

KJ

The lucky ones die from being too adventurous. I died almost arbitrarily during a summer's day because of someone else's decision. He would be rewarded in heaven, I was to die and be counted. I suppose I was lucky. It was quick. A flash of light and a feeling of warmth and then,
and then,
and then:

‘I've never been here before.’ He speaks but looks around. He can't make eye contact. He learnt that in school.

I'd ordered a Guinness on the long bar in the Frog and Fiddle while next to me a group of students dressed as golfers did shots. Some, later versions of themselves, were talking on mobile phones

about sales deals. Outside, beyond the stickered sheet glass a white Mercedes van was parked outside of the Asian supermarket and the same old paper skinned smack heads were smoking at the front door. My companion, an earlier self, had ordered a bitter. Our pints poured and paid for, I'd led us outside to where, some hundred years ago, the dray had rested while the horses were fed. We'd sat on one of the benches where the sun could reach us. I'd heard myself with some friends singing *Come Together* on the raised wooden mezz some way off.

'I like coming here.' I say to him as I sip the first dark finger of my pint. He does the same with his bitter but says nothing. 'They did or do, I can't decide which, open readings here. For a time I would read my work to the others.'

'Are you famous?' He speaks into his pint.

'No, I just read to my friends'. He makes eye contact before turning to look at the red brick wall that the bench butts up against.

'I don't have any friends.' He states with a seasoning pride.

'That will pass.' I take another sip; pull out my tobacco, papers and lighter. I roll a cigarette. He watches my hands and then my tongue as I seal the paper around the shag.

'I smoke?'

'We do.'

'But smoking is so bad for us. You're poisoning our body.'

'I don't think that matters anymore.'

I drink and look up to the top corner of the building next to the pub. The vapour trails of all of the planes that have ever flown across Cheltenham are beginning to build up and the rumble of turbo fans is becoming a distant roar.

'I don't think there is much time left. There's an open reading today. I wanted to read to you, to everyone who has come.' I finish my cigarette and stub it out in the clean ashtray. He watches the smoke die.

'Come on, let's go inside.' I pick up my pint and he follows. We walk in, towards the dusk.

The stage in the pub's function room is not much more than eighteen inches off the dark floorboards. Set around the outside is a low rail. I walk around to rear stage left. Two simple steps of chipboard and I'm up.

I put my pint down and stand up to the microphone. I begin:

'It strikes me that within our history, and certainly within our personal history, we tell our side and to a certain extent, we lie. In fact, I posit to you, my friends, that we lie the most when we

talk about things in our immediate past'. I look at my notes, pick up my pint, take a long drink and continue.

'I think by the time we are emotionally removed enough from a triumph, disaster, or just, perhaps, a slight fuck up we have become so distanced from those events, that the fact of them is all we have left; all of the emotion has gone. If, in this age of plurality and subjectivity, the only truth is the truth of the self then do we not lose all and find ourselves picking over the bones of something we can never change?' I pause, look up to one of the rafters, concentrate on an iron bolt and look back at my notes.

'I wanted to redress this problem. I've spent a bit of time trying to re-write a piece about a time, a fraction of our universe that meant almost all to me. I found that because of what I've said to you I couldn't do it. But, what I *can* give you is a series of moments. It is for you to do with them as you will.' I turn the page in my notes and begin:

'You have a beanie on and you sit on the other side of the class with your head down low over the notes you are taking.

When you speak you play the vowels.

You are American.

You are not American but Scottish.

You have lived in the United States for the last six years.

You have worked for the Salvation Army in San Francisco.

We hold hands under the table as Dr Graham talks us through the Rwandan Genocide.

We argue over everything.

Your favourite Beatles track is *Day In The Life*.

You are a vegetarian.

We both like *Spaced*.

You are afraid of underpasses.

You are always making and doing.

You cry softly on my shoulder after our first kiss.

The skin on your shoulders and neck.

You have the most perfectly round areola I have ever seen.

The first time we have sex, you look surprised, almost fight as your orgasm rises.

You make great tea.

I've messed up and we've missed our change at Gloucester so you look at me and say: 'I like you'.

We argue and you break up with me again.

I go to work.

You turn up at the end of my shift in a dress.

Your blood because we can't wait.

We're warping to Cornwall and you are asleep beside me.

We walk around the Eden Project bathed in birdsong.

You say you don't sleep well without me.

We talk about who our children could be.

I crack you with a joke. It frustrates you so much you hunch like a rugby player and launch yourself at me.

I meet your family in Scotland and your Grand Father says 'you can marry him if you like'.

We sit on the end of my bed and watch Dexter's Lab clips on Youtube.

You fall asleep in my arms.

You have a nightmare about me leaving you for someone else. When you wake you are angry with me.

We're at the airport saying goodbye and you are crying. I just want it to be over.

You are crying as we talk on the phone. I don't notice.

My status on Facebook is a countdown, in minutes, until we see each other again.

I grow callous and we only talk about the sex we will have when we meet again.

We kiss in the arrivals lounge in SF airport. I know you don't feel the same anymore.

I can't sleep so I walk down the hill to the city centre where I find coffee and bagels for us.

We are shouting at each other at a wedding reception in Las Vegas.

I tell you I would marry you.

We are walking down Pine arguing over a silly remark I'd made to a friend you'd introduced me too.

We argue on a tram to Ocean Beach. A young mother and her son move to the other end of the car.

You get me coffee and I ask you whether you were happier in the UK with me. You look out to the horizon and say, 'yes'.

You thought I would hire a car and we would drive. I don't do it.

You tell me I have no right to be sad.

I phone you when I get back. It is over but you say 'don't make me cry'.

I phone you later and you tell me you have been with someone else.

After years of struggling and falling back I give up weed all together.

I want to send you a puzzle with the words of a letter on the back of each piece.

I don't do it.

I can't watch anything with Las Vegas or San Francisco involved for fourteen months.

I spend the next three years, up until my death trying to write about us.'

I finish speaking. Look out to the people gathered in the gloom and the turbine roar has reached us through the walls and the closed doors. I place my notes on the floor.

'I have reached the end of my life. I am still trying to work out what happened. I will never be happy with not knowing.' No one claps. My younger self just stares at me before there is nothing but the roar of the jets, and the endless curve of all that has come before.