

*Notes Relating to an Idea of Blue*

## Also by David H W Grubb

### *Fiction:*

Beneath the Visiting Moon  
The Almost Child  
Sorry Days Are Over  
Sanctuary  
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Hullabaloo and Secret Pianos (*short stories*)

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Out of the Marvellous  
It Comes With a Bit of Song  
The Man Who Spoke To Owls

### *As Editor:*

The Gifted Child at School  
An Idea of Bosnia  
Sounding Heaven and Earth

Notes Relating  
to an  
Idea of Blue

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for Beverly



# PART 1



## NOTES RELATING TO AN IDEA OF BLUE

The man was actually seated away from the tourists. He was the last to leave. It was then that I noticed his wine glass was full of stars.

I had spent all day in the field, away from the others. There was nothing left to say and we would soon set off in totally different directions. Years later he wrote about that day and how he loved.

The way that planes fly above our routines and tasks as if they were nearer to something else. The silver of it. The density of it. All those prayers. All those shoes.

The blue piano waits for Mister Punch. The faces of so many children. Meanwhile Judy is having it away again.

Behind the stack of deckchairs the body of a dead hedgehog. It was heading for another winter. Broken leg. Shoebox coffin. The small hole filling with blue.

The lupin rising like a saxophone seeking jazz. The drowned boy, always coming back for more of our noise.

The boy in the tree house saying “what we really need up here is a piano.”

Reaching up in search of his father’s letters he found a baby in the box. The box was red; what an artist might call Russian Red.

We write these things down so that we might find meanings and sometimes we do not tell anybody, especially those we love.

When the Hurdy Gurdy man departed some of us kept looking at the place he had performed and the shadow that remained.

## THE HONKY TONK ANGELS AND THE SILENCES

This is really about an orchestra at night  
and moments when you realise the room works best  
when the river is sleeping and poetry invades the kitchen,  
for we all love the men in red hats and yellow ties and what  
it is to believe in clowns on horseback and the tricks that flash  
and now honky tonk angels appear between the silences telling us  
that every bird knows what it is about which is why their nests are  
small blue boats that hide in our world until the eggs get up and fly.  
I think I forgot to tell you about the man who draws on the walls as  
he sleepwalks and when he wakes up everything has become blue; the pills,  
the water in the jug as he takes the pills, the face of his wife as she  
hands him the pills, the angel who keeps popping in to see if he's OK;  
and then there were the blue horses in Ireland as they came into the yard  
and moved out into the fields with the gorse jumping up and down  
and those deserted cottages clinging to their beings in case some day sad  
ancestors might return with the old songs and thin dreams and they  
of course would be happy to share the stories of angels as well, the way  
it was sometimes a voice only, a snippet of psalm or the sound of a bell  
catching silver at midnight or a letter that suddenly jumped right into the  
heart. I think I forgot to tell you also about Michael who now goes  
out each night to plant the potatoes, kneeling down to place them one at  
a time, no doubt whistling beneath the essential moon, covering them in  
earth and words and his idea of Heaven. Finally, if it is the only thing I  
do remember to tell you; it is said that when an angel has done whatever  
the message is about there will be a pause and you will feel it raining at  
the back of your head as if you had just been read by a brilliant poem.  
Sometimes I like to think that ancient trees can see us as we gather in our  
days and that the rooms in old houses are never empty and that a  
woman who whistles does it to hide the memory of a man's obsession.  
When we brought the dead horse down from the top field we had to use  
ropes and the tractor and six men. We stood around drinking cold tea and  
there were stories. And all the time I thought of the horse's head beneath the  
sacking and the early morning light that was still inside it.  
Much later we will come into our beginnings; grandmother smelling of  
lavender, dog licks, father changing the subject, the god who does not love,  
the gardener who takes his teeth out and drinks cold tea, dead birds and

dead babies, pathways in Cornwall that lead to nowhere, wind songs and grass whispers, the meaning of the meanings, adults who never look you in the eye as if you are untidy pets, shadow play and adult play and the silences that appear to say everything and sentences that crack, snap; the declensions of the dead, the husks of small histories, the ornaments in the rooms as we move houses and pack what we want to remember, and remember what we want to forget; faces, forgeries, forgivings. And the silences of the eyes, the way a smile slides across a face, the joke that cannot have any meaning, the tick tock rescue of the clock or the watch, these gestures of identity and secrets, these lonely and dead estates. Nettle territory and wildness. Stone territory and wind jabber. On cold days you can hear the silences, island moments, what we heard but never said, entering spaces where the words were waiting, wanting.

## WHEN THAT THE SUN

When that the sun has come up against the great unlit  
and the teeth cleaning has become smiling and the school  
has become its hum again and men have entered sheds to  
hear the stories again and the women have spoken to bees  
then what we know about battle and becoming and how to  
milk and lay a hedge and the best way to approach miracle  
has settled in the land and in the mind and in the meaning.

Then comes the bird song and what we do with hands and  
the very old growing younger all the time and if the trees  
are to fit in the living room where will the piano go for there  
must be space for everything and the single shoe will never do  
and the letters arrive from people we have never met smelling  
of money and terror and the whatever makes the world go  
and how would we like to live in a world without such nettles?

Then afternoon with its cradle voice and the quietness of birds  
and always a man in the top field returning from a dead war  
and the sun in the bucket like a big fish as the children come  
home with dates and names and stories and the secret of the  
meanings and we watch them in the trees and skipping talk  
and telling us of people who can do jokes and visions and  
did we know that every second of our lives was already dead?

Then comes the night with its closing verses and what we are  
to do with dreams and the passages of prayers and those who  
are to be bullied die all over again and those with bust loves  
and there are always people who have been here before who  
know why some animals will never return and that somewhere  
there is a man writing the History Of Grass and when we are  
sleeping they let the Rain Children in and listen to such quiets.

## THE WINDOWS

We don't do trees anymore. We don't see angels skipping.  
Jokes remain in their boxes and when somebody asks  
what we are waiting for we say the silence of bells and  
the poetry of ancient rivers.

The cat put itself out years ago and even the postman wears white  
as he delivers other people's noises.

We don't do fields and when Mrs Webster comes to sing to us we  
pull a sickie or pretend to sleep and Archie actually died as he  
pretended to.

Next month we are all moving to smaller rooms.

There will be rocking chairs of course and we will talk to our  
mothers and fathers and lost uncles and remember the smell  
of the children's bedroom and the roar of their dreams.

We will walk down to the sea and into empty classrooms  
and see the cedar tree and the remains of the chain to the swing  
and remember where we buried the dead goldfish  
and the hedge with the dead tramp inside.

We don't do art and television and long walks.

What we do is rock a bit and recall interventions and attempt to  
keep certain dreams at bay about betrayals and loss and poets  
and remember birthday party laughter and the deaths of friends.

We don't do trees anymore; they have to get along without us.  
Owls and red kites I expect and those white butterflies flitting  
and the way light climbs down them until it reaches grass  
and earth and robin soft.

We do gates though. We like the look of gates to take you off  
and gather you up and when the next field appears there may be  
people who will greet you with generous comments and plates of  
sandwiches and jokes about what the living will do without you,  
poor things.

Days stacked up like deckchairs.

We won't need days.

Next month we will all be doing future.

One day soon I would like to talk to you about selling  
all of the windows.

Sometimes an idea is a pretty thing until we put it on.

## YOU WILL NEVER BE ALLOWED TO LIVE IN A SUBMARINE

And therefore my friend you will never be allowed  
to live in a submarine.

You can sit on an old tractor at midnight beneath the cracking  
of stars with a silent friend.

You may hurl yourself into a wind and feel the whites of its mind.

You can visit the old peoples home when they throw a party when  
another inmate escapes.

You may attempt to interpret what goes on in the minds of midnight  
gardeners at the allotments.

You might observe the way that snow disguises the remains of the sniper's  
secrets.

You will in due course learn that we all have silent songs  
but, my friend, you will never be permitted to live in a submarine.

It is matter beyond wisdom and politics and what the world might mean.

It is a matter older than grass and mountains and oceans.

You are a wonder, a brilliance, a zazzle;

but, my friend, you will always be an owl.



## HOW TO MAKE A HORSE

You will need moon and grass and the stench of nettles  
and the voices of farmers and even their children  
who have seen births and deaths and the way  
men with ropes and small children  
seek to witness the arrival  
and what blood is about  
and the manner of winds  
and ancient rain  
and the assisting grace  
of those who have seen all this before  
and their deliberate and cautious actions  
as if their hands might at any moment  
catch fire.

## HOW TO MAKE A TREE

Once there were dances and places where the sun  
fell on the land as if planting a secret  
and those who witnessed knew that  
a tree was about future and nests and fruits and  
the way sun might sing.

## HOW TO MAKE A GOD

A mountain can make you want to do this  
or days when rain gets inside your sleep and relentless wind  
and somewhere always there is a gate that should have been locked.

## THE SPACES BETWEEN THE HEADS OF HORSES

*for Clare and Emily*

There were horses here once;  
they owned the top field and when  
they came down to the yard at evening  
each one was heavy with light and grass.

At Easter, on the beach, they stood where the sea  
became ice, stilled, hardly moving, as if they might be  
searching for trees, hedges, a gate, that place where a  
field becomes opening, track, passage.

Low light levels and shifting surfaces  
and a boy with his red kite that must have seemed  
like something on fire, jerking as if wanting  
to escape, leaping to find wild.

But it did not happen; the kite was tamed,  
dark sky appeared to suck away the sea;  
the horses were led back to the farm  
and a world of winds and water.

After; the horses were sold for slaughter,  
the farm bent over, fell down, split, spilled;  
I can still see the heads of those horses,  
the spaces between when their names

were called.

## TAKING THE DEAD HORSE DOWN

Taking the dead horse down from the field  
late in the afternoon took six men and two boys  
and bottles of cold tea and some more cake.

Most of the time we could hear bits of sky  
still inside it and somebody said it was rivers  
but I liked the idea of early morning sky.

It took ropes and chains and a cradle thing  
and when it began to come on rain the horse  
shone silver and smelt of old pear tree.

Dragging it across the yard the dogs yarled  
and then one of the men got in the way of  
the head as it swung down sudden; swearing.

The fact is its head was still full of morning.

## WHEN WE SAID GOODNIGHT

When we said goodnight to the men on Ward Twelve  
we sometimes wondered if they might be sane in their dreams,  
the stumbling, worrying, collapsing ceasing.  
Did they become earlier versions, bright and eloquent,  
capable with shoelaces and door handles and crosswords  
and getting the old jokes just right?  
Did they get the order right, the sequences correct,  
or even in dreams were they distant observers as if these dreams  
belonged to other people? Were trees real?  
Michael said he kept his dreams in a beautiful box  
but now that he was dead there was no point in dreams.  
Did I want to know?

## MOTORCYCLE

And when I was told that I was dead  
I left the bed and walked out to the garden.

The owls were not there and the poppies  
had completed their fire dancing.

I waited for you by the summer house  
as another blue day became words

and then I went back and got on  
with my death.

It was like eating rain at first and then  
I met Chagall and he painted a motorcycle

which took us everywhere.

Because we were dead we could dance on  
pin heads and sit inside rainbows  
and enter poems before they were written.

I waited for you by the log pile  
and knew each tree  
that had been cut down

and then Chagall said he wanted  
to play some more with the sound  
of light.

Sometimes we played blue kazoos  
and sat at the white piano with  
Edward Elgar

who told us that when he was a piano tuner  
everything in the world was possible  
and that handstands were better than  
bandstands.

I waited by the silver birch as it shed  
some of its bark on the grass  
like scrolls

and thought of what I might  
write on some of them  
to surprise you.

## LIFE'S NOT FAIR BUT MY KNICKERS ARE

—*Fairtrade strapline at John Lewis*

It's a good idea, like Braille rainbows and the parrot at the barbers that keeps cutting in just when there might be a silence or the Park Pretty sign at the side of the ruined hotel. Even if you don't, we do, sometimes and often, I mean go there alone, leave messages for people we will never see, salute Ben Bloomer who is Head of Customer Services and who knows what you eye you will one day buy. What you see is what you dream etc etc. And there you go again, the eclectic tricking the mundane, the dead angel abiding, the lost frozen in the future, Jesus asleep in the park, somewhere a nowhere, ancient trees hugging the future and church bells calling us to the always. It's a good idea, like the poem that has no end and silent songs and the snowman seated on the bench knows that there will never be a snow woman or snow children or even a small snow dog. What happens may never repeat itself, the farm in winter is about arrivals and the bank manager got the job because his name is Jolly. Then again, we keep meeting people coming back from where they never left; Elgar's Dream Children hitting the hard stuff for all the saddest reasons and the man from *Readers Digest* wafting jobjoba.

## SHOCKBOX, BALLYHOO AND GRASS BLOWING

I was nevertheless writing this late in the early  
when the buttons were off and trash talk began  
and there was again this dispute about just what  
was who and did grass matter and whoever it was  
who invented rain should remain locked in the ?  
mark which was hovering again and I decided  
to let it have its way concerning the life of pigs  
and what trees see and what I might say in the  
next sermon about the man not on the cross and  
the trick of the tomb and what took place and then  
there were boys in the field running down to the  
stream to skinny dip it was so cold they must  
have been ghosts of the Garland twins drowning  
again at this time every year and never seen in  
summer, in sunlight, in harvest time, in daylight  
and sometimes you hear them say that the only  
thing you remember for ever is the smell of grass.