

I only dream in black and white.

Countdown set to thirty minutes. The flywheel builds up momentum with a fizz and whoosh as the first power-chords of Iron Maiden's *Brave New World* fill my headphones. I taste my fitness poison, the rowing erg for the first time this year and It's already February.

Don't chastise, the weather has been so inclement that getting out on the mountain bike isn't an option. Then you can add in all the other strands of fluff that have clogged up my life's Dyson, interfered with my wellness programme.

I start at a steady pace. No need to overcook things; it's been an age. The points of my synapses switch the flow of neurons down rusted rails, toggle a less travelled path. Rock music steadies the reverie of this workout. My brain now sculling pent up emotions to protective compartments, to be shut behind slammed doors so as not to overwhelm.

My heartrate climbs. I'll check the fitness App on my phone later to see how effective my heart rate monitor. I pray it's not off the scale, close does to heart-attack territory as I'm starting to blow, matching the pace boat. I concentrate on the readout. It's monochrome scale now large in my vision. The remainder colour in the room, dims at the periphery of my eyesight. Is exercise trying to soften the external impact of the rubbish start to the year or dump on my circumstances, illumination that never navigates the end of the tunnel.

Internalised compartmentalised reasoning, raises the sandwich generation question. That's me and it's not prawn on sourdough at Old Trafford. Kids and parents who'd have em? My son is severely struggling with his mental health and to add insult to injury, Dad has now been diagnosed with full blown dementia. We're having to put his gaff on the market so that we can either move in together or put him in a care home; all to keep him safe. Traumatic times? Selling property; the second most stressful thing you can go through and I'm walking a tightrope strung between dad and my misses to prevent the first.

As the album spins through its repertoire, I speed up, being behind the pace boat. Time to up the ante. A sneaky glance in the mirror and I see my sweaty mug staring right back. Not much left on top and more than a touch grey around the edges. I smile; can still cut the mustard. I look again. A longer stare...

When did I morph into my father? God, shoot me now. His yin my yang. Hypoxic, have I just fantasized my reflection as a nostalgic sepia print or an old-school Harold Lloyd movie?

In, out; backwards forwards, projecting loneliness and loss. I wonder what a trick-cyclist would make of my disposition? Point to the fact that I have big decisions to make. No shit Sherlock.

My sight fades to exerted shades of grey. Please don't tell me I need clarity, to manage change, simplify my chaotic and overwhelming life. There's enough messages plying my inner self's spiritual guide with guilt and uncertainty. I don't need any more distractions.

Rowing is more than preventing a heart-attack; it helps blow the cobwebs from my soul. Makes time to analyse and evaluate. A deep dive into the mixtape soundtrack of my brain. My raised heartbeat heightens thought, transcends the dross; helps me make sharp precise and emotionally focused decisions.

The clock counts down. Flat out I try and match the pace boat. One second, I'm behind, next level-pegging. So close, will I bust my best distance or a lung? The monitor finally says winner, yet my ribcage has an alien trying to burst out and my brain is frazzled. Somehow, I know I've reached a pact within myself. Of course, there will still be soul searching but with the information I have in front of me at this very moment in time – I'm happy with my choices.

The future is the past, a reflected dream of a captured time. Is that what dad's thinking right now? Is he lost in his dream of mirrors?

The workout has kept me true. My colour vision has returned as I fall off the rower; too shattered to even crawl towards the fridge for a cold drink. Colour however is nothing but a turmoil facilitated by Farrow and Ball. ***I only dream in black and white. To save me from myself.***

No holding back my emotions; I'll face them head on.

Iron Maiden

Brave New World

Dream of Mirrors