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EXTRACTS FROM PLAYS (59-64)

A

the tragedy of the white king *(a word-dance drama)*

enter all the blacks

- bl. queen: how much longer are you going to let him rant
 squelching the honour of our country in the mud
 take up the challenge of this brazen miscreant
 damming his malice fore it turns to flood
- bl. king: yes my dear – but my dear
 what is there to fear my dear
 how beautiful the weather is this time of the year
- bl. bishops: indeed and the leaves on the trees are divine
- bl. rooks: suns sing like blackbirds in the blackberry wine
- bl. knights: a soft bed of grass is so good for the spine
- wh. king: so you've dared to come out black king
 to join in this jubilee of ruin
 make much of your royal last-fling
 there's more than a tea-party brewing
- bl. king: white king it is vulgar and brash
 to stand there and blatantly jeer
 about nothing – if you must make a splash
 please dive in where no one can hear
- bl. queen: mad and foolish – foolish and mad
 can't you understand his threats
 his mockery aimed at your shaking throne
- wh. pawns: beware the black queen
- wh. king: here comes the wild cat into the battle
 swinging her tongue like a spectator's rattle
- bl. pawns: the king is proud
- bl. queen: take care white king the day
 you think us easy prey
 you shall regret the error
 not one of your white men
 shall find his home again
 but die in terror
- why do you ache to spend
 the bitter dividend

of pride and rash delusion
your heart is big with war
yet you'll gain little more
than death's confusion

wh. pawns: beware the black queen

wh. king: your boasts are a bag of wind
look to your land black queen
dust where good earth should be
nightmare instead of dream
look at the hungry eyes
where plenty should be sown
look at the dying mills
and the over-nourished throne
kings must know how to act
swiftly against disaster
daily your subjects starve
where is the king their master

bl. pawns: the king is proud

bl. king: i'm getting annoyed
it's as if you enjoyed
arguing and warring
how soulfully boring

bl. queen: you are enemies to yourselves
a disgrace to us all
presenting our country
for this mad beast to maul

(to white king)

let not your hunger
for absolute power
feast on our fields
or wither one flower

bl. pawns: the king is proud

bl. queen: listen to what the white king cries
power breeds power in his lusting eyes

wh. pawns: beware the black queen

wh. king: the lesson's plain – today we must defeat
my father's folly and this black conceit

bl. pawns: the king is proud

bl. queen: cry death to the tyrant
strangle his arrogance

wh. pawns: beware the black queen

wh. king: tread on this termagant
put paid to her pestilence

bl. pawns: the king is proud

bl. court: the queen is right
we must fight fight fight

wh. court: the king is wise
must we suffer these lies

wh. pawns: beware the black queen

bl. pawns: the king is proud

wh. king: to arms to arms

bl. queen: sound sound the alarms

all pawns: life is a candle
peace is a bubble

bl. king: i'm sure we can solve this without any trouble

all knights: you and you and you and you
you and you and you and you
your country's in danger
your country needs you

bl. pawns:) the king is proud
wh. pawns:) beware the black queen

all knights: one two one two one two
think not pray hard be true
three four three four three four
your country's going to war
you must do what you're told
be strong be proud be bold
be strong be proud be bold

wh. king:)
bl. queen:) remember the fate of the state's in your hands
remember the state of our fate's in your hands
be noble and daring and happy to lay
down your lives for the blessing of victory today
right's on our side and so into the fray

wh. knight: attack

bl. knights: defend.....advance

wh. knights: retreat

both courts: the battle is raging uncertain the end

wh. king: back to the attack white men – no further retreat
death to us all if we suffer defeat

wh. pawns: beware the black queen

bl. queen: get back get back you underfed chicken
now is the time for your spirit to thicken
repel the marauder and drive drive drive
leave not a single intruder alive

bl. knights: attack attack

bl. pawns: the king is proud the king is proud

both courts: people at home are pleased to know
of glorious deeds against the foe
fight well for glory and honour.... and us

bl. queen: fight fight fight
exterminate the white

wh. king: attack attack attack
annihilate the black

all knights: clash clash clash
sword on bright sword splash
hack and slash and cut and thwack
thrust and yank and smash and crack
clash clash clash

wh. court: victory in sight
press forward white

bl. court: regather your forces black
our line is beginning to crack

wh. king: now for the final blow
shatter the reeling foe

bl. court: our armies are beaten beaten

bl. queen: shame on this tattered land broken in battle
sold by a poltroon king and a bloodless court
cut down by a bumptious peacock – shame on you all
who bred this loathsome day

wh. king: the black land is ended
king and vile queen deposed

bl. queen: you have won white king
but do not think this paltry war can shake
the gallstones from our hearts – we shall ride
blood-eyed against your rule until all traces
of this victory are trampled from this earth
and your small gain is lost a thousand-fold

wh. king: i'm in no mood to listen to your bitter prophecies
take her from the board
a long and solitary cell
shall draw the poison from her twanging tongue

bl. queen: black will triumph over white

white will perish in a shrug of time
black will break clean the chains of night
white will be smothered in the perpetual slime

she is dragged off

B



one:
**THE
MONSTER**
(1959)

RG GREGORY

**EIGHT
THE MOB**

slink wart beetle puss and slop dragging quest and flute (gagged)

all: we are the monster's bodyguard
 we keep the mountain free
 of sneaks and spies and sceptics
 who scorn his authority

 we are the self-appointed
 dispensers of his laws
 we terrorise the foothills
 with loud and monstrous laws

 each year from every village
 we squeeze the monster's dues
 and take ourselves the proceeds
 to squander as we choose

for we have found a gold-mine
tucked in the mountain fold
and we intend to keep it
safe from the prying world

we are the monster's bodyguard
we keep the mountain free
and while all live in terror
we live in luxury

slink: what shall we do with them

puss: roast them

wart: stew them

slop: bake them

beetle: brew them

wart: fry them

puss: try them

slink: try them

rest: yes try them

slop: who'll be judge

slink: i'll be judge

puss: i'll be the jury

beetle: and me

slop: and me

slink: that's enough for the jury

wart: i'm the only one left
what can i be

slink: you can prosecute

wart: who'll defend

slink: you'll defend

wart: i can't do both

slink: who says you can't do both

wart: it stands to reason

slink: nothing stands to reason

if i don't tell it to

wart: i'll defend

slink: assemble the court

slop: assemble the court

puss/beetle: assemble the court

all three: court assembled
all present and correct

slink: take the oath

wart: the oath

rest: the oath

slink: we solemnly agree before we start
that the prisoners are guilty

wart: guilty

rest: guilty

slink: good – it is better at the start
to remove all misunderstanding
i prefer things simple and clear
now we may proceed
who's clerk of the court

wart: we haven't one

slop: he hasn't come

puss/beetle: he overslept and missed his train

slink: make a note – he must be whipped
you shall be clerk of the court

wart: i can't be clerk of the court
i'm prosecution and defence

slink: and i say you shall be clerk of the court

wart: if you say so

slink: i do say so

wart: then i'll be clerk of the court

slink: fetch the prisoners

wart: the prisoners are fetched

slop: boo

puss **ugh**

beetle: **sssss**

all three: **give them the works**
push them off the cliffs

slink: **what are their names**

wart: **give the judge your names**
the prisoners refuse to answer my lord

slink: **insolence – deaf and dumb insolence**
make them answer – twist their ears

slop: **torture them**

all three: **torture them**

slink: **despicable rogues inhuman newts**

wart: **they will make no answer**

slink: **very well we shall outwit them**
for the purposes of this court
they shall be named – they shall be named
tate and lyle

all three: **tate and lyle**

wart: **yes i recognise them now**

slink: **which is tate**

wart: **which what**

slink: **which is tate i say**

wart: **which one of you is tate**

slink: **answer on pain of death**

all three: **answer answer**

slop: **boo**

puss: **ugh**

beetle: **sssss**

wart: **they will not answer my lord**

slink: **villains criminals fifth columnists**
do not think you will get away with this
i am too clever for you – i shall trap you yet
listen carefully – the one of you

shall for our purposes be tate
that is not lyle

slop: hooray for the judge

puss: that shook them hard

slink: ah wait my friends i haven't finished
now – which of you is lyle

wart: which one of you is lyle

slop: boo

puss: ugh

beetle: sssss

slink: answer or this minute die

all three: die die

wart: they still refuse to answer my lord

slink: o bloated guttersnakes beware my wrath
paltry cockroaches scurrilous toads
beware the seething cauldron of my anger
lest it spill and scald your lying gizzards
you go too far – answer to my commands
or i shall set my tongue to whip you
till you sizzle – answer.....answer.....
very well i shall remember this
read the charge preferred against them

slop: read the charge

puss/beetle: yes read the charge

wart: my lord they are accused of being.....

slink: stop – enough – shabby unspeakable worms
measly microbes of disaster
you are accused of *being* – *being*
can you stand there unashamed
what greater sin can you be saddled with
being – my tongue burns to say the word
low pestilential subhuman beasts

puss/beetle: the judge is weeping

slop: a hanky for the judge

wart: my lord it is plain to me within
if i may call them such the circumstances
that the accused having been charged
as you so rightly say had not did not
are not cannot and moreover shall not

while the court is in session as it is
had not did not are not cannot
and moreover shall not i repeat
whilst there is justice – ay justice
that joy of man's beholding for i think
if there is not then they shall not
cannot are not did not and moreover
had not ever been – i say with proper emphasis
and due accord respecting your honour's person
why are they here if they are not guilty

slop: bravo

puss: proof positive

beetle: so beautifully put

all three: bravo bravo

slink: sir you have brought to light
crimes i had not dreamed of
their malevolence grows mightier
every minute – i fear the punishment
of death that i had fixed for them
will not be punishment enough
we must teach their fellow-spies a lesson
let them both be.....

wart: my lord can i now speak for the defence

slink: there is no possible defence

wart: my lord you yourself appointed me defence

slink: i swear i did not – it stands to reason
how can you be defence and prosecution

wart: you said i had to be defence

slink: then you deserve to share their fate
birds of a feather i always say

slop: birds of a feather

puss/beetle: yes birds of a feather

slink: how can you stand there and offer to defend them
these poisonous apes these....

wart: i didn't offer to – you told me to

slink: lies lies – you're worse than they are
you must be tried for treason

all three: treason treason

slink: do we find him guilty

all three: guilty guilty

slink: what is your name

all three: answer answer

slink: what are you accused of

all three: accused of being

slink: being being – o wicked crime

wart: stop boss stop it
i know it's all a game
i'm on your side
don't you know me – wart
i helped you find the mine remember

slink: how dare you speak to me sir
you stand condemned

all three: condemned condemned

slink: it is plain to me within
if i may call them such the circumstances

wart: stop please
it's not fair
you're torturing me
i'm wart

slink: for the purposes of this court
you shall be tate and lyle

all three: tate and lyle
are you tate and lyle

wart: no no

slink: you shall be tate or lyle

all three: are you tate

wart: no yes
yes i'm tate

all three: no you're not – you're lyle

wart: yes i'm lyle

all three: you're tate and lyle

wart: yes i'm tate and lyle

slink: arrest that man – he stands condemned
it is a crime to be two people at the same time

all three: **seize him seize him**

wart: **i'm tate and lyle**
 i'm tate and lyle
 out of the strong came forth sweetness
 out of the strong came forth sweetness

slink: **throw him over the cliff**

all three: **throw him over the cliff**

wart: **throw me over the cliff**

laughter – they go out – scream – silence

flute: **there – free – quest are you alive**

quest: **alive but barely sane**

flute: **we must be quick**
 they'll soon be back for us

quest: **you're right – let's go – i don't believe**
 in jumping into space before we have to

they go

C
the woman

(extracts)

(i)
the woman: **i have the gift of knowledge – i know**
 the body the position of bones
 the functions of all the vital organs
 charms and old wives' tales are not for me
 i have the gift of understanding
 i can see into people's minds
 when things go wrong – i can glimpse
 what must be done to put them right
 i have the gift of imagination
 but i am not a god and i am fallible
 some of those who are ill will die
 tomorrow – the cripples won't walk
 and the eyeless will stay blind
 but some i have seen will recover
 because i have seen them and others
 will wake up in the morning with fresh minds

(ii)

enter milly and albert

albert: come on milly old girl
 looking at it won't put it back again

milly: i was such a beautiful house
 and we built it with our own hands

albert: yes and it burned better than any others too
 you've got to have a good class house
 to burn as well as that did

milly: it must have been the polish i used on it
 dangerous stuff that polish though it did its job
 i could see my face in the floors on a bright day

albert: where do we go now old girl
 we've got to start putting another home together now
 what'll this be - our fifth

milly: yes it'll be our fifth
 not counting the first

albert: no
 the first was hardly the first was it
 it wasn't private
 it wasn't a home you could call a home

milly: no
 we didn't have a home until the second

albert: that was a good home, that was
 the best we ever had

milly: a shame they had to knock it down.

albert: still they were right you know
 it did get in their way

milly: oh yes and they were very fair
 they needn't have told us
 they were going to do it
 after all, there was a war on

albert: of course they *were* on our side
 then we lived in a ditch remember
 that was our second home

milly: no - third

albert: second old girl
 we did agree the first was not the first

milly: well second then
 i get confused at times
 i liked that ditch

it didn't get too wet in winter

albert: then came the next war
every ditch in the kingdom was commandeered

milly: so we went and lived as refugees in the desert
till it was all over

albert: sand for breakfast dinner and tea
and one drop of water a fortnight

milly: it was all right
as long as you kept out of the way of the fighting

albert: that was the time you went mad
and i got gangrene in my leg

milly: yes
that was quite a happy time - all told

albert: i wonder if cedric's and elsie's graves
are still there in the sand

milly: funny
i'd forgotten all about our children

albert: well
they didn't live long enough
did they

milly: then we went to live in that pigsty
didn't we

albert: when the next war came we did
there was nowhere else we could live

milly: it wasn't exactly high-class
was it

albert: then they came in the middle of the night
and chucked us out of that

milly: they needed it back for the pigs
or that's what they said

albert: still
when that war was over we came here
we thought it would make a change
living on the other side

milly: i don't remember very much about it

albert: well
you wouldn't would you
this time you went completely off your rocker
they kept you underground
till you came back to your senses

milly: and all that time you were walking around
without a coat to your back
begging for food

albert: people were very kind you know
and dustbins were a great help

milly: and when i came back to my senses
you'd built us a house of our own
i can never make out how you did that

albert: well
i was always good at a bit of the d.i.y
you have to put it down to necessary experience.

milly: oh i do miss that house

albert: you've got to laugh you know
all those years on the losing side
then we come here and damn me
if our own people don't come
as it's getting dark
and burn our house down
i suppose some day
someone'll see the funny side of this

milly: i don't feel much like laughing really

albert: well - one thing
we didn't save anything from the fire
so we shan't have very much to carry on our backs

milly: let's get going then
i like a nice walk in the dark

albert: all right, old girl
which way do you want to go

milly: i'm not particular
whichever way we go
we'll find somewhere
to make our seventh home

albert: sixth home - old girl - not seventh

milly: are you sure
i thought it was the seventh

albert: no - only sixth
if the first was not the first.

milly: yes
i was forgetting that -
albert

albert: yes, old girl

milly: i sometimes wish there wasn't such a thing as war

albert: if we didn't have wars - old girl
we wouldn't have any peace
we'd all be fighting and squabbling
over the silliest things
war's like a game
it clears the air
and (when it's over)
at least you know who's won
no milly
where would we all be without wars

milly: i suppose you're right

(they go out)

(iii)

dolphin: are you going to tell me what your power is

the woman: i can cure the sick

dolphin: is that all

the woman: yes that is all

willow: she is a fraud

dolphin: the delts want you for this
there must be something more

the woman: nothing

willow: she is lying – torture her

angina: can she do more than toxin

toxin: she cannot cure the sick
look at her – does she look like me
my mother and her mother before her
cured the sick – i can cure the sick
because i have learned the charms
and understand the mysteries of nature
she cannot cure the sick because
she is sick – sick with evil
in her eyes and in her face
i see the weed of evil – i shall
pluck it out and hold it in my hand
for all to see to prove that i
toxin (daughter of my mother)
know what sickness is and how to cure it

the woman: don't let that woman touch me
or she will have to suffer

in a way she does not comprehend

dolphin: toxin show us that root of evil

toxin: *things in the air unknown
winds that have never blown
rain not made by clouds
dust like a dead man's shroud
thick as the desert sand
explode within my hand
and at the snarling fibres tear
in the cavern of her person where
evil's seed has forced its root
and evil's deeds store up their loot.....*

lydia: edith – what's happening

edith: the woman's eyes

willow: she's using trickery i swear

toxin: *clutch it shake it wrench and turn
till her flesh and sinews burn
cleanse her body purge her mind
of all that is to goodness blind
i snatch you out of darkness weed
and let you in my fingers bleed*

angina: toxin is asleep

lydia: the woman is still

edith: and there is nothing in her fingers

**willow: the woman looked at toxin and toxin
fell**

dolphin: what have you done with her

**the woman: nothing – she sleeps more peacefully
than she has slept before with all
her mumbo-jumbo stilled in her**

angina: will she sleep forever

the woman: until i say

dolphin: make her wake up

the woman: recover woman

**toxin: eyes biting into me – i remember
nothing but eyes**

willow: you are dismissed

toxin: what did she do to me

willow: **get out fool**
if i see your face around the court again
i'll have you hanged – get out – get out

exit toxin

D
dreamer

scene seven

lilian's home

lilian rodgers present

lilian: *pussy-pussy find my girl*
and bring her to me soon
on her wrists are bracelets
in her mouth a silver spoon
pussy-pussy find my girl
and bring her to me soon

enter doreen

doreen: **mrs rodgers – mrs rodgers**

lilian: **is that you doreen**
my lovely child

doreen: **it's doreen marsh**

lilian: **come in my dear**
i've waited up for you
i knew you'd come tonight

doreen: **you can't have known**

lilian: **you've been a long time gone**

doreen: **i was given your address**

lilian: **sit down here my child and rest**
you've come a long way

doreen: **do you remember me**

lilian: **and how's your father**
a pity he has to work away from here

doreen: **mrs rodgers – i'm doreen marsh**

lilian: **you haven't kissed me yet sweetheart**
i know how tired you are

a daughter ought to kiss her mother
when she's been so long away

doreen: i'm not your daughter
i've come about my mother
alice marsh

lilian: alice marsh is a poisoner
i forbid that name in my house
she's a stealer of men's hearts

doreen: tell me all you know about her

lilian: she sometimes comes here in the night
carrying the bastard child
she had for sidney
she wants me to look at it
but i won't look
the bastard child is dead
it hasn't even got a face

doreen: look at me mrs rodgers
i'm the girl you tortured in the park
listen to me will you
the girl you showed the ring to
and the photo of my mother
my mother – alice marsh

lilian: she gave birth to a stone

doreen: say you know me mrs rodgers

lilian: of course i know you
i carried you inside me didn't i
i suffered pain for you
burning fingers wrenching at my heart
they took you away before you were born
but you were beautiful they said

doreen: do you remember the ring

lilian: my wedding ring – your father
gave it to me in the church
i wear it for him always

doreen: and where's the photo

lilian: our photograph
of sidney you and me
you sleeping in my arms

doreen: yes – do you still have it

lilian: i keep it with the others
in my handbag (close by me)
it's with me all the time

doreen: will you show them to me now

lilian: they're mine
you mustn't see them

doreen: i want to see them mrs rodgers

lilian: you must be tired out my dear
why don't you go and sleep
i have a bed all ready for you
in the other room – you can ask
your questions in the morning

doreen: you offered me a card
with an address on

lilian: it must have been your father's

doreen: it was my father's

lilian: and how is he

doreen: you wanted to destroy me

lilian: i wanted you to understand
the kind of man your father is

doreen: my father is a pimp
living with a woman
in a house that stinks of cats

lilian: he is a wonderful man

doreen: i feel sorry for the woman
she gave me this address

lilian: his job keeps him away

doreen: he was obscene about my mother

lilian: so gentle-tongued he was and kind

doreen: he tried to touch me – like a prostitute

lilian: he was the finest man alive

doreen: you chopped my life down
and now you think your madness
will keep you out of harm

lilian: my head is spinning my darling
leave it till the morning

doreen: where is alice marsh

lilian: the sun will be shining in the morning

doreen: listen to me mad woman
i can't stay here all night
what do you know about my mother

lilian: she is tired my dumpling
your mother is very tired
give her a kiss
she wants to go to bed

doreen: let me look in your bag

lilian: i must take my handbag to bed

doreen: what i want's in there

lilian: no – it's my handbag
i won't let you look inside

doreen: then help me to find alice marsh

lilian: alice marsh is a thief
she's a stealer of men

doreen: you know where she is

lilian: i wish she was dead

doreen: you know she's alive

lilian: you're safe from her here my darling
my daughter is safe with me

doreen: your daughter is dead
when she was born she was dead

lilian: she's a big girl now
one night she will sleep in her bed

doreen: give me your handbag

lilian: she'll kiss me one day on the lips

doreen: must look in that handbag

lilian: not my handbag – it's precious to me
what are you after

doreen: no time to tell you

lilian: you're not my daughter

doreen: what does it matter now

lilian: i know who you are
you're alice marsh

doreen: damn you – let go

lilian: **they're my secrets – not yours**
alice marsh

doreen: **do you want to get hurt**

lilian: **don't take my handbag**
you'll have to kill me first

doreen: **i don't want to kill you**
you stupid mad fool

lilian: **i want my daughter**

*pussy-pussy find my girl
and bring her to me soon
on her wrists are bracelets
in her mouth a silver spoon
pussy-pussy find my girl
and bring her to me soon*

doreen: **fifty pounds – fifty pounds**
four photos – all with alice marsh
two letters both signed alice
one ten years old – one eight
both with the same address
fifty pounds – i could do with that
no more than she owes me
i want the ring

lilian: *the ring is on my finger*
such a song it sings

doreen: **it was stolen from my mother**

lilian: *sidney was a good man*
a good man a good man
sidney was a good man
he gave me the ring

doreen: **you want me to break your finger**

lilian: **don't take my baby away**

doreen: **don't kick my life in the teeth again**

exit doreen

lilian: *pussy-pussy find my ring*
and bring it to me soon
i've put it in a pawnshop
i've thrown in round the moon
pussy-pussy find my ring
and bring it to me soon

E
death at the new year

(i)

suddenly set off by the booming cannonade of the town hall clock
bells and hooters flood the meadows of the icy moon
the doors of the uproarious hall are flung back
and the first splashes of the new year water their way
into the long-past-sober hearts – a timeless hushed
silence of a second snaps cavorters to a frieze
the trumpet leaves its nervous notes suspended
and grave respect is paid
to one more notch on man's quick-firing age
then (the moment pledged) tongues and flushing lips
break out into an amnesty of kisses
the cut cord of the new year has leased
their neatly-packed away but not-so-frozen passions
and everyone of everyone is free
to taste forbidden honey out of unsealed mouths
and so in primal colours of a newborn year
men and women relations friends
intoxicated strangers mill and mingle
loudly through the hall – streamers stream
balloons balloon and pop against the swaying
eager gaily-interchanging caring-now-for-no-one
crowd – laughter rises now from uncaged throats
the band retaliates and roars
a tipsy tarted *auld lang syne*
and young and old
hot spinster and virgin uncle
catch the fever in their feet
join wanting hands and throng the giddy floor
to burst the banks of their careering pleasure
hailing the new year
yelling the bride and groom
to break the kiss
uninterrupted since the turn of time
cries of *martin and catherine*
catherine and martin
started in a corner
seized and set on by the crowd
rolling in ascending tumult
burst and scatter into ribald laughter
still the kiss goes on
another cry *the bride* is taken up
fuses and explodes among the tickled guests
the bride – the bride
stampedes and thunders down
upon the silent two
the bride – the bride – the bride
and sudden strangled calm
the bride is dead

(ii)

i know the bastard – a surly kid

trod on my cabbages once he did

i told my children not to play with him
there was something strange in the way he looked
a soft eye and a squinted mind

i was in his class at school
we sat together in a cosy desk
i loved him (i think) – at least i was sorry
he used to stand in the playground all alone
so i kissed him once – he ran off home

a murderer's made before he's seven
i read it in the reader's digest

i didn't like him much – didn't know him really

he was all right – bit quiet perhaps

too quiet for me
a boy without noise isn't natural

you can tell by eight if they've got strangler's hands
i read it in the reader's digest

i was in hospital same time as his mother
he came out sideways so the night-nurse told me
bound to upset the juices – bound to

a delicate child

gave his mother hell

i caught him once
watching my missus at her sunday bath
i'm not a prude
but i thought it a bit much on the lord's day

i knew it was fishy when he couldn't play games

a killer's eyes grow hard at ten
i read it in the reader's digest

(iii)

we say blame the teachers
don't we send our young to school
to be taught the simple rules
for decent public-spirited behaviour
do we pay such crushing rates
to have our children turned to louts
we're sick of all this fuss
we say blame the teachers
or the preachers
they're all the same to us

we say blame the preachers

what right have they to shake
their moral fingers every week
at us and call us pharisees and sinners
let them wave their holy book
where these thugs can take a look
we're sick of all this fuss
we say blame the preachers
or the police
they're all the same to us

we say blame the police
they're very quick to chase us
when we speed in the wrong places
or accidentally cross the lights at red
but don't they take their time
when there's really been a crime
we're sick of all this fuss
we say blame the police
or politicians
they're all the same to us

we say blame the politicians
they promise and they promise
when election time is on us
sterner measures to prevent delinquency
yet when they win their phoney war
they do nothing as before
we're sick of all this fuss
we say blame the politicians
or society
they're all the same to us

we say blame society
blame the bosses blame the workers
blame the bankers blame the forces
blame the doctors dentists papers – blame tv
blame the jews united nations
blame our neighbours friends relations
we're sick of all this fuss
we say blame society
or the world
but don't blame us

(iv)
in june that year the regiment was posted
to the east to face a dangerous situation
local tribes were making ugly gestures
but no-one knew exactly what they meant
we arrived in the crackling heat
and set our camp right in the bull's eye
of the trouble between two snarling packs
of unwashed arabs – and there we waited
growing our own black beards caught
in a triangle of hate – who would spark
the war and who would be consumed
was writing in the sand that only

patience would decipher

(martin i gave
a temporary stripe and kept him near me
at company headquarters – the move from home
had got into his eyes and now they shone
as clearly as the desert sky)

daily

the tension grew – heat and the smell of arabs
so closely shrouded in their mystic feuds
whetted our solitude with the spice of death
the long desert played upon our nerves
our enemies (mutually at war) had joined
it seemed to make a waiting mockery
of our armed attempt to keep the peace
forcing us to sense our uselessness in days
of grit and sun and biting nights
action ceased to be a luxury we could not afford
knowledge at least of what the situation was
we had to have – my company was singled out
to shake the desert from its crippled sleep
twelve men (the choice was mine)
six to each catlike camp
should move at night across the sand
steal a bunch of prisoners and return
before the switching on of day (i knew
the desert from a previous spell abroad
so gave myself the charge of one small force –
took martin with me)

the moon was high
and threw our shadows starkly on the sand
each move we made was guarded by a wait
to sense what ripples showed to watching eyes
but slowly (in that deeply-frozen silence
we edged towards the camp – suddenly
first signs of life – sentries two three
four we counted – we reckoned two
would be the most we could escape with
made our plans split to groups of three
and marked our quarry (martin still with me
crouched at my elbow confident and pleased
the danger singing in his moonbright eyes)
closer we crept – our man was now
in breathing distance

martin (taut)

nudged me – i nodded – the arab moved
martin sprang and sank his cosh
behind the hooded ear – the arab tensed
and fell heavily on the soft sand
no sound
i grinned at martin – then
a thick surprising cry
our third man stabbed lay dead
three arabs faced us knives alive
martin squeezed my arm
and leapt across the moonlit space
his own knife bare for blood
the madness of it struck me even then

the desert stillness shouted in my ears
no human noise was made so swiftly
acts had chased upon each other
i ran to martin's help but none was needed
the arabs all were dead their blood
in staggering gulps was staining black the sand
martin too was cut but nothing more
i stood bewildered in the midst of carnage
he wiped his knife and came to me
that's done me good he said
we bound our prisoner and cautiously
set out to meet the other three
they'd met no trouble
i took
one back with me to fetch our own
dead body whilst the rest made off for camp
the other band returned without an arab
the prisoners would say nothing
the following day both arab camps attacked
and we were forced to wage a bitter local war
with many dead – the rest you will have heard

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