



## THE **BLACKHEATH BOOKS** EDITION

OF

BEAT THE DUST

October 2009

### Introduction

Not content to get into bed with Tangerine Press for a special collaborative issue of Beat the Dust in June 09, we've only gone and done the same with Blackheath Books now an' all – tart! Well, no actually, cos we really do love small indie presses at Beat the Dust – so much so we've become one ourselves. Run by Geraint Hughes, Blackheath Books is that rarest of things - an artisan publisher with an ethical approach to book-making and a love of books and great writing. Providing 'a home for the literary outsider', each limited edition, signed copy is hand-crafted using 100% recycled paper and card, containing a high percentage of post consumer waste. Yep, a love of the written word and the environment, something we heartily applaud here at Beat the Dust. For this special Blackheath Books edition of BTB, then, we have some of the latest work from a selection of Blackheath authors...



### Billy Childish



Billy's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

- B:** What's My Name - The Clash
- L:** Who Do You Love - Bo Diddley
- A:** The Ballad of Hollis Brown - Bob Dylan
- C:** Deuces Wild - Link Wray (instrumental)
- K:** Oh Bondage Up Yours - X-ray Spex
- H:** Judy is a Punk - The Ramones
- E:** Boredom - The Buzzcocks
- A:** Strange Fruit - Billie Holliday
- T:** You Make Me Die - The Headcoats
- H:** Love Comes in spurts - Richard Hell & the Voidoids

### **forget the romance of the bottle**

i have no desire to be a riter  
 only  
 to be  
 happy lovesome and whole

theres no value to become  
 somone  
 only to be no one

and  
 its no great shakes  
 to be spark out in barcolona on 10 fat trebels  
 of spanish brandy  
 using the curbstone as a pillow  
 legs jutting out into the road  
 waiting for some passing maniac  
 to do a weel spin your guts  
 because your sad and  
 alone  
 and have fuckt too many  
 and lost too many  
 and have been burnt  
 by every girl  
 whos eyes have said no  
 and waking  
 you realise your idiocey  
 and stand and walk back into the bar

**tame critics**

there is only one painting to paint  
 one poem to rite and  
 im still painting that painting  
 still riting that same poem

a thousand times  
 i draw it  
 my pencils sharp as daggers  
 or  
 blunt as hammers

but  
 the duller the cut  
 the truer my voice comes  
 the worse the painting  
 the closer i get to the hart of it  
 and  
 looking up  
 smiling thru the paint  
 and gore  
 i see these other artist  
 poets and tame critics  
 feared angered and annoyed  
 at my butiful uslessness

**a bad poem**

can you imagin  
 it was fun  
 making all these mistakes  
 then riting the hatred down  
 with a bludded axe  
 and invocking the hatred  
 of the innocents

failing and fucking up royaly  
 then gleefully admitting it  
 in public

these piss-poor dramas  
 and  
 painfull  
 feelings  
 nothing  
 but  
 a mockery  
 a fucking joke  
 a bad poem

## Geraint Hughes



Geraint's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

- B:** No Fun – The Stooges
- L:** Yma O Hyd – Dafydd Iwan
- A:** People Who Died – Jim Carroll Band
- C:** The End – The Doors
- K:** Gloomy Sunday – Rezso Seress
- H:** I'll Be Your Mirror – Velvet Underground
- E:** (Thinking of You) Broken Pieces – The Prisoners
- A:** This Land is Your Land – Woody Guthrie
- T:** Desolation Row – Bob Dylan
- H:** Orgasm Addict – Buzzcocks

### **interview with geraint hughes**

*David Oprava of Grievous Jones Press asks: "Can you describe the feeling you get when publishing someone's book?" and "If there was one writer, living or dead, you would most like to publish, who would it be and why?"*

Hi David, I consider myself an 'artisan' bookmaker as well as a publisher! Publishing someone's book involves weeks of toil in the evenings. So relief is probably the first emotion, and then a fleeting feeling of having achieved something, then it's onto the next project. I enjoy working with authors, working quite closely (even though it is often via email) over a quite an intense and short period of time. The ones I enjoy most are when I can contribute something; otherwise I'm just a printer. It's strange though, I don't get much time to reflect on publications before I'm off working with another author on another book. I just drift from one project to another. Whenever I get any of my stuff published there is a certain anti-climax, then it's on to the next project.

I like the new [Grievous Jones Press] books by the way, David.

One writer? Bukowski was very influential and reading his poetry and prose really got me writing, and thinking about writing in new ways; I found it comparable to listening to the Velvet Underground, Kingsmen or Ramones and wanting to form a band. You don't need to be well versed or a virtuoso musician - expression and connection are more important. Or some great unpublished/unwritten work, e.g. Neal Cassady's 'Second Third', John Cooper Clarke's 'Collected Poetry' and Billy Childish's 'Tales from the Garage.'

*Andrew Taylor of erbacce-press and Michael Curran of Tangerine Press ask: "Have you ever been tempted to try and get Arts Council funding, or do you think that's getting into bed with the devil?"*

I did think about it at one time, but apparently what I do isn't "Industry Standard." I like that 'Blackheath Books – Not Industry Standard'. It's always been my aim to be self-supporting and to grow things gradually from solid foundations. Most grants seem to be aimed at supporting the publishing industry. We exist very much outside mainstream publishing so playing the grant game would probably lead to compromises I'm not sure I want to make. I have an uneasy feeling sometimes that some 'outsiders' are only 'outsiders' because they can't get on the 'inside.' I relish offering something different. Hand-made, limited editions, letterpress, recycled materials etc, they all help me maintain my 'outsider' delusion. At present we are supported solely by our readership - I like that.

I can just about afford to take the risks at the moment; I wouldn't like to get to a point where I was getting beyond myself though. Also, most grants seem to be aimed at supporting individual publications. I'd be more interested in some help to buy some printing equipment. So never say never.

*Andrew Taylor of erbacce-press asks: "Do you think that the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook, myspace etc has helped small presses or hindered them?"*

Yes, I think they are useful, although they can lead to a very limited world view. There are people out there who don't use these sites apparently! It can all get a bit incestuous as well. Adelle Stripe has recently deleted her Facebook profile, I believe because of the banality of it all. It's important not to forget that there are lives to be led out there.

I've always liked the idea behind erbacce Andrew, I know some of our authors have also done books with you. Good stuff.

*Michael Curran of Tangerine Press asks: "Other than those published, who do you consider the most interesting/gutsiest/askancest poet out there?"*

There are a few people out there I'd like to do something with. Some of Ford Dagenham's stuff is superb. I really like the lyrics of Chris Broderick (Singing Loins). Sexton Ming is another superb creative individual. I've stuck with British/Irish writers, but Rob Plath seems to be very prolific and interesting. I really enjoyed 'Pray For Us Sinners', one of Joolz Denby's collections. I may have O.D.'d on Tony O'Neill, but I like his work, and of course Darran Anderson and Adelle Stripe who both have publications in the pipeline.

Michael it's good to see someone making hand-made, outsider publications of such quality - the other end of the 'artisan' spectrum to ourselves. I'm looking forward to the Billy Childish collection.

*Paul Ewen of Shoes With Rockets and 3:AM Press asks: "I love the look and feel of your books. What thing in the world do you most enjoy touching/the feel of?" and "Ben Myers' collection 'Spam' used some pretty nifty typography on the cover. What is your favourite typeface/font and why?"*

Touch, such a neglected sense! Letterpress is such a tactile print medium, especially for book covers. Publishing and making your own books is such a treat for all the senses. The smell of the

ink, sound of the press, the feel and look of the finished book in your hand, and the sweet taste of success! Blood, sweat and tears more like!

Favourite typeface? Times New Roman, Times New Roman *Italic* and Times Bold. I've had to limit myself. I'm trying to build up a stock of type. I've got loads of random stuff. The 'Spam' cover was a happy accident. Someone sent me links for some free font downloads, just as I was trying to come up with a cover. It fits well with the composite nature of the poems.

*Andy Rivers of Byker Books asks: "How do you go about getting the word out about your books when the media in general simply aren't interested in anything other than what Jordan had for breakfast?" and "Big gun... one bullet...no witnesses...Chris Moyles, Piers Morgan or Kerry Katona? Explain your reasons."*

I'm not very good at promotion. I hope that if we believe in what we're doing, try and maintain a high standard, pick the right authors and are honest in what we do, that we'll eventually find our audience. It may be a bit naïve. I try not to play the media game, 'cause it is a game. I'm trying to figure out how to send group emails at present.

How big is the gun? Big gun small bore? Line them up one behind the other and I reckon you could do all three. Reasons? Who needs reasons when you're being unreasonable?

*Steve Hussy of Murder Slim Press asks: "You predominantly print poems through Blackheath Books. What do you think poetry holds over prose as a method of expression?" and "Why the name Blackheath Books? Any particular reason why you chose that name?"*

It's not always the case, there is some impenetrable crap out there. I read Bukowski's prose and loved it, then I explored his poetry and it was life changing. I like direct, I like simple, I like honesty. Poetry is also easier to publish; it takes less ink, less paper and less time!

Blackheath is the name of our house. We bought it fifteen years ago from a friend in the pub. I used to write a lot of Haiku poetry and got really into a 'sense of place' and belonging. Our family moved around a bit when we were kids. Modern life often divorces us from places. The local graveyard has all the old families who have lived in our house over the years. The gravestones have 'of Blackheath' on them. I like that and wanted to develop a sense of belonging with the books. I want people to be able to recognise a Blackheath book and have a sense of where it was produced, and produced by hand with some integrity and purpose.

*Wolfgang Carstens of epic rites press asks: "John Yamrus wrote in his poem **contrary** that "the internet/has ruined/poetry/for/the world./it has/fooled/too many/people/into/thinking/they/can do/this." (New and Selected Poems, LummoX Press 2009). I'm curious about your reaction to this statement. Has the internet ruined poetry? Also, do you believe that writers posting so much free material online (stories, poems, etc) helps or hurts book sales? Should writers be more guarded with how much material they give away for free?"*

I think the interweb has really helped independent publishing. It's opened up direct sales from independent presses to a global market. It enables presses like ours to maximise our profits through 'farm gate' sales rather than take 30% of the cover price from book shops/sellers who aren't really interested in what we do or stand for. It always amazes me; the other night I sold some books to Japan, Belgium and Australia. So for me, in terms of sales, no the internet hasn't

ruined poetry! 'it has fooled too many people into thinking they can do this'? Isn't that just the point though, they can. I'm not into precious specialness. Of course anyone can do it, and that includes publishing! I think the internet is a great testing ground. I sometimes wonder though who reads some of the stuff on these poetry sites. Choose a good and reputable one like Beat The Dust! Or better still go and stick your poems to lampposts!

*Wolfgang Carstens of epic rites press asks: "What could/should independent press authors do to promote their books and help support the presses that support them?"*

The more the better! If they don't we don't sell many books that's the truth of it. The best publicist is a self publicist. I'm hoping that our reputation grows over time through continuing to publish interesting books. It does seem to be.

*Wolfgang Carstens of epic rites press asks: "The advent of POD (Print On Demand) technology has enabled many "hobbyist" publishers to flood the independent press market with thousands of books that never should have seen the light of day. POD technology has made it too easy and too cheap to produce books. What is your reaction to POD technology? Has POD technology helped or hurt the reputation of the independent press? Has POD technology (much the same as the internet has ruined poetry) ruined the reputation of the independent press?"*

Don't knock the hobbyists they do it for love not bucks! POD technology? Sounds expensive. Anything that makes it too easy is not good. Independent/Underground publishing has always seemed to use the available and cheapest technology. Early photo-copiers were the technology of punk and Loujon had Letterpress. POD sounds like a Capitalists dream. Half the fun is taking a punt and printing up a limited edition of 100 copies rather than waiting for the orders to come in. Even if you do end up with 70 left on the shelf! I use letterpress (19<sup>th</sup> century technology), an old duplicator (20<sup>th</sup> century technology) and recycled paper and card. Keep it simple I say.

Good luck with the Rob Plath collection, Mr Carstens.

Thanks for all the questions. I just wanted to say thanks and acknowledge the work of all our authors. Without them there would be no Blackheath Books. They are the stars.

### Adelle Stripe



Adelle's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

**B:** Shipbuilding – Robert Wyatt / Elvis Costello

*'It's just a rumour that was spread around town / A telegram or a picture postcard / Within weeks they'll be re-opening the shipyards and notifying the next of kin / Once again / It's all we're skilled in / We will be shipbuilding / With all the will in the world / Diving for dear life / When we could be diving for pearls.'*

**L:** Jeane – The Smiths

*'Jeane / There's ice on the sink where we lay / So how can you call this a home / when you know it's a grave / but you still hold a greedy grace / while you tidy the place / but it will never be clean Jeane.'*

**A:** The Last Time I Did Acid I Went Insane – Jeffrey Lewis

*'I was hanging with some friends just getting loaded / When all of a sudden my mind exploded / I had a flash that I was gay and I got paranoid / I was sitting on the floor listening to Pink Floyd / The last time I did acid I went insane...'*

**C:** Ne Me Quitte Pas (If You Go Away) – Jacques Brel

*'If you go away, as I know you must / There'll be nothing left in the world to trust / Just an empty room, full of empty space / Like the empty look I see on your face / I'd have been the shadow of your shadow / If I thought it might have kept me by your side.'*

**K:** Strange Fruit – Billie Holiday (by Lewis Allen)

*'Here is fruit for the crows to pluck / For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck / For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop / Here is a strange and bitter crop.'*

**H:** Folsom Prison Blues – Johnny Cash

*'When I was just a baby, my mama told me, "Son, Always be a good boy; don't ever play with guns." / But I shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die / When I hear that whistle blowin' I hang my head and cry.'*

**E:** The State I Am In – Belle & Sebastian

*'The priest in the booth had a photographic memory / For all he had heard / He took all of my sins and he wrote a pocket novel called 'The state I am in' / So I gave myself to God / There was a pregnant pause before he said ok / Now I spend my day turning tables round in Marks & Spencers / They don't seem to mind.'*

**A:** Hard Times – Baby Huey and The Babysitters (by Curtis Mayfield)

*'From my party house, I'm afraid to come outside / Although I'm filled with love I'm afraid they'll hurt my pride / So I play the part I feel they want of me / And I pull the shades so I won't see them seein' me.'*

**T:** Where Did You Sleep Last Night? – Leadbelly

*'Her husband was a hard working man / Just about a mile from here / His head was found in a driving wheel / But his body never was found.'*

**H:** Sheffield Sex City - Pulp

*'I didn't want to go in the first place but I've been sentenced to three years in the housing benefit waiting room / I must have lost your number in the all-night garage and now I'm wandering up and down your street calling your name / In the rain / Whilst my shoes turn to sodden cardboard.'*

**after dusk**

That first night,  
sticky from the Highbury train  
I'd made an extra effort  
(packed heels in my bag)  
I waited for you on the hot dusty pavements  
and searched for your face  
in a sea of Goya masks.

You were late. I remember your call  
as I queued at the news stand  
buying ten healthy menthols  
with my last five pound note;  
your voice deep and rusty,  
broader than expected  
told me you were 'lost on the Holloway Road.'

Listening to the sound of  
a cheap shit tune  
I stared at my reflection  
in a cracked pub window  
transfixed  
by my new skinny bones  
that poked through my  
wet shirt  
wafting in the breeze.

I was a rack of old lamb  
dressed up as mutton  
with cold brittle wrists  
waiting for your call.  
And under the backcombed dark art hair  
where I pretended to be confident  
in torn fishnet tights  
- in reality *I* was the one  
lost on the Holloway Road,  
smoking cigarettes  
in stuttering  
street lamp shadows.

Joseph Ridgwell



Joseph's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

**B:** Africa - Toto

Anyone who manages to get the word Serengeti into lyrics gets my vote. And *'Kilimanjaro rising like Olympus'* - what the fuck?

**L:** Big Five - Prince Buster

*'Spunky, spunky night in Big Five / It's gonna be pussy versus cocky tonight / Right now I'm feeling irie / Want a big, fat pussy this December night / Today I smoke an ounce of weed / Tonight I'm gonna plant a seed / In her wump, alright.'*

**A:** Return of the Grievous Angel - Gram Parsons

*'The news I could bring, I met up with the king / On his head an amphetamine crown / He talked about unbuckling that old bible belt / And lighted out for some desert town / Out with the truckers and the kickers and the cowboy angels / And a good saloon in every single town.'*

**C:** Itchycoo Park - The Small Faces

*'You can miss out school, won't that be cool / Why go to learn the words of fools / It's all too beautiful.'*

**K:** Twisting the Night Away - Sam Cooke

*'Here's a guy in evening clothes / how he got here I don't know / but man you ought to see him go / twisting the night away.'*

**H:** Be my Baby - The Ronettes

*'For every kiss you give me, I'll give you three.'*

**E:** Wouldn't it be Nice? - The Beach Boys

*'Wouldn't it be nice if we were older / then we wouldn't have to wait so long / and wouldn't it be nice to sleep together / hold each other close the whole night long.'*

**A:** Personality Crisis - The New York Dolls

*'And you're a Prima Ballerina on a spring afternoon / Change on into the wolfman / howling at the moon.'*

**T:** In My Life - The Beatles

*'There are places I remember / All my life, though some have changed / Some forever not for better / Some have gone and some remain / All these places had their moments / With lovers*

*and friends / I still can recall / Some are dead and some are living / In my life I've loved them all.'*

**H:** Annie - Ronnie Lane and Slim Chance

*'Old oaks stand tall Annie / Seen our world grow small Annie / But when they fall Annie / where will we be?'*

### **they are gods**

First day on the job and the supervisor told me this - 'As far as you or I are concerned, they are Gods. Whatever they want, they get, ok?' I nodded like some sub-normal freak.

The supervisor was clearly insane. It could've been the job, could've been her age, could've been that she was just nuts. Whatever it was, it was there. I'd been hired to work the evening shift as catering assistant in a small private hospital. The shift started at 4.45pm and ended at 9.30pm. Plenty of time to work on my novel during the daytimes, I thought happily when I applied.

But I didn't do any writing. I rose late each day, just after noon, usually hung over. Then I'd stare at a battered portable typewriter sat on an equally battered school desk. The typewriter had an accusing aspect to it and was difficult to use. Mind you, back then computers were expensive and I couldn't afford one. I bought the typewriter from a hock shop. It was blue and had a blue plastic carry case.

I was drinking every night. Some nights I'd play around with the word and the typewriter, and in the morning I'd read what I'd written. It was mostly nonsense, the odd interesting sentence that led nowhere, random words and letters repeated over and over, or scraps of song lyrics. I figured it was writers' block.

The hospital was five minutes walk from my cockroach-infested apartment. On the way I passed a model agency. Sometimes the models would be hanging around outside, both men and women. The men looked like homos or cardboard cut-outs, but the woman, ah, what long legs and pretty faces, and nice tits. However, they never even noticed me, not even a casual glance in my direction. I figured it was the uniform. Black and white stripes, like some prison get-up, accompanied by the look of the hunted.

I arrived for work each evening just as other members of staff were leaving or had already left. The majority of patients were plastic surgery jobs: facelifts, nose, tits, nip and tuck. The immediate after affects of the operations were horrific. The women - they were mostly wealthy middle-aged women - looked like they'd been in terrible car accidents.

I worked alone. At night the hospital was a sleepy, tranquil place. An empty kitchen filled with stainless steel and echoes of daytime industry. I served dinner, tea, and coffee. Most patients were heavily sedated. They rarely ate the food or drink. I was under strict orders to return any unopened bottles of wine or beer to the kitchen fridge. I made certain each bottle was opened. Usually I saved the bottles to take home with me, or I swigged from one or two as I pushed my huge silver trolley along the desolate wards. It helped to pass the time.

One evening there was a huge hail storm. The hail was the size of golf balls. I stopped working and watched the storm with interest. Some expensive cars were in the car park, out in the open. The hail began to destroy them. I watched as the owners suddenly appeared, the brain surgeons, neurosurgeons, plastic surgeons, whatever surgeons, coats over their heads, making desperate attempts to save their vehicles from further damage. And these were The Gods.

I had to make special sandwiches for The Gods. I had to cut the bread into quarters and remove the crusts. Each quarter had a different filling. I loved those dainty sandwiches. I'd roll my trolley up to the surgeon's canteen and peer inside. Most nights it was empty. The canteen was more like a lounge - leather chairs, TV, magazines, etc. I'd grab a bottle of vino from my trolley and a couple of rounds of exquisite sandwiches. Then I'd plot up in one of the comfortable armchairs and peruse a lifestyle magazine or two. Sometimes I dozed off.

The days and weeks passed, sleepy mornings and idle afternoons. I began to put on weight. The free food was to blame. I didn't do any writing. The typewriter was soon covered in a thick film of dust. Sometimes I went for a walk to a nearby marina and listened to boat masts chiming in the wind.

Three months into the job and I was suddenly hauled into the manager's office. I'd noticed some of the other staff giving me funny looks, but dismissed it as paranoia. It wasn't. They had video evidence of me eating and drinking in the God's lounge. They showed me the incriminating evidence. In one scene there I was stretched out on a chair, feet up, drinking wine and eating the crustless sandwiches. I even drank the wine with my little finger waving in the air.

The manager reacted like I'd just raped her youngest daughter. Her face was contorted in anger, her eyes filled with hate. The hospital was well within its rights to press charges, she said. I told her I didn't think that was necessary. The woman said I had let her and myself down. I didn't say anything, but felt sorry for the woman. She was trapped. I was fired on the spot.

A few weeks later I walked into a trap of my own. I landed a similar job, but in a much larger hospital, early shift, 6.00am to 2.30pm. The supervisor was equally as crazy, but also a little sadistic, and she spoke of other Gods. There was no free food or drink, or delicious sandwiches, or comfortable armchairs, or empty wards; just a grueling eight-hour slog. I didn't do any writing, I didn't even pretend to.

A few months later I sold the typewriter with the blue plastic carry case to the Radioman for forty bucks. I spent the money on gut rot wine, which ruined my stomach and stained my teeth. I stayed in the new job for three years.

### Ben Myers



Ben's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

**B:** People Who Died - Jim Carroll Band

*'Teddy sniffing glue, he was 12 years old - fell from the roof on East Two-Nine / Cathy was 11 when she pulled the plug, on 26 reds and a bottle of wine...'*

**L:** Motown Junk - Manic Street Preachers

*'Adrift in cheap dreams don't stop the rain / Numbed out in piss towns, just want to dig their graves...'*

**A:** Exit Only - Fugazi

*'This is three minute access, so pop the question / Will we leave the last place burning? Or do we just get leaving?'*

**C:** Thirty Foot Trailer - Ewan MacColl

*'Farewell to the blossom and besoms of broom, farewell to the creels and the baskets / The folk of today would far rather pay, for a thing that is made out of plastic...'*

**K:** Shame - Wu Tang Clan / Ol' Dirty Bastard

*'Yo, I come with that old loco style from my vocal / Couldn't peep it with a pair of bi-focals / I'm no joker, play me as a joker, I'll be on you like a house on fire - smoke ya!'*

**H:** Crown of the Valley - Jets To Brazil

*'The hedge casts heroes late across our lawn - the valley hunt militiamen, all gone / Thought we had the lock in '54, now the maid owns the house next door...'*

**E:** Remember Me - British Sea Power

*'We're all part of the same fucking regime / With someone taking it out, and someone putting it in...'*

**A:** Time for Heroes - The Libertines

*'There are fewer more distressing sights than that / Of an Englishman in a baseball hat...'*

**T:** Survival of the Fittest - Desaparecidos

*'He hides in his suit like a snake in the grass / His sales-pitch-fork-tongue-hissed / Now the wolves wear their name tags - they are hunting in packs...'*

**H:** Inertiatic ESP - The Mars Volta

*'Last night I heard lepers, flinch like birth defects / Its musk was fecal in origin as the words dribbled off of its chin...'*

### **the copper-bottomed stream**

The copper-bottomed stream  
carries messages from the  
mind of the troubled wood  
to the field's green pages.

It holds secrets in its bubbles.  
It is June and the mayfly is  
four weeks late, but on a day  
like this, who is counting?

Jenni Fagan



Jenni's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

**B:** Messiah Ward – Nick Cave

*'You are a force of nature, dear / Your breath curls from your lips / As the trees bend down their branches / And touch you with their fingertips / They're bringing out the dead, now / It's easy just to look away / They are bringing out the dead, now / It's been a strange, strange day.'*

**L:** She Belongs to Me - Bob Dylan

*'She's got everything she needs / She's an artist she don't look back / She can take the dark out of the night-time / And paint the daytime black / You will start out standing / Proud to steal her anything she sees / But you'll wind up peeking through her keyhole / Down upon your knees.'*

**A:** House of the Rising Sun – The Animals

*'There is a house in New Orleans / They call the Rising Sun / And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy / And God I know I'm one / Oh mother tell your children / Not to do what I have done / Spend your lives in sin and misery / In the House of the Rising Sun.'*

**C:** Oh Bondage Up Yours - X Ray Spex

*'Some people think little girls / Should be seen an not heard / But I think, Oh Bondage, Up Yours!'*

**K:** Don't Dictate - Penetration

*'Penetrating voices going through my head / I haven't listened to a thing they said / Always there with the answers / Don't suffer the consequences.'*

**H:** Geraldine - Glasvegas

*'When you know I'm no good / And you feel like walking / I need you to know / It's just the prescription talking.'*

**E:** Feeling Good – Nina Simone

*'It's a new dawn / It's a new day / It's a new life / For me / And I'm feeling good / Fish in the sea you know how I feel / River running free you know how I feel / Blossom on the tree you know how I feel.'*

**A:** Hot Freaks – Guided By Voices

*'I met a non-dairy creamer / Explicitly laid out like a fruitcake / With a wet spot / Bigger than a great lake / She took me to the new church / & baptized me with salt / She told me 'liquor' / I am a new man / Hot freaks.'*

**T:** These Days – Jackson Browne

*'I'll keep on moving / Things are bound to be improving these days / One of these days / These days I sit on corner stones / And count the time in quarter tones to ten, my friend / Don't confront me with my failures / I had not forgotten them.'*

**H:** Season of the Witch – Hole (I prefer this to the Donovan version)

*'When I look out my window / What do you think I see / Thousands of people / Staring back at me / It's strange / It's strange / It's strange / Must be the season of the witch.'*

## **impilo**

I fall backwards into the screech. The lawn mower blades whirr once, twice through air, gouge into flesh, muscles sever, bone cracks and splinters, the sky turns white. The motor snarls, jagged steel teeth rip into sinews, tear globules of fat and gnaw tissue ragged. Blood, flesh, grass and earth arc up into the vast bleached-out airless nothing. The daffodils nod their heads quietly. The grunting motor whimpers to a metallic halt.

Silence.

I am back in the jail.

The cell doors' tiny mouths press tightly shut. Each is unwillingly snapped open so the eye can look, then four steps along to the next cell, click, look, shut. My cell is 736a. I am on my bunk reading an article about a Zimbabwe hospital called Impilo, which means life in Ndebele. My Ama's Dad was from Zimbabwe, not that she ever met him.

'Amadika' she said when we met, offering me her name like a sweet wrapped in a Scottish lilt. Amadika means beloved one. I drag my focus back to the article. The hospital staff is burning amputated limbs on bonfires. Sixteen bodies have fully decomposed; sixty more are in advanced stages of decomposition. The generator no longer works. I read each word. I do not dare consider Ama too long in here. I have gone ten years without her in my bed. I know how to pass time now. I know how to not go crazy. I am still dying inch by inch though, and she is the only one who will save me. The only person I ever met who made me feel - my Ama, my Amadika.

My cellmate snores on the bunk below me. Tomorrow I get my first unescorted trip into the outside world; my reward for good behaviour. I have played nice for a decade. I am trusted to return. The little mouth of the door snaps open, the eye looks, then the mouth snaps shut. My cellmate is high risk. She made it out the seven suicides cell, just, so the staff check us every twenty minutes. They are concerned she won't make it so they put her with me. I am a stabilizing influence. A listener. A mentor. An exemplary inmate. She farts lightly on the bunk below me. Her kids smile from an old photo. All three are in care now; one is in a home I used to be in.

Ama puts her mug down on the drainer before looking out into the garden. Between us my leg struggles up, lurches forward. The ankle swells purple, flesh curls away at the calf, one clean shard of bone stabs out the top. The back door whacks open. Ama frantically unwinds her headscarf as she runs, skids down onto her knees. The toes of the leg wriggle at me.

'It's going to do a tap-dance,' I moan.

'Not the fuckin' day it's no,' Ama says grimly as she rapidly winds material round the stump below my knee. I watch the leg hop away. It wavers on the edge of the steps before catching its balance and planking itself down. It bleeds all over the decking Ama finished for me coming home. My heart hollers. The leg tap-dances across to an old cracked mirror behind the peonies. It admires its reflection, turns this way and that to see every bloodied angle. I feel sick. Ama strides over and it hops furiously away through the wild garlic patch, by the bin, under the rose bush where Ama stops chasing it, pretends to look at the sky. It stops slowly, she lunges down, grabs it by the ankle. It wriggles in her hands as she marches inside.

Ama comes back with a duvet. Then there is a pulling, white heat and thuds. My dead dog barks at the leg, runs off with it, takes it to the sea where it paddles itself clean. My sweat is slick and cold on my skin. Everything recedes.

Time leaves, it will have no part in this.

I am laid out on the kitchen linoleum. Ama grabs a rubber hose, snaps it round my arm and yanks it tight. She lays out her beach towel, a bottle of gin, her needle kit, morphine she said she didn't have, a bag of brown and a saw. Why do you still have the brown, Ama?

'It's okay, it's okay,' she soothes pushing the needle into my vein. Warm floods through me as she pushes the stopper in all the way. She lifts my thigh straight up and leans it against the wall to slow the blood flow. The other is folded so I am a half lotus.

She is beautiful, so we float.

Ama strokes my hair. A black starless sky whorls through the kitchen door keyhole and drags its weight across me. Ama shrinks. Through a tiny pinprick of light, I see her reach for the saw.

I am on the train; it is yesterday. I have seventeen hours of legal freedom left. The carriage chugs Ama, Ama, Ama, Ama. As the train crosses the border the windows rattle, way hey!

'Escape?' the tea lady asks me, coffee pot poised. I look out the window at cliff tops where seven dead girls sway, just like they hung in their cells. Each of them waves me on my way.

'Thank you, yes,' I say to the tea lady.

In a morgue, the hanging cell girls rub at the red marks round their necks. They snap vertebrae back into place, look at each other and nod.

'She wouldn't have survived much longer' they say.

'I couldn't do another ten years' the youngest says.

'Mercy mercy,' they mutter and lay down, wait for the morgue man to come and drain their fluids away.

The train smells of beans. It smells of floor. It smells of smelly old man. It does not smell of metal, keys, doors, linoleum, and bleach and despair. I know I won't be able to work legally if I don't go back. Or use a doctor or dentist or exist within the system in any kind of a way.

Ama waits in the car on a street where there is no CCTV. In the station, I resist the urge to give that last camera a wave. I won't be back Eye, take a good long look, you'll never see this face again. I step, light and free and there she is, in the car, bathed in sunlight and twice as bright and beautiful as she has ever been. The nine-hour drive to the cottage is me taking in her silhouette, her hand on the gear stick, driving like it's so easy. An' her smell, her laugh, light, nervous, our words of mush rolling over each other saying nothing, saying I love you, I am here, you are here, this is us again.

The cottage is sixty miles away from anywhere. The forests are holy. The fields an' gates an' earth an' skies an' brooks an' stiles an' rabbits are holy. Tomorrow I will mow the holy lawn. I will love Ama every single day.

Bits of bone, cartilage drop into the bucket, rags, towels soaked bloody, tissue. Clean gauze soaks in; yellow fluid seeps out to heal raw flesh.

I wake on the sofa in unbearable pain.

There is a knock knock knock from the porch. Knock, knock, knock, walking sticks getting rattled over, welly boots flung around. That limb was never so active on me. It's like having a puppy.

'What do you want to do with it?' Ama asks.

'Build a fucking bonfire' I say. She takes it up to the bathroom. Bathes it in the sink. She reckons I have to say goodbye, have to take a look.

'Or it'll itch and ache,' she says. She tells me about a documentary she watched where people have a chapel they can go to, to say goodbye to their limbs. Apparently it helps them to accept what's happened and move on. Ama sits on the chair at the top of the stairs, patting the leg dry. She knows I'm watching. She sat there with her dressing gown open trying to catch my eye a million times before this all happened, before I went away.

'Chanel black' she offers, painting each nail carefully. I un-mute the TV and hope the blare will take away from the horror, but I can't stop looking. She rubs foundation into the leg, powders it and blows on the toes to help the topcoat dry.

'Why not a little blush, or paint some eyes on, glue on some fake lashes; maybe it'll meet someone nice?' I state solemnly and she giggles. I miss my fucking cell.

Ama says burning it should be a celebration.

'What is there to celebrate?' I grind through my teeth.

'Celebrate you ever had it in the first place!' she says slowly.

'Yeah, okay, great!' I say.

She smiles.

She is insane.

Why do I love a lunatic?

I hate the groggy. I hate her. I hate that stupid fucking leg. Why does she try an' make me feel? Isn't it enough I am here, Ama? She tried to show me the leg in rigor mortis, but I refused to look. I can smell rotting on what's left of the meat around my kneecap. Ama says the smell is all in my brain. I think of everything is meat. My brain is meat. My hands are meat. My heart is meat. I feel an unfamiliar empathy with vegetarians.

Toes dried, Ama wraps a silk scarf round the top of the limb. She cradles it carefully, pads down the stairs, barefoot, bare skinned, kimono flowing behind her. She sits the leg down on a velvet cushion on the table. I wonder if that scarf is long enough to strangle her with. She would look beautiful strangled.

'Look,' she says as she lights the candles. I sigh, I look. Despite the glitter an' the Chanel nails an' the velvet cushion an' the candles an' her sitting with her tits out like as soon as I need some, she's there; despite all the ceremony, that leg looks queasy to me. It looks like it's in drag.

I'm not queasy.

I'm just as nothing as I've ever been. Ama says it's ironic, even when something like this happens, I still don't know how to feel. Ama photographs the leg with her digital Nikon. I remember when she took Polaroids.

'Why don't you just seal it in a Perspex box, load it up on formaldehyde, bring it out at fuckin' parties?' I squawk. She looks thoughtfully at me. I wonder if anyone has been bludgeoned to death with a limb before. I want to kick her head in with it. I want to kick my own head in with it.

'It's not art,' I state.

'It's all art,' she retorts, 'every breath ye' inhale intae aw they cells multiplyin' an' dyin' an' recreatin'; it's all art.'

'Like shit in a fucking tin, it's art,' I say. She thinks that's hilarious. She laughs so much she glows. I want to kiss her, but first I'd have to slap her and I can't get up by myself yet.

'I can't take love,' I told her the first time we met.

'Bullshit,' she said. I watch her plump up the cushion underneath the limb. I feel like something is tearing in my soul. I need injected again.

I wake as Ama is lacing a daisy chain anklet round the leg.

'You're barometer of normal is fucked!' I say.

'I never did do normal,' she says.

She's not lying. She did other stuff, like the piercing, through her lip an' her tongue, an' her clit an' her ears an' her chin. She did them by herself, sealed the wound with almost boiling water on cotton, like she did to my knee. She's got tattoos trailing up her neck, down her back, round her waist, ornate on her tiny feet. She lived in a barge, a shack, a hilltop hole, a commune, in the forest on platforms, on stilts where bison ran below each night and she drank vodka in shots, one for her, one for the moon, one for the forest floor, one for the spider weaving webs of silver. Then a tepee for three years, until she was twenty-three and got left the cottage and it was here she brought me.

'This place is for us,' she said.

She lavished it with love and made everything grow wild and tall and beautiful, even me.

I shouldn't have tried to cut the grass. Who want's a motherfucking cripple? Stupid question. I was always crippled and I was always a motherfucker and she always wanted me, right from the start.

I shouldn't have had a gin for breakfast.

I shouldn't have let her meet my Mother in 1983. My Mother looked at her like she was some kind of disease made up by some kind of being no-one's even heard of. Ama took it like a real big compliment.

Ama isn't keen on normal as an idea. She says that normal is just something they bludgeon you guilty with. She says we're raised to think that normal is a real thing an' so we police our thoughts and our actions for any aberrations that could outcast us. Ama says that's just how the system wants it, so people keep giving them money and shut the fuck up.

I'd do a thousand years in jail for you, Ama, for this night, leg or no fuckin' leg. She made me a stew last night. Greens out the garden. Rabbit out the trap. She told me about her Uncle Willie's scars over pudding. He was stabbed in Glasgow, scars all over his back, stomach, and part of his right ear was hacked off.

'Then there's the masterpiece,' she says. A three-inch wide scar right round his wrist. 'He wears that scar like a Rolex,' she says, 'like a Rolex he isnae' ever takin' off, no' till his dyin' day.'

She says we'll be okay. She says I went through worse before I was five years old. She cut down a whole bough off the oak tree down the road, and she says she's going to carve me a new foot and ankle and calf herself. 'You never did know anythin' bout' your roots anyway,' she says, 'this might help make you more grounded.'

'Hmmm,' I say and I watch her tits moving through her thin top. I want to slip my finger in her knickers but I can't concede yet, my sulk is too many days long now; I'll have to ease my way out.

I was twenty-nine when I first met Ama an' I'd felt dead my every waking day. I never thought anyone could change that but she did. She's like that. There's always a lot Ama can do. You need a room painted nice, she paints nice. You need someone to help you with something that makes most people sick, call her, nothing makes her vomit. You want something counted or you want to talk about them Greek weirdo's with the big thoughts, she'll pontificate philosophy till the cows come home. You want to tell someone 'bout something bad and dirty and not feel dumb? Ama'll make you a cup of tea.

She only has one friend.

'One's all I need,' she says.

'What about when Mick dies?' I ask her.

'I jus' won't see him for awhile,' she says. She says if she needs people again she'll go out and find some.

'Plenty of 'em out there,' she states. Ama says the trees are her friends. The ocean, the stars, the sand, the sky, the soup she cooks and the bread she bakes an' the films she cries to with a big smile on her face. My love is enough, she reckons.

'You're broke as fuck,' I tell her.

'Nah,' she says, 'I just got lucky that way.'

The bonfire purrs and pops. I am wrapped in a duvet, sat in the wheelbarrow. The stars stare down. The leg wriggles on the flames and I whack it back in with a stick; flesh sizzles and ash flutters up. I take a long drink of beer.

'Last time you help out in the garden,' Ama says solemnly.

The laugh begins around me. I breathe it in through the air and it eases up through my veins and out through my nose in snorts as Ama's thumb strokes my palm. The fire burns and the moon stares down in a silent O. The willow tree swishes its tendrils to and fro and it sounds like waves.

Miles J Bell



Miles' Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

**B:** A Century of Fakers - Belle & Sebastian

**L:** Three Wars - Momus

**A:** Great Grimsby Literature Crime - The Nannas

**C:** Friday Night, Saturday Morning - The Specials

**K:** Yankee Bayonet - The Decemberists

**H:** Fugazi - Marillion

**E:** Canoe - Nosebag

**A:** Laika - Arcade Fire

**T:** Back Together - Babybird

**H:** (Are You) The One That I've Been Waiting For - Nick Cave

## things we've lost

to step back  
and drink together  
in a pub built for old boys  
now that  
would be something

low conversation  
if necessary  
stuffing appearing  
from red leather snug seats  
a barman who won't hurry  
but knows your name  
smoke from half-remembered cigarettes curling  
away from us  
like time  
misty reflections glinting in the optics  
the world elsewhere  
with  
the whole place quiet  
and heroically weary  
like a washed-up boxer  
punch-drunk and  
fighting from memory

### Darran Anderson



Darran's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

- B:** The Mercy Seat - Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds
- L:** Pirate Jenny - Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht
- A:** People Who Died - Jim Carroll Band
- C:** Christmas Card from a Hooker in Minneapolis / Alice - Tom Waits
- K:** Our Anniversary - Smog
- H:** Live Bed Show - Pulp
- E:** Chelsea Hotel #2 - Leonard Cohen
- A:** Tesla's Hotel Room - The Handsome Family
- T:** Holland, 1945 - Neutral Milk Hotel
- H:** Then She Did - Jane's Addiction

**22<sup>nd</sup> november 1963**

32° 46' 58" N, 96° 48' 14" W

Dallas, Texas.

Left onto Elm Street from Houston,  
on the dressmaker

Zapruder's 8mm film,  
waving to the crowds.

Kennedy, wearing a blue-grey  
double-buttoned suit,  
with a navy tie, suddenly  
clutches his throat with his fists.

As his wife grips him,  
there are only  
milliseconds left

until the side of his temple  
will explode and she will  
crawl, in retrieval,  
across the back of that  
Midnight Blue 1961 Lincoln.

34° 3' 0" N, 118° 15' 0" W

Los Angeles, California.

Aldous Huxley voiceless  
and dying in the morning,  
cancer of the throat,

requests to his wife  
on a large sheet of paper,

"*LSD - try*

*it - intramuscular*

*-100 mmg."*

54° 59' 44.88" N, 7° 18' 26.64" W

Derry, Ireland.

My grandfather, more  
mystery than real to me,  
framed in the only

photo I know of him,  
a rugged young

Elvis profile, wearing  
a military beret at a rakish angle,  
father of eight children,  
is drowning.

It's just  
another  
Friday.

## Vic Templar



Vic's Top 10 songs that mean something to him:

**B:** The Amorous Humphrey Plugg - Scott Walker

Well, this is my fave song of all time. Has been since 1985. Only Tin Soldier or Waterloo Sunset occasionally threaten this status. As far as I can make out, it tells of a little episode in the life of a daydreamer. So aside from Scott being my god, I can identify with the lyric. A man out of touch with reality, dreaming of the stars.

**L:** Merry Xmas Everybody - Noddy Holder

Tells the story of the family gathering on xmas eve, exactly how it used to be at my nan's house when I was a kid. The song has made me cry on more than one occasion as my nan, granddad and dad are no longer around. Yes, I am a soft, sappy, sod.

**A:** New Face in Hell - Mark E Smith

*'Wireless enthusiast intercepts government secret radio band and uncovers secrets and scandals of deceitful type proportions / Aghast, goes next door to his neighbor, secretly excited, as aforementioned was a hunter whom radio enthusiast wanted friendship and favor of / A new face in hell / Nearly a new face in hell! / A muscular, thick-skinned, slit-eyed neighbor is at the table poisoned just thirty seconds before by parties who knew of wireless operator's forthcoming revelation / A new face in hell! / A prickly line of sweat covers enthusiast's forehead as the realisation hits him that the same government him and his now dead neighbor voted for and backed and talked of on cream porches have tricked him into their war against the people who enthusiast and dead hunter would have wished torture on. A servant of government walks in and arrests wireless fan in kitchen for murder of his neighbor.'*

Could have picked dozens by Smith. Make that hundreds. Wings or Edinburgh Man are two other favourites.

**C:** Shangri-La - Ray Davies

The Kinks are my favourite band, probably because I like the imaginary place Davies used to escape to - the village green stuff. Yet no-one was, at the same time more rooted in the real world as it was then. Singing of family life, men without jobs, the struggle to pay your rent and bring up kids, the erosion of post-war optimism, the break up of long-established working class communities, and shipping them out willy-nilly to newly-built suburbs.

**K:** Live Bed Show - Jarvis Cocker

Again, could have picked several by Jarv (I Spy, Joyriders, David's Last Summer, Do You Remember the First Time, etc). I like his story telling, and he usually writes about people I can identify with. Influenced by Scott Walker of course.

**H:** Anything Goes - Cole Porter

I like the way the words flow into each other. As they do with my next choice.

**E:** Too Much Monkey Business - Chuck Berry

He wasn't good for long, but he just managed to write a whole bunch of songs in that short period. Again, could have picked several, but any song with monkey in the title gets the edge in my book.

**A:** Creeque Alley - John and Michelle Phillips

I'm normally disdainful of 'clever' lyrics, but when you've got such great singers and some sunshine to back it, well, that's a different matter.

**T:** Philadelphia - Howard Devoto

It was Howie who sparked my love of words more than any writer of books. All his lyrics are great, even when I'm not sure what he's singing about, but in music, that has never bothered me. The voice is another instrument and that's how MES and Bolan use it. Words used simply for their poetic sound. Likewise Lennon on I am the Walrus. I'm sure Devoto had great meaning and depth to his lyrics, but I love the way he strings his words together.

**H:** I Don't Mind - Pete Shelley

To think that he and Devoto used to be in the same band. Probably only The Beatles can also boast two great lyricists (George wasn't bad either). Identified totally with his lovelorn lyrics as a young teenager. Don't know if that made things worse or better, but great songs nonetheless.

The first chapter from Vic's forthcoming novel *taking candy from a dog*, out on Blackheath Books:

### **advertisement**

A middle-aged man in search of a monkey. And I don't mean Attenborough. A middle-aged man balancing on rafters. He's in here somewhere, he's thinking. Here in the dark. Here among the cobwebs. Somewhere here. Must be. Living with the spiders. Luke the Sock Monkey. Loft dweller. In here somewhere, surely. The smell of cardboard and dust. Cobwebs and fibreglass rolls; blackened candyfloss. Here must be treasure. He fully realises that most went to the cubs' jumble sale a long time ago, but not all of it. There will still be relics.

A big buff-coloured cardboard box. The words on the side of this box say Puffa Puffa Rice. It says Kellogg's. It says Sooty's Favourite Breakfast. Contains 24 x 8oz boxes. It also has lettering in purple felt tip pen. The lettering says *Ian's Things*. He looks inside.

There's a notebook. A reporter's jotter, its pad of lined pages bound together by a spiral of wire. There are two slender combs of paper tangled amongst the metal pig's tail, the pages probably ripped from it when Callaghan was Prime Minister. It's not what he was looking for, but he flips it open. He recognises the handwriting. In green fibre-tipped pen, it has a list of favourite toast toppings. The next page has Top Ten Marks and Spencers Crisp Flavours in red biro. After that comes a parade of cricket matches played by dice: Kent v TV detectives; England v Pop Stars; England Cricketers v England Footballers; Puppets v Celebrities (Raymond Baxter c. H. Hare b. Virgil 17).

He continues. He sees a National Cycling Proficiency Certificate, a scrapbook of the 1974 World Cup, another of picture postcards, a bag of marbles and a Six Million Dollar Man annual that is not his and never was. It's not what he was looking for. There's a newspaper. That's not what he was looking for either - The Sunday Mirror, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1982.

He sees a familiar sight. You can't open a paper without seeing it; the box in the bottom right-hand corner of the page next to the crossword. The crossword finished by his Dad, all except for 6 down and 14 across, with his bold, precise letters in blue biro, accompanied by doodles of Stetson-wearing cowboys in the margin.

Thirteen tiny letters across the top of the box; *Advertisement*, followed by six words in a much larger, bold font screaming '*Does Your Memory Let You Down?*' A man peers blankly from the page. It's the man who looked out from the same box for donkey's years. They don't use him anymore. They use a different man, same puzzled expression. I expect you know who I mean.

*Does Your Memory Let You Down?* Are you kidding, he thinks?!

Now in his early forties, his head is full of memories, thousands of them, any one of which can, without notice, get a rerun in his brain's cinema. Not the whole movie, possibly just the trailer, random snippets and excerpts. Not necessarily the major scenes either. Often it is footage that should have been left on the cutting room floor, events and conversations that he'd much rather have forgotten, that repeats again and again.

Wanna see what's playing now, now his memory's been jogged? You do? Okay, settle down, you don't need popcorn.

There's a bus, a green Maidstone & District bus, trundling along Railway Street. It passes under the viaduct and stops to pick up some passengers near Waghorn's statue. Two people get on; a woman and her little boy. They take seats downstairs at the back, the sort where you sit facing other passengers. The bus begins its climb up Maidstone Road, the steep bit, like a shire horse with wheels, laden with its cargo of OAPs, dockyard workers, young mothers and a small boy...

I remember a complete stranger winking at me one day in 1971, nigh on forty years ago. Sitting on a bus with Dad going along the Maidstone Road. The man was sitting opposite me and just as the road levels out by the Co-Op laundry, he winked at me. It was a warm, comforting, working-class wink as if to say, "Everything's all right, cocker. You're safe."

He was right. My childhood was safe; safe, secure and full of love. Growing up in Chatham, Kent, an hour east of London; the town that built Nelson's Victory. My world was as dangerous as a day trip to Trumpton.

My third birthday, three years earlier. What's this, a green and orange plastic trumpet? "It's a present from your new sister," Nan says. My one-week old sister Kes, short for Kestrel. I was impressed and confused. How could she have bought me this lovely present, I wondered?

1970. Going to the barbers in Gillingham with my Dad one day and getting a lift home from a pal of his. I'm sitting in the front alongside Dad in his mate's snazzy car, a bunch of keys dangling from the walnut dash. Dad was so proud of how I'd craned my neck to the barber's requests - "Just a little to the side, that's it son...and now back the other way...lovely....there, that should do you." "He was so good," Dad told his pal, "did everything the barber asked. Didn't create once."

"He was such a good little boy." I heard it a thousand times, cocooned in this world. Nothing could go wrong and the memories won't leave me.

Can 'Ian 11-8-75' carved into a fence post in our garden, still be legible? Does the fence post still exist? Come to think of it, what about the piece of chewing gum stuck into the pebble-dashed

wall on Wyles Road? I disguised it to look like another pebble, but I knew it was there. I could always spot it.

So many memories, such fine detail. I begin to think of Pontins. Wick Ferry Holiday Camp. Were our holidays so good that I can recall ridiculous minutiae thirty-odd years later?

I'm playing FBI with a Scots lad called Andy and running past the swimming pool to hide behind some shrubbery. "Don't run," he said, "the FBI never run". He took three seconds to say it, one day in September 1972 and I remember it clearly now. *Why?*

September 1974. How I begged Raymond not to throw one of my Dad's Polaroid flash cubes into the camp's swimming pool. "It's a dead one. It's used up," he said, but I couldn't be sure. How did he know? What if it wasn't a dead one? Dad would've killed me.

Peg and George, Gwen and Tony, Vera and Bill; three couples we'd meet up with every year because we all went to the same place at the same time. Same holiday camp, same chalets, same week, every year. Ours were the top two on the balcony above the swimming pool. We were in 119, Nan and Granddad in 118. The clang of footsteps upon a metal fire escape still resonates with magic for me; it's the sound of holiday, of climbing up to your chalet. The early morning hum of the swimming pool generator accompanies it. A beautiful piece of music. Clang and Hum.

These were old-school working-class holidays. Engineers, mechanics, plumbers, painters, decorators, postmen, milkmen, insurance salesmen and spies. (Dad wasn't really a spy, I don't think, but when, at school they asked what my father did for a living, all I knew was that he drew nuclear submarines for the Government, so that's what I told them. Wilf then declared that "Smith's Dad's a spy" and it's much cooler for your Dad to be a spy than a draughtsman, and the tag stuck). No teachers at Pontins though. We always went the third week in September, after the schools had gone back; an extra week's holiday after six weeks off for me and Kes. That's the way it was.

These men were married to mothers and grandmothers; former or current nurses, secretaries, shopgirls, factory girls, dinner ladies and postwomen. These men and women drink tea at every opportunity. The men like beer, real beer, dark, malty, sour and hoppy (lager is 'fancy' and treated with suspicion until it finally takes over around about 1976) of an evening, but tea is the staple throughout the day.

They wear ties with Windsor knots and fold back the cuffs of their shirts twice so that they expose two-thirds of a muscular or sinewy forearm, revealing, in some cases, a tattoo. Not on the men in my family, but an anchor, a heart, snake, dagger or bust of a raven-haired woman, can often be seen. The women wear their best frock out at night, with their best handbag and some gaudy jewellery. The younger women wear mini dresses. Mum wears crimplene slacks and a nylon blouse from Marks and Spencers. Always Marks and Spencers.

Why do these details stick and yet my later life is pretty much a blur? What year did Lee and Dawn get married? '99, '01, '03? No idea. What did I do last Thursday? Working late? At the Royal Academy? Having a beer with Rex? Playing cricket? Picking Debbie up from work? Well, it'll come to me eventually, if I give it some serious thought.

We went to that Pontins camp at Wick Ferry in Hampshire every year, in that third-week-in-September slot, from 1970 to 1975 (in '75 they switched the boundary so that our holiday was now in Dorset not Hants), but once the spell was broken, that was it. Six years and a hundred thousand memories, but once I started big school in the autumn of '76, the September thing was

no longer an option. In '76 we went on holiday to Devon in June and as for 1977 and '78, I have no idea where we went. No recall whatsoever. The Pontins magic had gone, never to return.

Schooldays - the best days of your life? No, not for me. My best days were spent with my family; my parents and grandparents, Penny and Dave, Betty, Mac and Lee. On picnics, at the seaside, in the park, at the zoo. Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, summer holidays. Nan and Granddad lived 'next door but one', another phrase I heard a thousand times. Mum explaining where we live in relation to her parents. Mum, Dad, Kes and I at 21, Nan and Granddad at 25. Jack, our brother, came along later.

I have one Granddad and two Nans. Granddad fell off a ladder the Saturday before Easter in 1971. I was watching Thunderbirds, the one where an alligator attacks a town, when Nan came to fetch Dad for help. She'd phoned an ambulance. He was trying to fix the washing line but it was windy and he fell. He nearly hit his head on the bird bath but luckily he was all right. He had to sleep on the wallpaper pasting table for a week.

Dad's dad died before I was born. Dad's mum is called Nanny Smith and we see her every Tuesday night until 1976 when she emigrates to South Africa. In fact, I have three nans, as Nanny Cook is Nanny Robinson's mum. So she's Mum's nan. She calls everyone "ducks." She never says anyone's name. She says "ducks" instead. I don't know why.

Penny is mum's sister. She's younger than her by eight years, but doesn't like it when people ask if they are twins. That makes her swear. It's probably because they wear the same clothes like twins do. The same Marks & Sparks outfits. They don't plan it that way, it's called intuition. She married Dave in 1971. He's a carpenter, like Jesus' dad (that's a joke, by the way) and supports Man United. I drank ten drinks at their wedding; a mixture of squash, lemonade and Pepsi cola plus half a glass of Granddad's homemade sherry.

Betty is Nan's sister and she is married to Mac. Mac's not his real name but that's what everyone calls him. Lee is their son, but his real dad died when he was very young. Lee is ace. He likes Marc Bolan and David Bowie. He's six years older than me.

A young life played by a concert of sunshine and laughter.

I put the newspaper back in the box. I couldn't find what I was looking for.

I hear a voice from down below, two flights down, "What you doing up there?"

"Just looking around."

"What for?"

"Luke."

"What?"

"*Luke.*"

"Who's bleedin' Luke?"

"Luke, you remember, the sock monkey."

"What you looking for that for?"

"He's gotta be here somewhere."

"I think they all got thrown away."

"You can't have thrown him away...?"

I go back downstairs, fold the ladder back into the loft and click the hatch shut with the special stick. I go into mum's bedroom and cast a look round. I look at the large photo of my Mum and Dad taken nearly fifty years ago; half a bloody century, in black and white, before I existed. A young couple who knew not what lay ahead. The wardrobe, the dressing table, the koala bear; same props, different house. I remember the koala; been sat there since before I was born. He never got relegated to the loft.

I look in her mirror. I look at the face in the mirror. It's not the same man who used to stare back at me. It's a different man, same blank expression. Something changed somewhere. I don't know when. This man was once a boy and it was all different. Sometime, somewhere, it all changed.

### Garrie Fletcher



Garrie's Top 10 best-written songs playlist:

- B:** I am the Walrus - The Beatles
- L:** A Town Called Malice - The Jam
- A:** Subterranean Homesick Blues - Bob Dylan
- C:** Waterloo Sunset - The Kinks
- K:** To Have and Have Not - Billy Bragg
- H:** Night Club - The Specials
- E:** Tramp the Dirt Down - Elvis Costello
- A:** Walk Away Renee - Billy Bragg (same tune but different lyrics)
- T:** God Save the Queen - The Sex Pistols
- H:** Love Will Tear Us Apart - Joy Division

### **magnetic field**

You were electric, magnetized.  
The corn, iron filings bowing,  
Your hand blessing the golden heads  
As waves shivered through.

Swayed by the crop, I listened;  
True north, like you, now lost.  
Blue, hot rich ozone, wisps of cloud,  
The merest hint of moisture,  
Evaporating like sated lust.

Scythed down, burnt to stubble,  
Your pull ebbs and fades.  
A tide of memory,  
A ghost of metal.

### **the night has a thousand eyes**

From under the flap of underpant  
A molten stump of leg  
Aborted child in hospital sheet  
Smothered, fastened  
A thick belt around his waist  
Secures the memory of foot  
Plastic toes stick at sock, shoe  
Weight transferred from wall to floor  
Handrail to door.

His skin the yellow of forgotten books  
Words only just discernable  
Thoughts one step away from lost  
Burning down to the filter  
Slurped down to the dregs.

Framed on top of the radiogram  
Proud motorcycle, a younger man  
B.S.A. in black and white, victorious  
Spokes flicker, fade, stop.

Through the display valves, warm dust orange  
Guitar fades in through smoke rings  
Coughed chords, exhaled memory  
A girl, his girl with the wrong guy  
His girl in the wrong arms  
Bobby Vee sings "The night has a thousand eyes"  
Rubber on asphalt, lean, drag, slide  
His voice cracks, foot rests spark, snap  
"Wanna bloody well use them then!"

## Graham Bendel



Graham's Top 10 best-written songs:

**B:** Needle and the Damage Done - Neil Young

**L:** All You Fascists - Woody Guthrie

**A:** How Soon Is Now - The Smiths

**C:** Tube Disasters - Flux of Pink Indians

**K:** Strange Fruit - Billie Holiday

**H:** Cut-out Witch - Guided by Voices

**E:** Waterloo Sunset - The Kinks

**A:** Telstar - The Tornados

**T:** Axel F - Harold Faltermeyer

**H:** Green Onions - Booker T & the MGs

an extract from Graham's novel **a nasty piece of work**

They were somewhere in South London and Urich began to feel apprehensive again.

Why hadn't Cynthia come with them? Internally, he wrestled with reasons, and was annoyed at her for abandoning him. He didn't trust Hunst, and was worried that his own lack of knowledge about art would be exposed.

"Sit down," said Hunst, after they had entered the flat.

His apartment was minimal and ultra-clean. Teak-obsessed, with marble-topped tables, and some fancy paintings. There was also a big flat-screen TV with accompanying speakers. It was just what Urich liked. The walls were the colour of vanilla ice cream. All the furniture seemed low, near to the floor.

They sat on tiny trendy chairs, saying nothing initially, and Urich hoped that Hunst would turn the big TV on. But Hunst, still not saying anything, left the room and went into another, which was lit up by a red light. Within a minute, he returned, smiling, and carrying a metal box. This he placed on a table. Then he said something unsettling, and random.

"You do seem like a good egg," he muttered, opening the lid of the metal box, "but I think you'd be happier if you were just a bit fried."

The artist laughed. Urich, in response, creased his face up and was about to laugh too, but

didn't. Instead, he tried to decipher the artist's statement.

"It's time the fireworks started," said Hunst.

He spoke in a hassled drawl, sounding almost bored, as if he had brought out this same box many times before.

"What's going on?" said Urich, sotto voce.

"There's no need to be secretive now. There are no secrets in here," said Hunst, offering Urich a porcelain pipe, and a lighter.

Urich, without saying a syllable, lit the pipe, and sucked up the acrid smoke. After a short time, Urich's brain exploded with illicit happiness and he became fascinated about having more money, in a quick-time vision of the future.

He sat back in his small chair, and thought about things. About what Hunst stood for. He felt out of his depth being with this artist. This was not a writer but an artist – a much nastier breed, more honest; interested in bodily functions and obsessed with death. Writers were much nicer and had kind, polite wives. (Well, according to Urich's own experience of meeting clients from Hinds Starkey and Sacks at least.)

Urich was wired, and imagined his eyes to look a little wild. He'd never done crack before, and closed his eyes in a moment of toxic bliss.

They were both sitting on small chairs, about a metre apart, and must have looked ridiculous. He looked around at the geometry of the room, and kept re-exploring the fact that the furniture seemed to be near to the floor. He felt at a slant.

He also noticed that Hunst had become less sociable. Like a mood had overtaken him. Soon, he began to feel slightly unwelcome. But necessary...as though Hunst wanted him there for a reason. Urich lit a cigarette and convinced himself not to be bothered about this. He was becoming higher, gradually.

But at the peak of this feeling, it got icy. Urich picked up a coldness, a kind of underlying violence in the atmosphere. The type of violence, Urich suddenly thought, quite cleverly, that Hunst was famous for concealing in his work. Urich laughed and caught Hunst's eye.

"What's in this shit?"

"God only knows," said Hunst.

Hunst's voice was unnatural, Urich now observed. 'Artificial' and kind of macabre, and it was freaking him out.

Within the next five minutes or so, Urich groaned. He was conscious of perspiration dotting his face, on his forehead mainly and below his nose. He felt warm. Much too warm.

An indeterminate amount of time had passed.

"Are you alright?" asked a voice.

"What?" said Urich drowning in an overall restlessness.

"I didn't say anything," uttered Hunst.

Urich heard the voice again, telling him to 'just chill out'. He felt, he thought, like he was entering the early stages of an acid trip. Something was not right, and he began to fret about Hunst having slipped him something...

It was a female voice.

"Who's that?" said Urich, squinting, and conscious of grinding his teeth. He turned around, trying to wake himself out of an unexpected delirium.

"Just me?" said a girl, from somewhere in the confines of the flat.

The voice instructed him to come and join her.

Urich knew what was going on: Hunst, in an effort to impress Urich, had hired a prostitute for the occasion. But then Urich considered that maybe this girl-who-he-had-not-even-seen-yet was always there, on a retainer, just hanging about, waiting to fuck his artful friends. *These artists, Christ, they were depraved.*

"Go in the other room and be less up tight," ordered Hunst, and Urich felt even more uncomfortable. He didn't like the 'control' in Hunst's voice.

Shit, Urich thought. His conservative upbringing was tapping him persistently on both shoulders. He could almost hear his mum and dad imploring him to find a more suitable friend. Someone with a proper job.

Urich wiped a hank of hair off his own forehead. He was sweating and worried that his hair was becoming plastered to his cranium. He felt a mess in comparison to Hunst.

What was going on here? Urich was asking himself questions, and got off the sofa, with tension burning in his shoulders. He felt the urge to just walk out, but, immersed in an idea he had just imagined, was compelled to meet the owner of the voice.

"She's in the bedroom," said Hunst, smoking a cigarette, "go on, don't be frightened."

But Urich didn't feel scared. Quite the opposite: he felt strong.

There, lying on a bed in the near-darkness was a girl who could be no older than twenty-two. The light from the hallway informed him of crimped red hair, which was clearly dyed. A closer inspection revealed a nose-ring and pierced eyebrow. (She was the kind of person who Urich would not usually spare a thought; from another world, as far as he was concerned.)

Urich felt unfocused now, and his mind became foolish with some strange thoughts. He sat down on the bed next to her, and glanced at her side-on.

Her perfume, which filled almost half the room, was nice: natural, Body Shop maybe. She had on a white T-shirt and jeans.

He looked at her again and, close-up, considered that she was maybe younger than he had originally thought. All of a sudden, Urich got the fear and felt that he was being set-up.

The girl removed her jeans and stood there in her knickers, and looked very slutty through Urich's drug haze. He saw slim thighs and dark pubic hair through diaphanous knickers.

"He says I've got to be with you," the girl said, cautiously.

"What?" said Urich.

"He...the man...in there...says that I have to sleep with you, do what ever you want..."

He glanced back into the other room, squinting in the mist of red light coming from Hunst's ceiling. Hunst was gone, maybe in the toilet.

Urich felt a surge of honesty, and became compelled to confide in the young woman. "I have someone I like very much," he said feebly. "So...I don't know about all this."

"Are you fucking her?"

Urich paused and considered the reason why he hadn't and, marvelling at the outline of the girl in the half-darkness, decided to forget about his unconditional love for Cynthia. Just for a while.

"So are you going to go with me, or what? You can do what you like, y'know," the girl said in a, now, distinctly regional accent.

But Urich wasn't ready; his head was all messed up. He needed to make small-talk, to sober himself up, make him function better.

"How old are you," said Urich, in a formal way, wiping the hair from his eyes.

"Twenty-five," the girl said.

"What do you do?"

"What you think!?"

"I mean do you have any ambitions?"

"I write, sometimes."

That was the last thing Urich wanted to bloody hear, and became deaf to that side of her.

"What's your name?"

"It's Liz."

She moved away from him and took her necklace off, placing it on a table near the bed. The necklace looked expensive and had a gold locket attached to it.

Urich picked it up in his hand and admired it. One day, he imagined, he would present Cynthia with something like that.

"Nice, isn't it," he said softly, feeling that he was losing his voice.

She turned around and faced him, and said something 'dirty' to him, that made him feel

embarrassed. He then grabbed the girl by a clump of her hair and pulled her knickers down with his other hand. He felt invigorated by the 'moment', however unusual it was.

"Not so rough!" she said, complaining about his intense hurry.

He was unfocused with a lust that he had not recognised in himself before. Then, ravenous, he went to kiss her mouth. He made her step out of her knickers, bent her over the bed and took his hard prick out and entered it into the crease between her arse cheeks. He wanted to fuck her right inside her arse, but could hardly see what he was doing. Before long, the room was starting to stir, and his vision began to slowly strobe.

Hunst arrived at the entrance of the bedroom, smiling.

He appeared to be smiling.

\* \* \*

It was about four o'clock in the morning. He felt ashamed with himself for what he had done, and needed to speak with Hunst urgently. He went into every room in the house and could find no one.

But he did see a leather briefcase lying on the kitchen table. It was wide open and inside was a manuscript, bound in a thick blue card.

According to a yellow post-it note, it was called "The Confessions". And scribbled in biro on another post-it, was the inscription:

*A present for my newest, brightest friend.*

Urich grabbed what was rightfully his, and let himself out the flat.