

## BOLT FROM THE BLUE

JEREMY COOPER



Fitzcarraldo Editions



*And in the end the one you were totally certain was the best  
turned out to be the coffee you'd been drinking for the last three  
years.*

*So funny!*

*With love*

*Mother*

8 JUNE 15

Mother

Absalom is dead and buried, beside the garden fence.

He was ancient. A shock, nevertheless.

I came home from the studio at about eight one evening last week and he was laid out on the kitchen floor, legs straight. Knocked flat by a heart attack, no pain, it seems, his mouth closed, no sign of a stifled scream.

Lindsay happened to be staying the next night, which was a comfort. She had meetings with some Charity or Trust or something, in Pimlico.

I'm tired.

Off to bed.

Love

Lynn

Dear Lynn

*Good that you've got a friend like Lindsay. How's she doing in Sheppey? I once spent a week's holiday in Southend-on-Sea, on the opposite bank of the Thames.*

*With your dad, it was.*

*You might have been there too, a babe-in-arms.*

*Can't remember.*

*There's an awfully long pier at Southend, and a model steam*

*train with bench-type open seats facing to the side. Takes you to the café at the end. And a lifeboat museum.*

*Say hi to Lindsay from me.*

*Friendship is what matters, not sex. A sister who is also a friend is the best. Like Betty.*

*Not an option I gave you. Makes Lindsay extra-special.*

*Love*

*Mother*

21 JULY 15

Mum

I can't believe it!

Have to tell you.

I had a meeting the other day at Bloomberg, in the City.

They're ... actually I'm not quite sure what they are.

Thought they were a bank, but apparently not ... Let's say financial services. Covers sufficient iniquities!

Anyway, Bloomberg has been involved in contemporary art things for years and they approached Bridget to see if I'd accept the commission for a quadruple screen installation in the atrium of their New York head office. The meeting went well, until, while we were having a break for coffee and croissants, the Bloomberg pair, two middle-aged men in ocean blue suits and whiter-than-white shirts, began to reminisce about their fathers' wartime experiences.

One of them told the other of his father describing the cruelty inflicted on him by the Japanese when he as a prisoner-of-war, aged twenty.

His colleague responded, very reasonably: 'Nothing compared to the Americans H-bombing the citizens of Hiroshima one night and Nagasaki three days later!'

The first man, the one wearing a pink tie, frowned: 'Not



at all. Kill the bastards, it ended the war.'

I got up and walked out, without a word. Bridget muttered something. I didn't hear what, and followed me onto the street. Where the sun glanced through the leaves of an old lime tree, and I felt ... I don't know ... cleansed, saved?

It's what we're up against. Bloomberg gives forty or fifty million dollars a year to the arts. Money buys influence, the validation of views like that.

No New York installation for me!

Let yourself have anything to do with them and, in effect, you endorse the system.

Lynn xx

P.S. Mother is out, gone, caput. Sorry, but it just doesn't feel right. You're Mum again.

Lynn

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

50 today

With lots of love

Mother

P.S. You're old enough to call me what you like!

[Mum wrote this on a very elaborate birthday card, groaning in plastic mini-fruits and glitter.]

29 JULY 15

Mum

Georgie and Gary took me out today for a birthday

breakfast at their favourite café, in Exmouth Market. It was lovely. Georgie has awful intestinal pains, worse recently than before, and is extra careful where and what she eats.

I like it when the three of us get together.

They live four months of the year in America, on their farm in upstate New York, the barns converted to separate studios. Georgie does the vegetable garden and Gary looks after the orchard, both of which they created from scrub. Don't have children. At least not together. Gary has a grown-up son, born when he was still a student at Goldsmiths and ... long story!

They've invited me over to stay whenever I want.

Maybe, maybe, one day.

For ages Georgie felt bad about living off Gary's money, her own work sidelined by the art trade. She accepts it now, trusting in the value of her contribution to his shows.

Her work is seen and sells more these days.

Gary is relaxed with money, never having had or expected any after leaving his Kent Estuary comprehensive at sixteen with only three O Levels. Until the YBA phenomenon erupted and made him rich. At breakfast he told a fun story about being interviewed recently and trying to make the journalist accept that, much though he admired Ellsworth Kelly curves and Brice Marden stripes, for example, the only paintings he cares about are his own. 'They're great artists,' he said, scoffing scrambled egg, 'I love their work. But what people don't understand is that the only person I'm really interested in is me!'

Yeah, Mum, don't say it! Me too!

It's true.

With love, Lynn



Dear Lynn

*I understand Georgie. She's from Harrogate, I think she said.  
Where money counts. Does in Birmingham too.*

*Everyone judges you by what you earn. Admires the man who  
buys a round of drinks and, casual like, leaves the change on  
the bar.*

*Stands to reason it doesn't feel right to Georgie not to pay her  
share, in a good marriage.*

*I suppose Gary's a fancy cook too? Don't tell me!*

*At my age, L'Escala is pretty boring. Holiday spot for the  
young. Young-er, at least.*

*There're cafés on the beach where I like to sit in the shade, read-  
ing the British papers. Plenty in the supermarkets, half a day  
late. Occasional concert in the town hall. Nothing much else for  
the likes of me*

*The main trouble is my skin. Ten years on the Costa Brava and  
after ten minutes in the sun these days my skin erupts. Have to  
go about wrapped up to the gills, like an Arab.*

*I read a lot. Anything more to recommend?*

Love

Mother

13 AUG 15

M

You're 'washed in the blood of the sun.'

That's Joyce!

L XXX

[This was on a postcard captioned *There were these thick  
paddies...*, designed by Bob Starrett, of a caricature cock-  
ney comedian telling a joke against Irishmen, the names

of Beckett, O'Casey, Joyce, Wilde and Shaw emblazoned  
across the wall at his back.]

19 AUG 15

Mum

I've stopped trying to imagine what books you might  
like and simply list what I do!

Alphabetical by author this time, all novels published  
within the last five years:

Nadeem Aslam – *The Blind Man's Garden*.

John Darnielle – *Wolf in White Van*.

Viola di Grado – *70% Acrylic 30% Wool*.

Lars Iyer – *Dogma*. [I found this a bit too dense and philo-  
sophical, but noted a good quote: 'There is the reserve  
of the wise man, full of learning, full of modesty, who  
knows that the truth is infinitely subtle, infinitely com-  
plex, and that one must never speak too soon. And there  
is the roaring silence of the idiot, which resounds with  
dark matter and barren wastes and bacteria.']

Joyce Carol Oates – *Mudwoman*.

Emily Perkins – *The Forrests*.

Marilynne Robinson – *Lila*. [I was entranced, still am,  
by the first two lines of this novel: 'The child was just  
there on the stoop in the dark, hugging herself against  
the cold, all cried out and nearly sleeping. She couldn't  
holler anymore and they didn't hear her anyway, or they  
might and that would make things worse.']

Ali Smith – *How To Be Both*.

Christa Wolf – *City of Angels*.

Mostly women authors, as usual with me. Hope some of  
them fit your taste.

Did you hear what Aunt Betty gave me for my fiftieth?

A Victoria Beckham handbag!