

Warehouse

Extract

Introduction

Ian Daley

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route

Introduction

Ian Daley

‘People who see their lives as a shipwreck set out to hunt down the guilty parties.’ – Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*

The *Warehouse* collection is a series of linked short stories with musical accompaniment that is inspired by, and in some cases driven by, a very specific urban subculture. It is drawn from aspects of life that are rarely exposed and created by a group who are seldom afforded artistic expression. The words and sounds sit together to form the whole picture. The subject matter is at times harsh and uncomfortable. However, if you are able to slide beneath the surface and avoid any prejudice, you will discover a richness of expression that is breathlessly universal. This is a story of how life forms itself around given conditions and could easily be transferred to many places around the world. This introduction’s intent is to provide you with a brief resume of the necessary context for the people and the place.

The majority of contributors to this collection, either as writer or musician, have at some time plied their trade as a warehouse operative. The exceptions being one who works in a factory, and one who operates a till on the

check-out. They all inhabit the very compact urban conurbation that flanks the A1/M1/M62 interchange just south of Leeds; most of the action in the book takes place in one small town. Visitors to the town will comment on its character, even its prettiness, they will also notice the surrounding industrial landscape, dominated by the eight giant cooling towers of a nearby power station.

The town itself boasts centuries of history. Standing midway between London and Edinburgh, Edward I referred to it as the 'Key to the North'. This strategic positioning has dictated its fate. The Romans set-up camp around a huge signalling beacon; the Normans constructed an imposing castle and set up a stronghold. During its day, the castle had a reputation for being particularly bloody, it was also reported that it would fire cannon intermittently onto the townsfolk to keep them quiet. Following a long and painful siege during the Civil War, the locals requested Cromwell's permission to pull the castle down, and it was granted. The castle that took centuries to build was down within weeks and much of the town was rebuilt using its stone.

The coal industry and the supporting mining culture have dominated the area for the last century, up until recently when, following a yearlong strike, the majority of pits were closed down. The remaining wash of cheap labour and the good road networks attracted multi-national corporations with distribution centres, their

warehouses soon becoming the economic lifeblood of the area.

That was then, this is now. For those employed at the lower end of the labour market, the once protective arm of the trade union has given way. Instead of job security, sick pay and annual holidays, insecurity and short term contracts are all that are on offer. The mining culture, once almost communist, has also moved on, connected as it is to environmental circumstance and the modern society through the expanding reach of the media.

The traditional route into a warehouse job is through temporary-employment agencies that contract on a day-to-day basis and for an hourly rate much lower than the company employees who the temps would be working alongside. If you show dedication, hard work and flexibility, there is a chance you won't be laid off at the end of the busy season. The work is mind-numbing, repetitive and physical. Often temporary employees work as long as they can stand or until they have earned the money they set out to, then they will rest for a while before re-emerging somewhere else.

The day life of a warehouse operative basically involves unloading suppliers lorries and transferring their content to designated sections of the warehouse, and also picking individual items from the warehouse floor and loading them on to a lorry which will then dispatch them to the retailer. Day in, day out. This is an arterial function of the

economy; the book you are holding has already passed through at least three separate warehouses.

For a lot of the young men, work is seen as a necessary evil in order to fund an active social life. Premium lager is the order of the day, Stella Artois if available. Jack Daniels is the standard chaser. Drum is the tobacco of choice and is readily available at black market prices. Blue cigarette papers are obligatory, usually Rizla. The dope is strictly grow-your-own, always bud, strains of which come with names like AK47 and PR1.

Of other drugs, acid and mushrooms are not uncommon, pills for certain events are *de rigueur*. Cocaine is present and welcome, but not that often. And then there is the very real prospect of a heroin problem if you are not careful, and many aren't. One of the numerous housing estates in the area was recognised as having the largest per-capita heroin problem in the UK.

A big night-out could entail a trip to Leeds, but mainly it is local, the town was recently known to hold more pubs per square mile than anywhere else in England. There is one, discretely tucked away in a corner, that is well known for its unfashionable décor and its very strong lager. Any session that starts there will generally turn into a mammoth one. A session is not without its hazards, gangs of men from surrounding towns tour the bars in packs wearing their very local identity with pride and are prepared to fight for it. Bouncers are the first line of

authority and they do not pull their punches. The loud and dark nightclubs are traditional hunting grounds for one-night stands, and the local park an established venue for casual sex.

This collection has been slowly drawn together over a four-year period, the music on the CD is the soundtrack for this time. *The Chapter* provides warehouse blues, music for late night candle-lit melancholy and metaphor. (The story that follows these songs around is that they were composed on top of a stack of fridges, on nightshift.) *Budists'* dirty urban funk supplies the energy and readiness that all young men possess. A number of the stories featured in the book are based on real events, which from time to time have been topics of conversation, accompanied by other gossip far too salacious to be written down here. As a whole, these stories and this music take you right to the heart of the matter.

There is no claim that the people who have contributed to this collection are totally representative of the norm, far from it. These people are filled with creative spirit, are giants within the community and, in part at least, its ray of hope. If you are left wondering what life could be like in such a place, slide in your CD, read on, and enjoy it in all its glory and splendour.

Ian Daley

Dustbin Man

Alan Green

I awoke from sun drenched dreams and fantasies to a head full of hangover and the electronic alarm clock screeching in my ear, reverberating through my head. I heard the rain straight away being driven, in fact smashed against the window by a powerful and howling wind. I smacked the alarm clock out of desperation to make it shut up, and commenced trying to separate my mouth from itself. It felt and tasted as if someone had poured a tin of *Evo-Stick* into it. This was a distinct possibility because at the moment I didn't have a clue where I'd been, who I'd been with or what I'd been up to at the weekend. It was five-fifteen am, Monday morning. I was on days. Some sober and moralistic people I know say it's not a bad shift, but I'm a piss head (amongst other things) who can't stand life before eleven-thirty and who finds work mind-numbingly boring.

I lay there in the pre-daylight gloom, trying to get my thoughts together for the coming day, trying to clear my thumping head, but it hurt too much. Normally under these circumstances I would have put my emergency utility action plan into operation, which would have

consisted of telephoning work with some shit excuse and lying it. The last excuse used was that I'd been abducted by aliens (I had been on acid so I only considered this a white lie) but the finalist of all final warnings from the accursed employers had sabotaged the *modus operandi* of this once trusted method of escapism. This meant that I had to rely on my built in auto-pilot automatically automating me in to some semblance of action.

'Brain to body, brain to body, come in body, over.'

I swung my legs off the bed and put my foot in what felt like a plate of chow mein, I couldn't remember buying any or eating in the bedroom, but who knows? Wiping it off on the crumpled Fred Perry on the floor I wobbled to my feet, immediately reeled and wretched whilst the room did three hundred and sixty degree revolutions which put Bonaparte's France to shame. Steadying myself I managed to get dressed whilst looking at the jammy bastardette, the girlfriend who didn't start work until ten, and who shifted and took up residence in the warm spot I had vacated in the arena of lust, the bed.

De-fumigating the mouth came next with the help of Colgate Blue Minty Gel and the electric tooth brush with expired batteries, a quick swill, then breakfast with copious amounts of coffee. I was coming round slightly, but didn't dare disengage the autopilot in case of a crash landing. It also reminded me to take out the dustbin for the bin men, which is where the fun began. I put on my

coat and work boots, opened the door and stepped out into the maelstrom of weather. The wind buffeted me and the rain was driving into my face like hailstones. I felt like a Scarborough trawler man in a force ten westerly and I'm sure Ahab would have been happy to employ me.

Grabbing the wheely bin I set off out of the gate and down the ginnel which ran adjacent to the back of the row of houses where I lived. Most of them being boarded-up. I was trundling along pulling the bin and then I was suddenly on my arse on the drenched floor. I thought for a second that my autopilot had disengaged its navigation systems, but it hadn't, it was a saboteur's booby trap. A length of washing line had been tied across the ginnel at shin height. Kids no doubt, or urban terrorists. Apart from being wetter than I previously had been, and extremely pissed off, I was OK. I fumbled around trying to undo the knots that tied it in place, but I couldn't, so I just picked up the bin, left the spilled litter where it had fallen then heaved, dragged, wrestled and fought the dustbin over the obstacle. With the objective gained and bin in place I set off to the bus stop from where I caught a lift with Andy to work. After a twenty minute drive and enduring Andy's conversation about the West Yorkshire Working Men's Darts and Dominoes League, which holds no interest for me whatsoever, we arrived at work. Entering via the gatehouse the familiar

gut wrenching feeling of I don't want to be here overcame me again.

Did you know that there isn't a law in England that says it is compulsory to work and yet, through the government and its agency the Employment Services, you are forced to. The law says you need fifty quid a week to live (ha) but they also say that if you don't find a job they will stop this benefit??? What the fuck ever happened to freedom of choice.

I clocked in and immediately tried to get into my work and ignore the uneducated morons that I work with. It's a harsh assumption but here are two examples of many. First break. I was sat reading Shakespeare when Frank walked up. Rugby player type and said 'Wot yer reading?'

'Shakespeare' says I.

'Fuckin' Shakespeare, why dunt ya read summat proper?'

Dinner break, Tony, bodybuilder, six foot two, telling me how he had shagged his babysitter five minutes before his wife came in and then proceeded to explain that if he caught her with anybody, he'd kill them both. Do you see what I'm up against? Turns out that later she ran off with another woman. (Poetic justice or what?)

I put up with the bullshit for the rest of the shift and with a degree of relief I was on my way home letting Andy's conversation go in one ear and out of the other.

Stepping through the front door at home I was

confronted by our lass who had a look of laughable disbelief on her face.

‘What’s up with you?’ I said.

‘You’re not gonna believe this’ she said ‘but we have had our dustbin nicked.’

‘Eh?’

‘Our dustbin. It’s been nicked.’

I was incredulous.

‘Was it full?’

‘I don’t know love but I’ve phoned the council and it’s gonna cost sixty-four quid to replace.’

‘Sixty-four fucking quid.’ I was exasperated.

‘And it’s gonna take a week to replace.’

‘Marvellous. I don’t fucking believe this.’

‘Me neither’ she said ‘but I’ve been talking to Sarah Jones today, y’know she sees that lad who’s on heroin (which one I thought, there’s fucking hundreds) and she’s had three nicked, two were full as well.’

I wondered at this point if there was someone, somewhere who had a secret rubbish stash and was collecting it, but then all was revealed.

‘She also said that what happens is that they nick the dustbins, empty them and then take them across the field to the Granada Service Station to the lorry park.’

This I could understand. They rolled the bins up to the lorry, slashed the curtain side of the wagon, threw the cargo inside the wheely bin and then legged it back,

sometimes hotly pursued, back onto the estate. I wondered why they didn't use their own fucking bins. Is there anything thieves wouldn't nick? I doubted this.

'I can't afford sixty-four quid love.' I said.

'Me neither.'

I knew what had to be done. Now I'm no thief, but you've got to put your rubbish somewhere, so I would have to sink to their level, and engage in a covert operation and nick a dustbin. A fucking dustbin. I couldn't believe I was actually having to consider this, but what choice did I have? When in Rome.

I'd left it until late at night to do a quick reconnoitre under the guise of walking the dog with our lass. She having lived on the estate for years knew who lived where. I didn't want to be stealing some old dear's dustbin. As we walked around she sounded like she was singing the chorus from a corny song that she couldn't get out of her head. Single parent, thief, junky, miss a house. Single parent, thief, junky, miss a house, etc. After strolling around for an hour I had selected two targets. A fat ginger wanker called Jonny Jerkoff was one. A thief and small time dealer and the biggest shit stirrer I had ever known. I knew him from being in the same year at school. There was no love lost between us then as now. I didn't have a lot to do with him and it was tempting to get one back for all the grassing he'd done at school causing no slight interference to my truanting days.

The second choice was Jamie Burns. A young boy racer who I didn't mind at all and got on quite well with but I owed him for the time he'd belted the XR3i through the puddle I was walking past wetting me through. It delayed me going out on a Saturday night for an hour, which is no mean feat. I'd feel no guilt for taking off these people. I classed Jonny as a pay back and Jamie as just mischief.

With these targets selected it was time to put the plan into effect. It was Friday night so I felt safe with my assumption that the two target premises would be empty due to the occupier's being out on the piss. Jonny's was the first target as it was nearer. Approaching, I noticed that only the hall light was on. It was a good sign. I walked up as casual as anyone could who felt ridiculous about having to steal a dustbin. I quietly opened the gate and entered the garden. A quick furtive look around to make sure I wasn't being watched and I had my hands on the dustbin. Then I heard it. A low rumble. I looked around, senses alert. Nothing. I pulled the bin a couple of feet and heard it again along with the sound of a chain being dragged along the floor. Just as I realised what it was it was almost on top of me. The outhouse door had been cut away at the bottom to make a dog kennel. The coal-bunker blocked this from the view of the road. A big fucking German Shepherd came bounding at me, jaws agape and snapping, dragging a chain with it that must have once held the anchor to the Titanic. I felt like a

cat must do. In one fluid movement I'd leapt back, spun round and was sprinting for the gate. I jumped and I'd almost cleared it when the searing pain of the dog's jaws clamping on my arse shot through my body holding me back just long enough for me to clip the top of the gate with my foot and land face first onto the pavement. I was in agony. I could feel the blood trickling down my arse cheek and thigh while the grazes on my face, hands, elbows and knees steadily stung. The dog was going ballistic at the gate trying to shove its head through the bars trying to get at me. I felt like booting the bastard but having a brain and not succumbing to emotions prevented this. The dog was only doing its job (marvellously). It should get promotion. It's not the dog's fault but mine for not realising the fucking thing was there. With plan abandoned I ran away. I was in half a mind to go home but I wanted to get this over and done with. I headed for Jamie's, his car wasn't there. A good sign. I approached and checked for dogs, entered, grabbed the bin and left. I was paranoid at every sound of car engines. Jamie could pull round the corner and catch me red handed, or the Police even. I'd never live that down. In court for stealing a wheely bin. I wondered what the fine would be and had to laugh at the ridiculousness of the situation. I just couldn't believe I was pulling a stolen wheely bin through the estate. I couldn't decide whether to laugh or feel bad about being dragged down to someone else's level

through no fault of my own. I entered our lass' garden and put the bin in the corner under the kitchen window. I got my bike lock and secured it to the drain pipe. I shook my head and thought, the things you've got to do sometimes.

Survival Instinct

Jono Bell

It all happened so quickly. I didn't know what to tell *anyone*. Most things wash by me, days go by without me noticing a thing. I'm in a trance and I drift. But there are moments that are triggers to change. There are moments in a situation when you are so awake, so conscious and clear headed and your brain works so fast you can see the whole of life in an instant, you can look back on the path you have drifted and see every turn and every mistake. It's in those moments when instincts come into play, you pledge an oath to yourself, never, absolutely never, again.

I woke up at twelvish and came round about one, maybe half-past. It had been a late night. There's an office across the street, and the dozy bastard who worked there had left the door open when he went home. I had fuck all else to do so I let myself in and started playing on the computers and using the phones. Not on my own like, with a mate, Roger, a rich kid that had lost it in his head, fucked up somewhere early on in life, couldn't cope. We were buzzing, heads rushing, we'd had a bag. I don't say that coolly as though I always take that shit, I don't, it's just a matter of fact, I did it, and I'm certainly not proud. I've seen how far that shit can go. But when you're short

of kicks, of a buzz, then you take what you can get. Anyway, we were playing away, next thing you know, it's late. Then all of a sudden it's twelvish and there's a rehearsal.

I was in a band and we rehearsed in fits and starts, but at that time, we were doing quite a lot. We practiced in my bedroom when I lived with Roger, so I thought I'd go and get the front man, he wouldn't have got there otherwise. Anyway, and I don't know why I did this except that my head was still in pieces from the night before, and the hazy ones before that, but I can still see the moment so clearly, above all others in many ways. I got in the car, and that was it, things were gonna happen.

It was an easy task considering. It had only been broken into a couple of weeks back so the driver could get in just by putting one finger into the void where the lock used to be. It wasn't my car, it belonged to Roger, who was still fast asleep. There was no need for keys either, which was handy, you just had to lift off the plastic on the steering column, dig in to the spaghetti of wires hanging out, put two together and it was off. Hot-wired and all that. What the fuck was I thinking of?

I should point out here that I can't drive – I was going to say 'to save my life' but that wouldn't have been funny. When I say I can't drive, what I really mean is that I can drive, I've paid plenty of attention when I've been a passenger and figured most of it out, and I ride my bike

on the road, it's just that I haven't had any lessons or passed my test or anything.

I felt alright about it. I reversed the car out and I could have shot straight off, but I was careful, and it was only because I was going steady that I saw him coming down the street when I spun to face the journey ahead. I noticed that someone, as well as me, had remembered to come and practice. It was Norman. Our drummer. Bumbling along.

'What you doin'?' he asked, all jolly and fresh.

I told him that I was going to pick up our man. Without doubt or hesitation, Norm got in the car. What the fuck was he thinking? He knew I couldn't drive, I was certain of that because we'd talked about it more than once. I used to tell him how much I wanted to be able to drive and to have my own car, and feel all good and achieving. He'd moan at me about being banned. They took his licence off him for twelve months for getting arseholed and swaying down the road only to be met with flashing lights in a lay-by. Stupid bastard. He had gotten off lightly too. And with all that, he still didn't seem bothered about me driving, not at first anyway, not when he just got in. When we were stationary. Everything was alright then.

We set off. I was cool, or I thought I was. I was going through the gears and being confident, but not cocky, I knew I had to concentrate. We got down the end of the

street and out on to the main road. It didn't take long for Norm to get nervous. It must have been how I was driving, I thought I was cool, but when I felt his nerves, they sort of made their way into me. I felt his tension double when he saw me light-up a cigarette and start driving one handed. If you're gonna drive you might as well be cool about it, make the most of it. I was through the gears, second, third, I got a bit of a rush when I got into third, then when I hit fourth everything seemed a hell of a lot faster than it normally did.

His nerves were burning into me, I swear it, and that's what set me off and set the whole thing off really. He made me feel less sure of myself and that's what led me to swerve past a parked up Fiesta. I'd glided past loads of parked cars and would have done with that, but he was putting me off, and I was a bit spooked and all of a sudden I wasn't sure I'd left enough room to get past. I swerved and panic filled the car, on-coming trucks, cars, bikes, pedestrians were suddenly hard to keep track of. If I had to pinpoint a moment, I would say that was when the real trouble started. The first doubt.

'Slow down man, fuckinell you've got to do it really steady.'

He was gabbling.

'Just glide out until you've past it then glide back in again.'

'Norm, calm down a bit man, you're shitting me up.'

He did. He was silent. Real noisy silence. The void created by him not speaking left open a massive crack for all the normal, scary sounds to rattle in my head. I could hear the engine, obviously. I could hear the rubber tyres rubbing against the road. I could hear all the bearings rolling against each other, I could hear how badly lubricated they were. I could hear the tension in the suspension springs. Birds, passing cars, I could hear so much. Every individual sound crisp and precise. Each one clear and distinct from the other. Each one burnt into my memory. I must have been tripping or truly shitting myself. Fear washed into my head, it was like a liquid, a tidal wave. Everything I could see was vivid, bright and technicolour. The grass verge was so green, and I could smell it, like it had just been cut. Proper doubts were well in place.

We were just rolling away and there was a moment through the silence where we thought we would make it. I'm saying we, because I'm talking for Norm, I knew what he was thinking, I swear it. There was telepathy, I could feel his head in mine. But we were cool for a while, everything would be fine, the worst was over. It was a thirty-zone and I was doing forty, we acknowledged that that was a shrewd move, if I'd have stuck to thirty, then we would have been obvious. I got a buzz from it, looking back, I can remember actually enjoying that time,

that lull, when we were safe, in the face of it all, we'd pulled through and I was cool and I was hoping people would see me, hoping to be noticed. We rolled into my hometown, where I was born and raised, a lot of people knew me and I felt right. I had temporary fantasy fulfillment, like in those moments when I talked to Norm about driving and wanting my own car, this is what I thought it would be like. Pain and pleasure, they are so close, they are inseparable.

We came down a hill and round a bend at the bottom and looked out into a little straight with traffic lights at the end. I felt Norm tighten up again, 'It's the fucking lights man, it's the fucking lights'. I don't know if he was thinking it or I was or that we both were, but I was nervous again. Calm was over and the forces that be, which just before the bend were in perfect harmony – me, the car, the road, the momentum all tuned together – were now in discord. It wasn't just the lights, but I had to turn right and the road split into two lanes and I had to get in the right hand side. Now I knew what to do, but I also knew that this was one of those situations where it would have been useful if I could actually drive for real. If I was on my bike, I would have ducked out, banked on to the pavement and missed out the whole mess. But that wasn't an option.

'Do you know what to do man?' buzzed Norm, trying to hide the shake in his voice, which just made it weaker.

‘It’s alright man, don’t worry.’

And it was. I drifted right, there was one car in front of me in my lane, and cars started to pass me on the inside, they were going straight on or turning left into the estate. That was weird, cars going past on either side, this was a real driving situation, but I was fine and if the truth be told, buzzing off it. It was intense.

‘Slow down man.’

I didn’t need that. It was just enough to break the spell of my concentration and doubt flooded back in. The car in front of me was getting closer fast. Fuck, I did need to slow down, the lights were red and the car was a few hundred yards in front of me and I could have stopped easy, but then the lights went and changed and I could see the guy set off and I felt the tension drop. I couldn’t believe it, a green light, and I would be round and that would be it, it was no problem from there. Safe again.

A cunt coming the other way jumped the lights, cutting up the guy in front of me and made him reach for his brakes. I saw the red lights come on at the back of his car, two great big red glows was all I could see, it was like I was staring straight into the devil’s eyes.

‘SLOW DOWN, SLOW THE FUCK DOWN, FUCK, FUCKING HELL.’

Norm lost it. I went straight for the brake with both feet. I could have stopped I know it, if I’d used my head and gone down the gears and braked heavy I would have

stopped I'm certain. But Norm was screaming like it was all over and the Devil's eyes were getting closer and my feet were hard on the pedal and I thought fuck.

And then I did what disturbs me the most. I gave up. That was it, I delivered myself into the hands of fate. I took my feet off the brake, clenched my fists and made my arms into an X in front of my face. Protect the face, that's all I felt I could do. I'd been on the edge the whole trip and the moment came where I no longer felt capable of intervening. I gave up. Totally. And this is what scares me, in that moment, with my arms in front of my face, hurtling towards collision, what was at stake, what I had given up on, was my life. I felt the moment of death. These were my thoughts, I saw myself as a child, I saw my family, I saw the bag and I saw darkness. In the very last moment I saw my ultimate error and I have not stopped seeing it since.

There was a jolt and an awful bang and a metallic crunch that started like someone had stamped on a milk carton. A big fucking milk carton. I don't remember much about that sound, it's all a blur. Thankfully, something took over, and I just didn't listen to it, or if I did, something wiped it straight out of my memory. Whatever instinct did that for me, I am eternally grateful. All I can remember is a moment of calm, I was alive, I was unhurt and so was Norm. Relief just swept through every single fibre. Whatever had happened, I was alive,

and nothing else mattered. Whatever was instead of death. And that is some fucking buzz, not to be dead.

My view was pure blue, the bonnet was laid on the windscreen, it looked like a big clear sky right in front of me. I opened the door and stepped out onto solid road. I confronted the situation, fuck knows how I did this, by walking up to the car I'd crashed into and checked on the people inside. As I came alongside the driver's door and peered in to see the dark crimson blood run down his face, my heart sunk and my head flipped. I saw the blue sky again, only this time I was on a beach with my own store, a thatched little open fronted Caribbean number selling watermelons. I'd figured it all, the way out, every single step, and accepted my new destiny, to be away, to have run. The scar created by that very moment would never heal, the task of talking my way out of it appeared beyond even me, with a lifetime's experience of a seemingly never ending string of situations that required plenty of talking out of. And there I was, on the beach, with my own hut, a pile of watermelons, a big knife, not talking about what took me there. My future reality. His voice brought me back, and filled my head again with that vision of blood and wreckage.

'Shall we get the cars off the road?'

He was calm. Very calm, considering. Shall we get the cars off the road? Wait a minute. Shall we get the cars off the road? I can't drive. I haven't a licence. The car was

stolen. Who was driving? They didn't know.

'Norm, you're going to have to move the fucking car man, I can't do it, I'll look a right twat, pull it over Norm.'

Norm bounced the bonnet down, jumped in the driver's side and started fiddling the wires. I jumped in beside him. No need for that, I can see now, but then, I was on a thinker, if he was going to drive off, I was going with him, he wasn't going to leave me there, stood near all that blood. Norm was fiddling like crazy trying to hot-wire the car. They were watching us, the bloody folk we'd crashed into and the nosey bastard by-standers. Two young punks, ramming the back of a car and then hot-wiring their banger back into life. It was obvious we'd nicked it. Norm couldn't get it going. I leaned over, all eyes on me, stretching over Norm, I could just about reach, I put the wires together and it started. He pulled it over and bumped onto the kerb. The front end of the car was mashed, it wasn't going anywhere fast.

So there we were, on the kerb. The other car pulling in behind us. A small crowd had gathered, watching the little thieving bastards in their hot-wired car squirm like fuck. That's when I wished I wasn't me. Now what? I looked at Norm and he looked at me. Pure telepathy. We both dropped our shoulders, yanked the door handle and we were off. Legging it. Very fast down the street. Every ounce of me was given to the pursuit of speed, as fast as I

could, every morsel, every breath, every drop of blood giving it for speed. I'd given up once, minutes before, gave up on my life, made a cross with my arms and left the rest to be, but not now. Everything about hummed in harmony, go, go and go.

I heard four things. I heard my feet pounding the pavement, I heard the whistle of the wind as it rushed past my ears, I heard my breath, in and out, and I heard my heart pounding, *thu-thump, thu-thump, thu-thump*. This was the buzz, the ultimate buzz, it was instinct, the survival instinct, it felt primitive, urging me on from deep within, get out, get out, away, away, nothing else entered my mind, just that one thought and everything combined to the action. This was the buzz all right, the ultimate buzz, better than anything. Survival. That's what we do. That's all that we do.

We cut through the estate, through ginnels and backways, over garden hedgerows and all kinds of obstacles to lose the trail of anyone stupid enough to follow us. All the while tired and hurting but never once thinking about stopping. We ended up in some grotty municipal park in the middle of a housing estate and sat on the swings to get our breath back. We just sat there rocking gently back and forth, heads bowed down and our legs dangling loose and free. We didn't speak. We didn't think either. We just sat there. Numb. Down.

Roger was still asleep in bed when I got back. As far as

he knew the car was still outside waiting for him. I wasn't going to tell him otherwise. It didn't take him long to accuse me when he found out. I denied it, but he didn't believe me. Called me 'A fucking lying thieving arsehole shitbag' if the truth be told. After a couple of weeks of unbearable tension, I think he'd even told the cops he thought it was me, I confessed to it all. I wore a tie when it came to the trial, I smiled sweetly at the magistrates, first offence and all that. The judges were lenient, digging old people's gardens and having my dole docked every week was going to sort me out apparently. I paid the fine eventually and I did the service, it wasn't that bad, it washed by me, I was in a trance most of the time. As I said, there are moments when you are so awake, so conscious and clear headed you can see the whole of life in an instant. The big smudge that is the rest of life can also make you forget just as quickly.

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