

The Gas and Dust That Orbits My Sun

The 13 chapters that bring us here are the gas and dust that orbits our sun.

Chapter 1. First, I Have to Find Her

1976. I am 16, I am in love with a gambler who is also in love with another woman. Because I will not give him up, and the shame it brings my dad — I am the talk of the neighbourhood — my dad throws me out.

The other woman Pauline is crazy, literally. She even assaults my mum. But love is love. And my mum ran off with my dad for God's sake leaving her 4 kids behind. Besides, I am a rebel. Influenced by Germaine Greer. Jane Fonda. Brigitte Bardot looking after animals and not taking care of her skin. I'm not sure if she is doing this yet. Anyway, I am born into frilly apron housewifery but grow up in the 2nd wave, I think. My bra is well and truly burnt. I work in British Engine. Industrial Insurance. Everyone's bras are truly in place. Except Bev. She is enraptured by 1950s starlets. She's one of those people who can wear a bin liner and look good. I wonder what she looks like now — 12 years older than me — she will be 78. Everyone, including Bev, who of course is my friend, wears an engagement ring. It's a prerequisite. Bev's looks equivalent to the block of ice Richard Burton gives Liz. So, I take Ivan to the pawn shop to buy me an engagement ring. £21. Zircon. I pay. Cos he's lost his money in the bookies yet again.

Insurance cheques arrive. We log them. We have a calculator. Large. We have a ledger. Large. We carry forward what is not accounted for — credit and debit. I inherit £200,000 debit outstanding. And around £200,000 credit unaccounted for. Though not obviously penny for penny aligned, I have a hunch that I can disentangle and align them. Just like I do now, I devise a meticulous grand plan to find out which unaccounted cheque belongs to which unpaid policy. Cos, I want to be better than everyone in this massive account's pool. All females. Sheila sits at the head, facing us, our overseer. She never looks up. Even when you go for help. Her freckled hand goes over your paperwork and finds your mistake in minutes. I do not want to be first cos I dislike any of them. I just have a compulsion all my life to do what I know can be done.

First, I need to find the original cheque in the files on the fifth floor. Not the actual cheque but the ledger it is logged in. So, I can trace the person who sent the cheque. Their name and address. In the lanes of name and address drawer cards. I detect the moment it isn't logged properly. This frequently leads to an unpaid policy. Most, satisfyingly cancelling each other out. I also draft a polite, direct, one-page template, requesting payment for unpaid policies, explaining the danger the firm are in should anything go wrong. Overjoyed when Sheila gives it the go ahead with no changes. Proudly take my pile to Moira of the Scottish accent and the lacquered beehive. She is always pleased when I arrive. It gives her and her ladies plenty to do. They type my template, now with the name and amount inserted. Put them in envelopes. Type the

name and address. Post them. I create a Rolodex of all my companies. Driving a colour coded reminder calendar. 1 month: first request. 2 weeks after: 2nd request. 1 week after: final request. Most usually pay in the first week. From £200,000, in 3 months I have only £673 outstanding on my account. Birmingham is truly under control. I immediately get promoted to Mr Smith's sidekick. I am equivalent to Shiela. But Ivan is dead. Stabbed through the chest by Pauline. I ask for the week off to have my 6-month abortion. I never go back.

Chapter 2. My Dad Was a Ponce

My dad was a ponce. Not the kind who wears platforms and has a fur coat draped on his shoulders. He is stealthier than that. He smokes a pipe. Sits in his chair. In the house he owns. She doesn't own it. We don't own it. He sends £5 postal orders to his kids in Jamaica. A lot of money in the 60s and 70s — peoples' rents are £5. She takes it to the post office. No wonder she hates herself. No wonder she drinks. Her Guinness is hidden below the sink in the blue painted cupboard. That he owns. Like he owns the bedroom with the cute black fireplace that she waits for his absolution to join him in. The rest of the time she sleeps downstairs in the front room with us. Beneath the spider blanket. The tenant. He has the mortgage. She is his tenant with the rent book. That she fills out cos he can't read. How stealthy do you have to be to pull the strings of a puppet that can tell you anything. Except she won't. She loves him. She must have told him how to do the swindle when her husband dies, the father of her four kids. The kids she leaves. She substitutes us for her dead husband's four kids. Now there is five. He's in the ground, the husband who fell under the back end of the bus. They're sounding more like Rose and Fred West. Except he sits in his chair, the pope. Like Diego Velázquez's portrait of Innocent X. You have to kiss his ring. As he sits in his throne of stolen money. The dead man's pension. He is sat in his papal chair the day I come home. Ivan is dead. Pauline's friends have broken our flat door down and stolen the sheets. Stripped the bed. They've painted enormous on the wall. **Bitch.** I think it is in paint. The flat is derelict. The light is gone out. I leave. What choice do I have? He is sat in his papal chair. There is still no absolution. I go through to the kitchen. 'Mum...Mum.' She will hug me like this once again when she is in a care home, her brain eaten with what he gives her once she's finished jumping up and down on his bed — in his bedroom with the cute black fireplace — so happy to see him. And he becomes Francis Bacon's The Study of a Head.

Just over a month ago, 03.11.25, 49 years after Ivan dies 31.10.76, I spend £750 on linen sheets. Fitted. Flat. Pillowcases. Berry. Rhubarb. Botanical Green. When they arrive, I flick through the Rolodex of my homes. It is true. None of them have a decorated bedroom. They are all derelict. This will be my first.

Chapter 3. My Mum's Eldest Daughter

How do you stop someone who has tantrums? How do you get them to settle? How do you not sacrifice your life to theirs? Why do you imagine you have to?

'You had one grey blanket,' She loves to shout at him to bring him down. To humiliate him. To make him small. He always remains big by not answering. He may have stopped answering when he drowns our Dachshund. In the drain in the backyard of Maine Rd. Around the time Angie shows up. My mum's eldest daughter. I have to be 4 years old. Angie is 12 years older than me. 12 when my mum leaves her after Angie sees her and him leaving the pictures They are in love.

I know they are in love. I am there. I am there when they leave the pictures. I am in her tummy. 1959. She already knows she is giving up a 12-seater in a kitchen with fireplace in a wall-to-wall black cast iron grate. That has a slate, grate bread oven. And her husband and his brothers in their handmaid suits. Maybe that's why my dad has handmade suits, and she only has scraps of clothes. Crimplene. Polyester. Drip dry. Suits live in his wardrobe. Magnificent — the dapple-grey blue one is the best. A Zoot suit.

I wonder what they have just watched — the day they come out of the pictures. She won't be in her scraps yet. Her father-in-law brings her back what she wants from his department store. 'All you had to do was put a docket on the kitchen table and Mr Stanners would bring it home.'

Was her husband an alcoholic then? Or did she not notice because it is not the same when he can still afford the drink. Her husband and his 2 brothers against a door in O'Connell Street, Limerick. Maybe, that's why she left the 12-seater table? And Angie sitting bald, round-headed in her Edwardian Black Silver-Cross pram. These are photos in the box, her good box, inside her wardrobe with the necklaces, costume jewellery, and the white, real leather shoes she must have owned when she came here.

They ship her 4 kids back. To the spinster aunt. Madeline. 'That bitch!'

He has suits. I have a blue trike. My brother has a red trike. With boxes on the back. My mum has costume jewellery he bought her. The day 16-year-old Angie knocks on our door. Maybe her scraps are the remnants of the sackcloth Angie hands her. And she refuses to wear.

She's buried in them. Something we take out of her wardrobe. He's buried in a new handmade black cashmere suit beneath a hand-painted Last Supper. To keep his tantrum at bay.

Chapter 4: Angie

I do not remember the day she knocks on our door. I do remember she brings my brother a bow and arrow. She brings us pick-and-mix when she works in Woolworths. Her hair is always blonde. This means she has white- blonde hair as a kid in the house

that overlooks the Shannon River with her mum and her dad, and Mr and Mrs Stanners who are really good to them, and her two uncles and their wives and their kids.

Did my mum never love Angie? Is Angie just the product of the self-survival trick my mum manages to pull off. Her own mum is a prostitute.

This makes my daughter laugh when she unearths the amount of times my nana — May Lynch — is in court for loitering. The woman in the town hall, Limerick, calls us forward, 2018, to get my mum's birth and wedding certificates so we can have Irish passports. There's no one else there. No one at all. Just me and my daughter. The woman gestures. We go to the counter. She whispers, 'Your mum has no dad.' We laugh when we are outside. She tells us to go within the walls of the castle there are Stanners there. We walk to the castle walls. 'I was born within the castle walls.' She wasn't. She is married in the little cathedral. It is declared on her wedding certificate. It is probably in the newspapers. You have to take your hat off to her.

But Angie loves her. She gives it up, the house on the River Shannon and the suitors she most likely had, to chase her mum here. Knock on her door. Never treated any better than a nanny to us. I don't remember where she sleeps. I vaguely remember leading my brother outside in his nappy and getting the chair to stand on to lock them outside. Angie, gossiping with the neighbour. No, she lives with us before we move to Maine Rd. She is Jill Roddy's friend. On Grafton St. She takes me to the park. She ties me to the fence. She hates me. But she loves Elaine when she is born.

Elaine. Sat in her navy Silver-Cross trolley. Plates are flying. The blue and cream milk jug. Over our heads. We are staring at each other through the handle of the navy Silver-Cross trolley. I am too small to save her. Angie seems to be at the bottom of it again. Or maybe I am making it up. She always seems to be at the bottom of it.

They continue their ascent up the housing ladder to Cowesby St. They have lost most of their friends. They're not that young when I am 6. She's 39. He's 46. Friends are a thing of the past. He no longer stands with his trilby pushed back. At the bar looking like Humphrey Bogart. You have to admire him. Holding court. There are no new suits. There is a mortgage. And a black man by Angie's side. Like mother like daughter. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. My dad hates this. He chases them up the street in Maine Rd. But let's them into Cowesby St when Angie is pregnant. They live upstairs. In the big front room. It's him who says Carlton is blind. He's more than blind. He's small for his age. He never walks. He never talks. My mum says that's cos he beat the living shit out of her when she was pregnant. But you can't believe a word out of her mouth. It's poison now. She'd have to be mad to think this is okay — swapping the house by the River Shannon for this. The 3 up 2 down that she is renting from the man who said he loved her enough to make her leave her 4 kids — Angie 12 — little Margaret 18 months. Little Margaret hasn't spoke to her since. Carlton is put in a home. Angie sits forward. Her shoulders hunched. Her eyes sad. I can see her sad eyes now. Her feet bare. Her little toe arches like a bridge. Her fingers digging into her cheeks. Her hair still strawberry

blonde. Silk Cut. One after another after another. Her mum's confidante. 'When that bastard tells me to go for his milk and bread, he never gives me the money back. This shop and that shop. How the fuck would he know? He can't read. That half a fool. He can't read. Who's to pay for the bus fare?' Angie's fingers leave their mark as she pulls them away. She goes missing for a few months. I'm so relieved. She sends back the only glamorous photo of her. Dressed like ever young woman of her age. Her strawberry blonde is piled high. She has eyeliner. Like Julie Christie in Dr Zhivago. Her dress is Mary Quant. Sat at a table with loads of other nurses in the nurses' home. She is happy. Drinking Babycham. He does the big I must save her. One of the few black men with a car back then. Drives over the Snake Pass. Whatever he says, she is back. Her fingers digging into her face. 'When that bastard asks me to go for bread and milk ...' Guinness under the sink. Angie buys them. Her mum's birthday. It must be her 40th. They get some of the old friends around. She fills her tumbler of whiskey. 'You're all bastards...' Delbert carries on playing because he is good with our mum. He brings her around. Every time. 'You remember this one Peggy, John Holt! You've always love John Holt.' She raises her arms. Her belly stiff in its corset below the Crimplene. Her wrists thick below their polyester. She rolls her belly. Her sexy dance. We cringe. Delbert is good with her. He plays another she likes. Her man leaves the room. 'Fuck him! Fuck him!' Swabey is up. Swabey will dance with anything. If we want to keep the windows tonight best let Miss Peggy have what she wants.

Angie is dead. The girl who cries wolf. All the time. The girl who cries wolf is dead. I cross the park to the house of the kids of Delbert's long-term affair. The eldest opens the door. Angie is sat up on her deathbed. Her arms in the air. Stiff. Beseeking.

'She was asking, 'Where's me mum?'

'Her mum died 3 months ago.'

Chapter 5. What Can My Passion Be If I Am Not Born David Attenborough

The title sentence comes from me trying to work out the selling tagline for 12-words 8-stations, my book. This book. And who is my ideal customer? My niche. I think I am writing for people who want to be writers. And I'm hell bent on not talking about race anymore. So, I imagine I am talking to writers like I was, who want to learn how to write. But maybe they don't exist anymore. With new technology and creators, does anybody look at anyone's heart anymore. To give value everything is a how-to book. How to act like a fucking robot in 12 steps. 3 steps. 5 ways to trick some fucker out of money. So, I have been trying to lock down my tagline. Who am I here to help? Who the fuck am I here to help?

I've got it down to, I've got as far as:

'Unresolved emotional pain kills creativity. 12-Words 8-Station provides the framework to confront these ghosts. Lay them to rest: Resurrect your creativity.'

Well, that's a fucking lie. I live in my pain. Why the fuck do I live in my pain? I never talk about anything else. Why the fuck do I never talk about anything else? Then I realise something. Well, I realise it from 2 angles, maybe 3 angles. I've never known any peace. That isn't true either. My mum and dad love each other when I am born. I am hot housed. I am part of their love. She teaches me to read long before I go to school. Education means a lot to an Irish mum when they have had to hide behind hedges prevented from being educated when the English occupy their land. And he loves numbers. He can do them in his head. He goes to work. He picks me up out of my cot when he gets home. Sometimes he works overtime. Sometimes he buys her costume jewellery. Tasty pieces that suit her neck. We sit by the fire. Other times if she is angry in a Bette Davis kind of way she throws the jewellery in the fire cos she can't be bought. He refuses to pull it out because he can't be brought to his knees either. Other times they dance in the moonlight that comes through the long, tall window of the big room we rent from her mum who is living with someone else's husband an Englishman who she has 2 kids to. The respectable lady now. With old lady glasses and not a dash of who she must have been to produce 4 kids without 4 dads and a charge sheet as long as her arm. I am happy. They are happy. Chorlton and Medlock are happy. Like brownstones. Like ghetto New York brownstones. With loads of nations and loads of ethnicity coming home from work. And loads of kids outside doors in prams taking in the sunlight. And record players oozing music into the night. And Teddy Boys with quiffs. Angie and her friend Gill Roddy with sticky out skirts. What Gill Roddy's mum does is to pay the bills.

I think I read this once, and I can't be bothered to look it up, and if it wasn't David Attenborough, it will definitely have been someone like him, born in khaki knee length shorts, in a Milly Molly Mandy life with friends who live The Secret Seven life who I wouldn't have wanted to be when I live in glorious Chorlton and Medlock technicoloured grey with someone hollering for Eddie to come for his tea. And streets that are wide for the horse and carriage and houses the place and the people the place was built for. The dinosaur bones of a lost civilisation. I think I read once that David Attenborough and his dad hunted for dinosaur bones on the east coast littered with dinosaur bones and this action makes the David Attenborough we know.

Chorlton and Medlock built for the Victorian upwardly mobile. We are the rats. The happy rats on the deserted ship. And far away in books is David Attenborough and his brother Richard. Being hot housed by society itself. Born into the rights of Englishness. Cut off from Little Richard oozing out of a bedroom window. That isn't a bedroom window but the apartment of a whole family. With the cooker on the landing. Dreaming of better days. While enjoying these days. In the Bowling Green. A pale ale. Bodies really close. That's how he touches her back. 'The minute he touches my back.' 'The minute he touches my back.' My back. My back. My back. The floors are floorboards. They are loud. Loud. Loud. Loud. 'Hey Jack.' 'No, a whiskey. She said a whisky.' Women don't smoke on the street. Until they've had a few.

Okay, I'm trying to avoid blaming Angie. Because, actually, it may be simply that they are upwardly mobile that cramps their style. That stops him touching her back. That's what us working-class are taught. You have to move away from them. You have to ... Maybe, maybe, that is why there are no working-class writers before the revolution of Look Back in Anger. Saturday Night Sunday Morning. Maybe they are deliberately suppressed. Cos, if they aren't upwardly mobile. God forbid. How will we sell them a lifestyle they can never have? Cos if you ain't born in khaki knee length shorts you sure as fucking hell can't fake it.

This morning, I get my tagline down to:

'Unresolved emotional pain kills creativity. 12-Words 8-Station provides the framework to resurrect this pain. And make that fucking pain your creativity.'

That's the truth. That is more like the truth. Angie takes me to school on my first day. Subliminally I begin to learn lessons straight away. Fake it till you make it. The objective is to assimilate. Osmosis. Become an Englishman. Do not whatever you do admit you were not born in khaki knee length shorts with a spyglass in your hand. Interested in everything. Especially bones. Learn everything fast so no one can accuse you. No, they are not accusing me. Not in 1964. It is only 100 years since abolition. I have promised myself I will not talk about race anymore. But fuck, how much can change in 100 years? There are people alive today who have lived 100 years. 'You have to try twice as hard,' my mum repeats. 'Because of the colour of your skin.' So, I do. There are blue book and green book and red book and all kinds of fucking books. I devour them. Literally. Other people have 8 gold stars. I have 40 gold stars. Other people do their homework. I devour the walls with mine. Pictures as well as stories. I make sure to colour in the toga. Purple. The people who win wear purple.

In both Look Back in Anger and Saturday Night Sunday Morning their pain is their passion. Both white males. Those born in khaki knee length shorts have drained the colour from the world. His brother Richard Attenborough caricatures a gangster in Brighton Rock. Like Laurence Olivier wears black face to play Othello.

And the library teaches me more. Week in week out. I love my journey to the library. I have no idea I am swallowing resentment. I have no idea they will never let me in. To the worlds I now admire.

Chapter 6. Episodic Hero. Part 1.

Films & Dramas Timeline, Theme Tunes, Quote/Synopsis.

1. 1964. Gilligan's Island.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtfodUnc8uU>

'I'm the movie star.'

'No, I'm the movie star.'

2. 1966. Star Trek.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdjL8WXjlGI>

'Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.'

3. 1966. The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOI73VQOS9M>

'Don't Die, Blondie. Don't die.'

4. 1967. The Prisoner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWTdmwwK-ME>

Fuck you. Patrick McGoohan slams his resignation down on the desk after driving through London in a stylish yellow sports car past the fucking seat of power, Parliament. Suitcase. Passport. Evil dude walking towards his door. Gas is sprayed through his keyhole.

5. 1971. The Devils.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBTlZVCMHVA>

Discordance. The first time I see the church desecrated. Venessa Redgrave's character loves Oliver Reed's in Derek Jarman's set. The entire lot of 'em are lying. The whole of Christianity. There is something so honest about this film. The want. The lust. The desire. "I am beautiful. I am beautiful. I am beautiful." When she clearly isn't. Her piety. His hungry. He eats his fill. Taking us back to the time when this was the real purpose to be a priest. A nosegay in a world where everything stinks and death is close, closer, closer still.

6. 1972 — 1975. Kung Fu.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvu5YcmYhSQ>

It makes me sad and happy and nostalgic and hopeful. 'As quickly as you can, snatch the pebble from my hand.' Young Kwai Chang Caine attempts it. 'When you can take the pebble from my hand, it will be time for you to leave.' Then he does loads of cool shit learning his craft. Growing from a teenage boy to a grown man. Then he grabs the pebble. 'It is time for you to leave.' There is no more fanfare than that.

After 3 long years, 1972 — 1975, he bends to a cauldron his sleeves rolled up. They show us a dragon cut into the bowl. He must put his forearms on it. He must put his arms on it or his journey has been for nothing. He must put his arms on it to show himself and the world he passed. To know he can do it. To achieve the ultimate over his

own fear — show himself his own capabilities. He crosses the sand dunes on his lone journey.

The first comment beneath the post is: I never understood the wisdom contained in this show until I was in my 40s. This was an EPIC and timeless series.'

It is an epic and timeless series.

7. High Plains Drifter

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRfPEYl_j1Q

Clint Eastwood crosses the sand dunes to fuck up the town that fucked him up. He's no saint. He's already branded. 'I want every building in town painted red.' 'Even the church?' 'Especially the church.' When he rides out again the town's sign has been painted over with a dripping red HELL.

Gilligan's Island, Star Trek, The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, The Prisoner, my dad is with us. We watch them together. They are a family event. She doesn't really watch them. She's busy usually. Or doing her crossword. They sit opposite each other in their armchairs. We take up the floor. The sofa is too far from the fire. A real fire of wood he gets from the railway station where he works as a blacksmith making the rails. The wood full of kerosene, as he calls it, burns bright. The theme tunes kick us in. If she hasn't started. To be fair to her she doesn't really start at this time, or does she I can't remember. These are sacred times our times with our dad.

The final frontier. We have a Father Xmas who is bent in the middle cos his air won't stay in him. A faulty valve. This is the first Xmas I begin to notice that nothing is right really. 'The movie star.' 'I'm the movie star.' All us girls want to be the movie star. The four sisters. We're on the floor. Elaine is always by the fire. We trust him. We don't trust her.

'Don't Die, Blondie.' Makes him laugh. He has a wry sense of humour. He loves Eli Wallach as a comedian. He loves Clint Eastwood. We all love Clint Eastwood. You can hear a pin drop. I think if she runs in now with her shit, we may kill her. Or am I making this up? Are these Xmas reruns because the dates I have found are the dates they are released. And they will only be at the pictures. And we don't go to the pictures as family because it cost too much. Or cos. Actually, why don't we go? We don't go anywhere as a family.

Sometimes she pisses herself. She tells us she loves us, bladdered, as she lies on the end of the bed. And he goes to his room with his radio to listen to the cricket. She pisses herself. I take off her knickers and her girdle cos I'm the oldest. When she's screaming at him and we get out of bed and sit at the top of the stairs I am the eldest. When the house has gone to sleep, I am the oldest, I treat myself to The Devils and all other kinds of weird films. I am educating myself. Seeing right through them. The ambulance coming. And the heart attacks happening. That turn out to be one heart attack. And Angie running to the phone box. And him saying, no, shouting — it is unusual for him to be

shouting, 'Let her die in here tonight.' And Angie crying, 'There's no need for that, Bas.' Let her die in here tonight. What the fuck does the ambulance man think? And the blue light pouring into the hallway of the stairs that I have swept that day. Not cos the house is dirty. It is never dirty. I don't know why I've done the stairs. And I'm crying in the cloisters of my high school cos she's said you may not see me again. 'When you come home from school you may not see me again.' She means because of her heart. And Angie who is a nurse now explains at every opportunity about her heart and how we may not see her again when we come home from school 'What is wrong?' I am taken to the head teacher. But how the fuck do you tell anybody what the fuck is going on. Besides the teachers are part of the establishment. They are part of the Devils. They are cunts. You're all fucking cunts. I don't tell them this. My marks tell me this. I'm not getting As. I'm getting C minuses. But that doesn't matter cos no one is talking about my reports. We may never see her again. She has patches on her heart. She takes aspirin every day. Her legs are swelling because her system isn't draining properly. And then one day she's gone.

There is no explanation. Her suitcase is gone. Her clothes are gone. Angie doesn't visit. He doesn't explain. He gives me her housekeeping. I go to Co-op, and the greengrocer, and the butcher. I make their tea cos I am the oldest. And our house is at peace.

And a week later she turns back up. She's been in Ireland. She's been to see her other kids. The youngest, the girl, won't talk to her. The eldest boy is overweight. 'A big fat slob.' She opens her suitcase. She hands me a pink jumper. The collar isn't right. I keep pulling it to right it. Then realise it has been stitched on wrong. But nothing can change how great I feel about myself. Look what I have done. The house is spotless. And we didn't know if we would ever see her again. And the cupboard is full. And tidy. Like the drawers on the 5th floor, I have made everything function. I've chopped the wood and stacked it. And cleaned that fucking pile from the side of the telly. The side of the telly is empty. And the room feels styled. And I am becoming who I am today. And then Angie comes. I don't care. Angie always comes. And then me mum says something about something we haven't got. Or something she'd like. And I say, cos I'm kind and feeling benevolent, "I will go to the Co-op and get it for you." And when I get back, she is drunk. And only one cunt has given her the drink. And she's gone from being appreciative. To vindictive. And she knows I've stolen the money, the housekeeping money like Angie's said. Like me dad said. You've stolen the money. 'You've stolen the money he gave you for them kids.'

'I didn't mum. Look in the cupboard. I didn't, mum.'

'You fucking did. There's nothing in the cupboard.'

I go to the kitchen. She's behind me. 'You've always been sly. You've always been sly just like him. Just like him.'

I flick my poncho back. 'You fucking bitch.' Angie is 12 years older than me. 'You fucking bitch.' Cos when my mum's drunk, she's fucking lost all reason. No fucking point talking to her. 'You fucking bitch.'

'Ring him. Fucking ring him and tell him what a cunt she's being.'

Ring me dad? Bring me dad home from work?

I'd be a liar if I tell you how the next bit happens. I have no idea how the next bit happens. Or the timeframe. Actually, thinking about it they may have already rang him because by the time I have Angie by the hair banging her fucking head on the floor his key is in the door, and I don't fucking care. He has to drag me off her. My legs are swinging in the air. Yet again yet again he fucking back doors me when he takes her side. They are downstairs in their pact that allows them to live with each other. And little do they know I am upstairs packing the suitcase she has just emptied.

I am 14 on the doorstep of my final frontier. I am 14 at the end of our street 'Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of Linda's Enterprise. A 45-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no Moss Side girl has gone before'. To the door of the Whitworth.

Chapter 7. Babushka's Eggs

Fucking hell. This isn't going anywhere where I was thinking it was going. And it's been fermenting beautifully in my head all week. I've had the most amazing discoveries to tell you. And now it is taking me to the other end of my story. But the nature of this method is you go where it is taking you. You trust. I'm not trusting at this minute. I've not been trusting all morning. There is writing that is a good sentence. What I practise for a long time. What I think I must practise. Then, then, there is real writing. About things that happen. Things that matter.

1973, I am in Scarsdale Rd. In a Victoria house. A big house. With lesbians in dungarees doing right by girls like me who are in danger. I don't know how I get here. I remember going to the phone box when I have the suitcase. I don't remember who I ring. The chain. The links. I do remember someone telling me to go in a taxi to Scarsdale House. I'm not one of these girls. But obviously I am if I'm here. They give me lunch boxes. I'm not sad. I am sad about the pink worn candlewick spread. I hate them to this day. I am sad about the other girls that don't come from homes like mine with fluffy biscuits from the Irish shop on the end of Crofton Street and cabbage and ribs and Monday soup, Jamaican soup, with pinto beans that doesn't taste too bad if you put a drop of brown sauce in it. I am not really from a bad home. I must be if they have put me in here. I stay here. I go to school. I'm, as usual, teacher's pet. Well, they are not teachers really. I go to school. I don't tell anyone in school. I have no plans. I can't go home I know that. I can't go home to those people. I can't go home to that place. Then one night she turns up. Her coat is done up to the throat. She has her posh telephone voice. They tell me in the kitchen. I

leave and go to my room. The room I am sharing with the other girls with the candlewick spreads. I don't know how to talk to her. She follows me in. 'He misses you.' 'Does he?'

"He misses you. He's not sleeping properly. He's sad all the time.'

Maybe, I like that he misses me. I go back. I go to his room. He's in bed. He looks small. He looks shrunk. He looks bald. He has no teeth. He must be 54. He has his blanket up by his throat. We don't know how to talk to each other. We don't know how to look at each other. He simply says, 'Don't do that to me again. You hear me? Don't do that to me again.' I go to my bedroom. To our candlewick spreads that have not had a line of girls from bad homes living in them.

2000, me and Rach' are in the pictures. Angela's Ashes. We've both read the book. We're proud. The first thing ever about Limerick. I realise how poor my mum must have been. To have one toilet at the end of the street. And how she has been lying. Fuck this, cut to the chase, what I realise the other day is I am there. I am there in every drop of shit that woman has been through. And she is there, my daughter, Rachel, in every drop of shit I have been through. We are Russian dolls. When my mum's mum is repeatedly 'loitering' on the end of the street, she is there. I am there. Rach is there. We are already eggs in wombs. Mad, hey. And everything that she has been through, I have been through, Rach has been through, we have been through. No one wanting to talk to her. No one inviting her to their birthday parties. The man by the river dragging her into the bushes and raping her aged 13. Him getting time. Her being pregnant. Her getting time in the Magdalene Home washing sheets for the nuns. Her son dying there. While her sainted nana washes the dead and births the young.

Angela's Ashes tells us she has, we have, a toilet on the end of the street. One toilet for how many? So, candlewick spreads make sense. Like my boyfriend being stabbed on my doorstep. And Rachel's husband dying on her doorstep. The trauma is already affecting us in the womb. It is already making us a doormat. A fucking doormat. A fucking doormat. Fucking hell.

Ovarian intergenerational continuity

- **Prenatal Development:** A female foetus develops all the eggs (technically called oocytes) she will ever have while still in her mother's womb.
- **The Timeline:** This process peaks at around 20 weeks (5 months) of gestation. At this point, the foetus has approximately 6 to 7 million immature eggs.
- **The Grandparent Connection:** Because these eggs form while your mother is still a foetus inside your grandmother, the specific biological cell that eventually becomes you are physically present inside your grandmother's body during her pregnancy.

This chapter is such a mess.

2000, it is my dad's birthday. I am brave for a year. I haven't spoken to them for a year. I am trying to have my own life. I am sick of her trauma. I am pickled in her trauma. I have

been there every moment in her trauma. I want to be a writer. Stop bringing me home. I can't be a writer if you keep bringing me home. Will you fucking leave me alone. I've been brave enough not to go when he turns up and she is in hospital. I don't say no. I just don't go. When he turns up with the walking stick as a prop on my 40th birthday with £10 in a card. He has never bought a card in his life. Leave me the fuck alone.

'It wasn't that good was it really.'

'They never are books are always better. Will you take me to his?'

'Are you sure?'

I am just not brave enough to ignore his birthday.

I bow my head as I go through the living room door. He is smoking his pipe. Wafting his fan, a hanky on a stick, to stop it staining the ceiling.

'Hi, dad.'

He doesn't acknowledge me. She goes into the kitchen. I follow her into the kitchen. It is never awkward with her. But we always, I always, me and her always have to give the pope his due, await the pope inviting us to kiss his ring.

'Do you want a biscuit? She offers me the biscuit tin of cheap ones. The good ones pile up in the cupboard for no one to eat.

He doesn't speak. My daughter asks him what he's watching.

'Cricket.' He says it kind. In his mind this generation is not part of our generation they are nothing to do with him. They owe him and her nothing. The same is true the other way round.

'Do you want a cup of tea?'

'Yeah, I'll have a cup of tea.'

It goes on for about 20 minutes.

'Are you ready, mum?'

'Yeah.'

'Happy birthday, dad.'

He eeks out his manipulation, to just before Rachel is about to drag us out the door.

'Don't ever do that to me again.'

Outside Rachel is furious. 'You looked like a little girl. You looked 5 years old.'

Leaving them again, I just feel broken again.

Chapter 8. A Miracle

On Tuesday, just gone, 04.02.26, the day before my dad's 104th birthday, Elaine, who is not sentimental, sends me a photo of our mum and dad's headstone.

Then she writes, 'I found Angie's don't know why it popped up in my head at least that's being cared for as well.' She sends me that photo too.

The following day Elaine writes, 'It made me sad to see Angie's grave yesterday purely because she still ended up on her own not in Ireland not in Jamaica and still separated from her mum.'

The miracle to me is Elaine has no way of knowing I am writing about mum, dad and Angie. It is as if the Universe is saying to me, it is all right to write about this. It led her there. It is leading me here.

I am so scared of this chapter. I am so scared of it being in bad taste. I am so scared of getting into trouble from my sisters. Why every time I want to write do I write about them? Peggy and Bas. Bas and Peggy. What a selfish pair of twats. How the fuck could you actually leave both sets of kids and think it is gonna be all right? But I don't have to judge them. They got away with fuck all. Oh, my God, the story is so sad. I'm gonna have to start from another angle. Washing your laundry in public. Wow. For a few shekles? Yeah, for a few shekles. I'm amazed I didn't tell this story in MY MUM IS WHITE. I did. I told it to Sol. I told it to Sol, our photographer, quickly.

My dad is lying like Lindow Pete. He's squashed flat with cancer, death, and fear. 'You have to come now,' the care home says. She is in another home. Her mind is gone. Holes in her brain. We have seen them. But, yet, when we turn up, Me and Elaine, she says, 'Is it time? Is he ready?' He's ready, mum.' She already has her coat on.

For the first time ever she is calm, she is useful, she is the matriarch in his little room off his care home garden. It is the nicest place he has ever lived in. His jumpers are hung up. His caps. His pipe is on the side. And now he is dying. The patriarch. For the first time it is all going the way society would plan.

Then Pam, the sister after Elaine, goes to the shop. Once she puts the whiskey on the tree stump, I know the peace will come to a stop. My mum doesn't touch a drop. But Pam, who comes from the same womb, from the same trauma, but unlike me, hers includes mum's drinking, fills her glass.

The next thing Pam is screaming in my dad's face. In my dying dad's face. These are the last words he will hear on his journey to the other world or wherever you fucking end up. 'She fucked my boyfriend, dad.' Now Pam is chasing her family between my mum, who is still staring at the love of her life leaving this world — a man who has long, empty, seconds between the breath he is clinging to.

Pam is chasing her whole family around the garden with her handbag. Like Dick – fucking – Emery. And Angie, while she's got the chance, and she thinks no one is looking, no one is listening, leans to her mum's ear and asks, 'How does it feel now, mum?' Wow.

Val, the youngest, who comes from the same womb, from the same trauma, which unlike Pam includes daily painkillers now, takes the £200 we send her but doesn't turn up to

The Gas and Dust That Orbits My Sun. 18.03.26

his funeral. 'She's chasing the dragon,' Mum's having a lucid moment. Followed by, 'Look at his fucking handles.' We look at his fucking handles. They are bronzed carvings of The Last Supper. Pam is burying the Pope in style.

We don't need freedom because of our colour or race. We just need the freedom of peace. Demonstrated in the other photos Elaine has been sending me this week. Of her stylish sideboard, and her graceful drop-leaf table, and their positioning. Building her new, solitary, peaceful, country home. And my comments of encouragement because I am the eldest. Building my solitary, peaceful, country home.

Chapter 9 Our Baby Universe. Collates the first 8 chapters. The original gas cloud.

<https://www.lindabrogan59.com/chapter-9-our-baby-universe/>

Chapter 10. How to Make an 8-station Mind-Map. Teaches us how to make a mind-map.

<https://www.lindabrogan59.com/chapter-10-how-to-make-an-8-station-mind-map/>

Chapter 11. I Have Failed Her. Our First Stars

Monday 23.02.26



Ignites

This is how it begins. My mum says I have to try harder. The Art's Council still single me out. We will help you try harder. We will give you a leg up. They are still looking through the same mirror as my mum. She is seeing herself in the mirror. She is also seeing herself reflected in her child. Herself reflected in her child. And what it says about her. What the world thinks about her. What the world thinks about what she has done. What the world thinks about her child. She is trying to protect her child. She is trying to protect her child, but she agrees with the world. Her eyes see that I am disadvantaged. Her eyes tell her that I am not full. I am not on par. I am not equivalent. That she shouldn't have shagged a black man. Or she is trying to arm me. Like an African American has their race conversation with their 14-year-old son. Self-fulfilling prophecy. Is it? It is scary. What are you teaching your child about itself? About the world? Should you tell it, or shouldn't you? What danger do you put it in if you do tell it? What danger do you put it in if you don't?

Tuesday 24.02.26



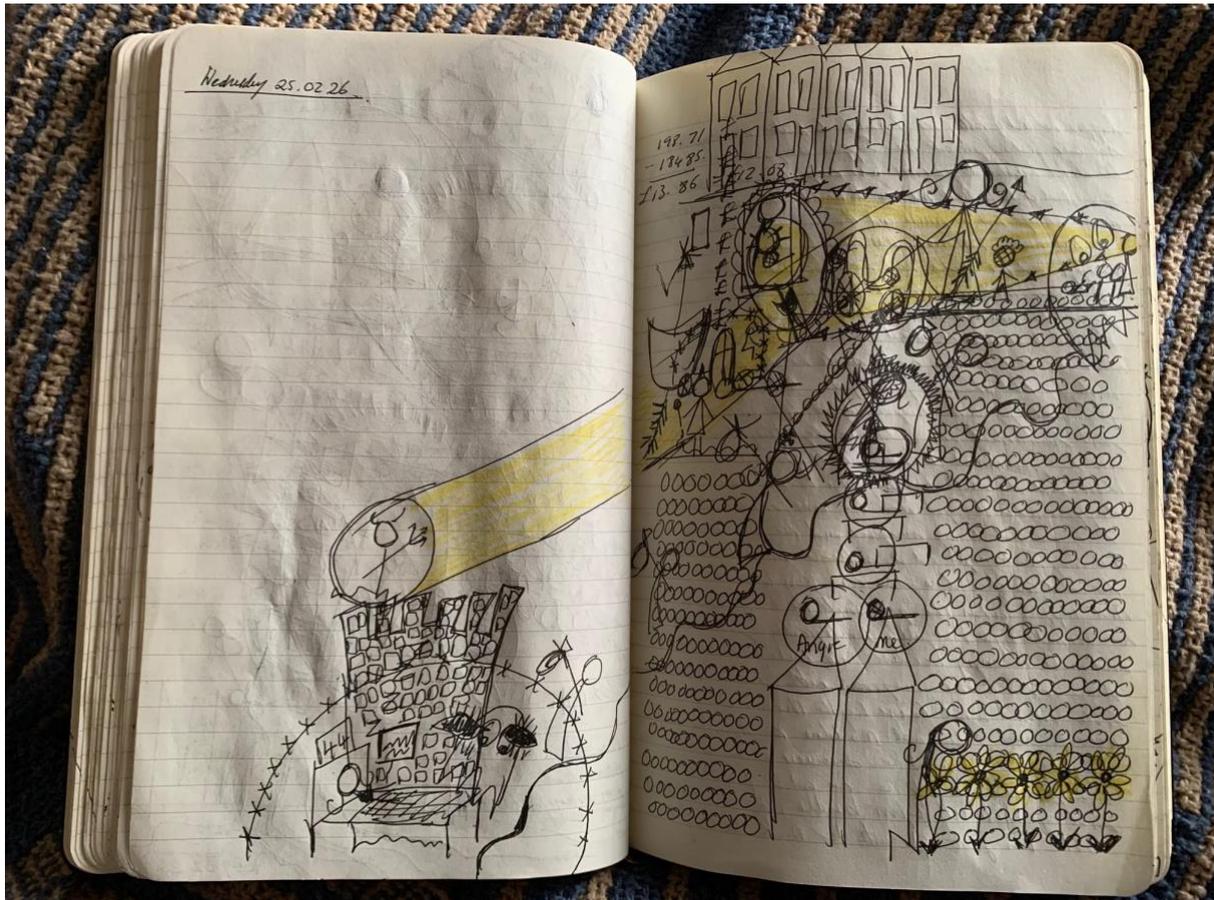
Ignites

1959. Richard Burton in *Look Back in Anger* is on at the pictures when she leaves the pictures already pregnant with me — I am born into a changing world.

Sleeping Beauty is also released that year. My mum conspires with the fairy who conjures the ghosts in my nursery who dictates the limits of what I can be.

1963. The blue and cream jug flying above our heads put mine and Elaine's peace asleep for 60 years.

Wednesday 25.02.26



Ignites

Suppose her act of telling me I must do better is completely selfless and to protect me.

Suppose using her dead husband's pension is completely selfless. She does it to protect me. So, I will, me and my siblings, always have a home and the only way she can do this is if his name is the only one on the mortgage and she has a rent book because I think they are more means tested back then. And he just keeps the bank book. She is absolutely not entitled to. Even when he is dead. She screams about it. What if she hasn't made herself a doormat but is protecting us.

Suppose when she is lying in the hospital aged 44 with her first heart attack, she thinks it is her punishment. It is only 11 years after leaving them. What if she is making a pilgrimage to see them. But when she gets there, she is shocked they are not baby Margaret and her 2 boys. They're teenagers. Which makes it more obvious to her what she has done. She can't turn back time.

Suppose when she gets back, she is grateful to have us. But Angie, tactfully, strategically, poisons her. Which makes her angry because she can't undo the past. And Angie is a reminder, here in Moss Side with her, and not in that house on the banks of the Shannon in Ireland where the other 3 are living with their maiden aunt Madeline — that cunt.

Suppose she just hates the dreariness of the back living room that never gets the sun the day she propels me and my Dick Whittington bundle into the empty sand dunes she has just left with her Dick Whittington.

Thursday. 26.02.26



Ignites

The bravery. The stupidity. Irish women are not English women. I cannot go to the ball. I can never be a debutante. She has condemned me. She knows she has. She has been thinking about it. You must do better than everyone else.

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents, Isabel Wilkerson defines why.

The 8 Pillars of Caste:

1. **Divine Will and the Laws of Nature:** The belief that the hierarchy is preordained by God or is a natural, immutable order.
2. **Heritability:** Caste is inherited and determined at birth, allowing no mobility to change one's status.

3. **Endogamy and Control of Marriage/Mating:** Strict rules against marriage or reproduction outside one's caste to maintain the purity and rigidity of the structure.
4. **Purity v Pollution:** The idea that the dominant group is pure and must be protected from pollution by lower-caste individuals.
5. **Occupational Hierarchy:** The assignment of work based on caste, typically reserving desirable jobs for the top and manual/menial work for the bottom.
6. **Dehumanisation and Stigma:** Stripping lower-caste members of their humanity through stereotypes and abuse to justify their subordination.
7. **Terror as Enforcement. Cruelty as a Means of Control:** Using violence and fear, such as lynchings or public punishment, to enforce caste boundaries.
8. **Superiority v Inferiority:** The deeply ingrained belief that the top group is inherently better, and the bottom group is inherently lesser.

She is invoking all of that when she says you have to do better than all others. Like she can undo the spell cast in my nursery, that the fairies brought to my nursery when I come out of a white womb with non-white skin. A part of her has to disown me. I can never truly be hers. I can never truly be his either. It must play the other way around. Does he think I am worth more than him?

I am brushing Rachel's hair. She is aged about 14. I am stood behind her in the mirror over our fireplace. It takes over. Visceral. Not something, I think. Something I feel. We are alive in it. Bigger. Deeper. Inside. It is in both our DNA. That she is worth more than me. Her quarter-caste skin is worth more than mine. And I must care for it with my life.

It happens again. About 20 years later. Her baby has died. She is in the bath. It feels like a cowboy bath. With a slanted back. I am washing her back. I am her servant. I am her slave. I have failed her.

Friday 27.02.26



Ignites

When my mum walks onto the stage, her heart is already broken. Its blood is the floor of my stage. The glue he uses to imprison her. Her feet are already stuck to the floor. She has found out that Double Indemnity does not work, or she would have stayed with the money. He must have his eye on the money or why doesn't he be fair and leave it to her in his will. No, the house is his. She carries on living with the man who pulls wool over her eyes, though the femme fatales she studies are the ones who make the killing.

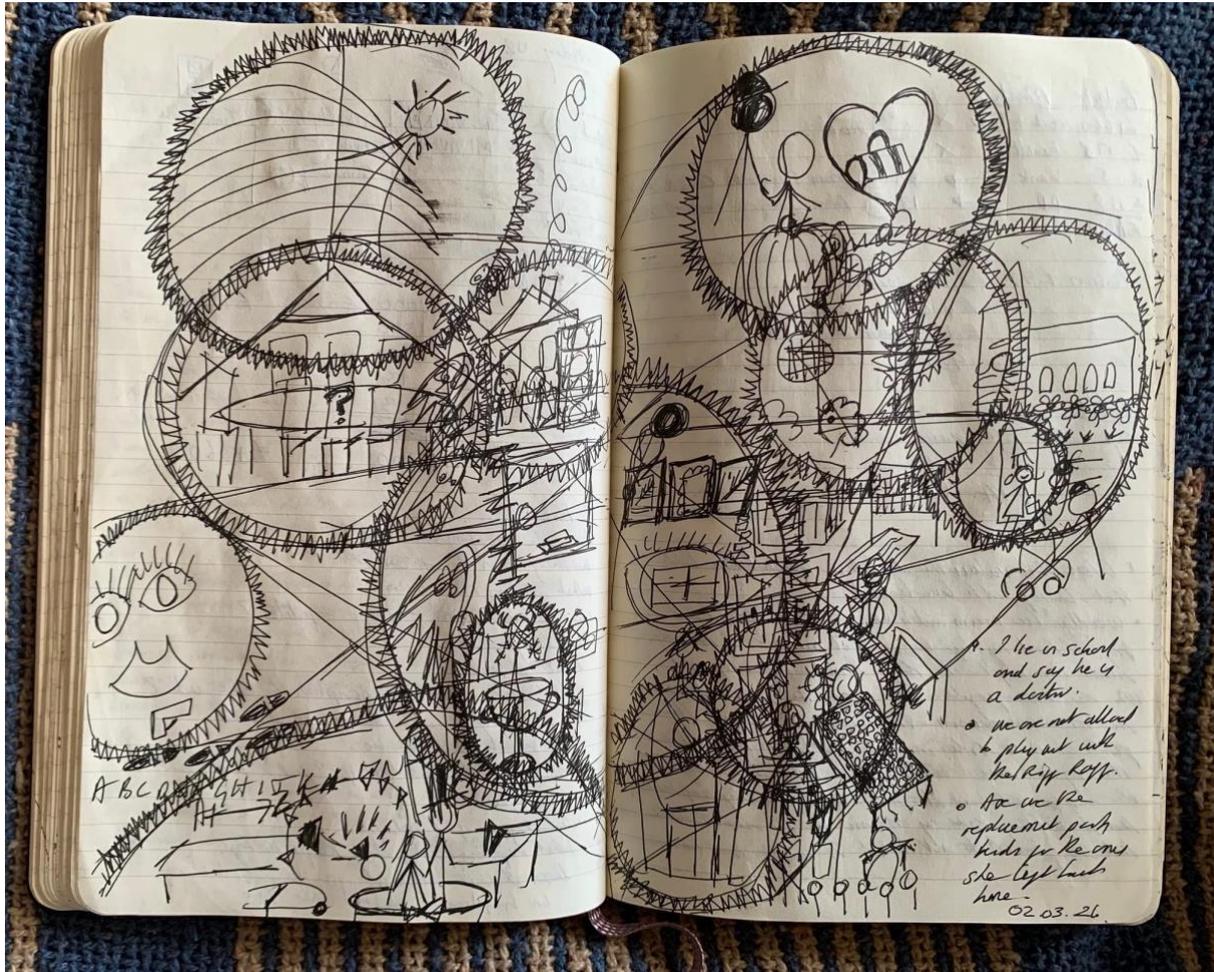
She is the granddaughter of a saint; the daughter of a whore; she does well for herself. Then gets tricked.

Her heart is indeed broken before the ambulance comes for her that night. Maybe she tries to go home. To Ireland. It is insane to think of her on the boat doing the flip the other way around. I believe in my heart she is leaving us to go back to her real life. Her authentic life. Her moneyed life.

You have to do better because of the colour of your skin is to help me get my hands on the money. Like Barbara Stanwyck and Fred McMurray, they are as bad as each other. One of them has to die.

Chapter 12. Not Another Fucking Mug. 2nd Generations Stars.

Monday 02.03.26



Ignites

I lie in primary school and say he is a doctor. We are not allowed to play out with the riff-raff. Are we the replacement posh kids for the ones she left back home? Are her values the dockets on the kitchen table that she refuses to leave behind?

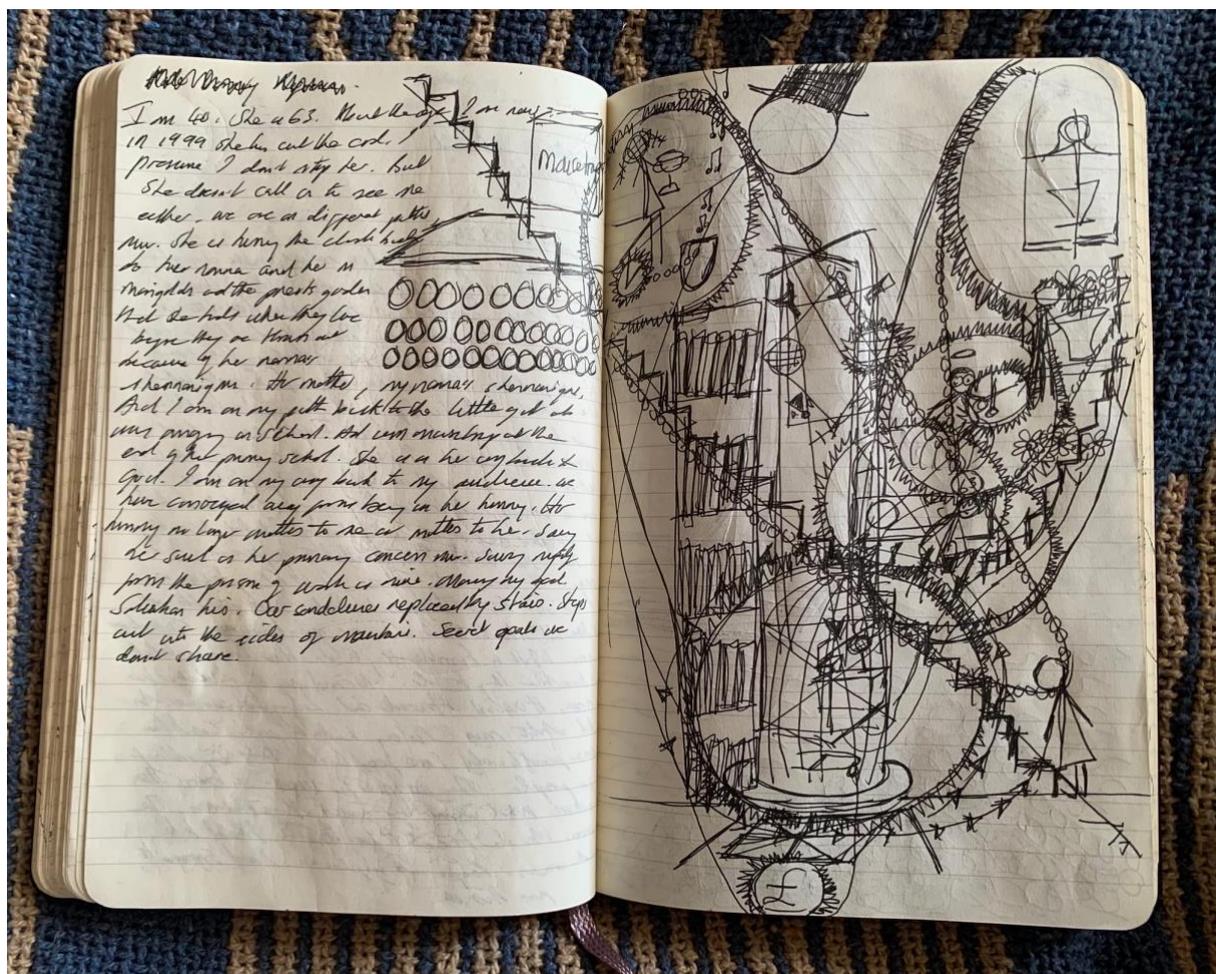
Weirdly, I love cream and blue porcelain. I love that jug. I love my life before that moment. I love school. The idyll. The things I make up in my mind. Who are these people? I love the Jewish dream that a documentary tells me is the bottom line of the American dream's pecan pie. The Irish family values. She plants in Moss Side. She has to be better than anyone else. We buy a sideboard with prestige. Does the drop-leaf table stand for all we know of mum's 12-seater table that she plans? It won't have been the first time she sees it, when she marries him. She has seen it many times. When she comes to high tea with Mr and Mrs Stanners, and their 3 sons and their daughter, the maiden aunt Madeline. She's hardly gonna say her mum's a prostitute.

I scream at her, 'You married a man for money.' Angie, that fucking Angie won't go away. Go away. Fucking go away.

Angie's pram is in the garden. In their big garden. I think she still thinks she has that garden. We are not allowed to play outside with the riff-raff.

School is taking us to the zoo. I am sat, from inside out, in new clothes with a straw hat with a blue ribbon around. She has beaten the shit out of me in the school grounds because I have got on the bus. Then she washes my face. No. She drags me home in a duffle coat he has bought me. She brings me back without any lunch because there isn't enough time. I am dressed from inside out in navy and white, with a straw boater. The other kids are wearing what they were wearing when I left.

Tuesday 03.03.26



Ignites

I am 40. She is 63. 3 years younger than I am now. 1999. She has cut the cord. I have been presuming I don't stop her. But she doesn't call in to see me either. We are on different paths. She is turning the clock back to her nana, and her marigolds in the priest's garden that her nana tends where they live before they are thrown out because of her mum's shenanigans. Her mother, my nana's shenanigans. And I am on the path back to the little girl who is amazing in school. Who wins Mousetrap at the end of her

primary school. She is on her way back to God. I am on my way back to my audience. We have converged away from being in her tummy. Her tummy no longer matters to me or matters to her. Her soul is her primary concern now. Saving myself from the prison of work is mine. Money my goal. Salvation hers. Our sand dunes replaced by stairs. Steps cut into mountains. Secret goals we don't share.

Wednesday 04.03.26



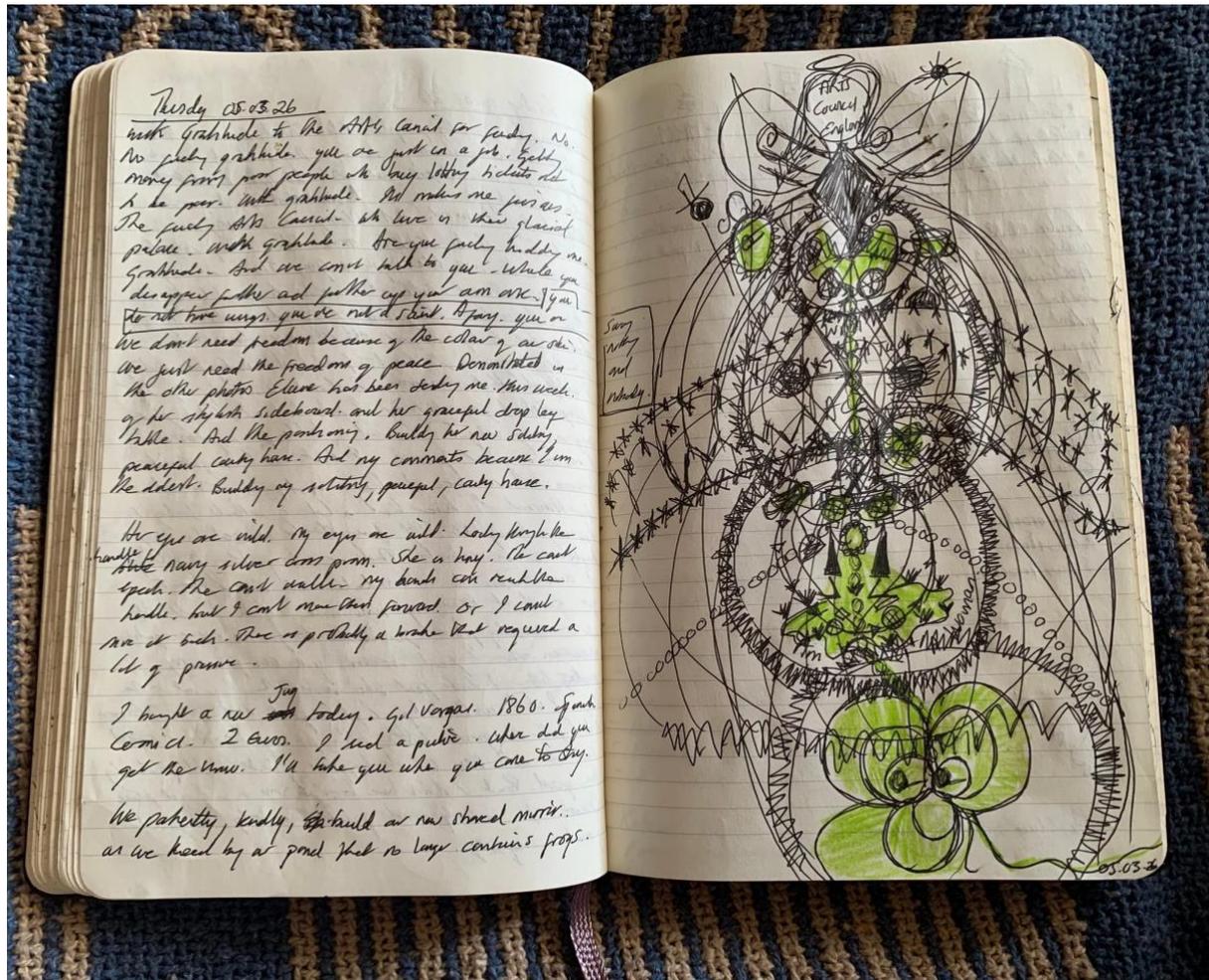
Ignites

When he comes off the boat he must have told her people were staring at him. 'I cried living eye-water' When he comes to this country. To the United Kingdom. He cries living eye-water. He has one grey blanket. Maybe, she becomes a doormat by accident trying to staunch his eye-water. Trying to be a tissue. A handkerchief for all his pain. For all his grief. For the hundreds of years of being less and not knowing you are when you live in a country where everyone is less. In a rural county. Where everyone is less. Till you come here and you buy whole hands of bananas. Whole arms of bananas. So, they will, so, the greengrocer will, who you know by first name, will think you are a millionaire. You are not nobody. Your kids must be better than anyone else to make you proud. You have a triangle coffee table, and plaster plaques on the wall, of middle eastern men, until the jug cracks the sky above your kids that must try harder than anyone else and the blue

and cream jug becomes something the eldest daughter buys in flea markets for decades. Maybe she is trying to stop it from being broken. Trying to catch it in flight. Or maybe it is a twisted fantasy.

'Not another fucking jug for me to throw away when you die.' My daughter is putting herself in rehab tomorrow.

Thursday 05.03.26



Ignites

With gratitude to the Art's Council for funding. No. No. Fucking gratitude. You are just in a job. Getting money from poor people. People who buy lottery tickets not to be poor. Gratitude. It makes me furious. The fucking Art's Council. Who live in their glacial palace. With gratitude. Are you fucking kidding me. Gratitude. And we can't talk to you. While you disappear further and further up your own arse. You do not have wings. You are not a saint. A fairy. You are...

We don't need freedom because of the colour of our skin. We just need the freedom of peace. Demonstrated in the other photos Elaine has been sending me this week of her

The Gas and Dust That Orbits My Sun. 18.03.26

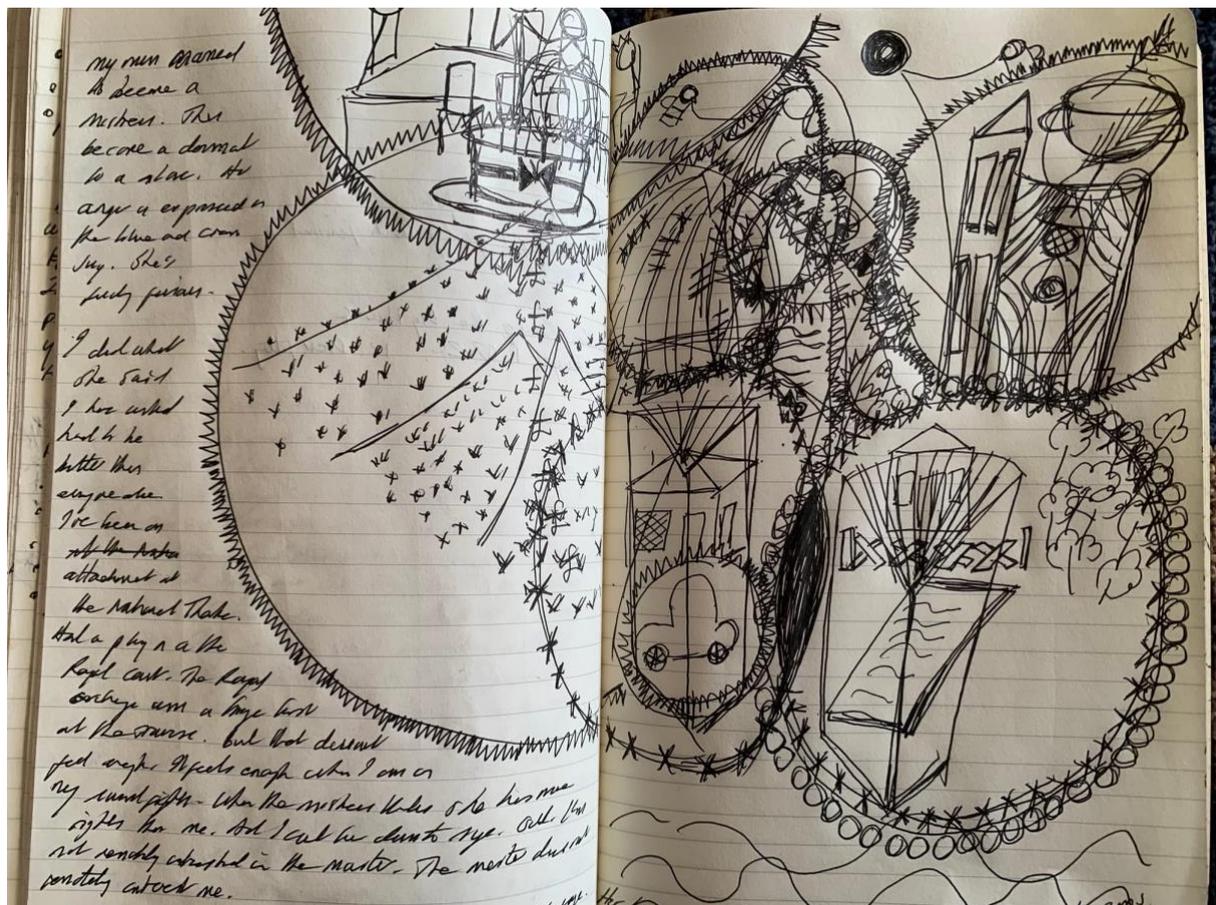
stylish sideboard and her graceful drop leaf table. And the positioning. Building her new solitary, peaceful country home. And my comments because I am the eldest. Building my solitary, peaceful country home.

Her eyes are wild. My eyes are wild. Looking through the handle of the navy Silver Cross pram. She is tiny. She can't speak. She can't walk. My hands can reach the handle. But I can't move it forward. I can't move it back. There is probably a brake that requires a lot of pressure.

I bought a new jug today. Gil Vargas. 1960. Spanish Ceramics. 2 euros. I send Elaine a picture. 'Where did you get the throw?' 'I'll take you when you come to stay.'

We are patiently, kindly, building our shared mirror as we kneel by our pond that no longer contains frogs.

Friday. 06.03.26



Ignites

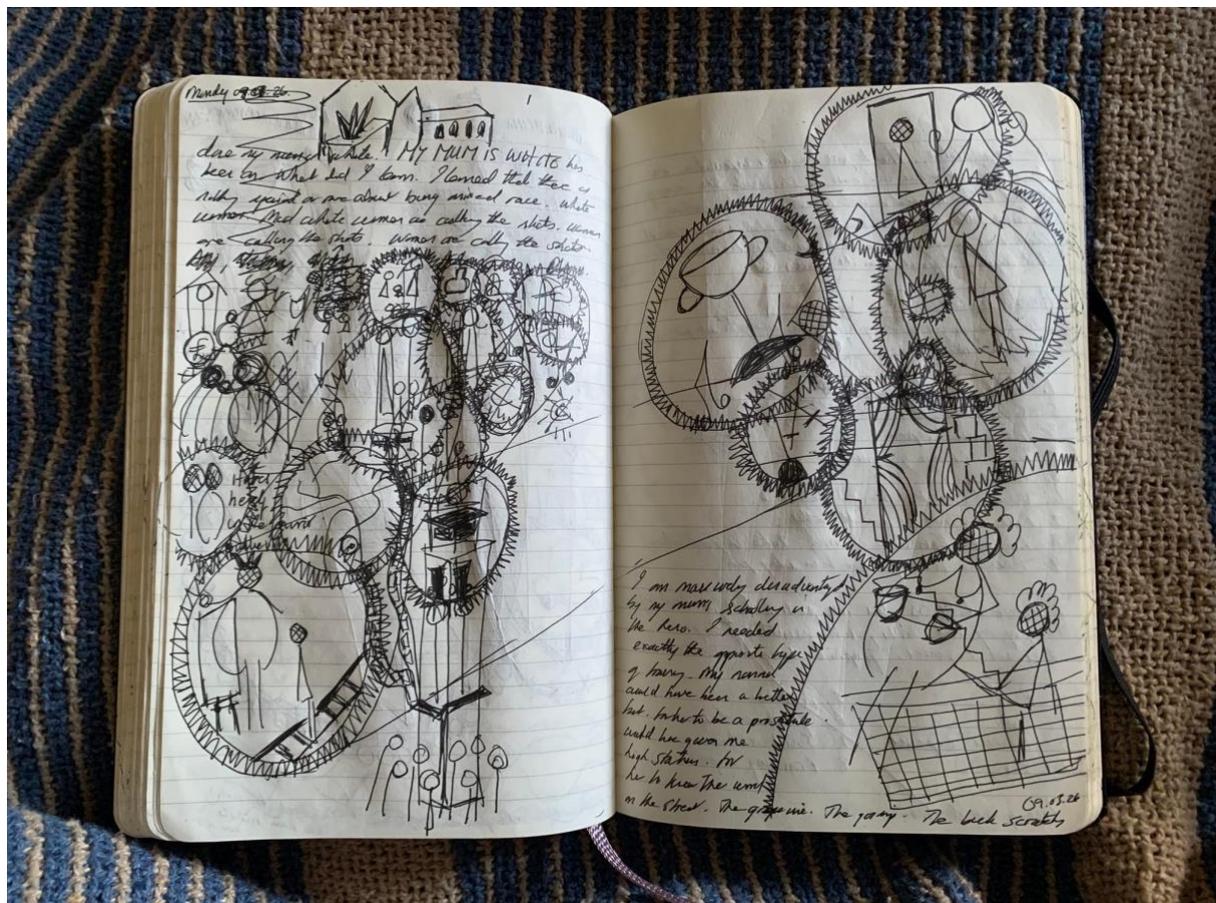
My mum marries to become a mistress. She becomes a doormat to a slave. Her anger is expressed in the blue and cream jug. She is fucking furious.

I do what she says. I work hard to be better than everyone else. I am on attachment at the National Theatre. Have a play on at the Royal Court. The Royal Exchange. Win a Fringe First at the Traverse. But this doesn't feel enough.

It feels enough when I am in sword fights. When the mistresses think they have more rights than me. And I cut each down to size. Oddly, I am not remotely interested in the master. The master doesn't remotely interest me.

Chapter 13. How Angie Kills Her Dad. Modern Stars.

Monday 09.03.26



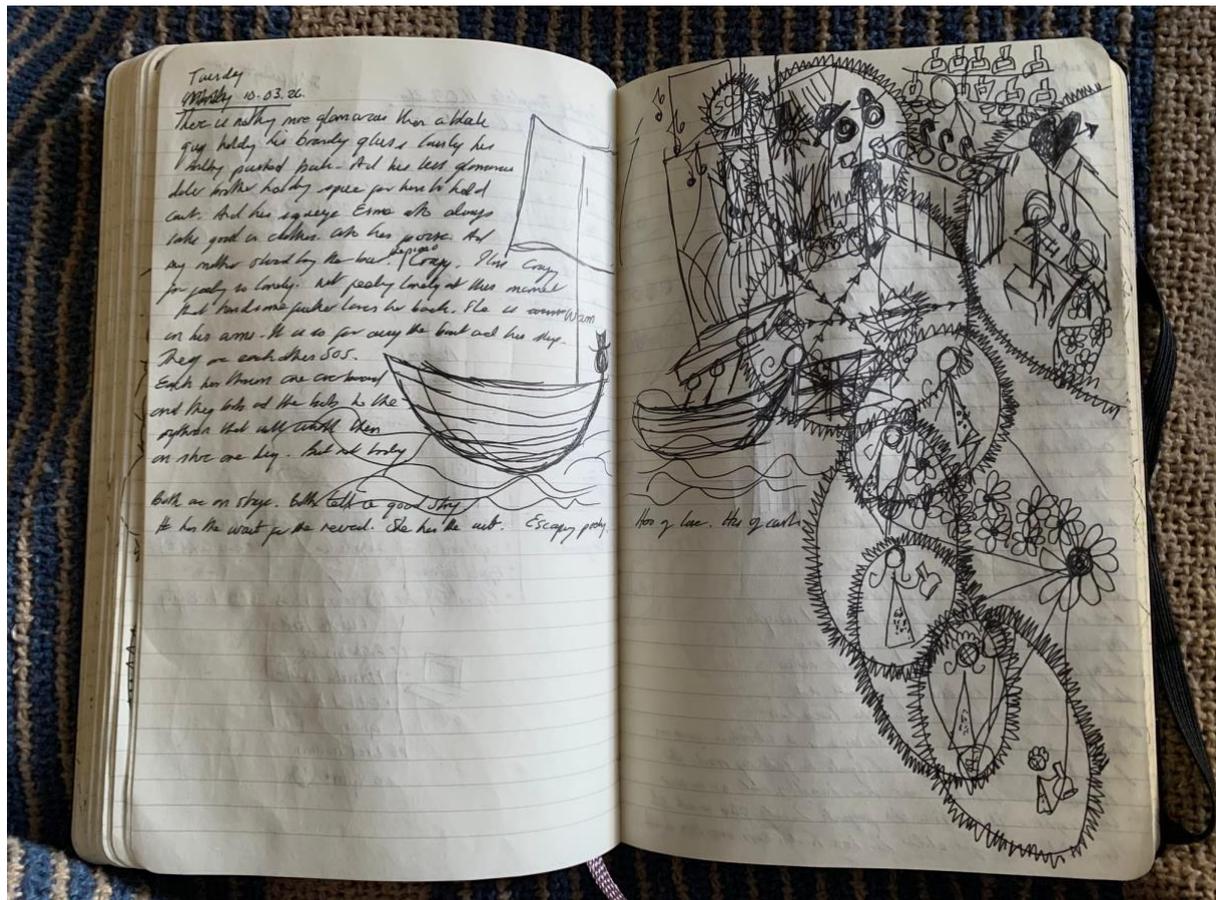
Ignites

Done my mum is white. MY MUM IS WHITE has been done. What did I learn? I learn that there is nothing special or rare about being mixed-race. White women. Mad, white women are calling the shots. Women are calling the shots. Women are calling the shots.

I am massively disadvantaged by my mum schooling me, in the Reno. I need exactly the opposite type of training. My nana would have been a better fit. For her to be a prostitute would have given me high status. For her to know the word on the street. The

grapevine. The gossip. Back scratching has high stakes. How to pass the hive's information. How to trade the here and now. The shortcut. My mum simply refuses to be lumped in with the other white women. She is better than everyone else. Her clothes are straight. There are no sequins. There is nothing to translate she does anything different than the queen.

Tuesday 10.03.26



Ignites

There is nothing more glamorous than a black guy holding his brandy glass loosely his trilby pushed back. His less glamorous older brother is holding space for my dad to hold court. And his squeeze Esme who always looks good in clothes. Who has poise. And my mother stood by the bar, the piano.

Crazy

I'm crazy for feeling so lonely

I'm crazy

Crazy for feeling so blue

I knew

You'd love me as long as you wanted

The Gas and Dust That Orbits My Sun. 18.03.26

And then someday
You'd leave me for somebody new

Worry
Why do I let myself worry?
Wondering
What in the world did I do?

Crazy
For thinking that my love could hold you
I'm crazy for trying and crazy for crying
And I'm crazy, for loving you

Crazy
For thinking that my love could hold you
I'm crazy for trying and crazy for crying
And I'm crazy, for loving you

She's not feeling lonely at this moment. That handsome fucker loves her back. She is warm in his arms. They are so far away from her boat; and his ship. They are each other's SOS.

Each has thrown a float overboard and they bob and they bob to the rhythm that will swell then hit shore one day. But not today.

Both are on stage. Both tell a good story. He has the wait for the reveal. She has the wit. Escaping poverty. Her of love. Him of cash.

Wednesday 11.03.26



Ignites

Fuck. Maybe I have a 12-seater table, maybe I descend the Bette Davis stairs in Factory International to sit at a 12-seater table because Angie has a 12-seater table. And there are 4 photos. A close up of my pram. And one of my family, of us unauthenticated kids, of us usurpers. And one of me in the Reno, waiting to go to the Reno which makes me better than everyone else. That act, that sheer will to perform that act, to excavate it, makes me indelibly better than everyone else. Then I celebrate it by declaring myself the mistress of my own plantation. Not because of my dad. I am, not because of my dad's plantation, but to usurp Angie's plantation. When they come out of the pictures that day and Angie sees them, and she runs to her dad, and her dad judges them. And maybe my mum didn't run off. Maybe they are dragged off. Could this even be to entice her back. But she can't go back. Not just cos I won't fit in. But she loves him. And he judges her. His wife is a Christian woman. I meet her on the way to Pisgah. To get my mail. Her hands are clenched over her handbag. And no one else is in sight. This is how she projects herself. This is who she is. As he gets older, he too has a cross over his head. Both of them are waiting for Old Nick. Both of them are waiting for Old Nick's judgement.

Thursday. 12.03.26



Ignites

Imagine the gossip when Angie gets home that night. 'She saw them coming out of the pictures.' 'When they took her in.' 'When she was defiled.' 'She should have known her place.'

Imagine her image in the mirror. When they took me in. When they knew I was defiled. She has a soft spot for Mr and Mrs Stanners who take the docket and bring her back shoes for the 4 kids. Who will swirl. Swirl. In my nursery, as ghosts, when she tucks me up at night. How could they not?

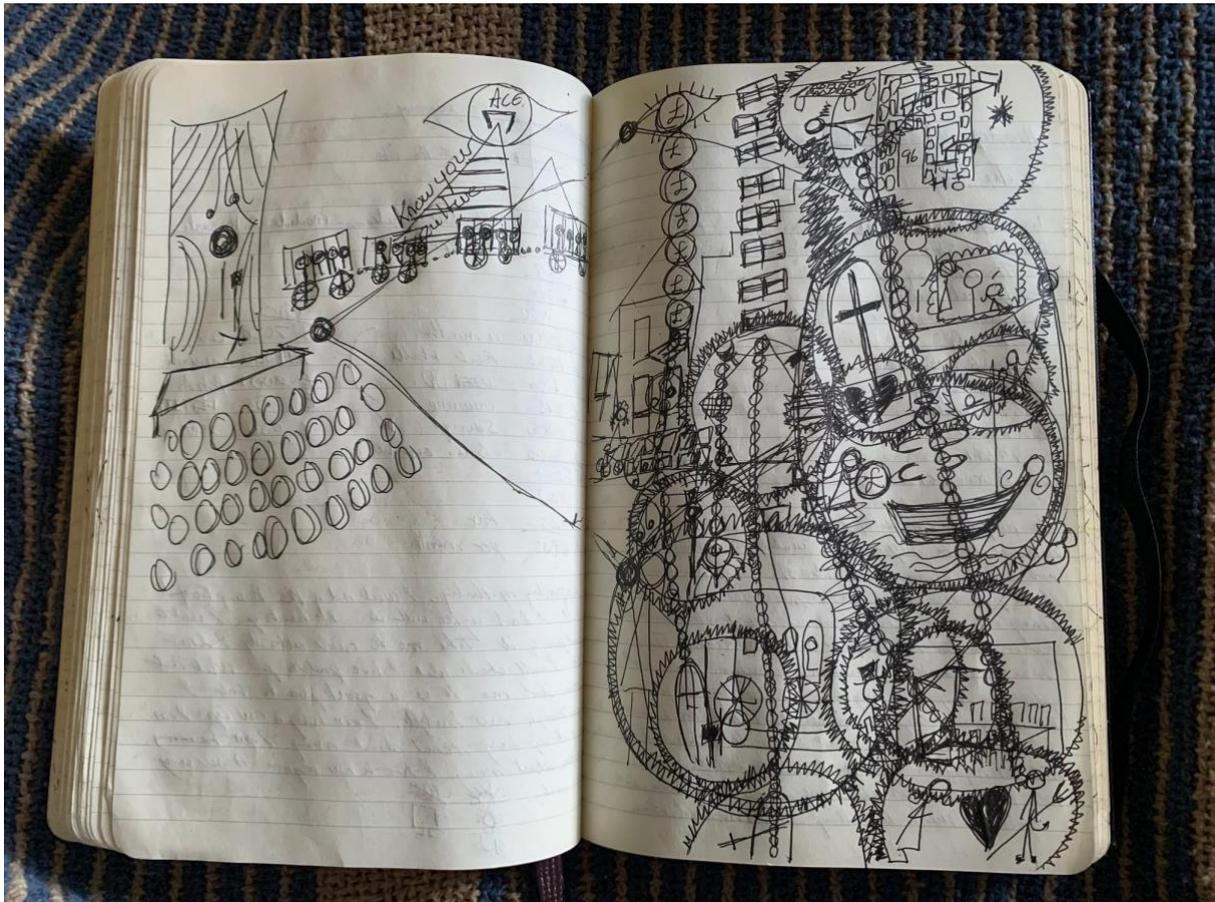
They are the mobile above my cot. You have to do better than everyone else. Because it redresses her shame. Of a man who pushes her down on a riverbank and fucks her. And then they judge her just the same. And drag her off to the Magdalene Home. Where she washes sheets for the nuns. She's never the same. When the son she has dies, she jumps out of the window. And runs back to her nana who used to weed marigolds for the priest. But no more. Cos her mum is a whore. Imagine the mirror she looks in.

But one day, as if she has been coached, she pulls up her bootstraps, and weds the most eligible bachelor. What a woman. A cathedral marriage, no less. And now she is coming out of the pictures. Probably North by NorthWest. One of the white men my dad fashions himself on. One of his heroes. They are probably laughing. I can probably hear their

laugh inside her tummy. I am in her tummy. Part of their fantasy. Part of the insanity they are telling each other. Part of what they will never get away with. She might have good days. There may be days when she picks me up and hugs me without guilt. There may be days when her fat Irish milk is given not tainted by shame. There may be days when they can look at each other in the eye and enjoy their love.

Then there is Angie. 'Dad, I saw mum coming out of the pictures with that guy who lives in her mum's house with his brother'

Friday. 13.03.26



Angie

How Angie Kills Her Dad.

Angie may have innocently told the story. She may have relished it. She may have luxuriated in it. She may not be the person I meet, yet. She may be a little girl. She is 12. She sees, she sees her mum coming out of the pictures. I'm not sure if it matters to her or not that he is black. They mix well. They have the same kind of sentence structure. Long. With flowers. They love language. Naturally. Infectiously. This is my stereotype of black men and Irish women. I know one black man. But I also know his brothers. And his nephews. Who come to borrow money. Not ugly-like. Not because they are in trouble. But because this is how they trust each other. They turn up to the front room. We are

never allowed in the front room. This is the men's hut. More stereotype from me. More misogyny. More culturally sticking them all together. He goes into the front room with his family. They drink rum. Not in the way I view white men together stereotypically drinking rum. It's not to get drunk. I think you can't have an empty hand when family come round, and you are the man. The host. The god. He views himself as a god. They are expected to view him as such too. I don't know how and I don't know why. Maybe, because Miss Peggy loves him so much and she can, no, he can wrap her around his little finger. Or maybe they remember her in the pub with her big lungs and her white woman Ella Fitzgerald. A tisket. A tasket. Summertime. And the living is easy. We know she is feeling good when she sings this. Summertime and the living is easy. Your daddy's rich. And your mamma's good looking. There is a time in the halcyon period when this is true. When they are the hosts. Before Angie's dad dies. And they begin their ascent up the property ladder. When Angie comes, the messenger again. 'Under the back wheels of the bus.' He has fallen under the back wheels of the bus. The red bus. With an open platform. His alcoholism worse when she leaves him. He turns up at Maine Rd. Our house with the plaster plaques. Where the blue and white jug flies. He begs her to come back. My dad sits him down at the triangle table. Which is not quite big enough to hold both their glasses. You can see his suits have been good once. And she gives him dinner. He is a walking tragedy. After she upends his 12-seater table.

A Greek tragedy. When she sails. Making a pact with the gods. A pilgrimage to see the 3 kids she left behind. In return she's asking them to heal her sick heart. And make him love her again. 'Make him love me again.' Her first attempt is crossing the sea back to Ireland. A pact with the gods. And a ruse with him. Will he miss me? Will he want me back? The games grow and they grow till one day she calls death. She asks it to hold the bottle while she takes the pills. Strewn across the table. The ugly cold tile-topped table that replaces the trendy warm triangle table. She is on the floor. There is piss and vomit when Elaine comes home from school. He steps over her like niche is new. The pawns call the ambulance in the latest phase of their love story.

And the Arts Council on Mount Olympus. No, stop right there. Stop there. What the ... I remember ages ago, and I don't know where it began, when people began to look at mixed-race. And the latest put down is — 'They don't know their culture.' 'They need to know their culture.' A myth. Let me tell you this — my dad is not a pan of rice and peas, or reggae, or ginger beer, or braiding your fucking hair. He is up and down and round and about and in and out and happy and sad. And the Gods hold him by the legs, stationary on their chess board, immobile, immovable, and say, 'Tell us what he is like as long as he is like this and we will give you a leg up in the arts.'