

BLACK OVER BILL'S MOTHER'S

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‘Say anything you want. Don’t mind the audience. Stones hear – a stone may hear.’

– Sokatsu Shaku

THERE WERE two barbers. One was at the top of the road and the other was at the bottom. The one at the top didn't sterilise his scissors between jobs, mum said, and everyone who went to his shop had lice, they were all council-house kids. So mum stopped taking me there. She said the barber at the bottom of the road was better. You had to cross a busy road to get to it on the other side of the island, a big fat tub of concrete with a lawn on top that grew daisies round its fringe. The barber at the bottom of the road had a proper sterilisation oven you could see he cooked his scissors like mum does the Sunday roast. He had long fair hair and looked like a pop star or footballer. He was the kind of barber who had ladies with big Daisy-the-cow eyelashes popping their heads round the door his dolly birds dad called em and he was probably doin'em, though I wasn't sure what doin'em meant but it had

something to do with the box of something-for-the-weekend-sir stuff he teased me with after giving me a puddin bowl without the bowl winking at the men sitting queuing up along the wall stretching right back to his glass trophy case. Next door up the stairs to his barbershop was a ladies' hairdressers and that's where the women came from who popped their head round the door to say hello to Tony, that was his name which I learnt from them. I didn't know his name was Tony from being introduced. I always felt embarrassed going to Tony's, he seemed too good to be a barber he seemed too good for Wednesfield altogether Wednesfield was men with flat caps smelling of beer and men in brown overalls selling nails and old women at bus stops talking about the immigrants smelling of garlic though no-one knew what garlic was it was just 'the smell of em on the bus'. Still, I'm glad I didn't have to go to the barber at the top of the road where everyone had lice and he didn't clean his comb and they were all council-house kids. That was where we got the 59 up to town it was next to the fishing-tackle shop it was above the florist who always had things written in flowers like 'Goodbye Granddad'. There was a cake shop too that had three cakes on top of each other going up on pillars for weddings but we didn't buy anything up there we just got the bus to town. Almost every week there'd be

a chimney on fire and people standing around outside waiting for the fire engine but mum'd not want to stop she'd drag me up to the 59 bus stop, me looking back. It was all council houses up to the top of the road where the gardens were caked mud with a few balding scraps of grass and dolls with arms missing and mongrels tied to drainpipes. Two bullies from school lived in these houses. Our house was the first house that had been bought and from there to the bottom of the road was all private houses with neat gardens and drives and new bricks, down there was the 68 bus stop that went a more picturesque route to town there was a greengrocer with apples and pears and oranges stacked in pyramids and a dress shop and the chemist with a big bottle with blue liquid in it in the window, and Tony's red and white barber pole revolved round and round on the electric like a stick of rock swirling its coiling spiral. The barber at the top of the road didn't have one that moved his was just painted wood.

I liked going down the bottom of the road more than I liked going up the top of the road.

We didn't have a fridge or a phone we kept the milk bottles in a bucket of cold water in the hall and for the

phone well only dad phoned about anything once in a blue moon and it was such a tuh-do making a phone call he'd put on his cap and his overcoat after half an hour pacing backwards and forwards in his head about whether he should phone or not and then mum'd fish change out of a crystal glass on the breakfast bar just so he had enough for all eventualities and off he'd go to the phone box up the road just outside the betting shop. I never knew who he was phoning and why, all I know is it was a right ooh-aah making a phone call and I never wanted to make one besides there was no-one for me to phone anyway everyone at school had a phone but I didn't know what their numbers were anyway so what did it matter it wasn't something I missed it wasn't something you did for pleasure it was something you hummed and arrhed about for ages and then put on your hat and coat and went out the house you didn't *want* to do it you *had* to.

We used to go down to the scummy old green canal a lot me and my mates we used to get tadpoles and newts and frogs and we used to bet each other whether we could jump over the canal at the bit where it went narrow but no-one would take the bet but we heard that Joe Maggly had done it I think that was his name we just called him Magger and that was all we wanted to know Magger's jumped it someone said so it can be

done and kids would try to jump it of an evening before it got dark on their own just to see if they could before they started betting on it and you'd see wet footprints and green slime trails heading away from the canal at the narrow bit and you'd laugh and think I'm not doing that I've got more sense. And Magger told us about how him and his mates had had frog racing contests across the canal what you do is, he said, you get a frog right a big frog is best for this and you take a drinking straw right and stick the straw up its arse, cloaca I said we done it in biology, and he said arse is good enough so you take the straw and stick it up its arse and blow blow like you're blowing a really tough balloon up you blow and you blow and the frog's body bulges out and gets bigger and bigger and you've gotta keep blowing you don't want to have a blow-back uurrrrrrh we all go and then when it's about this size he holds his hands like he's got an invisible football you pinch its arse with two fingers like this see to hold all the air in all that puffin you bin doin and there's maybe six frogs been blown-up see and you all carefully place the frog in the water its little eyes bulging y'know like it dunt know what's gewin on and we all laugh and then old Scobie Scobber from the cross country team he's like the referee and he's got a whistle and he says on yer marks get set and he blows his whistle and we all let go of the frog's

arse and whoosh away they go like fuckin speedboats
man and the winner gets a ciggie like.

There was this girl Linda Percival at the juniors everyone called her Goggy she had the lurgy she had one dead eye and one live eye it's not a dead eye Smartypants Samuels said it's a lazy eye it's not dead you clot it's just wonky it's a wonky lazy eye she's got it's not glass just don't move right. I said you mean it puts its feet up and don't want to go to work yeah he said lazy. Goggy had yellow stinky cotton wool in her ear and couldn't do swimming she smelt of wee and no-one wanted to sit next to her in case they got the lurgy off her she wore stockings at the juniors while all the other girls had bare legs but her stockings looked like old people's bandages and were always wrinkled and the colour of plasters and she ponged of ointment as well I always dreaded it when Eddy wasn't there cos he was ill or something so the desk next to mine was free I dreaded she might come and sit next to me she was desperate to give people the lurgy and would sometimes run around the playground trying to dab it onto people who'd been teasing her a deadly game of tick but we'd always get away and leave her standing there like a dog who's been

rolling in cack and can't understand why no-one wants to play with it. I felt sorry for her but what could I do she had the lurgy and that was all there was to it and besides she had a fat squashed-up face and was sour all the time saying 'I'm tellin on you' and 'when I have a good toy you can't play with it' and I wouldn't have liked her even if she didn't have the lurgy but I think she always had it so maybe it was what she was one big walking bunch of lurgification all lurgified it was too late for her she'd had it. If you saw her outside school coming along the pavement towards you you were supposed to shout *It's Goggy! It's Goggy!* and run off screaming but I never did I just crossed my fingers in my pockets and nodded as we passed. She lived round the corner from me and there was always a lot of laughs going on in that house at Christmas lots of lights and Christmas decorations up and her big fat mum'd have a proper Christmas tree even though it was a council house all scraggly privet and bald-patch dead grass and kids making mud pies after it had rained like they didn't know sandcastle buckets are for sand not mud and they'd pat the mud down and make mudpie fortresses dad'd say they're as happy as pigs in shit them lot they're no better than gippos don't you sit close to any of them at school they've all got nits.

I became convinced I was shrinking. I looked in the mirror day after day and I was sure of it, I was shrinking. So I marked my height on the doorframe with the dot of a felt pen placing a ruler level on my head and feeling behind to find the spot where it touched the doorframe. After a few days it looked like I was right I was shrinking, but then I thought nah I'm just not getting the ruler level and after a few days more I stopped worrying about it well not stopped worrying just didn't think of it any more it had passed out of my head like a train in the night. Then my eyes started to itch and itch and I rubbed them till they were red-raw rub rub rub all the time mum said stop rubbing your eyes you'll rub them out but they itched too much and mum got eyedrops it was hay fever. I used to like the time waiting for a scab to get ready to lift you could always tell when it was time it would shout at you open me open me it was a waste of a good scab on the knee to wait until it completely healed over and shrunk and fell off all nice and healed no what was best to do was wait until it was ready to lift you'd get your fingernail under the edge of it and hold your breath a bit and feel whether it was ready yet sometimes you were a day or two early and you'd have to leave it but when it was ready it'd want to

stay down a bit like a snail clings to the slabs when you want to pick it up by its shell but then lets go and a good scab was like that it'd cling and stay down and then it would give up holding on and lift up like a miraculous manhole cover into your leg like it was on a hinge and you'd prod the fresh red glistening inside and it'd be just a little tacky and you'd know that's going to make a nice new scab over it that is smaller one and one you'd probably leave this time you've had the main scab up and what a scab that was best scab for ages and you'd tear it off its little hinge this dried-up blood cap the size of a tiddlywink and examine it for a while turning it round in your fingers then you'd wrap it in a paper handkerchief and push it down towards the bottom of the bin in your bedroom.

I started learning all the knots from a book the reef knot the bowline then I was learning all the insects and butterflies then it was semaphore flags and Morse code. The kid next door who was younger than me knew all the cars but I had no interest in cars at all who cares I said what car that is it's a Ford Escort he said I said who cares I don't care. We didn't have a car only Uncle George had a car and I'd only been in it once I didn't even know what type of car it was I didn't care. I knew an Aston Martin because I had one in Dinky or Husky or Corgi that had an ejector seat that shot a little plastic

man out who James Bond didn't want sitting next to him but you didn't see any Aston Martins in Wood End or Jaguar E-Types so I didn't care about cars just boring all-look-the-same cars round here butterflies were more interesting lots of different types even round here.

'Think of those poor children in Biafra,' dad would say if I left a little food on my plate, 'they'd be glad of that.' Then he'd lean back in his chair and rest his hands on his belly and say 'I'm stuffed mother.' Every time it was think of those poor children in Biafra and the pictures would be on telly while we were having tea of starving bloated-bellied little black kids eyes crusted over and flies helping themselves like they do on dog poo and mum'd say oh switch it over it's putting me off my tea and in would go a big slice of Battenberg then rich tea fingers dipped in tea and sometimes you'd leave them in the tea soaking just a half-second too long and it'd flop off and sink to the bottom leaving you a horrible splodge of blubbly-blobbly biscuit mush at the bottom and mum'd say why do they have to put this on at teatime?

Then there'd be an earthquake somewhere and mum'd say oooh I wouldn't like that. The most I had to worry

about was meeting a bully on the way home from school or finding a bit of skin in the rice pudding I didn't like the skin you had to be grown-up to like the skin like the fat on the beef gramp loved that the thicker it was the more he loved it.

There was a fairy ring of mushrooms that come up on the front lawn dad was convinced some drunk had stood on our lawn in the middle of the night and had pissed all round in a circle and his wee must have had seeds in and so that was why the mushrooms were coming up in a circle like that and I tried to explain to dad that no this was what was called a fairy ring and that's how mushrooms grew but he wasn't having it and just muttered dirty bastard to himself and would look out the curtains every so often at night to see if he could catch him doing it. Bastard does it when we're asleep, he said to mum, and he'd get worked up about it. Some toerag from the council houses, you see em coming out the boozier at all hours they doe work y'know they're all on the social sponging off the rest of us. I showed dad a picture in a book I got from the library of a fairy ring and he put his glasses on special and took a good look at it and called mum over and said have a look at this our kid's found it's just like what we've got on our lawn. Ooooh yes, said mum, can you eat them? And dad said, yow day want to eat them they've bin weed

on love and I said no dad no that's the way they grow in a circle like that it's a fairy ring and he looks at me over his glasses and says yow'm tellin us the fairies brought em? He looks at mum and does a whirly finger pointing at his brain. I give up, and then one night I hear a commotion outside and peep through the crack of the curtains and see a man watering the mushrooms with his wee before stumbling off.

And then they landed on the Moon and the *Express and Star* had a twenty page colour supplement that was how you knew it was important and next day everyone was talking about it at school but mostly we were wondering whether they were taking a cack in space and whether there would be big cacks floating around the Moon I don't know how we got onto cacks but everything got round to cack eventually. Johnny Catten was a bully and we all laughed when we heard he was stuck in the lavatory and the teachers were stopping people going in because Catten was cacking himself couldn't stop it it was pouring out of him and two teachers were guarding him and everywhere the word went round. Have you heard? Catten's cacked himself! And we'd laugh and laugh. He cacked himself in class and they dragged him out and he's still in there sitting on a big pile of cack. And we'd pass by the lavatory and it was true the teachers were stopping you going in. And

then that black girl fainted and we had to troop past her sitting on a chair staring into space like a zombie it was really scary we didn't know what had happened to her. Nothing like that had better happen to me while I was at school it's better if that happens to you in your bedroom.

I sometimes think I see the life going out of my eyes, glazing over like a scummy puddle the shine's gone off with all the dust landing on its surface, but just going like that, while you're looking at your eyes in the mirror, the light falling dark there now, the glint gone, the thing that made you alive, scabbed over with a dullness, and it's frightening and you don't know where you are any more, a foot this way or that way and it could be a foot wrong. And I'd lie down on my bed feeling faint or trying to feel faint or seeing if I did feel faint and a fountain of maggots would shoot up out of my belly and I'd squirm but they'd be gone and I'd ask myself what is this chill that I'm full of and the fears of everything would come like a shrivelled black baby crawling out from under the sofa while I was looking at the fringe and then the kettle would be whistling and I'd draw my legs up into the chair knowing tea

would be ready in ten minutes then I'd dive through the front window gambolling onto the lawn firing a machine gun . . . erh-erh-erh-erh! . . . erh-erh-erh! . . . I didn't know what to do with myself but something always came some wind would push me this way or that and I just wanted to shout out BASTARD! but I'd mumble it instead into the small end of a traffic cone turning it round in my mouth and the sound would didgeridoo out onto the pavement and I'd jump up and catch a branch and swing and fall and cut open my knees and sometimes I wanted to ride Sally the sheepdog like a horse but she wouldn't let me get on properly so I just hugged her instead she was kind to me an old dog wandering around padding shaggy old paws up to see you.

I dunno I dunno I dunno I dunno I dunno.

How am I sposed to know?

Feel all stupid and

STUPID!

How am I *supposed* to walk?

Every time it was a full moon mum said make sure you pull the curtains together before you go to sleep. Why I said and she said you don't want the moon shining on your face while you're asleep why not I said and she said you just don't. Why why why? Because because because. So I was left to work it out myself, deliberately lying there with the curtains open with the moon pouring in making my bedroom like a cave you were shining a torch in. All the shadows had their ears pricked up and it felt like they could leap at any moment and bound across my stomach and out the window. I didn't want that happening in the night but I was convinced that wasn't the reason and I lay there with my eyes closed clenched tight though I could open one a bit and it wouldn't count and that way I might get a glimpse of what was going to happen the full moon was already high and beaming in bathing my face I wasn't asleep yet so there was no real risk because what happens happens when you nod off and I started starting to nod off just pretending but it got real and I could feel the moon tugging at my face trying pull it off and steal it and I wanted to shout out mum! mum! but I'd get into trouble so I struggled and struggled and clamped up my eyelids and the moon backed off quick and was just yawning in the black sky and thinking about sinking down and going to bed himself and I stared wide-eyed

at him and quickly grabbed the curtains and pulled them shut peeping out just a little for one last look and the moon was winking at me and saying next time kid I'll have your face off and laughing like a pirate and he gobbled on my window a big spittle but then I saw it was spitting with rain and he put his umbrella up and ducked in under the storm cloud rolling over the houses he nearly had my face and I told everyone at school next morning and they were scared really scared and Tezza said maybe that's what's happened to them kids with purple patches on their faces that's where the moon's had a bit of their face off. This gave me a fright and at the first opportunity I ran to the washroom before anyone else got there at break and looked at my face in the mirror to see if any bit was going purple maybe the moon had a bit of my face off.

Slowly my tongue learnt not to spill the contents of my brain too easily I wasn't exactly bottling things up I was keeping them for myself I dunno where I got this idea it may have been from westerns where strong silent men just come into town and shoot everybody up for looking at em wrong or getting a bit of dust on their boots and then they'd leave and they still hadn't said anything. And I learnt that a mistake you made

with your tongue was a lot harder to put right than one you hadn't blabbed. So it started to make sense this new way to be in daily life and they'd say what you all quiet about and I would open my mouth to spout out about how I was a silent one now so they'd better watch it but instead I just closed my mouth again like a lizard's that's been open for ages waiting for a fly to fly in it and it does and clomp down come the jaws and that'd be me silently dissolving the tiny fly in my spit.

I turned a wheelbarrow into an armchair and spent more time on my own after that seeing as how they expect you to speak when you're with other kids and if you don't speak they think there's something wrong with you and somehow I knew this decision was going to chase me through the rest of my life there was a reason those strong silent gunslingers always moseyed on into town on their own. All the same it was just an itty-bitty idea chased around in my bedroom one evening after tea an eensy-weensy twinge of an idea, that I could become unlike the rest by the power of me. What made that an acorn that was going to grow into an oak instead of a cress seed on damp tissue growing up into a weedy two-leafer cut down with a hundred like it just to fill a cheese and cucumber sandwich? That's what I couldn't figure out as I stepped into boots too big for me I just had to wait until I filled out.

I made a face at the thin taste of the night. I was stuck where I was alright. There was no escape from this until I was old enough to leave home. I counted my toffees. I made do. I read about the archer fish shooting water at insects resting in plant leaves, knocking them into the water where it could gobble them up. There were kids at school who were always gobbling because it made them look big and tough, they'd clench their front teeth together and draw in air then do a gob maybe on your blazer or the back of someone's blazer just passing it wasn't an old man's heaving up of green phlegm like a crane hauling it up it was a precision gob shot through the front teeth like nipping a jelly baby's head off and shooting it out with a mouth trained to be its own peashooter. I couldn't do it. If I tried to do a flob it'd come out of my mouth like trying to throw a handkerchief over a stone. I was downhearted I admit it I wanted it to go *ker-ching!* in an iron bucket. I couldn't even get a hoop over a plastic duck at the fair it was just a fiddle I was sure of it they made the hoops just too small to go over the duck no-one could do it I was sure then I'd see someone get one and I'd be sure it was it *was* a fix they knew the owner he'd given their kid a slightly

bigger hoop so of course he managed it he'd have a hard job not to hoop it over the duck with a ring that big and steadily the ring got bigger and bigger in my head and he was hooping it over rhinocerosscuzzes. I had to do something. I was falling behind. I didn't know what I was good at because nothing had showed up yet. Then I had this idea after Penny showed me how to suck the witch's nipple. 'It's sweet! It's lovely,' I said. What you do is you pull out the white flower from a white deadnettle and suck the end it's the bit the bumblebees like best that's why they clamber right down inside like they're scrambling after sweets that have fallen down between the cushions on the settee. You just put the end that you pull out to your lips like a mini flask and suck gently and wow it's lovely it's sweet. Penny said I was to tell no-one, it was our secret. Well that was good because I'd had another idea, an evil idea. Because white deadnettles don't sting, and because there was a big patch of stinging nettles on the wasteland over the road with a little area of white deadnettles in it, and because white deadnettles look just like stinging nettles if you remove the white flower, I pulled out all the white flowers and dared other kids to stand in the stinging nettles. But clever me who they insisted go first had memorised his safe area and went and stood there, no-one knowing these used to be friendly white deadnettles. And I'd

say look see they don't sting if you say the magic word *Shazam!* And to prove it I bent down and let the nettles claw and paw at my bare – I command the nettles not to sting me – arms. Come on in, it's safe, they won't sting you, these nettles are friendly. And so they did and went ouch oooh ow that hurt get some dock leaves. You're cowardly cowardly custards I said, your magic is rubbish. Well, I'd achieved something. Even so, the spell to get out was to pretend that the nettles had stung me as I was coming out. Oww it stung me and I'm rubbing my arm as if it hurts and coming out now saying give me a dock leaf give me a dock leaf ouch it got me again. So I could fit back in. Your magic didn't last very long, they said. It made them happy. I chalked up a victory on my inside wall. So much, there was going to be so much that they didn't know about me.

I rubbed my hands together in glee. I didn't really.

Kids these days they don't know they're born, dad'd say, and look over at me like I both shouldn't hear but also hear at the same time. I didn't know what to say, but it went in, and I thought about it in my bedroom later. I don't know I've been born. Okay, so I've been born. But maybe I don't know what being born is. The more

I thought about it the more I could get nowhere. I don't know I've been born. It made no sense. Somehow I got the impression it meant I was having an easy time of it. But what's that got to do with being born? I tried to work it out bit by bit. I don't know I've been born so I must think I'm yet to be born, but I have been born I just don't know it, so I'm acting as if I haven't been born yet. I'm not doing something properly. But it's not just me it's kids these days, so kids in other days, in dad's day, did know they were born, so acting properly is acting like you know you've been born. Aaaah. This was making no sense. I got myself tangled up in thinking something not worth thinking but I couldn't get myself out of it. What to do? Smash something.

Those were the days that now seem too good to be true.

Nothing really mattered back then. Oh, I thought it did, of course, but no, all a mighty fuss about nothing. Easy to see it when you're at the other end of the tunnel. So what does matter? I'll tell you, when I think of it. You'll be the first to hear. Look, I'm making a note in my notebook: tell them what it's all about the minute you get a sniff of it. They'll thank you. Oh he was made of something after all. Not just the usual stuff

and nonsense. He had something to *say*. I can see it now. Headlines in the papers! Writer has something to say! And we thought they were all on bob-a-job week or something. Look, you open the door for me I go through. That's the way it's always been with me. Open the door. I go through. Claro? I'm not mister sooty chimneysweep looking for a bar of soap from little missy in the kitchy, make it ard soap luv I'm a working man I don't want to ruin your nice pretty pink sudsy soap that you lather yourself up with and make it all gritty for yer nice titty no miss I'm a workin man I'll ave your workin man's soap don't matter none if it's all shitty yer ole man's grey lather still clinging to it just fish it out the bucket and hand over it'll do me.

I'm naturally the type who expects second best. Third best. The best wasn't made for the likes of me. Throaty rattle and gob. That's me. No time fer yer lords an ladies, lordin it over me, no time for them types. I'll keep to my own spitpath and they cun kip to their'n. I've nowt against chucking a lit match on the whole woouooooofin lot of it, me.

I'm not going anywhere. I can't even empty my piss-bucket till morning. Unless I empty it on my head and it'll only be me has have to clear up the mess.

Implies it. Course it does. Just don't be so sure. That's why I'm not going into *those* sort of details just yet. It can all be wiped. Blackouts see to that. Hang on to my every word if you want to. Just be prepared to discard them, and yer fancy theories. Then we'll get along just fine. A mirror talking back at ya.

Incarcerated with the telly. Still haven't seen a kooka-burra but I know its laugh.

The good reputation he had acquired over the years as a man of sound principles collapsed like a poorly erected marquee.

He gave thought to having some convenient means of self-destruction handy, as if it ought to be a commonly found item in anyone's repertoire of ordinary household goods. He had daydreams about hanging himself and then noticing to his annoyance as the chair was toppling over that he had left the curtains open, having meant to close them, and so having to pull up on the rope with his hands with all his might, assuming such were possible, to unnoose himself. It was indeed a genuine daydream, not concocted consciously in any way, and he realised he didn't even know whether to expect asphyxiation or an instantaneous broken neck. He should do research

before he no longer had the means even to do that. He felt like a canary in a cage with the door open. He didn't know what to do for the best so he just sat there.

A man alone in his room surrounded by a dim terror he can barely make out. This was the way it looked like the days were going to go. He couldn't recall giving up hope, but wherever he looked he couldn't find it, like a treasure thrown out with the rubbish. It is easily done. Who has not had that peculiar absentmindedness whereby they put their spoonful of sugar not into their cup of tea but into the bin, only on going into the habitual arm motion of stirring noticing the absurd thing they have done. Thus, hope was disposed of, routinely, unnoticed until it was missed. And now the madness he had often joked about and indulged as a source of creativity an artist would cherish, took on an altogether more surly demeanour. It had stopped playing games, it meant him harm. How easy it would have been to give in to this, like a frightened child in the shadow of a towering gardener angry his sunflowers have been messed with, but pleased to have an excuse to throw the child into the shed and see how he likes being messed with. But fuck it, stick the fucking fork into his goolies and run you little bastard run run for your life. And so, even encroaching madness, though momentarily upsetting, could be given a run for its

money with a bit of spunk. He smiled to himself, it was the first bright thing he had thought all day.

But more than this, it was a glimpse of his old self again, and that was enough to put paid to the whole of the dark cloud that had enshrouded him for . . . it didn't matter how long, and that was another of his discoveries, that years in a nightmare don't mean much after they've disappeared in a puff of smoke. And he sat there thinking what a charming and generous fellow he was. When he stood up, he was a little tottery on his feet, and a passing thought reminded him of the ordeal he had just been through, but the next passing thought was of scones and a pot of tea, and he did not let the darkness gain another foothold for the rest of the night. But he knew it would be back. And all the watchfulness in the world was no protection against a darkness that knew it was invited. All he had to figure out was why, apart from the usual reasons.

A sorcerer is supposed to have no moral conscience about his tampering with the world, and yet would it be a surprise for you to hear that most often I gather myself into a little ball of sunlight to consider every matter into which I am about to interfere? My camouflage

colour is bright light, blinding light, I am a sudden reflection on car chrome, a plane glinting angled to the sun. Every chance ball of fiery bright light is me thinking, sparkling something over before I act, and act decidedly, like telling two tales at once, one that has inhabitants, another that has none, that is a stone travelling through the air that has not yet reached its target, but will surely crush it in when it does.

In agony, legs buckling, a wisdom it is too late to acquire fending off a stone coming crashing into a skull, a safety net that snaps at one corner and the crowd put up a Oooooooooo! They know something's happened before they know what has happened, they feel it like a giddy bull will charge the first thing it can gore without thinking what it might be, it doesn't matter what it is, a need to kill, if one is about to be killed. To make it seem right. And clutching a bag of apples the man falls his legs giving way beneath him, he falls to the ground with a bloody head and a stone snuggling up in his brain. What to do? What to do? He lets go of the apples of course, they roll every which way, some under passing cars bump squash bump squash. And he is down this bull of a man. That'll teach him. And the blood pools and his eyeballs float away on it a day out for peeled lychees they fall out of his skull sockets as if nothing was holding them in, they were just resting there like

tiny ball-bearings in the clown's eyes in a child's tilt game. I pick up an apple and bite it. No-one sees me I am the sun shining in chrome. And I fork him onto the dungheap still shivering with terror. Then I weave my way away like a shadow snake through the crowd, miles to go. It is nothing more to me than treading on an ant on the pavement is to you. What audacity, but it is my privilege.

So I became an evil sort of person, in ordinary terms, evil in my thoughts, unrelenting. I threw stones as a child, at trees, at windows in abandoned factories.

Why do I want this kind of momentum? There is an interest in launching oneself off in strange directions, playing with wishes one does not ordinarily entertain.

What made Vlad the Impaler play around so with impaling? One day you make a pile of small pebbles like a hill, the next you pull the wings off craneflies, the next you receive a package of stamps through the post there are far too many Magyar Posta and you get angry and throw blue ink at the wallpaper. You feel like killing someone, but something holds you back, of course it does. So you dream it instead, you fantasise. You take that bully's head and you hold his eyes near the sharp railings and press down his head. You command sewer rats to climb drainpipes and gnaw out the brains of babies in their cots. It is normal growing up, isn't

it? Guilty of everything, but we've done nothing. And you throw tomatoes at passersby from high buildings. You've seen the smashed eggs on the pavement along by the multistorey car park. You look up to see if the little fuckers are there now, or whether it's old. You read about a nail falling from the top of the Empire State Building accelerating and accelerating into a sharp missile that is going to cave in a skull. Simple as that. And you'd rather be chucking than get chucked at. Same with shit.

You have to take sides. Rather perpetrator than victim. It only seems a choice between those two. Doesn't seem you can be neither, you're not wise enough for that. You're only a fucking kid. What do you expect? You still think you can fly if you try hard enough but you're not going to try that hard are you, you not going to fling yourself into that. Save it for the dream world. Run around like a screeching Spitfire seagull thing put your hand in your gob and wriggle it around make it smaller and work your way up to your eyes and pop them out with pushing fingers look you've got two fingers wiggling about out of your eye slits doesn't it look good eyes dangling down your cheek like silverskin onions threaded with string like conkers. And you sneeze with the first pollen in the air and blow your face off it just shoots off and splats against the wall.

Always better when swapping sweets to keep a bit of a hold on yours and then when you're swapping them you snatch his out of his hand and keep hold of yours and say ner ner ner-ner ner I've got both you've got none I've got both you've got none.

What is there to know about life when you're twelve? You haven't done much. You don't even know what there is to do. You stick matchsticks in your ears to dig out wax you drink tea out of the saucer like gran you make things out of cardboard toilet-roll insides you stick your head in plastic bags to see if it's true you can die you bodge holes in things you wee on the carpet you try to stand on your head you gambol down grassy slopes you break things and have to cover it up you pull your shoelaces into a knot you can't undo you do a big cack that won't flush away and you panic about it. If there's anything else, I missed it.

She asked me the other day: 'What planet are you on?' Normally this question wouldn't present any difficulties, I know the standard answer, but it was my natural hesitation that rather impressed her. And the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't really give an answer. And all the while I was missing that she didn't

actually require an answer. I thought to myself, so, if this is the way it is going to be, I am going to stray ever further away from the ability to put square pegs in square holes and round ones in round holes, I am just going to stare at the whole set-up like I've just arrived and think my hosts mad, while they are drawing rather rude assumptions about my capabilities. Look, just give me a minute to think about what you require of me, I'm sure I can work it out, but no, they judge you on the simplest of things and never become aware of the more complex matters they could test you on. But, never mind, in time they will see that I was right, that the numberless worlds I find myself tumbling through only to arrive momentarily at theirs by the simple trick of someone snapping his fingers in front of my eyes . . . I feel like telling them, I'm a traveller. I am not in my natural environment here. Square peg bang bang round hole. Can they tell if someone is not playing along? That's it, a way out, surly indifference for ten minutes. Wait until they leave me alone. Then do it. Off they go. Square peg square hole round peg round hole star peg star hole. Hell, some spaceships aren't this complex. I'd told you I'd get it. Well, I didn't tell you. Well, *you* I told, it's them I didn't tell. Oh god, bring me a cup of tea if you're gone that long.

What might happen. We're obsessed by it, what might happen. Why, all manner of things could happen, and who am I in the middle of all this, a fly, that's who, a tiny little fly. An octopus feeling all around him tentatively his tentacles exploding one after the other, fucked for a direction. There should be more red in the world then we wouldn't be so shocked by blood. Ladybirds and pillar boxes and berries. Why would I want to preserve this tiny bit of snot of a brain, if I were to believe that this is me, then I'm too fucking small. Me in a dream and me woken up. Some fine communication going on there. That's just like a string stretched taut between two tin cans that never worked as a telephone when we were kids. Tin cans attached to each other by string thrown away all over the place, going rusty. Bastards. Bastards! Oh stop it with the shouting in the street will you, give it a rest. There's a sandy coloured cat made a den in my bramble bush. He's a nice cat. He has young teeth. He likes me. He comes to see me. He didn't think much of soya milk poured out on a saucer for him, but it was all I had. Sorry puss. I've forgotten what I'm waiting for. I just get on with the day now. There doesn't have to be a lot. Hard to believe a person of such ungraceful

movement could have poked his prying fingers through the ricepaper screen. Tumbling through space at night locked away from the world.

There's a man who looks very like him who begs in the street with chalk drawings he's made on the pavement. He never actually begs, it's just a cardboard box for coins if you like his art. He's the kind of stranger you want to get to know, or I would like to get to know anyhow, you might find him off-putting, be all fingers and thumbs, not know what to say. Well I don't know what to say either. And the fact is I'm not going to introduce myself, I was just saying, he was that kind of geezer, one you look at and think, there's a lot going on in there. But he's a wall man, he's a stone brick wall, rising up high, and you ain't never gonna climb that wall. He never looks at anyone, he doesn't sit there long when he's finished his drawing, he likes the coins to come in the making, not on the finish. It's hard to say what the drawings are of exactly, geometrical often, like a kaleidoscope pattern, but with people or beings clambering out, emerging from twelve or more different dimensions into one new dimension, fragmented people who have their lives stretched out in many universes simultaneously, touching this one for just a moment in a forgotten flown thought while sipping coffee staring out of the window of a coffee

house at the street, at him, drawing down there. And he looks at you for a moment as if he's done a Svengali on you, and then he's away, he disappears, turning on his heel and joining the crowd of pavement walkers without looking back, as if he was never there, and you just know you've crawled up out of that picture of his on the pavement, it's a multicoloured manhole, he's brought you into this world, but that and many other fragments of thoughts are carried away as quickly as he is until it was just a passing thought a daydream slipping away – like a snake between stones.

I've found several dead reptiles clustered around the back door of late, I don't mean frogs or toads I mean geckos and skinks that kind of reptile and I know they don't live here so at first I wondered whether next-door had lizards for pets and they'd died and they'd rudely chucked them over the fence like that wanker who used to live next door when I was a kid and he threw his condoms out of his bedroom window on top of our shed. Well I didn't want to go round and ask whether they'd been slinging dead reptiles over the fence did I, how do you begin that conversation especially if they haven't they're really gonna look at

you like you've cracked then aren't they so I tried to look for some alternative explanation like maybe my back door was an elephant's graveyard and these lizards had trekked some distance to find me and die they'd used supersensory abilities or the positions of the stars or whatever abilities lizards may have that we don't know about and can't even guess to get here like maybe I was emitting a homing beacon for lizards ready to die and they'd made a pilgrimage to me. I was frankly disturbed by it. Because none of these explanations was any good. I buried them in the garden anyway and wrote 'Here lie the lizards' on a wooden lollystick and stuck it in the ground to remind me not to dig it up to sow parsley seeds.

What is there, after all, that needs to be said, that wants to be said? We may as well fold up the distance and put it in our pocket. We've abandoned other plans. The one thing we can't bite is our own face I know I've tried I've sat there and tried, until someone notices me that is and I become self-conscious. There are things to find out I am sure but I've had it with finding out. I could say a prayer dear god do you remember when we played in the big field behind our house do you remember when we grew tomatoes together do you remember when we hurled stones and picked up lollies off the ground that we'd just dropped and there was

grit and grime and hair and feathers all over it and I cried and cried and you cried too do you remember that god when we cried and cried because of the ruined lolly – I dropped it but you pushed me. And I picked it up and hurled it as far as I could which wasn't very far at all I was never any good at throwing and do you remember when mum made us eat our greens and said they were good for us but I didn't believe it and you didn't either you said this cabbage is boiled to buggery and didn't want any. And you said you made the birds and the trees and I said you liar you're a fibber you are always fibbing and so you said well I didn't make the birds but I made their chirps I made their songs and I stopped and thought well that's possible you could have done that I suppose that's not so hard to do and I said well I made this hole in the ground and I made the buds burst open and you said no you didn't I did that and I said you day'nt you're always telling lies you are why can't you tell the truth for once in your life and you said did did did I made the buds open into flowers I did that did did did so snob off with your ice cold hands I'm making daisy chains I'm not playing with you any more and you went off in a huff you did and I said aw come back but you didn't come back you went off on your own so I went off on my own too and you never came back not even when I needed you I'm not

friends with you any more if you made my tongue you made me say this so you bear that in mind you no-good grownup's god loafing around in your glasshouse and painting your fancy iron gate and your mile-long drive I walk by your house every day but I never see you but I know what you're doing you're got your feet up slicing cucumber on a board on your lap I know what you get up to when you take your coat off and come in of an evening you just make sliced cucumber in malt vinegar and dip your bread in it and you don't like any salt and pepper in it neither. So god, don't you miss me sometimes I don't miss you it's true but then I'm not god I play with my toys on my own my god-given toys and do you remember that time we saw a dwarf for the first time and I said well did you make him that little man-boy and you said I can't remember and I said you're awful you are you never remember when you should remember you're always pretending not to remember and stop putting your colds hands on me will you blow on them warm them up and look is that a maple leaf or a sycamore leaf and you said I don't know I mean I can't remember but I made it that's mine and so I said did you make ghosts because there's a haunted house along here and I bet you're too scared to go in it with me and you said you can't go in there an evil lady lives in there and she'll catch you and pull your brains out of

your nostrils and fry it up for a tripe supper and you'll be walking around like a caterpillar all the squish has gone out of the arse-end of you will you will you'll see and I said you're a scaredy-cat you're scared of your own shadow you are you sing out of your bottom you do you're a fartypants you're all of everything and nothing's in the bag when you open it up and look inside you're a silver sixpence in a Christmas pudding I break a tooth on and the tooth fairy won't take it you're always sliding down the slide face first you think you're hard you do but I think you're a proper softie you can't even tie your own shoelaces you can't even stick glitter on a clown's face you get the glue everywhere you should be hung in a sewer like lesley whittle so don't tell me the proper way to eat an orange because I'll eat it any way I like. You've got udders like a cow but only bats come to drink the milk you're always nodding your head like a donkey and I'm going to make a clock out of your skull and when I grow up I'll float I'll walk like I'm held by elastic so there god that's my prayer to you.

Some days are like a barrel of water, a few molecules evaporate a few are added. A barrel of water standing there. A mouse hides behind it until the cat has gone. A

fat and bulbous barrel of water, damp green in patches, welcoming the rain, doesn't matter if it seeps over the top, fulfilling itself in staying full, water right up to the edge. Doesn't do much. Holds the water. What's to do? Another satisfying day of staying full. But hot sunny days the level goes down. Not so nice. Not so fulfilled today, but accepting. The rain will come. A quiet drizzle in the night may be enough. Why yes it was. Look! In the morning, a big fat bulbous barrel of water full to the top. The barrel looks happy. It had to happen. Day after day, guardian of the level. Not begrudging a magpie wants to perch and sip, bows his head and sips bows his head and sips. Doesn't begrudge the sparrows either, but scared for them, scared they will fall in and tumble tumble tumble through the gelid water all the way to the bottom. Little birds may unbalance themselves bending down to sip. Stick to the dish between the herb pots. You can paddle in that if you fall in. I'm Mr Big Fat Bulbous Barrel, I look after the water. When I go to Heaven and talk among the other barrels none will ever have held as much as me. I can barely remember being made. All I remember is one day opening my eyes in this garden when the water reached the top, it flicked a little light on when the water touched the rim, my eyes opened on this garden and I thought, I've stood here some time but only now

am I aware I'm standing here. Look there is green moss growing on my sides, I must have stood here some time. I'm going to stay awake now and guard the water, the rainwater that has filled me up. Thank you rain, the barrel said. And the rain said, You're welcome. Do you suppose a man comes and takes scoopfuls of me to water the plants on dry days? Well that's okay, that must be my purpose, to save the rainwater for the garden. And it is a beautiful garden isn't it Mr Mouse? I like being a big fat bulbous barrel standing here in the garden. I shall do this all my life. I can't remember being a tree. I suppose I must have been. And before that an acorn. Ah, I am an oak barrel, I have remembered that much. I have more important work to do now than waving my arms around in the gale. I am a rain barrel. I can't be moved. I am too heavy. It's not a bad life, being a rain barrel.

I tried to untie my belly-button like a shoelace that's gone into a tight knot. Couldn't do it. Stupid idea. If you could do that you'd just whoooosh off like a balloon you'd blown up that'd slipped out of your fingers before you could tie it. I tried to pick it out with a knitting needle tried to pry it free, get a bit of a loop up you'd

have something to pull on it was obviously a knot so even hard knots come undone and I wondered whether I'd unravel. And the clouds had faces like yeah sure the clouds had faces you fucking stupid kid with your fucking stupid ideas and yer mum's arse is like a baboon's and look at you you lollop all over the playground like an orang-utan you hide oranges in your shorts and expect no-one to notice what kind of clodhead are you with your toy aeroplanes and your sock up on the end of your bed at Christmas I bet when you take a cack it comes out with a rat-a-tat-tat and a splosh and goes sideways all over the wall. Look at your hair johnny dirtball it's rat's tails it's got . . . you think you're a cat you do you go off hunting flies in the long grass we've all seen you chasing flies you think you're a cat you do your mum hasn't even got a washing machine you haven't got a fridge you haven't even got a phone we've seen your dada in the phone box outside the betting shop you think we haven't noticed he wouldn't be phoning from there if you had a phone at home so we know see we know all about you you haven't even got a proper haircut your mum did that with a pudding bowl. Did not! I go to Tony's he's the best barber around you just have nits like you a nit your mum has bandages on her elephant legs if they get any bigger they'll explode and you'll come back from school one afternoon and she'll

be standin there on bones and bandages and jellymeat will be all over the walls like the stuff you scoop out of catfood tins with marrowbone and it goes plop every spoonful and your mum's legs will be plopping from the walls I think I heard a bang just was it your mum's legs exploding when you get in for tea it'll be legs for tea don't forget to keep the dog in the yard or he'll snap your mum's legbones in two gnawing on em and she'll slump down to the floor and you'll have a midget mum stomping around on stumps with grit and fagbutts sticking to the red slime oozing out of her knees when she goes to town to do her shopping and you'll end up having to pull her along in a go-cart and it'll be hard work because she's so fat and your dad'll leave and go off with a dolly bird because he's had enough of Stumpy and the starlings will swoop down and drop worms and centipedes into your hair and the blackbirds will spit earwigs into your eyes and when you try to pull em out their little pincers will pull your eyeballs out.

So there.

I was playing on an anthill when it caved in and I fell in headfirst into ant city and they were all in my hair and coming out of their tunnels in the ant capital of the

world to get me to find me to destroy me a little boy who didn't mean any harm he was just playing that's all leave me alone you ants you should know I'm just a kid and if you don't leave me alone I'll kick you to bits kick you in the head and they were going down the tunnels in my ears heading for my brain they'd make a new capital city there and when they asked at school what was the capital city of the ant world someone would say it's in his head sir it's in scruffbag's head sir. And I fell and I fell deeper and deeper into the ant world I was falling into a pit and the ants were jeering me and saying get out of our city you human fiend and I thought maybe an ant was chewing bits of my brain and making me think this it was taller than me this anthill and the ants bit at me I don't know why I climbed on top of it I thought it was stronger I thought it'd hold my weight I didn't mean to collapse it it must have taken them years to build it and I ran and I ran shaking the ants out of my hair and brushing them off my legs some smearing into squashed berries.

Sometimes I look about, and see the pattern in everything. One of those great big silent peaceful moments in which the tide of life comes right up to your doorstep

and you say hello how are you today and you're all cheery and the world is smiling at you. You stop what you're doing for a moment, in my case driving nails into a potato to give it little nail legs and I couldn't decide on six or four so I did the corners first so there'd be room in the middle for two more if I decided on six and yes YES I know I KNOW a potato doesn't have corners but I couldn't think how else to describe where I put the nails, just where you'd put four nails if you wanted to give a potato four legs and leave room for two more in the middle and then I thought as I only have six nails I should save the other two for antennae oh so I'd decided this was a nail-potato-insect you see how things become clear that weren't clear at the start as if you know how things are going to turn out even before you begin. Ideally I wanted antennae like dandelion clocks but they're too delicate and, hang on, does this potato nail insect even have a head? Where's its head? And maybe it should have a nail tail. So anyway, I was driving nails into a potato with a hammer when my ribcage tickled and the chuckles got into me and mum said 'what's got your funny bone?' and I was laughing too much to say. I think I'd just rigged up a contraption in my head whereby a roll of carpet unrolled and rolled down the stairs and knocked a broomhandle which toppled over and hit a bucket of snowflakes which fell all over me.

And I remembered running with other boys to pick up lumps of coal after the coal lorry came down nan-and-gramp street and I took the coal in to gramp and he put it in the coal scuttle and gave me a washer to go and spend with the fairies down the bottom of the garden they had a shop and they sold dock leaves and pebbles and if you were very lucky they might bring out a shell or a bit of broken teacup with a blue pattern on it. You left your washer under the big rock which you could lift up a bit pushing it with your hand and you'd take what you wanted and sometimes I'd lift up the big rock even though I couldn't see anything I wanted today and there pressed halfway into the soil being protected by Squirmy Worm who went away when he saw me was a BLUE MARBLE all shiny and new and I plucked it out of the ground and rubbed the dirt off with my finger and thumb and left my washer under the big rock and as I turned round to come back into the house I saw gramp smiling at me round the curtains.

I was lying in bed with Emily. We said we'd be together forever and live in a stone cottage over a rushing river, and it would be ever so nice, and there'd be a waterwheel and an orchard. And I would sit in the garden painting

and Emily would take the German shepherds for a walk and we'd throw sticks for them throw them into the orchard and laugh together when they brought back a fallen apple because they couldn't find the stick. And the waterwheel would turn and turn and I'd fish off the bridge the cottage was built on fish from our own cottage down into our own rushing river. And we lay there in bed and made plans for our life together. We never spoke about her husband Joe, and the wonderful life they'd planned together since they were at school. I don't know what their wonderful life together consisted of. And Emily told me her grandparents owned a whole valley in Italy and they had made an olive grove on the side of the mountain. It was wonderful, we would spend our summers in Italy and make love in the olive grove on the side of the mountain and we'd sit at a big table outdoors eating chunks of warm Italian bread freshly baked dipping it in olive oil we had pressed ourselves and balsamic vinegar, although I don't think I knew what balsamic vinegar was then I came to the joys of balsamic vinegar late. And I thought we'd inherit the olive grove and the whole valley in Italy and we'd spend our time between the olive grove and our stone cottage over the rushing river where I fished off the bridge and the waterwheel would go clank clank all day long and be as peaceful as a silent night lulling you into sleep

with its night-time clank clank rush water rush. And the brown trout would hide in the waterweeds and I'd sit and paint and Emily would ride her horse in our own paddock and in the winter the snow would be little goblins in the air and the fishes would come up to feed on them as they slid into the water. Oh and there'd be a small pond with frogs and toads and lily pads with the waterwheel going clank clank rush water rush and we'd look into each other's eyes and be so in love. And we told each other these things lying in bed in my little flat in Walthamstow, Joe crying his eyes out at home a note at the top of the stairs and the cat staring at him wondering what's wrong big fellah? Why have your eyes all gone to papier-mâché dribbled down your cheeks? And she fed the cat before she left, left forever, for the dream life that was calling her, for the love that had formed in necking in her car of an evening but not wanting to go any further, not yet, to see if she could hold off going any further, and I thought it wise too, but we couldn't help it our love grew so strong it could not live without her sitting on my lap sliding up and down my cock in the kitchen, but it could wait, to see if it didn't happen. And we were so full of joy lying there in bed talking about our stone cottage and the waterwheel going clank clank rush water rush. We were so happy we would have buried

corpses under floorboards we would have dug holes in the floor for torsos and concreted them over. We would have catapulted away the vultures with stone after stone drawn back in the elastic and fired off another another. We would have made friends with all the snakes in the world to have our stone cottage we wound each other around our little fingers to keep us close we would have said yes that's lovely when a cheap topaz was brought into the house. And that was so funny when a banana was peeled and it was already sliced inside. Read it in a magic book when I was a kid, see you do it like this and I showed her you get a needle and thread and you sew it through the ribs of the banana and then you pull the thread and slice the banana with the thread and you do it all up the banana and then when you peel it it's already sliced. Or something like that you really need the diagram.

And then she ran off with an Italian and took with her the stone cottage over the bridge with the waterwheel going clank clank rush water rush and the olive grove on an Italian mountain and I was left thinking it's safer to want nothing I should want nothing in future if I don't want anything I can't get hurt but I liked the dreams we had for our future and sometimes I sit under a tree in that orchard thinking about building the pond for the frogs and toads and lily pads and wondering whether

I buried Emily under the concrete some days it seems like I killed her and then I remember I only wanted to kill her but I never had the chance because I never saw her again. I think.

The flies are on it, it's shit.

That girl has sticky eyes for me they're turning in their sockets like compass needles towards a magnet it's giving me a bulge in my pants she says my fly's undone we're early for class waiting outside she says my fly's undone and rather than look down I say I don't believe you and she looks down at my fly and says it is your fly's open but I know if I look it's like the bulge will get bigger and I don't think I want that but I like her looking down and I keep looking in her eyes and say it's not open you're kidding me I'm not going to look and honestly I don't think it is open she just wants me to look down there and part of me does want to look down there so we've both looked down there and it feels good to have this between us before anyone else arrives for class she's the girl I think about in bed at night and I wonder if she

knows that but I don't know how to take this further so I just act like I've always acted but now in unfamiliar territory the first bit of sexy conversation with a girl at school. If my fly is undone not that I think it is that means I'll have to touch myself down there with her watching have to stroke my fingers there fumbling for the zip and there's already a bit of a bulge and I wonder whether she can see that she acts all cool like she's just pointing out that I've dropped my hankie or something she's just saying, your fly's undone, doesn't mean anything, except it means she's been looking at where my dick is and I like that and I start to wonder whether my fly *is* undone and if it is undone not that I'm going to look down then that means I'm standing there in front of her with my fly open and I'm not sure what to feel about that is that embarrassing or is that sexy can't tell yet can't be sure this is new territory and I'm still exploring not had a girl look where my dick is before so we stand there for ten minutes her saying your fly's undone it *is* undone why don't you look you'll see then and me saying it's not undone I don't need to look and I'm looking straight in her eyes and she's looking straight in mine except for when she looks down to where my dick is and says it *is* undone and I say it's not. And I'm pretty sure by now that it's not but then I glance down and see that she's right and without thinking I just

do myself up and I see her looking at me feeling where my dick is as I do my fly up and I'm fumbling about trying to find the start of my zip and she's watching and I can feel it's grown a bit and the tip of it has found its way out of the Y of my Y-fronts and I don't want her to see that and I don't want to catch it in my zip when I pull it up either and I don't want to look down while I'm pulling it up I want to see what she's doing and I don't think this moment is going to last forever and ever in my memory and eventually I have my zip pulled up and I'm saying oh you're right it *is* undone and she says I told you so and she's looking where my dick is a long time and I'm looking at her looking where my dick is like all along we had to get to the moment when I was looking at her looking at where my dick is and then waiting waiting forever for her eyes to come back to mine like the magnet's pulled her compass eyes back to me and now she's looking into my eyes and I'm looking into hers and she's got this expression saying I've just been looking where your dick is and I've got this expression saying I've just been feeling where my dick is while you were watching and we half-smile a smile of embarrassment but then she shakes it off and says I told you your fly was open.

‘Teck yer coat off yow woe feel the benefit.’ Gramp’s proud of his roaring fire.

I’m struggling got my arm stuck in the sleeve he says, ‘Come ere yow great lummocking looby.’ He stands me in roasting position before the fire tugging my coat off, says to mum, ‘Ay it gewin a treat, it’s roarin up that chimibly a darn sight better since we had the sweep down. Ay he growin tall! A good yard of pump water this un.’

And you know what, life was like a great big scoopful of trifle had been taken out of it you never got long to see how pretty it looked with the hundreds and thousands and silver balls sprinkled all over it. Every morning when I got up and walked around life was already dirty and used, it had been trampled on, and what I couldn’t work out was whether this was just something that happens in growing up or whether the world had changed itself. Or was it me who felt dirty and used from the moment I got up? And so I cast my mind back to see what happened along the way. I was the kind of boy who when he was following a long fence had to follow it all the way round. To me a fence didn’t say keep out a fence said find the way in,

find where it's not so tall or a slat is loose, get in, see what they don't want you to see. I liked houses with tall fences all the way round that had big scary notices nailed on posts where the paint was red and running like dripping blood because they'd been so impatient to get their sign up they hadn't even waited for the paint to dry they'd banged it into a hole in the ground straight away and the paint had run like tears down its cheek and I thought these people who put that sign up must be very scary people or at least wanted you to think they were very scary. When I saw a sign saying KEEP OUT! I'd naturally form a question in my mind: Why? And then: Why should I? And then: Who do you think you are to fence off a piece of the world for yourself like that? And it would make me want to throw stones and hope they would go smash tinkle tinkle a cold frame in the garden or a greenhouse. And people would write things on their fence and I thought it was good the way it is good if a rolls-royce gets scratched when it's parked where poor people live the way I still want to spit at cars like that when they pass by in the street or I want to walk out in front of them and force them to stop like a beetle defying a wheelbarrow. I get angry seeing expensive cars and hope they have accidents when they're driving fast. The world makes me want to screw it into a ball like a piece of paper you

can't get a drawing to come out right on and throw it away. So I think back to chasing balls down alleyways and smiling at rabbits and knocking apples off trees with a stick and think, that was fun, where can I do that now, what's fun *now*? And I put aside my harrumphs for a whole afternoon playing with a visiting cat in the garden, the world a place away from me. I have my invisible KEEP OUT! sign and am forever looking out of the window at people passing by there goes an eastern european who looks like a caveman there goes a cunt with two pit bulls there's that kid I remember playing with toy cars in the road standing outside smoking and looking tough and I think I should draw my curtains but if I do that everyone will think I'm watching porno movies all day they won't realise I am an artist giving expression to my art, mind you better that they don't realise that. Cunts! You're all cunts! I don't care about any of you. Sometimes I'd like to be nice but I think the way I'm turning out is into a bad bastard I'm like a mouldy orange you're just not going to eat any of it cheese you can scrape the mould off an orange no way and mould goes with cheese a bit not that I've seen any mould on cheese that isn't supposed to be there not any more did that stop happening when we got a fridge? The thing is, there's this great emptiness in the world that I'm going all around the big fuck-off fence of, I

want to know what's in there I want to know why I hear nothing when I lob a stone over like a plop that doesn't come when you drop a stone down a well because you just happen to have got the well that leads all the way down to HELL. It's just dark down there, and no plop comes. Maybe there's a bed of feathers down there, no water. But I keep thinking there's a world fenced off from me and I'm tracing its contours and I won't rest until I finish, and when I finish I'll just be dead, whatever that amounts to. I'm staring into it, though, I'm sure I am even when I don't realise it, staring right into it I am. And every time a squeaky gate goes I'm turning my head to see, see where that came from, who's going in or out. And when a car alarm goes off I shout: *Cunt!*

I'm like this piece of foil that's been screwed up tight and I'm opening it up and smoothing it out on the tabletop with my hand this is a nice bit of foil I'll get those crinkles out I'll smooth it out, and then I think oh fuck it away with it why can't I just shoot off to another galaxy right now I'm just about browned off with this one that's what I want I'm expressing it at last just squeeze me out of the universe and shoot me through a Perspex tube to somewhere else and I'll start again there start again with trying to find out who I am and where I am and what is this all about, because that's my job isn't it? C'mon, done this place.

About 5PM the flies came. Thousands of them, in direct view. They came as the sun was going down over the ocean. The wires on the telegraph poles were six inches thick with them, as far as I could see. They settled on them at first, and nowhere else. The wires sagged heavy with them, waiting.

The beaches, I knew, were full of the washed-up carcasses. I say I knew, I had heard. I did not wish to go to the sea wall to see for myself. The smell was sufficient, and I supposed it was that that had brought the flies. Waiting, I surmised, for the low tide to fully reveal their bounty.

I was taken by the curious appearance of the telegraph wires, swelled to six inches thick. You might not have guessed they were flies, had you not seen the black clouds swarming in. Could they have known the dozens if not hundreds of conversations coursing through their mass were about themselves?

In time, their sickly drone rose to the sky and headed down. These were not bluebottles or greenbottles, I had been told, but of an amber metallic sheen. I stood around waiting to see them lift off the wires.

It tickled me to think of so many iridescent reflective bodies suddenly holding themselves against the sun. To match themselves to its final embers.

Turkish delight is cut into cubes and so is fudge. And there's sugar cubes as well. And I'm trying to think what other sorts of small cubes there are around that size. There's not much else. Things become important for a moment, and then they aren't any more. There's lots of things I could be thinking about. Things you hang from hooks in the wall, bracken, that very special sort of tissue paper that valuable things are wrapped in. I still remember men in three-piece suits standing around outside pubs just before 12 o'clock Sunday lunchtime consulting their fob watches horrible brown suits that went with whippets and pigeons with the racing form sticking out of their jacket pocket and the scarlet fever ambulance tumbling down the road to pick up another dying kid who wouldn't be rolling his wooden hoop down these pavements no more making it turn and turn with his stick and then, at last, the big heavy bolts on the pub doors drawn back bottom and top and in they came and the kids fishing with magnets on strings lowered down into drains sprawled out on the carless

roads and the horse and cart going past nan and gramp's and if the horse did his sugar outside and gramp was home and saw it through the nets he'd be out in the road in a flash with a shovel shovelling it up for the garden. And I'd be out in the road with another kid touching fists and chanting one potato two potato three potato four, five potato six potato seven potato more. Ah, the memories are getting distant, they're doing the wrong end of the telescope. They are looking like dry leaves that will be brushed up and put on a bonfire, they are like flaky scales nothing keeping them adhering to the mind but the little patch they've always rested, like yellowed sellotape that's lost its stick and stays on torn paperback spines only out of habit, any day now you could aimlessly catch it with a fingernail and its thirty years will come to an end. And what does any of it matter eh? We may as well invent ourselves a bucketload of memories if having memories is important to us. Yes, when I was a molecatcher . . . when I was a hobo . . . when I was a clown . . . I'll just sit here a while, a tramp at the side of the road. You want to give me a penny but you don't want to touch my hand you let it fall into my filthy dirty palm. The little pop of hydrogen a match to the end of the test-tube. The lightning flash. I keep coming back to this fudge, cubes of it, the way it takes an impression of my fingerprints. I forgot to get

off at my stop and am now just going along with the journey. This is all new to me, around here. No, I tell a lie, fresh parsley in wet fish shops, sawdust on butcher's floors. Just crumbs in the biscuit tin. Ooooh that awful sound of a fly sizzle-cracked on the ultraviolet lamp, was that really an advance on the dangling strips of green flypaper with thirty flies stuck to it like currants? Those shrunken old women I didn't even come up to the brooch of who'd ruffle my hair and say oooo int ee luvley and give me half a crown.

There'll come glimpses, naturally.

Something suddenly flung on a fire, right in front of your eyes quick quick snatch it snatch it at least with your eyes if you cannot get it out of the flames with your hands.

You have to understand there's a certain comfort in this cotton wool. I'm freer to change direction once I've pulled my legs in through your ears. Made myself at home. Look, any second, we could be kids in crap dress-up Dalek suits *Ex-term-innate! Ex-term-innate!* We could be sorting through a Lucky Bag seeing what we can find. A flying saucer with kayli in it. Looking in the window of Martins at all the different nails. D'you think he'll let us buy one of each? That's the grass that's a lamppost that's a bike that's a shopping bag that's the pavement that's the road that's a dog that's a traffic

island that's the library. So that's what I've got, that's what I've got when I empty my pockets out. I'm right in the middle of it and I don't know how to stand back.

I am speaking with a head of crazy voices. Howling dogs provide the punctuation. Dad polishing a queue of black shoes lined up on newspaper. I am wrapping up a parcel of quivering bloody words here for sure. I have to stop, before I take a lunge at myself and pull out the stuffing from my belly like straw from under Golly's waistcoat searching always searching and destroying in the process. Just hang on, hang in there, and the frights will pass, and the Brussels will boil to buggery while you're thinking steaming up the kitchen windows another lost it lost it all Sunday.

A hand like mine that can stretch out into another dimension and grab a handful of flies and just throw them droning into your room, just to say, that's a little thing.

To live and not plan. The glorious truth of merely being here, pursuing echoes. Long gone the orange glow against the night sky when they tipped the steel. The pounding of the drop hammer. Trying to watch Jimmy Clitheroe with the TV aerial held aloft moving

it around the room to get a picture, which comes when it's placed on top of a pile of books in the corner or at an angle in the bowl of walnuts and brazils. Settling down in the armchair of the three-piece suite only to have to get up again to fiddle with the vertical hold, eventually giving the set a good bang on top with the flat of your hand and smiling it did the trick. Has it ever been terribly important to remember the taste of a turnip? The ruddy face of the rag-and-bone man putting in my little donny green balloons to blow up, happy with his bag of old woollen cardigans given to me by mum and dad to take down to him, the horse whinnying and steaming out his nostrils his eyes in blinkers. Sometimes he'd give me a conker on a bootlace and wink, That's an eighter son, now you go and make it into a niner.

Sometimes I think, it doesn't matter whether anything ever happened, it doesn't matter whether I'm right or wrong, all that matters is that peacock butterfly just settled on the concrete, all that matters is that I don't move and scare him away too soon, before I've had a good look at him, because he's come to visit me, as things do.

The heart and soul of a simple-minded fellow. Then it fluttered off and came back, to exactly the same spot on the concrete, and I said aloud: 'What is it you like

about that spot?’ In my head I imagined the butterfly saying, ‘Oh, I don’t know, I just like it I suppose.’

I learnt an important lesson when I was about five. The infant school took delivery of a set of brand new large wooden toys shiny and varnished and looking splendid and as soon as I saw the teacher taking them out of the boxes and onto the floor I excitedly exclaimed: ‘I’m having the crane!’ It was a wonderful thing, easily the best. Better than the jeep or the truck. And I didn’t really mean I was having it and no-one else was having it I was simply expressing my pleasure on seeing the crane but the teacher took issue with me sharply and immediately, saying sternly: ‘The toys are for everyone.’ And I had an unusual reaction to this ticking off. I no longer wanted *any* of the new wooden toys. Anyone could have anything they liked without interference from me. I no longer wanted anything to do with the crane, or any of the other toys. I became withdrawn and refused, inwardly, to play with any of the toys when the other children started claiming the jeep, the lorry, the crane, the van, and all the others, claiming them with no less of a feeling of personal possession than I had been fool enough to express in words. The

teacher tried in vain to interest me in a small wooden dumper truck that had attracted little interest, showing me how I could carry wooden blocks around with it and deposit them on the other side of the room. I looked at her with a snarl in my eyes, like a cat who had been playing quite happily thank you very much, until his tail had been pulled, and now he wasn't going to be easily forgiving. Though cats generally are, either because they have a gracious nature or no great memory to speak of. I knew only one thing. I was not to play with *any* of the toys. Since I had been warned off the crane, the rest could go to hell too. Though there was doubtless a resentment being fired in the basement boiler like a mad janitor disposing of a corpse in the afternoon during the teacher's staff-room teatime, nonetheless a freedom was also being expressed, a freedom to want none of them, to want nothing. And I have often looked back to this moment and realised that beyond the humiliation of it that teacher did me a great favour, in that she showed me how strong I could become by not wanting. I have often noticed, when I have wanted something too much in the beginning, such as a beautiful girl, it was not good for me, this wanting to possess. That things went better when I did not want at all in the beginning, when the want came over me slowly or perhaps not even at all, when the girl wanted me and pursued me, such that

I didn't even notice at first, like an unobservant fool. Then there was having before I had even thought about wanting, and it was better. When I wanted and wanted badly I was dangled on a string of my wanting, and that wanting would still be there, even harsher, when the having has already been and gone, when the wanting truly was forlorn, since it has been fulfilled but had hardly satisfied before it took its sexy wobbling arse and bobbling tits off to some other hairy-chested bloke who was hard with the need to fuck leaving me fuckless and ununderstanding, for then it was love that had flown not just flesh, and love is what you wait for all your life isn't it, only to lose the moment you find it. Or so ten years or more taught me before I learnt not to want but still have, and the having was better, and when the flesh moved on it was only flesh, and if it stayed then love made the flesh more oiled and glistening, and if it was really anything then it would outlive the flesh, it would be a companionship still there when the flesh was old.

There was a girl who chased me without me realising. Because she already had a guy, a Vietnamese grocer who was building a boat so they could both sail around the world in it, and she was doing night classes in navigation with a sextant, so I naturally supposed they were serious about one another. She invited me to have a picnic with her in the park one sunny afternoon, and then we took

out one of the rowing boats on the lake. She did most of the rowing. And we talked about this and that, and I never thought she had eyes for me, I never thought to want her. She was taken, and I was not interested in taking her away. After a pleasant afternoon's boating she invited me back to her place. I thought nothing of it. She was living with her boyfriend above his dad's Vietnamese grocery store. On the way there she told me: 'You're in for a surprise.'

Oh yes, I said, what's that?

And she said, 'You know the Vietnamese eat funny things?'

I had read they pickle hummingbirds.

'Well,' she said, 'They have four grades of duck's egg. The first is like a normal duck egg. The second has a small crack in it, because the chick inside has started to hatch. The third has a bigger crack in it, and the fourth, the one they like the most, had a bit of bill and feather sticking out.'

'Are you serious?'

'Serious.'

'Yuk.'

'Yuk, indeed, but wait till you hear this. Hoochi ordered a big crate of ducks' eggs but left the heating on overnight in the shop and they all hatched out. We came down in the morning wondering what the racket

was. And there was all these lovely little balls of yellow fluff chirping and waddling around all over on the floor. That was a few days ago, and they're growing really fast.'

By this time we'd arrived and were going up the narrow staircase.

'Where are they?' I said.

'That's the surprise,' she said.

We came into the flat.

Hoochi was lying on the double bed with ducklings all over him and scampering about the floor. There must have been two hundred. Place stunk of them.

'Great, aren't they?' she said, 'When they're a bit older Hooch is gonna take them to a duck farm.'

Hoochi looked at me with a look that I only realised later was the look a man has when looking at the guy who's going to take his girlfriend away from him and there's nothing he can do about it, particularly as the guy doesn't even realise yet. Oh but she knew, she knew very well. So I just played with the ducklings like a little boy who's come across something marvellous and delightful. And she seemed pleased that me and him got on okay.

The starlings gather in the sycamore at the end of the garden just before twilight, a hundred or more, with the noise of a whirring machine, running clicks and the odd loud pee-wee and clattermouth piling up of notes like springs ping-pong and cogs turning winding down the day and inviting the night. And they swoop down to the ground as one wave of the hand and back up into their places in the tree as if on elastic, and several times they come down as a coat for the grass and back up before they see the great starling exodus stretched out against the sunset heading north and trees of starlings join onto it all along the route and mine do too off they go too and I wonder where they roost, they look like they are setting off on a great journey, but maybe it is no further than an old church tower loud with a thousand starlings tucking themselves in shoving out the bats whose time has come, and only minutes after the birds have all disappeared and become silent there are bats steering in fast curves and fluttery slownesses grabbing rising midges. And the night settles in a painting calming all.

More and more it becomes clear to me we are here to witness it. To take it in with our eyes. Every cat every dog looks you in the eye. Rarely a turned away glance, or eyes shy to meet you as with some humans, when they look at you they're really looking at you. Birds look at you, insects do. Everything is looking at everything.

The planet is entirely looked at, the coverage is amazing. Where there are no humans, rattlesnakes take it in, the desert soil, albatrosses peer down into volcanoes, the buzzards take in the dying wildebeest the eye glazing over and licked at by flies imprints the buzzards floating over the fog of its crystal ball. We look we look we go on looking. That's it. Everything must be looked at. And then we go microscopic and telescopic, we have instruments to look through, and who is to say that we ourselves aren't instruments to look through. I feel I'm being looked through most of the time, and no longer is it the looking of a 'me' lodging inside for the duration, no, it is the looking of the biggest thing I can conceive of, the universe, the universe looking, curious, about itself, as if it has not quite made its mind up yet, doesn't know what it is, but is making lasting observations about everything, it cannot help itself, and some are proven time and time again, the coming of the leaves to the bare wooden skeletons of the trees in the spring, the falling of the leaves dry and brown in the autumn, the trees that keep their leaves through the snow, the profusion of everything, the never-endingness of it all, further and further out, deeper and deeper in, the mystery of every single thing, a pebble, a blade of grass, the screamingness of everything that to many has got itself dulled down, turned to low, and finally off, that is

turned back up loud in those who wanted to see more in the same old things they had looked at for ages without seeing anything different, who need the calming down of the night to settle the blood, and then the stars tell another story that the day pretends has gone away. But many prefer television.

Sometimes the day is so nice and sunny that I think it would be good to share it with someone, to gambol about and have fun, to walk down by the ditches and see the bulrushes and frogspawn, to have a drink at the pub on the river, where all the people come to on a sunny lunchtime but is deserted most grey overcast days, just a couple of old men playing darts. But if there is no-one to hand to share your bright sunny day, you have to enjoy it on your own, reading in the garden, watching the birds, welcoming cats who visit, listening to footballs being kicked in fields. And when you tire of that, the longing comes back to share this day with someone, and you know who, but she is far away. And when you ring she is not there. Ah well, it is a matter of time, and *still* there is a contentedness to be found in this day, determined that this shall be a happy happy day, it has to be it is so sunny and lovely, the first really warm day of the spring, the nights still chilly but that

will change. And then she does answer. She's ill, in bed, asleep, wants to go back to sleep, but just saying hello for a few minutes. And the sunny day is still sunny.

Often there is nothing much else to say. You can look forward to what will happen in the future, but if you cannot take the present that's handed to you then the future is always going to be the future and will never arrive. There is so much in the now, even when it is much the same as yesterday. The bluebells at the end of the garden, I should raise myself from this chair and go and have a look at them before they shrivel and die. They were not there last year after all. They are new. Okay, go and look right now.

And what happens? You notice there are flowers in need of watering, the soil is parched in the heat of the day. The garden needs you. It is good to be needed. So go and fill the watering can right away.

The sadness can be chased away. But it doesn't always quite go away, it just runs off a little way and stares back at you. Then it creeps back closer to you again, and you lift your head and shoo it off again. It may get bored with you, like a bothersome stray dog, and go off elsewhere. And then whole hours go by without you knowing you are happy, because you don't think about it. It just strikes you, maybe towards the end of the day, why that was a good day you say to yourself.

That was a well-filled day. Though lazily spent, a little digging the soil to plant seeds, a little trimming of grass with shears, a little reading and drinking of tea. A little staring into space, the brightness of the day, warm skin, the afternoon going about its business, and you wanted to make the most of it but didn't know how, yet somehow, somewhere, it happens. After all, it draws in close to you, this nice day, and rests its head in your lap, like memories of fine days, and this one too, this one can count as one of those, though it seemed at first it needed to have a little more going for it than just the sun, the air, the unable to put your finger on it.

This could be wishful thinking. A beautiful blue sky can be an appropriate backdrop for feeling lost and alone. Not able to understand, or shake off the stupid feeling. Trying to discern in the faces passing by the window the thing that they have mastered. You just want to know, that's all. The little step you can take to change things completely. Perhaps you persist in it, this pattern that was established early on in your life, because it is *worth* penetrating, for all it seems a caving-in time and time again.

I wanted to call her. I was missing her. I walked to the phone. Stopped myself. She may be asleep. It is only weakness in me. Is it going to take all of life to make me strong? For what?

Outside, down the corridor that gets brighter, the sparrows are chirping. For a moment, you forget there is another world so close to the one you have trapped yourself in. All it takes is a chirp, and the sunny day reaches inside the gloomy room and calls me out. Okay, follow this intimation. Go with it. See where it leads.

Make a coffee. Dig the garden. Get those parsley and coriander seeds in. In five years' time you may have kids. You may be living in another country. There may be salt in the air from the sea. She may be your wife and the mother of your children. This present moment is just another piece of the mosaic I'm cementing in place. I will not be able to stand back and admire my handiwork for at least a year. Who am I to say what part in the pattern this is? Whether this part is better or worse than that part? All I know is that the whole cannot exist without all its parts. The dull brown, the bright blue, just stick them down and wait and see. Pull up those divots now and loosen the soil, loosen up a little rectangle. But first, make a fine coffee and sit a while longer just taking in the day, being wiser than any mood that comes along, because you are after all. You only forget it so that you can remember it again.

It's good to bring her into these days too, these days apart. I thought it just now, preparing the coffee. She is sleeping and dreaming of a temple in the woods,

riding a dragon through the sky. Oh how many times has she talked of throwing herself off a bridge, and I say don't talk like that I don't like it, and she says oh I wouldn't do it, and we agree that none of it matters. I am waiting for the first dragonfly of the year as much as I am waiting for anything else.

And mad Karl passed by my window. I see he has bought himself a bike. He is off exploring, a fine day for it.

Looking out at the first leaves of a London plane across the road, I see that I have defeated something, something that comes across a man on a sunny Saturday afternoon like a boy with no-one to play with, and the smile rises up inside me like the browning crust of a fine apple pie cooking in the oven. I have untied all my knots for today, and I've got it back, the misplaced thing, the handle by which I lift myself up, and this is an afternoon that is going to sail by itself now. And if there was a secret maybe I got it down, keeping my mood company like this.

I have drunk the coffee, which came from bushes grown in the volcanic soil of Sumatra, but I haven't yet dug the little patch of soil for my seeds. It's too hot. Even the jumping spiders are sluggish.

Sometimes I am possessed. It comes over me, entering the body through a paper cut or settling down in me like a stone statue coming over and sitting in you. I notice I am now carrying a lot. Simplicity has become complexity, light floating things are burdensome. I snap I snarl, mostly at objects, since I am no longer in a pleasant solitude enjoying the day I am a caged animal, kept away from the world, not even in the bright shiny cages the visitors file past, no, in the dirty shed cages way round the back where the potato peelings are thrown and left to fester and ants troop through my cage carrying each one a potato peeling dragging it somewhere important they are building a potato peeling temple out in the forest they are taking a short cut through my lair and I don't mind them, they fascinate me in fact, but I know I could wipe them away with a swipe of the hand or tread on them, if anything though they calm me down, it calms me down to watch the column of ants carrying their potato peelings through my cage. And I have forgotten I am possessed and am not where I suppose myself, though anywhere where you huddle yourself up into a ball pulling your knees up to your chin and sit in the corner is this forgotten

cage. And I long to be an ant carrying a potato peeling because there is a marvellous journey there, out out into the wood, I want to see their temple I want to follow them follow behind them like a little boy following a paper boat floating along the rushing river in the gutter after a great storm. I want to hold something aloft too so I hold my jumper aloft and walk beside the column of ants out out into the forest. See me I'm carrying a potato peeling too. Oh look my legs are caving in I'm sinking beneath its weight nah only joking it's not very heavy.

But I want to punch the desk sometimes, punch the wall. I drop a spoon and I'm yelling, You bastard! Falling on the floor like that! Bastard! And I bend down to pick it up and I bang my forehead on the table and I'm so annoyed I deliberately bang my head on the table two or five times more and roar like a lion with a gag in its mouth.

I get annoyed with my normal self and want to send it away the boring bastard I want to fly I want to run out into the garden and just leap up into the air and fly. I feel grounded all the time. I feel enclosed all the time. Penned in, caged, I want to smash down the walls and be sitting on top of a pile of rubble king of the heap. I don't care what happens then. I consider it, as if it were possible, as if I was a bulldozer, and when it comes

back to me that it is not possible, that I don't have the strength to knock down the walls I'll only have a little restraint in me to stop throwing a hammer through the window as if to say who you telling it's not possible just watch me. And the restraint feels like what I should do though I don't like being told I *should* do anything, no, don't like that, I shout off the face of anyone who tells me that, so don't tell me that and I spit out FUCKER! at them so I notice a little while later them wiping away little spots of saliva that have hit them that they didn't want to wipe away when they fell in case it exacerbated anything, but they don't exist, they're just phantoms I'm shouting at, only the restraint in me when faced with real human beings. I still don't like being told what I *ought* to do though. Oh I ought to ought I? I should should I? And I want to tell them to FUCK OFF but I don't I just glare and let them feel the vicious fucking cunt in me that is better off caged and forgotten about in the mouldy old part of the zoo no-one ever visits any more except the ants.

Thrash it out, that's the way. Thrash it out. Spew up all this madness before it gets you into trouble mister, because you like to slide close to the edge don't you you like your hotel window to look down into the abyss don't you you like to know where you can throw dead things so they won't be discovered don't you? In certain

moods you can see the enjoyable side of cutting up a body in the bath, the sense of achievement in tying up your little packages, in planning it out, how you're going to dispose of this one. Ridiculous. Stick to being a caged animal. Don't call the sun out on a cloudy day just for *you*. Well look, it wouldn't just be for me would it? It would be for everyone, it'd just be me that did it and had the power to do it. That's all. But there's a lot more to it than glaring up at the cloudy sky and growling: 'Come out!' So again I'm powerless, put back in my place, my slug antennae recoiling like hurt little children. The collapsing universe collapsing all the time into ME, and I don't like it y'hear?

I wonder how much is in there I have forgotten. Where's it hiding? Or has it gone like coins fallen through a hole in the pocket? Well if it has gone there must be places that show where it once was, show the edges it left when it flaked off, from which I can deduce what it might have been. Yet the amazing thing is that I have no sense of loss. So many days chucked out the back like a pile of old newspapers. And if it comes down to it I am even less bothered about not being able to remember what happened yesterday or the day before. Sometimes it is

a struggle to recall, but I do find it, eventually. Ah yes, I did this I did that. It rained, yesterday. And the day before it was wonderfully sunny. Before that, it's not even worth trying, and to what purpose? I may want to catch up on a few unfinished things from yesterday, so there is a purpose. But a week ago? It is as meaningless as a month ago, a year ago, a decade ago. I guess a goldfish doesn't get bored in its bowl because it has forgotten it has already been round it umpteen times already. But what is it living *for*? A friend had a goldfish for twenty-eight years. I remember when I visited him in the last year of its life. A large orange gulping thing just resting itself in the shallow water of a rectangular glass dish, a member of the family, almost sitting at the dining table with us, looking our way, gulping, taking an interest in us eating at the table, opening and closing its lips in tune with my own my own chomping, it seemed to prefer being half out of the water, resting on a rock looking like a bedridden soul, too old to have any interest in swimming, he was in a bed made up for him, his pillows plumped, and he was joining in. He was loved, without doubt, and can you imagine what a loss it was when he died, twenty-eight years standing on the sideboard watching my friend have his dinner, and now there was only a bowl of apples. He was quite a pathetic-looking goldfish, but no more

pathetic than many old people, but most of all I could not help but notice how *included* he was in the goings on in the living room, so much so he was lifting himself out of the water to partake even more. He was not staring through the glass, he was looking over the rim. I feel certain that by that time he must have become a sacred fish, a knowing fish. I cannot imagine having an audience with the Pope would be anything to speak of in comparison. Twenty-eight years. When I looked at those little goldfish magnified in plastic bags from the fair, won for hoopla-ing a square block, I never thought one could live that long. They inevitably died, diseased, or their water fouled by insufficient changes and rotting food sprinkled on the surface. I'm glad they died. I wouldn't have wanted the responsibility of tending their lives for twenty-eight years. And here was a twenty-eight-year-old goldfish, grown podgy, on his waterbed throne, who had looked out on human dying. First a father, then a mother, and then a son carried on the tending. And the goldfish became everything of the love that had been poured into him, and tears were shed when finally he died, King Goldfish. Watery tears blur my vision sitting here thinking about him, watching me eat my dinner.

The peace descends in a slow moment and spreads itself out getting comfortable, smiley eyes almost in tears don't know how to welcome it enough. All the rush has gone. There was nothing to rush for before but now the rush has gone. The dark stormy sky is a perfect dark stormy sky. The light at this hour is just right. It wants to rain but it wants not to rain too, and that shall-I sharn't-I feels good out there in the sky.

Years pass without ever dreaming of the rocks that had to cool before we could be set down on this thing. A glimpse of a rare or exotic creature could keep me going for days. The sight of a million moths battering their heads against the floodlights of the sports field would soak up ten seconds of staring that was well worth it. The deadpan expression of a sad-faced clown would soak me up. Even now, the fair is coming to a nearby park in a few days' time and I have a note written on my table reminding me not to forget it. I saw a poster for it on a demolition site. I noticed myself noticing, and half of me said you should go to that, remind yourself

what the fair is like, the other half said what on earth do you want to go to that for, don't you know already that fairs are tacky in the extreme? And, you know, I don't know, because everywhere there is something to see, some little detail to raise a smile, to remind myself of the brightly painted sideshows, candyfloss, the children whose first fair this is. And if it is no good I will have reminded myself, and I can walk on to the little wood where an old girlfriend was once followed by a man who wanted to rape her but wasn't sure enough of it to make much of a success of the thing, where there are spiders' webs everywhere and bracket fungi on the trees and pushchairs in the brook and old suitcases of nylons, something I have never understood, what it means when one comes across a flung-open suitcase full of nylon stockings. I remember coming across them in lay-bys out in the country as a child, those black crystalline grit lay-bys where a car had quickly pulled up, the boot opened, and an old suitcase flung out into the nettles and rose-bay willowherb, and the clasps would click up and spew their nylons all over. Nothing else, just thirty or forty pairs of nylons. I have come across such suitcases three or four times and each time I think, what does that mean? Dead fish floating upside down in the brook, gathered into the arms of a chubby faced doll one eye closed one eye open floating on its back. I have

often thought of having a shit in this wood, just for the hell of it, because it is so close to the cricket pavilion, so close to the park where people walk their dogs. It's only a small wood but so much seems to happen in it. I wonder how many children's eyes it has poked out, running like fools into the jabbing undergrowth in the dim light. There is litter in this wood of chocolate bars that are no longer made. I walk by along the overgrown path peering from side to side as in a painting-hung passageway. Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after. This is the kind of literature to tell God about, after all this is over.

I keep getting distracted. Like some bastard has shot a water pistol at me while I was doing something else and now all I want to do is chase him and bash him or wrest the water pistol out of his hand and fire it at him or throw it in some dogshit splat! It's the chases though that make you come alive, get your nose out of your shell collection and now it doesn't even matter if they all get smashed trodden underfoot in the scuffle it's all a right old tuh-do. Mum was telling me about how there were tripe-shops when she was a girl, they'd have white

enamel trays of tripe in the window and real parsley and there'd be sawdust on the floor and she didn't like tripe and every time she went in the tripe shop with nan the tripe-man would give her an inch or two of pig's puddin to nibble on 'but I cor stick pig's puddin so I give it to yer gramp he luvtit he did. But that's gewin back some years . . .'

And then you get lost in yourself, but never quite lost, but being lost is good because you're just floating and something amazing happens then, suddenly you're sitting on a radiator you haven't sat on for forty years a big fat school radiator with five coats of paint and initials scratched in it going through to the other layers and hearts and arrows as best as you can do em with a compass point that keeps slipping and you're warming your bum up on a winter's day they're just dragging in the crate of milk it's got snow on top and you poke your straw through the goldtop and there's a big lump of ice floating inside it it was such fun looking round at others do you have ice too? And even Goggy was smiling and she's got ice too and everyone's forgotten she's got the lurgy for a minute everyone's happy and Mr Disley isn't in the classroom he's outside in his Rupert Bear scarf with a shovel making a path in the snow and cars are bumping along slowly their tyres in snow chains never seen em before it's the new fad everyone's got

them someone on the telly said they'd be a good idea and Martins got a load in and stuck a sign up saying *Get Your Snow Chains Here! Just In!* and they flocked in and now they're trying them out a rum idea if you ask me yow con see everyone's not quite into the idea gewin along like snails ere.

Night will be buried hand in hand with the day and there won't be any excavations in the orange sulphurous atmosphere. Storm warnings will be of gigantic cyclonic eyes covering a third of the planet. We will hardly believe we once lived there. Our restlessness will have carried us far away but even far away will be beset by petty strife and a longing to fail and *still* we will be awaiting death. I remember when it was down to me. A mission remembered from long ago. It drew out my initiators. I realised how small the views I'd had up until then really were. But now, even all that seems small, replaced by nothing but a sort of giving up. Better it look like giving up than finding I was deluded. My not caring simply grew and overtook my caring, it only ever had to be a few steps ahead. Of course, fool that I was, it was my caring that backed my not caring into its corner. But I don't even care about this any longer.

Tired of talk with perching angels. The long exile in a stone house. The bills, especially the bills. I looked everywhere, but I couldn't find it. It had skedaddled as if it was a dream. Something impracticable for day-to-day living. Nursing such a huge impression of myself and what I was capable of. More and more I just sat there leaning my chin in my hand. I was thinking it through, but rarely could I spot anything in my mind. It was the gesture of thought, but without any thought, just self-evident isolation. The thinker. Who'd have thought he had nothing in his head? It was just a physical gesture, an outward appearance of thinking. But I knew it well. Not thinking but waiting for a thought. Stopped, certainly. There go the mice hugging the skirting board. I am so still they must think I am a statue. And at last my mind fills with something. I remember a story mum told me many times. It was when she was a little girl. She sat on a cushion on a three-legged stool in a bare room, all the furniture moved out into the hall, waiting for the mice to come out. She had a mallet in her hand and was watching the hole in the skirting board. And out came mummy mouse and daddy mouse, but still she waited, not moving. And then came out baby mouse and another baby mouse and another and another. Just trooping across the floorboards. And she just rose to her feet like lightning and threw her cushion on the hole

and then brought the mallet down on the mice one after another Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Such glee in her eyes, telling me.

The snow was there for weeks, though very little more fell. A network of trenches had been dug. Snow on both sides up to my shoulders. The snow started to get a black crust from the smoke of coal fires. Every so often you'd have to stop to empty the water out of your wellies from the snow that had got in and melted. Socks steaming in front of the fire.

All day great thunderclaps while the sun has been shining. I have felt like killing people.

Sometimes it's madness to attempt to go on. All I want to do is lower my head onto the desk and sleep. I think I have said before that one day is much like another. Watching the birds in the garden, watching the skies and seeing the lightning hearing the thunder, sitting there on the toilet counting how many seconds from the flash to the rumble, an old ingrained habit to see how far away the centre of the storm is, the boss end. Nothing like heavy rain and thunder and lightning on a day much the same. The cat comes, I play with him for a while, but even the cat is at a loose end, vainly

chattering his jaws at pigeons on chimneypots striking out at flies this way and that. Maybe there is something restless about the day, and I am just feeling it. It's not me, it's the day. The fair must be all muddy puddles. Men standing surrounded by pink fluffy bunnies holding onto their hoops cursing the waste of time the water cascading off the awning. Maybe the dodgems and waltzer has a few bored teenagers. A day for listening to the great big nothingness. At least there is a sort of silence, the kind of silence for closing the eyes and simply sitting there. I had so many bold ideas that have washed themselves away, and now I find myself wanting to capture an essence that is hardly there at all, to soak up the less and lessness, because this is worth speaking of too. I used to think I couldn't think of anything, and then I thought: what is that, that hardly anything, why don't I just try to get to grips with that? If people could see through my window they would see me with my head resting in my hands and think what is wrong with that poor fellow? But they would have got the wrong end of the stick entirely. I'm just looking around, that's all. If I sigh it's because I want to hear that sigh, want to know what's really in it, what spectrum of sounds I can separate it into. It sounds so far away, is the first thing I notice. So very far away. And for a minute or two I don't move. It seems longer. I don't move because

I don't want to spoil what I've happened across. There is just breathing. Cabbage boiling. Boiled to buggery. Steaming up everyone's windows on the way back from Sunday school. These footholds in memory take me down not up. Climbing down into a ravine. I didn't want to go to Sunday school. Penny called and asked mum and dad whether I would like to go with her to Sunday school. I was quite happy reading comics thank you very much. But they saw it as a way to get me from under their feet while mum was cooking the Sunday roast so I was sent off to Sunday school and was still sent off to it long after Penny stopped going. Sat there singing hymns. Sometimes a visiting vicar looking all black and important with a dog collar a big man would come and tell us about something or other to do with Jesus it was always about Jesus had they nothing else to talk about why not talk about what was on telly and butterflies and bees and zebras I livened up slightly when ziggurats and palms trees were mentioned but apart from that I didn't know what I was doing there, apart from hanging on until we all got Captain Scarlet and Thunderbirds annuals with fancy presentation stickers inside. On and on about Jesus. The harvest festival was good because the fruit and bread was arranged very nice but what's that got to do with Jesus and I sat there on the cold hard wooden bench singing songs about how Jesus

wants me for a sunbeam and thinking I can be a sunbeam myself aren't I a sunbeam every time I follow the ray of sunlight laser-beaming down through a crack in the dark clouds and I run there and stand in it. I'm a sunbeam! I'm a sunbeam! See me I'm a sunbeam! I'm a sunbeam because I want to be a sunbeam not because Jesus wants me to be one. I was more interested in hearing the voice of the Mysterons so when I got a Captain Scarlet annual for keeping on coming I thought, there, there you go, it's got nothing to do with Jesus that was just a con it was really about Captain Scarlet all along and when the big important vicar came in his black clothes, so black never seen such a black suit on anyone people wearing suits outside the pub had brown suits so I thought he must be really evil to have such a black suit such a great black suit and he had a booming voice and I started to hear his voice as the voice of the Mysterons that had got inside him and Jesus wasn't anything to do with it that was just pretend and so that is what I learnt about Jesus at Sunday school that it was Jesus's job to get me out of the house while mum was preparing the Sunday roast and they gave you an annual if you went enough times.

Dear god why don't you make all things bright and beautiful I offer this as a suggestion because I look around and see they are not and can you make less noisy lawn mowers for people's back gardens in the summer too while you're about it but seriously what does everything do what is everything for what do the ants do wandering all over the concrete it seems a strange life to me if you ask me I know you didn't but that's what I think I have so many questions to ask you and yet, not a single one, not a sausage, fluff on the lawn by a dandelion must be dandelion fluff well I'm glad you spread your dandelions about I happen to like them and don't regard them as weeds. And it's a nice cat you've got coming round to me and the mint is nice too it's all very nice when I look around so what is this dissatisfaction in me what's that about that I can't even put my finger on what I'm dissatisfied about? I think it's something to do with wanting a different life to the one I've got, like living on the coast with *her*. Am I building up to that god? So I should be happy in the meantime right? Just enjoy all the little bits and bobs you've placed around me and I *do* smile at the yellow faces of the dandelions but god what is it I should be wanting what is it I should be doing? Because I don't know I really don't. I've tried lots of different things but I can't seem to find my place in the world. But the lilac is nice, swaying in the wind,

and the way the leaves start off little on the sycamore, that's all real nice and I don't want to sound ungrateful or anything but why don't you just tell me what I'm supposed to do I'm a big boy now and I'll just get on with it if you let me in on it. I keep looking for clues in everything and I *almost* get it I really do. I sometimes think, god, that my story is one of looking and not finding. Should I give up looking is that it? There's that lovely little blue butterfly again. That's the best thing you've had coming round my garden lately, apart from the cat of course, but that lovely little blue butterfly is really special so I can see you've making an effort and that's such a beautiful way to attempt to show me something, and for a moment or two I almost get it and I'm watching the ants as well their little patterns running around each other and I *know* I'm part of all this too but I can't think the yearning in me is what I'm about. Think yourself lucky I still pretend to believe in you and now and again . . . well I wouldn't want to get my hopes up. It's a lovely sunny day I plan to go to the fair later on it's Saturday so there'll be lots of people about enjoying themselves if I've got a request it's don't let me feel *too* lost and alone because I know I'm taking a risk going there I'm only going to have a look around and if all the fun of the fair *does* stab me in the heart as I half expect then at least twist the blade and pull it

out and wipe the blood on my jacket without looking back god and just walk off into the crowd and leave me dying there on your beautiful green grass, because you are a bit of a cunt sometimes aren't you?

The fair was useless. All bouncy castles for tiny tots. Hook-a-duck. Bored fat stallholders scoffing doughnuts. But still they came, came from out of all the side streets. Couldn't tell whether it was any good from far away, just the colourful spectacle of the fantasy town come to squat in the park. Nothing death-defying. I remember the rotor when the fair came when I was a kid, huge barrel that spun round and round and you stood inside and then when it had got up speed the floor dropped down and everyone screamed but you stuck to the wall and if you were very daring you could turn yourself round and play silly games if you were like me you'd just grit your teeth and bear it and wait until it was over. I never went on it for quite a few years, in fact what am I talking about, I never went on it at all as a kid I was too scared or embarrassed to be watched I just paid to go up to the viewing platform upstairs which was just as good but no, never dared, it took till I was in my thirties until I dared. That was a great thing to have

at a fair, not only a ride but it showed you something too, it illustrated a scientific principle, centrifugal force. But it was always tough boys who went on with their screaming girlfriends and I was jealous of them that they were having so much fun I didn't want to go on on my own and I was more scared of going on on my own than the floor dropping away and sticking to the wall. I liked the hall of crazy mirrors and the booth with the large glass jars with mermaids discovered off the coast of Japan with spiky teeth and chimps with two heads.

But I don't know. Thinking back to childhood like this. Faced with the life I have. Sitting here watching the birds, very lively today. I forgot the fair and walked through the wood, full of cow parsley in flower and nettles, keeping you to the muddy path. Kids sitting on a tree-trunk I might have liked to sit on with their psycho-eyed pit bulls guarding their encampment that I've got to walk through the dogs run up like alert sentries turning their heads to one side to look at me lopsided as I approach. A kid assures me that the dogs are okay and I walk by as if I couldn't care less. Always some little danger in this fucking wood. The brook is black and stinks, I look and I look but I can't see anything living. I walk round by the rubbish dump, trying to latch onto something in my head, trying to feel happy, since there doesn't seem to be any reason

why I shouldn't be. But as always it's trying too hard. I know what it is, I want to spend this bright sunny day with *her*, who I haven't heard from in days, who is far away. But I know that my life's work is something to do with feeling okay on my own. I'm losing sight of everything though, everywhere I turn just not sure any more what the point is. How long can one sit and watch the birds? Forever? And I ponder a life like that, as if I haven't already lived a life like that. And it's pleasant enough, there is even something to get to grips with, so long as I don't allow myself to simply be happy. And perhaps that's it, I'm still searching, still trying too hard. Though it feels tissue-thin now, what's in the way, I could poke my fingers through if I just reached out, but I don't reach out, I keep my distance, and continue with the eyes going from the dandelions to the forget-me-nots to the starlings with straw in their beaks to the lilac almost in full blossom to the little leaves of the sycamore noticeably bigger than yesterday, growing, growing on their own, and me still sitting here. Oh, I'm sure it's here, hiding in this mystery of a simple garden, made a mystery by my continual looking looking hard into it as if I expect it to crack open and reveal golden stairs going down into the earth, oh how that would solve everything, at last, long last, the beginning of the adventure.

A ground beetle and a rusty nail. I find myself staring down at the juxtaposition on a sunny bank-holiday-Monday afternoon, the stench of other people's garden barbeques in my nostrils. I followed the path of the ground beetle as it tumbled along the cracked concrete trying to think of a name for that particular green sheen of it, and it came to a rusty nail. And I found myself staring at the ground beetle and rusty nail in expectation of a zen enlightenment, but what enlightenment there was to be wrung out of the moment had already been and gone, either unnoticed or not enough. Enough for what? Enough to make it alright, make everything alright. But it's no use looking too hard, ever, you can watch ants chasing each other over a grow-bag and a jumping spider on your trousers and hear a wood pigeon coo-ing till you're blue in the face and still not make the grade of a zen moment in which the meaningfulness of all things crashes into formation. But sure, it reminds you of the kind of thing you're going to get it off, and so you still look earnestly at the fiddly little fly trying to get a grip on the chive stalk with an artificial wonder that doesn't know it's artificial that could just pretend to be real wonder and before you know it is real wonder,

and you can almost hear the ocean from your crummy garden chair hundreds of miles away from the ocean like the whole world's a shell put to your ear and still the ladybird is traipsing over the half brick and the little greenbottle says My turn! My turn! Look at me now! I forgot what I was looking for years ago I go through the motions of looking in the hope of remembering but the thing is it's not about remembering it's about a fresher moment than that it's about being here now and living and living good not squeezing wonder out of little sparrows as if they were lemons. A few gardens down hidden by my big bush the clitter-clatter of garden plates and sounds of piling plate on plate and finishing off the great big eating in the garden thing that is so exciting for everyday couples I almost want some of it myself. I'm like a tired mechanical boy auctioned off from the fair sitting in the garden wound up and nodding turning my mechanical head from side to side a ventriloquist's dummy dumped in the garden eyelids blinking, smiling and sighing, almost on the brink of saying something but then just sighing. Seen it all before, ants up the sleeves and down the sleeves up one nostril and out another. So demanding of every moment, entertain me! Show me why I'm here! Give me a purpose for living! I wish I could be like a little butterfly wandering over hedges fluttering from garden to garden settling

on the flagstones now and then. Just give me the brain of a bird and sit me on an upturned flowerpot, don't let me wish for faraway places and exciting journeys let me be little more than grass growing in the sun or a fly flying about the world don't let me waste my life wondering whether to phone her or not or wonder what she's doing right now or what else I might be doing let me be like that ladybird heading over to my watering can no he's decided to go in the other direction now he hasn't a clue where he's going he's just wandering all over the place. Of course, I will look back to this moment in the sunny garden with affection, years on, when I am stuck in a foreign dungeon wondering what the rat has on his mind. So I reluctantly open myself to what's before me and lie to myself through the teeth: no, this is fine, this is the best of all.

This silent space where I don't care. Where it doesn't matter any more. But it does, of course, otherwise why make such a big deal of it not mattering? So much still left to say, yet I can't think of a thing. Am I being driven into a corner where there is no more writing left? Where you can't quite get a grip on the lack. Where everything you write feels like it's got a line through

it already, a great big scrawl of a crossing out, so much so you're writing under a crossing out already formed. It's deleted before it's even conceived. Well, you write it down anyway. Who can tell? We hold on too tight to the things we know we're going to have to chuck, but the stuff that makes it slips out like a perfect fried egg onto a plate when you aren't trying. It's hard being so constantly where there is nothing. Just nothing. Nothing everywhere. And the habit of saying, what's the point? How to move away from that space? Tell a story about an ant called Fred. Fred was an ant all day. He was never anything but an ant. He didn't turn his head to admire pretty Japanese girls going by in shades. He couldn't care less about men in red shirts carrying box after box down the road. Fred was just an ant, and as an ant he had ant's concerns. But he didn't know what those concerns were, because he couldn't think. Fred didn't have much of a brain, he was a pretty elementary creature, though you might think him clever if *you* had a brain or looked at him under a magnifying glass. Fred was just an ant. He was little more than a bundle of wiring controlling some fairly sharp mechanical engineering. Scurrying off all over the place. Look at Fred trying to climb on top of the ladybird. Look at Fred wondering about the heap of steaming dog shit. Fred doesn't wonder whether he is

cleverer than a bluebottle. Look at silly old Fred, going round in circles now children. What can Fred know about going from A to B when he's just going round in circles? Now he's off, oh, now he's coming back, no, he's off again. He wouldn't be much of a postman would he children? Mind you, my postman isn't much of a postman either. And zoom up there at the being who's looking at us through his magnifying glass, do you think he thinks we are intelligent, children? All these little boxes they live in.

There is perhaps a pointlessness in which one starts to see the point, because of the space it has left. Because an immense space is left when you begin to doubt everything you have lived for. There is a calmness that comes out of nothingness and not caring, when, in addition, you forget yourself. You don't realise how great it is going to be, when you are still thinking of it as an affliction; how wonderful I mean, not how big. Just stop a moment and look about. The annoying flies of everyday have flown. The wind is getting up on a sunny day. The sky is bright blue and vast. Not a wisp of cloud. And you've given up, utterly and completely, given up. What is this unearthly lightness in you? Nothing outside can quite get a foothold on you. Oh, you're furrowing your brow alright, still, but it's just out of habit, the habit of peering deeply into every mystery

and even those that you're not even sure are mysteries, because you have a habit of seeing everything in that way. But now, you're lightly – and it's making you laugh to realise it – furrowing your brow over the absence of any mystery. Now that's a mystery alright. A whistle is blown in the distance and little children all cheer. The trees are swaying and playing shadow-puppets against the walls. A lion is talking to a little girl. A Punch and Judy show is going on but no-one sees it, they all walk by, it may as well be in another dimension. Dirty potatoes bought loose are pulling on the handles of a plastic bag. Again I see it is right to not try to be anything else.

There is something incredibly trivial about the way I live. I may as well realise it and make a break for freedom. The freedom that there is in not thinking it more than it is. How binding it is to think you are engaged on important work, when in actual fact it doesn't matter, and the sooner you and another two or three million are dead the better, or whatever the excess is these days, the 'over' in overpopulation. Do something worthwhile in your life, and volunteer to be included in that number who are overpopulating Earth. Be brave and say yes

God, stick me where your best cyclone is waiting and dash me off like a fly against a windscreen, I volunteer. A fantasy of course, like much else. I either will or will not be treated like a straw dog, it won't have much to do with me in the end, save perhaps in as much as I call a halt to being so damned careful everywhere I go, careful to preserve myself. For what? To hear the bumblebee resonating in the end of the drainpipe one more time, hang on to see the swifts arrive one more time? To catch the scent of lilac on the twilight breeze? Looked at that way, it is enough to stop a man in his tracks. Make a resolution, live for *that*, make *that* enough, and forget this silly nonsense of having any more importance in the world. It could work. Put aside the gripes and just *decide* to like whatever happens now, since it is borrowed time, time you could have just flung away or had flung away for you, on a whim. The freedom there is in knowing you don't amount to much. Start living that, make that your philosophy of life. Realise you went wrong somewhere back there, when you started craving *variety*. It was only *meant* to be a few silly little pleasures spread thinly, endlessly rotated. And listen now, you know that sound don't you, you don't even need to look up any more, it's been happening everywhere the past two weeks, that's the distinctive whimpering little chirrup of a female sparrow being shafted up there on

the guttering by randy Mr Sparrow jumping on and off Mrs Sparrow, such a pitiful sound, you hear it at first light when you want to sleep on further into the day and you hear it before the sun goes down. Just how many batches of eggs do they want? Well, it's more interesting than the goings on in the human race I observe from my front window. Oh for the spring! And the warmer weather, and the sitting outside till the sun goes down with nothing better to do than watching jet contrails taking the bright sunlight still from a sun that has sunk below the horizon and the air is full of the chill now old pal Mr Sunshine has gone in. I'm determined to get to the bottom of this lessness of life, make it my subject. Who knows, I may even end up saying something. But away with that, not interested. It gets on my nerves this need to have something 'interesting' to say. I am regressing, using my voice less, forgetting. Sitting always in the same spot I start to live like a tree. Snipping a bit of thyme to dry makes me as proud as I imagine a farmer is who ploughs two fields. Stop fighting it, regard it as my experiment in living, let it show me what it has to show me. We can all yearn for more, but how about this: just stop yearning for anything at all and be satisfied with what you've got. And the cat with marmalade eyes comes and stretches before me. And it's the blackbird's turn now to sing its

peaceful tune. I can hear a goods train going slowly over the rails in the distance. Outside my front door is a place of tension, men with Popeye forearms driving expensive open-top sports cars, fluorescent yellow ice lollies melting on the pavement, kids exuding thickness who will only grow up to be a menace, coming at me from all sides the noise of the world and I think I must get out I am doing myself no good having this mass of blighted existence outside my door. And after an hour out there I don't care about anything or anyone, wipe it all away, that place where money is important and everything is more expensive than it was last week and I just find myself staring at a world of morons, not half as entertaining as three ducks flying around quacking at each other. And I try to work out what is happening to me. Has the world become more gross or I more alien? In the sense that I don't belong here. Not alienated, not *caused by*, no, just an alien to all this. Always was alien, just spent too long attempting to fit in and now have given up, so the ugliness of the world rears up at every turn, and I want to get the right message, be sure I'm reading it right, because it's preparation for something I'd say, this increasing inability to stand where you are, where you retreat more and more and you become acutely self-conscious of being a person who is keeping up appearances long past the time you should have let

them slip utterly and take that as the cue to take your leave, like a snake slithering into a shed to shed a skin in private and leave early in the morning, unnoticed. There's only going to be so many times more that you do the familiar things, you sense it strongly now, because you have to break out, something else is wanting to be born out of you, and that's what all this is about, this confusion. The plain fact is you're not human, you've just stayed too long in the same place, that's all. Time to see how you appear against a different backdrop, Mr Chameleon.

I wonder if I could become a cat? Say goodbye to the human world forever. I mean being a human. I expect I would find a human like me to keep company, a human kind to cats, who like me has lost the point of being human and would prefer to be a cat and enjoys the company of cats. Good hours spent at twilight, being with cats, in cat society. And I think it over, like a job offer, like a real possibility. Yes, you can be a cat now, if you want. It's an offer you didn't realise was on the table, and then there it is, you've got the invitation and it was as simple as that. Read all the books you still want to read, write the bit you still have to say, and then just strip off that human body and come and be with us cats, come and chase the bumblebees come and play in the fields come and see who can get up onto the highest

roof. And if you want, maybe eventually we'll show you our spaceship. Oh wow, I'm like a little boy who's been invited to join a great gang, I can hardly believe it, and so much else seems like nothing now. I'll study the cats, I'll find my place. It's going to turn out a lot simpler than I thought.

Oh where did this joy in my soul rise up from?

Freedom. A matter of sitting quietly in the night and letting it wash over you. Letting something sink in. Not knowing what. Enough. Put this to one side. Feel free enough not to finish the fucking thing, not to be what I tell myself I am. Free to accomplish nothing I've planned. That's the hardest thing, failing. And then it's not. If this is all I am good for, then this is it, here it is. Away with it.

This pressure to come up with words. What for? There is no-one, no-one at all in the world, this is a dream activity. I write in a dream, to no-one. I can't post this letter outside of the dream. Y'know, I've been thinking about cats. Their lack of literature, furniture, inventions, films. Their lack of everything we have surrounded ourselves with. And does it matter to them? Not a jot!

Am I alone? Am I, as an entity, utterly alone? Or is the concept of being alone meaningless when there are no others? There is no 'other' to wonder about when you are all. How much it is like a children's game. It'll be easily dropped, won't it? When it's time to come in for tea. It's a dream, but *of* something. And that something is a creation, that created itself. It hid itself from itself, and because of that it will forever be safe from the loss of waking up, just as our ordinary dreams are complete and indestructible, wherever they are. And that's the thing, they can't be destroyed because they can't be located. They were, once, just as history was, but they still are, it all still is, what has gone, just not here.

I picked something up off the carpet, something brown and brittle I took to be a dry leaf I had brought in from outside on my shoe. I crushed it between my fingers as I did so, rubbing it to feel the texture, when I suddenly thought oh my god this is not a dry leaf this is a moth I have just squashed a moth a hawk moth between my fingers and then I thought hot on the heels of that no it must be a dead moth and then I thought no I feel it's warm body on my fingertips and then I looked and crushed some more, because it was a dry brittle brown leaf after all.

It is a wonderfully sunny day, and I am starting to see things at last. Such as, one's current circumstances are indeed the best and most suited to what you have to get done.

Don't be reliant on *her*. Fuck her!

That's it. That's all. You have it now. You've changed like a tiger and even the buzzing flies can fuck off.

And I think of our wonderful conversations, the things I talked about with *her*. Oh what fun the cat is having chasing flies and jumping in the air. And I think, those times can return. Like looking at a snowflake under a microscope, it melts before your eyes, but the shape is set, you can find it again. You can learn from everything around you. I miss her, but I'm smiling. Does she know any of this? Or is she just too busy to notice what is going on inside her? Ah, there is something to understand in everything. Every day, a classroom. Still.

Who am I learning it for? Lay low for a while, suck up the sense of solitude in the pee-wit pee-wit days.

Ah yes. Continuing is what absolves one of wasted time. Reading the patterns in the clouds, not so much to know what they say as to hold a focus to your longing. This lonely business of living and woodsmoke rising in the twilight air brings with it memories of days living around fires living in the dust and dirt with pagans, good companions, and that other world of jobs and cities just *a* world, and one more easily done without for all it is the one that dominates the years, the other just a temporary escape to something that could be forever, if only . . . if only . . . you had someone to share it with. It always came back to that, sitting lonely face to the fire there too, wishing for that special companion who would lighten the days, who would go along with you quite some way, before she left more naturally to death and left you with a remainder of dark days in which to chew over your wonderful love, or you before her, and she's learnt well a strength from you, and cherishes your memory before the fire in her leftover days and nights. And so you read it in the clouds, what is the substance of your longing, of what kind of woman is good enough for you, in the pee-wit pee-wit evenings.

‘You’ve got a green nose,’ I said to the cat. He did have. A green nose. Let me look at your green nose. There is an animal who spends his time in the grass. I remember having green knees all the time. I hardly ever have green knees now. I used to dash about in wasteland as a boy. I had a cat then, very similar to the cat who comes to visit me now and sleeps in the long grass at the bottom of the garden. The bottom of the garden is not that far away, it’s not a big garden, but still there is something magical about it. I suppose it’s where I used to think the fairies were to be found, or there were more interesting insects there than close to the house. I like to keep the grass long down there for things to live in, to hide themselves away, much like I used to hide myself away in the long grass as a kid. My concerns are very few, when it comes down to it. Seeing a new flower would be enough for a day, when I am not greatly yearning the excitements of the world, or, really, comparing myself with others. Because that’s all it is. The stupid thought that I would be looked down upon for having so little, enjoying such small things. I should be off out there driving a big car and making love to many gorgeous women and have the money pouring in out of the end of a pipe, my oil

pipeline to the world, pumping the money out of the world and into my bank account. That's what I should be doing. But instead I just laze around watching the birds eating seeds and the flowers blooming and going.

For now, I am content to be carried in my sedan chair of the days. Already the leaves of the sycamore making a tremendous windy wavy flourish have grown from tiny little things like the flags children wave at processions to a great mass of flapping elephant ears, all while I've been sitting here.

In her absence, she could just be anyone, a girl you were momentarily attracted to on the Tube, for instance, coming back home late, and in the morning you line her up with *her* and it's frightening how there doesn't seem much in it, they could both be forgotten.

All of nature talks, you just have to come to it defenceless if you want to hear it. You spot a fossil shell in the rock and are cast back millions of years and the scale of things becomes vast and when you flip back to your own tiny life all those things you haven't got that you would really like don't seem so important any more, because you are a part of something, and look about you a moment, it's everywhere, getting on with itself.

The universe is one entity with a gazillion eyes upon itself. Even with the eyes turned inside out in sleep, some facet of it is being explored. We are not reporting back to someone else, we are reporting back to ourself, but we're not there. Should we feel our unity with everything, it is still a localised little feeling, but it fills our head enough with stars to be glad of having no more to chew. Tiny little walnuts for brains. Stomping feet and shouting, Sharn't! Sharn't! Sharn't! ending up in a pile in the road knocked off our bicycle, a wonder we weren't killed, looking at the sun flickering through the still spinning wheel, feeling our skull for cracked moveable bits.

How long should one honour a vision once it has started to be corroded by the suspicion it may have been a delusion? I'd say, all the way, all the painful way, and fight it with the suspicion it may not have been a delusion, and in the process create an uncorrodible version of the vision, one that has fought and lost only to be reborn as a reality crafted from the gift of an idea that delusion brought.

I am an outsider to the outsider I used to be. I am peering right into the abyss. I make it across the landing naked with a piss-hard cock. No-one comes out of their rooms. They're sound asleep. She makes me piss it all away, won't be fucked with that, wants a real hard-on. I'm crying myself to sleep. Ten years old. Blankets tightly tucked in, not a duvet. With my eyes closed I'm flitting all over. I ate a grapefruit out of the fridge. I want to chuck half my room into a skip. Don't cry, collecting fallen apples in your pinafore, you've not got many but don't cry. It is so hard to let go but I don't know what I'm holding onto. This is all there is. Why do we think disasters from space will come in the night? How does the day blind us to the bare rock we are on travelling through space? I want to know who I am. I am just a body on a ledge.

If I regarded it as just a place for a few nights maybe I would be less restless. I am restless because I have regarded it as just a place for a few nights for the past many years. I don't have to go, but I could make it easier to go. Maybe then I would not feel so restless. All the little intimations, it'll seem like a grandfatherly talk smeared out thin through your life. The breeze in the

trees is so soothing a sound. Listen to me, it says, put aside everything else. And I do.

The questions are too big to answer, they have to be answered in little ways, bit by bit. Tidy up these leaves first, gather up these grass cuttings first, wash your hands and scrub your nails first, have a bath first, then I'll tell you, then we can talk about it, if you still want to, but for now tidy up these books on the floor, do a little bit of work on this and a little bit of work on that, do that first, read another story first, have another cup of tea first, cook yourself a fine meal first, and you see how it goes on, step by step you get back in tune. We'll talk about everything you want to talk about, but first . . . put the kettle on.

There was a tramp fast asleep on the bench down in the tube station just after the last train for the night had gone into the tunnel and away and the people were walking to the exit and the station master came over to the tramp with a great big smile on his face and shook him gently awake and said with his beaming smile, 'Wakey! Wakey! Rise and shine! It's a *lovely* morning out there, the birds are singing up bright and early, the sun is shining.' And the tramp got up and shuffled

out to the exit not realising, I supposed, that it was the middle of the night.

She was telling me a story about the rhino she saw at Berlin Zoo that had worn a path with its running in circles in its enclosure half a metre deep. Because we do that in our brains, she said, thinking the same old thoughts. And it's nice to have a new thought now and again and I said but what if the path the rhino is wearing is the subject matter you want to explore, what if that's all it is, and she said well there's a lot to be seen in a wall if you spend long enough staring at it. But, I said, what if I want to tell the story of the rhino going round and round in circles and wearing a deep rut, wouldn't that be great if that's all it was? We're afraid of repetition and every day the same but why not make it something to celebrate? And so I said, I want to capture what it's like when not much happens, I want to stare long and hard at the wall so the wall will stare back into me and it'll be a staring match. How about a book that was one long staring match between the writer and the reader? That always somehow never nodded off or blinked, just became glassy from time to time like there was no-one in there. Imagine you're having a staring match with someone and they die during it but they don't fall over they're propped up in their chair and they go right on staring at you but somewhere along the line they just

died and you didn't notice right away or at least you can't be sure when they died if it was a good long hard staring match. Would you notice them slip away? Hell of a way to beat you. He just carried on staring. Left his body there like a chrysalis you don't know whether there's a butterfly in or not. You have to investigate to see if it twitches to the touch or whether the pupa case has already been split open and slipped out of.

Being aimless is a goal too, I said. She hummed and arrhed. You have to do it properly, she said. Could be I'm not doing it properly, could be I'm doing it the only way I know how. Do you think I have any idea how any sentence I start is going to end? Do you think that any paragraph of mine you start to read has the faintest idea where it's going? I'm either waiting for the words or they're coming and if they're coming I haven't got time to wonder where they're going I'm too busy getting em down and if I'm waiting for em I can't wait for a thought to finish unravelling itself before I start to write it down can I or it'll just be a thought that forgot itself and how it began by the time it's ended and complete and so not even complete because it can't recall where it came from. If a snail wants to get up a ladder leaning against the side of the house he doesn't need to use the rungs. Something is being said the way you can get a squeaky sound out of a balloon by

stretching the blowhole wide and letting the air fart and fumble and finally screeeeech its way out or tie the damn thing and rub your fingers all over it like plucking a balloon double bass or dragging your fingers across it in stuttery plop-plop-plops giving way to a smooth stretched squawk of a balloon fuck torture going on and mum shouts, Will you stop it with that balloon. And dad says, You heard your mother.

‘Yow ay arf got a glum face,’ mum said, ‘yo’ll stick like that if the wind changes.’ Dad looked at her and said, ‘I ay ad a sugar all day. Yow’d be lookin glum if yow ay ad a sugar since supper last night. My gut’s churning up somethin rotten.’ Dad sat on the sofa holding his belly. He didn’t know it was tied up in green knots and going mouldy. Mum’d stand there looking at him in her apron, pocket full of pegs and knick-knacks, the odd humbug. ‘Yow get up them stairs to the La Pom,’ she said, ‘wring a few drops out of yer diddler if yow car do a number two.’ Dad smiled and started to laugh from right down inside himself. ‘That tickled yer funny bone,’ said mum. He’d go up and squeeze out a few rabbit droppings and by the time he got back night had already come draping down over the fuchsias. I

was playing cars on the carpet, bumping them into table legs and knocking down giraffes. I wasn't really listening but I was.

She has such a lovely arse, so rounded and smooth, it's an arse for pulling cream silk across slowly revealing it oh how I'd love to be sipping a little thimble of coffee with her in an Athens café right now, writing a poem about hollow and conflicting passions finding themselves real and come together, like we could do anything! Like we could walk arm in arm through the rain walking a little monkey on a gold chain.

The peace of rainy afternoons with all the windows open listening to it, next door's cat having a nap on the bed. Thinking, I could do so much now, this is the start of something great. She said to me, It's good you're still seeing the dream of us walking through the rain arm in arm, I can still be anything for you, it's good you're not seeing me all ugly and pregnant with my hair all matted in the morning.

I want to see you in a mess, I want that too.

That can come later, she said. We can do that too. But for now, just be glad you can dream me as you want, I've not set like concrete yet.

And I lay on the cushions listening to the pouring rain, listening to the cat purr. And it was a wonderful afternoon, and the cat was her and I buried my head into the fur and lay there thinking it all out but without thinking if you'd have popped your head around the door you'd have seen me wearing a cat hat and I stopped wishing for everything to hurry up and be what it was going to be because that was only getting away from what it was and what it was was more wonderful than I'd been imagining. The uncooperative world was cooperating, even though she was still miles and miles away. But there was a pop and a sparkle in the air and the enthusiasm I thought had grown old and ready to throw away had got back its youthful spirit and I only wished I had a good sturdy table because I would have got up onto it and danced danced like a madman on a dour afternoon and wouldn't have cared who saw me through the windows. Soon, I would go out and clean all my windows again and shake the magic dust of welcome around the place and let the breeze blow right through the place from end to end and blow away the old cobwebs and half-bitten things abandoned but not quite abandoned fallen down behind

other things I'd ask Mr Wind to flush them out blow out everything that was hiding behind something else do it for me Mr Wind blow blow blow it all away let's remake the world together let's go on a fishing trip and swap sandwiches. Oh yes I could feel it now the marching ants of happiness coming in to stay.

I could be an alchemist out searching for salamanders, I don't want company for that, I don't want people for that, that is something I do on my own. There will always be something of the fairytale in my blood something of the ominous raven about me, so why deny it why try to fit in at this late hour? So, away with it then, all *out there*. What does it mean to *me*, scurrying ant society. What I leave behind is precisely what will keep me here forever. So I will just play, play around, no time any more for unsettling the innocence of fools. The roses are fading. All things shall fade. Is there time? Is there still time? More than ever there is so much to say but only spare moments to say it. What a project is unsettling the soul and growing wise from the discomfort. I am a monkey hanging down limply by both arms from lianas stretching up into the sky. All I can hear all day are cuckoos. She looked at me, with

love I thought, and set me on the road to becoming something else. But when she seems to go, where am I going then. What is my course? What is my passion for? But never mind that, for am have been full of meantimes since the beginning, a pouncing lion that will not hold its shape, just a passing shock leaving a ruminating unease, spiky and charged. Of course I forget who I am. Constantly. Because I do not accept who I am supposed to be I know I am not him I know I am full of disguised rain landing softly pluffing the dust meteoric balls of rain big globules of rain trying to hit you but spaced far apart and until one does hit you you won't even know it is raining, and so out there in space where it is raining catastrophically.

Cat comes to cheer me up. The cat with marmalade eyes. If he can be happy entertaining himself, then so can I, and I play with him, trailing a stick of grass and he chases it round and round. I admire his infinite capacity to just sit and look about and then clamber over flowerpots in the excited pursuit of a fly. I like that he comes to visit me. I like that he appears to want to hang around close to me. He makes me smile all the time. What is his world like? I am so curious to see the world through his eyes. Bounding about over the grass. I am freest when I forget myself and just blend with the breeze swaying the tree. My chair in the garden

overlooking my little bit of nature is my truest anchor, the place I know I should return to, the sameness of it, the bees on the chive flowers sucking out the last use of them. And I watch them as I have watched them countless times before, and think, Here is the answer right before me. So tireless. There is much to be said for staring at the same patch day after day. Just beyond the thyme is a pot-bellied Buddha. I sit facing him. He is smiling. The cat stands on his belly to peer into the thick bushes. Fieldmice hide behind his back. And so this is my urban koan. My field of view. My adventures deep within looking for escape. Here is where I return to, like a man returning from exile. I do not need a mountaintop. There is a perfection in the way I have let things grow on their own, just trimming a bit here a bit there. Waiting for rain, sensed in the heaviness of the sky. A lifetime of distant police sirens and cupboards banging and television sounds through open windows. First, life is too long, then it is too short. I am following myself, no-one else. She tells me almost every day of another insect she has saved from drowning in the pond. I say to her, Were you like that before, before you knew me? And she says, I don't know, I can't remember. This respect for life, all life, it's really something isn't it? Yes it is sweetheart, it's beautiful. And I tell her how I tried the cat on a bit of sun-dried tomato, it was the only thing I

had and I wanted to feed him a little something, and he wolfed it down he loved it. No I haven't told her that yet, that's something I plan to tell her, if I remember, if it doesn't slip away. I long to rest my head in her arms, but she is far away still. I sometimes wonder, will she always be far away? Is that what it is? But it is something on a lonely man's journey. Someone to tell things to.

I grew up thankful I wasn't like everybody else, but it came at the price of being excluded. I have always spun on a pyramid's apex. My mother and father were proud of me, but often said they thought they must've brought the wrong baby back from the hospital. 'They gid us the wrung babby day they?' dad would say, looking at mum with a smile. Though I think I must have realised at some point that he was joking, it led me to think that perhaps these weren't my parents, and how easy it would have been for a life to take a completely different course from what it might have done simply by such a small error in the beginning. But you would never know what your life could have been, it was just a fantasy. But in later years I remember being happy on looking through old photographs of my father and recognising certain features in my own face. Not that I was particularly

happy he was my father, more that at least I could be sure a mistake had not been made, since a mistake like that could haunt a man for his entire life.

I have a horror of not allowing my life to be all it can be, and a suspicion that it is already too late. And yet, is this not just an accumulated detritus, is my true nature not the one where all this concern simply falls away? So in that, I have probably done something of note, in that I have treated this question as a thing to be answered with a single-minded intensity. I have forever sought a standing-apart, like an angel in the middle of the day who doesn't know what to do with himself. I swapped the usual marbles I lost the usual treasured possessions I let slip the usual great loves, until eventually I was little more than a camper in my own life. Whatever it was I was supposed to do, because I was clearly supposed to do *something*, was going to take *years*. My ambition moved like quicksilver to fill in my depressions until the silvery lakes all joined and presented me with a flat mirror surface singular and impressive in its calm, the roughness underneath it quite irrelevant now. I just stood and gazed at what I had apparently created by hard slog so steadfast over the years that frankly it had seemed just the annoyance of life interspersed with brief moments of reaching out to the stars. It was nothing I planned, yet one day I awoke to the mirror

of mercury all still, as if it was what I had intended all along, all along with my stupidities and forlorn longings. Now this has come upon me, I said to myself. I have arrived somewhere. I have poked my head above it all. What's to be done with it now? Am I to just sit upon its still shore? I didn't scream out for the answer as I might have done in the past. I just sat and looked out of the window at the lives passing, the sweet girls their hair flowing with finger-winds. Had I a clock to wind I would surely have wound it and satisfied myself with a job well done, a day not wasted. As it was, I walked from room to room wearing new shoes in and scurried my eyes up the wooden telegraph pole like a little mouse wanting to sit on the top. Magpies flew right over my head as if they wanted to show me their armpits. And at night when it wasn't raining I counted the stars because it seemed better than counting nothing at all, though equally as useless. I made grand plans for the future, such as what I would cook tomorrow, scribbled on a scrap of paper and attached to the fridge door by a magnet. I experimented to see how many days I could go without spending any money. The parade of previous selves living like moss and weeds in crumbling old walls, always with a bit of a grumble going on beneath the surface. But now, I'd licked my plate clean, it was like something had happened in the

night, I'd woken up in a different universe, similar in all respects to the one I went to bed in, but changed, unalterably changed. Oh my god, it dawned on me, I've eradicated the source of my awful despair, I have come back into the world, but it's a different world, and this one won't go away (it will, it will). This is the world where fairies and elves live, where you cannot pick up an old bucket without seeing the wonder that lies behind it, this is where I have long wanted to end up. Of course, this is where I have been heading all the time. I knew it! I knew it. Oh winter street summer street spring street and autumn street, tell your secrets to me. The first thing I recognised of the changed world was orange, it was an orange, but I looked at it for some minutes asking myself what on earth is that? Then it came back to me, it was an orange, and that's a chair, and that's a table, and that's a bowl and that's a plate and that's a spoon. I know this, I know all this already, but this is no ordinariness I return to, this is a remade world, this world is as fresh as a daisy, this is the first day of this world, this world has not had a chance to become stale, yet it resembles the old world in every way. I keep looking for things that are missing, as if I have had a burglar in while I slept, but no, it's been done to precision, this replica world that I feel altogether different in. An angel was sent to wake me

this morning, that's it. I am seeing the true potency of life, where even an apple is an extraordinary vision, and things that once belonged to me are simply things that are there. I could walk out of the front door, leaving it open, and just carry on walking. Because there is no difference. I have gone from being trapped to being set free. This parallel universe has been crossed over into through an invisible door somewhere in sleep, but it has fixed itself and I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Even my socks have become unsocked. In this world everything drifts deliriously like froth on a river. Winter nights and summer mornings weave in and out of each other. Drudge-filled life has become an astonishing aliveness. I have paid my admission fee and gained entry to a secret world. What a transformation when nothing changes but everything changes.

Sometimes the pressure builds up inside the head so much you have to do something. Just then, that is your chance to defiantly do nothing. Defiant at first, but peaceful not caring if you sit still long enough. This is a point of change, when you rest. Listen with your eyes closed to footsteps along the pavement late at night with the window open, the slamming shut of a door.

They've gone to bed, no more noise out of them. And gradually as the night deepens the quietness becomes such that you could just be the only person awake, you are always awake in the night asleep in the morning. You are on the same rhythm with cats and foxes, hedgehogs and hawk moths. All you have to do is sit, and listen. Sit still and listen. Not long. Soon your cares can be gone. Absorbed. Dismissed. Flung away. You can get up like you might in a dream, without place or load or name or body or tomorrow or yesterday or friends or enemies. The cool night breeze is your friend. The coming of the dawn is your enemy. Just love the peaceful quiet when it's there. Not even the birds. Distant sirens like a fellow creature. You undo the knot. There's no-one to tell, they're all asleep, wouldn't want to talk about it anyway, just have it, be it. If it stops seeming easy, set it aside. It doesn't matter. Just sit. Listen to your breathing. Anything else is too much effort straight away. Instead of saying 'It's all pointless' as if there was some point in that take another look and see that it *is* all pointless, but that's good not bad. That nothing we do matters is an escape from needing to amount to something. We're let off the hook. Do what the hell you like. This whole thing is going to be flushed down the toilet. We're in training to be masters of our own elbow. So you can set your feet on the pavement and walk, congratulations

you've fulfilled your part in the divine plan, He's just testing out the hydraulics. It's ages yet before you get to speak, and then it'll only be shit, so don't worry, you're assuming far more responsibility than you need to worrying you never learnt the piano you never went to Mexico. Can you stand on one leg? Can you put your hand flat on a table top? If you just do that before you wear out you'll have already done more than you were designed for. Not enough to do? Lie on your back and wait. That's plenty isn't it? Who did you think you were kidding going to university? Thick as thieves in student bedrooms of a night discussing philosophy. You may as well have sat around a tumbler of warm water watching salt dissolve for all the good it did. All those people you admired for having brains. You may as well have admired their hats and coats. Why do you think you were at your happiest dramatic nights on your own watching the lightning? You don't have much to do but when you actually do it wholeheartedly it's plenty. It's when you're sifting through your thoughts for meaning, instead of just watching, looking, that your paw goes in the water and you pour your cold tea into the bin instead of the sink, like junk made in Hong Kong. Get your groundwork done, get that arm into that sleeve and call it a day for things done. The loneliness of porcelain statuettes on mantelpieces, only days of your

life left and no inclination to dust. There are many who bear false witness to their Age, but I will not, for I am past caring about accuracy and so true. I simply speak, talking to ants of another day. Too clever for his own good, this glove puppet I have my hand up, this face of ME. This twenty-four-hour-a-day-can't-make-his-mind-up-between-God-and-fuck-all.

The sun likes to make its departure something to remember, atmospheric conditions permitting. Oh what a lovely red sky, oh look at that lovely sunset! And they rush to their back garden fences with their cameras. Bye Mr Sun, you big ball of fire you. And they all wave goodbye but I'm with the bats bring it on Mr Night it's a lie we live by in the day ain't it it's a lie that takes away the pretty big damn bloody obvious truth that this is a lump of mud in the middle of space. Oh I never knew. The day had me in its stranglehold. And then I went indoors to watch TV. And when I got up it was day again. I vaguely recall something from winter, but I just closed the curtains when it began to get dark and switched the TV on, I didn't fully examine the phenomenon.

Hotness insects the jungle alive with sounds of life everywhere the trees are hissing-zing like live air or a channel left open the million stridulations of grasshopper legs cicadas crickets and unknown specks adding their tiny bit of sound a rocket heading into space it is going so far its flare is so bright it will surely explode it has to explode it has to and fall back to Earth a hundred buckets of flame.

Memory is not yet ready, it says go away I'm changing. Do your chores. I'll be ready when you get back. Don't have this pride. There are men who worked at books all their lives, it's a great camouflage for people who think things that shouldn't be thought, people who wrap up packages with brown paper and string in the middle of the night and go out and throw them in a moonlit lake before dawn. Poetry burns as well as any wood, fill the world with firebricks. Read to me from your past. Take the water snake out of your slipper and put it back in the bucket, though it complains. 'Yeah . . . it's annoying to be in a bucket all day.' She lived with a grey-haired Bavarian man who filled the house with reptiles, brought fish back from Thailand in his suitcase. In his suitcase? I said. Yeah, in his suitcase, in

plastic bags of water. And he'd bring back snakes. There were turtles hibernating in the fridge and I woke up one morning and went to put on my fluffy pink slippers and there was a tiny water snake curled up inside and it came out and reared up at me and spat like a cobra. And he used to play with his snakes on the wooden table at night. He'd let them coil round his bare arms. But he'd fall asleep in the chair and his head would go back and he'd snore and his arms would flop down and the snakes would say Hey what aren't we playing any more? and so they'd get fed up and drop off his arms like cut sleeves and go and explore the house they'd always come in my bedroom and so he lost his favourite snake that way and was upset until a few days later I put some bread in the toaster and clicked it on and swoosh out like lightning the snake slithers out nearly had toasted snake and I shout Hannes! Hannes! I've found your snake! It was in the toaster.

I forget what I wanted to say but it comes back at unexpected moments, so I just let it, let it settle as it wants, like ashes falling from the sky, and, hopefully, leave it undisturbed, unread again, not even one set of footprints through it, let it build, don't ruin it with human presence, it was enough the hand hurled the canister, the rest is too heavy. Every instant is gradual. Burned to the bone and burnt the bone too. Fish slipped

through customs, keep thinking of that, multicoloured fish in a grey-haired Bavarian's suitcase. What I really want is a carved cane, a demonic walking stick, bendy as a willow but rigid as iron too, something to teach a thing or two about not falling over. I've examined my mind and it's made up, I'll just carry on now, it's a most trivial excursion, hardly a planetary expedition, but it doesn't pay to have grand ideas in one's advancing years. It started out without even knowing what was breathed down here, what molecules they had to bind to blood, but as the years pass you forget and get into trips to the shop and the daily envelopes on the mat. You forget how new it looked through the porthole, you forget even your pretended human hopes, such as to get married and have a good job and a nice house. And settle in to what the day fetches you out of a pile of dead leaves out of a wishing well of tossed coins. Nothing is sudden in heavy silent worlds. Luminous fish glowing in the depths of the ocean. Tiny angel fish in and out of the orbits of human skulls. The soundless breaking of promises. Small decisions that before I took them were like lost dogs running deserted streets, holding my head like a stone I wanted to crush. I was the only one who turned up for the riot, but it was the kind of riot I like, in that I was big enough to make that point on my own.

The indifferent jail of moments before.

The back gardens are whispering among themselves in the dark. They have folded up the day and put it away. Their loyalties to their particular houses divided, they are the gardens of the moon now, they turn their backs on the sleepy houses and look up up. A splendid night for moonbathing. I could go out there naked and lie spread-eagled in the long grass. Go and get a hatful of potatoes in the morning. I miss the clinking of glasses and the banter with friends, but the money has dribbled away and I dig in, left to my own devices. The free entertainment of the mind. The temple of the moon is everywhere. I am not much different to an ancestor wearing animal pelts, at night, when the sound of the machine city dies down and I take my place on the crowded Earth, sitting cross-legged in the dew. Sitting and forgetting. They're queuing up round the block to get into dreams, the doors open and in they rush. I hold it off, as if I must, another night. This is my

job, like it's hers to do midnight twirls in a grass skirt in front of her mirror. It tickertapes out, sometimes fast sometimes slow. I read it once. It accumulates in piles. Loops and loops of it. I don't know whether I'll be able to make my living from it. But home is a den, and dinner is potatoes boiled over burning books. Read em. No-one else will, so it doesn't matter. Diary of a man committed to something ridiculous. Sand mandalas constructed in solitude and seen by no-one. Left for the wind. Why be grand about it, it's only mud pies and broken sticks, a palace for joyous hours but the children have gone in now and no-one else sees in it what they saw, what they whooped about. I have seen the sea wait until the children were out of sight before it flooded their fortress, crouching down his frail bony shoulders to see inside, filling up the moat slowly, he knows it's coming, the great tide that will level it back to smooth beach, but while there's time he decorates its walls with strips of seaweed Old Man Sea loves the children's handiwork and he wrecks it gently at first.

And so we grow the afternoon on an agar plate until the shadows arrive in carts. The moon saunters over the horizon but that's no good it has to get over the houses before it's even noticed rooftops are the new horizon.

The mystery of every blade of grass singing a lullaby to the stones moving into the moonlight.

What I love is left on the tree. A summer no more mysterious than the last. A place safely empty. Is my brain turned on? Hungry with small things I keep to myself. I lie on the floor and wish I could lay lower. There is nothing to study. Some kind of sentence, live out the time of this. Be bigger than it. My only goal. But what a goal, what a good big hard goal. I feel my insides go to steel at the thought of it, be bigger than it. Six months of not seeing her passed so fast I turned over in bed and was startled to see her there beside me, and it was only moments because the time when she was not there was thrown away like packaging that had protected a precious item in transit. And the dozens of faces I had experimented with being fell away mask after dropping mask until the only face I had was back in place. Never left just hid. Saved itself for her. And I said, Now, now you must dance for me. Get up on the table and dance for me in the moonlight.

There is just this moment of being alive, so be fully alive, don't put that off to another day, put everything

else off to another day but not that. You're just a village idiot sitting in the shade of a tree picking your nose, and you understand everything. You can laugh at those other fools. We're all fools! But this fool *knows*. It has to be said, every so often. Because it's easy to get lost, and getting lost is part of it too so don't mind getting lost it makes the getting found something you can carve out a conviction from, not rotten wood that crumbles and won't keep a shape. And you can stride into dark forests with your hands clasped behind your back as if handcuffed, not fearing lurking dangers. My whole trouble the whole time was thinking myself clever, because that meant there was shame in my lack of understanding, and this held back understanding because I gave the person who wanted to know too tight a form and never let him fade away, though he wanted to, no, you shall not, I make you responsible for understanding this, and he furrowed his brow and beat his temples with his fists, but I'd made his job too hard by not allowing him to understand he didn't exist, and time and time again he came up against this abyss and I wouldn't let him cross it, so he fell into the only behaviour proper for the edges of abysses, to sit down and cry, to mope around like one lost forever, when more appropriate behaviour would have been to skip and jump about the edge and pick daisies with foolish

others he managed to tempt close the laughing boy laughing his head off at the danger because he knows it's not real. So eventually he comes away, back into the world, where people fear abysses but have never seen one close to. But standing apart from all of this is the part of him that crossed over and now understands and wants him to understand. It is him, but not wholly him, because he of the world is filled from the tap he's under. He cannot hear my voice as his own. He only hears snatches of the conversation. He listens in on the future talking about the past, and listens more intently when he realises the talk is of his present. What are they saying? Is there more than one? They are saying there are many. The trouble that has been taken. But they notice he is listening and it gets harder to hear, in front of him and above him television noises through the walls. They lower their voices. He'll not hear anything of any worth now. He's back in the noise.

Nothing's real.

I used to be fooled by it, now it's as much as I can do to stop it fading away. Because I still think there is something worthy of examination here. How this unreality is constructed is still a worthy interest, and

something is implied beyond it. But no, this everyday is not real. Time is not real. There is no movement. Perhaps there has been movement, perhaps there will be movement, but the framework these perhapses exist within is not real. Few people look at this. For them, it's all real, but for those who even suspect in the slightest that nothing's real there can only be dissatisfaction in taking anything to be real. It's too late, they should move on to the next level, leave these shadows behind. But that's a step few are willing to take. So they stay and build it up, but it doesn't make it any more real, adding to it. But actually when you see that nothing's real the dilemma becomes the new adventure. But first you have to see, nothing's moving. Nothing is happening. It is a mirage that things are happening. Nothing is happening.

What kind of being am I? Am I a construct in some sleeping mind? What will I see if I prise open *his* eyelids to look upon the scarlet green dawn of another beginning? Will any of those *here* be *there*? This is why we wait, why we see it through. Don't want to muck up the mechanism. Not knowing how long to wait we are taken hostage by our own innate wish to wait forever for the good to happen to us. So we give it a

chance, what has done nothing to deserve such a chance. We eat our fill in the meantime, waiting to hear what is this great thing we could do with our lives? Did that taxidermist when young hear the still voice within: 'Stuff a swordfish m'boy! Stuff a swordfish!'

And so I write, better than being caught imagining I am governing a small country when the ball stops rolling and our respective lives and what we have made of them are cast out into the arid desert heat for scrutiny each by the rest. O you prime ministers and presidents, you kings and queens, what fools you'll look then, forced to rub up against the rest of us, exposed in the act of biting off more of the silly illusion than you really knew how to swallow, but no sillier than the fools who have spent their lives watching you on television.

The coin tosses that have led me to do one thing rather than another thing, for the past thirty years. They have led me to a reclusive life. No doubt about that. It feels natural to have no choice. I am like a caretaker of a temple. I decide how far the mint may wander into the territory of the buttercup, and how far the buttercup may wander into the territory of the mint. I take that decision: I shall lay down a little wall between them

now, to stop either spreading any further into the other. I will make the demarcation line here. And I kneel and dig a little trench and lay in it a piece of slate fallen from the roof. I tidy up the edges. It is my job, this. That and turning over beetles fallen on their back if they cannot do it themselves. I keep everything growing a little more wildly than a proper gardener would. I don't have to do much. I have plenty of time to think. And mostly I think about myself and where I am. There aren't any monks at the temple. Just me. It is the temple of the setting sun. I don't think, What could I do? If there is nothing to do, I do nothing. I let a singing bird lead my mind. I recall the same song from five years ago, ten years ago. A different bird, but the same song. And then I am waiting ten seconds, twenty seconds, thirty seconds, but the bird has stopped. But still I'm in a mood to listen and listen instead to the wind banging the blinds. But then that stops. And then a helicopter, but that goes away. And this is my day. It becomes visible on all sides, something standing out in the open.

It's just that I don't know where I am. Or something. I'm lost in the days. I don't want to see anybody but it's not because I like to be alone. I don't know why it

is. I suppose I have to carry on talking like this. Until it changes. Maybe it will seem like more than it does now, later. Didn't I want to get to grips with a nothing life? Didn't I want to document it? There is so much in the day, dulled by familiarity. Those fine fine poppies. The sun heading down to its setting shining slanted rays down upon me. I have done everything I can, and it's not very much, the sparrows chirp. The wind in the sycamore like the ocean coming in, I listen to it with my eyes closed, sunlight red on my eyelids. This is worth talking about. I sit in the light of the sun heading down, tears in my eyes I tell myself it's hay fever. When all of this is gone, *then* it will seem it was worth talking about. This simple sameness every day. When it's gone . . . then . . . when the foxgloves have gone, when the poppies are no more, when the sweet peas have been and gone, when there is no more sitting in the sun, when there are no more lazy days, when there is no more profusion of nature, then I will be glad I spoke of it while it was right before my eyes, not something I had to imagine. Why else would I persist? Persist in *wanting* to talk about the same thing every day, talk about it with myself, and others who may follow after me, for whom it is freedom, freedom spoken about out of an illusion of not being free. Would the children I may have one day like to read about what

their father did before he was their father? How he sat in a garden all day long. He does that now, perhaps, but cannot speak, though the ghosts of cats rub about his legs. He has sprinkled some magic here, hasn't he? Some real magic. He has blown a bubble that has not burst. He didn't always know what he was doing, but we can be sure, can't we, having seen enough of it now, that it was always there in him, even when he directly wrote out of the lack of it, oh yes, it was there in him alright, standing aside so its absence could be felt, so its absence could be expressed, because how can you know what you're filled with unless you are drained of it too? He did it for us. It was tough sitting in that garden for that length of time, choosing to do so little when all the world about was busy, wanting to be no busier than a poppy coming into bloom. Is it any wonder insects considered him their friend? Really. They came to him like a father. He sank and sank in those days, sank down deep into the garden. She phoned him from time to time. That would be your mother, before she was your mother, before she was his wife. Before he could be sure she would be his wife. Before there was anything that could be done about anything. When the world was ceasing its movement, when fuel was running out, when food was becoming expensive, but only a few saw the consequences of it in their hearts.

This is what he did. He sat in the garden and thought. She rang him from time to time and they spoke. She was sitting in her garden, in that other country. He was waiting and she was waiting, and nothing could move. She told him how she saw a tiny winged aphid on cut flowers brought indoors, and she took the aphid on her fingertip three floors up and showed the aphid the roofs below and said, You're very far away from where you belong little aphid aren't you? And she pointed her finger at black tarmac that way and concrete that way and paving slabs that way, until she saw a little patch of green, the green of the garden between the houses, and she pointed her finger to it with the aphid on the tip and said, There's your land little aphid, do you think you'll be able to fly to there? It's an awfully long way away for one as small as you isn't it? And he interrupted her and said, So did you take the aphid down to the garden? And she laughed and said, YES! He stayed on my fingertip and I thought it's just me and you in the world at this moment little aphid we're all there is and I took him down and he stayed on my fingertip and I found some flowers that looked similar to those I found the aphid on and I let him walk on a petal.

Dear children I may never have, your father was so happy to hear it, this delightful moment in your mother's day.

Days come and go, and the hours pass. It could be havoc, but it isn't. When I worked I had to steal days like I have now, steal away from my lord and master by pretending to be ill. That is no way to live. Better to take your days as you want them, if you're stealing your own days then no money you earn can be an adequate compensation. A seagull peers down at me from the blue sky. We are all stranded in our existence. The days can be just as much the same even if they are different every day. The minutes become more expensive as they run out. When you're a child they're ten a penny, when you're old you wonder how much longer you'll be able to afford them. Years can flash by, wasted. Or seems like wasted, in that you didn't notice them and your situation is more or less the same as it was. I used to have more belief that a phantom apparition would come and explain things to me, some revelation would awaken me to my purpose. An adventure would start. But let it be said that having little belief in such ideas any more does not make them less likely. In fact, I rather think these days that the less I want or expect, the more I will get. I am examining the notion of just stopping, slowing down to motionlessness in one's life. For whole timeless seconds I manage perfect stillness, as

if the world ends on such a note, and begins. Coming back, I see the restlessness in people's faces, how they confine themselves to a narrow sliver of reality that is as much as they can handle. They don't have time to explore other dimensions, that would mean giving up what they have, what they have worked for. They invest in their narrow slivers with their lives. They are kept in check by themselves, by an allegiance to the world as they found it, as it was drummed into them. Ostensibly, they are better off than me. But I could never go that way. I started my journey into the world by turning my back on it. Looking for alien artefacts left like fossils in the fabric of existence, that ought to be there in the thin air of it all in the everyday nonsense of it all. If I kept looking, eventually I would trigger an encounter, I would track them to their lair and they would show themselves to me. It had to work that way. If I follow the mountain tiger's footprints then in time though I may not ever come across him he will surely be watching me, and he will come and inspect me, he will leave his footprints in the snow around my hut. What has this to do with increasing the profits of some global sons-of-bitches who talk and talk in spinning phrases and say nothing at all but hypnotise the world to their way. This had nothing to do with me. I was on a private quest, and the more I looked at the structures of the

world the more I saw they had nothing to do with me, I was perched elsewhere and I may as well give myself wholeheartedly to it.

So I lingered on outwardly not so different looking, squatted in their street, not working, but apparently beavering away at something the lights at night never going off just fading with the dawn behind the drawn curtains. I even stopped buying into their definitions of madness, since to me it was they who were mad in acquiescing so easily to a surface reality that served a few rich and privileged bastards who had nothing but contempt for those they fed upon. A minute casting a glance in their direction was a minute wasted, truly wasted, because behind it was a part of me toying with going back, fitting in, doing what they do, paying off my loneliness with fake industry that did nothing to further my interests save to the extent that I could afford to cushion myself from looking the world in the eye. I didn't want any of that, I *wanted* to look the world in the eye, I wanted more than that, I wanted to know where the tiger was what the tiger was doing. And let that desire make something of me, even if I ended up walking about like a tramp in smelly clothes in bare feet dirty and bandaged. Because this would just be a battered scabbard inside would be what really mattered and sharper too for being unexpected.

I sometimes think that in the future I will not be able to recognise these words as my own. The part of my brain that enables me to know will have holes in it. Perhaps I will have the sense to believe people when they tell me I wrote that, that indeed I foresaw this very time, they'll point to this passage and say, You see, you knew all along. And maybe I will start reading like one who has found an old treasure map in a secret compartment of a bureau handed down for generations. Seeking to discover something of myself as I once was. And I will find a man for whom memory was already a tenuous thing, who believed neither in the future nor the past, who lived in the present like an eagle on a ledge in a ravine. For whom the past had already fallen away, even though he could force himself to remember it, and the future looked ever more like something that has disappeared. I came from somewhere. But these dim fading pictures of my parents are not what I mean, I mean before that.

Falling to earth smoke behind. A seed tunnelling up out of the earth. A bird flying high riding thermals. Cracking open of everything to the atoms. Pulling a

long hair out of a slab of butter. Looking at the tap from different angles could be a spaceship. And the geometry of things comes back drawing itself endlessly over everything. The spider-like creatures rising up into angels. The cooling surface of the planet, not so long till the newsreel images of newspapers rolling off huge presses and the grandeur of it all is both lost and yet, stand back stand back, something's coming through. The universe slims down to the simplest thing, to show itself to you. Something you can hold in your hand, a pebble picked from the ground. And then it all collapses, leaving faces in the rock. And you're travelling, your body is no more. Life was so many footprints in the mud. Now you're finding your true being. It doesn't matter what you've left behind, you're entranced and growing into your new future, leaving behind your life like a dream the end of the world was just the end of the world, you didn't expect to be leaving. All those things you could barely grasp, you don't even need to try. It was wrong it was all wrong that's why. You were ready too soon. And you've still got that pebble in your clenched fist. The thing took. Why that? Why not that? You couldn't have taken it from a dream. It wasn't a dream, that's what it says. It could have been anything. Something small enough the universe made of itself. Before it stopped. Just stopped. In five seconds

you'll be back in your room. As if nothing happened. And you'll know, you'll know again. What this is about. What this has always been about. Newfound purpose in a tired old room. Find it again and again. Find it hold it be it. This is it this. Is it. Sway with it. Get in the groove of it. Sway from side to side with it, this is the rhythm baby this is where it's coming from you've found the universe baby you've got the universe in your hand you're back and you're gone all at the same time and this is the tune this is the fine old tune baby you know it now and you've got it hold it hold it tight because this is a car that's about to start like a rocket okay baby off we go off we go the light horizon slicing into us a horizontal light razor into us. Keep your eye on the birdie.

What can you do when you don't want to do anything? Live with yourself and your stupid world. Where the day is bright and sunny but you are stuck in a cave. When nothing entertains any more. What can you do about it? Nothing. Wait for it to change. Always wait for it to change. Be better than it, and that's a hard thing. It is hard to live with a pointless world. Staring at the wall again. Can only think of destructive things to do.

Times like these don't matter if the world ends. But still, a small something inside that wants to understand it, understand even *this*, this state of mind that traps you so effectively. You want a strategy but all you want to do (and don't even want to do that) is punch the wall. You're a clock spring wound too tight. This is a state from which to plot the downfall of the government or something equally as inane. You see through it and can't be bothered. Building a nuclear bomb in your living room is too much effort, and you just don't feel strongly enough about it. Oh, if the bits and pieces were already lying around in boxes and bags, maybe you'd have a go, maybe you'd press the button, but only in the spirit of idling away an hour or two with your old Meccano set found in the loft. Certainly the world is saved from the *casual* basement A-bomb maker by making the bits and pieces needed slightly hard to get. Funny thing is, the *technical* skill is all there. There's the irony, got the ability and half the will, but as for lifting a finger . . . fuck it. Well there's some private amusement in the thought after all, to relieve the pressure of a dull day. The swifts are zooming about the bright blue sky. I wish I could do that, but then I'd only be after flies, a beak full of flies and skill like that.

Trapped with an open door. Forget people forget this world. Consider myself a block of concrete. What

would you expect of a block of concrete? Jettison myself. Space trash. The embarrassment of a life form living in a flat like an insect under a stone. Get out more, do things! What for? Life could be more painful, I'm faintly embarrassed it is not worse than it is. Bending under the strain of fuckall. It's the waste of it flowing by all the time, like something that shouldn't be wasted. But I don't know what to do to not waste it. The cat comes miaowing. That's something. Buck my ideas up, another life form is looking to me to be better than I am. I say hello and stroke him. It takes me out of myself, and then he bounds off again. What power a cat has. He goes back to his favourite spot for watching birds, in the hope of catching one. He won't. He keeps a forlorn vigilance on the peanut feeder on next door's line. Is it because I'm aware I could be so much more? I find it hard to be content with being a sack lying where I'm dumped. Is that the Hawaii Five-O music? Oh people in the gardens eating al fresco will you never cease talking about your satisfied lives? Oh, put up with it, it's where you are now. That's all there is to it. Stare at the sun go on stare at it and go blind. The polite clap of cricket maybe a rooftile will be blown off the roof and strike me on the head cracking open my skull like a boiled egg and spilling my brains out. Daddy bird feeds baby bird a seed from my seed feeder. Now the cat's playing

at running about. I thought something was chasing him or he was chasing but no he's just decided to dash about for fun. He wanted me to follow him. I followed him to see what he was up to and he jumped out on me and I said to him, Did you want me to follow you? You did didn't you. It is so funny. He's dashing about like that and I can't even work out it's me he wants to play with him. And I chase after him up the garden this is fun. THIS is *fun*! And now I'm sitting there in the same place where I was moaning before but now I've got a big stupid grin on my face. The poppies are the colour of raspberries and the wind is in the tree pretending to be the sea and I close my eyes in the sun and listen to the sound. Don't think. Thoughts are the enemy. Listen. Sit still.

The peacefulness of a grey sky. It could be I have no more to say. Okay. Have a rest. Look at this liking for nature. A garden like a twisty path into a mysterious wood. No more to say is some more to say. The sun is setting. It looks beautiful on the undersides of the leaves of the sycamore. Warmness painted on the garden fence. None of this need matter. The time, the light. A cormorant flies over. Lovely lethargic twittles of a

solitary wren, a song for putting the feet up by. Drawn-out peaceful ending of a day, so peaceful. A mood of transitoriness held still. This could be a moment to characterise it all. The sun is sinking deeper by the way the leaves are glowing with its gold, a perfect light, I must stand up to see its brightness.

To see, you need less. Beyond the clouds, just whiteness. The flowers are so still. Everything . . . is beautifully still. I feel close to something promised. When did time pass? Okay. Okay.

I don't think we're alive. I think we are in some holding centre. I am finishing off some loose ends, then I can move on. I probably had a life very much like this one. But it's already been lived. This would explain why it feels like looking on. Can I alter anything? I can finish off my state of mind, probably. I can get that up to speed. So it's a matter of understanding something. I wonder if anything filters down to the first time it was lived, what might be called the life proper. How many removes from it am I? How many times have I gone over this same thing? I saw a fox in the field then I saw a fox in the clouds. The foxes are surrounding me now. Eleven at the last count. They are spirits of some sort.

They're always looking at me, stock still. They're not afraid of me they just look at me, and I look at them, over the back garden wall. And every time I am there staring at them I feel the cat come between my legs, like he wants attention too. I don't know who the people are either side, I mean I don't know whether they are living their lives or not, whether they are in the same space as me or not. They seem irrelevant, we don't impinge, I hear them but I could be in a completely different dimension. But the cat, the foxes, the birds, the insects, they are in this thing with me. I know that now. And that girl on the phone far away, she is important too, but I'm not sure how yet. Just sorting the strands out. The foxes, I've been watching them. They live in the waste on the edge of the playing field. Eight cubs and three adults I've seen. They're usually there, playing, when I go to the back garden wall and peer over. They're there still at night, I can just make out their shapes. If next door switches the bathroom light on I see them better, but then something is destroyed too, some communion that was there in the dark. I am here to understand something. That's it. Is that such a revelation? Didn't I know that before? Ah but revelations are like that, the same thing understood again. And then, gone again. I have to break out of the habit of being confounded, that's just a synaptic pathway

I've made like a dirt track cutting off the corner of a green. Don't mind my circumstances, see them as the best possible thing for me right now. I am a pathfinder. That's why I am alone. There is no-one like me here because I am not really here. I have burrowed out of my dimension, or their dimension. I just rent a room here. It may seem I never go out to people roundabouts but actually I'm somewhere else altogether. I never consider that the military helicopters may be looking for me so I never run and hide. I give them nothing unusual to notice, but only because I forget who I am. What I am. I forget that all the time. I can't keep hold of it. It is better not to have to live with that so they gave me forgetfulness. The truth is that the time I don't know what to do with is surplus. It was expected I would get bored so they built a reality out of confusions to keep me occupied, but when the time comes it will all just drop away like netting off a tank. Then I will be in gear and the life I have been living, the identity I have been given, will be slung aside like a duvet on waking. I see it, I see it clearly, and then I don't see it, or I laugh at it, I laugh at the stupid thoughts in my head. And that's the way it is meant to be, that is the safety mechanism. I have been well designed, a true sleeper, but the kind of sleeper who has a command, not commanded, the commander. Every single thing, built in. How readily

one can accept having a life that has been completely fated, at the moment it is time to do what one has been led to do, because in understanding one can take the fated step with utter freedom. You chose to do this long ago, what you are doing right now. Fate was just a way of getting there.

The day was a day less than the day it had been. All its great ideas had scurried away back to their holes, the tea party on the lawn empty and abandoned, litter for foxes to sniff around later, the cubs playing with the paper doilies and plastic cups, mum fox eating angel cake. Empty days are always waiting to be filled, and in their emptiness still take along their blue skies and sunny afternoons, still the planes fly through them leaving vapour trails and the swifts swoop high high above, but for some human looking out his window the day is like a film he has seen before, a good film, but he has seen it already, he should turn away and create something in it that has never been seen before, he should paint a picture with the day, he should see a friend, but he waits instead until he does something with the day or nothing. Later he will cook, that is inevitable, that will be good, that will be a good use of the time . . . so

then, is just standing and looking not also a good use of the time? Surely there are things to be seen in the day that have *never* been seen before. He casts his mind back. A spider in the kitchen has spun a web by the bin. Ordinarily he would snatch it up and not let it stay there but he noticed the tiny little spider had caught at least five mosquitoes, and he didn't like killing mosquitoes it was better if they were naturally caught by something that had a use for a dead mosquito, so he smiled at the spider and stopped himself snatching it up and putting it out and said, You can stay, little spider, you're doing good work there.

And what about that headless sparrow under his garden chair he found the other morning? The cat must have caught one at last and left it there for him as a present. But what was most interesting about it was that the cat must have recognised the chair as *his* chair, this was where *he* sat. The ants were already over the corpse of the sparrow and he took it up on a trowel and threw it over the back garden wall for the foxes to find. Ah yes, and early this morning, 5AM, there was something distinctly different about the day, in that a fox came into his garden and was sniffing the poppies and he was watching it for a while before the fox noticed him. He had gone out to investigate what the cat looked worried about, why he had jumped up onto the fence

in a huge leap and was peering down. So it was the cat that saw the fox, and I saw the cat. Was it me? Ah yes, it was me, it wasn't him, he was just someone I invented to talk about me. So I was watching him and he was watching the cat and the cat was watching the fox and then I was watching the fox and the fox saw him and he was me and I was the fox, wasn't I the fox for a moment. I think I was the fox, and I was the cat, and the garden and the poppy and the grass the grass the fox darted away over and over the back wall and back to where the foxes were and there was another one under the lilac tree as I walked towards the back garden wall to look over to see him running away and he too up and over the wall he went and I started to mix my delight with a little fear for the cat that the foxes might be hungry for cats and could this little cat defend himself against a growing strong fox and moreover a skulk of foxes all marauding the gardens for food and finding none but cats.

Now I understood why foxes run away as if there is always a gun on them if I had a chicken house maybe I'd not think them so beautiful and I thought am I now the bodyguard for the cat against the foxes and still it was five o'clock in the morning and no other humans were up and out inspecting this delightful chilly morning with the fox hightailing it away and the cat coming up

behind me as if to say, Has he gone now, I'll come up and rub myself around your legs, I don't really know what that is it's not a dog is it and it can get up fences no trouble so that's a threat to me isn't it that's a threat to all catkind you must protect me. And I lift the cat up in my arms and he's purring and we both watch the foxes leaping over the grassy humps and away away into the old dumped goalposts and overgrown nettles and bramble where they live. And the cat's muddy little paws are on my shirt and he licks my forehead and makes me smile.

I'm very glad to get back to Back Door World, Front Door World is too tense today. These humans, they're on short fuses. I keep to the shadows, I slow and speed with the tide of their unskilful pavement walking. I keep my distance, more than ever I keep my distance. All I think about trudging closer to the house with my supplies is Back Door World, must get to Back Door World. The minute I am through the front door I hurry to the back and unlock it, the birds are twittering the sun is bright the cat is playing. Walking down the corridor feels like shoving off dirty heavy sacking from my back and dumping it on the floor, even though it's only a

few paces I walk out of the heaviness and become light, the kettle is on, Back Door World how I love you, your peace, out the front the humans are foreseeing their own doom, chewing bricks with their lives, and it comes too close to me. I have taken to posting letters in the middle of the night, skulking down the road like a fox. As a fox cannot walk abroad down the street in the daylight I am starting to be unable to myself, it is taking more and more effort to disguise myself, to be taken for just another person. I avoid any actions that might be misinterpreted. The minute I take out a notebook to jot down a thought eyes are upon me from every street corner, and cameras blink their blind eyes too, staring down at me like severed heads on posts. I observe their mounting aggression, so I walk in the dark of the shadow side of the street, through pavement cafés in the shade where burly East European gangs hang out. There is no wildlife here but pit bulls. Glaze-eyed drunks lean smoking outside pubs putting the world to rights in phlegm-webbed gargles bursting in the breeze. And shop assistants interpret everyone's behaviour as the behaviour of a thief and you feel like a thief for coming in there for bothering them with a little of your money for a little of their shit. I cut it down, what I buy, to the barest essentials. Vegetables mostly. And I take them away from the supermarket counting my pennies and

realise I am poor, and poverty has altered what I buy from what I want to what I can afford and cannot do without, and the vice will doubtless tighten further to a few staples that still remain cheap. But I don't care about any of this. Proud foxes stick their noses in bins, cats lap up dirty water from puddles. We're in it together. Back Door World is where I belong. This is where the butterflies come to, this is where the flowers grow. It is time I took my shoes off and poured the tea and took my cushions out there.

I just realised staring at the big bush that is all tangled together from bramble and forsythia and pink sweet peas into an igloo with several archway tunnels into it that this is Mr Cat's House. I see him go in one door and out another later. I thought of it as the mass that hides me away from the sight of neighbours while I sit here reading a book but no, it's Mr Cat's House right on my doorstep. He's in there now, rustling about, sprawling around. This is my real neighbour. And there is an ant city at the end of the garden a huge heap of loose soil that has half buried an old barbeque grill and if you stand on the end of the grill sticking out of the ant hill it causes cracks to appear and the ants come rushing out screaming blue murder you bastard you bastard don't

you realise you're destroying our streets you're killing our babies go away you monster and so I'm careful now not to step on the grill when I go to the end of the garden to see if the foxes are about . . . this is a better world, isn't it? I could have this as my zoo enclosure, notwithstanding that I do have it as my zoo enclosure. If I am watched, it is the stars that look at me, peering through the glass of the atmosphere. Oh these pink sweet peas couldn't be finer, look at them standing up proud to the sky bright with the sunlight. When I tell her she tells me she wants to get some pink stockings she has seen in a catalogue, baby pink, and a big fluffy animal, and then I am to take her from behind lying on her big furry teddybear with her ass in the air wearing her baby pink stockings with her hair in pigtails like a schoolgirl. 'Would you like that?' she says. 'I'd like that,' I say, 'even though I don't usually like pink.'

I should go and knock on the door of Mr Cat's House. Dangle a stick of grass by his favourite tunnel entrance, like a decoy fish by a pike's lair.

Used to be today and the next day but now it's in weeks. One minute the head's a dungeon dank and dark then the summer comes like a speedy insect to alight on your face but that's gone soon enough and you're pulling at

roots like pigtails a whole row of potatoes. I've done those crazy exams I got it all I knew what all those useless things were now I can forget them I'll never need to know any of that ever again what a fucking bunch of junk childhood learning. Just being herded ain't it? Oh I suppose I could have taken any one of those things and run with it. Maths no. Geography no. Religious instruction fuck that. I suppose it lends a general impression that one is not a dunderhead to have learnt something, and that is not so easily forgotten when faced by the painful ignorance of the masses. Why one is positively *learned*, though one knows nothing. At least it was known *some time*, before the holes in the brain gobbled it up. Oh, and with a bit of head-scratching could probably be found again rerouted into some back closet of unused junk languishing in the silence of unwatched love. Hey I'm keeping this for you. Look, I stored it all, you threw it out I kept it. So do some sums on your deathbed and run through the capitals of the world, faces around you devils in a mist. I even remember what lemon curd is though it disappeared from my life for decades. Sitting with farty cabbage bastards, was that my punishment? Eating aluminium particles scraped off saucepans to ensure a good helping of dementia later on. God keep a gun handy take a few down before you go. Go out in the street and play

cowboys and indians. Receive nothing but praise in mad fuckers' heaven. Isn't that a goal. Leave mad. Leave well mad. Sit there mouthing foul nothings at attendants. Lovely. So there was a point after all. You were an interdimensional assassin, it was your task to kill some little black boy at a bus stop. He was evil incarnate, though all he had done so far was play with building blocks and go to a few matinees. Your life has meaning, you are an assassin, your roster is random, first to turn his head your way is next on your list. You weren't intended to have a normal career, your path was marked out from birth. You read *The Beano* and *The Dandy* and *Crime and Punishment*, a 96-issue partwork you went off when the paper quality changed and became less pleasing though they kept their promise to keep the cover price the same for the entire series. Oddly enough, it was the article on Aleister Crowley that had the most impact, though it was touch-and-go between that and the Acid Bath Murderer. Imagine being caught by the plods on the oversight of a kidney stone being found in a drain. But Crowley looked madder, though he'd done fuck-all apart from be the Beast 666. It comes to something when the maddest you can get is that dull.

The will quiets down after some while, realises it is on course and it is not a time of pushing but a time of coasting.

Sometimes a struggle needs to show, the struggle to make it be simple. If only to make you appreciate that what appears simple was hard-won. The steep effort to reach a plateau. Then you can be king of all you see, even if it is only a field of green as a jewel of a mountain. Down on the ground such a field wouldn't delay me long, but here, a climb to reach it and worse much worse to go on, invites more than a pause. Pitch a tent here, live here a while, see how long the supplies last. Who said going on was the aim, is this not a better summit of my achievements? Oh, it will tire the senses soon enough, but for now, look what my will has wrested from the world. Not so much pleasure unwrapping a mummy. Climb up high, abandon yourself to what you find, let go of the endless striving for more and more. At least for a time. Find the place in your head that correlates with this terrain. The audacious locomotion of plants. Silently stealthily rising up. Each a minute sun to itself. A double helping of everything life has to offer, to a flower. Battered by winds and rain, they

shake it off. They are naked life itself. Now why can't we do as well? I pass a shop window and see a wall chart of the human body showing all my arteries and veins, a peeled man. I test myself on a few names. Femoral. Jugular. I pick up knowledge from bits of old newspaper someone has wiped shit from their shoe on. Glancing down, dawdling on a street corner. I scan a hundred magazines in the supermarket but don't pick any from the shelf. Someone I have never heard of is starting to look old and fat, people who have heard of her and who no-one will ever hear of can feel good about themselves for being young and slender, thirty years has conquered a celebrity the limelight has shrivelled them like a rotisserie chicken. Where was I when they gained their celebrity? Not caring. Away. Not bothered. No sooner walking on than forgotten. A man holding his marrow on the cover of a gardening magazine. My what an achievement. There is the summit of his success for all to see. The talk of the allotment. Will Reg be shut away in his shed from now on, avoiding the water barrel, too shy to want to bask in his glory. Or will it be a swiftly passing matter, Mr Universe of the Marrows. Which is more interesting – that he grew such a marrow, or that he sought attention for it?

We all seek attention in our way, I am not just some bloke walking down the street, feeble, pathetic, no, I

am Clint Eastwood and I could make my day by putting a smoking hole in your face, so try me why don't you, you fuck with your shopping trolley in my way you cunt who banged my knee with your fucking suitcase. God we're ugly when we're old, ugly in spirit as much as body, we should be shot down from a rooftop by a sniper.

There's another old one, blam, it'll look like a heart attack in the street. Get the ugly looking young uns too. Get them feet dancing from little dust explosions all around him them is exploding worms you stupid twat. You see why I gotta get out of this city. I could end up doing someone some damage at this rate. I need a place where there isn't anybody. I need to be gone before they find out about me. I'm working up to it. I don't really have a plan but I have a sense I'm being pushed the fuck out of here. Not so much that I have no tolerance any more for the things that ought not to bother me, but that I am calmly considering things that might have horrified me before. But then it was there as a kid too. Maybe I'm exaggerating. I would smash people in the face in my imagination all the time but only five times did I do it. I have to be cleverer, these old bones can't take the stress they could when young. I have to make strategy my weapon. Plot like a man nursing a sense of injustice that can only be ameliorated

by a dastardly revenge. But for what? Wouldn't it all amount to growing a bigger marrow? What's more trouble, getting a rifle or getting an allotment? Answer: they're both trouble, too fucking much trouble. Oh look at that guy walking along the road with his little tray of pansies, he's going to be digging little holes for each of them when he gets back home his front drive is going to look lovely. Even that's too much trouble. Time out in the world. I should just wash shirts pants and socks and put my feet up. No good examples for me round here. A pot over a fire, out in the wilderness. There must be a reason I've never been able to flush away that little image. Some kind of frontiersman, am I doing that in the city? Christ the world out my window starts to seem like television, or a fish tank, I'm so far away from it it could be the view through a periscope, I'm submerged in some other world. And that's good. Never let me forget: that's good. Now what to make of it. Make it more, and more, that's the thing. Make it more of what it's started to become. Take steps in *that* direction, burrow in. The next time I come out of here I'll be a dragon breathing fire won't I? Oh make it an invisible dragon. Shake off the chance to become a serial killer, that's boring. That's only one vision of a potential career on the edge. There's other things I can do, surely. Fucking writing for a start. Fucking agents,

be a serial killer of literary agents. Yeah. ‘Well would you be interested in my other book, it’s about a rejected writer who doesn’t take no for an answer. It’s a trilogy actually, you can see the build-up of insanity in the first two books and in the third one he’s in the asylum after an act of atrocious brutality. There’s a bidding war for the manuscript and then the police are called.’

The stuff that goes through your head in the potting shed.

See what the world does to me? It makes me mad. The sun has come out and I am back in the garden, the sun has come out as the days headed into winter and I notice that the leaves haven’t even fallen from the trees yet haven’t even turned brown, except for one or two they are still green. Peacefulness interrupted only by the periodic firing of sweet pea seeds, and that too is a kind of peace. And I am back somewhere in my own past, back to retaste a contentedness. To take apart the day to examine what it’s made of.

A day for washing on the line a sunny breeze through feverish knotty sheets tired of radiator rumples. Throw open the doors the windows, this may be one of the last of such days for a long time.

Still I ask, What is it all about after all? How come others seem to get along fine not wondering? Turn it topsy-turvy, I want to do. Turn it inside out from outside in. Send a bucket down into the well. Break through the membrane of it all. Shake hands with it for miles and miles glaring into the mirror nestling on top of some more sleep billowy with more and more wondering at it. Raising a glass of water to the light to see the swirly bits of grit vanish. Vanish not settle. I've been wanting so fucking much to live at least half a life saddled with a quarter. Ring-a-ring-a-roses I fell down some time ago-ago. I had a recent fever, the hours and hours of overlapping scales of a thought not worth thinking, I couldn't help but notice the structure more than the content. Losing your mind like a cloud formation isn't going to be a rabbit forever you can be damn sure of that. Ashes of tears mixed with blood I ought to be able to fire up some dark alchemy with that and add a dollop of spider shit I wondered for years what the little dark splurges were on the wall when one happened while I was sitting staring at a blank patch of wall and I looked up to see my proud spider wiping its arse and getting back to comfy. Chuck in a few dead mosquitoes on their backs legs in the air off the shelf and I'll have a ripe old mixture for some mischievous conjuring I'd say, scrape a bit of lichen off a gravestone

and a bit of pulverized silver from a broken mirror and a
pendant for looking far far into the distance and maybe
I can train myself to do something, even at this late hour,
so hang on in there, on this train that's thundering into
nowhere this piece of boredom that's bearing me along
like a lonely block of polystyrene trying to work the sea
out seeking purpose not realising yet it is going to save
a man's life one day, yes even stupid blocks of lonely
polystyrene can cry to understand understand at last
that it is so little and yet so much. Only owls know their
destiny. Look at them by god, they know their destiny.
Look them in the eye if you get the chance, they know
their destiny. It's to fly from church tower to oak to
chimney spreading enlightenment all the way, and to
regurgitate little pellets of mice bones. That's it. Flying
eyes of god, who's not the mice god much. The playful
leisure hours lie sure they do but come back! We haven't
finished our conversation. I've got more to say to you
put out your little hand I'll take you for a walk. I once
knew a man who said something worth hearing. He
talked continuously, I didn't interrupt, save to show I
wasn't dumb. He took me from the outskirts of the city
of his mind and inducted me through the streets until
we arrived at the centre. He was one of the few who
had built a beautiful city of the mind, but it was scarcely
populated, naturally. Now and again he took a few in,

and you listened like a young lad at a storyteller's feet, half a tear in your eye and a hard lump in your throat as he wove his spell. I tumbled into his city of the mind and thought how wonderful it would be if everyone had such a city in their heads. But most people barely have a tabletop, a curtained room. I was thinking just the other night, as I was vomiting apple and blackberry crumble into a bucket, I'll put this down the lav and wash the bucket after I'm finished. I should perhaps have been considering the Enchiridion of Epictetus, since there is no better time to consider philosophy than when encumbered by the ridiculous trials of life, but frankly I was more taken by the peculiar pink of the spew, thinking first that I should not have eaten quite so much of it and, somewhat later, fastening onto a certain air of achievement to see how much I had gathered in the bucket, resting in-between bouts of bodily spasm to assure myself that I was doing rather well and finding at last a little sympathy for what Jesus endured on the cross, though frankly was it much different to what many others have endured, so once again dismissing that silly little religion after a rather embarrassing call-out to gods all and sundry to put an end to my suffering, knowing that my best god was the knowledge that it would be over soon enough. Meanwhile, just gargle with it, the Abyss. Let time fry its own eggs I'm not

hungry. I wish only to fold myself into sleep or some other fucking nowhere where I can drop the fucking parasites onto the hotplate like fat bulging grubs and slide into being seven once again or bloat up a lost desire and regard a wound as a joyride a jolly old ripping time a doh-ray-me-fa of a need to fucking know caring as much as a stoned spider that a gnat is having a go on a trampoline. Wasn't it all one big fever? Swindling me out of any way to tell, strangulated by twisting sheets reaching out for the constellations. I doubled up my pillows to bolster strength, it seemed the thing to do. And could it, after all, have anything to do with the Large Hadron Collider? Same day it was switched on. No, I refused to entertain that coincidence. It was the fucking crumble.

I live my life by forgotten bonds . . . deals made with intruders and handshakes with water. Peaceful sewage coming out into the river, ruining it for paddlers oh mummy mummy there's turdy turds floating around my legs. I especially have no time for dopes and gods and demi-gods I could just as well say yes to as no, and goodbye to all daisy chains I ever made all kind old women called Mavis and thirsty birds sipping warm

water on hot days. My dunghill notoriety will suffice. I'll face the music when my influence has gone away in the meantime I'll live on apparently not and surprised scanning of the horizon to see nothing. I always thought I was chased, but apparently not. Always on the lookout for pals, naturalismo! The stuff o me bones! Another of my kind. Recognise another little bit of what my kind is. You know this patch of green? I was kept on a leash here for days. Now I run wherever I like . . . shit wherever I like . . . bite whoever I like. But I'm not a dog I'm a rabid human being or something pretending to be, singing its dirge slobbering its incantation. Why fluster? Think of the tenderness of human heart to spend the afternoon making jam, dainty little cakes, calm and cosy inside an eggshell world. I like to look at all of it, the people sitting in used tyres poking through their treasures, used fag ends, but without the grace of a black catfish cleaning up the slime from the tank. When you're on your tod other people are just snooping around, it doesn't matter where you are it's your desert island and better the sharks get the rest. If there's to be any company better it surprise you, like a tree that is not just a tree but a tree with a man sitting under it you didn't notice at first. Because you're like that man, and people walk by and don't see you and that's because you have the art, you blend in you've programmed

them not to see you to keep their place their distance. You don't want to wind up in a conversation at this late hour, have to explain yourself, christ isn't it self-evident? But there's one or two who long to know, they see you have the power, that you've tamed the horrendous chaos that is a waiting beast for others. A tree anywhere is good enough to sit under and watch the world go by. See if you can guess which of them will see it in your eye, a gold sovereign sticking out of a cowpat. You can filter it into any form you like. Words on a shelf. Same old routine. Something a little brighter than the rest that catches the eye. A shelf of shit, mostly, but what's this? It pulls you in and before you notice it you've been abducted and you're in danger. There's a tongue in your ear, you're bound and gagged. You're taken to a ramshackle shed where your clothes are removed and set fire to in a metal bucket methylated spirits poured over them. But you chose it, you looked in that direction, there's something in this for you. And gradually it emerges. Childhood was a train journey that has pulled into a station, and now you can become some ordinary fucker or you can come this way and head into a smeary world of impressions hard to make out hard to understand, and you're not likely to find out for years either. And the only person who could reliably be described as a guide in this difficult terrain

often disappears, leaving you alone to figure it out, you're treading about in your head until it's mud and visits to the barber tend to get put off and you don't know whether you're in a room appreciating a candle flame in the middle of the night or somewhere else entirely. You lose your taste for the journey, of course you do, and the money is always in another room you can't get to right now, and these rooms you flit between none of them seem real even the one that has to be real where you keep your accumulated belongings. And that room is full of fungus spores that are doing you no end of harm and good. And thunderstorms are full of snow and the floorboards are sturdy enough to jump up and down on, and everywhere is just good enough for now but never quite what you want. And you try to remember whether you have always had black webbed feet, but it's no use, you're just plumping up your pillows because all of it will be over in the blink of an eye anyway, and what you're wearing is of no relevance and whether it's autumn or spring is just staring into a mirror for entertainment and seeing water gush out of it and men coming down the lane angry with pitchforks and flaming torches screaming *Kill the monster! Kill the monster!* are just on television, and though something gives you the creeps most of the time you get used to it. And you smell the musty drawer

where you keep your socks and pants mauled by a dog with three heads and you ride the storm of the musty drawer. And though you're not making much use of your brain intellectually you can pat it into shapes with wooden clappers like butter, some kind of philosophical malingerer with a nagging sense of shame for not doing more but an almighty will to say Fuck it all! And more annoyed because you haven't found the most effective way to fuck it all, resisting violence but allowing the desire for it to be whipped up inside you, just to see to taste it to see whether it's likely you'll pass on it if push comes to shove or whether you will jump into it like a man escaping from a corrugated iron prison cell into the bright sunshine of the daisy-spattered hillside having carried eggs home carefully too many times, welcoming their smashing like a thousand flies a fresh steaming shit. Oh, now you're rubbing your stubble tripping over your shoelaces down by the grassed-over railway line, you've come some way ain't you, you've got music in your head and Christmas was on another planet. You've botched it up good and proper this time, but boy you're free now, the long sad weeds of long ago are just slammed wardrobe doors on too many clothes what does it matter if you smell if there's no-one to smell you? And it's not going to last forever is it? You can rejoice in what you know, its airiness. You can go

around for days in the silver globules of dew mirrored in the round of your walk all eyes upon you all dead evaporating eyes, but it's the best time of the day when the alien eyes cover the weeds of the wasteland. Pull a pike out on a bent paperclip and wool unravelled from a baby's jumper and stuff it with gooseberries wrap it in wet newspaper and put it in the fire. Live on the chucked, feast on other predators. Wobble a little unsteady on your feet when you come across soap. Become a caked man. Dash like an ambulance to shooting stars that look to be crashing to Earth. If you've had enough, end it. Return the roulette ball to the spinning wheel. The flashlight of guards through the darkened building are they only on television? You've come some way, haven't you? How can you stop now? Go on, it's half-day closing, there will be fewer people on the streets, count up your strengths and call them your new weaknesses. We're not even halfway to a harvest. The coming cataclysm requires more of you you practising idiot!

It won't be easy for a lawnmower to snip this grass. You can see the curvature of Earth in his ambitions.

Nothing catches. No spark to make the tinder happy. A hidden dry mass waiting to flare up, I'm sure. But it doesn't seem like it will be today. Just ugly people walking by in the street. Screaming kids. A brink one tires of. Which direction? Downwards. Sit in the dust again. No point setting off decisively when there is no decisiveness in me.

Does it make it more valuable to know it comes with difficulty? What is there to write about a wilderness? The grass pretends to take the mind by the hand. You lay down in it you get up from it. But still, there must be something here for me to find, or why else would I keep coming back to it? I am cut off from the society in which things happen. All that happens here is that one scans the horizon, ties one's boots. A place so driven off of detail, scoured, scorched, left for dead. Animals are doddering on their legs, as if learning to walk again, and there's a truce between hunter and hunted, a little rest, that could be withdrawn at any time, a recently arrived dog, one capable of more than opening a sleepy eye. A place to consider your next move, not even sure there will be one. Thoughts grow in clumps like couch grass on dunes. Inside it's all black. You could be asleep.

But you can't wait on that for a solution, waking up is an elusive knack you haven't mastered. What is this faith that you still have, that it must all amount to something. Is it that that's getting in the way? But this brain doesn't work take it back get another one. I am convinced that anywhere is a good enough place to have this conversation. It's all a wilderness. No point flipping back into some semblance of a more familiar reality, the street the window the people passing by, it's not any more real than it is wiped out, answers there will always be the same, only going so far. It's like they're waiting, waiting for me to break through on my own. Drain the colour out of things, see what it's made of. Is a *knowing* raving less mad? Why is the world trudging so to its destination, the only enthusiasms are those of fools and recently arrived, and they're learning to have it knocked out of them. Why, you still have wind in your sails, let me remove it for you. And it dies down like a clockwork garden. Even the whining wind finds no more to whine about. And you're stuck, stuck with it. Where d'you find the key to wind this little lot up? Perhaps between the pages of a book, so you read, though it's a pastime gone out of fashion. You must be doing something worthwhile, then you think, why must I? Look around, it's all collapsing isn't it? Don't commit yourself to anything substantial just yet, wait

and see, it may not be there tomorrow, may just be a pile of rubble. Sit like a philosopher who has no ideas. Who has food but otherwise is starving. The people out the window have not progressed far enough to be of any help, they haven't a clue what lies behind the dark window, the landscape that stretches out here. The mouth of a cave in the middle of the city, disguised. I wander far. There is no-one here to stop me, to inspect my papers, to be a threat on sight, yet nothing about it is safe, shifting sands these. Go out the door, walk among the shadows, gather supplies. A tightrope where the High Street used to be, I stick to my course, walking the long line, not veering to either side when another is coming along it the other way, it's not a tightrope for them, they can back down, not me not me. It's life or death for me, they'd better see it in my eyes and get out of my way, this is my line, they have the whole pavement still the whole road the other pavement, but I can't afford an experiment out here. But it can shift, this fatal illusion, if necessary, become a mere entertainment elevated to life-and-death stakes. But I lose something by letting the tightrope spread once again, roll out like a carpet either side to lap up against the walls, it was better tight and hard, a rope spanning an abyss of fire. Believe me or not, the illusion of a solid street is far more dangerous. Gather in supplies and back to the capsule,

is my only thought most days out there. As the weather gets colder the living space shrinks, the garden less and less visited. And to go out as the darkness comes earlier is to be prepared to kill.

Can I expect less of myself today? Yes I can.

You can put a box on top of another box and another box on top of that and stare at it all day and not understand it, but then later, without touching a thing, you look at it and everything's clear. A little to the left a little to the right, it wouldn't have been right, it wouldn't be what it is. Then you fall over them in the night without putting the light on and it doesn't matter. You get up in the morning and something about the way they're just lying there, it appeals, so you leave them there for ages, and someone visits you and comes in and sees the boxes and says are you moving out and you say oh no they've been there for ages. Then you think, *Am I moving out?*

When you haven't slept for days sleeping is a waste of time and you have to wait until you're in the mood to waste it. And this delirium you twirl around in like a dog with his head in a cone off the vet is something you don't see happening. With the dark coming on you feel the absence of at least a hundred different people you've

been today. The one that's none of them is always just beginning and he's been doing that forever. Some riddle clogging the pores. The dark is a safe time but limited, always a privileged time that is about to run out. I would stay up all through the night even if I had nothing to do. The day brings with it people who want to poke their nose in your business. It's not a thing to rush into. Sleep away the morning. It's great to have nothing to do in a day and a day after that as back-up, and a day still further with nothing to do, no appointments, no schedules. No friends to attempt to appear normal to. Every day you hold off spending any money is a day of retaliation. Radiant with promise. A waltz with yourself. Enough tins, enough potatoes, enough pasta, enough vegetables. The world has nothing to offer me right now.

It's brown and covered in cellophane and I bought it in a shop I think it's shit but I'm not sure let's take the cellophane off it and take a look it looks like shit what d'you think is it shit it was expensive more expensive than yesterday I do believe it IS shit what d'you think it looks like shit let's have a sniff it smells like shit d'you think it is shit I got it in a shop it was quite expensive d'you think shit would be that expensive even more

expensive than yesterday it sure looks like shit let's taste it it tastes like shit but I'm not sure it can't be shit can it I got it in a shop it was quite expensive and look how nice it's packed in cellophane an'all it looks like shit it smells like shit it tastes like shit but is it shit I'm just not sure I'll eat it anyway it could be shit but I've had worse shit.

D'you think they'll get it get what I'm talking about d'you think they'll be able to fathom it out the little bit of art I'm possessed by or will they need it spiced up will they need to lose their virginity to it will they need to lose their life to it will they need their throat cut by it? Will they need a whore to explain it to them will they need a shoot-out to find it their favourite thing of all will they need to win it as a prize before they get it will they need to thread a needle to sew up their own wounds before they can say I get it I get it now I get the fine conclusion he's brought it to I get the whole big intricate fucking nothingness of it now.

One minute it's gone mouldy and the next you're gone you're invisible you're lethal you're the scorching sun brushing its cheek in the treetops and setting fire to them like a slide down into this whole thing like you've had your life ripped off and replaced and on the way home you stopped at a shit and looked down and there it was your whole life. And your little chicken's

heart is poundin passing big black fellahs and big white cunts and you'd like to slice em you'd like to injure them you'd like to kill them but you just blend into the shadows and walk behind trees and lampposts and are only half seen boy if only they knew how close they came how close they came to something rank in you that you've stopped being ashamed of that one day will have its night when the thermostat is turned up high on the world and everyone else is fuckin up for it with you one step ahead on this curve so thread the needle and get ready because this is a don't-matter world and you're a big cunt of a bloke yourself once you get over the littleness that's held you back for so long. Don't you feel it now feel it turned up high and these are after-images aren't they this is just an echo of something that has already happened you're washing the blood off your hands right now in the late-night bathroom of your soul it's happened already and morning will bring the realisation no more holidays for you my son you've gone and bloody done it now. And the lightning is striking with alien randomness couldn't give a fuckness have him have him have him! The world's on the run and I'm laughing like a mad cunt.

Rummaged around long enough looking for god all I look for now is lights in the sky the ufo god that's the best god but even the ufo god has loads of scruffy snotty nosed kids in anoraks following him where is there a decent god well there's only one decent god and that's the dark god the anti-god the fuck-off god the god with big sharp teeth I'll have that one I'll make him my one the god with the three-headed pit bull. A Catherine-wheel could be my god, or a particularly succulent orange. I'm a stranger to the people I know I live in a stark land hobo of the mire haven't left myself time to explore properly been minding the shop my little patch of desert. I need to hatch this little lot out. Another afternoon gone to waste another day down the drain another night to chuck away. Just a fucking noise in my head screeching hail coming down on my snowy white hair. She walks around without a stitch on. I could learn all the star names. The hound of hell is just a drawing scribble it out. Rotate the fire in your hands and take a closer look. Well they're engulfed there's nothing that can be done for them. Flying on until the thoughts make sense. Hold out for another planet for intervention for visitation for the unearthly had enough of this want something else I mean something utterly else it'd better come I remember I was walking down the road at twilight it was the same as always

but still I was burning inside burning with the need to leave to remove myself from everything but all I could do was carry on walking home. How can I explain this overwhelmingness? Must it be biting off madness and chewing it? I keep the machine running at such a low level but it's still overloaded. The same every day and nowhere to go, you have to hold out for a fiery rock falling out of the sky, what else is there and as time goes on the rock you hold out for gets bigger and bigger and expands from an interesting thing in the day a little crater in the garden all the neighbours stand round and say That was close wasn't it and we all talk to each other for the first time in years brought together by the hole but when that doesn't come you hold out for a larger rock that will destroy first an island then a town then a city then a nation then a planet and you wipe your hands of the whole affair and say Away with it. First step is not to care any more about your own miserable existence, then you're free to wish a great virus on the planet a great catastrophe get rid of yourself as something that matters and you become huge you become an agent of a different destiny. When you're that huge you can throw off ideas of destruction you can invite something more amazing in because after all we've had our fill of catastrophes haven't we why not invite in . . . some living intelligence. And it builds

up and up over the days, not knowing how this baby is going to come out whose womb is going to have to be sliced open to get this little fucker out because he surely ain't going to come out any nice and normal way he's going to come out his own fucking way and you either work with him or against him and frank as frank is frank frankly he *wants* you to work against him as that'll give him the excuse he doesn't exactly need but he likes. Oh I'm the tip of the iceberg of this build-up of violent revenge. I hardly know as yet who I have in my sights but I sure as hell have someone in my sights and if it's random then that's because that'll do according to whatever understanding I've scratched into the wood so far. The difference between me and thee is that I know I'm fucked. That's why you need to beware me. But I'm going invisible I'm disappearing the moment you realise and then you can fuckin worry because then the whole fuckin wood'll be scratched to bits and I'll have started on the granite and it won't be commandments for some cunt to bring down from the mountains for some other cunts to follow no it'll be a brain bleeding into your lives art bust out of its straitjacket and roaming the neighbourhood with sharp claws. So don't take pity on me because by definition I'm not here, I've gone now, all you see here is some poor bemused fuckers poking a pencil about in the aftermath

and bagging a few items. This is a crime scene always has been a crime scene. Testing the walls he went up for any remaining echoes and resonances. They all want to understand when one of their number goes beyond, goes way beyond. They can't answer the simplest of questions: is he, perhaps, still here? But don't think it, it's a scary thought that one. If he's gone into other minds could be he's gone into yours, and he's stowing away in you. Watch yourself when you start to behave strangely, because that's exactly how it happened with him too. A thousand blood-soaked rooms. Chaos. And after a while it has a rhythm of its own. Something takes over. The fake skins burns off and you become who you are. This is the Age of Chaos.

A Malteser in the salt. Said he was dead and she was done up with all that lifting. Lying there a giant puffball waiting to go whooooff with its spores. I didn't have to buy a Toblerone, but I wanted to remind myself what they tasted like and they were half price. And now I'm sitting here at six in the morning when I should be in bed and I want to go to bed just trying to find words to make my life worthwhile, as if I can force them to come right now when I've avoided looking them in the face

all morning all afternoon all evening and all night. But I could throw these minutes away and have no record of them at all. I'm tired. I'll go to bed. I haven't left myself enough room to come out charging. The time is going fast. How do I waste so much time and then have to cram some value into ten minutes. And then I don't value it. I can't seem to find my feet, it's a clumsy old outing that's for sure. Trains of thought sheltering like grimy diesels under corrugated iron siding sheds. Go to bed!

The days pass on and what comes of them? You pretend to the days, an outward show of support. But secretly you're plotting against them, you just don't know what your big showdown is going to be yet. Life becomes ever blanker, save for the gritted teeth. If it wasn't for the anger there'd be nothing. Like you're free to go, you're just hanging around waiting. Like you should take it into your own hands, this is Death's day off. You've been marked down, but nothing's happened. You're lingering. Fuck it, you have to see it out, you have to see what the natural end is like, just out of curiosity, far less curious about pre-empting it. That'll just be another of your fuckups. You know what they're like.

You want to see how the big man deals the hand. Is that a little bit of hope in you still? Drat it like a fly. No, it's that stupid feeling of wanting to see the end of the film even though you've already decided the film is crap. Got nothing better to do, may as well see it out. Maybe it's raining outside. Could always nod off. Sleep through the end. And then it's lights and people rustling in their seats getting up brushing past you giving you sour looks either for not appreciating art or just because you're in their way. Fuck it, that's what death'll be like. Waking up in a fleapit, can't even remember the name of the movie, disorientated, did you sleep through two movies even? And you can't remember where your house is, you're trudging out with the others but then fuck it where do you live? A hypnotist has whipped your memory. Do you even have a house? Maybe you're a vagrant. Maybe it's you who smells. And you're going out into the cold and wet night simply because that's what everyone else is doing, but they seem to have places to go they're hailing taxis they're rushing off arm-in-arm with determination. You're just left standing there, no money in your pockets, don't know who you are don't know anything don't know what to do about it. A moment more, and the thought you may be good at this. You may have been here before. You may know more than you're letting

on to yourself, for a laugh, no reason necessarily to seek an authority, police or hospital, just to tell you what you know already, what you can work out for yourself in five seconds of having no memory. Do you even have the power of speech. You try. A little croak comes out. Put that one on hold for now. Blood on the hands. You look in a shop window. Blood on the forrid. You touch it, fingertips bright red, fresh blood. Attacked maybe. Or just dead. Nothing to go on. How would you know how could you tell? Steamy breath on the window pane, but what does that tell me? I've lost the gist of ordinary things, they don't have their ordinary meanings. There's nothing to rely on. Lean a little bit on anything and it starts to collapse.

Yes, I see it now, I have to get away. It's makin me into a madman, staying in this dirty decaying city. The garden is peaceful, but it's surrounded by violence and disgust. I need to make my way away, soon, to a place where the place of peace is bigger, where it extends for miles and miles. The coast. A coast. Somewhere on the sea, the sea extending out to the horizon takes care of a whole direction and better that I'm facing it, day after day. The mountains would be good, but less practical,

having to come down all the time for supplies. A little house near the sea, that's where I should be heading. Is that so hard, if I make my mind up? Start with what I've got, which admittedly is nothing. So start with . . . the idea. Let the idea unfold. Let places suggest themselves. This country or another? Somewhere where it's warmer, where it's cheaper. Already, look! I'm on my way! It just needs a decision. To embrace the idea. Our many experiences, we don't realise it, are all the time ruling things out for us. I mean in a good way. It seems like we are getting more and more cramped in our lives, things being ruled out as limitation upon limitation is piled upon us, but actually, turn it around and you see, like a huge thing waiting to be seen, but coming softly one sunny afternoon before winter deepens, sitting listening to the breeze rustling the leaves of the tree and closing the eyes a moment and thinking, My that sounds so like the ocean. And an idea you've doubtless had before but not taken too seriously is suddenly taken seriously. You laugh at your lack of money to be able to do it! You ring *her* up and say, How would you like to live in a little house by the sea with me? And she scoffs and says, With what? Are you going to win the lottery? And I say, Never mind the practicalities! I'll do it on my own if you're not interested. It would be nice to have company, but it doesn't matter. And then I say, That's all I wanted

to say! I'm going now. And I put the phone down. Hell that doesn't matter either! None of the *will it/won't it will she/won't she* crap matters! Not having any money . . . it doesn't matter! What matters is that I've made my mind up at last. Made my mind up about something. That's all it takes. There's fresh air in these lungs, for the first time in ages. I'm riding the planet. I've stayed where I've stayed because I wanted to stay there, now it's shown me I want to be somewhere else. I'm practically there! Nothing is off-limits any more. I've made my mind up. That's all that was needed. The rest just follows. The reason nothing ever happened before was because I never wanted anything, couldn't be bothered to make my mind up. And that was a form of contentment, let it be said, but as the environment changed around me, the street became greasy and dirty, the roads stank, and even the rain needed three weeks to scrub up the bloodstains, it was no longer what I wanted, which I knew by several years of feeling fucked off by the lot of it the moment I went out my door, that's plenty of time to think about a few things trudging home from Sainsbury's, progressively becoming more and more isolated in my own little house and surrounded by scumbags appearing everywhere as if they were being shipped in. I started to feel like I was living in a compound, and only listening to the magpies in the

sycamore as Earth turned its arse to the sun gambolling backwards convinced me that I had a head full of shit and it didn't have to be like this. So thank you to the magpies, and the cat and his purring, and even the flies.

Something to live for. That's what I want.

I knows what I'm on about. But have to dawdle on lonely paths trying to remember whether I'm meant to run to catch up with someone or whether I'm waiting for someone to catch up with me. You're supposed to deduce the life that's living it, that's where the story is. Don't spend too long fitting together bits of broken crockery, as satisfying as it is to get a perfect fit. It's only making a bigger broken bit, it's not putting anything together, you can see that's gone to smithereens. Look at it, lying everywhere, broken bits of something once whole. But you could take it back to before it was made. Stamp on it stamp it into the ground you'd be getting closer to that end of things. There's a whole lot that's just smoke up a chimney, what point dwelling on past indiscretions or good deeds done. Raising your glass to skeletons. Where are our noble aspirations in a shovelful of dust and ash? Who's going to look after those for

eternity? It is because it was, it's got its own life. As for where it goes it doesn't go anywhere. It all is. Everything continues. Forty million years ago is continuing just as much as yesterday is. The best we can manage is NOW as the pinnacle of everything. The fossil record the geological strata the volcanic ash the tree rings, that's our bible. Curiously, it tells us how to live as much as any written word. It says your skull will be crushed by the titanic pressure of the ages your bones will be ground to powder you came from stardust to stardust you will return. And what is this thing? This thing knotted inside us that won't come undone. Doesn't it tell us that we aren't really here? Who designs eyes? Something that wants to see, something that wants to insert itself into the great experiment. An ant can look in a crevice a kitchen table knows it's level to water spilled upon it. A creaky door knows it's a creaky door. But who is looking who will be looking when I stop looking when I stop looking will I be stored in all my days and to what end if I am no longer looking if I am no longer looking what was it I was when I was looking, can I answer this while I am still looking and if I do answer it what use is it to me when I am no longer looking. Fabulous days alone, are they just wasted? Are days together more valuable than days alone? There is a void in every moment, as natural as clouds ambling

by. It invites immense curiosity and yet many don't even notice it. It is like living with a ghost in your room all the time. Everything is incidental to it. The lump of flesh carrying these stubby fingered thoughts, mighty peculiar. With it all the time, a mysterious aging creature that has surrounded itself with utensils and devices. It loses its familiarity, despite all that time. Is it a story? Is that what it is? I look and I look, but it's too broken up, many days the same and yet gigantic changes too. Body and mind dropped away, could be a walnut tree. A yawn gets you to bed. An eight hour gap when the world doesn't exist when you don't exist. I don't even know what the question is, beyond such simplistic empty words as who am I what am I where do I come from where am I going what is the purpose of it all why is this happening where am I. But what is the real question? What if I have the answer and am looking for the question that fits it. A tired mouse in a maze once more tucks its snout into its belly fuck you and your cheese.

I vary the means by which I unwittingly do what I do. I am dumb when others speak I am deaf when others hear. My memories are shreds in a box. I knew

a kid when I was a kid and everyone was a kid and grown-ups were grown-ups but I was in a kid's world and I was a kid and I knew this kid who never ate a chocolate biscuit without first eating all the chocolate off it either nibbling or licking he would spend ages eating the chocolate top before he would eat the rest. Everyone else including me used to just stick em in their gobs and bite but no he had to do it his way you'd be through three and he'd be scraping the licked chocolate with his top teeth. Why bother? Get a chocolate bar and a plain biscuit, job done for you. I thought there was a reason I was talking about that but if there was I can't remember what it is. Just a shred from the box. It doesn't matter. Eating nougat going upstairs imagining there's a desert up there sand coming down the stairs. Well you've gone and put your foot in it with her. I don't care. I can't tell the difference between things I care about and things I don't. Best thing all day, a new cat in the garden, who rushed over to see me when I bent down and called him over. Played with him for a while. I wonder if cats talk to each other about me. Did he already know I'm good to cats? Oh, I've decided, it doesn't matter what I talk about. At all. So away with thinking it does. Comical old process. So I see faces where there are none. So what? The years are chewing away at me now. There's no-one to mark my books,

to tell me I've got this wrong or that wrong and write 7/10 in the margin and write 'Quite good. Keep up the standard this term'. Mesmerised by the size of a silver sixpence. God that bloodhound's chops are flat on the ground. I would have regrets, but I can't be bothered looking for them. They'll hit me with their stupid agenda one lonely night I expect, a tear on a cheek, and I'll forget them because I forget everything so it's easy to forget them not hang onto them or perhaps I did that on purpose and made myself easy come easy go with thoughts. Fragments of floating memory tell me it wasn't always so, but I don't know, maybe it was always this way. When you can't latch onto much you can't even latch onto whether it was different before, so you don't know whether you've gone downhill or are pretty much the same, so it seems a useless concern, since I may even be a different model each time I wake up to a new day. The sense that I am a continuation from the past can only ever be a feeling I get in the present, I'm not sure it actually means much. It feels innate, but it's a construction as much as anything I might imagine. So I have started looking on the good side of this. It means I'm not tied down. The roof over my head isn't a cherished home it's just a temporary shelter, since the fact of having lived here for many years is not as real as waking up here today, and even waking up here today

seems a long time ago, inasmuch as I can't actually recall it specifically I just assume it was more or less how I have woken up before. Sometimes I am woken by the cat miaowing at the open window, and I let him in to sleep for a little while on the kitchen chair on a cold morning or to come and purr on my bed as I go back to sleep. He's a good pal. When I wake I make a pot of tea and if it is sunny I go and sit and read outside after I have washed and dressed. That takes care of the first few hours. After that, I drift, see what comes my way. I haven't seen anyone for weeks now. The deeper you go into solitude the more it becomes tangible around you the more it permits something to happen, something that would only be disturbed by people. It won't come in to see you until you get a few weeks into solitude, you usually notice the crossover point at around the time you stop worrying you have no-one to see and start to welcome the blank pages of the diary ahead. That's your run-up, then you can roll up your sleeves and settle in. Oh the gloriousness of making no plans! No-one to tell you what to do or suggest some other way you ought to be living, no-one to make you doubt yourself and falter. You amass a fortune in time . . . and do nothing much with it. You even forget you're living in it. You're playing at being completely useless, and nameless too. The din of names. I have several. I have

to remember not only the name but who knows me by it. But if there is no-one there, I can let it slip, or trust it will come to mind if necessary. They have numerous little bottles of impertinence to waft under my nostrils like smelling salts, to bring me back to somewhere they are. Even the one you love, or thought you loved, you look at her with an angled head, can't make her out any more, what is this beautiful rest without her? Permitting of going deeper, deeper inside another dimension, such that you wonder, might it be a mistake to answer the phone. Need to get beyond worry for that too. If it's important and good it will find a way to transcend the face of nothingness it presents. The gone-awayness without a care in the world. Presumably because it hasn't gone away, it has just entered an invisible state. I have lost things like that before. But one cannot argue with not being in the slightest bit bothered, happy even. It is not as if all the tins in my cupboard are labelled *Nostalgia* and I'm going to have to open one up soon, no there are only tinned tomatoes and kidney beans. It's funny how you feel you are getting somewhere at last when all the people disappear out of your life. What kept you back all this time? Letting them disappear of their own accord, I suppose. One by one, great stretches of time between meetings. You used to be afraid you were isolating yourself, then it started to get really

good. At last you were doing something. You were getting somewhere. It was other people who held you back got in the way. Now your horizons were really starting to open up.

I had to fetch and carry thoughts like pails of water to a fire. There is even less of me. I am just possession states. A fresco of catastrophic words never getting going. His life story, not mine. His poverty, not mine. I asked him questions but he was asking them looking to me for answers. He started talking to himself in the corner and I couldn't hear couldn't get close enough to hear except for the horrendous cackling. I suspected he was making a mask to wear he would turn around wearing it. I was going to have trouble with this one. He knew there was nothing for him to do but fall. He thought he had already fallen, at first. It sunk in. He was before the whole lot of it, before all the stories came out of nowhere. But it had already happened hadn't it? Oh yes, of course, but still it loomed, because it was happening eternally, it would happen soon but most of all, and this was what was least appreciated, it was happening now. But it had already happened and was a hard thing grown soft. When it happened again it wasn't

actually happening again it was the one time over and over. It was so long ago, this right now. It was as fresh as a daisy. To hell with his tatty little life. There was a voice through a megaphone that knew his name. What was there to say about anything? Pumice stone floating in the bath. Mum rubbed the hard skin on her feet with it. Feed me what I need to know. Intervene. Stop the playback. Let me see a track that has a beginning and an end, that I am playing out. Take another day to understand what today won't reveal. Others have an easier time of it. They don't bother trying to understand.

Caretaker of the breeze.

For my morning job I was in charge of my own head. Nightshift no fucking stupid pecking at the door, they said. The skin of everything comes off easy nowadays. Staring at the goggle-box all day wasn't for me. I needed company. Not tonight. Never tonight. No night. No company. I had a bunch of memories to take down to the dump. I'll keep that slate, wash it off good as new. I wanted a fresh slate altogether but slates are made for wiping I figured so just wipe it and that's your fresh slate right there. I listened to some bloke playing his guitar through the wall. My dreams didn't make any

more sense than my life, but brought out that I'd fight to the last man if any fucker started pissing around with their neighbourly fuckheadedness in the garden. Content to be a good neighbour, me, but if they wanted to try it on with me they'd soon find out I could stare I could swear I could hit people over the head with a spade I could . . . and I wake up sprawled out in the lounge again, the man still playing his guitar through the wall and the evil woman in my dream just a dream I was still seething about her I think I was annoyed she didn't exist because I wanted to *kill her*. And then how long do I spend catching up with memories I wiped yonks ago and I'm just a baby in a pram again and again and again. Arrested development, some might call it. I call it not being sure where I want to live in the time of my life. As if I have any choice in the matter. If I'm crawling through my own shit well then that's just what I'm doing. I'm not baking scones I'm not a part of some camaraderie I'm a shit-crawler and that's all there is to it. That's my region. Or I'm going upstairs in the old house to see granny poorly in bed. Or I'm coming home from work inwardly screaming what can I do what can I do what can I do. Or I'm back with exs them sliding their fannies off my dick. Or I'm jumping into the sea and dying or I'm staring at the wallpaper and hearing angels sing they're talking to me they're saying don't

you fuckin dare. They're speaking my language in their scintillating wavery shininess they're bad glum fuckers in all their radiance. You're not going to heaven they say you're going to explode. But won't that be it, I say, won't that be the final glory of the light? No, they say, that'll be little bits of your body hanging from lampposts ha ha ha! Ah, what the fuck, when you're fucking dead you're fucking dead. And they looked at me and said, Ay, you're right there. Angels peering at me like huge spiders out of cracks in the wall. So you've come to keep me company, have you, you're not much fucking company are you bloody great hairy leg sticking out of a crack in the wall and two coal-brazier eyes burning into my soul. You'll not keep me warm for long, have you no better tricks? Nah, they said, cutbacks mate cutbacks. Feelin the pinch everywhere now mate. Make do with what you're sent, make your prayers more fancy if you want the good stuff.

– I didn't pray.

– Precisely, get what you're given, you're in the pray-later category. You know how many molecules have to be rattled along through the chain of cause and effect to get this mild bit of amusement to ya? Yow doe wanna know mate. Okay, so you've had it as tense as fuck for a bit, you want to see my delivery sheet, fuck off mate, had a lot of deliveries. Think yerself lucky, it'll be an

ill wind that blows, test me if you like, I know your middle name.

Yeah, I said, but you could just be a figment of my imagination, not an angel at all. I could be doing all the work here.

Bingo! he said. They make em bright these days dun't they. What does it matter if you're only talking to yourself? You're talking to someone ain't ya? You're a bright spark, light your own cigarette. Get to thinking some. Bout time you used it, the ole noddle. Don't whine to me about how life is passing you by. You got no fucking money. Who's this about? You get me? And if you don't big feller there's always this bloody great finger pointing right in your face. I see you're thinking about it, so I'll just take my leave now and let you get on with it. You can do it. Ham it up a while, find your rhythm, and in no time the night will wrap its cloak around you and the day will take you for a dogwalk. You can be a growler if you want. But don't shirk sniffin shit, we're trying to organize things around here and we can't can't have no anarchists in the mix. No sirree, we will have chaos and oblivion just like it says in the book, we won't have any freelancers getting in the way.

So just loll about in your peaceable life, rest assured the Day of Judgment don't apply to you. You are an irrational phenomenon and will be measured by other criteria.

This brain has no momentum.

Chuffin on empty. Chuffin ell. Chuffin Nora. Stupid swordfish. Sabre-toothed tiger. Wager a bet. Better a butt. Butter a bread roll with no butter in the house, so no butter just a bread roll. And cheese. And tomatoes. Cat begs for bit of cheese give it him he enjoys it he licks his lips I'm pleased I give him another little bit. Middle of the night. Listening to empty head. Ripples. Nipples. Dimples. Uncles. Aunts and nieces. Pieces bits and pieces. Pisces. Prices. Up and up. Dupp a lupp a flupp. Bubbled up. Shovelled up. Shrivelled up. Onions bunions teeth and tongues. Tongue sandwich. Fumbling in girls' knickers. Can you get bored of that? Growing older, not sure what interests if anything. A fable for Mable. A dinner table. A cable. A stable. A label. A lapel. A badge for Madge. Cadge a fatso padding round the stable Mable. Codswallop herring dollop. Mashed in the mash. Doesn't matter. Never mattered. Rage. Age. Cage. Caged in alright. Mightily so. From cradle to grave. Save a look for me a little luck for me on the table. Draw a circle have a little ferkle round and about and under and over look at the dust under the bed the dust on top of the wardrobe. Sing a song of sixpence.

Sing for your supper. Ding dong. Huge dong. Don't say mong. It's wrong. It's not long till the bell. I'm bored start something new. Have a poo. Have a poo down a didgeridoo. Have a poo in a shoe. Not in a loo. Cows do a moo and a poo. A sugar a shit. Wait a bit. Go to the La Pom. Shovellin shit. Brick shithouse. Shorthouse. Snivellin git. Fuckwit. Knobhead. Shitty bumbum. Floppy dick. Dick dick. Pritt stick. Flipflop balls drop. Plop. Littler plop. Feed the horses the hay. A roll in the hay. Hay fever. Beaver. Open sesame. Look what I found. Bracken frond.

What's done is done. Join the ranks of everyman and let it stand, what you've done. Don't drag it with you for miles and miles. Let it fossilise let it sink into concrete. Bury it and move on. Don't keep looking back with homesick eyes, caught on the hop all the time, not knowing whether to go forward or back. Keep your head high and march, expose new surfaces. Swallow old prides like a person who has genuinely changed. What a great thing that your life has at last become meaningless. You're set free! Like a bird! Like a great bird with huge wings flying over the sea. It's flesh under these clothes. It's an immense enigma when all is said and done. We've

walked for miles and miles knowing nothing. We can manage a few more. Then, after a moment of feeling hard done by, you rest back in your chair and laugh. Just laugh! You moved like a glacier most of your life without even realising it, now you've crunched up against something big or something big's buckled itself against you. The soothing spring the soothing winter, it's only one hole you've been digging all your life. The nagging flowers are thrilled, this is something to talk about, and all the bees turn around to look at me and clap together their wings and even the flies fly closer to look me in the eye hovering there smiling at me and I'm smiling back at em. Bulging with potential all this time it bursts open and my oh my what a long way you've carried the unrelenting engine. It sputters into life and black and white memories spread over with colour, like something let back in.

How crumpled I have become, sitting days on end in the same clothes listening to the cicadas. Half a fresh day has come on the breeze. Half a day to get my teeth into. Was it hard simply because it took so long, what was easy in the end? Or didn't time ever matter? I remember saying it more as faith than knowledge, It doesn't matter. Over and over again, It doesn't matter. Then one day it really didn't matter. And the door closed behind me and it was too late in any case for it to matter, but it

never did matter. It was just people shouting in the fog. None of these were ever going to come close to me. Just voices reached me not bodies. They couldn't do anything to me as voices and they weren't ever going to get near me as bodies, even assuming they had bodies, even assuming I had a body, in that fog. Just a remnant of accustomed thinking. Washed ashore when the fog lifted the world was more colourful than I remember. I spoke in whispers to birds and animals, and forgot whatever world there was before, knowing that this one too I would forget. So clutch it lightly, don't make too many footprints in the sand, cover your tracks, and quietly disappear, living it like a too-big jacket hung about my shoulders. Temporary, a kindness from a stranger, not putting arms into armholes just something to be given back soon, and so it remained though I lost myself in the world and forgot whose jacket it was, someone bigger than me was all I could easily deduce, who placed it there about me to keep me warm when I was dazed, and I wandered off with it still around me, and now it is all I have. I owe someone, but I don't know anything else.

I've sat on beaches having nothing better to do than pump blood round. Give yourself a pat on the back, you've pumped blood round. Did you wanna meet someone as well? Did you wanna make a mint while doin it? Oh, you shoulda said, we could have worked out the arrangements, make a note in your file: 'Wants to do more than just pump blood round all day.'

What did you have in mind? Be an aristocrat perhaps? A politician? How about an art? Porno director? Hitting any chords yet? No? well, it's pumping blood round then. Keep your eyes peeled, you may see an interesting fly. Oh look a kite up there. That's a nice shell. This seaweed's great. That's a nice dog. Look at his tail wagging. Would you like to be a clown? Can I interest you in bar work?

We can follow a few fish to their breeding grounds we can watch a bucket of coal being brought in we can adjust the aerial to get a better picture way back in black-and-white daisy-chain days, when space travel was still a not-yet not-yet but the atom bomb was a doodle rising up from the blue faint rules of an exercise book, and four and twenty blackbirds were baked in a pie and I could levitate pencils and float down the stairs. And I brought in snow to look at under my new microscope one Christmas and spilled methylene blue all down the wallpaper. I had no idea then, not until a dream I had,

that I was everything I was my mum I was my dad I was my cat I was my granddad I was my teachers I was my mates I was everyone I read about in history books I had already discovered everything and I was having the fun of discovering it again, which, in a roundabout way, was how I discovered it in the first place, since the whole of time and space even that to come was how I arrived at entirely being me. I was beavering away like nobody's business even at the silly little things, like the best way to do curlers at the ladies' hairdressers, how to hold chalk so it didn't squeal on the blackboard how to dilute concentrated acids so they didn't blow up in my face (acid to water not water to acid). And it didn't matter that I didn't pursue my studies in chemistry or physics because elsewhere I was doing precisely that. No, I'd found my thing, I'd found where life was taking this little boy, and then I promptly forgot it again, but it didn't matter, because the course was set. And, if you really want to know, it's all done already anyway, we are living trillions upon trillions of years in the past of what we are. What you don't manage to do someone else will so best just realise that the someone else is you too. Everyone has an inkling, but it's like trying to keep a snowflake alive you've got to want to enough you've got to be prepared to fail you've got to spend your life like some mad fellow convinced a

lost city is just around the next corner you've got to be on the edge of your seat all the time as if the next spadeful will be gold coins and you've got to live like that not for one decade not for two not for three but for four at least and there's no guarantee your batteries are going to last that long anyhow and it's fucking tiring always heading in a different direction to the herds that roam the plains of constricted city streets weaving in and out of them searching out the narrow side streets to sparser populated byways that now are more and more blocked off by scaffolding and dossers sitting in pools of their own grease-lard-blood-and-urine. Every single one of them has it in them to realise their tea is stewed they should pour it away and get a fresh cup but they're barnacled boats dragged like a chariot drawn by fluorescent jellyfish pooting their skirts ever onwards through indifferent waters. What part are they playing looking through glazed portholes nursing festering little baskets of slurs shouting in libraries and stinking of piss. And then you realise, you stop being forgetful again, that's me too that's me where my fingers are numb and blue that's me in pain that's me in the shit and down the drain. You wanna say, Fight it man fight it! Take a look in the mirror of my eyes and wake up. Ah, they'll remember, they'll remember the days when all they wanted to do was forget everything, they'll

remember before they were born and after they died. Not every petal that falls is seen. But the petal knows. Not every stone on the beach is thrown. But one can do it for the many, follow that trajectory. There but for the grace of god. One should strive to be unique, no? One should be sure there has never been another the like of oneself. Perhaps a glimpse will be enough to inspire you on a trajectory of your own. Oh, it means constantly brushing against the way the masses are tending, rushing after the bargains, amassing money that will never be theirs, squeezing uncomfortably into their one-size-fits-all religions, eyes drying out on screens flickering into mesmeric trances shelving away their lives in dusty rooms no-one goes into any more. It means digging in the sunhot sand with your bare hands and finding the wet sand, kneeling there with a question on your lips, a good question a hard question a question worth finding the answer to, it means looking behind you to see the sea filling in your footsteps welling up from under as you walk along the beach filling them in like something following you something gaining. It means being a part of the haste of the night as you're gaining on yourself just up ahead the you that is everything of you just a little way back the you that's dogged you many a night without success. But some nights one cannot even stop for breath the chase is so intense and

you know, you know this is one of those nights when all the little pieces fall into place like tearing up a sheet of paper and throwing it on the floor and it lands as a whole sheet of paper. You've found it out for the cosmos the you that wants to know about everything get all the details like he's collecting conkers in a sack and has it in mind to get a lot. And how many times have you looked at a spider stock still at the centre of his web and thought there's something about what he's doing all day I rather fancy.

We are just having our glimpses, like a boy his tea come in from playing planning to go out and play again. I needn't worry this fellow will be no more, when he doesn't exist anyway. I wonder of course will I from the great ocean be able to poke a finger up through this little puddle and waggle it about, perhaps a little fond of one hair on my eyebrow more than the others. Why would I come back to visit when I am simultaneously everything? I do not know my thinking in all forms, but I know my non-thinking must be similar in moss and stones, who listen, I think, when I talk aloud to whoever is there to listen. Well times change. I used to collect wooden lollysticks I found in the street. I

still pick up the postman's red elastic bands. Pop your thoughts in a box and don't look at them any more. A mime artist trapped behind glass gives the gist to fools, but the truth of which this is an exaggeration brushes lightly against subtler minds almost as a conundrum, as it might to a fish wondering about water.

Though it is becoming stiller and stiller rooted to the spot like a tree it feels like going away. I think it has been several months since I spoke to anyone, or is it only a few weeks? But it could easily be years, I see that now. After a while I will not want to spoil what I have. Live in that silence when anything can begin. Smash the radio in throw the phone away. You don't have to know where you're going. You're not going anywhere. You're setting yourself aside. Throwing yourself into a bag and closing it tight. Wait for stones to talk not just listen. You want to show some sign you've been here, and then you want to wipe out any sign that you have, knowing it is impossible. I suppose you're working on the final questions. Everything else can go to pot. Haunted man knows the answer is simple and close by, but can't find it, knowing you've found it before just digs up a trace of it not the thing itself, and the

question has shifted since then, probably, shifted since the last light bulb said look at me aren't I a brilliant fucking light bulb call me the meaning of everything and thereafter respect every beetle you find. You don't need a limousine just old clothes don't buy any more wear them until they are rags and stay in your house attending to something and nothing and know it is good because I say so and it was good. And I would sit there thinking of the skull and skeleton inside me all the time. It could hardly wait for the maggots to have a good afternoon's start. Where would I be then? The spider looking in at my window?

It's space, actually space I'm talking about. Not this artificial space lit by electric lights in the middle of the night, but space out there, the black stuff. Lift your roof off and there it is up there. The room the walls, just an inner eyelid. Thoughts are fracturing, stumbling out wounded like gassed ants from a fissure. They're not carrying me along any more because I noticed them. They stutter a few tottery steps and fall. They fooled me they were mine, but it turns out I have more control over them than I thought. If you watch them closely they follow another path. Huge spaces between them

when I used to imagine I was thinking, but no, real emptiness. Peace and quiet. Nodding your head to the way things are going to be done round here from now on. Just the breath. The occasional noise out in the street. You've not even waiting. Though waiting is what it most resembles, you're not waiting for anything. You say it like you don't trust it, but you know it's just the creeping vines of before trying to cross the barrier. This shadowy incident will ever bother the people of Earth. I am an overnight guest for twenty or thirty years more, perhaps, perhaps much less, but I will stare straight into outer space from now on, and speak to you as if you hear me.

There is a certain something I want to say. It must emerge like blood from a stone. So you must excuse these bed-sheets flapping in the wind and winding on top of themselves. It's a scarecrow for the birds. Mr Wind tries on my shirts and trousers. I don't really want to bottle it and jam a stopper in. I'd like it to live all around me, like fairies. Golden sparkles who dance about me. There is much I would have to say to them, if I could find my voice. But silence is a mountaintop. In fog the view is wonderful. I can barely distinguish

between things I want to say and things I have just said. This is good, it means it is coming out without me paying too much attention to it. I have sat on ice-cold floors before. Waiting for earthquakes to subside. There is no reason I should not be still even when thrown. What has just happened and what hasn't yet happened are both wearing the same mask. I chug up the river of my life, I wave at children on the bank picking flowers. Only company I lack, I am trying to wonder where it went but give up, as if I am not interested any more. The strange thing is that I am not. I found a great love, the love I had waited for all my life, and then one day I didn't seem to be bothered any more. I wasn't sure what to make of that. Perhaps I just needed time to myself, perhaps that was it. I envied my own ability to close the door on the world, I say envied because I didn't know exactly how I did it. It struck me it was probably good that I didn't know, since not knowing meant I didn't have to concern myself with being able to do it, since I was able to do it, I just didn't know how. And not knowing how indicates something more solid was coming over me, a change was happening, and it was entirely likely that I would forget how to be as I was before. Was the effort that came to nothing the same effort that led to it happening on its own? Haven't you been engaged on trying to penetrate the

nature of reality since you were a little boy? Hasn't all your effort gone into this direction? Well then, all your non-effort, all your laziness and sloth, that too went in that direction. What other direction would it have gone into? It's then you see, you see what you've built yourself. Is it such a surprise the great cogs have begun turning at last? You knew this. You knew this all along. You've worked for this. You lucky fucking cunt you lazy fucking cunt YOU CUNT don't you realise don't you see it don't you get it isn't it penetrating your thick skull. You wanted to know. You're only just beginning every minute. Listen to the gulls in the dark brooding sky on a storm-coming afternoon, gulls wafted inland ahead of the great winds that you'll hear in the night rattling your windows, listen to the cries of the gulls aren't they magnificent isn't it a wonderful sound? You go out into the garden on the rain-spottled path just to hear them those great wheeling masses of gulls. And then all the starlings caught unawares by the suddenly darkening sky coated the roofs of the houses all down the street grabbing their nearest roost they dove out of the sky and brought down their twilight pilgrimage across the great sky to the pylons and trees in the distance they brought it down early and in the eerie dark light before the storm there were thousands of them chattering and squarking on TV aerials not a space of roof uncovered

on all the houses up the road and down like theatre-goers taking their seats for an Apocalypse. I'd defy anyone to think this was ordinary this was not ordinary this was beautiful astonishing amazing and the spottles of rain were as large as golf balls hitting my shirt and the thunder followed the flash almost instantly cracking across the sky and the starling's applause grew louder and louder the rumbling rocks rolling over the ceiling of the sky. O what joy what joy what joy.

Yes, there is a thought. It comes out of a stillness of thought. It says, You have understood something. It remains intangible, but with the hope of happening upon itself. As if it is almost just ready, almost ripe. Once it has been written down, it is already turned towards rotting, finding being spoilt preferable. So it exists just a little ahead of itself and a little behind itself at the same time. If you want to pinpoint it you expect things to be too easy. You want to kill it too soon. You want to sprinkle poison over a banquet. There is nothing that needs to be done just as there is everything that has to be done. Who can do it? There is no-one. Fantasy is the truth of the imagination, a story is just trying to make sense of it but it is better if no sense

can be made of it, it keeps it alive and out of reach. A little sense, for a time. That is fine. They want people talking. I want silence. They want to understand. So I say, Well understand then. They want people to explain it to them. I say, There is no-one to explain it to you. Another life will come in like that. And you will not remember much of this one. Even now, you're trying hard to remember the love you felt, the faces, but it is just as it is when you try to remember a bit of trivia from the lounge to the kitchen but you get to the kitchen and for the life of you you can't remember what you went there for. So you go back to the lounge and scan the room and something may trigger what it was. But you can't go back to a life you have finished living. And that is the sadness that must be dealt with. Though is it a real sadness, there is not enough remembered for that, it is a sadness conjured up because you feel you ought to feel it. But you don't know what it is what it really is. There is nothing to attach it to, so even the sadness slips away leaving an emptiness and you know you could in just a moment see the emptiness as a good emptiness but that's what holds you back you're afraid to admit or concede and finally put to rest the story that you have lived.

I mishear a little girl in the street: 'Mummy,' she cries, 'all of this is a dream.' I'm sure I misheard her, she cannot

have said that. But perhaps there is something about my little garden wall, that when people stop outside it something happens to them. Normally they walk on fast, fast past, but she stooped down a moment to fasten her shoe, or something, and she said it as I turned my head to look. Doubtless she said something else and my thoughts pressed their stamp on formless sounds, no, not formless, close enough to mishear. But why shouldn't she have said it? Let her have said it. And so. Back to nothingness, no, not nothingness, the time of prams up and down the pavement, and the spider in his web buffeted by the wind outside my window doing right now and all day exactly what he did yesterday and the day before and the day before that and the whole week before that and the week before that. Waiting, in stillness. I will never stop being impressed by that. Does he look down at me and wonder what I am doing? Waiting for little flies of my own and I will rush and bind them up in a silky cocoon and leave them there in my web. And all day brown leaves float to the ground and the sun shines on the houses pretending it is still warm. One day, you'll have forgotten what you couldn't allow to be forgotten.