
Nothing of Substance

Number Three

For lovers of consonants and vowels.

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London Underground A to Z: Extracts from the Gazetteer

Bartholomew's Bream

An Urban Myth to detractors, a truth to those that have seen it, Bartholomew's Bream is, allegedly, a gigantic Common Bream (*Abramis brama*) that swims through the warren of tunnels that make up the Victoria Line. The fish gained its moniker through the experience of Edward Bartholomew, the first witness to publically claim they saw the Bream: while waiting for the last tube to Brixton, Bartholomew claims that the fish literally swam past him, emerging out of the tunnel onto Vauxhall and then glide past him as if it were itself a passing tube train. Bartholomew described its movement as both "graceful" and "elegant", "a fish of considerable size and beauty". While many believed Bartholomew was either intoxicated or experiencing a drug-induced hallucination, the local press saw an opportunity to continue to fill column inches with what one editor described as a "light-hearted lunatic hoax" by asking if others has *Seen the Bream*, secretly ensconcing journalists at Vauxhall in an effort to gain a further sighting and eking out Bartholomew's experience with further (and increasingly strained) interviews with this witness. The sustained exposure of Bartholomew's account predictably bought forth a number of other witnesses – some regular commuters, others tourists and, unsurprisingly, a small number of London Underground employees. While the latter remained anonymous, the majority of the detailed accounts tallied closely with Bartholomew's experience. Many of those witnesses who came forward recognised the impossibility of what they saw yet refused to refute what they believed they had seen. With such media coverage, a prolonged period of increased use of Vauxhall was noted by Transport for London who recorded, alongside this increase in numbers that small groups of believers and sceptics engaged in illegal sit-ins long after the station had closed. None of these groups every claimed to have seen the Bream pass through. Of those recorded sightings, most are clustered around Vauxhall and Pimlico. The possible reason for this was posited by Bartholomew himself who claimed that those station's proximity to the Thames would indicate that the Bream lived not in the Underground but in that river and would, on occasion, make excursions into the Underground in its perpetual hunt for food. Although a petition was raised to launch an official investigation into the possibility of the Bream's existence, Transport for London has yet to undertake such an enquiry.

Hobbs End

A closed station on the now defunct Central Line, renowned for the events that took place while the station was being built: during the laying down of the tunnelling to platform section foundations, construction workers uncovered a skull of unusual shape and proportions. Noted Palaeontologist Dr. Matthew Roney and his team were called to the scene to both excavate and examine the skull. Clearly not fitting into the accepted prehistoric catalogue, Roney began a reconstruction of the being, an undertaking greatly helped by the discovery of further skull fragments and assorted bones. The resulting reconstruction was clearly humanoid but one that was of dwarf-like stature that was contrasted by its unusually large brain cavity. Roney speculated, much to the chagrin of the scientific community, that this being was a very early form of primitive man. Through Roney's continued research, speculation and proposition, the Hobb's End skull was eventually granted entry into the broad catalogue of Archaic *Homo sapiens*, sitting between *Homo heidelbergensis* and *Homo rhodesiensis*.

Lambeth Walk, The

Not to be confused with a popular 1930's song that gave rise to the walking dance that is performed in a jaunty, strutting manner, the term Lambeth Walk pertains to the act of committing suicide. The Lambeth Walk is usually undertaken by stepping off the platform into the path of an oncoming train (as in the well documented cases of Jugger, Hounslow and Cartwright) or, on occasion, jumping directly onto the line itself. Either way, no one has yet survived the undertaking of the Lambeth Walk.

Shunt

Heterocolloquial term used to describe sexual congress whereby penetration is granted from the rear.

Stuck like Foxes

Term used to describe the recording of couples caught on platform CCTV in the act of coitus. This highly desirable footage is usually collated by persons unknown into short but intense collections. Burnt onto low-quality DVD, they are sold on the black market and, on occasion, exchanged or swapped underhand in staff canteens, recreation areas and locker rooms. A *Best of* collection became available briefly in late autumn 2010. Limited to an edition of 25, this disc has taken on almost mythic proportions and has, reportedly, sold for an estimated £10,000.

Undone, The

A collective term used to describe the various indigenous homeless people that populate the Underground. While the origin of this descriptor is uncertain, its exact use is evident in the lexicon of the various sub groups of the Underground, making it one of the few true examples of Plat Slang^[1] to cross the various sub cultural divides.

[1] The other terms in this very select group are: *Domino Spots* (used to describe a range of venereal diseases), *Locum* (a temporary loss of bearings) and *Criss Cross* (meaning to simultaneously listen in on various radio signals within a small but clearly defined area).

1111 1111 1111 1111

I am
the
kind
of person
who would give up
when the war arrives

Cognoscenti

Get someone else to do the thinking for you. The R&D. The brainwork. Step in to front-fill the details, colour the ready-numbered sections, drop the blocks into the pre-cut holes. Brighten the thing up with a little context maybe?

What I am trying to say is that someone else has already worked it out for you. Dispense with the notion that there is a requirement or indeed the possibility of originality anywhere in your life.

Everywhere you look there is clear evidence that what I say is true. Alexander the Great had most of it nailed in a big old library that the Caliph of Baghdad destroyed in 642. Descartes was paraphrasing Plato, Plato riffed on Socrates and all of them were probably outrun by some unknown cave-dwelling bright-spark that lacked the good-fortune to live at a time when some form of useful recording was in place to retain their insights. Symbols cut into stones, icons burned onto blocks of wood, hieroglyphs scrawled on papyrus, or even simply a rich enough verbal narrative tradition to retain their name for future generations to treasure.

I used to think that the sheer sneering arrogance of Lydon 'nee Rotten' fronting the Sex Pistols was a meaningful act of true rebellion. He was of course on utterly safe ground, picking up where Little Richard left off scaring audiences with the apparent ungodly terror of rock n'roll. I suspect if I could trace the line far enough back, some fucked up animal-skin-drum banger from early prehistory probably didn't get his share of the mammoth meat due to perceived inappropriate posture while banging away with his bone.

The point is we are all on railroad tracks heading for a station visited many times before. You can update to the superfast Japanese bullet train, you can run retro on steam, but what you can't do is chug off-piste and find an alternative route or fresh destination.

This year's Turner Prize, last year's Booker, the Oscars, global warming, international peace prizes, political debate, refuse-collection, free-elections in a once totalitarian state, a six-figure sculpture commission from a large financial services corporation, this year's late harvest Reisling, tomorrow's weather, yesterday's bread, an unlikely combination of numbers in the National Lottery, three crows flying high above an over-head power-line, the improbability of beating anyone other than a child at noughts and crosses, the price of copper on the international markets, the price of true love on the domestic market, all of these things and more are subject to unknowable forces. So just relax baby, it's all a strange dream. Does what I say sound a little hackneyed, a little like an old idea? Yeah well – I told you so, no?

Relationships Are Not Taken Far Enough

I can imagine your house,
where you may do things.
But I don't know what
they are.

I only know you
and vaguely, your wife.
How can you do these things?

Joanne

We sit around taking it in turns to roll joints
Passing them between us
Talking nonsense and laughing
Listening to Kate Bush
The room is lit in reds and greens cast through paisley head scarves draped over table lamps

We are supposed to be going out
And it's getting late

There is a knock at the door
She answers it but just sticks her head out to talk to the caller
I can't hear what she is saying
Or who she is talking to
But she's not gone long

She returns and starts to get ready

Sitting at her desk in front of a round mirror she starts to put her make up on
Eye liner applied carefully, one hand steadying the other
Pausing between eyes to take her turn with the current joint

Then mascara
Long, slow and deliberate strokes
I am transfixed, watching every movement
My interest amplified by the lungfuls of THC

"Cmon, baby, cmon darling,
Let me steal this moment from you now."

She turns and laughs
"My ex used to like watching me put my make up on"
I have been caught out
She teases me a little more when she senses my embarrassment

She relents and starts to put on her lipstick

Now she is watching me watching her in the mirror
She is smiling.

(untitled)

when I make gestures
what do
you
think about my fingers?

An attempt (failed) to produce ten pages of hand written text every day for a week

Second attempt

Day Three

The more I progress through this project, this prolonged and, at times, seemingly meaningless exercise, the less it feels like a creative process. Perhaps having too rigid parameters is an anti-creative standpoint. But am I not free within these parameters to write whatever I please? I am, after all, only doing this to please myself; I know full well that this process will not alter the course of my life, it will not alter my understanding or appreciation of anything, nor (and perhaps most tellingly) will anybody ever read it. In fact I would probably not read much of it myself if it were not just to make sure I'd actually done it. And in another fact, I would probably feel quite ashamed if anyone were to read it. So where, if

anywhere, does the creativity in this lie? And what, if I may ask, is creativity anyway? A large enough question, no doubt, and one that I don't feel capable of answering, not at least in the pages that I have left. Actually, I don't think I could ever give a conclusive, definite answer to such a question. I can, though, give a wealth of opinionated and poorly thought out bunkum. ~~Hooray for me.~~ About creativity. It would seem to have a great deal to do with human enterprise, making things, whether for entertainment, utility, aesthetics, communication or whatever purpose you may wish to put something to. The whole of human productivity, for whatever end, from the beginning of existence is creativity. It is that continual, ever evolving drive within us all to question who we are and to make

something in response to that essentially unfathomable question. It needs no purpose other than to help us get through our days. Songs are just something to waste your time, I listen to yours and you listen to mine, before we know it the day's gone by. Songs are just something to waste your time. So's anything else to do, whatever makes you feel fine. Writing these pages doesn't make me feel fine. It tires me out, it bores me and frustrates me. So why do I do it? I am just going round in circles, moving no closer to having a real reason for doing this. I am tired. It's 10.30 in the p.m. and I would like to go to bed. I don't believe in my convictions. I don't trust my drive. Maybe I see all too clearly the pointlessness of this exercise. Others would do it easily though. And better. And then they'd take it to

someone and do something with it and the whole enterprise will have been worth the tiredness, the boredom, the faux existential angst and the aching hand. But I won't make anything of this, even if by next week I have 70 pages full of my writing. Perhaps that is my problem, I don't see things through, I barely even start most things. Do I just want to be like someone else? Have I seen or read about or been introduced to someone whose success I have turned into a model for my own aspirations? I can't believe that there is a rational explanation for my wanting to be an "artist" when I clearly see that nothing will ever come of it, nor do I ever have the commitment to actually make or do anything worthwhile. It's just pretend. I'm trying to fit in with a certain way

of being in order to gain acceptance from people whom I believe, for one reason or another, to be greater than the hoi polloi. I want to stand out, to be exceptional, to be something special because I cannot take the crushing ordinariness that absolutely everything, even my idols and highest hopes, is made out of. I am the direct centre of average, ordinary nothingness, and it really frightens me. I have nothing to prove to anyone and who I am was proven to me years ago. Maybe I have my nothingness to prove. But even that would require an absolutely startling and completely uncharacteristic burst of something that I will never have the ability nor the conviction to perform. — Is it or would it be cheating to copy out pages of text from things that I have written previously?

I suppose I would have to find a piece of writing of a sufficient quantity and quality and be so very sure that I couldn't ever put the sentiment in a better way. I probably couldn't. I have a poor ability to recall information other than visually. So I can recall where I was, the place and surroundings and so forth, when I wrote a piece but I will struggle forever to recall precisely what I was aiming to express in the writing. And surely I am not the same person as I was when I wrote the piece. I have grown wiser and dumber and modified myself so as to fit into the space and time that I currently occupy. So to copy a piece, even, would do a disservice to my current thought processes and would change the original meaning of the piece to fit a new mould. It would certainly be

easier though. At least from a conceptual point of view. I wouldn't have to think about what I was writing. Of course I would think about what I was writing and would in all likelihood disagree with my earlier self and be desirous of changing it. In which case, I might as well have written something new to begin with. What if I were to copy the work of someone else? I have already quoted some people in this project so why couldn't I take long parts of the literature which means so much to me and reproduce it? I would be able to put ~~my~~ my points across in far better way than I ever could myself and I would also have the added bonus of being able to hide behind a greater person than myself. But then the whole project would be

completely negated. I might as well simply sit and read my favourite works or spend the time discovering new writers and thereby hope to understand the world a little bit more. Maybe this is a wholly selfish act. A complete absorption within my own ego. A silly idea really when I don't generally like myself very much. Maybe I am just slightly delusional. Maybe a need to start a new start. What if I were to find a topic that I could fully investigate in the remaining 42 pages and properly commit myself to gaining greater understanding of something. But what? I only ever seem to come back to myself. I am self obsessed aren't I? I'm struggling now. I need to fill another two pages and two more lines so that I can go to bed and sleep poorly for a few hours before my

stupid and unsatisfied mind is allowed to drag me back into the world again. If I were to stay up really late, not necessarily to continue with this text but just to tire myself out completely, would I be able to sleep better? Does it make more sense to go to bed earlier knowing that I may very likely wake up very early and therefore have to slog myself through another god-awful day, or should I sleep less by going to bed later but possibly sleep solidly before having

to wake up at a normal hour? Either way I will be tired. Maybe I should stop worrying about it and just relax. What is really worth worrying about so much that I lose sleep over it? War, famine, disaster, poor ethically unsound methods of living one's life – these would be

quite sensible options really. But I have to think about work, or random places that I have been to during my life, or people that I am no longer acquainted with, or any number of completely useless things that I generally do not care about (I do care about my work, but not enough to fabricate random occurrences with non-existent students in unrelated events from my past.) I wish I could be quiet, and forget things. I wish I didn't worry. I wish I was better at interacting with people. I wish I wasn't so pathetic. I wish I could accept who I am and what I do as being perfectly fine because then I wouldn't force myself to write ten pages of full-on shit every day for a fucking week. Why am I doing this? I have no idea why I am doing this. Fill the last **line** up with words.

Wolf Skin

I was born of the wolf. Slit from his belly by the Woodcutter's axe, I was pulled from that wound and the intestinal umbilical severed as I lay shivering in the snow. The Woodcutter knelt down beside me, reaching out to peel away my woollen caul and to wipe some of the blood from my face. He then wrapped me in his cloak, gathered me up in his arms and carried me into Grandma's house.

There the cinders still glowed in the grate, orange yellow and fading reds resting amongst yesterday's ashes. He put me down before this dwindling fire, watching me draw my knees to my chest and wrap my arms tight around my calves before he took up the poker and raked through the embers. He spoke to me as this did this; the words were just sounds that were only faintly recognisable. He smiled at me, reaching out to gently touch my face before going back outside. As I waited for his return I could hear the dull thud of his axe as I felt father's blood congealing in my hair and leeching into my skin.

The Woodcutter returned, burdened with wood and kindling, his shoulders and cap dusted with snow. He knelt down beside me and, as he carefully placed a handful of dry leaves and moss upon the embers, I looked at the hunting knife hanging from his hip, its long blade safely sheathed within a leather scabbard. He leant forward slightly and blew and the embers glowed and sparks flew; the leaves and moss catching in his breath. Splinters of wood were placed over these rising flames and then logs, one atop the other. He rubbed his hands together and spoke some more before going back outside.

Again, I heard his axe fall. Four firm blows, one for each of father's paws. The axe fell once more and took his head. Then I heard the hunting blade against fur and skin, moving evenly back and forth, occasionally interrupted as it caught against muscle or bone. The fire had begun to dwindle when the Woodcutter finally came back inside, this time burdened with a pelt and a bundle of red rags. Without speaking he dropped the pelt to the floor and threw the rags upon the fire. I watched my red cloak begin to smoulder and burn, the flames revealing the contents of paw, lungs, liver and guts, a severed head. My father's flesh and bone. I raised my hand to my mouth and licked at the blood, his and mine mingled, that was smeared across my knuckles. Inside him I felt only warmth and the pitch terror of his consumption. Now I only feel the cold.

Chapter 6 (also misplaced)

London, All Bar One, Shad Thames, Sunday 11:15 am

A badly hungover couple, both wearing expensive looking casual rugby shirts with the collars up, spend too long deciding what to order from the breakfast menu. The bored barman wanders my way while they stare at menus, his intention is not to raise efficiency by serving me while they choose, rather just a way of displaying his contempt for their indecision.

A very slight rise of the eyebrows is supposed to alert me to the fact that he is now ready to take my order. I consider just staring back at him until he is forced to speak, but confrontation will just make me feel jittery, so I order a cappuccino. He walks off without a word to begin operating a Gaggia machine that could easily double as a piece of equipment developed by some specialist department within NASA. A huge combination of absurd looking chrome and LCD control screens, all primed to push hot water through some ground beans and fire a jet of hot air through some milk.

The couple have decided on eggs benedict, but are suddenly worried whether that is the one with ham or the one with spinach and I see a slight twitch in the barman's face that probably conceals a terrible animal rage built up over many months of standing behind the bar serving the hideously affluent city workers that spill out over Tower Bridge.

My loyalties are momentarily split as I want to hold on to the enmity I have developed with the barman, but the couple in question look pretty appalling too and I wonder about trying to be complicit in his dislike for them. In the end I opt for the surer path of simply loathing them all as I walk back to the reclaimed church pew seating that sits in amongst a mix and match of furniture intended to produce a kind of laid-back style that really only exists in the minds of commercial designers.

I leaf through the latest copy of (Unda)Ground magazine, mentally noting things I should go back and read after I have finished the column by so-zeitgeist-it-hurts, uber-critic 'Rayon'. There's a piece on a new band called Nuvoid that are all fifteen and are clearly obsessed with Gary Numan. Scanning the article I read that they actually sound more like an "electronic Soundgarden", with "a left-field existential-clownish inventiveness not seen since Devo". How can a fifteen year old not be an unwitting existentialist clown? Under a black and white picture of the three of them standing inside a wardrobe, there is a quote from the not too bad looking lead vocalist saying, "we just don't care what our fans think of us, we wish they would all die". Sounds promising, I must download some of their tracks, even if only to be able to rubbish them with the requisite venom when I next see Elliot.

Rayon's column spills out over a double-page spread and onto the following page. The layout is beautiful, with the text scattered as if by a demented typographer over what looks like dripped candle-wax, distressed gold-leaf and some smudged finger prints. There are two box-outs with photographs of people in what looks like rapture, their eyes clamped shut, arms aloft. It isn't clear whether their expressions denote pain or pleasure. The overall impression is highly confusing and some words are almost too difficult to make out against the under-print, but the whole thing just screams out to be consumed. "Read me – I contain information so visceral and true that your entire future depends on me".

The couple with the rugby shirts are now sitting nearby on my right, their eggs benedict arriving and for a moment I am distracted thinking about something Anthony Bourdain said about the terrifying bacterial holocaust to be found in mayonnaise in such dishes. He saves a special mention for the Sunday breakfast session where over-tired B-list kitchen staff use yesterday's left-overs with the minimum of interest. I say quietly to myself, "Staphylococcus aureus produces heat-stable toxins in food that, when ingested...", but trail off when I realise I have no detailed idea of what happens in this process.

I turn back to the magazine and start reading Rayon's latest piece.

[Unda]Ground Magazine January 2013

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Christian Rock music has come a long way since Stryper first connected the raw power of the devil's music and turned its cloven hoof to work for the Lord. Christian rock is now big business and there is a 'holy-clone' of just about every genre that exists in the non-christian domain. This extends even to doom laden bands such as Oathsayer and As I Lay Dying, which could easily pass for freshly minted satanic metallers were it not for the gospel content of their lyrics and the fact that their followers can mainly be found in church the morning after a Saturday night gig, possibly drinking blood at both events.

So as little Johnny's momma screams up the stairs to "turn down that awful racket", at least Johnny can assure her that these bad boys love Jesus. A quick read of the back of the CD can confirm that despite appearances, this is just another way to mainline 'the word', served up for a new generation with quirky tastes.

But, just as these cynical shit eaters are apeing conventional bands in order to allow even the kids of Baptist ministers to get their fix of rock subversion, so they are being reclaimed by the monster that bore them. At the heart of Christian rock, where the big bucks lie, several far more middle of the road bands that weld super uplifting gospel choruses onto U2-esque stadium rock anthems have started to find the margins of their gigs invaded by kids come to feel the noize on e's, MDMA and other tasty party drugs. The mix of highly charged emotional songwriting, the highly developed community atmosphere of the gig and super-euphoric drugs is proving a winning combination for a whole bunch of electro-gypsies too young to have had a chance to feel anything authentic in a club, having missed out on acid house by nearly two decades.

The story goes that one of the originators of the scene is a girl known simply as 'Neely'. Someone who had a childhood filled with four to the floor, one-true-church, house music all night long lectures from her reformed old skool raver mum A mum who had now replaced four-to-the-floor and pills with born again Christianity. Inspired by the stories of communal abandon at Shoom and Love-Shack, but with an intuitive understanding of which of the god-rockers provide some legitimate high-end musical highs, Neely started taking her pill-head mates out to Christian gigs with truly euphoric results.

Steve Taylor, Lead singer with big-time Christian rockers The Newsboys, spoke to [Unda]Ground about the ketamine-Jesus phenomenon.

Taylor said that initially they assumed the kids were just getting really carried away with the vibe. It was much later, when rumours started to come back from fans that there were way-fucked up people in the crowd that they started to discuss how this fitted in to the lord's plan. To start with they wondered if maybe this was a way to reach out to some lost souls, but quickly realized that the conversions seemed if anything to be heading in the other direction, as the numbers of mash-up cracker kids at their gigs increased to more than a sizeable minority. Now they have committed to making a statement openly condemning the interlopers at the start of every gig.

Another Christian rocker, Chris Tomlin has also tried to combat the changing crowd at his gigs by putting heavier security on the doors at all his European shows.

So, check out The Newsboys track, "He Reigns", consider the impact of enjoying it arms held aloft in a sea of believers while on a killer pill and tell me you won't be reborn. There just isn't anything so pure that we can't properly fuck it up.

Rayon

I put down the magazine and take a sip of the now luke-warm cappuccino. It is almost impossible not to feel some kind of total sickness is at work here, but the prospect of being lost on a seething crowd high on belief while wrecked and on a chemical high – you have to hand it to these kids, they know how to get some really pure kicks.

I notice that the barman is now engaged in some kind of pointless argument with the rugby-shirt goons and it seems best to get out of the place to avoid having to decide which side to take.

3 Chicken Nuggets

Imagine
violence, unrest
hunger
death

Homeless
missing, buried alive
ignored, blind, beaten
polystyrene cup

Unbearable silence
why do we kick and scream
and we turn away
ignore the obvious
yet we continue to breathe

No

‘Only the man who says no is free’ – Herman Melville

I suppose it perhaps could’ve started maybe like any other work might’ve started. He asked if there was any reason for them to be there.

“Is there any reason for us to be here?”

It could’ve been a much greater distance than they had believed but once any thing had been done or said, who knows how far their belief had been. If we go to the end and get what we wanted, I could ask you if we had a plan all along, complicit in the making of this thing that neither of us could escape from unless we chose to deny it. On, further on, carry on, keep up with those that are not struggling or falling behind. No things were not a pain but he felt something ache, put it down to a lack of confidence and asked a secret of anyone who might care to listen. No one was listening, so it, contrary to his desires in having said it, remained a secret. In this way it did carry on.

As the time passed and fewer of them made sense, it got to the point where one of them had to ask where it would go next.

“Where’s it going to go next?”

If there was an answer for you, or for these things that could be determined as aspects of creation, or at least creativity, then not I, nor anyone else, might’ve been in a position to give that answer. Obviously, before it could carry on, such questions, answerless as they may have been or as answerless as they may continue to be, needed to be asked. And following the asking of potentially answerless questions, a period of reflection is probably necessary. A period of reflection during which he reflected not on the questions themselves but upon the products of previous questionless periods wherein things actually got done, made, created and existed. Would this result in insight, I wouldn’t wish to say, but it could, with hindsight (which must come before insight anyway) result in a new direction for things to follow. Perhaps the point is not to know where they were going but to follow the track of whatever investigative route it was on. Questions from him would stop and it would only be those people who could support the ongoingness of the initial import that would raise objections or supports. Either would be fine I suppose.

And then it starts again. In a cyclical fashion, they start, stop. Begin, go round until it seems like there’s no where else to go and then they do it again. Maybe it can only ever be this way. But if they keep returning to the same question, could there be other questions to which others keep returning instead? Are there an infinite number of questions that, once asked, keep us locked in in a cyclical cycle, cycling round till we can go not forwards nor backwards, or even obliquely askance from, but roundly round till it seems madness or acquiescence might be the only things possible. To put the television on might be an answer. I don’t have one though he thought to himself. What then, could be the other modes of negation that he could put to use? What else could there be to occupy his time and make the circle of question not worthy of attention?

He sat down and tried to put his mind to it. They didn’t get much further than what ever he could really be bothered to say. It never went much further than what he could be bothered to do because he was too adept at masking his inabilities with laziness. Still, he tried. They carried on in various guises and brought with them certain feelings of success. People saw them, spoke of them with words that made others interested and then pay attention, then less,

then stop. Some things definitely do stop. It isn't always like this. Then you tell me what it is like this?

When something was done, they could ask of each other advice, guidance, support... They could ask for them. Whether they were returned was a debatable point not worth debating but debatable nonetheless. It could go only so far. It hurt sometimes.

Eventually sometime around the end of a period of make mirthing and potential squandering it was a point at which something could be asked of either a positive or a negative and I want the correct answer to this question. And he, saying, turned to her. She heard and turned him say "this will never do."

The White Whale – The Morning of the Third Day

And in that oil-scented darkness of early morning, Ahab stands alone to whisper their fate...

I stand here now, White Whale
Before the mainmast
And the nailed doubloon

And swear
On every Nantucket nickel and dime
That I will take your life

It is our destiny
Etched into the palms of our hands
In the scars that heal upon our flukes

For they are the navigation of our lives
The ships wheel, the rudder and keel
The calm waters before the rising storm

So rise slowly up
And let the waves unfold against you
Time enough to sound your place

For that will be our marker
The meeting place
Of our mutual fate

Until then I bid you fair weather, White Whale

Little Donkey

There was always a sense of anticipation.
We had been talking about him coming home since mid-morning.
It was like that every day.

He would return at lunch time bringing with him the smell of beer and Woodbines.
My grandma would have his dinner ready for when he arrived.
I only ever remember dinner being pork chops or sausage with boiled potatoes, vegetables and gravy.
He would always take a pinch of salt with his dinner from the little glass pot which would be placed on the table along with a knife and fork and an unopened can of Badger Bitter.

Dinner would be eaten in silence, we would wait patiently for him to finish.
His final flurry would be to pick up his plate and placing his mouth at the rim and drink the remaining gravy from it.
He would then open the can of bitter and the television would go on and the afternoons horse racing coverage would be found.
The television reception was always awful.

He would become visibly excited as the jockeys took their horses to the starting post, smiling and laughing, swigging back the bitter, pointing out the brightly coloured jockeys silks and winding me and my brother up, taking us all along with his excitement.

But once the horses were under starters orders silence was called for.

And then they're off!
You would have thought every horse he backed was called "Come on ya bugger!"
You could feel him willing the nag on, urging it to the post with every fibre of his being.

Sometimes he would win.
Sometimes he would lose.
The truth is that the outcome seemed almost irrelevant to him.

After his last race he would with much persuasion take to the piano.
No matter what the time of year we would ask him to play Christmas carols.
"Little Donkey" being a favourite.
I have no idea why.
But he would play and sing and we would sit on the floor and listen and laugh.

Occasionally he would play songs we had never heard.
He had some sheet music but never used it as far as I remember.
The songs often seemed sad but he appeared to enjoy it and seemed lost in himself when he would sing these songs.

Then when he had had enough he would close the piano lid.
We knew then it was time to be quiet.
He would then retire to his chair and sleep.

Selecting the Best Men's Hair Styling Product

It seems like all my life I have been seeking the best hair styling product to support my grooming routine.

Clearly at different times in life different outcomes have been the goal, so I am not seeking a single styling panacea that answers all stylistic requirements, rather that at every point in life I have been hoping to stumble into the optimum product du jour.

Gel, wax, putty, clay, pomade, mousse, gum, fibre, paste, cream, each word used sufficiently loosely by the trade to never fully define the likely contents. Grades of hold, fix and style are not remotely standardised, no international scale exists, no ombudsman regulates, so there is no way to judge in advance the likely adherence of the product. No clue as to its ability to sculpt or define, before we even get into the extent to which it will generate a gloss or matt finish, whether it will separate or group strands, whether it will offer a wet or dry finish, whether it will be re-mouldable, whether it offers a 'messy' or slick finish.

Packaging and brand plays a part in driving ever increasing acquisition of different pots, tubes and cans. The wild dream seeks its target in the bright headlights of major "laboratories" known from TV campaigns as well as bohemian corners from which more eccentric products might be found. Do I want to be caressed by an A-list hairdresser such as Toni & Guy, Sassoon or Worthington, do I want the reassurance of a global corporation such as Wella or VO5, do I want the scientific advantages of Laboratoire Garnier, or do I want the underground satisfaction of having found a Kings, Fudge or other lesser known type?

Of course, fashions come and go. As the TV series Madmen peaked, so greasy pomades such as Layrite Deluxe, and Royal Crown that had been lying low for decades, known only by rockabillys suddenly found themselves in vogue, more contemporary brands such as American Crew formulated their own super-slick output.

"Hair gel", much maligned as a kind of 80's throw-back is actually a quality product capable of quite diverse styles, but suffers from its tendency to conjure up thoughts of flat-tops, long-on-top buzz-cuts and hair so hard it's like a hat.

Current popular names such as clay, putty, gum and moulding-fibre are so nebulous that it's hard to say what you will find when you unscrew the lid, but they do tend to look, smell and feel nicer than almost all of their ancestors. Some of them smell good enough to eat.

And here's where the thing becomes a mess. Imagine all of the variables; hold, finish restyle-ability, smell, packaging, price, brand name.

Occasionally the thought strikes that the best option of all might be to use no product at all. That like the painted clowns behind make-up counters in department stores, the real advice might be to go natural.

This is my search, my grail quest.

i am the consequence

i saw what she wrote about me
i read every line aloud
and i told her so
then slapped her with my threadbare paw
and wrapped her lies in linen

Samantha

got like a snake
in a dancing contraption
flipping faster through
the cough of drums
this rag doll noise
a spinning ceremony
bent over
in imaginary silence

Square One Redux #1

saying her name
into the cool madness of the night
biting into troubles daughter
saying sorry
in this sick quiet blur
saying remember my name
again
remember my name

Square One Redux #2

my fixation with
the merciless she
bewitched tangles of hair
bleeding demolished secrets
into your unparted face
through unmarked sleep
we swallow night prayers
waiting for a hummingbird

Sleep Tight Sweetheart

Doesn't it always start this way? A dame coming into my office, wet from the rain and a cigarette between her red lips. "It's full of sin," she says, "city like this." I smile. My kind of broad - holding back the tears, telling it straight and just on the right side of plain to appeal to a bum like me. I tell her to take a seat and I open my bottom drawer. The tumblers clink against the half empty bottle. Before she sits she turns away from me to wipe the rain and probably a stray tear from her face. I offer her a shot, to warm her up but she says "No, I've got work to do." Running extra shifts I imagine. Working hard to make the already frayed ends meet and to pay my bill. I pour myself a generous measure as she takes another drag on her cigarette. She holds it in and I watch her throat tighten, waiting for those soft lips to part, for the smoke to drift lazily out and up towards to the ceiling. She knows I am watching. Exhales and the moment is over. She talks, something about a job, her husband missing. I can't hear the words, just the soft tones, sunshine in all that rain. She says she has a photo, "if that would help." I nod and take another pull of my whiskey. It burns my throat and draws me back into my dismal office. She puts the cigarette into the corner of her mouth and I should have known then - its lazy angle and how it broke her face. Perhaps she was giving me a chance. She opens her purse and searches about inside, taking out a gun instead of a black and white. Pulls back the hammer and squeezes the trigger, just about point blank. The bullet enters my stomach and pushes me slightly back. It burns. Burns like the cheap whiskey I have always drank. I guess I had it coming, all those years of being paid to make friends with the enemy. I drop the tumbler and hear it smash. She puts the gun back into her purse. "Sleep tight sweetheart" she says. I smile. The oldest trick in the book, sending a broad to do a man's job. And I fell for it. Still, I think, as I slump forward, she was one helluva dame.

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