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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

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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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