

mayo sandwich. Just without the ham. I sat down in front of the TV and continued with the list.

It occurred to me the list should be presented in no particular order. There was no way of saying that, for example, Danger Mouse was objectively better than Spaghetti Bolognese.

23. Danger Mouse.
24. Spaghetti Bolognese.
25. Wearing a cape.
26. Peeing in the sea and nobody knows.

I stayed up late writing and fell asleep in the living room. Dad must have carried me upstairs.

Mum didn't come home for a week or so.

While she was away I had to speak to the school counsellor, which was actually just Mrs Patterson from upper school. She was a wonderful woman, the sort of woman you looked at and immediately trusted.

*The NARRATOR looks at a woman in the AUDIENCE.*

I'm going to ask you to be Mrs Patterson if that's okay. Now, what she'd do is, and it seems a little weird now but remember this was the Eighties and she got results, what she'd do is she'd take off her shoe...

*The NARRATOR waits for MRS PATTERSON to take off her shoe.<sup>10</sup>*

Then she'd take off her sock.

*The NARRATOR waits for her to take off her sock.<sup>11</sup>*

Then she'd put it on her hand and talk to you through her little sock-dog which she called – what did you call the sock-dog?

*The AUDIENCE member says a name, for instance 'Mostyn'.*

Yes! That's it, I remember now. What Mostyn would do is he'd ask questions like 'how are you feeling today?'

SOCK How are you feeling today?

NARRATOR I'm very well thank you Mostyn, how are you?

SOCK I'm fine, thank you.

NARRATOR You're brilliant. What kind of dog are you?

SOCK I'm a... *(She specifies a breed or colour.)*

NARRATOR Wow, that's amazing. When I was little we had a dog called Sherlock Bones, and he was a cross between a Border Collie and a Doberman, because a Border Collie and a Doberman lived next door to each other in our street and there was a very low hedge.

You're brilliant, by the way. I really like you. I'm going to put you onto my list. 164. Mostyn the sock dog. Have I told you about my list?

SOCK No, tell me about it.<sup>12</sup>

NARRATOR I'm making a list of a thousand Brilliant Things. I'm not certain but I think I might be a genius.

*If MRS PATTERSON wishes to ask more questions that's fine, if not the NARRATOR moves on to:*

It's been very nice talking to you, but can I go now?

SOCK Yes.<sup>13</sup>

NARRATOR Mum did eventually come home from the hospital, and by that time the list was eight pages long and had three hundred and fourteen things on it. I left it on her pillow with the title:

'Every Brilliant Thing.'

She never mentioned it to me, but I knew she'd read it because she'd corrected my spelling.

I kept speaking with Mrs Patterson and Mostyn once a week, then once a fortnight, then once a month and then one day I left the school and I never saw them again.

I don't want to make it sound like my Mother was a monster or that my childhood was miserable because it wasn't.

We had a piano in our kitchen. It wasn't a big kitchen but it was the warmest room in the house and we'd gather around it and sing soul songs. There's a Ray Charles song, 'Drown In My Own Tears' that she sang a lot. There's a moment halfway through that sends shivers down my spine.

*This moment of the song plays – the drums building and Ray Charles singing 'why can't YOU...' The song continues, quieter.*

The way he sings the word 'you' gets me every time. It's like it's coming out of someone else. We all used to howl it like wolves.

313. Having a piano in the kitchen.

314. The way Ray Charles sings the word 'You'.

*The music swells and continues to play for a few moments longer. The NARRATOR listens. It fades.*

I forgot about the list until her second attempt, just over ten years later.

Dad showed up halfway through Chemistry. The same trapdoor feeling. Fight or flight. The same wordless drive to the hospital.

As a teenager I dealt with it less well. I wore my heart on my sleeve.

The night she came home, she sat at the kitchen table and said that if it wasn't for the ham and pineapple pizza lining her stomach from the night before she'd be dead. And I said:

*'You took three weeks' worth of anti-depressants, a packet of Aspirin and half a tub of antihistamines. You're probably healthier than I am. If you're going to kill yourself go jump off a bridge.'*