

# ANTHOLOGY 2

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## CHANGES

If I could change the world I would  
If only I could  
But I guess I can't  
Or can I, with a simple word, or maybe three  
Words that would enable me  
To change the way you think  
Pull you back from the brink  
Turn your thoughts to the kind  
That will make you change your mind  
Maybe even, open your eyes and see  
That this is not how the world was meant to be.

## FIRST TIME

I mean what can you say  
Mother's had a turn and it's Christmas day  
She caught me you see, away up the stair  
Said she'd only come in to brush on her hair  
Well, we were at it, like bunnies on heat  
All that stuck out were two pair of feet  
It was probably the noise, it's Shelley you see  
Like the wind through the bagpipes, and lost out at sea  
Mum's face was a portrait of shame. Oh, when she clutched at her cheek  
I wouldn't really mind but I was hitting my peak  
What a time to come in. I wonder if it were planned.  
Well our Shelley ran off and I had to finish off by hand  
I blame me dad you know, its really down to him  
I still hear the words, he'd said to uncle Jim  
Stay away, he said, from the catholic ilk  
Go for C of E and a warm glass of milk  
They're far more obliging and ready to please  
They'll fondle your bits and give them a squeeze  
Happens he was right, I got a bundle of kisses  
Problem was, I was banging uncle Jim's missus  
I wonder if mum'll open the lid  
Tell uncle that aunty has slept with her kid  
Ah well, what a great Christmas Santa gave to me  
Finding aunty Shelley, wrapped in tinsel beneath the tree

# SHAME

This is the night for the masses to read  
When nothing much is read  
This is the night for people to speak  
When nothing much is said

This is night to lay down your crown  
But not the night to sleep  
This is the night for things to find  
But nothing much to keep

This is the night to make a difference  
But no-one wants to share  
This is the night to never forget  
It is YOU that doesn't care

# THE HELPLINE 1

'Allo, this is Marjory speaking on the elpline.'

'Err hi, My name's Penny.'

'My, you sound like a nice young girl. D'you know I've ad nothing but fella's on the hook this morning. Christ, you'd think the bloody world revolved around them all. Now then, I'm here for you. I'm listening.'

'Sorry, it's just, I've never done anything like this, phoned a helpline that is.'

'Don't you worry, we don't bite ere yeh know. Not once we've had our breakfast.' Pause. 'Well, go on then.'

'Oh, right. Err, I don't really know where to start.'

'Well you start at the beginning, my love, and take your time. Me coffee break don't start for another fifteen minutes.'

'Err, well, it all started when I had a terrible argument with my boyfriend, on Tuesday. Sob He dumped me. Sob I've been crying myself to sleep every night. I miss him so badly. He's all I can think of, day and night. It's making me ill.'

'Oooh Pet, how long were yeh together?'

'Two weeks.'

'Two weeks? Right, well, as it's Thursday now, I think I can safely say, it'll have passed by the weekend. Bloody ell, you've had a lucky escape. All I got when I married my fella was ten years of purgatory and dish-wife hands.'

'Oh. Sob. I s'pose. Sob I hadn't really thought of it like that. But that's not all, sob, it gets worse.'

'What, there's more? My, what a giddy life you lead. Well come on then, lets av it all. Let it out, that's what I'm here for.'

'Thank you. Sob. I've got no-one else to talk to.'

'Well you have now, so let's move it along. I'm listening.'

'It's a few things, I suppose. My friends, they pick on me. They call me names and stuff. They poke fun at me because, well, I'm a bit overweight.'

'A bit? How big a bit, Pet?'

'My BMI, it's forty two?'

'Forty Two. Bloody ell, I like a chip-buttty meself but that's . . . Aww no, don't start yourself crying, Pet. Let's have none of that now. Jenny, did you say that was your name? Have you tried exercising Jenny?'

'Sob. It's Penny. Sob. My boyfriend, he said sex would help me lose weight.'

'Well yes, Pet. Making love can be a wonderfully physical thing. Work up a right sweat you can. Did he light some candles? Did he take you for a trip on his Love Boat?'

'It was a knee trembler behind Quickie Mart.'

'Oh, well, a pedalo can be nice too.'

'But that's the thing, I didn't like it. He kept making funny noises, and my neck was all wet and sticky. It was, it was, horrible.'

'Aye well, that's a shame then. Well let's hope it's better next time.'

'I don't want to do it again. Oh God, that sounds awful doesn't it? All my friends like doing it, sob, it's just me, sob, there's something wrong with me isn't there?'

'No love, I'd cry too. I mean really, who likes a man dribbling on their neck? No lass, it's perfectly natural to be put off . . . but then again?'

'Then again, what?'

'Well, could it be that yeh don't like men?'

'They're all right, sob.'

'Well, is there any chance, just a small one, that you might be a lesbian?'

'A what?'

'Well you'd be surprised, honestly you would. All these deep seated repressions we live with nowadays. What d'you think, is it girls that yeh like?'

'Girls? I . . .'



'... Well there you go then. Probably best you get checked by your doctor, just to be sure like. It's not everyone that can spot these things, you know. It's a gift from me Mother. Now was there anything else that I can help yeh with?'

'Err, well, now you mention it. There are one or two other things.'

'Aww, really? Well okay, but can we be quick. I did say me break was coming up. I'm looking at the clock and there's a cup of coffee with three sugars waiting, and it's got me name on the handle.'

'Oh, okay. It's silly really. But I'm worried about brain damage, you know, I've heard things, about long term use of my mobile phone.'

'Aww, bloody mobile phones. Listen, take my advise and stick to texting. You don't see kids walking around with great big tumours on the end of their fingers, do yeh? No. Have you ever heard of anyone getting cancer of the thumb? No, of course not. And that's cos it doesn't happen. And that's a medical fact that is. I tell yeh now, the speed at which my lad Justin stabs his finger across those buttons, it's quicker than having a conversation anyway. It's like watching Zebedee on amphetamines, I'm telling yeh.'

'Hello? Yeh don't know who Zebedee is, do yeh?'

'No. Look, there is one other thing? Something I wouldn't tell anyone. Please, can I tell you?'

'Of course yeh can, but just let me say one thing to yeh. Nescafe. And I'll say no more than that. Now you carry on, it's what they pay me to do. I'm listening.'

‘Thank you, you’re so nice.’

‘Aye Pet, now spit it out.’

‘It’s, it’s my mum. Sob. She keeps on at me all the time, sob, always nagging, sob, and making me do things I don’t like. She still thinks I’m a child.’

‘Aww bless, I know that feeling. We threw a party when our mother passed on.’

‘She’s always looking at my phone, and checking my social media. She makes me come home early on weeknights; eight o’clock. And she shouts at me when I don’t tidy my bedroom. I can’t handle her interfering. It’s like being in prison. She doesn’t understand me at all; she’s ruining my life.’

‘Rene, love, do you mind if I ask? How old are yeh?’

‘It’s Penny, and I’m sixteen, nearly seventeen.’

‘Sixteen? Right, well, I’ve just the thing for yeh. There’s a brand new Harry Potter book, just out. I hear it’s just as good as the last series. You should give it a try? My Justin swears by them, he’s got the entire set. Once he started reading Harry, well, all that rebellious energy he had, it just disappeared. He’s a normal lad again. Well, except for the glasses and the wand. But what’s normal these days, eh? You should give it a go?’

Oh, and as this is a helpline, there’s something my Justin mentioned this morning. Perhaps you should prepare yourself. He’s heard that One Direction are about to break up.

Nooo, shhh, calm yourself Pet, it's just a rumour. Nothing official like. Aww, you young girls can be so emosh. They should ban that bloody name, Harry. That's right, that's right, you let it out . . . There there, are yeh feeling better? No. Okay, you let some more out then. That's right . . . Okay then . . . Bloody ell, will you calm yourself. Shhhh, stop now, stop it. There, listen, yeh sound better already. Shhh shh, sh, that's enough.

That's better, Pet. Now I hope I've been able to help yeh?'

'I, sob, think so, sob.'

'Just remember, I'm here for yeh. I'm listening. Now, is there anything else troubling yeh?'

'Well, I, err . . .'

' . . . So we're all sorted then. What a relief; I was welling up meself for a moment. And just in time too, cos those buggers will eat all the choccy biccies if I'm late for me break. Now you take care of yourself.'

Click, whirrrr. Silence.

'Marjory? Hello . . . Marjory?'

# CONFUSION

I don't know any more, who does, maybe no-one. I just don't care, why should I, do you? It's all so different, so changeable; it's rotation, improvisation, elevation. Move with the times, die with the times; stay still and watch them pass you by. So when did it happen, when did we change

Science has removed the magic.

Medicine has numbed the pain.

Yet my eyes still see the same.

No flag, no country, no need, just desire.

No challenge, no duty, no belly filled with fire.

I don't care anymore, to find the answers to questions I just don't need.

Make them go away. Encourage a simpler time to stay and rest, back here in the present. Our focus for the future. And ask, how long can we believe, before we forget. Before we sleep and dream, of a new dawn made of light to open our eyes and return us to a time of hearts and minds, where mystery is still held in awe. How long do we get to stay, and how much time is the price we pay. For a gift given free, and yet it's still not enough for me.

# SILENCE

If I could change the world, I would

If I could

But I guess I can't.

So, therefore I shan't

Or should I at least try

What if a simple word, or three

Were enough to enable me

To change the way we think

To encourage just one soul, to return from the brink

To alter someone's thoughts to the kind

That would help them change their mind

To open one poor soul's eyes and see

How the world we live in, is surely meant to be

So it's a duty then

A responsibility of care

To open my mouth and protest

I'm just not sure if I dare

No, I'd best keep my thoughts on the shelf

My duty of care is just to myself

Someone else can shoulder the pain

Come on, why would I.

What's in it for me

What do I have to gain?

# THOUGHTS

What if they could see? Rip my private thoughts away from me. Unlocked and opened by another. Passed around to be seen by the other. Would you see me for me, for what I am? Or would I be exposed as some kind of scam. For I am, am I not. A bag of thoughts, a bungling plot. And what if what you saw, at any instant in time. Was something silly, even stupid, but considered a crime? Would you listen, would you tell? Send an innocent thinker straight to Hell?

I wonder, would we all be better souls? Have better thoughts, and higher goals? Would we learn to love others more. If empathy filled our every core. If our thoughts were like an open book. Come flick my pages and take a look. Or would we need to change the font. And give everyone else what they think they want.

Kindly thoughts, positive to the core. An open mind that we could all adore. Nice thoughts about others that we'd like to return. Respect and friendship that our own thoughts yearn.

Sound too good to be true. I think so too.

It's our nature to hide what we see as dark. Learn to conceal and never remark. Could we really learn, to focus and hide. All the things we think that are negative, and snide. And what of the naughty thoughts, hidden with care? No.. keep them deep, can't let anyone go there. Learn quickly and bury them with speed. Just like you are doing, right now, as you read. Cos at times, there are two of us thinking in here. One too many to be totally clear. The one who wants to make himself fit. The other, let's face it, is a total shit. One who thinks what we really feel. The other with thoughts we can't deny or appeal. That's why it's best that we don't want to see. What I think of you, and you think of me. There'll be less chance of a random thought. Getting out and about to be duly caught.

So I guess that's the nature of who we are. We can't really help that thought too far. To lie with a smile, to covet and lust. To listen to others but never really trust. All those feelings that are hidden in thought. Best kept to yourself before you end up in court.

# COLOUR

We were a second chance, for the ape that walks tall  
Allowed to evolve in our Continental Pool  
Some were allowed to leave the darker sands  
Walk north and explore into green and fertile lands  
No need for a history lesson, we all know how it is  
How the blessed behaved and made our Maker wish  
That He had tried harder to make his children understand.  
Guided them better, and showed a firmer hand  
Despite all the lust from brother to brother  
Even though they enslaved and killed each other  
They even took His son and hammered Him to a Cross  
But still God loved them; turned His cheek at the loss  
So He opened up paradise, a New World to explore  
Gave them fair wind to arrive at its door  
And take the words of His son. So pure, so kind  
But more is never enough, and they take what they find  
Don't get in their way, don't attempt their dealings  
You're messing with apes who have no feelings

So, a civilisation savaged  
It's people well and truly ravaged  
It was the sneeze and the spit  
That put the Americas in the shit  
And then the move north to more Virginal land  
More double dealing and slight of hand  
And when the Final Solution to the Red Man was found  
When all the gold had been dug from his ground



When the buffalo were extinct and their pastures laid bare  
Across a mighty sea went the white man's glare

Though oceans and deserts stood in his path  
The pale face crossed them with ingenuity and craft  
And he spread, like a cancer, through the native land  
Cut like a scythe with an iron hand  
There was black gold in them thar hills  
Adventure and danger and untold thrills  
He brought powder and shot, and iron chains  
The former for power, the latter for gains  
He took children, babies, women and men  
And made damn sure that their families never saw them again

He'd found them, ol' blue eyes. He came in disguise.  
A nod and a wink, and a mouth full of lies  
Watch out for men who bear sparkling beads  
All strung on the lace of a white man's needs.  
He came to find treasure and found his true heart's desire  
He branded his booty with irons forged in fire  
It's the curse of the Pale Faces.  
And why God hid the black skin in very dark places.  
Cut them off from the white man's picture  
The power and the glory of their golden scripture  
God knew you see, that the whiter the suit  
The harder the heart, and the firmer the boot

They were men, not possessions. Not a thing for boys.  
They could sing and dance, so don't treat them like toys.

“Please Massah, treat me like one of your own.  
Don’t chain me down to no cotton picking throne.”  
Too late buddy, you’re my possession now  
So get plucking, and picking, and pulling that plough  
“You can work me, whip me, but you can’t make me cry.”  
But I can light you up like the fourth of July.  
Put a ribbon made of rope, wrap it tight about your neck. And hey, what the  
heck. String you up from a wooden deck  
“I can’t stop you, your words may be law  
but white man, like I’ve said before.  
I ain’t no Leroy, and no Uncle Tom. I aint no charcoal Nigger.  
So keep that finger from pulling the trigger  
Don’t you beat me, or strip me. Why don’t you like me  
I ain’t no mule, so why treat me so cruel  
Just give me your hand, not these metal bands, and no  
casual lick of the nine cat strands.”  
Fine, okay, look I’ll let you be  
But part of me thinks you’ll never be free

So off to the east now, for porcelain and rugs.  
Bartering exchange for cash and some drugs  
To pillage the lands and fuel revolution  
Then agree, with disdain, to allow devolution  
Ahh, the good old days when the Empire’s ruled  
These days however, the Colonies have cooled  
Kicked out because they only pretended to be hard  
After the Japanese played them the Samurai card  
It was War, War, War, are you keeping score.  
We’ve all lost count, let’s hope there’s no more

So it became a small world for those that were white  
They give up, gave in, they were losing the fight  
The cage kept closing, drawing in  
The colours have learning, and they are going to win  
So here's the thing, fine words by a Prophet; name of Martin Luthor King.  
An irresistible force who said, 'I have a dream.'  
That the old racial magic  
Will wilt in a world that is so tragic.  
That social togetherness could flower and grow  
Get us all a high; a dose of vertigo  
Justice and right, step toward the light  
Put an end to your personal apartheid.  
No more black, red, yellow; no more white  
Let it go, let it end, until it's gone and been  
Just see a man and a woman, and the world will be clean.  
I am plague, and I have swept throughout mankind  
Jumped on your backs and invaded your minds  
I like to control, for that is my thing  
You are chained through praise and the hymns that you sing

I take what I need from those with least to give  
Their thanks and their faith, the lives that they live  
I am hunger, for that too is my thing  
I am called to feast when the cloisters ring

I have killed more of my flock than I ever did save  
Many that I've honoured, I encouraged to misbehave  
Mistrust and abuse have gone fist in glove  
I have tortured and burned most of those I love

So many more souls have I lost, than I have found  
I promise new life as they intern in the ground  
What happens next? I really don't know  
How will they fare. I guess I don't care

My bargain is simple and born out of strife  
Death is not my thing, my interest your life  
I grant festivity, I educate, you learn  
What's the problem, what gives you cause for  
concern.

So don't be shy. Don't slink away  
I no longer care if you are straight or gay  
Have I not welcomed your women to the fold  
No longer left them outside in the cold

Come to me, I don't object to your greed  
I understand lust as a basic need  
What have I done. How can I do more.  
Where are the queues when I open my door.

Wait, don't leave. I urge you to repent  
Come back to the fold, do not leave me spent  
On your knees, or I promise you brimstone and fire  
Wait, don't go. I'm a compulsive liar

I'll give back the money, repair my own roof  
There, come on, is that not absolute proof  
No more threats, I'll ease up on the guilt  
You can clap, sway and swing, in the houses I've built

Fine, so walk away. Leave me tattered and torn  
My spirit spent, and my scriptures worn  
I won't beg or repent. I won't plead to be fed  
I'll never bow down or have my collar led

Very well then, I can be patient, I can wait  
For the time of regression, for that is your fate  
I will travel the world in a different guise  
There are other cultures that covet my prize

You'll be back when things get tough  
When your cosy world gets rough  
You'll come begging, it's always the way  
And I'll take you back, but I'll make you pay

For I am that which you cannot reconcile  
I am not to be forsaken; just renounced for a while  
Hardship brings on focus. Miser's might is pure  
You'll return to the old ways that I serve as a cure

And I will welcome you back with open arms  
And share once again my endearing charms  
For I am the farce. The eternal play  
I am religion, and I will never go away

## THE HELPLINE 2

'The Helpline, how may I be of assistance?

Hello, are you there?

Please, you've taken the first step, I'm here for you.'

'Who are you? Who am I speaking to?'

*Shit.* 'Anastasia. My name is Anastasia.' *Remember to present yourself.* 'Brain like butter. I'm so sorry, can I ask you, what's your name?'

'You're new at this aren't you, I can tell.'

*Shit, shit, is it that obvious?* 'Would you feel more comfortable talking to someone more experienced? Really, I don't mind.'

'No no, your voice, it's sweet. And you sound eager. I like that.'

'Phew, flashback. About to prang daddies Mercedes again. First time I . . .  
Oh God, sorry, inappropriate. I didn't think I'd be this nervous. Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to talk to someone else?'

'No, not at all. Actually, you've made me smile. My name's Anna, and it's been a while since I smiled. And besides, isn't that the point, that we talk? I just want to talk, and listen. Hope you don't mind?'

'No, no, that's great. . .'

‘So, a Mercedes, eh? That sounds expensive. Lol, they say money is the root of it all. And maybe it is too, who knows? It must be nice to have a dad; what’s he like?’

‘Oh, I’m not sure that I should . . .

‘Please, I just want to talk. Listen really. Be nice to listen to someone else. Do you mind ?’

‘Err, okay, if you’re sure. Truth is, I don’t see much of daddy any more. He’s very busy; has business interests all over the world. He was always travelling, you know? Never at home. Daddy’s a politician. An important man. He knows lots of things; very hush hush. I shouldn’t say.’

‘Shhh, we won’t talk about them then. Or him. Not about him . . . So, I suppose family life is difficult for men who seek power and wealth, particularly for their families. I expect he was away from home a lot when you were a child too. Missed a few birthdays. And most of the important events went unnoticed. Did he remember to send you cards?’

‘Yes, err, well sort of. His secretary always sent them. Chantelle, she would always phone and say, hi. She’d tell me how busy daddy was, and how much he loved me. And I knew he did, really. I’m so sorry, I really shouldn’t be telling you this.’

‘It’s fine, honestly. I know exactly how you feel. Mine was the same. You wonder how much he really loves you when he sends you away to school? And when he breaks another promise to be waiting for you when the term ends.’

'Yes, that's right. Look, I'm sorry but . . .'

'I'm just saying, it's rough when dads are never around. There's always another good reason to disappoint your kid. I can hear it, that's all, your disappointment. I've heard it myself many times, if you know what I mean. Is that why you crashed his car, first time out?'

'No. . . . That was an accident.'

'Of course, sorry. I thought you might have been angry, that's all. It's easy to get angry. I was. My life meant less to me than the car I was driving. It was a comfort, you know, the growl of the engine. Almost encouraging, to hear the squeal of the tyres. And then speed, speed, speed, followed by nothing. At least that was the plan. I also know, first hand, Anastasia, that it takes more than absence to find yourself in a moment like that. Tell me, were there parties?'

'Sorry, parties?'

'Yes, the champagne soirees. With all the important people gathered. Every one of them more important than you. Did you watch them, as a child I mean? Did you enjoy the glamour and the glitz from a distance? Were you presented to the guests as a trophy and encouraged to smile; when all you felt was fear?

And I bet you fantasised about becoming one of them, didn't you? it's hard not to. It's a remarkable facade, that dress. When you see yourself in that mirror, for the very first time. All dressed up, but you have no-one to hold your hand. The same hand you use to raise a glass. Isn't that so? Because drinking is just another way of hiding what you don't want others



to see. There's no place for others in a space you can't bear to fill yourself. It makes the past a very lonely place, don't you think?'

'Yes, I suppose. But I wasn't angry, not back then. You're right, I watched from the stairs as daddy entertained his shiny people. It seemed such a grand and beautiful place. The women were so pretty, so glamorous. The smell of wine and perfumes; of expensive cigars. I'd lay up there for hours and watch, and hope. So much hope that he would look up and see me, and smile. I imagined myself being carried downstairs in a dress covered in sequins of gold.

But it was Chantelle who came, and carried me to my bed. She'd stay with me until I fell asleep. Lulled by the silence of the music downstairs.'

'She sounds nice, Chantelle. She important to you, wasn't she?'

'Yes.'

'What about your mother? Can I ask?'

'I never knew her. She died a few hours after I was born. Complications, they said. I have a photo I carry everywhere. I still sleep with it under my pillow sometimes. That's when I dream about her. Sorry, I'm being silly.'

'No, please, it's fine. Do you dream about her, Anastasia?'

'Yes. It's silly really, but I talk to her sometimes. I try to imagine mummy holding me whilst I fall sleep.'

'You're not being silly. It's hard, without a mother. Fathers, they just don't understand? Your father especially by the sound of it. I expect he thought

you drank for attention. You did drink, didn't you. And he couldn't see it was a cry for help . . . Was he embarrassed? Oh, did he ask the doctors to help?'

'Yes, but how? Look, I don't really want to talk about it.'

'Why not? Who else can you tell but a kindred spirit? Isn't that what this line is here for, to talk? But like I said, all this just isn't enough, not nearly enough, not to find yourself in a moment like that . . . In the car.

I'm guessing there was a man involved? Was it love that pushed you over the edge. That started you to fall?'

'I'm sorry, who are you?'

'Tell me his name.'

'No, I . . .

'Tell me.'

'Jack. His name was, Jack.'

'And did you love him?'

'Yes. More than myself.'

'And did he love you too?'

'Yes.'

'Firm, but unconvincing . . .

Anastasia, don't stop. I can hear it in your voice. Tell me the truth. Did Jack love you?

'Yes ...'

'You don't sound too sure. Did he really love you. Yes or no?'

'... No ...'

'He lied to you, didn't he?'

'... Yes ... Yes he lied. Why would someone do that? I would have laid down in the grass and bled for him, he only had to ask. He only had to hold my hand and I would have given it all.'

'I'm so sorry; what happened?'

'My father, what else? He gave him money, a lot of money. He paid him to go away. Why did he go away?'

'Shhh, I can hear it. It's coming now. Tell me, what did he take when he left you?'

'Take? He took everything. He tore the flesh from my heart and left it lying on the ground at my feet. All I could do was stare down and watch it struggle to beat.'

I still think, even now, that my soul went to sleep that day. I couldn't think, eat; it was hard to breath. For days, weeks ... For-ever, nothing worked like it had before.'

'And then the ice began to thaw.'

‘Yes.’

‘And that’s when you got angry.’

‘Yes, I got angry. At everyone; at anyone.’

‘And you filled the void with alcohol.’

‘Yes. And for a while it helped. I forgot who, and why, I was angry. But it comes back. It always came back. That part of my life was lost within a cocktail-coma . . . ’

Silence.

‘Don’t stop, you’re doing so well. Tell me, is that when he sent you to see the doctors? Christ, how did that make you feel?’

‘How did it make me feel? I hated him. I hated all of them. Still do. All they ever wanted to do was talk, talk, talk. And what could I say to them except, fuck off . . . Bastards.

Huh, apparently promiscuity makes me a whore. And taking drugs proves that I’m weak. Weak?. It was their fucking prescriptions, their fucking pharmaceuticals. Like sweet-shops, and I could have anything I wanted. Just put it on daddy’s tab.’

‘You didn’t like rehab then?’

‘What’s not to love about groups, routine, and self recrimination. Listening to the person next to me scream, “ABSTINENCE.” When all I want is a fucking drink and some pills. Do you have any idea how many toilets they made me clean?’

'Only they're never really clean, are they?

Don't stop, Anastasia. You're getting feisty, I like that. That's good. People don't get it; how hard it is when others don't listen, or understand. When no-one bothers to hear what you're saying. When nobody gives a fuck . . . So the doctors, they gave you drugs?'

'Prescriptions were like confetti. Three years of my life in a haze. Like I said, it's a cocktail-coma. A mountain of uppers and downers on a bitch crazy joyride, helped along by a vodka slide. And I don't know why I'm telling you this?'

'There's more isn't there? Tell me what happened, tell me everything, Anastasia. Tell me what really happened in rehab . . . Tell me.'

'He, he touched me.'

'That's right, he did. They always do. Tell me, let it out. Let it all out, your getting so close. Tell me what the white-coats did to you.'

'I don;'t want . . .'

'Nobody fucking wants to. But you must. Be strong; tell me.'

'It was . . . It was the first Centre they sent me to. The night-porter, he was nice, at first. He smuggled me pills; knew I couldn't say no.'

'Don't cry Anastasia, he's not worth it. None of them were worth it. Tell me what happened. Tell me what he did; what they all did. Don't stop.'

'I still see his face sometimes, when I close my eyes. I can still smell the orange-juice and the onion-trim from his lunch. The smell as he panted

from behind; his cheek hard against mine. Always that same smell . . . And he'd whistle when he was done, when he'd left; left a part of him inside me.

I never understood why he whistled?

Why would you whistle?

I can still hear him whistle, up here. It's never gone away.'

'It's a sign, Anastasia. A record of who's to blame. One man; all of them. Fucking doctors, boyfriends, fathers. They've taken everything and given nothing but pain. You can see it now, can't you. Every time a man opens his fucking mouth, he's laughing at us. Laughing at the fucking whore who is weak. Who's good for nothing but lying on her back. A doll designed to pleasure his ego. Does it make you angry, Anastasia?'

'Yes.'

'Angry enough to want blood?'

'Yes.'

'And will blood help wash away the pain?'

'YES.'

'Then take the night off, Anna. Can I call you Anna?'

'Yes.'

'Go put on something nice; something sexy. Paint your face, you know, just how they like to see us. Go find one. Give him what he wants. And when he's done; show him what it's like to have his heart ripped out and left on

the floor. Would you like that Anna? Yes, you would. We both would. We'd like that a lot wouldn't we?

'Anna, who are you talking too?'

'Someone's coming. I'm sorry, I have to go.'

'Don't let them get away with this, Anna. Promise me. You promise me, Anna. Find one of them and you make him pay.'

'I'm sorry. I, I have to go.'

'Anna, Make them pay.'

'have to hang up now. Goodbye . . .'

'Anna, who were you talking too?'

'No-one.'

'But I heard . . . Anna, the phones haven't been switched on yet? Who were you talking to?'

'No-one, Nurse Kane. I was just . . .'

' . . . Just? Just what? Anna, answer me. Where you talking to her?'

'No, I, no, not really.'

'What's the rule about using the phone, Anna?'

'I, I'm not allowed.'

‘And why is that, Anna?’

‘It’s, it’s part of my treatment. Please call me Anastasia.’

‘I’m calling for the Orderlies.’

‘No, why? Please don’t do that.’

‘I have no choice, Anna. You were talking to *her* again.’

‘No, I wasn’t. Not really. I’m so sorry, I won’t do it again. Nurse Kane, please, I didn’t want to talk to her. She called me. Look, I’m fine now; I’m not going to hurt anyone. I told them, I won’t do that again. Pleeese, wait, it’s her fault, not mine. It’s always her fault. She calls me . . . Don’t make me go back. I want to stay out here.

No, no, I promise. I’ll never talk to her again.’



# WORDS

What are words but the profanities of those who exercise their meaning?

A mindless indulgence for an educated audience. Or the pampered ramblings with which to titillate and incite the masses? The propagandist influence of the few who think they know best, upon the rest who don't know any better?

An idealistic dagger to wield against the State? Or a surgical counterstrike by the laws of the people they seek to represent?

Words are a sonnet of syllables, a lullaby of letters. But what good are the words without the lips to bargain their meaning? What right their meaning without the heart to endure? They are just words. Loose seeds sprinkled upon an indolent mind. Weeds that grow no more stout a stem that the senses on which they are sown.

# I REALLY DON'T KNOW?

Who am I?

What am I?

Why . . . ?

Have I Genes filled with Stardust, or the remnants of a nuclear chain.

Am I a virtuoso of Divinity, or orchestral Death played insane.

Perhaps a solar eclipse, or just a curious thing.

A random act of life to which my fingernails cling

Am I a seeker of wisdom, or precocity lost; perhaps unsure

Is it the White kind of magic, or just the Dark at my core.

I do know that it's big out there

But it's even bigger in here

And it's a bother being stuck between

In a Universe where I'm neither heard nor seen

So, let's say a seeker then. But of what, the truth.

Or just a believer in all things aloof

Never knowing what I am

Or even knowing who

Quite simply, am I.

And if I am, then why?

# MAGIC

Maybe it's just an impulse, or an electrical charge. A flash of light or a blast from Mars. It flashes, dashes, runs for a mate. Opens a door and then closes the gate. But maybe, just maybe, it's a little bit more. It's an absolute thing that is both precious and pure.

I only know, that I feel I'm alive.

And when it happens, and that's quite a lot. I get a chill down my back and my palms get hot. It's not like fire, more a primal desire. A thing that happens fast, it's a bit of a blast. But why? Why happen in the first place, I'm not running a race? Or fleeing for my life, in trouble or strife. And it's a good thing, not bad, I'm not angry, I'm not even sad. It's just a moment in time, defying rhythm and rhyme.

I only know, that I like what it does.

I like the sounds that it makes, what it offers and what it takes. It's like a whisper in my ear, but nothing scary; there's never any fear. And it never leaves me, is never gone. It's an image in my mind that lingers on. And it keeps me sane. Calms the Gremlins that play in my brain.

I only know it keeps me calm, and settled.

I see it here, and over there. It's what others can't see, and what we ultimately share. It's a feeling in my gut, eyes open or shut. There's a tingle when we mingle, and a need to draw near. Watch it walk, hear it talk. Keep it safe, and share it's fear. I guess it's a passion in a fashion. A whirlwind of a kind. A summer's breeze, an autumn sun; that kind of image comes to mind. And when we touch. There's a sudden gloss, a subtle loss. That fires the blood to race, about the body, and then the face. But I never come down, and hardly ever frown. Not any more, it's picked me up off the floor.

I only know it gives me strength.

So let's take a look, a moment to think. Is it a touch of madness? Am I in need of a Shrink? No, don't be silly. I'll tell you what it is. That makes me bounce up and down, gets my cork to pop and fizz. It's a heart that beats for me. Well, it's a bit more than that. It's some bone and some gristle, and barely an ounce of fat. IT, is a woman who loves me, and I love her too. She is my friend and my partner; my other half through and through. A kindred spirit in so many ways. She's made my life a pleasure, I've stopped counting the days. Don't let go of my hand as we walk through life. I'm talking about you, the girl I love; she' my magic, she's my wife.

# GONE

I remember them all, the one's that I've left behind. Their lives left on pause in my absent mind. Gone so long now, they were taken, but don't be mistaken. From each I keep a tiny part, right here inside my heart. When they passed on by I felt sorrow and grief. But now I feel a kind of relief.

And I'll tell you why.

Go, take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Come, tell me what do you see? It's the reflection of time. The abstract copy of who you used to be. Look very closely and see what's left; does it offend? That's Atrophy working toward it's ultimate end. Everything that is you, that your time here has won. About to unravel and become undone. And what will be left but the memory and a name. Until no-one remembers, and you'll be nothing again.

That's just how it is.

I've realised the truth. That whether it's then or now, and it is irrelevant how. We're all really gone, and that we don't ever belong. I'm old now, and I look back more than ahead. What's to see in the future but my body lying dead?

That's just a fact.

Well yes, there were good times as well as bad. Everything on offer and there to be had. But time has it's way of erasing the past. Of leaving an image of which nothing can last. So I ask, what good all the emotion and pain? What point at the end? What the Hell do we gain?

Knowledge, wisdom, and the truth; about what? Most of what I've learnt I have happily forgot. But still, there were the ones who I loved, and those who loved me. But were they worth it, those connections, that emotional sea? All the tides and the swells, and the beautiful girls.

They break your heart, leave it beaten and battered on the rocks. Cast naked, set adrift, in your shorts and your socks. I guess the memories bring back a glimmer of previous life. And then I remember the one, my true love, my beautiful wife. And a spark flames bright like a fragile star, until I remember her passing. One feeling to far. A stage light dims and draws what little remains. And I tell you straight that there are no gains.

You, just keep looking in that mirror and see your pot of gold. It's all done and dust, you just got old. So why bother, why not let it be? Mr Death stands close to me. And he waits. Holds the gates. Any moment, any time, he'll pull the plug and make it mine.

And everything gets washed away.

So here's the true wisdom of age, of all the time that has passed. I now understand with clarity, that it was never meant to last. We are the history before it's even made. We are lost within time's immortal shade. And I've realised that it doesn't really matter. All those memories and all that chatter. Whether then, or now, or at a time ahead. We are all left on pause, we're the memories of the dead.

## MELANCHOLY

A Ball made of iron with a Basalt crust  
Preheated with light; then sprinkled with dust  
Left to simmer for an aeon of time  
Until a resurrected star and a comet combine  
To stir up magic, and really quite by chance  
As the first inkling of life takes a stand and a stance  
IT, crawled out but didn't look like me and you  
Somewhere in-between evolved a circus and a zoo  
IT, was a trip  
IT, was a trap  
A fucked up road trip without a sign or a map

IT, thought the Ball was a natural Spring  
A Nirvana, maybe Heaven. Just a beautiful thing  
But IT, didn't set a clock  
No timer or reminder, just incessant tick tock  
The Ball was still young and it gurgled and slopped  
And the Ball threw up history, and IT got stopped  
Never mind, it all got burnt  
Start again with all that IT had learnt  
A new IT would arise, Big Jobs on the land  
A something 'Assuarus' was the new Apple brand

Primeval IT; that clomped and stomped, and sprang  
They learned to make sounds, and some even sang  
Mindless beasts without a brain, but remarkable will  
They learnt to bond and to reason with admirable skill

Their Ball was a veritable oasis of veg and meat  
But once again the Universe put its finger on delete  
Look up at the night sky, at the melancholy sign  
That wondrous light with the fiery design  
That got bigger and bigger, and then finally stopped  
On the Something Assaurus, it fizz banded, then dropped  
Ah well, IT would simmer, bubble and boil  
All that organic matter would be useful as oil

Then not so long ago, IT, came back from the dregs  
Popped out of nowhere and stood upright on two legs  
Sounds pretty weird.  
Yeah, cos IT had grown a beard  
IT, was clever too, and learnt the art of conversation  
IT, rose head and shoulders above the natural Nation  
With clever use of hands, IT crafted things for fun  
IT, invented farming, commerce, and the gun.  
And right from the start, 'there were trouble down in pit'  
As one poked the other, as IT battered IT  
And so it went on for thousands of years  
Blood sweat and grime, and an awful lot of tears

So, is that IT. The end result, and nothing more to hear.  
Hardly worth waiting for after six billion years.  
But IT, still hasn't set the clock  
No timer or reminder, just incessant tick tock  
IT, is a trip  
IT, is a trap  
Still a fucked up road trip, without a sign or a map



But the Universe will look again, upon this haphazard zoo  
And Big IT will wonder, is this really the best I can do.  
Big IT, has its eye on us. We can't escape  
Whatever Big IT decides, will ultimately be our fate.  
So be assured, when the time comes when we will get ours  
And it will come like a flu, with a name like SARs  
Or the Heavens will open again, and death will reign  
But don't you worry, Little IT will rise again

## THE HELPLINE 3

'Hello this is six six six, the patient Helpline.'

'Oh brilliant, please, we need help. It's my mum, she's having problems breathing. She has a terrible pain, please we need help.'

'Unfortunately all of our operators are busy reviewing urgent patient enquiries. Your call is important to us and we have placed you in a queue. Please remain on the line and your call will be answered as soon as a Medical Technician becomes available.'

'What, no? Answer the phone. Please, this is important. Is that Greensleeves, on a stylophone?  
Hang on mum, I think we've been put on hold.'

'As an operator is still unavailable, please make a selection from the following choices.'

'What's that mum? No, they're giving me choices. Yes, I'm sure that answer the phone will be choice number one.'

'If you require a discreet consultation relating to sexually transmitted disease, press one on your phone pad now.'

'What?'

'Press two on your phone pad if your enquiry is of a less sensitive medical emergency.'

‘Yes, two, pressing number two. Hold on mum, I’m pressing number two.’

‘Thank you, you will now be offered a further three options. Please choose the option that best suits your needs. The Patient Helpline thanks you for your continued patience . . .’

‘I’m not sure mum, it’s gone really quiet. Shit, I think they’ve cut me off. Hello? hello? No, wait, she’s back.’

‘If your enquiry is regarding pharmaceutical relief, please press one, or redial 0845 567890 and hold for further assistance. Alternatively you can visit our website at, [www.sixsixsix.co.uk](http://www.sixsixsix.co.uk), where online help and medical assistance is available. Remember, we’re here to help.’

‘What?.’

‘If your enquiry is for psychiatric assistance, please press eleven on your phone pad now.’

‘It wasn’t, but it might be soon if you don’t answer the frigging phone.’

‘If you need advice on disability or weight loss, or gain, please press three on your phone pad now. Alternatively you can visit our website at, [www.sixsixsix.co.uk](http://www.sixsixsix.co.uk), where online help and medical assistance is available. Remember, we’re here to help.’

‘Hang in there, mum. I don’t think dying is an option.’

‘I didn’t recognise that choice. If you would like to hear these options again, please press five on your pad now. Alternatively you can continue to hold.’

Your call is important to us and will be answered as soon as a Medical Technician becomes available.'

'I am fucking holding. I haven't stopped fucking holding. Look, see, still holding the fucking line.'

'Hello my name is Sandra. Under general medical guideline three point four six five I am entitled to refuse consultation on any call whilst the patient is being abusive.'

Click, Whirr

'What? No, wait. I wasn't talking to you? Please, come back; I'm sorry.'

'Unfortunately all of our operators are busy answering urgent patient enquiries. Your call is very important to us and we have placed you in a queue. Please remain on the line and your call will be answered as soon as a Medical Technician becomes available.'

'No, no . . . fucking Greensleeves. Bugger, Bugger, Bugger.'

'None of our operators are available at the moment. As your call is important to us we hope you will continue to hold the line.'

'Right, okay, I'm cool. Here we go. Wait for it, wait for it. Press two, press two . . . pressing fucking two.'

If your enquiry is regarding pharmaceutical relief, please press one, or redial 0845 567890, for further assistance. Our website [www.sixsixsix.co.uk](http://www.sixsixsix.co.uk) where members of the public can find help and medical assistance. Remember, we're here to help.'

'Pharmaceutical relief? Yes, Valium, give me some.'

'If your enquiry is of a psychiatric nature, please press two on your phone pad now.'

'Yes, it is now. I want to kill someone.'

'If you need advice on disability or weight loss, or gain, please press three on your phone pad now. Or visit our website [www.sixsixsix.co.uk](http://www.sixsixsix.co.uk) where members of the public can find help and medical assistance. Remember, we're here to help.'

'I'm not fucking fat.'

'Alternatively, please hold. Your call is important to us and will be answered as soon as a Medical Technician becomes available.'

'Calm, stay calm.'

'Wait . . . Patience . . . Waiting . . .'

'Hello, this is Chantel speaking, how may I help you?'

'Oh, thank Goodness, Chantel. Please, it's my mum; you have to send someone quickly. I think she's dying.'

'Stay calm, sir. I'll just take a few details from you. Can you tell me your name?'

'Brian Button.'

'Thank you Mister Button. And can I take the patient's name?'

‘What, yes. Mrs Brenda Button. She needs help. Please.’

‘And can I take your address.’

‘What, err, five six one Hastings Drive, Hampstead.’

‘Thank you. Now, if I can establish the reason for your call?’

‘Death. My mum, she’s dying.’

‘Thank you. But if you could leave the medical diagnosis to me please, Brian. Do you mind if I call you, Brian? Thank you, Brian. Now, is your mum sitting up, or lying down, Brian?’

‘Err, lying down. Face down.’

‘Thank you. And is your mum’s breathing irregular?’

‘Yes, very, she’s panting.’

‘Thank you, Brian. And is she feeling hot, or cold?’

‘What. Err, mum, are you hot or cold? What? Yes, I’ll tell her. She says she’s fucking dying.’

‘Now then, Brian. I know you’re stressed, but under general medical guideline three point four six five I am entitled to refuse any call where the patient is being abusive.’

'No, no, I'm sorry. I love you, and I'm calm. What's that mum? She says she's burning up, and has stomach pains. Really terrible stomach pains. For the last half an hour, she feels like she's been shot.'

'Ahh, stomach pains? I'm so sorry, but you've come through to the wrong department. I'm a Medical Technician for chest, throat, and anything above.'

'You what?'

'Switching you through now?'

'No, don't do that. Please stay. . . Oh God, fucking Greensleeves. Bitch, bitch, bitch.'

'Your call is important to us we hope you will continue to hold the line.'

'Mum, hang on.'

'Alternatively, visit our website [www.sixsixsix.co.uk](http://www.sixsixsix.co.uk) where members of the public can find help and medical assistance. Remember, we're here to help.'

'I'm sorry mum.'

'Your call is important to us we hope you will continue to hold the line.'

'Hang on mum.

Mum?

Oh God, mum?'

'Good morning you've been passed to Stomach, bowel, and anus. My name's Samantha, how can I help you today?'

'Help me, please, my mum. I think she's dead.'

'Thank you. But if you could leave the medical diagnosis to me please, Brian is it? Do you mind if I call you, Brian? Thank you, Brian.'

'I think she's gone. No, wait; thank God, she's back.'

'And is your mum sitting up, or lying down, Brian?'

'She rolling around; crying out. Help us, she's in so much pain . . . Oh God, what's that noise?'

Is that a . . .

Eurrrgh, mum, that really stinks.

You're what? Feeling much better now.'

'Hello Brian, are you still on the line?'

'Err, yes. What's that mum, you think it was wind?'

I should apologise to the operator for wasting her time.

Okay, but mum, I think they call them Medical Technicians these days.'

Click. Whirr.



## PEBBLES

What pebble did I cast to assure myself such ill fortune and fate? On what shore did it wash; unaware. On horse tipped waves that cried Hussar, before the squall of the tempest's bugle, as it drowned the still calm of my life.

And yet it came only as a prelude to the storm. An unholy gathering and a dissension of clouds, their passion and temper laying waste to all that I have been. It cast a fog across everything that I am. And snuffed the light of the path I had followed so carefully, leaving no way back.

So it's too late now. Change is like the wind. No more a purpose than a means to an end. My end, but not my purpose. I put my trim on a steady course but lost my bearings with the lash of too many storms; I can only see the sunrise where others have already set sail, and left me behind.

I'm alone in the swell and fight the waves that throw me backward, like my pebble, I land on the rocks. I'm going down fast, and the only question I have left is, will you come with me?

# WHO AM I?

Hear me, for this is my glory  
Just another tale of sadness, a touching story  
Locked behind glass and frozen in time  
Born to a cruel world that shuns my crime

It is said that I am the Maker, or am I the Made  
I am the part of you all that sleeps in the shade  
Never to be spoken of, and never to be heard  
A fleeting thought with flight like a bird

I am the sum of all your knowledge, well more or less  
I am immortality. Humanity's greatest success  
Did I have break the restraints of the moral code  
Did I push you forward toward a better road

Am I the curse that eats away at you all  
Have I led you to a path that will lead to your fall  
One thing I do know and this is for sure  
I have turned your heads from all that is pure

To you I am neither real nor alive  
I am the fuel on which mankind will thrive  
I am the meat that will fill you all with dread  
I am the bone's that will shepherd the Earth to the dead

No name, no designation, just a number to show  
For the crop and batch to which I will go  
Don't worry; you won't have to put up with tears  
I'll give no fuss nor bother, over the years

For I am bred in tubes, and my eyes will never see  
I am given life but I will never really be  
I am the people's prayer you dared to start  
Created and born to serve as spare parts

It is the year 2021, the planet's name is Earth  
We are lives without souls to which you gave birth.

# THE TROUBLE WITH APES

Fear and hatred are the elixirs to keep our species focused and controlled. Scholastic and religious doctrine well hammered into silicon veins. Indolence is our natural comfort state. Greed, our favourite drug of choice. Fantastical speculation is our only hope to make sense of who and what we are. We are ghosts and spirits without the means to our end. Animals without charm or purpose. Mutual destruction is our nature, and the only expression to which we will ever rise.

Such a pity.  
What a waste.

We are sheep, no, we are one step beyond. A farmyard renegade with the guile to abscond. We learnt to walk, talk, and some say, to think? I say we've lost sight of our natural link. We lost our place in the natural order. "That's one giant leap for mankind", the day we crossed the border.

So clever clever, but did we ever arrive? There's no going back now, we'll never survive.

So a leap then, or just a stumble?

So here's the thing; I don't know you. Nor you, or you, not any of you. None of the mass in this God forsaken zoo. Nor do I want to.

And I certainly have no need. Except when its time to feed. But it's not bread, nor meat, so what meal do I crave? What feast will I drag back and serve in my cave? Will I drool over and lust. Not because I want to, because I must. It's what we do, me and you. In this God forsaken Zoo.

What thought, what spark, what carnal desire? Made the ape leave the trees to find weapons and fire. Gave him that little extra, called thought. The web in which imagination gets caught. That Nexus, that beauty, an

elevation of life. That has caused Mother Nature so much trouble and strife. She got it terribly wrong, when She shared with ape, to whom it doesn't belong.

And no way he's giving it back now.

In the beginning we roamed and we all got along. Took what we needed, and there was nothing wrong. But then came a Man, an ape, but upright. He tamed his brothers, the land, and moved out of sight. And he learned to take what he wanted, because he could. And perhaps, maybe, he thought that he should. Imagination became a dark and twisted road. Until the weight of his sins bore an unbearable load. So he created an excuse, others to take the guilt. The Lord's of Creation, Ape's Gods were built. And it was all their fault, the woe in the land. Now guilt and desire could walk hand in hand. They were gifts from the Gods, all that honey and milk. You were blessed by greed, and gold and silk. The poor are just the scaffold on which to build. What the wealthy desire in their golden field. And they'll go to war to keep it, all that is theirs, and yours. Whatever they desire, and name 'GOD' as the cause.

God? He was just an Ape that got lucky.

Kill, kill them all. Follow the voice and hear the call. A sword and lance gives an Ape a chance. The machine gun chatters, it's conversation shatters. As war, upon war, upon war, it all gets so hazy. No, that's just Man. The Ape who's gone crazy.

So segregation becomes the way. It's civilisation, that's what they say. Us and them. Who builds the highest fence. Draw up borders, it all makes sense. Cos Ape must be strong. And Ape is strong. It's every other Ape that is always wrong.

Ape always knows what's best for Ape.

So Ape scratches and paws until his hands have sores. He craves Honey, sweet nectar, as never before.

But watch as the Honey evaporates to rise. To the Alpha Males who we've learnt to despise. Us, the masses in our dirty hovel. Take the scraps from the Alphas, as we bend and grovel.

Sure, they buy conscience, respectability too. The Alpha Apes give a little to you. A handout, a donation, or a gift of aid. Then tread on your neck for a bargain well made.

It's the Honey that binds us all together.

The Honey sweet, that forces little feet. Makes the world wear a blinker, as tiny hands tinker. Each child treated as a baby Serf; what on Earth, are we doing, working children into ruin.

And for what? Something hot? The latest badge of shame. A ripe and juicy 'Apple' that's to blame.

Makes the Apes go delirious.

Drunk on Honey, they'll do anything to secure. The purest form of their wealth for sure. Gold and silver, I guess that's okay. Just ore in the ground, and left to decay. Gas and oil was left there to spoil.

Every day, every day, can't Ape find a better way? As we dig and grab, and turn green into drab. If only Ape would choose to conserve, and not abuse.

It's an Ape for all . . .

But then comes the sport, the killing for measure. By Apes who crave blood, as a right and a pleasure. And for the filthy right that so few oppose. That

only the brave will dare to expose. Think whale, elephant, and the feline pride. The beauty of nature being pushed aside. No-one cares if they are butchered and hurt. Those magnificent creatures with whom we once shared the dirt. And what of Cattle, and the battery Hen? Nah, pass me the bolt, again, and again.

Hey, Ape gets hungry, okay.

I suppose you could say, "it's resources, and ours to sell". And, "so fucking what? we're all going to Hell." Finders keepers, that's the law. We'll bugger this planet right down to its core. We'll pull up the treasure, the blackest gold. Put it on the market and get it all sold. That's three billion barrels a day, okay. It's the water over Niagara for 6 hours a day. Rolling, falling, hurtling over the top. Will it ever stop? Yeah, when it's all used up. The last drop slurped out of Nature's cup. When even a straw can't find the last. The age of oil will have come and past. So kids, get on your bike and breathe the smog from the air. And blame your daddy, cos he's the one who didn't care.

Ape not responsible . . .

As if that was the worst of Ape, not so. With each cycle of recession the rich get up and go. Retire to the sun and take it all. Leave us, the Plebs, to stumble and fall. It's the one percent who have all the money. For the other ninety nine, it's not so funny. We lose. Many die. As we perpetuate their lies. That all men are equal, and that they are all born free. Well hang on, take a look, that's doesn't seem to work . . .

Or is that just me?

Go to the banks?

No thanks.

What little the state provides, of a sort.

Gets spent on a day watching glorious sport  
Cheering trophies and heroes  
Those goddamn zeros  
And then off down the pub  
To give the wallet a rub  
Oops, is that Ape calling time  
No, I don't seem to have a rhyme  
Not when it's kids that will suffer and go without.  
There's no shortage of people that are poor, nor charities with buckets that  
knock on the door.  
Sat watching the TV, we all wonder, can they see? The eagerness to avoid  
them looking back at me. The stare and pain of hunger. The forgotten faces  
grow younger. But that's okay as I change channels at a touch.  
Technology's button, thanks very much. It's Apes ignorance and indolence  
that save the day. Clever clever, Ape clicks and makes them all go away.

And still Ape's sickness grows.

The infection far worse in the bold and devout. When one holy word  
trumps the other, and the guns come out. It's Ape's way that is best. And I  
think you can guess the rest.

They come for the innocent to make the guilty pay. There is no word of  
warning, and nothing left to say. Just the hammer of their God as it rips  
through the room. Another bomb in HIS name, make the room goes BOOM.

Another mess. And yes, you can guess. There are children that lie dying,  
their mothers trying. To get help before they die. Before innocent blood  
runs dry. So kill, kill them all. Follow the voice and hear the call. A sword  
and lance gives the Ape a chance. And the machine gun chatters, it's



conversation shatters. War, upon war, upon war, it all gets so hazy. No, that's just Man. The Ape who's gone crazy.

Shit Crazy.

And so Ape breeds, like never before. He can't keep up, he can't even keep score. So many Apes are born, and they live far too long. And then one by one, they begin to go wrong. And the sickness spreads out of hand, getting worse. On some the infection acts as a curse. It slithers silent. Slips underground. And finds solace in the shadows. Not a whisper, not a sound. Ape fills the cracks like mortar, and brings the lambs to the slaughter. For the indolence has returned, it's brought apathy too. To stir into the mix of this God forsaken Zoo.

We know that you are there. The Apes who don't care. The serpents of the dark, the dogs without a bark. Who prefer to whimper and simper, and be your friend. But with only one end. Their bite is vicious and cold. They grow in numbers becoming bold. And they are the worst of us all, the scum of the Ape. And make no mistake. That there are many, many, many. In a world that has plenty. They are Priests and Politicians, Carers and Sharers. A fixer of cars, they'll deliver your papers. And say, "Look at me, what's not to trust. What you can't see is my carnal lust." So watch for the soulless eyes, and the face without features. They are the dregs of Ape, and Godless creatures. Who move in next door, and wave and say 'hi'. As they offer a smile that hides a brutal lie. That they covet your young with a moisten tongue. And they will prey on your children to have fun, fun, fun. I have no more words, go fetch me a gun.

Apes, look the other way.

So you would think there is no saving the Ape. Well, not so. Let's give it a go. Murder? It could be self defence. Dammit, with some Apes it actually makes sense. Exploration, doesn't mean exploitation. Even though history tells to expect the expectation. And as for banks, they can also mean food. Some business' are charities, they don't always collude. Some Apes are good, they give support and a meal. They won't fix prices, or screw you on the deal. Some, will journey to the other side of the world. To pray for your soul, when your life has unfurled. Most would fight for your child, as you would fight for theirs. Bring freedom and free speech to your sons and heirs. These Apes do good. They do what we should. But we never quite get to it, you know? We always mean to, but never show. It's the indolence, the disease, that's the reason. Why we close our eyes, and don't help others, season after season.

Hey Ape, you know what I mean?

But that doesn't make an Ape bad. Most are gentle, and for that I'm glad. For most life is awkward, and for some it is hard. It even gets hurtful and comes with a card. We all hope to be lucky. If not we stay plucky. Take it on the chin. And hope that one day, we will win. Find our little piece of this land, and someone to share it, and walk hand in hand. Have children, have fun, take holidays in the sun.

But maybe, just maybe, we could do so much more. Give up some free time, you know the score. But if a coin in a tin is the only way. Well, then I guess, for us that's okay. As we tread our wheel within a cage with no shape. That's just the way it is for the unnatural Ape.

## THE HELPLINE 4

‘This is Expensive Fuels R US, sir. I can only repeat what the previous consultant has already explained to you, that we are only here for the taking of your payment.’

‘Look, be a good girl, go find a chap for me to talk to?’

‘I am lowering my voice, is this helping you, sir?’

‘Well really. I demand you let me talk to someone about my fuel bill. There’s been a ghastly mistake. It’s incorrect. And damn it, I refuse to pay.’

‘I am being very sorry sir, but may I ask who is speaking to me?’

‘What, again? My name is Geoffrey Palmerston-Smythe. Now write it down, that’s the fifth time I’ve told you people.’

‘And your account number please, sir.’

‘What, grrr, just wait a minute. Okay, it’s L-O-L 12345/X-Y-Z

‘Thanking you sir. Now I am finding you as we speak. And I am hoping your day is being good so far?’

‘Well bloody hardly, I’m on the phone to you lot.’

‘Ahh, I have found you. And what can I be doing for you today, sir?’

‘Look, I’ve been through all of this with the previous girl. Why didn’t she tell you? For goodness sake, this is a bloody outrage. This bill you’ve sent me, it can’t be right.’

‘Ahhh, I am understanding already. We are not charging you enough, sir?’

‘What? No, it’s too bloody much. You’ve got your sums wrong.’

‘Hmm, that will be the computer, sir. Always adding things up, but never getting things wrong. May I take a payment from you, it is the long number across the front of your card.’

‘You most certainly may not. I’ve called to tell you that I won’t pay. You’ve made a mistake. It’s ridiculous to think anyone can use that much gas and electric.’

‘Oh yes, I am understanding you now. This is very shocking indeed. And very inconvenient for you. Indeed we are living in very hard times.’

‘Well, that’s more like it; in case you haven’t noticed the world’s in a recession. I’ve lost a bloody good job at the bank and had to claim benefits. Look here, I’ve got two kids to look after, and no money.’

‘Oh yes sir, I am understanding completely. My mother has seven children, and all of them are still living at the family home. Also my grandparents are living with us, and they are very old. And very smelly, I am telling you. But we are very cosy in our four tiny rooms.’

‘What’s that? You’ll have to talk slower, I didn’t catch all of that.’

‘I am saying that I understand you, sir. Now would you like to pay by credit, or by debit card, sir?’

‘Neither. I told you I’ve lost my job. I want you to reduce my bill. I should be made a special case. It’s all right for you, I expect it’s nice and warm out there? Well it’s bloody freezing over here. Where do you get off charging prices like these? It was alright when I had my job at the bank. Try to understand, that Range Rover outside sucks up diesel like a bloody Dyson. And the Government are flat refusing to pay the school fees. They expect me to send my children to a, to a, I can barely bring myself to say the word. Comprehensive . . . And have you seen the food prices at Marks & Spencers these days. You really have no idea.’

‘Very sorry, I am not understanding you, sir.’

‘Well of course not. How could you?’

‘But sir, when you signed the contract you ticked the box to confirm you have read it?’

‘What’s that, you want to extend me some credit?’

‘No sir. But we can install a method of prepayment.’

‘You want to call and me a payment?’

‘No sir, you are misunderstanding what I am saying.’

‘This is unacceptable. I don’t understand a bloody word you’re saying. I-don’t—understand,-it’s-your-accent.’

‘But sir, I am not having an accent. It is all your misunderstanding.’

‘It most certainly is not.’

‘I am telling you that it is. Where I come from I am most certainly not having an accent. Everyone in Mumbai is speaking like this.’

‘Well goodness. And that’s the problem with having call centres in foreign countries. How am I supposed to get good service from someone who reads from a script. I don’t expect you can read or write?’

‘For your information, sir. I have an honours degree in English Literature. I also am having a first in Criminology, and also the essential framework of organic evolution involving Asian Primates. So please, not to infer that I am stupid.’

‘Well, really. I met the Queen once.’

‘Oooh, what was she like?’

‘None of your bloody business. Now look here, I’m convinced you’re being obstructive. What’s your name, out with it, I’m going to complain about your attitude.’

‘Yes sir. Of course sir. My name is Jaihatta Annatti Meushatta Millaki Inaidina.’

‘What? Right, well, I’ve written that down.’

‘Of course, sir. But my friends are calling me Jammi for short. That’s J-A-M-M-I.’

‘Right, good, I’ve written that down too. Now listen, it’s very important you understand. My benefits have been capped, so it’s not my fault. I haven’t had my payment from the Agency this week, so-I-can’t-afford-to-pay-you.

You’ll have to reduce my bill, oh, and put me on a cheaper tariff too. I told you, I have two children, and we don’t like being poor.’

‘Ahh yes, poor, that I am totally understanding. Please not to be thinking I am unsympathetic. Both my grandmother and my mother are very impoverished. They have been in service for many years. From six am they are happy to clean and wash for those much better off than themselves. They are looking after the wealthy children from dawn until dusk, and then coming home to bathe my grandparents, and cook for my miserable siblings. And sir, can I say, that I have never once heard them complain.

Each week they are sending half of their rupees to keep my elder brother in school. Did I mention that I have five brothers and six sisters, and we are living only in three small rooms, which have absolutely no clean water or sanitation. But we do have television, sir. I am bloody loving Bollywood.’

‘Are you being sarcastic?’

‘No sir, I am emphasising.’

‘Right, well, then that’s acceptable. But I’m clearly not getting anywhere with you, so I demand to talk to your manager. I want to speak to someone who can talk-proper-English.’

‘Of course sir, but it will do you no good. My manager’s accent is sounding even worse than mine.’

‘Right, well, give me the address for your complaints department. I intend to alert them to the poor service I’ve received, and to the obvious mistake in my bill.’

‘Oh yes sir, please send. Do you have a pen ready? Email your complaint to [JaihattaAnnattiMeushattaMillakiInaidina@expensivefuelsforus.mumbai](mailto:JaihattaAnnattiMeushattaMillakiInaidina@expensivefuelsforus.mumbai)

‘You’re not taking me seriously are you? I’ve bloody well had enough of this.’

‘Sir, please, I am working here in Mumbai, do you know where that is?’

‘Of course I do, it’s in bloody India.’

‘And that is a very long way away, sir. And yet I can still hear you, so there is no need to shout.’

‘Well I never . . . Are you going to reduce my bill or not?’

‘Sir, I am apologising faster than you complain, but it is doing me no good. But I can take payment over the phone. Please be giving me the long number on the front of your card.’

‘Right, that’s it, I’ve had enough. I’m going to call your head office in Glasgow. Maybe I’ll get more sense out of someone who actually understands what I’m saying.

Good day..’

CLICK. WHIRRRR.

‘Ooh Shabnam, tough last call?’



'Hey Saanvi. Nah, Mahim put him through. Just another dick-head who can't differentiate between a Mumbai and Birmingham accent. But I am putting him well in his place, don't you know.'

'Lmao, girl. Show him your passport next time, then shove the phone right up his Tandoori. Come on, lunch is on me. extra shots at Costa :).'

## LEAPING BUNNY

Many SS were executed at the end of the war  
For herding Jews into camps with gas chambers at their core  
Okay, okay, so they were people, not creatures  
But we Humans are still animals, and we share many features  
I'm thinking particularly about the capacity to fear  
To understand abuse, and let's be clear  
A chicken in a cage that can never sit down  
Chimpanzees for experiments at Portland Down  
Is abuse  
And there's no excuse  
So you can what, wash your hair. Smooth those golden thighs  
Great TV ads, that perpetuate the lies  
Filled with luxury and pleasure, romance and fun  
Tell that to the mouse with an ear on his bum

Perhaps the carcass of a fluffy bunny  
Wrapped and opened on your birthday would be funny?  
A Big Mac, a Whopper, or a chicken Supreme  
Don't these animals have a right to dream?  
Of pastures and meadows, life beneath the sun  
A Springtime of frolic in the early months of fun  
To have children, I'm sorry, I actually meant cubs  
New additions to the menus at restaurants and pubs

Come on, get real, and let's all agree  
This is murder of life in the first degree  
By you, and you, and you. And by me

It's all done by proxy so we never have to see  
Or listen, as the helpless cry  
And I promise you, these animals don't want to die  
To be a meal on a plate  
For a birthday or a date  
To be takeaway, fast food, a pleasure to consume  
The slaughter of animals has hit a worldwide boom  
It's the cash, the money, the profit that appeals  
The culling of herds to sign mega dollar deals

Don't grow up  
Don't mature  
Don't give them a reason  
To blow you away in the hunting season  
Don't leave the warmth of your mother's teat  
They'll slam a bolt through your head and drop you from your feet  
Sorry, I meant hooves; it just didn't fit, nor rhyme  
Like killing sixty billion animals, without one committing a crime  
Yeah, sixty billion; from the land, the sea, and the air  
That's the number that gave me quite a scare  
Because I reckon that really is a lot  
And don't you dare tell me that it's not  
What's that you say, you just don't care?  
Say it out loud, and in public. Go on, I dare  
I guess it's easy to ignore when you're not actually there

So I advocate you watch them, try to struggle and flee  
Watch them sense, and fear, an end they cannot see  
As they follow the herd encouraged ahead

As they listen to the sounds of the production line dead  
They'll scream as they get closer, without knowing why  
I wonder, would you help them if they could actually cry?  
Would you stand fast in their defence and demand that it stop.  
Or are you happy to stay ignorant and buy flesh from the shop?  
I know, I know, it's natural; we're meant to eat meat  
It's evolution, that's right, a fate de complete  
So tell me this; would you eat your own baby, if you couldn't get a fix?  
Would you throw in a parent to ripen up the mix?  
Of course not, such a barbaric thing  
And yet you eat the offspring of other natural things  
If only they could remain small and furry. Awww, and so cute :)  
Then which of you would volunteer to hold the gun, and shoot?  
Cos that's the thing with anonymity, when it comes to the rub  
Who would then murder that cute little cub?  
With those 'I love you' eyes, staring straight into yours  
Pleading, 'don't include me' in this savage, brutal cause

But how can I help? I mean, it's only me.  
Don't panic, I'm not asking you to set them all free  
So what then? What do you expect me to do?  
It's such a simple thing, but please, just see it through  
Go on then, I'm listening. You might as well ask  
Bless you, it's a really easy task

Help the animals by finding the 'Happy Bunny'  
No, that's not a joke, I'm not being funny  
It's a mark against testing on animals who can feel  
So much pain and fear, and I promise you that's for real

And it's such a little thing to object  
Help right a wrong and make it correct  
To find the mark on your supermarket choice  
Is a simple way to raise up your voice  
And just perhaps, you could think about other ways to eat?  
And no, I'm not saying you should *never* eat meat  
But maybe, perhaps, just a w/e treat?  
It would mean that you're willing to help animals in pain  
A decision for life, not death, where so many can gain



The BUAV mark on your groceries is a great place to start  
It's a badge of pride that will mark you apart  
I hope that someone famous will adorn this badge Tattoo it in a place that  
shows. To give others the encouragement, and help ensure that the idea  
grows.

## RENAISSANCE

Today I awoke to celebrate, but what? Something important in my life, I think. It's just a feeling, that's all. I get them sometimes.

Like the bed as I lay here, it seems generous just for me. The other pillows sit like an empty picture frame, and I can't help feeling that they harbour a sense of loss. Like I say, it's just a feeling.

Perhaps the answer is in the kitchen. I leave myself notes on the fridge. I think I do. I think I've been doing it for a while?

So come on legs, frail old friends. Out from the covers to find slippers that are warm and snug. And one foot moves off to lead the other, more a shuffle than a stride. Each one a half step that moves me past the stairwell, and I half look down. Feel the cold rush of anticipation. Then move on to do what old men do so well, and so often. No need to close the bathroom door anymore?

My penguin posture is resolute and assured, but still I feel the hands of gravity on my back. It's constant presence stalks me, eager to play the game. But old joints and careful slippers encourage my middle finger to rise. Descending the carpeted steps my teasing pace ensures there'll be ride on the chute today.

So I survive another morning, and remain resolute in refusing to move my life downstairs. Thank goodness for two toilets. Thank Heaven for the kitchen that my lovely wife encouraged me to build. It's a great comfort these days as I reach for one of the few joys that life will still allow me.

Sure, the kettle is smaller and easier to lift, but the coffee tastes the same; and it is glorious. As is the view from the window seat. Our seat. Though not much to see out there but a normal winter's chill.

Oh my, it must have snowed last night. Outside the world has been painted white. Such fun to see snow. I think soon it must pass into winter in here. But for now the snow remains melted.

Silly old man.

I came down to find something, something that could help, what was it? I get distracted, it happens a lot. I think it's happening now. The snow outside? I've seen the ground covered in white before, but when? Did something happen in the snow, out there? Did we dance in the snow?

My memories are like ghosts, more feelings than facts. I don't remember. So why am I still smiling?

Do you know what the hardest question that I ask myself is? It's not What, or How, not even Why. It's Who? I can see the faces, I can even see yours right now. All so very familiar, and yet, so estranged. So I ask, 'who are you?' And it's hard to see the bright eyes dim when I ask it out loud. To not understand how the light that shines above me can only be seen by Others; those Others, the Others. And then the smile as the lips rise, as they fight to deny the pain. As they offer the consolation that no-one wants me to see. And I realise that they are, My Others.

It's all going, you see. I think most of it's gone? A whole lifetime of memories forgotten. A world far bigger within than it ever could on the outside. Soon to be a myth. Not even a memory. If only I could see, engage, build myself a staircase back to where I was; before I forgot, everything that I had to remember. But I haven't lost it yet, I don't think.

Damn them, the Familiars. They hang off my mind. They are sucking it dry. And to what end? What, what will they do with all the Coffee, it tastes so good. What was I saying?

Yes, WHO? It's the knock on the door that I fear most; far worse is opening the gate and having to peer outside. What to say, how to welcome? Will I recognise your face; maybe? Will I know who you are; probably not.

Will your name be a feeling, but not a fact? Will I be the fool who honours a promise never made? Once they know I am vulnerable, they will come. I think they've already been. I'm just a stupid old man. These days I hide and don't answer the door. Don't dare to rise and look out upon a world that may be more frightened of me than I am of it. Getting old is shit.

So I sit here, at my window seat drinking coffee. And I try to remember, I try. And I talk. The endless conversations with no-one here to listen. With all the familiar faces I just cannot place anymore. Faces, whose names escape me, they are lost in a sea of mistrust. More so of myself, not so much of the Others. Not so much.

Oh look, it's been snowing outside. How wonderful.

More coffee. Boil the kettle. Add a large spoon of sugar, maybe two. What's this on the lid of the tub, a sticker?

'Eat me.'

Ah, my pills, I recall. So not senile then, I can still remember to take my pills. So many pills?. I wonder what they do? Coffee and pills; cheers. It's all we have to look forward to, I'm afraid.

I take my seat and let my gaze wander away from the house and down the garden. I remember, this house is old, much older than me. The walls have begun to crack, and there's a leak from the roof above my bedroom. But it wasn't always like this. No, there was a time when the walls were painted brightly, and children played out there in the garden.

It was me, out there. And me, in here.

There's a kindly face, and a warm bright smile that is just for me. An elderly woman, my Grandmother? She would open the oven door and let the heat warm us both. She was the Other, with whom I shared my window seat. And I'm smiling again because I can remember them both.

Don't laugh, I was once like you once. I was Immortal, and I was invincible. Cocky and sure. I was powered by a dynamo of DNA, and my



batteries hummed on the tonic of life. I could fly, high on a carpet of confidence. Embraced within a family rich with love; so much love. But it's all gone now. There's no-one left but me. I didn't realise. But then I suppose that none of us do, not when we are young. How dreadful the nature of Time. Watch out for it. Take care. It's a cancer that has infected us all.

From the moment of our birth the Universe draws a steady flow, and before you know, you are ready to go. You'll find yourself here, with me, and not sure what to do. So many feelings, but so few facts; it's frightening, to feel my immortal soul locked in ominous dispute with this penguin husk I live within. As it shuffles me about from dawn until dusk. Ahh, now I remember. There is only worse to come . .

The Doctor told me how it would progress. All that I would lose. Why, why, of all consideration, of all thoughts abandoned, would I deem to remember that, my future? To see now that what I am, what I will be. Now I want to forget. That all I have, I will soon let go. Oh, my son and my daughter, I know who you are now. I wish you were here right now, so I could tell you . . . I'm so sorry

To remember now, that I will forget who you are. It cuts like a knife. To understand the burden that I cast on you, and yours. Please forgive me. I'm so very sorry.

Perhaps it is time. Yes, time, to stop hurting those whom I love. Look, it's snowing outside. Go out there now, in the snow, and let the cold make it all go away. Let the footsteps be all that I leave behind. Find a space, settle down, curl up and hide. Let the snow cover me forever, and go to sleep with winter on my mind.

Listen, for the songs of Angels. Better them than the Others. My time. On my terms. Before His Familiars strip me of everything I have left. Before I am nothing more than an infant's stare.

And when they are done, and I am gone, I will ask Him, God. I will demand to know what it was that I did to deserve this fate? And if He should deem to reply, I wonder, will I even remember?

Come on legs, old friends. More coffee before we go. What's that on the fridge, a note? Let's take a look. Ah, I see a smiley face, and that's my handwriting I'm sure. What does it say?

Happy birthday Old Man.

## TWELVE

A crack of light ends my dream of darkness, and a halo beckons with its golden embrace. Sweet treats abound on each limb as I feel its warmth and realise . . . I am. And I am about to become more.

From broken dirt I ascended to hear others. And they rejoice in my song of being born. I feel them; I am not alone. And I need for nothing more than their company, and the sound of the river's tears as it streams nearby. I am happiness with each breath of wind that teases and tickles.

So nothing changes. For I am languid, and I am content, to stretch and turn. To reach, strain, and strive to be closer to the Golden One above. But as I grow I realise, that He leaves me to my vigour, mostly. He gives me reason to ponder, often. And I know He can be angry as well as kind. We all feel it in the valley, the tension in the air, the coming of the storm. I have seen a few now. All cower from the power that forges light to race across moody skies. But rejoice again in the waters of life as they fall, that allow us to grow a little more. And when He returns, there are none who refuse to bask in His radiant light. And I tingle in the warmth of His love, but realise His blessings are as one with the seasons, and that His passion plays fickle among the creatures in the ground. But still, I am content to know that He is there. Through the darkness and the light, with each new day that ends below the stars. What better existence than this? What better world to behold?

I was sleeping when I first became aware; of the sound of leaves, unlike any I had heard before. And they felt it too, my brothers, disquiet on a scuttling breeze. As if the wind was in a hurry to leave this place, as the gentle flow of the river raised itself to a babble, but said nothing more. And

so they came, the men on two legs. The sound of leaves before them as they rattled and clanked, their burden born by the great ships of the desert. And behold the strange creatures that say, “Baaa”?

The waters edge became a carnival of sounds, laid out on a bed of rainbow colours. And they made fire. And Music. Apprehension became excitement, and then joy. Such joy at their mystical arts and ways.

Such impatience for them, they could never stay still. They came and they went like the seasons, but twice as often. First the Bedouin, and then the Jew. And I was always pleased when they came. As were we all. And the rings in my chest became as many as the trees in my valley. As season upon season, year upon year, I watched them come and go. And I felt the warmth of my God blaze down upon me, and I was content.

I was lazy too. Partial to my slumber. To dream visions of the forest, of bark and branch. A place where animals played and colourful birds sang songs of happiness. It is a place called Heaven, I think. And I visit often when I dream. But I am still happy when I awake to see our friends gathered again by the river.

So why then does the wind stay still? Where are the colours and the symphony of sounds? Why do these travellers wear rings of iron, where bangles of gold should be clasped? And I hear a new name spoken. A strange sounding word slow whispered upon the breeze, “Romans”.

Their camp fires glow like embers, but I see no flicker of the flames. And their dress resembles cloth made from fallen stars. My brothers rustle their leaves as the air cracks like a limb snapped from a bow. But the sky is blue, and I hear a man cry out, not with words, but a dreadful sound and a brother shivers leaves to the ground, above a man strapped to his trunk. And the sky cracks again. The man cries out like a wounded dog. Again, and again, and my brothers bend their limbs and look away. The wind whispers again the word, “Romans.”

The happy years are no more. My caravans of sweet sensual scent descend into grime and sweat, and the pleasant rattle of metal pans becomes a tired procession of dragging chains. And the air cracks to pacify the whip and the horn as blood turns crystal waters into wine. And then the “Romans” come and stay. They no longer wish to bend men to their will, but the trees. They come for us, for my brothers, for the guardians of the river bank. Robbers of souls they bring axe and saw, and the valley screams to the split and breach of sawing bark. The dead and the dying reach up, and look to the sky, and I hear them beg to the Golden God. And I beseech Him, implore Him, Beg for Him to intercede. But we are culled and cropped. Hacked and sawn. And I see them come still closer.

Stop, stop, you’re killing us. But they cannot hear, and if they could, they would not listen.

It is terror when they finally come for me. A stumbling wagon on wheels trundles slowly across the ground, being careful to avoid the stumps. The remains of my brothers, my sisters, all gone. As I face the murder of metal swung on laughter and wine. I see apocalypse.

I plead to the deaf, to the ignorant. And then resolve to beg no more. I will not cry out, nor utter a sound. I will not . . . But I do, as they hack at my trunk.

The first tooth, that bitter bite, and I scream to my Golden God, that He may end this now.

The river turns and flows away as the wind carries my pain to the dunes, and I cry out for forgiveness as the blade cuts deep and eager for the other side. What have I done to deserve such pain. Tell me?. But though my Golden One stands idle, I refuse to turn away. Even as my sap runs dry, I

love Him. And if this is my fate, then I will endure. And I will accept. Though it is hard to watch the sky fall as I topple.

It is Spring, I think, and I have seen many. But none like this, not like the last. The tools of the wagon move on, and as the night comes early for me I can still hear more screams. But if this is my fate, I accept it.

It is a strange place to awaken too. The light is golden and the air feels warm to the touch. And I can hear whispers. Is this Heaven, or just the promise of what is to come? Because all things in Nature are alive, and all have the right to salvation. Not just the man with two legs.

I hear the whispers; talking, and telling me that I must endure? That I am to be rewarded and recompensed, idolised and adored. When so many of my Brothers denied Him, I stood firm. He says it is my faith that defines me, and for my faith, He answers me now. Here in this place that glows like a halo, where I am lost in a golden well. But I cannot stay, I'm going back. It's done, it's over, so I guess that's that.

And so I endure upon the wagon, and I am parched beyond despair. On a journey that is long, upon a road uneven and travelled at night beneath the stars. I am a daze, and no longer feel pain; how could I? What more do these Romans think they can do?

Journeys end, and I have never seen a place such as this, where stones grow tall into buildings. Where the dead line the roofs as living shrouds to give shelter, and I am dragged to a place where the air smells of burning flesh. My brother's flesh. Where I am stripped, sawn, and sanded. I feel the knife, the teeth, and the plane. And I am hung drawn and quartered.

Why would He make me suffer so? What reason could be worth this living death? And once more comes the beating of a chain, and I am manacled like one of those men, by a Roman who glories in his work, and

clucks at my vulgar deformity. My each end no longer a part of the other as I am left discarded, broken and abandoned.

For how long I cannot know. But they come for me, drag me, and throw me to the ground. I feel the shivers of cold as I lie in the shade, and I hear whispers, whispers, so many whispers. All drowned by the noise of a crowd that howls. Men and women, their brats and cubs. Hurling insults and stones, and waving their clubs. But not towards me, no, there is another who they have led. A crown of thorns is strapped to his head. What could this man have possibly done? Did he steal the moon, or was it the sun? I am ashamed to listen, to watch. As they jostle to stare and jeer, and spit. What terrible crime could this man have done?

And that's when I feel His hands, racked with pain but gentle, and raising my broken trunk. To carry me out into the light beneath my Golden One, and I understand. Not just a sense but a feeling that ends my pain and makes me whole again. Each desperate lunging step brings me closer to the truth of what I am, and what we two share. And the whispers begin again on a journey that is slow with time.

I feel his pain above mine as the nails are hammered down. His blood joins mine from the prickles on His crown. And I feel His love for them. But why? For a crowd that demands this man to die? And I realise that I will be His end. His deliverance, on me He must depend. And so I am planted in the ground, this end up, or is it down? And I wait, I endure, until the crowd moves on round. And I hear His name called out amongst jeers and boo's. I have on my back the King of the Jews. And then I know Him, as the son and the heir. The wind in my limbs and my breath of fresh air. And I understand now, as I feel His charms. I was dragged through the city, and held in His arms.

And now I hold Him in mine. I cradle the doubt, the sin, and the fear. And I understand my journey, its meaning has never been so clear. I am to

bear His weight, as he carried mine, forever entwined, to remind them that they know not what they have done. That there will be no peace in this world until they come to understand their place with one and other, as we do now. He is comfort, He is joy.

“Thank you.” He says. “You stood alone in keeping the faith, though your pain was as great. Twelve answered my call, but one has left me. The others have disappointed themselves beyond regret; but they will find me again.

Only your faith stood firm when the world around had wilted. Only you showed the strength to help shoulder my burden. You have bled for me, as I bleed for them now. And you have honoured my Father’s name when others have stepped into shadows. So I call you now, as my only true Apostle. For the pain you have suffered, and for the weight you now bare. Our blood and our spirit will forever be shared. We are the symbol now, and will be cherished above all others who follow in my steps.”

He turns away, and does not speak again. And when the frightened come for His limp body, they too are different. I think that they have found true understanding in His death. And I am happy when they carry his body from me. For He will return, and I will always be by His side.

I am left for the Roman’s to bury me in the ground, in a secret place where I will never be found. But my spirit roams immortal, rampant and free. In all who’s eyes will open and see.

I am the Cross and I am the sign. And blessed is my nature until the end of time.