

## RAY AND JULIE

1

The letters of the alphabet  
Etched in her pale skin  
Punctuated by blemishes,  
Freckles, a bruise,  
A heart hanging over the i in her name

Julie

Like a toy balloon on a stick.  
Scratched into her arm  
On that mad day at the fun fair,  
And that wet, wild kiss  
Down the alley round the back of the pub.

Ray

Carved into her arm with a knife,  
Ever and for longer than forever  
Her skin stained with biro  
His indelible name bleeding petrol blue  
Into her skinny scarred arm.

\*

2

All you'll ever need to know  
Is written right here in this wall,  
Our two names scratched like wounds  
Into plaster and brick.

Some archaeologist bloke'll  
Find it when we're dead -  
I'd have written it in neon,  
Filled it up with the blood of my love.

All you'll ever need to know  
Is carved down this back alley,  
In the back wall of this ale house,  
Where we bled into each other's mouths.

I always wrote your name on the covers  
Of history books in school,  
And now this is history -  
Your name, my name, tattooed forever like scars.

\*

3

There are no mad beasts  
Escaping from zoos  
Or jungles on my body,  
No mermaids or dragons

Swimming through deep seas  
There is only your name  
And my name scrawled  
In the wrecked skin of our love.

\*

4

We fell into this having a drink  
It was eternal love straight off  
There was more to him than you'd think  
Loads more than his forty fag cough

And more than the crumpled five pound note  
And more than the crumpled sheets  
And more than the sinking drunken boat  
We sailed through rain lashed streets

We were mad in the gutter with booze and lust  
And the stars were like broken teeth  
When we wrote our names in the spilt dust  
Of the moon we howled beneath.

\*

5

Ripping bits off beer mats is  
What keeps his head together  
He's two ciders short of a booze cruise  
Two fags short of bronchitis

He just sits there hours on end  
As empty as old crisp bags  
Rattling like that tic tac box  
He keeps to fool the breath test

Where the corners of his mouth meet  
You can see the trace of lippy  
From the time she kissed him deeply  
At the bus stop by the offy

One more before the towels go on  
Then a bag of chips from china  
She'll be home, be all blown over  
Glued to that Emmerdale she videoed.

\*

6

We sit out the back on patio chairs  
With a spliff and a couple of cans,  
Wide eyed, staring up above  
At the flickering lights of heaven.

I don't know the names of any of it  
But Ray knows the shape of The Plough.  
It's the one shaped like a supermarket trolley,  
He points it out with his fag.

The aurora borealis is this dream he has,  
One day we'll borrow a car and drive  
North up the M6, takes two days  
Stop off at some B & B.

And under the dark with a picnic  
And a crate of little lagers  
We'll sit there in the middle of Scotland  
Like we own it, like it was fucking Christmas.

\*

7

The history of all our sleepless nights  
Is written in the scrunched up fag packets  
And condoms, bits of tissue and crumpled magazines  
Beneath the bed we are always going to throw out.

The dust down there has fallen from our skin,  
The tangled knots of dirty hair that drift  
Across the lino like small tumbleweed,  
Across the prairie of our bedroom in Liverpool.

Sometimes at night we cannot sleep and so  
Just lie there with our favourite songs played low.  
Ray likes a bit of Roy Orbison, it makes him cry,  
I'll have The Pixies any day, Black Francis howling.

Even tho we don't like the same records  
We're the same, me and Ray, the same,  
Could both lie there forever in our underwear  
And watch the dustbowl of our room and wait for morning.

\*

8

There was none of that drawing on envelopes  
Of anchors or bluebirds of happiness,  
No trying out with felt tip on my shoulder,  
Of shapes ripped off from the Chinese alphabet.

I didn't even go to the tattoo parlour  
And look through his book of glories for ideas  
I just stuck a darning needle in my skin  
And filled his stabbed out name with fucking ink.

\*

9

She bought a clock at a car boot sale  
And hung it on the wall  
He messed around with his old car  
Round the back even though it was going nowhere.

He was telling her about the moon  
And mans first footstep still there in the dust.  
He knew all kinds about all kinds  
And what he didn't know he made up.

There's a way of being married where  
You don't need rings and churches,  
And it's all about the clothes you wear,  
And certain ways of saying certain words.

She sits there on the step and watches him,  
He's acting daft to make her laugh, she doesn't laugh.  
And when that broken clock finally ticks to life  
That car'll burn rubber, shoot red lights, heading north.

\*

10

I was defrosting the fridge  
He was watching the box  
When the bird flew in.  
The closest I'd ever been  
To one was a budgie we once had that died.

He picked it up, so gentle  
The small bird was in his hands  
Its wings were moving  
Against his fingers,  
A sparrow with a leg bent, broken.

I'd never seen this side of him,  
He soothed it with a whisper.  
Then he put it in a Dolcis box  
We had on top of the wardrobe,  
Never throw them away, might one day be handy.

And there we were and it was lovely,  
Me, him and this broken bird,  
In our bedsit with the fridge drip dripping.  
And that bloke who does the races  
All excited about horses on the news.

\*

11

Sitting forever  
In the same two chairs  
At home, him in his underwear,  
Me in my Snoopy pyjamas

Sitting forever  
In the same two chairs  
In the pub, him chain smoking  
Me ripping beer mats

Sitting forever  
In the same two chairs  
In the street, but no one sees us  
We are invisible.

\*

12

We were dying for kids  
But then we gave up  
The moment passed

We sat in the caff  
Messed with spoons  
Spilling sugar sacks...

I couldn't look  
He couldn't speak  
We couldn't bear...

I said it's just...  
He said it's not...  
It's all a bit...unfair

Couldn't agree on nothing  
The things he liked  
Was stuff that I'd avoid

For instance  
I was mad on Marc Bolan  
He was more into the Floyd

\*

13

You forgot to defrost the fridge, you promised.  
I'm going down the pub for the quiz.

You forgot my birthday again, like last year.  
Yes I know you don't believe in giving Hallmark your cash.

This is the way of it, the small things,  
The nooks and crannies of ordinary days, making do,

With the broken toaster and the broken lock,  
The broken light in the fridge, the broken switch.

The grumblings are what it's all about, the sighs  
And the lies. We wouldn't still be here without the lies.

\*

14

On her birthday she'll dress up, look extra nice  
And in the pub I'll buy her a bottle of fizz.  
We'll get a bucket for the bottle, full of ice,  
Sing Happy Birthday when they've done the quiz.

I'll wear that suit and tie, the lot all pressed,  
One year I wore a flower in the lapel.  
The lads all laugh, I'm mutton like lamb dressed,  
We always have a laugh, I give 'em hell.

She gives me the eye eye, and that means watch,  
Watch out for what you'll get when we get back.  
I'm thinking what I'll get's rat arsed on scotch,  
She's thinking more of action in the sack.

And down the alley I whip out the paint  
And spray up 'Ray & Julie' on the brick.  
I look at her, I'm bladdered, she feels faint,  
But what I write's romantic. ROMANTIC.

\*

15

In London Road the shops are boarded up  
But we still walk the length come rain or shine,  
We do the same old pubs cos where you sups  
What matters not the vintage of the wine.

It's who you're sitting next to after all,  
There's folk round here who get a bit above.  
Us? We're Ray and Julie walking tall  
So don't come telling us we're not in love.

It's written on our skin for all to see,  
It's written in the blood, the tears, the sweat,  
It's written in the dust on our TV,  
It's written like that so we don't forget.

Ray

Julie

Always.

Jeff Young