

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

PAUL ASKEW

© copyright 2013 Paul Askew

Cover image © copyright Eleanor Leone Bennett

Published by 79 rat press as a limited first edition run of 25 copies. This is copy number:

<http://79ratpress.blogspot.com>

for
Siân S. Rathore

with thanks to
George Chopping
Dan Holloway
Helen Kidd
Tom Sherry
&
James Weiner

Contents

1

The Body Trilogy	9
School Hard	13
Pigeons Are the Alcoholics of the Bird World	14
The Crow	16
Boudica	18
Equus	20
Aldilà	21
The Time I Tried Working In A Café	27
Mabel	30

2

Cat	35
Wine Gums	36
Holiday	37
#YOLO	40
Battlefields	43
An Anonymous Pocket of Oxford, 31/7/12	48
Orange Was the Colour of Her Dress, Then Silk Blue	49
...	50
The Hypnotist	51
Ten Minutes in a Service Station in the Middle of Nowhere	52

3

THE EXTREMELY ABRIDGED HISTORY, PRESENT & FUTURE OF PAUL ASKEW, IN FIVE DREAM SCENES	63
The Beach	73

1

The Body Trilogy

Head

I lay in the punt,
fingers in the water,
watching you propel us
down the river. When you were sure
no-one could see us,
you let go of the pole,
lay down on top of me.
We kissed. Your hair
got in the way. We didn't mind.

Thorax

You undid your shirt in the rain.
Your wet, white bra clung to your breasts,
revealed a secret.
You took off my t-shirt,
wrote poetry on my chest,
corrected years of mistakes.

We took sharp breaths
in between bursts of thunder.
Your heart murmured.
I had an asthma attack.

We huddled, damp,
under the trees,
waited for the storm to pass.

Abdomen

In a service station car park
we stayed up all night
telling each other stories
then went for breakfast
and left without paying,

left without filling your car.

When we ran out of petrol
you lay on the bonnet
while I went to find help.

I was jumped. A punch to my gut
floored me. My wallet, phone,
taken.

I made my way back
to find you and the car
gone. Exhausted,
I lay by the roadside.

At some point someone pulled in.
I was carried to their back seat,
given a flask of lukewarm tea.

The driver didn't say anything
the whole way back to her house.
She was playing...
I can't remember now.
I want to say Fleetwood Mac,
but I don't think that's right.

She ran me a hot bath,
fed me shepherd's pie,
we watched Any Human Heart.
She cleaned my teeth,
put me in a child's bed,
gave me a hot water bottle,
sang lullabies til I fell asleep.

I woke up in hospital.
You were holding my hand.

You weren't holding my hand.

School Hard

we are the best dressed messes
in the world when the lights go off
we run amok hunt our own dinner
meat tastes sweeter for it
in any corridor I will kiss the
blood from the corners of yr mouth

Pigeons Are the Alcoholics of the Bird World

Jim was watching
as I fumbled with an orange.
'This might sound strange,'
he said, 'But you remind me of a pigeon.'
I'd recently cut my fingernails
so was having to peel it with my teeth.
The pith tasted disgusting.
Juice ran down my chin.

'When did you last have a shower?'
I couldn't remember.
'Friday, I think,' I lied.
'No wonder you look like a tramp
and smell like a pigeon.'
I threw what remained of my orange at him
and got a can of cider out of my bag.
'That's just the sort of thing
a pigeon would do,' said Jim.

He snatched the cider out of my hand
and threw it up into the top of a tree.
He laughed as I climbed to retrieve it.
As I sat in the branches drinking,
I saw him take out some ginger nuts,
crush them up and throw them on the ground.
A flock of pigeons flew down
and started pecking at the crumbs.

'Ha ha, look! They're just like you!
You're one of them! I've always said that
pigeons are the alcoholics of the bird world!'

I couldn't be bothered to argue
so looked at the sky for a while.
At slow moving clouds that changed shape as they drifted,
a couple of planes in what seemed like
a near miss from this distance.
I fell asleep

and dreamed about French cuisine.

The Crow

I wanted to be able to walk up this wall,
so I sewed velcro to my hands and feet.
A crow came over and bellowed,
'What on Earth do you think you are doing?'

I explained myself.
It called me immature.
I said, 'That's not fair, you don't even know me.'
It said, 'I've met your sort for sure,
galavanting around, making noise,
throwing stones at my kids!'
It started pecking my temples.
'Get off my wall. Get off you bastard.'
I tried to swat it away,
but it just flew round onto my back
and started attacking my spine.
'Get off my wall! Get off! Get off!'
Then it stopped.

It was still for some time
before I heard a muffled, 'Oh fuck.'
'What's up?'
'I've got my beak stuck
in between two of your vertebrae.'

I couldn't pull it out
coz it was in a hard to reach area,
so I had to go to hospital.
The wait to be seen seemed like forever
and I couldn't sit down
as I was scared if I leaned back
the beak might sever my spinal cord.

'I'm thirsty,' it said.
'I'll get you some water.'
'I don't want water. I want coffee.'
'I can't afford coffee! You ought to
be glad I'm getting you anything at all!'
It mumbled something I couldn't make out.

Finally we were seen by a doctor.
Next thing I knew, I woke
lying on my side.
In the bed next to mine I saw the crow.
'Thank God for that,' I thought.

We were both going the same way home
so ended up sharing a taxi.
I was surprised that the crow
apologised for what had happened
saying it felt terrible. I ended up going back
to its place for a drink.

Half an hour later
we were making sweet, sweet love.

BOUDICA

We were in a café that used to be an underground car park. There was something about the coldness of the concrete that emphasised the warmth of the decor. It was a lovely place. Shame it was only temporary.

Boudica was going through my wallet. "What's this?"

"That's my Tesco Clubcard. I have no idea how many points or whatever I've got on it. Sometimes they send me some vouchers. I always forget to use them though."

She put a corner of it in her mouth and chewed. "Mmmm, this is good! I'm gonna save this for later."

She'd already scoffed a tenner, a shopping list, a condom, and part of the wallet's stitching.

Boudica suffers from Pica, a condition which makes her want to eat things that aren't food. She's also kind of thoughtless, which means you have to be careful with your belongings.

"What's this?"

"DON'T eat that. That's the only photo I've got of..."

"Of?"

"Just put it back, okay? That photo means a lot to me."

She put the photo back and put my wallet on the table. "I've never understood why people keep photos in their wallets. I mean, if a photo means that much to you, why not keep it in a frame at home, rather than carry it around with you and risk damaging or losing it?"

A man at the table next to ours was drawing a picture. I couldn't see what of, as an old sewing machine was obstructing my view.

Nicholas Parsons was in the café. Almost everyone was looking at him while trying to make it look like they weren't. The man drawing the picture read a message on his phone and smiled.

Nicholas Parsons laughed at something he'd read in the paper.

I looked back at Boudica. She was eating the photograph. She looked like a child who knows it's done something wrong, and finds that fact slightly thrilling.

"Sorry," she said, insincerely.

Equus

A slow motion mass fall
at the first hurdle of the Grand National,
the sun blocked momentarily
before dazzling you, the shock
just about to set in. You
don't believe, but in that moment
say a prayer anyway. You are
in the eye of the storm, bracing yourself.

Aldilà

1.

I wouldn't say I'm looking into the void,
more like it's on the tv while I'm on the sofa
updating Twitter, saying that I'm in tonight,
watching the void. The void is bad
comedy. Its jokes are stale, outdated.
It's easy to ignore, but it's still there.

2.

The void has joined me
for a drink with some mates
and sits there looking at its pint
for the whole night. It sucks
the atmosphere out of the room.
I leave early, embarrassed
that I brought the void out with me.

3.

The void tries teaching me to skateboard.
I think it's confused 31 for 13.
My body isn't what it used to be
and the void is getting frustrated.
Afterwards, I have a milkshake.
'I don't understand you,' the void says
in between sips of energy drink.

4.

Why is it snowing in Burnley
in August? I'm on a bus.
The void is tapping my temples
and singing Johnny Cash songs
at me. I'm looking out the window,
watching a couple kissing
and missing my girlfriend.

5.

‘You were fun before you died.’
‘Yeah, I’ve had that a lot recently.’
We’re all at the fair. I’m the one looking
after people’s bags while they go on rides.
They seem to have forgotten that
I never liked going on rides when I was alive either.
While they’re on the Waltzers,
the void wins a goldfish at the hook-a-duck stall
and promptly downs it in one.

6.

It’s Christmas time, and the void
has taken me to see a pantomime.
It’s getting really into it, and doesn’t understand
why I don’t seem to be enjoying myself.

For the next few days, whenever I lose something,
it’s because the void has hidden it
somewhere behind me, so that when I ask where it is,
the void can say, ‘It’s behind you!’

The void is becoming rather tedious.

interlude

When I was alive, I was in love. We bonded over comedy, courted on wine, lived on sex. We kissed in public. We were the most unsubtle couple you ever met. Our jilted admirers didn't know how to handle us.

Time worked against us. Too slow when apart, too quick when together, but boy, when we were together, we were explosive. We were the cheesiest fiction, the funniest humourists, the classiest pornography.

We felt each other's heartbeats, mocked each other gently. We would lie together and not care how sweaty we got.

When we were together, everything felt just perfect.

7.

In the library,
the void is showing me
photographs of redheads
with their breasts out.
This is annoying,
it's supposed to be going over
a draft of my latest poem.

8.

At an open mic night, the void is reciting
my latest review. The writer hated me.
The audience finds this hilarious. I go
to the bar, get a large whisky. I can hear
the void getting the biggest applause of the night.

'I wouldn't like to be the guy that's about,'
I hear someone say. I down my whisky
too enthusiastically, and fall off my stool.

9.

The void has me tied to a chair
and is force feeding me pork pies.
'We need to fatten you up,
you're becoming invisible!'
It's true that I've been off my food
since I died. 'Remember,
you have an image to maintain!,' it says,
stuffing a handful of cheese in my mouth.

10.

I ask the void if it's ever been to America.
It hasn't, but has watched a lot of American films.
'I especially like that Christian Bale guy.
You get the feeling he's genuinely unhinged,
a real American Psycho.' The void laughs at its joke,
until I point out that Christian Bale is actually Welsh.
The void starts crying and I feel pretty smug
to have finally got one up on it.

The Time I Tried To Work In A Café

The Catastrophe Café.

That was the café I worked in for a few months.
The broken sign bore the tagline:
'Embrace your mistakes.'

The owner was called Jane
and was as accident prone as they come.
You never saw her without
some sort of cast, sling or plaster
showing off her latest mishap.

The walls were decorated
with photographs of disasters.
All the chairs and tables wobbled.
Every mug, cup and plate was cracked.
Every menu gave you paper cuts.

The kitchen looked like
some sort of bomb site;
a constant mess of dirty dishes,
well-past-the-sell-by-date food
always spilling out of left open fridges.

She'd keep wild animals in the office.
They frequently disordered and destroyed everything,
and she would dance around in the debris
laughing with arms swinging.

I once asked her,
'How on Earth do you put up with this?'
'I adore chaos.
I want chaos to be mine.
I want to take it into my arms,
kiss its lips,
make it blush,
make it squirm and twitch,
I want to make chaos my bitch.
I don't see why I should be afraid of it.'

The café became a trendy hangout
as Jane's carefree attitude
was seen as being 'Against the system,'
which was totally missing the point, of course,
but we were happy for the business.

I once heard her utter the words,
'Oh fuck.'
I hadn't thought this was something
she was capable of thinking,
but there they were, those words,
temporarily tattooing a worried look on her
as an error with an order
(something that happened regularly)
resulted in a customer falling
into anaphylactic shock.

That's when it got too much for me
and a couple of days later
I handed in my resignation.
She responded with frustration:
'You'll look back on this experience
one day and see what I've done for you.
I detest everyone's quest for perfection.
People need to celebrate things going wrong,
it's those moments that make us who we are.
Instead we let ourselves be terrified,
never realising that perfection is boring.
I've seen perfection. It's hollow and so fragile
you become too scared to even move.
That is not a life. Life isn't museum pieces,
it's organic and complex and sometimes a little dirty.'
'I'm not asking for perfection,
I just don't think I can handle this.'
'Of course you can't! I can't! No-one can!
That's the truth of it! That's why we do it!'

(I still haven't been able to work out
what she meant by those final lines.
Was she crying for help
or trying to make me realise
I can't control what happens in life?)

Mabel

I used to be in a band with a farmer called John.
Once when we'd gone for practice at his farm,
he showed me his ducks.
He kept them in an air-conditioned barn
where they each had a little nest.
He went round and introduced me to them all,
taking their eggs while they were distracted by my
 pleasantries.
They were all very friendly and chatty
except one.
'That's Mabel,' John told me.
'As you can see, Mabel is my most beautiful duck
but she's also mute and never produces eggs.
She looks great in photos though
which is good for my promotional material.'
He smiled and gave her a wine gum.
'In a way you know,
I think she's my favourite of all.'
I wasn't sure if she was listening.
We left the ducks and went into the house.

After practice, as I was leaving,
I heard a little, 'Psssst.'
I looked around, but couldn't tell where
it had come from. 'Over here.'
Mabel was by the barn
motioning me towards her.
'I've got something to show you.'

All the other ducks were asleep.
Mabel put her wing up to her beak.
'Don't wake them,' she whispered.
'Follow me.'
She took me to her nest and moved it
revealing a small trap door underneath.
She opened it and lead me down some stairs.

‘I thought you were mute.’
‘No, I just need him to think that.’
‘Why?’
‘Look over there.’
She was pointing to a corner of the room
in which I saw an enormous pile of eggs.
‘I don’t know what they are,’ she said,
‘But I know they’re mine
and that he wants to take them,
so I hide them down here.’
‘Why are you showing me?’
‘There are so many now,
I don’t know what to do with them,
but I can’t let him have them,
I just can’t!
You seem like a nice guy,
do you have any ideas?’
I thought for a moment.

‘I might do.’

I took three of the eggs home with me
and boiled them for seven minutes.
Once that was done,
I painted pictures on them
depicting stories I’d seen in the news.
I showed them to an art dealer friend of mine
who said they were amazing
and he knew someone who would pay
at least twelve thousand pounds for each.
Apparently it was the kind of thing
the art world was, ‘Crying out for right now.’

I went back to see Mabel a few days later
and told her what I'd done.
She seemed unsure at first
but soon changed her mind
when I gave her her half of the money
and an assurance that this was the safest way
to ensure they were away from John.
She gave me sixteen more eggs.

I repeated the process.

The set sold at auction for one point two million pounds.

The next year made us very rich.

Then, one day John phoned me
saying Mabel had hung herself.
I went round straight away.

She hadn't left a note.
John was distraught
and in floods of tears.
As I put a hand on his shoulder
to comfort him,
I noticed on his mantelpiece
and egg that I had painted with
'The Death of Michael Jackson.'

2

Cat

A cat
sat
on my lap
and wouldn't get off again.

It was years
before I realised
it was dead

and by then

so was I.

Wine Gums

I used to love eating wine gums.

After a while though,
I found that the different colours
were fighting for my attention.

One day, in an effort
to curb this behaviour,
I decided I'd eat
a whole pack in one go.

I choked
on all the juice
and saliva

and I died.

So I don't eat wine gums anymore.

Holiday

Hey, let's all go to Scotland
and walk around in the rain.
Let's take photos of the traffic.
Let's get refused service
in pubs and bars
and sit in the street
drinking energy drinks.
Let's throw our empty cans at pigeons
and laugh inanely. Let's get tattoos
of words we don't understand.
Let's have a party and get thrown out of our hostel.
Let's stay in the woods
in tents we've made from our clothing.
Let's start a fire. Let's howl at the moon.
Let's beat our chests and skin our own venison.
Let's set up a settlement and declare ourselves independent.
Let's declare war on our hometowns.
Let's write and distribute propaganda leaflets
called REASONS WHY YOUR TOWN IS AWFUL,
which will read:

REASON 1: YOU LIVE THERE.

REASON 2: THERE'S NOTHING TO DO THERE.

REASON 3: THE PEOPLE ARE UGLY.

REASON 4: THEY'RE ALSO OBNOXIOUS.

REASON 5: YOUR PUB'S QUIZZES ARE FAR TOO
EASY.

REASON 6: YOUR LOCAL FILMMAKERS ARE
SEVERELY LACKING IN IMAGINATION, AS
ARE YOUR LOCAL MUSICIANS, WRITERS
AND ARTISTS FOR THAT MATTER.

REASON 7: YOUR RESTAURANTS ARE
DISAPPOINTING.

REASON 8: CAR PARKS ARE NICER THAN YOUR
PARKS.

THERE ARE MORE REASONS, BUT QUITE FRANKLY
YOU'RE NOT WORTH ANY MORE OF OUR TIME.

CARPET BOMBING WILL COMMENCE AT 2PM ON
SATURDAY, UNLESS WE RECEIVE A GROVELLING
APOLOGY FOR YOUR VERY EXISTENCE.

And when we've sent them out,
let's lie on our backs, staring at the sky,
waiting for the retaliation.
In the nighttime, let's invent constellations
and come up with new myths inspired by them.
If it rains, let's make love,
and if it doesn't, let's still make love anyway,
because we'll be free and it will feel incredible.

And if we're still alive at the end of the fortnight,
we'll pack up and go home. Back at work,
when people ask how our holiday was,
we'll say, 'Yeah, it was great, thanks.'

Yeah.

#YOLO

So I look at the sun
and it temporarily blinds me.
I close my eyes. I can see
the dark is tinted red.

There is a man
and he's kissing you.
You're real into it.
Guess what? The man is me.
That's right, I'm kissing you.
This isn't a metaphor or anything,
I am kissing you.
Actually kissing you.
IRL kissing you.
My lips are on your lips
and I'm kissing you.
My hand is on your face
and I am kissing you.
My fingers are in your hair
and I'm kissing you.
My tongue is in your mouth.
We are kissing.
Really kissing.

I wonder how many times
I can write the word kissing
before it becomes something
that loses all meaning?

Hey look, we're still kissing
and that means something.
People are looking at us
because we're still kissing.
Someone just told us to get a room.

Maybe we should get a room.

Battlefields

WATERLOO

One man's newsflash
is another's obsession.
I'm sitting here waiting
for you to awaken
so I can say, 'Hey,
I have you, Napoleon.
I won't let you go.'

NORMANDY

It's D-Day, bb.
I can see Neptune.
It's wet. I love
you in the moonlight.
One day we'll speak
broken French on a beach.

YPRES

Sometimes I get short of breath
and let's say this is one of those times.
Let's say I'm wheezy and taste chlorine.
Let's say I've collapsed to my knees.
Race me to the sea. Wash my face clean.
Kiss me with confidence. Don't let the dark
strike fear in your heart. Hold me til dawn.

CRECY

The time for chivalry
is gone. The time for honour,
gone. You're fighting dirty,
changed the rules. I'm naked
in this room. I want you.

MARATHON

We've learned it can be done.
This slow embrace can banish
anything. This is the long game,
baby. When I sleep, I dream
of closing in. We are heavily armed.
We are ready for anything.

An Anonymous Pocket of Oxford, 31/7/12

I'm no good at describing nature,
but if I were, you'd want to be here.

There are punts passing.
I'm remembering bottles of wine in the sun
and the time I hid a girl's shoe up a tree
(easier than admitting I liked her).

I've forgotten the name of this river,
but years ago I saw a couple kissing
here on the bench where I'm sitting
now. They looked so in love.

I'm in love now.
I want to kiss her here.
I want these people in boats
to see us kissing and feel
how I felt then.

Orange Was the Colour of Her Dress, Then Silk Blue

I ordered a date
and was given the future.

I don't know why, but I'm imagining you
listening to Charles Mingus and smoking a Gauloises.
Everything changes with the dusk;
your dress, your hair, your lipstick, the way you move.
In deeper light, you become the evening,
just as you had been the day.

The song's still playing as you undress,
turning into night. You click your fingers
and I come.

And now it's November.
We're huddled in coats, drinking whisky;

the fireworks are done. We have a clear sky
and a fire that neither of us will let die.

...

Holding you, all poetry
goes out the window,
flies away on the breeze.

The word 'Love,' lands on a roof
and will dissolve later on
in the rain.

'Contentment,' settles in a tree.
Its letters are taken
by birds for nesting.

'Wonderful,' wraps around the bottom
of a lamppost. Gets sniffed at
and pissed on by dogs and drunks.

I have no words to describe
this moment that I'm in right now.

The Hypnotist

I am composing a soundtrack to your latest gif.
The gif is two alternating images.
The soundtrack is three hours long
and exists only in my head
because I have no way of playing it
and I don't know musical notation
and besides, I've forgotten it already
because I couldn't note it down.

Look around you:
I am there you know.
I am on your walls, watching you sleep.
I am on your duvet, surfing on the rise and falls of your
 breaths.
I am in your laptop, memorising your search history.
You really need to stop looking at some of the things you
 look at.

When you wake up, you will think of me
and I will have something to say:

'Today, you will go for a walk somewhere
and at some point you will feel
like everything is not okay,

but everything is really okay.'

Ten Minutes in a Service Station in the Middle of Nowhere

MINUTE 1

Because the toilet on our coach was broken,
the driver pulled in at a service station
so we could relieve ourselves.

It was drizzling, and the air smelled damp,
like an old basement. Simultaneously inviting
and terrifying, like a drunk Aunt at a wedding.

I enjoyed the walk through the car park
as I find that wet concrete makes you sound
like you're wearing expensive shoes.
It gives me a feeling of grandeur
that I don't have in everyday life.

MINUTE 2

Inside, the walk to the 'Restroom'
seemed clinical and sterile,
kind of like a hospital, or an airport.

The walk was long and we were all slightly rushing.
It reminded me of Challenge Anneka for some reason
and I imagined a team of people back on the coach
barking orders at me: 'Take the next left!
Keep going!' 'Wait, what's that?'
'It's not important, just keep going!'

I wonder how Anneka Rice is these days?
The last thing I remember seeing her doing
was building a swimming pool for someone
in a really short space of time. I wonder if she swims?
I wonder how far Anneka Rice can swim?
Could Anneka Rice swim the English Channel?

MINUTES 3 & 4

I don't think you want to know about those, really.

MINUTE 5

Two guys were gambling on slot machines.
It was just after 11 am and they looked
like they'd been there a while. I imagined
what they would look like holding hands.
Wondered if they'd ever held hands.
Wondered if they'd ever whispered sweet nothings,
or if they'd ever accidentally brushed each others arms
while going to put more money in and felt
a moment of excitement that neither of them understood.

MINUTE 6

You can buy a Krispy Kreme doughnut for £1.65.
Who the fuck pays £1.65 for a doughnut?
I contemplated seeing how many I could stuff in my pockets
before being chased out by security guards.
I didn't embrace this rebellious urge though, as I was
concerned
that the driver wouldn't leave if I were being pursued.
I reckon I could've got six or seven, easily,
although it would've made my pockets unpleasantly sticky
for a while.

MINUTE 7

I was looking for typos on the tabloid front pages while considering whether or not to get a coffee.

I decided against it for two reasons:

- 1: It might make the whole coach smell and everyone might hate me.
- 2: There might be a problem with the machine, which might make me miss the coach leaving.

I walked away with no coffee, and no typos spotted. Tabloids are annoyingly good at proofreading, it would seem.

MINUTE 8

Back at the coach,
the drizzle hadn't stopped the smokers
taking any opportunity they could.
A man was trying to impress two women
by showing how well he could blow smoke rings,
only it wasn't working in the weather conditions.
The women were giggling and he looked
like he wanted to throttle me right there
to reassert some lost sense of masculinity.

MINUTE 9

The driver got back on with a coffee.

Bastard.

I really wanted a coffee
more than before, now.

All I could think about was coffee.

Coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee.

He wasn't even enjoying his coffee
because he was trying to drink it too quickly.

I would be enjoying that coffee.

I'd be enjoying the heck out of that coffee, properly.

He should've given me that coffee.

Bastard.

MINUTE 10

I always seem to get the aisle seat
with the broken arm that won't stay up.
It makes nonchalantly leaning somewhat tricky
and I'm never sure what to do with myself.

The driver checked everyone was back on
before pulling away and onto the motorway.

I checked the arm a couple more times.
No, definitely broken.

Sometimes on the motorway
it feels like everyone's going to the same place
and I imagine that, when we all get where we're going,
we'll joyously embrace, ecstatically shouting,

'Yes! We made it! We really made it!'

3

**THE
EXTREMELY
ABRIDGED
HISTORY,
PRESENT &
FUTURE OF
PAUL ASKEW,
IN FIVE
DREAM
SCENES**

SCENE 1

I'm Harrison Ford
in one of the Star Wars
films. I don't know which
because I don't like Star Wars
and frankly I can't be
bothered to look it up now.

We've just done that bit
where Carrie Fisher says she loves me
and I say, 'I know.'
I'm very smug for a man
who thinks he's about to die.

The bounty hunter guy
takes me into a classroom
from one of my old schools,
says we have to wait here
til someone picks us up
and in the meantime
we're going to play Ludo.

'Ludo? Really?
Ludo is the most
boring board game ever.'

The bounty hunter holds me in his arms.
The bounty hunter takes his helmet off.
He's Harvey Keitel.
I'm bleeding from my gut.
I tell him, 'I'm a cop.
Larry, I'm sorry.
I'm so sorry. I'm a cop.'

He moans. I'm terrified
of the disappointment in his eyes,
but I feel I owe him the truth.
I hadn't expected to make friends
with a man like this.

Some policemen burst in.

Harvey Keitel is going to kill me.

SCENE 2

Someone left a dead dog on my doorstep.
I named it Cliff,
took it shopping,
enrolled it in a creative writing course.
It took a particular shine
to the haiku form.

Cliff moved in
and we became a couple.
On his birthday
I took him to dinner.
We went to the opera.
Cliff looked good in a suit.
I'd put on lipstick and a wig
and was pretending to be Cliff's wife.
We got some weird looks.
I pretended I didn't care.

On the way home
we had a fight.
I threw Cliff in a skip.
After a bit, I felt guilty
and went back to get him,
but the skip was gone.

I went home and framed Cliff's haiku.
They covered the walls of my bedroom.

SOME OF THE DEAD DOG HAIKU

I am a dead dog.
I don't have a heartbeat or
anything like that.

I used to chase cars.
Now I can't even chase my
own tail. Death sucks.

A bird pecks my eye
and I can't do anything
because I am dead.

SCENE 3

ROMEO AND JULIET HAD SEX.

Well...

When I say Romeo,
I mean me, and
when I say Juliet,
I mean you, and
when I woke up
I was like, 'Aw...
Aw man... Wack...
Seriously, wack,'
and I was miserable for, like,
the next year or something.

SCENE 4 (UNFINISHED)

I'm in a hotel room with Ezra Pound.
He asks me what I think of his work.
I tell him that I've never actually read any of his stuff.
This seems to aggravate him.
He becomes rather aggressive,
starts shouting at me about his personal life.
I go to leave, but he raises
a stockinged leg up
in front of the door,
blocking my exit.
'Ezra Pound, you're trying to seduce me.
Aren't you?'

He doesn't answer,
just smiles, unbuttons his shirt,
licks his fingers
and plays with his nipples,
because he expects this will get me excited.
He thinks that I'm trapped,
but forgets that the room is on the ground floor,
so the hotel owners haven't bothered
to restrict how far you can open the window,
because no-one tries to commit suicide
by jumping out of a ground floor window,
do they? I mean,
that would just be stupid.

SCENE 5

I'm on a beach.
I'm guessing it's low tide
at Weston Super Mare
by the amount of sand there is
between me and the sea.

I'm in my late fifties.
I look like Tony Bennett.
The music from Tetris
is on a loop in my head.

There's not much else to say.
I'm just standing,
staring out to sea.
The smell of seaweed
makes me hungry for fish & chips,
but I don't want to move yet
so for now I'm just standing,
staring out to sea.

I have no idea
how long I've been here.
I can hear an ice cream van
drive by, playing
Que Sera Sera,
and I feel like I should be
remembering something
but I'm not. I'm just standing,
staring out to sea.

The tide's coming in,
covering my feet,
going up to my knees,
and I think to myself
I should probably leave,
but I have no desire to yet.

And the water goes up to my waist.
And I should probably be leaving now,
but the water is warm,
it feel really nice.
It gives me an erection
and I think of someone
I should've given up on years ago.

And the sea comes up to my chest.
And I'm annoyed at myself
for thinking of that someone
I should've given up on years ago,
and I really should be leaving now
but I'm not, I'm just standing...

And the tide rises to my neck.
And I'm not scared
and I'm not trying to get away,
I'm just standing.
I'm here,
just...

waiting...

for something
for whatever to just
happen.

And the tide goes back out.
And I have over a hundred unread text messages.
And I should probably be reading them
but...

The Beach

//**R**andsandandsandan
//**O**andsandandsandand
//**L**andsandandsandandsa
//**L**andsandandsandandsan
//**I**andsandandsandandsanda
//**N**andsandandsandandsandan
//**G**andsandandsandandsandand
//**W**andsandandsandandand
//**A**andsandandsandandan
//**V**andsandandsandandsand
//**E**andsandandsandandsandan
//**S**andsandandsandandsandands

Acknowledgements

The Body Trilogy was published in the anthology, Sounds of Surprise: Readings from the Albion Beatnik Bookstore.

Pigeons Are the Alcoholics of the Bird World was published in FAKE magazine.

An edited version of The Crow was a winner of Competition Crook and appears in the book Kimi's Fear by John Hudspith.

Boudica was published on the 330 words website

Aldilà was published in the webzine SADCORE DADWAVE.

The Time I Tried Working in a Café was published on the Ink, Sweat & Tears website.

Holiday was a winner of the Bang Said The Gun Golden Gun.

Battlefields was published in Ariadne's Thread.

An Anonymous Pocket of Oxford, 31/7/12 was the silver medalist in the Grist 100 Meter Sprint poetry competition.

Orange Was The Colour of Her Dress, Then Silk Blue was published in the Albion Beatnik's 2013 poetry diary.

Ten Minutes in a Service Station in the Middle of Nowhere will be published in GENE02 (not published at time of writing).

THE EXTREMELY ABRIDGED HISTORY, PRESENT & FUTURE OF PAUL ASKEW, IN FIVE DREAM SCENES was awarded ABCTales.com's 'Poem of the Year 2012.'

My thanks to all listed.