

NORMAN CRABTREE

(2005-2010)

Pierre and I

On April 1st
Pierre and I
Were given a pound each
Twin brother's birthday present
Sparkling from a grandparent past

I saved and I invested

ex unus plures
And I became rich
A large house, a trophy wife
A new car
Blunt picket fence
Golf clubs and a new T.V.
People looked and envied me
Envy of my freshly cut piece of grass
My nature
My lifestyle
 Even my beautiful kids
All this time I forgot Pierre
My darling brother

Pierre took his pound
And bought a bird
And took a girl he knew
To the top of a hill
And waited
 waited weeks
 years
For the perfect moment
For his sunset
Of spiraling purple and red
For the moment
To release his bird
And hold onto to time itself

And with the girl he knew
Created a moment
 A memory
Then he had nothing
But I envied him
I envied his everything
 his nothing
His tie with nature
His girl he knew
 his memories
 the bird that went free

Forecast

The sky was a smoked ham covered in flies, hung
from a taverna's ceiling high in the Sierra Nevada mountains

The weatherman (same alumni, just tags along) turns to Crabtree
and says 'Really? looks to me more like a strong south westerly

bringing in low pressure from the Irish sea' - 'Oh, don't start
with all that stuff, might as well read the bloody horoscope out'

'well if you would let me finish, also with a 40% chance of rain'
'oh well, how poetic, but I'm warning you, don't even think

about bringing statistics into all this' - The weatherman
nervously re-adjusts his regional news tie, clinking

his tie pin and his engagement ring. Crabtree thinks to himself
bet that's brass, fucking weatherman and he has a brass tie pin!

a copy of the News Of The World blows in from a southwesterly
direction & lands open on the horoscope page. The weatherman

beam like isobars and reaches for the paper. 'Don't even think
about it,

I'm warning you, I'm really warning you, I wouldn't do that'

'oh come on grumpy guts, let me read yours out, what's your sign?'
'My Birthday is the first of April' Norman, through gritted teeth.

'Aries! Right OK' The weatherman proceeds to read out loud
'Today you will be faced with unspeakable forces conspiring

against you, but you will soon learn the importance of those
closest to you' - 'See! what did I say? complete nonsense, look!

at how beautiful that sky is, like summat out of a Rembrandt
painting'

& just then, a fly falls off the meat like an angel falling from Heaven.

Crabtree's Notebook

When Norman was a child
he drew constellations
in a black A4 notepad
kept it under this bed
to look through each night
just before he went to sleep

which during the divorce
was almost every night
for Norman it was solid, safe
dependable. In amongst
the forgotten P.E. kits,
the latch key suppers
his book was always there
full of stars

so precious to him (or
indeed so paranoid a child)
he wouldn't even dare take it
on the journey to grandmas
on the weekends dad had him
best not to confuse traditions
mixing life between families
different rituals between them;
eating fish n chips out of the paper
on dimpled brass top tables
in front of 3 bar gas fires
a mantelpiece filled with pictures
of family men he'll never meet

but it's one particular weekend
that sticks out for Norman
one of those old fashioned
Christmasless Novembers
it began to rain

at Grandmas,
they barricaded
themselves in
with Swiss rolls
and board games

heat lapping up against
the inside of the art-deco
stained glass that lined
the living room window
that framed the rain
stair-rods, cats & dogs,
worse than the flood,
the world outside
a watercolour stripped
by it's own substance

little had Norman known
that back at his house
the weather had cracked a tile
and released the whole storm
into Norman's room
ruining every brittle
possession he had

eventually, he found the notebook
beyond all recognition
his name on the cover
now bled into the cardboard
all the pages stuck together
and yellow
he pulled it open
the stars looked broken

a crying music score
that would play
out of tune nostalgia
for the universe
in a little parlour
on the front
at Weston-Super-Mare
which could only
now exist
in Norman's
diminishing imagination

after this, the dreams stopped
he didn't know how to dream
all his dreams had just been
stories based up on the shape
& names of the constellations

ancient myths of warriors
on their epic journeys of yore
he was Big Bear Hunting
The Arc Of Heaven

but now the narrative was gone
when he shut his eyes
the insomniatic machine
ticked &
ticked but never
tocked
and the dot-to-dot
smudging of his unconscious
had the plug pulled

dripping taps
and centuries of T.V. test cards

monuments to gods
of ampersand

sleep became another task
like filling out a tax return
So now, if Norman wants to dream
he has to start from scratch
curled up against white bedsheets
he arranges shapes of matter
billions of lightyears condense
into dots in a heat beyond temperature
manipulating gravity
to form perfect spheres
against the burning acid of everything

then he winds all his fears
& desires into string, threading
them through the stars
in the fashion of a conker maker
or even God
he hangs them all
on the syzygy of his emptiness
and stands back
back
& further back until
he hits his head on the corner
of the pillow like an asteroid
hitting a planet until the stars
look like they are flickering now
like a satellite transmitting
like dots in a kids notebook

then Norman Crabtree
shuts his eyes
and begins to dream

Crabtree's Best Fuck

it felt like what he's always imagined
Cambridge would be like, late summer
willows hanging in the face of the river

a chipped cubic zirconia tea service
laid down next to crumpled linen suit
bottom frill of Ada's dress catches the dirt

& against a gift of birdsong, they slowly
undressed each other & held close
a tedious edge of dangerous matrimony

Crabtree was a new born, Ada was light
burning & empty bright, he was a priest
& an engineer. Her, a puppy with brand

new teeth. He, a cold untwining spring.
She was God high off hubris, their hands
balanced, welded, fingers are barbed hooks

& they fucked like they've always wanted
to fuck. The sky clouds, summer left alone.
eyes become long streams of numbers

random ticking, clocked, staring within.
no-one rushed about at things, taking
every movement as a carefully planned

sacrament, investing in Salvation.
Back in London, in his offices
Crabtree's trading algorithm

combines the numbers for absolute
proof for previously unknown states
of a deaf dark equilibria

Woods

must have been the early noughties, somewhere
out in Somerset, Crabtree was heading to the woods

a soundsystem & space, must have been then, because he had
a haircut & a Kenneth Cole by '06. His girlfriend at the time

had a wrist covered in beads & bands, past nights & past festivals
it was years before she would realise how to work out the
sound

that returned from the back of her hands was indeed, hollow.
for Norman, it was just a routine – a routine now finely honed

^{FIRST} they ALL meet up. Then, cider, MDMA, speed, a few spliffs
to steady, rum. Get There. Swallow half of all MDMA, buy pills

then start to recount the alphabet in hallucenes, 2cb, LSD, dance
dance, to dance is to be free, to be free is to be human. But
around

halfway through the word ^{DANCE}. The body & mind clicks back to a
place
before civilization, a jungle of spiritual genesis, round-a-bout
Da,

yes Da Da Da Da. Norman was in love & it was fucking beautiful.
very soon, hours pass & the sun begins to rise, where
everything has gone

down the throat & gone from where that leads. & after we've gone,
what is next? Yes, queen of cups over the fool, Lady K. Wonk.
Gone.

they gather around a struggling fire, trying to find a place in this
new light

same pale hue as a postman kissing their newborn on their way
out to work

the talk begins, *sometimes it's like why do we even have bodies
when I feel*

*that inside we are all as big as the universe. – or – Corporations
run the*

*world through a global news media that fuels an agenda of
declining*

*civil liberties through prescriptions of fear & materialistic
consumption*

In between holes, he sees a collection of pop-up books from
childhood, how

his girlfriend is oxygen to him, how the best things are always
unsaid.

Then two weeks later Norman was in a bookshop. A corner of a
book leaned

out, Norman pulled down the top to reveal a cover of a golden
man

carrying the world on his back with a metallic sun rising in the
background

Ayn Rand - *Atlas Shrugged*. Norman shrugged & bought it

The Rowans

The early morning flight to Frankfurt,
fibres of a new shirt feel their way into Norman's pores
the freshly poured black coffee burns his throat

out the window, sun slits off the white cloud
straight into his small eyes like razor burn
Norman feels most alone on aeroplanes

In these rare moments, he remembers
the sort of things we all hope to forget
such as the day he first saw Annie

the party upon the stairs, filled with voices
disguising emotion, everyone extinguishing
themselves with a slow and painful hedonism

quickly pushing back from their futures
thrusting timelines begging for repair.
Then, when he called her the next day, just

to know, (both voices shaking by their pulse)
if it was true about all those great things
she said. That sort of slow, colliding conversation

continuous, until there was nothing else to say
and nothing else was important. In the clouds
he could see her obsessions; the French fashion

an amazement of chic, framing her when she said
yeah, I could be a woman in Paris one day
Their shared dreams of giving it all up

and moving somewhere vibrant like Cuba,
but you know, when they've sorted the socialism out.
Norman joked, he always joked. Until the joke was worn

and thin as the walls in their house,
which would look so perfectly pretty stood on The Rowans
somewhere in Surrey – filled with all the *best* things

Egyptian cotton, walk in wardrobes, chromed kitchen
new cars sat on a pebbled drive behind sturdy
gates to keep safe all the family.

But for Norman Crabtree, to remember is to regret.
if you could see me now Annie
I've made it, I'm a real big hitter, and I earn more in a year

than my father did in his lifetime, and for what it's worth
I'm not the only one dear, in my office who doesn't have a picture
of my wife and kids on my desk - Norman shuts his eyes.

that day, Annie stood at the front door waving goodbye
when she knew that all that was left for her was death,
and her only power; when it would arrive.

Crabtree's Lullaby

every night, usual monologue of number cooed out in computer voice

faint buzzing, more than just a mere algorithm – it's just a thing

that isn't reality; self perpetuating infinity perhaps, behaving like magistrates in an ancient Babylonian court.

when Annie was still there she would try to soothe his sleep, damp flannels

whiskey, handjobs, hot water bottles, lavender, diazepam, red-bush

but nothing would do – what do you tell someone who was raised with a firebrand of educated women, backdropped against

floral printed lino & repeating valleys of terraced roofs, who's forehead

is stamped with an invisible barcode, when the only music

is a chorus of shrieking into telephones and addiction to a game he knows they can't possibly lose. The careers advisor said,

the only job your personality suits is a grave-digger, but now the dirt under his nails is Caviar. Annie whispers in his ear

I wouldn't care if you never touched me again you horrible little man.

the white light reflected in his sweaty brow the way light

reflects on a snooker ball, white as stones, pebbles, forming like fists.

