

"an exquisite meta-story"—*Editorial, The Blue Nib*

Our neighbourhood is a story, which I myself have been setting down. It mostly told itself, though I suppose I brought to it a distinct attitude. I let it meander—until my patience broke and I forced an ending upon it. I had been circumspect, until that point. As Jo-Ann said, her face close to the mirror, putting on her mascara, my attitude is typically carefree. Carefree, yes, *typically* no. I had my own way of going about it. I treated even the most solid local features like props. But without moving them. I left the old level-crossing where it always had been. I didn't argue with the river. As for the crowd from the next neighbourhood to the west, when they surged towards me, drunk, beside themselves on account of the virus, I ran, successfully. The drunken rarely catch up with the sober. This observation was confirmed as we all moved west. Alcohol makes for poor avoidance of drinking fountains and railings. It causes exaggeration in turning corners, inefficient crossing of roads, costly losses of time in climbing steps, in making decisions, understanding others, and so it was. When, finally, they broke into a fight they had no idea I was looking down on them from above, at the parapet of a bridge. Significantly, it was Kew Bridge. Significant because knowing when to capitalise words like *bridge* landed me the commission, the task of telling the story of our neighbourhood.

While I was not aware of others seeking the position, there was an audition. As if setting down an account in writing was to be an actor in a drama. The one judge I got to know, Jo-Ann, told me I was chosen on account of my hands. They looked trustworthy. I must have left them on the table, there in the interview room. But the official explanation, if that is the word, explanation, was that I knew when the word bridge required capitals. I could also spell *Glocca Morra* and pronounce *Knopfler*, both of which will be featuring in the coming account. Kew Bridge does not feature, but Jo-Ann, so she told me leaning on one elbow, up from the pillow, Waterloo would. We quickly got into the habit of calling each other *my love*. Her lips are heart shaped, my hands apparently a fine feature, particularly on the palm side. An investigator, not by profession but by character, Jo-Ann also intended to look into the neighbourhood for herself but has never got around to it. Since the area I lived in is being knocked down and rebuilt she would have to have made quite a detour, several detours, so she comes and goes in the most direct route possible. After our times lovemaking it is enough for her to simply stagger

back to her place. We may enmesh one last time, then that is it. I sink into a deep sleep while she, keeping close to the wire-mesh fence for something to cling to, staggers home.

It has been a relatively easy assignment, nothing like my last, when I gave accounts of the three great artists who were struck down before they became great, as they undoubtedly would have been. The research, the research. Each was struck dead, I should have said, not *down*, although they did fall, or at least slip. One fell from a ladder, one was hit by a bus he never saw; one was struck by lightning in a storm, causing him to slip off a walkway by the sea. The last of these meant a trip to Travemunde, looking for the darkest, blackest of skies in the rain; to Timmendorfer Strand, which is getting as far away from the point as it is possible to get, as far geographically, culturally and even scientifically, if meteorology is a science. Telling the story of our neighbourhood was and is simpler on almost every count. I can divulge my method. I began by suggesting my subject was something else, not our neighbourhood, but something more wonderful, more moving. The irony was that the account of the neighbourhood turned out very moving, more than the auditioning committee dreamed of. I jumped into the deep end of the task, beginning with the title:

That final wonderful someplace

The manuscript, propped against the ...

it's a record, my love, of a quest

for that place

a first and only quest

complete with the obstacles that appeared

quest-appropriate obstacles

for even as it began, as I set out looking here, looking there, approaching the goal from so many angles ...

along come the distractions, the fleeting question of whether to set a tab for a paragraph ... sweeping all aside, even the thought of you ... swept aside by the simple presence of the word *tab* ... tab, a tool of subtlety ...

on top of which

tab has many meanings ... *score a tab* could take many directions ... there were those drug dealers in California, cruising the strip ... or ... think *tab* and *score* and in the blink of an eye appear hippy football players, longhaired goalkeepers with beads around their necks, Tom Wolfe and Kerouac paperbacks nestled in the corners of their nets, ready for diversion during corner kicks at the far end of the ground, om ... om ... slipping a tab on their tongue before the next attack ... the looping lob, or the lightning strike, a thunderbolt from the blue, the roar of the crowd, far out, amazing ... om ...

There's the proof, I let this account meander. I let it meander—I prefer the word meander to ramble, meander has more sinuous movement to it than ramble—until my patience broke and I forced it to end. That is liberalism all over, Jo-Ann says. Now we're over the first stage, the flushes, I'm ignoring some of her remarks. I'm tempted to put all she says in brackets but that would be mean. I am only so mean. I am not that mean. I am mean enough to bring down the curtain on some fun or other but not to shut someone up. But I did force a stop, ten pages on from here, five thousand words, the words hurtling onwards, I stopped them all like train buffers in the middle of the countryside.

The manuscript propped against ...

needs a sensation for it to be noticed, picked up, a sensation to carry it along ... a public sign that startles ... which should be possible even in this quiet neighbourhood with its magnolia trees and Labradors and postmen and prisoners on parole knocking on doors with accreditation round their necks dreaming of somehow selling knife-sharpeners or if the knife-sharpeners have all been sold then selling strange fluffy brushes, their minds dark with anger but ... show some sympathy ... their minds floating on the wings of hope, condors high among the thermals, because inside them too is that twisted hope, of a better life, and there they are, making the jump from violent crime to petty salesmanship ... jumping but not reaching the far bank ... should have reached for that overhanging branch but never saw it ... forever splashing in the shallows ... understandably looking daggers spitting nails on doorsteps ... steps of neighbours ... the steps of women with seventy pairs of shoes, that's just the downstairs cupboard ... the steps of men quietly drooling over the very latest in drone technology, flaunting sprays of credit cards, importing alcohol from South Africa and adulating Ermenegildo Zegna

footwear

The closer her face was to mine the more starry-eyed Jo-Ann seemed to become. Conversely, the more distant she was, the further apart—back in her own place, reading about the neighbourhood, or about the three great artists who never lived to become great—the more baffling she said she found me. The hands, my hands, clearly played a more important role than could ever have been guessed. I use them a lot when she is around. I take them out casually, for example hesitating with them in view before stroking her cheek. This is a kind of extra activity. You might say they slow things down between us. The connecting takes longer, between the hands at one end and the staggering down the road at the other.

There have been many interludes, many diversions. With our breath back, a window open to the back yard, Jo-Ann would tell me about some of the places she'd lived in. Houston/Albany/Biloxi/Avranches. In Avranches her house burned down. She says there are some things people say which you never forget. We make little lists.

there are some things people say which you never forget:

the world could be so beautiful

take me

it's only right I wipe around the basin now and then

The manuscript needs a sensation ...

say *Nazi* and/or *sex* ... in a permanent marker draw a swastika on the A4 envelope so it's immediately noticeable propped up against the ... and anticipate an immediate result ... because *sex* and/or *Nazi* trump everything ... and thanks to the permanent marker, the script edges closer to the quested goal ... to manuscript discovery ... manuscript success ... here it comes ... the breakthrough ... the tumult, the literary adulation ... make a mint but be gracious about it ... bow and scrape but with irony ... examples of irony being, from the worlds of acting/presenting/writing/politicking ... Reese Tablespoon ... Mariella Fruitdrop ... Bernadine Aberystwyth ... Andrea Loathsome ... which reminds me, for supper let's have aspergers with Hollandaise sauce again ... just you and me, resetting our relationship ... stirring at the lumps will be my job, my

position, as we work away at the resetting ... over a wee dram of Le Corbusier ...

restating what once was obvious ...

in the middle is you ...

yes be gracious, above all be positive ... an upstanding member of society ...

upstanding outstanding understanding, everything but bystanding ... be a contributor, learner ... salute the Open University before it closes ... learn Spanish ... practise the cajón ... build a house plant a tree have a son ... learn some important guitar riffs ... find *the* studio down the road that guitarrero Mark Knopfler [*neighbour*] uses, go there, insist on a meeting, make plain those credentials of associations with the Newcastle area [almost] native to him, swear you can spell Cullercoats as well as Whitley Bay, fake your way through chatter about the Sage and the Baltic, talk about the funfair they call the Spanish city like it's original home turf, say you're studying the rudiments of the electric guitar, learning Spanish ... best not mention the cajón, for technical musical reasons ... namely, you are still crap at it ... best not mention your striving to reach a wonderful someplace, with or without a manuscript, probably without it ... say instead you are learning Spanish so you can negotiate the city as no other has ... while you do know in reality ... the special reality of the north-east ... the Spanish city is a city not in Spain but on Tyneside UK, and is a funfair, and since you are a dab hand at combining this with that, Spanish with the city, you can't wait to call *toro* on the dodgems, scream *puta la madre* when the big city dipper corkscrews down to the centre of the Earth oh my god *eso*, when ... once your brain has come down from the sky, rejoined the rest of you before *chinga* the elastic of your neck goes snap and the dipper smashes through the water feature ... spraying half of Cullercoats ... reaching Hartlepool depending how the wind blows ... when Mark leans on his Stratocaster telling you the Spanish city closed as a funfair years ago don't turn red and whatever else don't leave immediately, stick it out, draw an extraordinary sketch of him fingerpicking, draw like Dürer, like Dürer did a hare, perfectly still yet so alive ... and never mind, this was never quite getting to that wonderful someplace, be prepared to start afresh ... leave Mark to cross the room to his desk, he asks to be excused but he really has to get on, he too has a tab to score ... tab also being short for tablature, a term worth contemplating an asterisk over, a term musicians the world over are familiar with, as a form of musical notation indicating instrument fingering common for fretted stringed instruments ... above all remember, desperation is not a strategy ... just nod, walk out, pretend you never noticed the cajón in the corner ...

the ... the manuscript has been propped against the ... for days, just down from the drinking fountain which once doubled as a cattle trough, the last cow to lay its tongue upon that stone may have traded glances with Queen Victoria ... propped for days despite the swastika, halfway between the fountain and the veritable mansion built by that celebrity chef [*neighbour*] ... propped up unseen, untouched, unsmiled at, uninterrogated, unwondered at ... curiosity is a dead dog nowadays, in this nowadays of walking on while looking down, contravening all those years of parental advice to *look where you're going*, with children grown up to become not so much doctors or virtuoso musicians but phone zombies ... and the phone zombies, it could be argued ... know not what they do ... see not what they might ... allowing the surroundings to get on with it ... weeds and flowers can grow in peace ... and in the animal world, alligators ... this will be a revelation ... alligators can freely roam the parks which are somehow still there with their palm houses and little brooks and sweeping fields so unspeakably desolate in their emptiness, alligators snapping at unattended babies before making off into the shrubbery with smiles on their lips, telling the inquisitive mallards not to worry it's only ketchup ... the secrets of these parks, gosh ... before our noses ... extraordinarily in this nearby park Garibaldi, Garibaldi who gave the murderous order to firing squads with the cigar still clamped between his teeth ... almost certainly a Tuscan smoke made from flame-cured tobacco and wrapped by hand ... the same Garibaldi planted a cedar tree ... a tree gone now, without trace ... unlike the alligators, which are gone but with trace ... the trace left by the snapping in two of the trunks of newly-planted saplings, thwacked around midnight by the wagging tails of the said gators ... no sign on the camera footage of any person having entered the park at night ... yet come morning the saplings are found snapped in two ... the culprits out of sight, asleep beneath the lilies ...

the studio down the road didn't quite reach the object of this quest, the park round the corner didn't either, so ... where to turn to next, who do you call? ... possibly Eric ... how about this splendid anecdote told by Eric Vuillard at the British Library on 29 May 2019 ... it may show the way, a way, it may be helpful in the long run ... under every stone may be a signpost ... but sod it, more than anything I would like to record the gist of the splendid anecdote told by Eric Vuillard, distinguished French author around fifty years of age, told at the British Library on 29 May 2019 ... Eric in a short jacket, broad plain scarf elegantly tied, folded ... fiction, he said in a French of clarity, intellect, charm, authority, compassion, has its centre of gravity in the world outside ... not with some

poor lonesome author in a garret (where are these garrets?) regarding his navel or whether to tabulate a paragraph ... leaving pages around in public places haunted only by the ghosts of cows ... no, reach out to the world outside and it will respond ... will fold back on you, be your biggest fan ... *voici un exemple illustratif*: take on the one hand Zola, on the other Tolkien ... Zola wrote about the hardships of miners, Tolkien pure fantasy, so ... when Zola died miners bore his coffin ... when Tolkien died no elves showed up to carry his ... in other words, *allez*, take to the public places and observe ... seek and ye shall find ... ye shall always come across *something* ... late at night on the high roads of west London, beside some swollen river in the Cairngorms, on the sunny slopes of Hampstead ... ye lay there didn't ye ... you, my love ... and was it not wonderful ...

so reach out, *allez* ... plunge into the mire of history ... if you can't go that far, if you haven't the gloves or the wet suit then at least get outside the garret, lock yourself out, stretch at least as far as the neighbours ... paint a picture ... talk about Grove Park Road and Waverley Gardens, the one that's lined with cherry trees ... the Queen Mother used to like being driven down this way to see the cherry trees in bloom ... she was a one ... but all this adds up, in perfect sense ... hats off to Eric and his wisdom, *chapeau!* ... it may first be necessary to clear the way however ... to first examine and probe the immediate surroundings, if only to step beyond them ... so ... before locking up the garret for ever, abandoning the miniature washbasin, the bed of crumbling iron, the candle that never did much of a job, never even kept down the cobwebs ... before striding forth, glance left ... such a privilege to live with this, your one and only photo ... not exactly on a mantelpiece ... more on the shelf, between the rotting pencil box and the little vase with the Chinese chopsticks poking out ...

the photo of Georgette and Rene Magritte [*model, artist*] ... Georgette, Georgette Berger, shepherdess I suppose ... so *alive* as she caresses the cheek of Rene, her other arm around his shoulder, looking at the camera full of the joy of fucking, fucking in its yet to be rehabilitated sense, not even that, in its yet to be habilitated sense, because if we ever get out of this Victorian hellhole and love-making finally makes it unchallenged onto the white-horsed crest of a wave of unalloyed joy ... it is their wedding day, 1922, their amorous affairs with others are unimaginably way off in the future, and no they don't have a dog and let us not get into the matter of bowler hats and things in the sky just look at Georgette ... this is a full arrival into life, this is *love* ... together they have come to that wonderful someplace ... ask anyone, even the oracles of the social media have purred

over this photo, I read as much on my phone the other day, walking along as usual with my head down: *J'ai toujours été profondément touchée par cette photo ...* glorious love ... albeit Rene is a little ... distracted ... his mind is a little on his work, he can't help it, he wants to check if what he sees is the same as a painting of what he sees, well it should be because he is painting what he sees, in his painting, which is but the start, because he wants to see if a painting of a painting is the same as just a painting *floom!* goes the flash of the camera, he looks a little skeptical, everything about him is a little something, but for the wholehearted way he has his forehead leaning, warming against Georgette's ear ... and that's that then ... I can see what's coming ... the paragraph once so new and fresh, on the wane already, soon to be as old as that ancient psychedelic incident with the goalie, which has not exactly turned yellow at the edges, or rather the goalie is not yellow at the edges, he has moved on, from delighting at how the ball in the air still twirls and how the goal netting still billows, on, to marvelling at the sky à la War and Peace, the sky oozing tangerine clouds, the floodlights are blooming bougainvillea and, he thinks, does not Napoleon looking down on him oddly resemble a football referee ... the place looks more like Wembley stadium than a battleground ...

more of some things people say you never forget

I never thought it'd be so much fun

no

wanker

you've got a great touch

the manuscript has been rained on, blown on, shined on, or is it shone, mudsplattered, peed on by that dog from down the road, that brown expensive one that gets treated so abominably by its owner, the retired director of a vacuum-cleaner empire [*neighbour*], who has twice been seen with the dog harnessed to a moped ... understandably this dog that drew the short straw in the lottery of dog ownership wants revenge against iniquity, what dog doesn't ... out now on a more straightforward walk, a walk more in keeping with the neighbourhood with its magnolia trees and postmen and prisoners on parole knocking on doors, it wants to pee against a tree at length, to buy time to communicate with the tree... here the word *bark* could make such a punning link ... but here an insight is vying with the creation of a pun ... and insights take precedence over puns ... here it comes: the

peeing is just a cover for the standard dog-to-tree communication ... notice that the leg is cocked with one paw against the trunk, by which means of contact it is hurrying to conclude a ripping plan for the tree to fell the owner ... the idea: for one great *thwunk!* to squelch him against the pavement ... his legs sticking out and twitching until his expiry, one day this winter ... a deal can be made but the dog is out of pee and yet to work out what to offer the tree in return, too late ...

the manuscript has been cycled by, driven past, jogged past, scootered and segwayed past ... time has passed and passed ... action and developments galore are everywhere ... the goalie lying on the ground with lysergic acid in his blood has decided time can be measured in nightingales ... the forty thousand crowd are not of this view ... but even to those without lysergic acid in their blood can see a sense to this ... for while all is propped up as before, a constant among the street furniture and the dog-walkers ... many nightingales have passed ... nightingales, disappointed by the squares of London ... choking, so say the parliament of rooks, the parliamentary finger on the pulse as always, on the aerial particles of English arrogance, which are all that's left of empire ... oh yea, what songs may be sung amid the bitter dust of Brexit ... nightingales overhead going from London to Berlin, hearing and singing of reports of the fine scrubland around the river Spree ... the superior birdseed put out by the citizens of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern ... while at ground level below people have been trickling by, in two major trickles, with the occasional ruffle ... one trickle on and off the trains, residents on their ways to and from Waterloo ...

time to move on, oh is this not jolly, another jolly exposé, the mouth-watering prospect of a star turn, the *neighbourhood* ... might the neighbourhood itself rise up to be that grail, that pinnacle, that end, might a neighbourhood one day be the subject of a Nobel prize? ... over to our roving reporter for a scrutiny of those residents in their trickles ... for example the packaging developer [*neighbour*] with a house in Grove Park Road who has made a hedge out of a ceanothus ... annoyed he didn't stick to his guns in the family discussions, more like family mumbles, and insist on a hedge of the spikier *ulex europaeus* ... off to work and back in the same dark blue outfit he goes, toting his black working case, toting is the right word ... here ... once it has proven possible to place him at the centre of our interests ... here we come to the touchstone of the whole business ... of his value, his worthiness ... as he returns he swings his case through the front gate, it almost fits but as so often grazes the gatepost, partly because he doesn't lift it high

enough ... this is probably because as he walks from the train he realises his day has been tiring and the mere thought tires him further so that when he reaches the little gate he's too tired to lift the case properly ... had he found a better job, been worthy of a better job perhaps ... I mean, surely *not* having a *ulex europaeus* was everyone's loss, he thought, not just his ... give him a *ulex europaeus* and he would be lifting his case so much clearer of the gatepost ... that ceanothus could do with a good trim too

set a tab, continue ... of the trickle from the train, he with the awkward indeed basically failed hedge is only one part ... many parts make a trickle ... just as Waterloo itself has many parts: Abba the battle the bridge the station the Kinks ... all fitting together ... first came the Waterloo where the battle was, Waterloo in Belgium it was a Sunday the weather was horrible, secondly the bridge which was already there was re-named to memorialise the battle and thirdly the Kinks crossed it or at least one Kink crossed it, Ray Kink, out at sunset probably he had only just got up ... Ray soon linking it to love ... then along came Abba who joined all this together and sent all the Waterloos whoosh to the top of the charts ... soldiers in the mud having given their all to some unknown popular music ...

so, demographically speaking, demographically typing, the residents of this area are in the main those who would work around Waterloo ... their activities will tally with the economies there, hence there are no cheesemakers no blacksmiths no candlestick makers no pilots no rocket scientists around but there are bankers civil servants shop assistants museum staff even sandwich makers even traffic wardens one packaging developer ... forming this trickle, joining together like raindrops on the window ...

a second trickle of people is the trickle of people that legged it round to the emporium of the glorious entrepreneur Ravi [*ex-neighbour*] ... Ravi's minimarket ... which is, or was, another part of the local panorama ... piece of the urban jigsaw ... these people legged it there before the takeover by the Co-op, yet have retained their trickle because those who went to Ravi's for the fresh croissants, the coffee in funny cups, the bin liners, the cocktail sticks and the coaxial cables, staple guns and of course gossip, still live around here even though Ravi's minimarket is no more nor is Ravi there either, he was a genius at business whatever you needed he sold it whatever came to your mind he discussed it whatever size battery you wanted he had one whatever bird you found dead on the pavement he buried it for you even if it was a pigeon he did and you can't say that of the Co-op all you can say of the Co-op is that there is a story it was founded by Gracie Fields

ready to sing before a bingo hall in Rochdale ... she cut the ribbon and wished it success, having been told just beforehand not to sing, certainly not *How Are Things in Glocca Morra*, not even *Little Donkey* and all there is to add to that is that Mark Knopfler said *I'd recommend success to anyone*, which is also one of those things people say which you can never forget

like

a good cook always washes up while cooking

we should go back to the west coast, for the sake of the child

God is imaginary [comment, other script:] but big

The manuscript with its swastika has gone and I think I know where ...

after being picked up by the chef with the veritable mansion it was passed on to the local councillor [*neighbour*] who lives on the corner who frequents the health club down by the river who has a Labrador called Patch and who is bitter because, although he rebuilt his house with a roof terrace ... the rebuilding was bad enough, getting everyone's backs up, who wants an old man with a gin and tonic looking down into your yard ... he omitted to include a basement ... now he would give anything for a basement, such as sponsor his worst enemy for a marathon, or sell his Adagio sports car ... he, his wife and daughter and two friends are sitting round the table on the ground floor hewn from a single piece of oak, clearly oak because the carpenter has set an acorn into one corner of the surface ... sitting round ... dark out, it must be getting on for ten ... checking out the manuscript ... inexplicably excited at the discovery ... it's like a message in a bottle, said one of the friends ... there has been nothing like it since hamburgers left these shores for the ... why didn't you photocopy it, oh *Maurice*, we can only pass it round, *do* pass it on, surely you could have slipped in a few photocopies at the council office, this is a dreadfully awkward way to go about this, positively medieval ...

and so it was that the twenty-five pages of the script fell into the hands of amateurs ... reacting with displays of constructive ambiguity, as one put it, the one by himself at the far end of the table [it means hedging] ... the hands of bemused dinner guests, distracted by the dwindling number of olives, relieved to be able to read something at the table, the right pair of glasses permitting, reading the same bit over and over, or imagining faces at the window, looking around for clues on the whereabouts of the loo /

toilet / bathroom, fantasising about some new liaison ... ah if only someone else had picked up and/or passed on the manuscript, there are many colourful individuals round here ... like the dog a few pages back, the manuscript could have had a very different life ... in this part of town live many actors, for example ... clearly other kettles of other fish ... colourful partly because their experiences of work have coloured them ... between them they have lain with queens and kings, had angry sons and daughters, have travelled by spaceship to Jupiter and back, murdered and gone to trial, driven cars with sirens and gone to Scotland, their times have always come with great drama, even when they were school dinner ladies or scientists boring through the permafrost for samples, things have happened to them, they've had affairs they would never have dreamed of in real life, have been to Barbados one month and the Isle of Dogs the next, their cars have overturned and houses undeservedly caught fire ... they too live down the street somewhere, eating corn flakes and hanging out washing, arguing over radio 4 versus radio 2 and fretting over odd pairs of socks ... while that goalie ... can count himself lucky if he now even gets farmed out on loan ... but who can say what, maybe tomorrow morning at the training ground he'll be found hanging from the crossbar ... he might still get his flowers lain at the football ground gates

in another world, the manuscript might have fared better propped against the ticket machine at the station ... an actor [*neighbour*] in a daze from the shoot the day before ... he had never expected to have lain beneath the real ruins of a real building, pretending his ribs were crushed ... now with croissant crumbs still at one corner of his lips ... the task of dog-walking having fallen yet again to him ... on passing the manuscript ... he might have mistaken it for a screenplay ... yes at the station, South Western rail, that station where the sun falls golden on the tracks beneath the bridge ... the commuters join the trickle to the platform, that's the first trickle again, the same trickle, the one which has the merging exactly like rain on the window ... until they are one great drop in a train carriage ...

back at the table the talk has come to the content of the manuscript, finally ... what is it about ... what is its point ... who left it there ... who did this ... is it a him or a her ... who cares, have you seen that house through the window ... there, through the window ... that house with the ceanothus ... they say he's a packaging developer ... what's a packaging developer? ... is that ceanothus? ... could do with a trim ... we really should go, you've been such hosts ... must you ... think the hosts: fine, it's a natural end, all the

olives are gone ... but how has the talk gone, the evening gone, well, the farewells in the doorway may tell ... handshakes kisses hugs, if and how many ...

you're so funny
stop it
of course I do

it may seem as if the content has been withheld but this is not the case ... now it has been glanced, at least by some ... what happens in it is that a Scot from around the Borders is enamoured with the harmonies of two young Slovaks ... he takes them on holiday to Amsterdam ... as they spend his money they tell him ... rather, sing to him, because each time it comes to the point where he begins to feel terribly exploited ... they start singing ... next: they stop in a clothes shop and tell him point blank that his jacket looks all right, his pants all right, but he really should get rid of those terrible shoes that make him look so old ... they pull him into a nearby shoe shop and tell him what looks good on him ... without needing to break into song they persuade him to buy these shoes ... which of course look absolutely great ... down the street they go, actually arm in arm, actually singing ... he doesn't sing ... he just walks, the way people do when they're enamoured (it's the gait, the looseness in the knees) ... him in his shoes, them with their angelic harmonies ... passing dropped jaws and wordless admiration, the singing turning all around to silence ... a perfect silence ... the perfect backdrop to their singing ... the sun glints on the water ... they cross the nearest *gracht* ... unforgettable, one of those

things you never forget ... like ... The world could be so beautiful ... you said that ...

you

making the point with your person ... an apparition at the café door ... you walked this way ... looking radiant ... more radiant than ever ... than you were at the kitchen table ... than when we walked on the heath ... lay on the heath ... is this what all this is about, yes ... you knew that you and I could get there

that final wonderful someplace.