

Own Goal

For Robert Henke, Gary Speed and all those who can't find a way out of the darkness

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I imagine Gary, his arms outstretched, clasping a white ball, the dark stitching buried deep in its leather fold. He places it on the penalty spot. The grass glows green, like the stadium floodlights are on, burning bright, even though the sky is blue and the sun's glowing. The ball is a comet. Gary shoots, Robert flies through the air and catches the ball before it reaches the top corner. A squirrel leaping through the air and reaching safety, he lands on his feet, smiles, - squirrels don't smile or do they? – Robert smiles at Gary, throws the ball at his head. The ball bounces off his soft dark hair and rolls away. Gary laughs. Robert laughs. They laugh together. Exactly the same thing happens, again, and again and again and again and again until their laughter is so hard they can't carry on. They stumble towards each other, clutching their stomachs, laughing their heads off. Robert puts his left arm around Gary's shoulder and pulls him close, Gary puts his right arm around Robert's shoulder and they walk off together, laughing. I want to laugh with them

I imagine my dad's disappointment

I imagine the stadium collapsing, collapsing in on itself, crushing all of the people, the fans - men, women, children – that have come to watch the game. Concrete, metal, plastic. Flesh, blood and bone

I imagine the sun in Spain

I imagine a fan tearing my heart out with his teeth. Half man, half dog, he chases me. I can feel the heat of his breath, the slather from his tongue, the foamy drops splashing against my legs as I run. My socks are soaked, stuck to my calves. A low growl is vibrating in my ears. I run and run and run and run and run and run. And then I run out of running space. I charge into the nylon of the net. I'm trapped. I'm not a goalkeeper. I shouldn't be here. My fingers pull at the nylon and I realize that the heat, the slather, the growl, has stopped. He must have gone. Given up. I have outrun the dogman. The mandog has been beaten.

(Chants) One nil to the running boy, one nil to the running boy

I turn, slowly, praying he isn't there, like I'm in a horror film, but this is the scene where everything is okay. It isn't. The dogman is sitting ten yards away. I hadn't noticed before but he wears a woollen scarf, white and blue, our team colours. I put a hand out to him, *Good boy. There's a good boy.* He doesn't make a sound. Just sits there looking at me. Then, he leaps through the air and his teeth sink into my chest, clamping down on my heart. He rips it out and runs off with it, the scarf billowing behind him. *Good boy. Good boy,* I call after him. Gently. I look down at the hole in my chest, peering inside I see a tiny white football, as if I am looking through a telescope and it

is miles and miles and miles away. The dogman has gone and I've still got the ball

I imagine crying without ever being able to stop

I imagine killing myself

I imagine my girlfriend holding me like a baby and telling me that every thing will be all right

I imagine everything will be all right

continues....