

## The Dummy

Balancing me with your hand up my back, listening to the voice you gave me croaking for truth, you keep me at it. Your lips don't move, but your eyes look desperate as hell. Ask me something difficult.

Maybe we could sing together? Just teach me the right words, I learn fast. Don't stare like that. I'll start where you leave off. I can't tell you anything if you don't throw me a cue line. We're dying

a death right here. Can you dance? No. I don't suppose you'd be doing this if you could dance. Right? Why do you keep me in that black box? I can ask questions too, you know. I can see that worries you. Tough.

So funny things happen to everyone on the way to most places. Come on. You can do better than that, can't you?

## Model Village

See the cows placed just so on the green hill.

Cows say *Moo*. The sheep look like little clouds, don't they? Sheep say *Baa*. Grass is green and the pillar box is red. Wouldn't it be strange if grass were red? This is the graveyard

where the villagers bury their dead. Miss Maiden lives opposite in her cottage. She has a cat.

The cat says *Miaow*. What does Miss Maiden say?

*I poisoned her, but no one knows. Mother, I said, drink your tea. Arsenic. Four sugars. He waited years for me, but she had more patience. One day, he didn't come back. I looked in the mirror, saw her grey hair, her lips of reproach. I found the idea in a paperback. I loved him, you see, who never so much as laid a finger. Perhaps now you've learnt your lesson, she said, pouring another cup. Yes, Mother, yes. Drink it all up.*

The white fence around the farmyard looks as though it's smiling. The hens are tidying the yard. Hens say *Cluck* and give us eggs. Pigs are pink and give us sausages. *Oink*, they say. Wouldn't it be strange if hens laid sausages?

*Hee-haw* says the donkey. The farmhouse is yellow and shines brightly in the sun. Notice the horse. Horses say *Neigh*. What does the Farmer say?

*To tell the truth, it haunts me. I'm a simple man, not given to fancy. The flock was ahead of me, the dog doing his job like a good 'un. Then*

*I saw it. Even the animals stiffened in fright. Look,  
I understand the earth, treat death and birth  
the same. A fistful of soil tells me plainly  
what I need to know. You plant, you grow, you reap.  
But since then, sleep has been difficult. When I shovel  
deep down, I'm searching for something. Digging, desperately.*

There's the church and there's the steeple.  
Open the door and there are the people. Pigeons  
roost in the church roof. Pigeons say *Coo*.  
The church bells say *Ding-dong*, calling  
the faithful to worship. What God says  
can be read in the Bible. See the Postman's dog  
waiting patiently outside church. *Woof*, he says.  
*Amen*, says the congregation. What does Vicar say?

*Now they have all gone, I shall dress up  
as a choirboy. I have shaved my legs. How smooth  
they look. Smooth, pink knees. If I am not good,  
I shall deserve punishment. Perhaps the choirmistress  
will catch me smoking behind the organ. A good boy  
would own up. I am naughty. I can feel  
the naughtiness under my smock. Smooth, pink naughtiness.  
The choirmistress shall wear boots and put me  
over her lap. I tremble and dissolve into childhood.*

*Quack*, say the ducks on the village pond. Did you  
see the frog? Frogs say *Croak*. The village-folk shop  
at the butcher's, the baker's, the candlestick maker's.  
The Grocer has a parrot. Parrots say *Pretty Polly*  
and *Who's a pretty boy then?* The Vicar is nervous  
of parrots, isn't he? Miss Maiden is nervous  
of Vicar and the Farmer is nervous of everything.  
The library clock says *Tick-tock*. What does the Librarian say?

*Ssssh. I've seen them come and go over the years,  
my ears tuned for every whisper. This place  
is a refuge, the volumes breathing calmly  
on their still shelves. I glide between them  
like a doctor on his rounds, know their cases. Tomes  
do no harm, here I'm safe. Outside is chaos,  
lives with no sense of plot. Behind each front door  
lurks truth, danger. I peddle fiction. Believe  
you me, the books in everyone's heads are stranger . . .*

## And How Are We Today?

The little people in the radio are picking on me again. It is sunny, but they are going to make it rain. I do not like their voices, they have voices like cold tea with skin on. I go O O O.

The flowers are plastic. There is all dust on the petals. I go Ugh. Real flowers die, but at least they are a comfort to us all. I know them by name, listen. Rose. Tulip. Lily.

I live inside someone else's head. He hears me with his stethoscope, so it is no use sneaking home at five o'clock to his nice house because I am in his ear going Breathe Breathe.

I might take my eye out and swallow it to bring some attention to myself. Winston did. His name was in the paper. For the time being I make noises to annoy them and then I go BASTARDS.

## Psychopath

I run my metal comb through the D.A. and pose my reflection between dummies in the window at Burton's. Lamplight. Jimmy Dean. All over town, ducking and diving, my shoes scud sparks against the night. She is in the canal. Let me make myself crystal. With a good-looking girl crackling in four petticoats, you feel like a king. She rode past me on a wooden horse, laughing, and the air sang *Johnny, Remember Me*. I turned the world faster, flash.

I don't talk much. I swing up beside them and do it with my eyes. Brando. She was clean. I could smell her. I thought, Here we go, old son. The fairground spun round us and she blushed like candyfloss. You can woo them with goldfish and coconuts, whispers in the Tunnel of Love. When I zip up the leather, I'm in a new skin, I touch it and love myself, sighing Some little lady's going to get lucky tonight. My breath wipes me from the looking glass.

We move from place to place. We leave on the last morning with the scent of local girls on our fingers. They wear our lovebites on their necks. I know what women want, a handrail to Venus. She said *Please* and *Thank you* to the toffee apple, teddy bear. I thought I was on, no error. She squealed on the dodgems, clinging to my leather sleeve. I took a swig of whisky from the flask and frenched it down her throat. *No*, she said, *Don't*, like they always do.

Dirty Alice flicked my dick out when I was twelve. She jeered. I nicked a quid and took her to the spinney. I remember the wasps, the sun blazing as I pulled her knickers down. I touched her and I went hard,

but she grabbed my hand and used that, moaning . . . She told me her name on the towpath, holding the fish in a small sack of water. We walked away from the lights. She'd come too far with me now. She looked back, once.

A town like this would kill me. A gypsy read my palm. She saw fame. I could be anything with my looks, my luck, my brains. I bought a guitar and blew a smoke ring at the moon. Elvis nothing. *I'm not that type*, she said. Too late. I cased her down by the dull canal and talked sexy. Useless. She stared at the goldfish, silent. I grabbed the plastic bag. She cried as it gasped and wriggled on the grass and here we are. A dog craps by a lamp post.

Mama, straight up, I hope you rot in hell. The old man sloped off, sharpish. I saw her through the kitchen window. The sky slammed down on my school cap, chicken licken. *Lady, Sweetheart, Princess*, I say now, but I never stay. My sandwiches were near her thigh, then the Rent Man lit her cigarette and I ran, ran . . . She is in the canal. These streets are quiet, as if the town has held its breath to watch the Wheel go round above the dreary homes.

*No, don't*. One thump did it, then I was on her, giving her everything I had. Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man. Easier to say Yes. Easier to stay a child, wide-eyed at the top of the helter-skelter. You get one chance in this life and if you screw it you're done for, uncle, no mistake. She lost a tooth. I picked her up, dead slim, and slid her in. A girl like that should have a paid-up solitaire and high hopes, but she asked for it. A right-well knackered outrageant.

My reflection sucks a sour Woodbine and buys me a drink. Here's looking at you. Deep down I'm talented. She found out. Don't mess with me, angel, I'm no nutter. Over in the corner, a dead ringer for Ruth Ellis smears a farewell kiss on the lip of a gin and lime. The barman calls Time. Bang in the centre of my skull, there's a strange coolness. I could almost fly. Tomorrow will find me elsewhere, with a loss of memory. Drink up son, the world's your fucking oyster. Awopbopaloooop alopbimbam.