

solstice

a Glastonbury solstice
near dawn
a young guy
balanced on top
of a standing stone
at the mini-henge
amongst the crowds
awaiting the sacred moment
trying to have
some kind of "pagasm"

he had rainbow laces
in multi-coloured dockies
purple macrame flares
plaited leather belt
paisley waistcoat
with grass leafs
loads of beads
a big felt Dr Seuss hat
and a mahoosive spliff
everything looked
brand new

I looked on
with a bunch of loafers
as someone made a remark
about the poor guy's awkwardness
his self-conscious determination
to have an epic moment
and we cynics
began to take the piss

I recall hysteria breaking out
merciless laughter
people howling
and rolling on the grass
one guy
lying on his back
drummed his feet on the ground
and cried
"no more! no more!"
I hadn't laughed like that
in ages
the fact that he was
only just out of earshot

made it funnier still

all these decades later
with evening coming on
a twinge of shame
has replaced that mirth
a cynical carapace
hasn't defended us
from diddly squat

neither his hopefulness
naivety or pretence
nor our scorn
or street-wise posturing
as we waited
for our suns
to rise
could delay
our fates
blazing
sputtering forth
towards the setting
of that sun

credit sunrise.maplogs.com

youth club

we'd not done a show
together before
me and Dik

a famously rough
council high-rise
booked us
for their youth club

we were given
a cubbyhole
to get ready in
about one hundred kids
mostly black
under fourteen-ish
were making
rowdy noises
as we stepped out

around the stage area
stood four or five of them
facing out
towards the crowd

arms folded
being the law

a pang of apprehension
to realise
these tots
needed security

we probably juggled
and might've unicycled
clowning around
but it was a surprise
to me
as much as them
when Dik
did his escapology routine

he produced chains
and locks
and had volunteers
to bind him up
and put him
in a sack

there was a countdown
backwards from ten
as he struggled on the floor

they went ballistic
as we got to "one"
and Dick burst out
wearing nowt
but a posing pouch
and still
all chained up

pandemonium broke loose
and we legged it
back to the cubbyhole
a forest
of juvenile hands
banged on the glass
with much shouting
and general uproar
as we hastily
put on our street clothes

the mini bouncers
escorted us out
we made the street
and legged it once again

around the corner
we slowed down
and turned back

hearing a high
little boy voice
a wee head
popped around the corner
and called out
"we liked you really!"

image credit

with thanks to [Dik Downey](#)

beep

the command I typed
had a space
where it should not have been
a message was supposed
to pop up
on my mate's monitor
it said

"om mani padme hum"
just for something to type
given our conversations
about Buddhism

we sat in a long row
modern day scribes
at computers
the room had dozens of rows
and the message
did arrive

"beep!"

it went

but then the first row
all beeped too
then the second
and so on
sweeping down the room
an electronic wave
of punishment beepings

apparently it went on
to nearly five thousand machines
across the whole company
on multiple sites
around the country

I had changed the message
at the last moment
from

"shave my back
and call me Edna!"

I didn't get sacked
but man

I thought I was having

a heart attack

clickery tappery

is no way

to earn a living

big wig

the big wig explained
just how very big
his bigness really was
power-pointing his way
through charts and numbers
apparently proving
spectacular successes
a God of code
a titan of acumen

when he came into a room
everyone shut up
and fixed their eyes
on their screens

he would stride past
bigly
and if we remained
unfired
someone would sing
the Darth Vader theme
“daaan daaan daaan

dun derdaaan
dun derdaaan”

we felt the relief of rabbits
when the tiger passes by
in search
of bigger game

his big meeting
in the big hall
turned out
to be a valediction
he had been removed
effectively sent
to Siberia
the levers of power
exchanged
for the straightening
of paper-clips

he finished
his big hurrah
and closed his laptop

tucked it under his arm
and paced away
no-one
made eye contact
and apart from a slight squeaking
from his shoes
he left
in pin-drop silence

suddenly
my heart went out to him
what is it
to pretend to rule the world
and be
friendless?

top dogs

the top dogs
our CEO from Murca
with his consigliere
gathered the pack
to throw us a bone
and to tell
of the year's results
the usual damn lies
and statistics

awooooooooooooooooo!

in question time
I raised my hand
"the bonus scheme
is supposed to motivate us
but the bigger the salary
the bigger the percentage
ensuring nearly everyone
feels hacked off!
how about
just give a flat rate?

you spend the same
and nearly everyone
would feel great!"

"that's not the world
we live in"
barked the number two

"don't we make the world
with our decisions?"
I asked

they left it hanging
as a rhetorical question

a few days later
I saw the number two
in a corridor
he sniffed me out
and whispered
conspiratorially
"that lefty rubbish
won't wash with me!"

yes they get the lion's share

but

the dog-eat-dog mind

belongs to the animals

credit

kite

lifting spinning

breezy flitting

kite strings sing

whipping wind whistles

words flew

right out

of my head

gotta die

cancer pneumonia

HIV

choking on a bun

with your cup of tea

tripping on the carpet

falling down the stairs

the light turns red

catch you unawares

everybody's gotta die

but we're still alive

fall from the ladder

and your back is broke

the house catches fire

you go up in smoke

your arteries are furred

you block a ventricle

an ovary a lung

a breast a testicle

everybody's gotta die

but we're still alive

thrown from the train

stabbed in the back

you lend your kidneys to a friend

and you don't get 'em back

a heart attack a stroke

the wrong injection

take viagra

get a fatal erection

everybody's gotta die

but we're still alive

the perils of life

are crowding in upon us

don't sit on my lap

if you're a hippopotamus

it started with a kiss

and ended up in homicide

nothing seemed amiss

except a certain whiff of cyanide

everybody's gotta die

but we're still alive

dangle from a rope

a hand-full of pills

slipping on the ice

the winter kills

we all gotta die

we're all on the clock

reach 98 and your

heart

just

stop

(song lyrics)

pretend

why do junkies always
tell you that they're clean
and pillars of society
turn out the most obscene
the friends who fawn with flattery
and smiles a mile wide
it's them that stab you in the back
they've got the most to hide
we've all constructed facades
but falsities offend
don't they say let's all be nice
so pretend pretend pretend

tricks

impromptu magic show
a large Indian family
had reacted with fear
it was a shock
to see
how they really believed
it was something supernatural
I toyed with the feeling
such awesome potential
but soon gave up
the temptation
and showed them
how some of it was done
"look, it's in the other hand!"
they relaxed
and began to have fun
it was a relief
yes there's a deception
but the intent is to charm
to amuse
to bridge the gap

but they are right
to be afraid
look at these other deceptions
the ones that lead
to lynchings
to concentration camps
the appalling trick
of stirring up rage
of summoning demons
like the fear of foreigners
or the belief in superiority
I walked away from the family
but paused
a little boy tried some magic
all by himself
he held a stone
and closed his hand
he blew on it
just as I had done
he snapped his fingers
just like me
and opened his hand

only to find the stone
still there!
his eyes went as wide
as they could go
his mouth
perfectly round
he really learned it
that time
that it wasn't real
not like those others
those who believe
their own sorcery
that they are victims
even while
they kill

itself

John I still miss you
but not so much
especially now I've remembered
our last interview
we gazed into each other's eyes
for a time out of time
where I can see you again
any time I like
in that eternal present
in silent appreciation
of this moment
just being itself

clench

a centre had an open day
they hired us for a show
thirty odd teenage boys
all with Down's Syndrome
they were tremendous
and we got off
to a flying start

suddenly

in walked Miss Wales
in full regalia
sash and tiara
and unspeakably
heart-stoppingly
gorgeous

the guys were already lairy
but in her presence
they lost their minds

we invited her
to volunteer

we would knock a cigarette
out of her mouth
with flying juggling clubs
it's a very old trick
all the jokes and patter
well rehearsed
with clubs whistling past
front and rear
she had to stand

still

we asked her
to keep her hands
by her sides
and told her
"if you're going to laugh
do it sideways"
in a brainwave
I asked her
to clench
her buttocks

she was a great sport
and so she did
just to prove it
she turned around
and showed the guys
“one, two, clench!”

it was like a cartoon
they way they went
completely
and utterly

bananas

30 years

thirty years ago

today

that young man died

three decades of mourning

this old man

still struggling

to be born

bins

the expanse of sky

so clear

so empty

the evening

cool and massive

suddenly happy

putting out the bins

another birthday

minutes often drag

but decades are whipping by

what is this "time"

that people

keep talking about?

Noel Reilly

on a slow afternoon in the Beehive
I was working behind the bar
when this red-faced woman
came storming in

"I demand to see the manager!
I live next door
and one of your customers
has just been
outrageously rude to me!"

"Of course Madam
please follow me"
so off we went to the back

I knocked on Noel's door
"What is it?"
he called from upstairs
so I told him
of the upset neighbour

bump bump bump
he came stomping down the stairs

"I'll not be having
my neighbours insulted"
he says
as he opens the door

"THAT'S HIM!"
she shouts
and points right at him
as Noel does a quick 180
and disappears
scuttling back upstairs

Philosopher

Chris Evans

whose name did I write?

now, I don't think I looked
anything like him

Chris Evans that is
him who married Billie Piper
the singer from Swindon

back in the mid 90s
it seemed like you would see
his gingery hair
and thick-rimmed NHS glasses
every time you turned on a TV

this was back before the internet
imagine that!

back when if you wanted
to watch a film at home
you'd have to hire a VHS video

and so it was
that me and my then girlfriend
went to a Blockbusters

in Gorse Hill

to get a copy of True Lies

or was it Pulp Fiction?

anyway

that detail got drowned out
by what happened next

on our way in

some youths on a bench

noticed my characteristics

the gingery hair

the thick-rimmed NHS glasses

and called out 'Chris Evans'

they all laughed

I rolled my eyes

and tutted

in the shop

while we were browsing

there was some banging

on the window

which I ignored

but by the time we came out

a reasonable sized crowd
had formed outside

a bunch of people rushed at us
multiple voices lifted

'Chris Evans'

'Chris Evans'

I couldn't raise my eyebrows
any higher
when someone thrust out
a paper and pen
and asked for an autograph

nearly thirty years later
I honestly can't remember
whose name
I wrote

Thursday boys

up the boozier

my mates

the pulse of friendship

outpacing marriages

and careers

easy come easy go

beer and banter

on girls

and physics

and

bicycles

bicycles

bicycles

snow ball

the snow was brilliant
the whole school
going mad
the play ground riotous
snow balls flying everywhere

Sister Mary
in full habit
came to break it up
blowing her whistle
and shoo-ing everyone
back to their classes

as we left
I turned to see her
shoving the boys
off the other side
of the playground

one last snow ball
might just reach her
what was that?
fifty yards or something?

I don't know
like magic
it left my hand
and described the perfect arc
never before or since
have i thrown such a throw

even now
I recall the apalling thrill
the sheer jubilation
the back of her head
protected by a dark blue veil
went 'dufff'

thirst

it was thirst

that drove the iceberg

to drift across the seas

searching for its source

even as it melted

away

don't freak out

when Hughie is freaking out

Cháng Kè says:

ruminating on hurts of the past

only hurts you in the present

it's usually pain and tiredness

that is really the problem

so stop trying to figure it out

stop trying to fix it

stop trying

its only a false alarm

remember your heart

is both good and true

and is made up out of

everything and everyone else

and so practice

is for all of us

the universe wants you

or you wouldn't be here

your honour is redeemed

the pain is not failure

it's the fare for the ferryman

to bring you back across

just what Mother Nature needs

in return for your life

so have a rest

then take the backward step

love cannot arrive from outside

we must return

in silent appreciation

to this moment

just being itself

and sit still

in the heart

with all suffering beings

have faith and surrender

to the surrounding hush

so bright

with loving

rhyme

The practice of poetic rhyming,
Of rhythm and metre and timing,
Are rules you can follow
or not

deluge

above the waterline
we speak
and breathe
an airy world
where we think
we are
where lightness
loving bright
reaches
for nobility

below the waistline
slow motion
deaf unsteady
wading heavy
primal urges
heaving up
sex
and murder
sinking mutely
into shit

the deluge comes
regardless
so speak
while you can
and take a stand
while there is yet
ground
beneath your feet

reflection

droplets condensed
on a window
moments ago
they were steam
free

a hard surface
freezes words
into black and white

finger writing
on glass
I point
at my reflection

shoes

argument and counter-argument

all night long

the philosophers debated

locking horns over free will

wrestling

about karma

after every hair was split

at last the morning came

and so

tired out

and none the wiser

the unstoppable force

and the immovable object

got up and left

which shoe each of them

put on first?

that was free will

the second?

karma

words

little time capsules
propelled into futures
and returning
from vagueness

words

i bet you don't remember
writing us
but here we are
reminding you

centred
in amazing chaos
you are ablaze
with the mystery

oh yes
the very same
nothing less
the mystery
of forever

ink

popping the lid
on a violent heaven

ink
squiggles off the stick

bone ivory
annihilating into
cerulean blue
becoming sky
its aroma
intoxicating
a vibration
you can breathe

iris widens
pure magenta
cyan conjuring
with indigo
and jade

somehow eyes feel
the frequencies

down to the feet
redolent
with memory

summer's goldenrod boyhood yellow

September's burnt melancholy
ochre

violet's first amethyst kiss

red's primal scarlet uproar

midnight's longing blue quiet

forest's calm emerald pulse

the ink by itself
was always more exciting
than any shapes they made
on paper

some days

some days
the pain won't stop
and sleep
won't come

some days
are just going
to be like that

some days
all the stories
about love
and its triumph
over death
just won't wash

some days
everything
makes you cry

when death whispered
in my ear
when death

shouted down the house
I hoped
it might make me
special somehow

but some days
I realise
no-one really
wants to hear
about the end

leaking

the cabin boy said
"my God, the ship is leaking"

the captain said
"put him in irons
he is a hypocrite
weighing us down
like everyone else"

the optimists
along with the pessimists
the doomsters
and activists

drowned

stick

walking stick
on the conveyor belt
at the airport

the official
picked it up
and called after
the old couple
who had just left

“I think you've left this”

they turned back
still fiddling
with belts
and jackets

this was the moment
that I had dreaded

“the stick is mine”

all three
looked at me

mute

I still thought of myself
as a fuckin Samurai

I still thought of the stick
as belonging to my dad

it's not a katana
ssssssik
with its rubber ferrule
thomp thomp

my cheeks burned
with a clamour
I couldn't name
as I thomp
thomped away

two wheeled tiger

we somehow acquired
a clapped out motorbike
a washing up liquid bottle
for a fuel tank
front brake lever repurposed
as a throttle

the engine actually ran
it was very exciting
but the time spent
naming it "the tiger"
and painting it with stripes
would've been better spent
fixing its saddle

at last they gave me a go
on nearby parkland
instructions were given
right brake lever
go
left brake lever
stop

I don't recall
if gears were involved
such details drowned out
by the intoxication
of the burbling motor
the smell
of popping petrol smoke

by gosh I think I had it
and off I went

bouncing across the grass
the saddle immediately gave way
I slid off the back
the rubber of the back wheel
dangerously close

highly motivated
to keep my boyhood danglies
from being erased
I spontaneously demonstrated
the yoga pose known
as "the scorpion"

from such a position

I was unable to release my grip
on the throttle

wEEEEEEEE!

such exertions had taken my at-
tention

from any notion of steering
as it lurched and bounced
around the grassy banks

far too late

I noticed a young tree
supported by cables
approaching at a bit more
than running speed

my neck proved
heroically tougher
than the diagonal wire
that pinged me backwards

the tiger
had a brief spell
of freedom
before it collapsed
into a heap
and growled

ghost

the death was years ago
my God how long has it been?
decades anyway
I don't know
when the anniversary comes
around
i get increasingly tense
in the few weeks before
and often wonder
why i can't remember
the funeral

so how do i fill these days?
hard to say
hard to describe
a nondescript drifting
a groping through greyness
a searching
for something to satisfy
a seeking
after something real

there are tons of stories
that make it sound
all glamorous and sexy
about being dead
but mostly
it's really boring
mostly
all the philosophising
is inconclusive

thoughts and feelings
still keep happening
but i'm not sure
who they are happening to
exactly

is it the guy who fell?
there was a sudden rush
into blackness
a confrontation
with the abyss

maybe it was the woman?

she rushed to help

and cradled a body

forgetting

they were supposed

to have split up

or the other guy perhaps?

sore rope-ripped hands

sprinting for help

on painful feet

both those guys

loved that woman

she loved the fallen one

but they fought

way too much

to stay together

all that scene

is on the other side

of a veil

where things happened

to characters

who had actual lives

a place

where people knew each other

and often said things like

"hi!"

and "what's that?"

and "i love you!"

i miss it

but if i'm honest

i can't expect people

to talk to me

when i'm invisible

Sam

a brilliant little dog
was our Sam
a feisty Jack Russell

he would sit
with his back legs crossed
aristocratic
aloof
and wait for the railway workers

three times a day
the big siren would sound
haunting
and thousands of Lowry-esque
guys
on bicycles
would spill forth
peddling home

Sam's ears would prick
he'd look up the street
and get ready

dozens of legs
going up and down
trying to shuck him off
in his deadly
game of bones

one time he was missing
for days
we got a phone call
that he had been seen
sitting in the middle of the road
over four miles away
traffic streaming both sides
unconcerned
insouciant legs
crossed

zebra

Joolz wanted to buy the zebra
it was an actual zebra
stuffed
and standing about weirdly
in the second hand shop
the natural habitat
for terrible taxidermy specimens

the idea had seized her
and our chum Sally
and so it was
that the three of us
went to make the purchase

huh students!

anyway
it turns out it's really hard
to lug about
African equine awkward
and very heavy

there was quite a way to go
and while they announced
amidst gales of laughter
that it was going to called
Bret

(Bret?)

i decided to lift it
using the classic
firemans lift

as soon as i got it up
on my shoulders
i legged it
for home

after a quarter of a mile
or so
enduring the honking
of passing cars
i was shagged
so i put it down
and turned back

waaay in the distance

i could just make out

the waving

of arms and legs

as they lay on the floor

in convulsions

blob dog

he was a big bouncy Collie
was Jake
we usually called him
'blob dog'
for some reason
no one could remember

my dad had taken him for a walk
and on their way home
he stopped off
for a newspaper
leaving the blob
in the car

standing in the queue
dad heard a car's horn
blaring
it went on and on
as he inched forward
towards his turn
at the cash desk

at last
getting back to the motor
he found blobby
sitting in the driver's seat
paws on the wheel
looking most
alarmed

homo geologicus

a personality
and a landscape both
collide with the present

only after
a tortuous formation

a laval eruption
of madness

when a straightjacket
of regolith
cracks

sedimentary deposits
pressed down over millennia
into resentful mudstone

bubbling springs
of youthful joy

alluvial meanderings
of maturity

porous limestone labyrinths
carving chemical confusions

our momentary snapshots
of the character of place
take in only the surface

the kaleidoscope of time
delivers to us
just fragments
created over epochs

mica and schist
the granite of high places
brooding over memories
of a fossilised sea

ancient tectonic psychodramas
authority versus rebellion
throw up vast mountains
and arid
icy deserts

nothing could withstand
the glacier's hydrosexual demand
for the ocean

to wear the mantle
as it is
rather than try
to remake a world
is surely
a more graceful way
to honour
its contours