

Cordite and Petrol

I am exhausted. I didn't show ~~lan~~ Michael Thomas how tired I was today but I felt every day of my seventy five years old. He never slows down; it's spectacular catches followed by stilt-walking and then chicken feeding. I don't mind (of course I don't) but it's getting harder to keep up.

I'm trying to keep this diary to sharpen up my memory. I never thought about it too much but the Doctor reckoned it would be a good idea. It's this or Sudoku and they bore me rigid. I've never been a numbers man.

He said it would be good to write down my memories as well so I may as well. Those stilts in the garden: I remember walking on them when I was twelve – the same age as the boy is now. Blue and yellow, freshly painted: blue for me and yellow for my sister Alice. We'd stagger like creatures from the Black Lagoon around the garden, digging up the soft grass and trying to balance. We could reach the apples on the tree from the stilts too. That tree's still there but the apples are wizened and brown now. Like me.

We were on the stilts when the Germans came: fourteenth of November 1940. I won't ever forget that day as it was the day before my birthday. Some birthday that turned out to be. The centre of Coventry was destroyed, blitzed and left in ruins by their terrible bombs, their rain of fire. The cathedral was left a skeleton: charcoal black and gnawed to its bones by the snapping jaws of the air-raids.

Seven of my friends were killed.

This is harder to write than I thought. I've kept these memories where they should be: buried in the past. The world that Thomas is growing up in is a lot different. It's strange but I can remember every detail of that desolate night: the smell of cordite and petrol in the air; the flames on the horizon and the choking clouds of thick smoke.

But I can barely remember what I had for breakfast yesterday.

Well, if Thomas was here it was probably eggs and tea. He loves those chickens; I'll keep them for as long as I'm able to. Same with the dog – she's losing it too: she sings along to the BBC News and Neighbours. At least she's a BBC girl I suppose.

I haven't been up on those stilts for fifteen years; I don't need toys to be unsteady on my feet. I just hope I can keep it together long enough to watch him grow up. They say fresh tea, twice a day, is good for longevity: that's one routine I surely can't forget.