the way back.

Bring on the Pig Derby.

Twelve Wednesdays of Christmas

When the twelfth day was Wednesday, my true love gave to me,
Twelve Owls a-hooting
Eleven Pressman's plunging.
Ten Laws a Leaping
Nine Hirsty's Scoring
Eight Waddles Jinking
Seven Bruntys Shooting
Six Palmers Smoking
Five Phil Kings
Four Colin Wests.
Three Wim Jonks,
Two Tommy Spurrs,
Ritchie Partridge in a Pear Tree.

Memories

Teeth

This is the story of my earliest memory and how I became traumatised by a bag of salt and vinegar crisps.

The summer of 1968 was the summer of Batman. Earlier in the year I had been given a Batman birthday cake and my Dad. I owned a Corgi model of the Batmobile which had a flame coming out of the back and fired little red pellets. Despite the fact that one of these had nearly had my Dad's eye out, he had stuck plastic fins on my pedal car and painted it black so that I had my own Batmobile. Although I could barely read them, I was already collecting Batman comics.

Although there was one in the shop at the end of the road, one thing I didn't have however was a Batman suit. My mum had compromised by buying grey trousers and a Batman T-shirt and allowing me to wear a pair of black underpants over the top. My mate Ian had a red T-shirt and external green kegs and he was Robin and we would run around the garden shouting na-na-na-na-na-na-na-BatMAN!

Unfortunately my mum's creativity did not run to a utility belt and a cowl so I attached carrier bags to an old belt and wore a balaclava backwards. This led to a number of bugaboos, not least of which was that it looked bloody stupid. Also the plastic carriers would catch on my legs as I ran and because of the balaclava, I couldn't see where I was going.

One day, full of na-na-nas, we were chasing an imaginary Riddler round the rhododendrons in Auntie Sarah's garden when we were lured back to his lair with the promise of a cup of crime fighting Cola.

As we ran towards the house, the plastic bags, which contained amongst other things cardboard Batarangs, caught on my legs. I sprang forward like a kangaroo on a promise and then tripped and fell with my mouth open on the doorstep. There was a sickening crack. Curiously, I m and was feeling no pain but pulling up the balaclava brought several teeth with it. There was blood everywhere and Auntie Sarah fainted. She never could stand the sight of blood.

My mum stuck me in my sister's pram and pushed me over to the nearest dentist. The dentist, a large man in his fifties panicked and filled me with NO₂. He removed not only the broken stubs of teeth, but also the healthy ones.

When I came round from the anesthetic, I was back home. My mum had a black latex sofa with red cotton cushions.. It was a hideous bloody thing, but useful for hiding behind in the event of Daleks. I was laid on the sofa and on the tubular metal coffee table was a glass of water and a small porcelain jar. The jar contained all my teeth. *Brilliant*, I thought. *I'm quids in with the tooth fairy.*

I took a sip of the water and realised I felt a little peckish. On the mantelpiece was an opened bag of salt and vinegar crisps.

My screams were heard in Buenos Ares and we were off to the dentists for the second time that day, this time to remove fragments of salt and vinegar crisp from the bleeding sockets that had once contained teeth. I didn't eat another salt and vinegar crisp for twenty two years and even now, a chill of fear runs down my spine every time I see the familiar green and yellow of a bag of Walkers.

But the story has a happy ending. When I came round for a second time, there on the white metal coffee table, was a cardboard box with a clear cellophane front. Amongst other things, it contained a yellow plastic utility belt and a silky black cowl.

Anesthetic

Many bad things happened when I was in hospital, but I was told a real horror story by an anesthetist. He had come to go through the standard preoperative questions and been pleased that I was a non-smoker. After he had explained the procedure, a nurse had offered him a cup of tea and he had said yes.

He pulled up a seat besides my bed and decided to have a friendly little chat.

“This is the first castration I’ve done for a bit,” he said.

I spat tea and biscuits all over him. I knew I had a testicular teratoma, but thought they were doing a simple biopsy. I told him this.

“Well, if they go in and find it’s fetid, they’ll rip it out save time.”

I questioned his use of the words “fetid” and “rip”.

“It’s alright,” he said. “We’re only chopping one out. It’s a sort of semi-castration.”

I explained that this wasn’t quite as reassuring as it might be.

“No? Well listen to this. I used to have this friend,” he said, putting a curious emphasis to the word friend and I guessed the “friend” involved was himself. “He was an anesthetist as well and he had a little ‘joke’.

“When you inject someone in the back of the hand, they’ve got 3-5 seconds before they pass out.

“What my friend would do was inject them in the back of the hand and tell them to count back from ten. When they’d get to eight he’d turn to the surgeon and say “So this is the castration is it?

“The patient would attempt to leap up and shout “no...No...NO!...zzzz”.

The anesthetic was cutting in and they’d fall asleep

“When you come out of an anesthetic, you’re feeling a bit groggy and a bit numb. You’re not sure what operation they’ve carried out and you can’t really move your arms.

“So the patients would wake up and the first thing they would remember was a doctor threatening to cut their balls off.

“They’d turn to the nurse and say in a groggy voice ‘Nurse...nurse...are my bollocks still there nurse?’

“The nurse would say ‘Have you had Mr. Dixon?’

“The best they could manage was a nod.

“The nurse would say ‘It’s just his little joke.’

I was still thinking of this when they wheeled me into the theatre.

The anesthetist gave me a half wave and smiled before putting in the anesthetic through a canula in the back of my hand.

“Count backwards from ten,” he said.

“Ten...nine...” said began.

“So this is the castration, is it?” said the anesthetist.

“Fuggov...” I said.

And passed out.

Play Bass

When I was a kid, I never did woodwork. This was because I used to play the double bass and my bass lessons coincided with technology (wood).

My bass teacher was an amiable buffoon with the unlikely name of Haydn Haydn. Haydn had been one of the greatest bass players in the world, a concert virtuoso and an international standard jazz musician. Then, one day, his bottle went and he found he couldn't face an audience. The stage fright became a mania to the point at which he could no longer perform, so he made his way in life as a peripatetic teacher of the bass.

As well as a bass player, he was a part time alchemist and full time conspiracy theorist. It was unusual for him to be teaching someone who was studying science so instead of me learning the bass, I learned that the moon landings were shot in the Sahara desert at night and that it might be possible to make gold from copper sulphate and Epsom Salts.

Because of Haydn's fear of performance, I was determined that I would join the school orchestra in its public appearances and eventually, the concert season began. For me, the piece we were playing consisted of a hundred and twenty bars rest, eight bars scraping away like a demented gibbon and one hundred and twenty eight bars rest. The problem was that not only could I not play the eight bars, I was incapable of counting to one hundred and twenty. This meant in five months of practice, I never got the eight bars in the same place twice. On the first night, I lost count completely. Things were made worse by the fact that the crescendo that the piece built up to in bar 128 was followed by a quiet passage and, sadly, the violin solo in bar 129 became a duet for fiddle and bass, much to the confusion of the audience.

On the second night, I took extra care and carefully counted out the bars. Unfortunately, I was counting too slow and again came in during the quiet bit. To add to the ignominy I found out I had been counting out loud, making it hard for the rest of the orchestra to keep time.

On the third night, I had agreed not to try and count, but to come in when the conductor gave me a signal. By the time we reached bar 120, I'd forgotten the signal, so when he nodded at me, I nodded back. He waved and I waved back. When he started pointing at me, I'd no idea what was happening, so I grinned weakly and pointed back. Then the penny dropped and I joined the violinist in his solo for a third consecutive night.

On the fourth day, something strange happened. The conductor, for some not readily apparent reason, had felt the necessity to take the bass into the kitchen and caught it on the door jamb. He had accidentally done this fourteen times before the bass was rendered unplayable. Unfortunately, the fact that I had not taken woodwork had not gone unnoticed by the music teacher and I was not

given a chance to fix it. This was a pity because I had already got my hands on a chisel and a hack saw. Instead, they stuck the scroll back on with duck tape and told me just to stand at the back and just hold it. I could mime if I wanted to, but under no circumstances was I to touch a string. It was my best performance of the season.

First Kebab

I remember my first kebab

Back in my early twenties, I was a heavy metal axe god. Blue denim and black T-shirts were de rigueur as were leather jackets and green flash trainers, but every so often we would go for a change.

In those days, towny pubs still required lads to wear a shirt and tie and night clubs would need a suit or at least a jacket. Once every month or so, a group of mates and I would “dress up”, hit the kind of pubs we would normally be denied entry to and then hit a night club.

It was usual on these nights to start fairly early and grab some sort of food before heading of to the night club early. One of our number, Tom, had encountered a new delicacy called “A Kebab” and was anxious that we all should try it.

“Do you want chilli sauce with that?” asked the woman serving the kebab.

Tom was feeling expansive. Buoyed by the fact that he was wearing a suit and already had eight pints of lager in him our resident kebab expert snapped his fingers and said

“Hey, gimme the works.”

I could tell by the expression on the woman’s face that this was not the best answer to the question. When it came to my turn, I asked her what she recommended and she suggested that I should give the chilli a miss.

The kebab was delicious, a veritable oral explosion. It was unlike anything I’d ever had from a chips shop and a perfect compliment to beer. I turned to tell Tom this, but he was no longer with us. We looked round and Tom was there, in his best bib and tucker, on his hands and knees, trying to drink a puddle.

So I learned two things on that night.

1. Kebabs are nice, I mean really nice, especially after beer.
2. The answer to the question “Do you want chilli sauce with that?” is not “Gimme the works”

General Poetry

I'm a bugger when I'm badly

I'm a bugger when I'm badly,
Why don't you leave me alone?
I love the dark and sadly
I just mutter and moan.

When I'm fine, I seem so friendly
But my cover is blown.
I'm a bugger when I'm badly,
Why don't you leave me alone?

I know you greet me boldly
But I just want you to know
But I'll have treat you coldly
And I need you to go

I'm a bugger when I'm badly
Why don't you leave me alone?
When I'm well, I'll greet you gladly
But give me time on my own

Although I love you madly
I won't answer the phone
I'm a bugger when I'm badly
Why don't you leave me alone?

After the Funeral

Birth
Football Strip
Action Men prepared for
war
School

Birth
Nurses uniform
Looking after dolls
School

A chance meeting at a funeral.

A levels
University
The Firm

A levels
Nursing college
Life on the ward

An early drink in a pub leads to a meeting and turns into
a late drink.

Meeting some one that
isn't her
Looking for her

Friends talking
Missing him

Courting
Marriage
Children

Work and promotion
The female accountant
Trips abroad
Secrets and Lies

Home raising the children
Meeting other mothers
The school trip
The chatter of the daily
grind

Divorce

Work and promotion
Breakdown
A house alone

Being a mother
Retraining
Back to work

A chance meeting at a funeral.
Reconciliation

Road accident

Grieving
Being Grandma
A new life
The ex-accountant
A home in the sun
A last breath

Together in Heaven

Brief Encounter

I've always wanted to run after a train;
Like they do in the movies.
You know the sort of thing

A chocolate box station.
Verdant hanging baskets festooned with pinks and pansies
Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson hold chaste hands
A uniformed guard cries 'All aboard!'
His shrill whistle pierces the pregnant air.
They primly kiss.
Passengers scramble into the carriages
Celia leans out of the window
The train begins to move away
Cold iron wheels turn slowly on cold iron track
Their pace increasing
Trevor runs alongside the train to the end of the platform,
The train gives a forlorn *Toot!* on its whistle
And suddenly, there is no more platform
Forcing him to a halt
I love you, he cries daring only now to say the words he
truly feels.
He curses the cowardice, which, for the last week has left
him mute.
She mouths *I know*, a solitary tear on her rosy red cheek.
And as the train disappears down the track
They shout their undying love across an ocean of lavender
scented steam.
Not knowing if they will ever meet again
To consummate their undying love.

But this is not my world.
The forlorn toot and the pinks and pansies
Never happen.

A whistle blows.
A door slams.
You are gone
And I am alone.

Christmas Card Verse

Christmas is a happy time
A time for fun and frolics
If you don't like the poem I wrote
I'll kick you in the kitchen

Although you are so far away
In distant foreign parts
The season brings us close to you
We keep you in our hearts

Eric the Brown Nose Reindeer
Is a fairy tale to tell
He runs behind old Rudolf
But he can't stop quite as well.

Deck the rooms with mistletoe
With holly deck the halls
If you don't like the poem I wrote
I'll kick you in the kitchen

Mary was the Christ-child's mum.
And gold's a gift for her
Frankenstein's a monster
And what in heck is myrrh?
To pick a gift's not easy
But I'll tell you this as true
I don't need a Christmas gift
'Cus All I need is you

A time for sharing egg nog
A time for pulling crackers
If you don't like the poem I wrote
I'll kick you in the kitchen

Scream

It happens in slow motion.
The bus turns,
The taxi swerves,
The biker dies,
The timber lorry stalls.
I see the planks lose their settled berth
And a guillotine of ash moves towards my neck.
I try to dodge, but it takes my chest.

Firemen fight to cut me free, but still aware,
I see only their blood red tender.
Sparks fly, an ocean of steel tears.
And while the heat and light are at their peak,
My world goes dark.

And so, I awake.
My senses are dead.
The air is not my own.
I cannot feel or move.
In the distance I hear whispered tears
And saddened voices cry "Mercy".

And suddenly,
I feel.
I am whole, I am here, I am alive.
I realise the satin by my hands,
Cloth meets my face.
Hushed in the distance, there are words of ashes
Then suddenly, I know the rain of soil.

And so, I lie.
Swaddled in silk and bound by oak
A dreamer in a field of dreams
Entombed within a field of tombs

I cry and I cry
But my voice has been stolen.
I am bound, caged and strong-boxed.
Being, while I am un-been.
And then, there is nothing more.

But my cask is not alone,
Many crypts gather here.
And from some of them,
Come screams.

The Naming of Cats

The naming of cats is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I'm mad as a hatter
When I tell you a cat must have three different names

There's the name that you give to those loveable kittens
On the way that they look or the things that they do
Like, or Dibsy or Rugrat or Whiskers or Mittens
Or Tigger or Tribble or Topsy or Roo

The seconds a name for a sensible mog
A tom cat, a mouser or matronly queen
Like Casper or Pushkin or Ruskin or Notdog
Or Beauty or Peter or Shadow or Gene

And the third name is one for a different case
And if you've a cat then you know this is true
It's when you wake up with her bum in your face
Then it's *fuggov* or *bugger* or *gewon* or *phew*.

How does a poet say I love you?

Do I compare you to a summer's day?
Or my white rose of Mary's gift.
Are you the lily of the valley?
Or the presence that turns roses red?

Do you walk in beauty,
Or make melodious birds sing madrigals?
Perhaps you are my beautiful dreamer
Or my gold bar of Heaven?

Do I love you as the last rich smile of a fading day?
Is one world not enough for two?
Or shall we walk together the path of life
Where music, moonlight and feeling are one?

You may be my well of love and spring of light.
Or mould my Hopes and fashion me within
And had joys no date nor age no need,
You should be my all.

The words are a poet's currency
And he must spend them wisely.

So how do I say I love you?

I. Love. You.

The Smell of Flowers

When I think of lavender
The smell I love is yours
I know I'd always find a sprig
Hid deep within your drawers

But when it comes to smelling flowers
Then the smell I love the best
Is the smell of Parma Violets
'Cus you keep them in your chest.

Fetch The Space Dog

It Could Be You

Like many people who read The Inky, I enter competitions. I read the brief, think about what it is I'm going to write, draft and redraft, then at the last possible, the precious words are bundled up and sent. Often you're lucky if you hear anything at all, but some time, the letter arrives. You know the sort of thing.

Large number of entries, blah, blah, blah...high standard of contributions blah, blah, blah...best of luck for the future.

In February, I entered the BBC's RAW competition to write a short story featuring the characters described in Max and Laura's Space circus. I wrote a story about Fetch the Space Dog who just kept fetching his ball. I drew a picture of Fetch to illustrate it and noticed that he had on a space helmet. This worried me, *How could he fetch the ball in his mouth?*

This caused me to rewrite the story, turning it into something very different.

On the closing day for entries, I sent it off by e-mail.

Two months later, I got an e-mail back

Large number of entries, blah, blah, blah...high standard of contributions blah, blah, blah...congratulations, you are a regional winner!

The prize was a year's worth of cinema for me and a child and all expenses paid trip to London to pick up the award. My sister got the cinema tickets (I don't have a small child to take) and a friend and I got to stay in a hotel on Oxford Street, attend a posh reception hosted by Vanessa Feltz and meet the other competition winners

So here's the message,

Keep trying.

This time, it could be you

Fetch the Space Dog

Max and Lara were playing with Fetch the Space Dog. They were throwing his ball and he was chasing after it.

"Why is he called Fetch the Space Dog?" asked Lara. Perhaps it's because he likes fetching the ball" said Max.

"No, I don't think that's it," said Lara. "Let's ask Kooloo." And Fetch kept chasing his ball.

Kooloo was eating biscuits and thinking of Spaceships.

"Why is he called Fetch the Space Dog?" asked Lara.

"Perhaps it's because we fetched him from the space pound." said Kooloo.

"No, I don't think that's it," said Lara. "Let's ask Baked Bean." And Fetch kept chasing his ball.

Baked Bean was in the ring, breathing fire and thinking nice thoughts.

"Why is he called Fetch the Space Dog?" asked Lara.

"Perhaps it's because he has a very fetching space suit," said Baked Bean..

"No, I don't think that's it," said Lara. "Let's ask Mr. Scatterbrain."

And Fetch kept chasing his ball.

Mr. Scatterbrain squirted his squirty flower at them.

"Why is he called Fetch the Space Dog?" asked Lara.

"Because he'd fetch a lot of money if we sold him," said Mr. Scatterbrain.

"No, I don't think that's it," said Lara. "Let's ask The Space Unicorn."

And Fetch kept chasing his ball.

The Space Unicorn took off his glasses and looked up from his quiz books.

"Why is he called Fetch the Space Dog?" asked Lara.

"Perhaps it's because in the old days, a fetcher was a type of dog used in hunting."

"No, I don't think that's it," said Lara. "Let's ask Tiny."

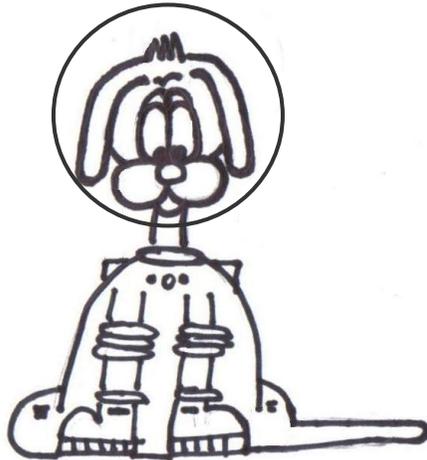
Tiny picked up Fetch's ball and threw it hard.

Max and Lara, Scatterbrain and the Unicorn, Kooloo and Baked Bean, all stared as Fetch shot off the space circus and followed the ball into space.

And they all shouted together

"Quick, someone fetch the space dog."

"Ah," said Lara. "That's why."



Mrs. McGinty and the

Stolen Specs.

A Mrs. McGinty Mystery

Solution

“Well,” I said. “The lack of stock or the lack of knowledge mean nothing. If they knew what they were doing, they wouldn’t be running units in a disused department store. The person who is running the underground railway isn’t an expert in coins or stamps, she’s an expert in travel.”

"She?" asked my aunt.

“If they were trying to get somewhere, it has to be Sandra Mewes, the numismatist.”

“Why?”

“Kevin Yeow was a philatelist, and as we all know, philately will get you nowhere.”

"What?!"

“I knew you’d like it,” said Pikeaway.

My aunt groaned.

Holmes and Watson Meet Tom Jones

Solution

“The secret is in the album,” said Watson. “With his dying breath, Jasper grabbed for this package of card and plastic.”

He held up the album sleeve and pointed to the title of the first track.

Oolu waved his tentacle in confusion, so Watson read it out loud

“It’s Good-To-Touch the Green Grine Grass of Orme.”

John Holmes groaned.

“Do you get many cases in the twenty-third century involving the music of Tom Jones?” asked Oolu.

“Its not unusual,” said Watson.

And Holmes groaned again.

**Mrs. McGinty
and the Missing Link.**
A Mrs. McGinty Mystery

The Solution

“Let’s look at this logically,” said my aunt. “The thieves would put their booty in the place that it would be hardest to find.”

“Yes,” I said.

“No doubt about it, then. The stolen nail is in the electronics shop, owned by Abdul A Aneedul.”

“Why?”

“What’s harder to find than a Hayes’ Tack in Aneedul’s?”

We all groaned.