

MONOLOGUES, VERSES, SONNETS

A collection of work from across
prisons in the North West.

NOVUS 
FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE ®

**SHAKESPEARE
NORTH PLAYHOUSE**

A VOICE YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD

This collection of work' comes from a collaboration between Novus and Shakespeare North Playhouse, working with learners in prison across 13 establishments.

It started with a simple idea: reading doesn't have to be hard or out of reach. It can be spoken, shared, and brought to life.

Through short speeches, poems, sonnets and monologues, Novus learners were given the chance to read out loud, perform, and try something new. Many didn't think they could do it at first. Some had never enjoyed reading before.

But things changed.

They found confidence.

They found their voice.

They realised they had stories to tell.

Shakespeare, which can feel distant or difficult, became something real, something you can hear, speak and understand.

The pieces in this book are honest, creative and full of different voices. They show what can happen when people are given the space to try, to speak, and to be heard.

This book is for anyone.

Because everyone has a voice, sometimes it just needs the chance to be heard.

Ascension

The light that flooded the doorway was searing. As I gazed I could feel the blinding intensity. My body froze, like a state of paralysis. I literally could not move.

Had my time finally come?
Is this what ascension looks and feels like?

The feeling felt like an eternity, was this a sign?
Was this heaven?

My body shuddered at the prospect of leaving the life that I had lived for so long behind.

That warm light that cascaded down and enveloped me now felt cold, distant and empty.

Had I arrived?
Was this my final destination?

Was there no going back?
Would I ever get the chance to rectify all my mistakes, even just to say I'm sorry?

Had I took the wrong turn!

The Way He Opened My Eyes

The way he opened my eyes
was a thing of fate.
When he gets upset and cries
is a state I come to hate.

I miss him like mad,
my one and only son.
Everyday I'm sad
but soon it will be done.

My love for you is rare,
it's clear for all to see.
No bond can compare,
the bond between you and me.

I love you to the moon
and we will be together soon.

Star-crossed Love

Lovers star-crossed they said.
Didn't mean we had to end up dead.
Why did others' pain infect our lives.
And cause our castles to crumble.

The walls built to protect us.
Stand no more, now all are dust.
Their splendour a footnote in history.
Yet our love now eternal mythology.

Verona weeps and families mourn.
As age old strife is shed and shorn.
Civil blood, civil hands unclean.
Forgotten now as we set new scenes.

Yet what remains is a tale of love.
Only marred by terrible words.

Judgement

It's hard for people to believe I can do hair. I dunno why! We get misconceived and misjudged in this life we live.

Because we're in jail. Because we have broken childhoods. Because we look anti-social. Because we do the unthinkable. Because we have been in the system too long!

We're judged every second, every minute, every hour, every day for the rest of our lives... DAY in DAY out.

When we try to do better, try make people feel better, try make people look better or try make people do better – we get judged!

YES I can cut hair properly! What are you asking that for?

YES I can do women's hair! Why would you think that I couldn't?

YES I can plait, cornrow and braid my own hair! Why do you think I can't?

Because we are judged DAY in DAY out!

We may do bad things... but remember you don't know my past, what I've been through and what I've done to get to this stage.

NEVER! I said NEVER!... judge a book by its cover.

Jail has bad people in it, but it's also full of people – good people who do bad things, and I'm one of them.

So please don't judge.

Your Eyes

Your eyes, a silent movie,
In shades of grey they tell me
More than words can ever say.
In those eyes my own gentle heaven,
A release from torment, from prison
And the path to a brighter day.

Your smile, most wondrous of sights,
The memories of which keeps alight
The embers of my once shattered heart.
And gently eases years of hurt.
This light now burns bright, it blinds me – a candle in the dark.
It guides me to the edge of love's perilous abyss where beauty reigns immortal.

Distant Love

Distant zephyrs carry distant love
Words never again unspoken, now said
Barriers to happiness now removed
As hunger for love is once more fed

Simple words deconstructed to ones and zeros
As telephone calls encode our conversations
My heart now burns as Rome under Nero
Leaves me in a stage of lamentation

But time destroys everything and turns to dust
All we built, our dreams, our hopes.
The framework of our lives now turned to rust
Memories gone now lost in the scope

Of a judge's gavel and his sentence passed
Now left bereft, I hope and alone at last.

Hurt People Hurt People

I've always said 'Hurt people hurt people'
That's how it is and will always be
It's not about whether you're good or you're evil
I know this for a fact. I'm talking 'bout me

Sometimes we lash out at those who we love
Sometimes we hold back from doing what's right
Whatever we do, is it ever enough?
These are the thoughts that trouble me at night

But what about people who haven't been hurt?
Why would they strike out without any cause?
If you're feeling good, why treat someone like dirt?
There are some born in peace, but they still fight in wars

'Hurt people hurt people' will always be true.
But just people hurt people. That's what they do.

Inspiration

I wish I could compose gilded words
And lay out your wishes like scenes of a play,
But if circumstances were so different
There would be so much I would say.
In between waves there'd be no mistakes,
No confusion, no doubt, no words left unsaid.

You're my inspiration, my muse.
No words left in my life without you
When you like, you make me believe
There is nothing I cannot achieve.

But with each goodbye, each time you leave,
I feel like I'm drowning.

The stars, sun, no moon no longer shine
As all unsaid I love yous remain hidden between the lines.

Zak in The Park

A short scene about 'A' - a 50 year old Pakistani man from Small Heath, Birmingham. The scene takes place at 8am whilst he takes his bull-terrier Zak for a walk.

A: Come on, Zak- get your lead. I'll meet you downstairs in a minute. Let's go to the park

Zak: (excitedly wagging his tail) Whoof Whoof!
Gets his lead in his mouth and waits at the front door.

A: Let me get my watch and some money so I can get you a treat and get myself some chips on the way home.

'A' puts Zak on the lead. They walk into the park and 'A' lets Zak off the lead.

A: You have a run! (to himself) I'm going to get some ice cream.

A dog warden rushes less than a minute later.

Warden: I've just seen your dog have a crap and you just walked away.
There are children in this park and other dog walker. Do you think it's acceptable to leave your dog's mess?

A: Who the hell you talking to? Me? Or the dog?

Warden: Get your dog on the lead now and pick up that mess, then get gone!

The warden attempts to wrangle Zak but cannot, he accidentally kicks the dog and whilst 'A' is a bit deaf, he's not blind so he starts going mad. He grabs the warden by his neck.

A: Why you kick me dog?

Zak suddenly goes for the Warden and is biting him.

A: (shouting urgently) Quick mucker, let's go!

ENDS

Roots

We all have roots unique to us,
One in a million like the DNA that's in our blood.
From walking to school or riding the bus,
To doing things you never knew you would,

Starting off as a baby watching cartoons,
Preserving the innocence that comes with our youth,
Playing out in the street and acting like buffoons,
Home for 4:30 to watch my favourite cartoon sleuth.

As the years progress the innocence dies,
From playing in the street to petty crimes,
Trapped in a vicious cycle of deceit and lies,
Mum's hearts been broken one too many times.

Level playing fields, ha there's no such thing,
You gotta bluff your hand if you want to be the king.

Market Rant

A market stall holder has a moment of release tells Sharon what they really think.

Stall Holder: "I'm getting bloody sick of this! Past 20 years I've worked hard on this market and the owners have no respect. They say jump, we say how high — that's what they expect. Well no more Sharon, it's getting beyond a joke. Closing down all the stalls to make a bloody car park. Like there isn't one 2 mins away and 5 minutes away and 10 mins away. I'm handing my notice before they give me theirs and that's a promise. I'll quit before they close the place down because our notice is on it's way, mark my words!

"Jack over the way got his just this morning. I've got the stress from this place, Jeff being a mard arse and Gareth and Cami are arguing again. Not having it Sharon. I'm booking a holiday love, I'll see you in two weeks."

John le Drape, a 32 year old car mechanic from Bolton, currently living in a run-down flat-share in a dodgy part of town. His best mate, George Frownie, has just asked him, "If you could go back and speak to yourself 15 years ago, what would you say?"

John (to his imagined past self): "Hey John, you're about to be faced with several decisions that could – and probably will – have a huge effect on your whole life.

"You finished school last year with decent enough grades and decided to do mechanics at college. Even though it's quite limited, if you knuckle down and take it seriously, you can make a decent living and have a comfortable life. It will probably mean five years of working hard and doing long hours, but it will be worth it."

(sighs)

"Next month is your 18th. I regret 90% of what I remember from that night. I went out with a load of scrotes from college that I hardly knew, got pissed, and took any drug they offered me. I can't remember how the night ended but I woke up with a broken nose and bruised knuckles.

"From that day on I was hooked the lifestyle and ended up living with a few of them 'mates'.

"I scraped through college and now I pick up odd shifts at a local garage that barely cover my drugs and rent – in that order. I'll leave the choice to you, but I know what my choice would be."

An Anonymous Mechanic, living in Salford, talks to his best friend Matthew. His biggest dream is owning his own business...

Mechanic: "I need to start my own business. I have an original idea. No one has thought of this before. It's a combination of a cat café and a car garage. I'm going to call it Meow-chanics!

"It's a simple concept. I'll fix your car whilst you wait with a load of pussies – erm – I mean cats. I'll be the Hooters of the car world.

"You're not getting it, are you? Have you ever been sat in a garage for hours, getting your car fixed or serviced? It's a ball ache. I'm going to solve that. Now you'll be able to relax with a load of cats, or play with them using the cat toys provided.

"It might be a niche market, but this time next year, Matthew: we'll be millionaires."

Fortune Cookie

Roses are red, violets are blue
Farther and farther we go
My best work comes while I'm doing a poo
I will get to the top, I know

Life goes round and round, hand in hand
Like the ocean we go back to our creator
Billions of people like grains of sand
Just like curtains close at the theatre

So many beautiful women to be found
I don't know where to look
One quick glance – I love when they turn around
So much info to go in a book

I can see so much lust in their eyes
But when they die they cry

indicates emotionless monotone

indicates flurry of passion

indicates 'electric buzzz'

* complete darkness, only characters voice *

My life... has become confusing, almost unreal. Each day I wake when the sun hits our lodgings, and the scent from the wild flowers outside fill me with such hope, exhilaration!, but also with dread and confusion.... because I can't remember a lot from the day before.

My name is -----. My family and I rise exactly the same each day, with almost amnesia. Then people come and force us outside to work. As soon as we're out, though, 'freedom' hits us, and we fly to work as if it were our first day. When we were free, we loved our job. Working all day in the field, surrounded by friends and family. It's like we were supposed to do it, designed to do it... like it's a part of our very D.N.A!

That was until our matriarch was tricked into moving to new pastures afar. Now every day is the same. We wake up, we work, and return 'home' with our produce. Every now and then, 'The People' who control us, come and pillage us. After we've worked so hard, and we're proud of our work, it's all taken away. Next day, same thing...

So today is the day... !... Essccaappeel

* light fades up to reveal a bumblebee *

A Lost Soul

A lost soul speaks to their mum in a moment of struggle.

Them: Mum I need to come and see you.
It's important.

I feel rejected and isolated from you all at the moment.
I'm losing hope in myself, I've got things going round my head.
If I don't say it now, I probably never will. So here it goes...

Why is this family so broken? You're my mother & I need to know you've got my back.

You act like my business ideas aren't valid.
I've escaped to England to find myself but I realise now I need to be at home around people that love me.

Gym

They say that I am always down the gym
I want it to be open and not shut
I go there to get big, not to get thin
I need to train when my head's in a rut

A pint of water's better than a gin
And I feel good since I started to train
The water's also good for healthy skin
I've even thought of dancing in the rain.

I think it's really healthy to keep fit
And when I train I'll drink a protein shake
I've never even thought that I should quit.
I work so hard I never take a break

For better mental health and staying trim
I love the gym it's always a win-win!

Well Done

The jobs now done
Well done,
Don't tell no one anything
Keep your mouth shut
Don't go spending silly money
We had a good run
What a touch
What a send off
Go and enjoy yourself
Enjoy yourself
Look after your kids
Proud of us, boys
We did it
Gutted it's the last one but age is kicking in
So good luck fellas!!

Monologue of Grief

----- is sat on his own, looking across at his family.

I was her favourite grandson. The only one who cared!
I am devastated!
Nobody knows what she meant to me...
Look at them, looking at me in pity... Mum... Dad... my Sisters...
No one loved her as much as me and they know it..!

He puts his head in his arms and sobs, looking at his grandmother's coffin ahead.

Look at my so-called family over there..! They couldn't wait to put her in a care home.
I was the only one out of all of us who regularly visited..! And now we're at her funeral!

Joe looks at his families grief and thinks on in anger.

They're just acting like they cared...
I loved her the most!. I am overwhelmed with grief that she's gone...
I would do anything just to have her back. And them..!
They're probably counting the silver already..!
Oh how I miss her.

A Soldiers Soliloquy

(turns to speak to comrade) I can't believe I'm in a Chinook...

(leans out of window) Flying over the UAE...

(hands in air) To fight a war I don't even want to be involved in.

(slams foot) I'm so angry right now!!!

(hand in air) Why me? I only had six months left of service.

(fed up) And now I'm stuck here in a warzone, fighting somebody else's fight.

(sighs) Aww well there's no point dwelling on things I can't change. I'm here to do a job and keep people safe and I suppose that's exactly what I'll do.

(speaks to comrade) One day we'll look back at this and have a sense of pride, and know we stood for something... Something bigger and better than ourselves.

A Fishing Soliloquy

Wow!! That's a big one!!

All I can feel is the rush of excitement.

The adventure and blood rushing
through my veins from the bite alarm.

Screaming in my ears. I know this fish...

I've ever caught my Grandad hasn't got any sons.

I am the son he never had.

I have always looked up to him.

He is the father figure I needed in my life.

A prisoner. Locked away. Angry. Upset. Shocked. Reflecting on there situation.

Prisoner:

(Sitting on the bed) I can't believe I'm here, I never thought I'd be in this situation again.

(Shouts, hands on head) Wow! Unbelievable!

(Stand up paces about hands on head) I'm so annoyed, I have been stitched up by my brief. No way! 4 Years!

(Sad look) I should be home with my family, instead I'm here passing time.

(Sighs) Oh well! What can I do about it?

(Hands out wide pushes chest out) I suppose I best make the most of my time. Get to the gym and get fit, clear my head....

(Sits back down, laughs shakes head) I bet I'll look back on all this in a few years and laugh about this! Oh well! Let's get on with it!

Someone has Gambled Away Their Holiday Funds

Someone: OMG WTF I've gambled my spending money in the book makers! I had £4,000 in cash on me! I was on the way to change the money in the exchange for dollars. When I popped into the bookmakers whilst I waited for the Money Shop to open... It opens in 1 Hour... In that hour I lost £3,200!

Reality hit me. I was really disappointed. I had a lot of pressure on me too. I knew I had to do something to get my money back. Had five days before my holiday days... The clock is ticking.

I kept everything secret. I told my partner I had changed my the money and everything's all good.

The next fewdays were anxious and getting desperate. Something needed to get done. I needed cash ASAP. I try a few things but nothing good was going my way. Now it was Wednesday night, things were getting really desperate. I stayed out all night driving around. It goes into Thursday morning where I see a security van that picks up money from businesses around the area.

I think to myself, this is it!

My Dog Chester

I get my coat and I get the lead.
Time to walk my Chihuahua pup
He's calmer now he's had his feed
He sits in my hand like a tiny tea cup.

Now the dog has seen the snow. He don't want to go!
Gosh, its freezing, such a windy day
You can't see him, covered in snow.
He's so tiny I hope he won't blow away

Trust me to bump into annoying Frank
He'll have me talking all day,
I can't stand him. he's such a crank!
He's always on the tap. I wish I'd gone the other way.

"Bye Frank gotta go, the dog needs a wee"
Thank God for that, I need a warm cup of tea...

Working Away (On A Train)

Excuse me, is it alright if I sit at the table opposite you? Oh thank you, that's so nice of you to put my bags up there for me. It's all really exciting for me you know. First time I've ever left the city, ever, in my life.

I've been given a place to stay, for 8 months, for work you know, to cover after another girl who's off on maternity leave. I'll be up there doing my job see, they said I could go coz I'm good at it. So here I am. I like my job.

Of course I know that it's smaller than the city, like, no airport and not even any trams. I'll have to rely on buses like everyone else does.

Oh is that true, biggest town without a 24-hour Tesco. What, just a small Tesco Express opposite the post office? Really, there's a big Waitrose in town centre by train station. And we go under it on the train? I had heard it's a spa town; well-to-do folk came for the hot springs. All sounds a bit posh to me. Never mind I'm sure I'll be able to settle in...

I can't find any bands on tour stopping here, maybe they don't need a venue for that, like. Well the biggest event is the annual Yorkshire Show, for farmers, Best Bulls, Fattest Pigs, Cutest Lamb. Sheep dog trials and farm equipment like combine harvesters, tractors and ploughs. Reckon night life could be a bit limited. This is going to be a cold lonely winter.

The most popular shop in the town centre is a Tea Room?! Where they serve cream tea and cakes? Oh, I used to like rooting through the indoor market back in the city you know, looking for bags and accessories and stuff or going to the little shops by the uni to unique, second hand skirts and tops and things like that... suppose I'll have to buy me crap online more you know, as I'm IN THE WILDERNESS!

But lip gloss, eye liner and make-up has gotten to be bought in person like. I will just not feel right if I can't make myself an then look good every day. This place is worrying me, makes me sad thinking how long I'm gonna be stuck here.

(sniff) I really hope I can find a nice nail bar somewhere, it's important to look after me hands, you know... Oh dear. OH MY GOD! I will absolutely die, if there are no trendy hair stylist to be found anywhere in Harrogate.

(Long wail)

Waiting For..?

How did it come to this? Last minute and I have to write a monologue for this afternoon: I've had a week now, since last Monday to get this written but somehow there has never been the time.

I can't see how that has happened, after all we have not been to the workshop at all, constant shortage of staff. How do they get away with so many off sick every single day? That's beside the point, after all it just means I surely could have composed this speech by now.

Mind you, there has been live football on, not just all weekend, but every night and its getting near the end of the season which means each match was important one way or the other.

And during the day I've had to get my washing done, mop the floor of my cell and get on the touch-screen thing, when it's working, to put my dinner orders in, fill out my shopping list, book a dentist appointment and sign on for the Old-Man's Club.

Of course I also needed to get into the cleaning cupboard for some washing up liquid. And I had to ask at the office for the washing powder sheet thing, then my bloody plastic fork snapped, so I had to get a new one.

Well, it seems I have been busy, all these jobs take time. Waiting time. For someone to unlock cupboards, waiting to get things out the office. Waiting for a washing machine to be free.

Heatwave

In the sun
Sitting on the grass, in glorious weather,
listening to the little birds singing
Just all the girls, chilling together,
I could never imagined this at the beginning.

Having a laugh and joking around,
Who would have thought it would be like this
it's so nice to be sat on the warm ground,
Being in nature is what I miss.

Making the most of the scorching sun.
An hour outside doesn't seem enough,
Do we have to go in? We're all having fun
These are the days that are tough!

Who would have thought we were in jail today,
Wonder if we'll be allowed out tomorrow to play

To My Beautiful Mum

Mum, it has been 2 years 2 months since you been gone
it doesn't get any easier as time passes by
Without you I feel ever so lost and alone
thinking of you makes me wanna cry

You carried me for 9 months in your tummy
You're the one who brought me into this world
I want you to know you're my number 1 mummy
When I heard the news I cried as my emotions swirled

If you were here right now you will be ever so proud
You're the brightest star in the night sky
You always stood out from the largest crowd
I was never ready to say a big bye

I want you to know I love you ever so dearly
I really mean that sincerely

I miss you mum forever
in my thoughts and mind

A Learner Sits in the Prison Library finding peace and quiet.

Learner: I like it in here. Once a week, I get to go the library. It's quiet here. You can get away from the noise of the wing: shouts echoing and bouncing off each wing into the centre. Every time the general alarm goes off, it goes through me. I freeze for 3 seconds and can't move. But here, I feel calm. I'm not overwhelmed. My anxiety is reduced.

The thing about reading is it's a distraction. It takes me away from this environment. I could be in a fantasy novel or a sci-fi - instead of this place. I'm thinking about being a Mage producing fire or being a biotic lifting my opponent off their feet.

It's one of the few things I look forward to in here. It gives me some hope for the future. I want to get access to a bigger library. I've been here for a few years and to be honest, I've read most of the books. I need new stories, learn new things, to progress new skills for when I go out.

Thirsty Google

A Salesperson has a crisis...

Flippin Eck!

These new sales/money making targets are unreal! It's almost a boiler scam!

Cold calling, hard selling. Am I going to survive?

I'm sweating, cringing in this new enterprise with no possibility of check out!

I'm tired, exhausted, suffocating under the enormous weight of expectation to make money for this firm.

Keep my house, feed my wife and kids.

I feel paralysed, yet hypersensitive to pain and movement.

(something changes)

What's this! I'm floating above the Earth. I feel no more pain and exhaustion. I am now comfortably numb outside myself. This enormous black, blue & white expansion is filling me everywhere. I am neutral. I now have a mild sense of release and well-being. Ah! bright brilliant light! It seems that the Sun is filling my eyes.

I started I.T. today
Using drinking water when the third world can't have it clean
The teacher tried persuading me to stay
Kids dying because politicians are mean

We've been sending aid for tons of years
Where is all the money going?
Still got people in tears
The charities have always been flowing

Why are they still in this position?
We need to be more aware
The world needs to make a decision
Give up using search engines if you dare

When will the third world end
it's sending me round the bend!

Collapsible

Like melted chocolate in the sun
together hand-in-hand.
Looking into the eyes I've won,
Meeting his every demand
my ride or die.
Always and forever...
the Sun in my sky.

We ride together
Together 'till the end.
Our hearts merge as one
He is my best friend,
the rest is yet to come!

Would I be insane
to take a bullet to the brain?

A woman sitting opposite a man. We don't know if this is a first date or someone she has been with for years. Her mind is wandering and she is becoming more and more paranoid as the meal continues. This is an internal monologue which spills out into her speech.

Woman: I start talking to myself.
I like that chair. Do you like that chair? I feel like that chair.
What am I saying? I still like that chair.
It's just like me, just stuck there. Why are people staring at me. Is it because I'm talking to myself?

What do I care? I'm being me.
The deck chair is 'green' like me. So still.
Voice over my shoulder.

What are you looking at? Stop staring at me. Why look at me like that?
I wasn't talking to you anyway.
That chair is collapsible like me.

Derek is listening to me now. I can't look at that punchable face (she laughs).
I feel like that chair. I wonder what that chair is thinking. Should I feel it?
Hmm, I wonder if that chair is comfy. Sat on my chair, the comfy green chair,
I would really like one of those chairs.

My tiny meal. I didn't eat much of it. Is Derek going to pay for my tiny meal?
I want that chair.
Why is Derek looking at me? He's paid for my tiny meal.
If I'd known. I would have ordered a larger meal.

I want that chair. A solid one for the garden.
I like that chair. Why are you staring at me?
Where was I?
Oh - that chair.
It is lonely. I am lonely.

Dementia

Why is the past so clear?
Full of Love and smiles
Today Fills me with fear
To remember I would walk miles.

Oh I miss my wife
What a beauty she was
Such a lovely long life
Why can't I be Us.

The Dr called today
he is a nice man
Oh what did he say
I really need a plan

My children are grown
Now what are their names
The time it has flown
Is that their face in the frame

I think it's time for tea
Sadly it is just for me.

The Love

The love I have for her, it is just unreal.
She has honestly saved me.
I have never felt love like this before.
She's... She's the best thing that has happened to me.

But now I just feel useless. I can't see her. I'm relying on a phone call once a day. It is so bad ... Am powerless.
I can't be here like I was before.

My mind wanders... Am just... Am just... just so scared to lose her.
I'll be lost without her.

It's just so difficult being away from her. I miss seeing her laugh, her smile, and her pretty face. She really is everything to me.

My family look after her but... but it isn't the same...It... It should be me.

My spark has gone. I'm just... just a lonely pawn on a chess board... all alone.

Yeah, I have a few mates in here, but I'm alone. I'm at a low point in my life.

But it has to get better... doesn't it?
There surely has to be more to life!

Am just stuck on pause... I have to go on... Not just for me but for her and my family.

I just miss them, man.
Words can't express the way I feel, but I... I power through each day for them.

They're my first thought in the morning and my last thought at night.

I hope they're okay.
I will see them again soon.

One day it will be over... and I can't wait for that day to come.

Homesickness

I am 18 years old, and I live in Scotland.

For the past couple of years, I've been taking care of my mum. She hasn't been the same since Dad passed away... she hasn't coped at all.

Recently, me and my mate took a three-day training exercise as an introduction to the Navy. It went very well... and we've now been offered an 18-week basic training course to join full time. The only problem is... it's in Southampton.

And I don't want to leave my mother alone. I was only away for three days last time, and when I got home... she was a mess.

If only there was some way I could help her... build her up... make her function properly. At least that way I could start the conversation with her about me leaving. Then I would know she would be okay... able to cope without me. Then I would be able to start my own journey... my own adventure...

My own life.

First James Concert

Build up to the big day going to see James live at Winter Gardens in Blackpool.

Mike: I'm Mike, I've just turned 21. I have been out of the army for 6 months. After years of short back and sides I have grown my hair long reaching halfway down my back.

Me and 4 mates have managed to get tickets for a live gig by James in Blackpool. Excitement is growing as the day nears.

Finally day has arrived. we travelled by bus to Manchester Piccadilly train station and jumped on our train to Blackpool the expectations growing the nearer we got to Blackpool. We left the station and made our way to our BnB for our stay. We booked in and threw our clothes on our beds and got changed into our party get up. I'm dressed in a loose and baggy white hooded tracksuit and a black top with a James flower emblazoned on the front.

We all met up outside the BnB and made our way to winter gardens for what we were expecting to be the night of our lives. We made our way in and the music started and within minutes we had lost each other in the crowd.

This was the first night out in months, the atmosphere is electric you can almost feel the music in your bones. I was dancing like it was going out of fashion. My whole body was writhing to the music. Sweating so bad I had to keep pouring bottled water over my head to cool down and every time I did, I shook my head and the water went over anybody near.

I didn't have a care in the world at this moment and am totally lost in the music. I couldn't believe what happened next as my eyes were closed and I was being taken to the next level of enjoyment...

All of a sudden in the middle of sit down the music stopped I heard Tim Booth - the lead singer - shout out "HEY LOOK BEHIND YOU!".

I opened my eyes and looked around and to my amazement the whole audience was sat down bar me which made me shake my head, throw my arms and dance even harder. The music started up again and I felt on top of the world.

I couldn't believe this night would ever be met. One of the best nights of my life and a memory for all time was being made this night.

The Valentine's Incident

So, the valentine's Incident then... you... you need to understand how much I felt for this girl, you know... she was all I could think about... like this strong feeling... like love. I loved her... I mean, like that first proper love when you know its beyond "fancying" ... when the feelings convince you that this is the most important... the first ever... ever time a person in the history of the world has felt love like this, you know. At times I was sure my head was going to explode... god... extreme but I need you to properly understand how I felt about her, yeah. The intensity was overwhelming... but... but unless I did something nothing would... was going to change... I'd die of suffocation as the feelings strangled me... but anyway, so I had one of those ideas, you know, the type that seems like a good one at the time but later on you're not so sure... right, so my hundred percent perfect idea... a Valentine's card for her. The execution of this amazing idea would be on the Saturday before the big day. Saturday arrived. I asked myself if this was a good idea, myself replied that this was the greatest idea in the history of great ideas... yeah. Anyway, off I skipped to Woolworths... okay, so not skipping, but there was a bounce in my steps... the best thing to do... we'd tell this story in the future, the moment we became girlfriend and boyfriend... like in films... on TV... in songs... you know, it always... always worked, trust me. I scanned the card rack... country companions ... the hedgehog cards... a hedgehog holding a heart... cute... to the point... stylish. Compared to Purple Ronnie and Groovy Chick. Can't really remember what I wrote, it was short though, there was a lot of potential for ridicule with this. Releasing feelings equals ridicule is what I'd learnt from my family. I did sign it 'D' as a clue, a mystery though. No-one was going to claim they sent this card... this wasn't a 'Neighbours' farcical storyline. This was my card! Although not enough to put my name on it properly. So the final part., the delivery. The night before, I walked to hers and trying not to rattle the letterbox, posted it... and.. ran away... the spirit of Valentine's was alive! Mission complete! She just needed to solve the mystery, give me a knowing look... perfect. Okay. So after this bold move I had nerves going in school. Professing love isn't something done without a lot of courage... but then I was the only one who knew so shouldn't be nervous. unless, she'd already worked it out... but she hadn't. In fact it was spiralling in a different direction, rapidly... you see... as I walked to my classroom I didn't think I'd see an energetic huddle clearly talking about the card. My card. My card given with love. My eyes avoided the scene, fearing an unmasking. I sat on the quad steps... listening... her voice was

anxious, her words worried... her friends tried to reassure her it wasn't what she thought... it wasn't from the creepy guy next door. So, you know, panicked. This wasn't going how I'd planned... my card... with the right intentions... with love. Delivered from my ideal imaginary world... Into her real world. I froze. Honestly, believe me, I wanted to say something... that it was from me... don't worry, something like that... but I was scared, too fucking scared. Of rejection. Of ridicule. Whatever. I didn't have much with her but... but sharing this would end it and... and I didn't want that. After this the space between us was huge... but there was still hope... TV, films, taught people like me to not give up... don't give up. The bubble hadn't quite burst.

Life Being A Football Player

When I play football it's a great feeling.
The sound of the fans finally believing.
Fireworks of the fans taking of the ceiling.
Scoring then running towards fans kneeling.
The smell of the food in the air as I run.
And the amazing feeling that we've won.

We're together having lots of fun.
The ball flying like a bullet let from a gun.
The manager shouting to seal the win.
I play each week to take away my sin.

The winning move is the ball down the wing.
The dirty kit goes in the washing bin.
The ground erupts when the final whistle goes.
How good football is, when energy flows.

Friend to Lover? I Hope So

Ben is an introvert who wants to travel the world, but he's in debt and can't hold down a job. Ben is at the beach with his friend Charlie and is ready to talk about his feelings.

Ben: Um, hi. So... I've been waiting for the right time to say this. Now feels right.

Um, right, OK...

It's about you... well, about me, well – about us and life. Like, I know what I want... to travel and stuff, but I can't hold down a job and I'm in so much debt... my life is a mess.

And the only thing going right is... you.

Ugh, this makes no sense. Why am I so awkward?

You have it all worked out... stable job, no debt.

You have an amazing life – you are amazing.

And when I look at you... you smile and I just crumble because it's... it's a feeling that I get.

My heart knows it...and for once, I know what I want. I want you.

So why am I telling you this now?

Well... the world is ending – I want you to know the truth. We've always been there for each other... we've been through so much together, you and I.

And when you got that diagnosis... well, that broke me. That's the moment I knew. I love you.

I see people with their partners and I'm happy for them... but I get so jealous. I want that – for me... and for us. I get mixed signals... I look at you and I see that look in your eyes... but then that look goes. It's... disheartening.

And then that hug last night... it confirmed it for me.

And now I know what I want...

It's you. It always has been.

I want us.

It's now or never...

What do you say?

...Are you in?

Just Life

Miles, a 30 year old prisoner, in a therapy session.

Mike: Do you ever think about life? Sometimes I wonder how my life got so bad... I always did well at school – not the smartest, not the best looking... but I did well. Came out with nine GCSEs... except for maths – I always hated maths. I always had friends. I was a bit of the class clown. I learnt that if you make people laugh, they're less likely to pick on you. I always saw myself as somewhere between

Charlie Chaplin and Fatty Arbuckle. I was always a big lad, hated sports... except for rugby – I liked that.

Mainly because I was so big it took a few lads to take me down.

I always liked drama... not just because it was full of pretty girls – though it did help. Acting always felt like a safe space. I could forget all about my troubles and the bullies and just become someone else for a while. I've always liked stories that you can just get lost in and be whisked away to far away lands... Sometimes I close my eyes and try to take myself back there – back to a time when life was good, when I was young and my biggest worry was getting my homework in on time. My teachers always told me I'd do well... I wonder if they could see me now... what would they say?

It's hard being here... in those moments of silence. I find myself thinking about the past more than the future.

School... college... even uni... all the friends who've come and gone, the laughs we used to have... those nights we'd go out and stay up drinking till the sun came out. I think about lost loves... the faces come and go... all the bridges burnt, and people pushed away... I was always a bit awkward with matters of the heart... never could settle down and commit. Sometimes I think if I had... I might not have ended up doing what I did.

I'm getting out soon. I wonder if my friends will still want to be around me...

I worry that they won't look at me the same way. That's the thing about life... things change all the time – for bad or for good. One thing I've learned is that no matter what happens you have to keep going... you have to keep moving forward... because that's just... life.

Paper Ducks

I stand for twenty minutes in the sun
Absorb all of you within and without
closed eyes catch latticed laser glass, film reels run
This peace gets pecked at, feathers flap avian shout
"there's a form you can fill in" they tell me
I write my hopes on flat paper, float them
slot my life like ballot papers, hopefully
it's one thousand votes from one thousand men
fold paper ducks that sail a paper sea
"Throw us some breadcrumbs", they just see pond life
I just see sunshine, I only see you
for some it's a noose, for some it's a knife
Twenty minutes in the sun, words unspoken
Why stay in prison, the door is open.

My Mind is Like..?

My mind feels like a garden sprinkler
stopping, then starting on repeat
My mind is like a garden sprinkler
Giving life to new things, yet still wetting people's feet.

My heart is like a crystal vase
delicate, and easily broke.
My heart is like a crystal vase
it's always my secret, because I'm only a bloke.

My life is like secret pathway
full or unknown, and hidden treks
My life is like a secret pathway
full or adventures and no regrets.

So here I sit still, reflecting on my life.
things I've done right, Thing I've done wrong
But life is a lesson worth living
like an eternal dance to an everlasting song.

The Proposal

A Summer Morning, 2014.

I woke up at 8.30am, the sun was shining and the birds were singing.

It only seemed like a few hours ago that we had been talking on the phone and we had said goodbye for the night.

After that call I went downstairs and sat with my mum and dad. I questioned them over and over again as to whether or not I was doing the right thing. They both said yes, the time was right and I was doing the right thing. They both mentioned that I must have been wanting to do it for a while and my Dad recalled the same feelings he had all that time ago.

I took a shower, got dressed and went down for some coffee and some breakfast. I had already begun to feel nervous, which in turn made me feel silly. It was time to walk up to the shops and get my dad's paper and try to put my mind at ease. I set back home and passed my Dad his paper, gave both of them a hug and said goodbye. It was time to leave.

We had agreed that I would pick her up at around 10am so we could drive to the gardens and go for a walk. As I arrived at her house, I beeped the horn and she came out and jumped in the car with a smile on her face and not a care in the world.

The journey took just over half an hour, and we parked up in our usual space in the car park.

We grabbed our coats, rucksacks and camera out of the boot and locked the car. We started to walk around the gardens holding hands, taking in the fresh morning air. Walking further up we reached the Chinese Gardens and my heart started to race a little. I knew that it was almost time.

We stopped by the Pagoda and waterfall to take some photos, and I knew it was a case of now or never. I gently grabbed her arm and turned her towards me. I said there's something I need to ask you. I got down on one knee and as calmly as I could said Siobhan will you do the honour of becoming my wife. She paused, smiled and with a tear in her eye said yes. I slid the ring on her finger and we stood there arm in arm, holding each other tight and kissing.

From that moment on, I knew that it was going to last forever.

Crashed

A pilot who is afraid of flying in a therapy session aiming to overcome his fear of flying.

Pilot: It always begins the same way. I'm sat in the cockpit in a deathly silence. I look out the window and there is only darkness. I find myself drawn to it, fixated on it. Then suddenly – BANG!!! A huge explosion... the turbines begin to rattle, the whole plane starts to shake. All I can do is stare into the darkness. I try to snap out of it but I can't. I grip the wheel in terror. I can – Feel the terror in my whole body, gripping me. Frozen in fear. It's almost like time itself has stopped. The sound of the engine failing. The turbines rattling as they break apart. Then the console starts to blare, warning sirens wailing. The flashing red lights of the console begin to blind me, snapping me out of this trance of frozen fear. I look to my right to my co-pilot. The chair is empty. I take a deep breath, frozen in fear once again. The smell of burning jet fuel fills the air, a thick black smoke begins to creep into the cockpit. I begin to choke. I clutch at my throat gasping for air. I look out into the darkness again. I can barely turn away even as I stand there choking as my lungs fill with the thick black smog of burning jet fuel. I look to the console... 10,000 feet and falling.

Then suddenly my legs give way, I collapse, I fall to the floor. I reach for the door handle, still choking, still gasping for air. I struggle, managing to pry the door open with what little strength I have left. The door flings open. I begin to crawl on my hands and knees, the plane descending rapidly, the smoke filling the air. I look up and the whole plane is engulfed in fire. The smell of burning invading all my senses.

I look up gasping for air, tears streaming from my eyes...
That's when I see her... Charlotte... my wife... I've had the same dream every night since she died... I reach to her, just before I can touch her... I wake up.

Understanding and Love in Tolerance

I am who I want to be.
My life is what I make it.

Parts of life I cannot control.
My birth, my sexuality make me.
They give me an understanding soul.

Bigots and homophobes are a fact of life.
This bullying causes trouble, stress and strife.

We need to show more understanding and love.
We should feel we soar on wings like a dove.

We don't want this aggression and hate.
It can cause harm and make a right state.

So please show tolerance don't get irate.
I am who I am, I'm sure you can relate.

The World's Worst Striker

He is last to leave the changing room and is trying to get himself hyped for the next match as he suspects there's a scout present.

Striker: Yes, I've got this, I've got this c'mon. Boots? Yep, tied dead tight this time. Socks? Can't get these bad boys any higher. Ankle tape? Ah this masking tape will have to do, yeah, looks great.

Who are ya? Welly United, that's who! Best team in the QVC Merseyside division 3! This is my moment, if there's a scout out there today then yeah, this time next week I could be having trials at Liverpool or Everton, even Preston North End would do. I'll be the best thing since Messi, Skelms answer to Maradona. Just having a bit of a goal drought right now, but I'll bounce back to form soon enough. It would help if these boots stayed on, Mum these are Two sizes too big!

(imitating mum) "You'll grow into them love" she said, that were five year ago, I'm twenty-four, how am I going to grow into them?! Just have to get Nike or Puma to sponsor me, then I'll have the latest trotters every season. Nah, I've got this, not gonna let no one bring me down. 'Two left feet'? What does he know? Not even a proper coach, thinks he's Arsene Wenger, he's no idea! Best bring me off the bench today. Right, lets have it! Make way, here comes big number 38, premier league here I come!

MONOLOGUES, VERSES, SONNETS

A collection of work from across prisons in the North West.



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