

Sultans of Swing. (Dire Straits.)

I stifle a large yawn and turn up my collar against the incessant rain. I hope it will wash the smoke and sweat out of my pores that twenty minutes in the shower has completely disregarded.

The Parade is dank, sparse in the grey light. Perversely the puddles conglomerate. They queue; surround the pond. The detritus of last night's partying punters floats away. An icelolly stick, its joke, cartwheels down the bicycle lane to litter the depths of the underpass.

The Town Hall clock reads two-minutes to midday. My mission is near complete. Its Sunday; I know exactly where my quarry resides. No need to trawl the Nascot Arms or the White Lion on a wild goose chase.

Fighting back fatigue, I regress. On twinkle-toes, I dance up the steps past the Peace Memorial still bedecked with popped wreaths. Then dive out of the rain into the Horns to meet Dad – who's watching the jazz go down.

He's in his normal place; propped on his barstool in the corner. I've timed it perfectly. He's ordering a pint.

'Better make that two.'

Dad looks over the top of his dark glasses and rolls his eyes.

'Look what the cat dragged in.'

Shoulder to shoulder we hug. Behind me, the band start their set.

'You look knackered. Crap night?'

'Yeah,' I sup the head off my pint. 'Four calls; all car fires, all in the witching hours. An inconvenient arsonist.'

Dad laughs, finishes his IPA and pushes the empty glass along the bar. My turn to roll my eyes.

I stand, he sits. We put the world to rights as the band go through their repertoire of Bix, Louis and Duke.

'Have you spoken to your Brother recently?'

'How was Mum's trip with her Women's Group?'

'Me motor's playing up – needs a new alternator.'

'No – four days off.'

'Are Newcastle going to beat Chelsea this afternoon?'

'Of course not, we'll get a right stuffing.'

'Shh. Listen to those horns. How do they blow that sound? All feathery, all whispery.'

'Drummers good.'

'He used to fly Spitfires in the war and 'es got a false leg.'

That's impressive. The double-bass player, is he left-handed? Just like Uncle Ray (who's actually Dad's elder cousin).'

'Pains me to admit it, but 'es as good as Ray. Played with Ellington just like Ray and he can read music too. 'Es a music critic for the Guardian. Knows his onions. Can play the lot...'

I finish Dad's sentence. '...Swing, Trad and Ragtime.'

Dad's musical influences. Some of which must have rubbed off on me. From listening to all Dad's syncopated big-band home recorded jazz tapes, there is a logical progression. Dad inherited jazz from Uncle Ray and it's only a short step from there to big-band progressive stadium rock.

Another pint slips down as the singer steps up right close to the microphone.

'Thank you one and all. It's time for us to go home.'

'Howay,' says me Dad. 'Let's gan down the White Lion and watch the footy there.'