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1 Men Of The World (3.38)

... takes a quick peek behind the portals at the local Masonic Lodge.

“Good evening, John, so glad you could come! It’s quite a great relief.
I think they expect me to succumb like I’m some common thief!
When these embarrassments must be faced, we need the top man’s clout
And clearly no one is better placed to sort the damn thing out!
Oh, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch your back,
That’s our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I’m sure we always shall.

“I must admit, I’ve taken a drink; or maybe three, or four.
Her Ladyship kicked up quite a stink and showed me to the door.
I could hardly find my blasted keys – the Bentley was a blur!
I’d rather imbibe the anti-freeze than hear much more from her!
Oh, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch your back,
That’s our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I’m sure we always shall.

“So I’m on the road – I’m telling you, I’d hardly got half way.
Everything appeared determined to get squarely in my way.
Was it a man, or a midnight myth? Before I could respond –
Well anyway, it finished up with the Bentley in the pond.

Oh, you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back,
That's our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I'm sure we always shall.

"I can't emphasise too strongly now, I never lost control!
It's hard, when I think, explaining how I've ended in this hole.
I'd guess there were a few curses hurled, but bear this thought in mind:
Both you and I are men of the world – that's how we are defined,
So you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back,
That's our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I'm sure we always shall.

"If this can be something you can sort we'll all be in your debt;
And the Lodge won't end up one man short. You'll save the Baronet!
There's really nothing to answer for – you can be reassured.
Your future of course will (say no more!) be finally secured.
Oh, you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back,
That's our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I'm sure we always shall.

"I'll leave it with you to square your sleuth – I've kept it all oblique.
Sometimes it's better to tell the truth, other times not to speak!
When this is done – I don't have to say, to thank you for your skill –
I'll send a bottle, and by the way, Her Ladyship the bill!
Hah! You scratch my back and I'll scratch your back,
That's our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I'm sure we always shall –

"Oh, you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back,
That's our rationale.
We always did and we always do
And I'm sure we always shall."

2 Kitten Kaboodle (2.42)

– a traditional casting-couch ballad.

We remember the time that voluptuous blonde
Called Kitten Kaboodle ran into James Bond.
And who can forget his lascivious leer?
Romantically blowing his smoke in her ear
Whilst pouring his glass of contractual booze,
He makes her an offer she cannot refuse.

It started of course a long time before that,
Before her script even arrived on the mat.
The producer had shown her his thingamabob –
"It is," he said, "one of the perks of the job!"
And so, once again in a slough of despond,
Kitten Kaboodle prepared for James Bond.

Some like it on top; some prefer underneath.
Kitten Kaboodle just gritted her teeth
And threw herself willingly into the part
For Queen and for country, and possibly art.
However you cut it, it works out the same;
It's merely a drama by some other name.

The director, she knew, had a wandering eye.
"We could try a close-up!" – he loosened his tie.
So once more she'd done what she'd rather have not,
Convincing herself it was key to the plot.
Like titles, they rolled and they came at the end;
But what is an act if it's not to pretend?

That night of the premiere, Kitten arrived,
Another completed, another survived;

An all-action movie and, just like before,
So much of it down on the cutting room floor.
Her Oscar performance, above and beyond,
Brought Kitten a part in another James Bond.

3 Lacey Fayre (5.40)

... in celebration of emancipation and of course celebrity.

Out of the womb, it grew to bloom; and who knew what was in store?
The militant campaign took off in nineteen-three or four.
Their names are known to everyone; Emmeline and Christabel,
With Sylvia, Emily Davison and the other personnel.
I suppose it was expected, in the fight for women's votes,
Suffragettes and establishment would be at each other's throats.
Through times of war and uneasy peace and years of discontent,
At the end of a long and cruel road, an Act of Parliament
Eventually, in '28, brought Britain to its sense.
But we all know laws can have their unintended consequence!
Now times have changed; the world's moved on and history's turned its page –
Our heroine is of another kind from a very different age.
I doubt she's ever heard their names; if she has she wouldn't care
What Emmeline or Christabel might think of Lacey Fayre.

Lacey Fayre never gives a thought to anything but today,
Taking the view – quite rightly – that tomorrow is far away.
Lacey and her friend Chantal are going out to celebrate.
“We gotta get pre-loaded first!” said the child of twenty-eight.
“Vodka's cheap at the Bargain Booze, and so's their rum and gin.
So come on Chanty, it's getting late – it's time we got them in.
What's the sense in going out and remembering what you did?
The clubs are free for you and me – the guys pay thirty quid!”
Later on, when she's all cleaned up and discharged from A&E –
Thank God it's all on the NHS and everything is free! –
Even her mate Chantal looks at her and says, “What are you like,
Face down showing that local copper where he can park his bike?”
So Lacey's media status soars, as all her friends declare
How they'd all love to be famous too, and of course be Lacey Fayre.

Lacey Fayre has her YouTube channel – posts almost every day
To thousands of subscribers hanging on every word she'll say.
One time, a local TV station – working on drug abuse –
Almost seemed surprised when her top inadvertently came loose.
Back from Magaluf only last weekend with her mate Marie,
Lacey showed her latest recently collected STD.
“But what the hell!” She always says it. “They've fixed me in the past.
And anyway, the guy was gay so everyone had a blast!”
Home from her 18-30, met by cameras at the gate,
Who will ever censure or condemn a child of twenty-eight?
'Cos times have changed; the world's advanced, and everyone stays engaged;
Heroines of another kind who can never be upstaged.
She's probably never heard their names, and so she'll never care
What Emmeline or Christabel might have thought of Lacey Fayre.

'Cos times have changed; the world's moved on and history's turned its page.
Our heroine is of another kind from a very different age.
I doubt she's ever heard their names; if she has she wouldn't care
What Emmeline or Christabel might have thought of Lacey Fayre.

4 The Great Game (2.18)

Sir Henry Wotton, the 17th century English author and diplomat once opined, “An ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country.” Such dreadful cynicism can have no place in 21st century thinking...

It's always important to keep it a game,
A little like chess but not really the same,
Judging us more by the questions we pose
Than the answers we give. No one listens to those!
It's OK below, but up here in the cloud
If anything changed, it would not be allowed!

We know 'cos we hear them; antagonists whose
Carnivorous ways and herbivorous views
Should really disqualify them from the start.
But when it comes to it...? I guess we're all heart!
So here's how we do it; we meet 'em halfway,
Those masters and monsters of all they survey.

We're awfully polite; at least, most of us are –
I see myself playing the cool avatar
Who's often surprised being taken to task
When bread and a circus is all that I ask.
It's hard always acting and being bemused
And blaming spectators for being confused.

You can't always tell when the blighter's in play –
Coming towards you, or he's moving away.
Sometimes there'll be light and a ripple of heat;
Sometimes there'll be neither ('cos all of us cheat!).
Standing like statues nobody can budge,
We play prosecutor, defender and judge.

I used to ask humbly, "What's argument for?
Surely in truth it must be rather more
About change than assertion; or am I naïve?"
How tangled can be all the webs that we weave!
I'm sorry, but that's how it is, I'm afraid;
The Great Game is on, and it's here to be played.

So it's always important to keep it a game,
A little like chess but not really the same,
Judging us more by the questions we pose
Than the answers we give. No one listens to those.
It's OK for you, but up here in the cloud
If anything changes, it won't be allowed...

5 Demagogue Rules (3.26)

... offers a step-by-step guide to how you too can become a demagogue; or, if that doesn't appeal, on how you can spot one!

I offered my hand. He pushed back his chair.
"So what happens now?" He gave me a stare.
"I already told you, thought it was plain –
Playtime is over! I'll say it again.
All your advice is so out of touch.
Gimme disorder and chaos and such.
Folks without leadership, history recalls,
Never can hack it; or haven't the balls!"
The next thing he said rang warning alarms;
"Dominance somehow obsessively charms!
Pulling in those at the back of the queue,
You never need reason when fear will do!"
Now he's out there running – a man on the make,
A firebrand without an emergency brake.
He'll start out discreetly, then take us for fools;
And sooner or later, the demagogue rules.

"Way back in the past," the candidate roared,
Threatening as always to go overboard,
"People like us used to stand in town squares.
Majors or miners or millionaires,
Everyone listening knew where they stood.
Some were supportive, some baying for blood –
That was democracy taking its course,
Anchored by some gravitational force
That pulled us together into one mass
Regardless of colour or creed or class.
But yesterday's gone. I put it to you:
We never need reason when fear will do!"
So this is the call of the man on the make,

The firebrand without the emergency brake,
Amplified with rhetorical tools.
And sooner or later, the demagogue rules.

Antiquity's flaunted what 'populist' means;
Winding up millions of clockwork machines
And finding 'em scapegoats they can despise
'Til all they can see is blood in their eyes.
No, it's not pretty, but yes, it does work;
All that you need's a malevolent jerk
Naturally knowing which buttons to press –
Rather impressive, we have to confess!
They'll tell you, those books on the library shelf,
You've nothing to fear but fear itself.
Of course we all know that's not really true –
No one needs reason when fear will do!
And all that it takes is a man on the make,
A firebrand without an emergency brake,
Who starts out discreetly, then take us for fools.
And sooner or later, the demagogue rules.

6 Let's Get The Show On The Road (3.23)

... has its roots in a conversation I overheard between a social worker (at least, I'm guessing that's what she was) and a rough sleeper in an underpass in Norwich.

A non-person shifted the snow on his shoes
And huddled down deep in his coat.
Both of us knew he had little to lose –
At least, there was nothing of note;
How sometimes the wicked go walking away
And innocents suffer the loss –
A price he was being invited to pay;
A last nail to finish a cross.
He said, "Let's get the show on the road, my friend,
Let's get the show on the road.
Even in the dark there's a light at the end,
Now let's get the show on the road."

Our pathways had crossed for the briefest of time –
I guess that's the way you'd expect –
And as I expanded on victimless crime,
Parading my own intellect,
He laughed at the theatre of the absurd
'Til tears ran over his cheek.
Linguistically choking and largely unheard,
A million miles from unique,
He said, "Let's get the show on the road, my friend,
Let's get the show on the road.
Even in the dark there's a light at the end.
Now let's get the show on the road."

His world was a jumble of darkness and light
And, mixing the metaphor still,
Hoping that one day his cavalry might
Come thundering over the hill.
But that never happened. His life hit the skids.
The last thing he mentioned to me
Was, "Don't ever martyr your wife or your kids
On the altar of your purity!
Now let's get the show on the road, my friend,
Let's get the show on the road.
Even in the dark there's a light at the end,
Now let's get the show on the road."

And that was the moment the lucifer flared –
The start of his firework show.
A can full of gasoline, ready prepared,
Was leaking out into the snow.
And clear, in the light of his funeral pyre
Where everything seemed to explode,

It came out of nowhere! A heavenly choir
Sang, "Let's get the show on the road!
Oh, let's get the show on the road, my friend,
Let's get the show on the road.
Even in the dark there's a light at the end,
Now let's get the show on the road."

7 Damascus Road (4.04)

On October 1st 2017, shooting from the thirty-second floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas, one man massacred fifty-eight concert-goers at the Route 91 Harvest music festival. In the process, he also wounded over eight-hundred-and-fifty more. And to this day, no one has any idea why...

A smokin' night! The festival was coming to an end,
A noisy celebration and a very special blend
Of country and of carnival for folks of every age.
A cowboy in a Stetson hat was ripping up the stage.
So who could ever in their dreams envision or foretell
The maniac out there unleashing seven shades of hell?

"Howdy!" said the concierge. The killer looked away;
"The sun is going down," he said, "it's been a heavy day."
Sometimes, there are things we can't account or answer for.
His elevator took him to the thirty-second floor.
Something surely shifted on that rocky mountain road;
Something many down the line would struggle to decode.

Nothing on the table but another lousy deal;
Watching yet another ball go dancing round a wheel.
Dancing, always dancing, always messing with his head,
Landing every time on that inevitable red.
"Of all the gin joints in the world..." is what they'll likely say;
He'd visited Damascus on the road to Mandalay.

It's really nothing personal but, as far as I can tell,
None of you have visited the darker side of hell
Where all there is to think of is the furnace and the fire
And shrieking little devils in a screaming amplifier.
The door behind him closed and, for the final time that night,
He checked the clock, then checked again his perfect line of sight.

So time and tide had run its course. It came down to the wire
And shortly after 10pm the gunman opened fire.
Nine hundred people took a hit, and maybe there were more.
We know what was discovered when police blew down the door;
An arsenal of weapons – they were legal, so they said –
And on the floor, the body with a bullet through its head.

Oh, questions there were many, but the answers never came.
In under twenty minutes, they had come up with a name
But that was all. The rest was an enigma and a tease,
Circling round a thousand different wild hypotheses.
And meanwhile, down Damascus Road, a temple was in flames;
With Saul, a spear through his heart, acclaiming Jesse James.

And meanwhile, down Damascus Road, a temple was in flames;
With Saul, a spear through his heart, acclaiming Jesse James...

8 The Quiet Ones (3.11)

Back in 2013, Russian General Valery Gerasimov offered up a set of principles that became known in the West as the Gerasimov Doctrine. Put simply, the Doctrine proposes how, by undermining its institutions and inducing enduring unrest, a militarily fragile country can reduce a stronger state to the point of equivalence by 'soft' guerrilla tactics ('fake news', social media manipulation etc.). It has to be said, in recent times doubt has been cast on whether Gerasimov was the true originator of the ideas ascribed to him. Nevertheless, the Gerasimov Doctrine is surely a notion of which, back in the sixteenth century, Machiavelli would have been justifiably proud!

What's that thing they always say?
The quiet ones are often the worst –
Hidden in their hideaway,

All covert, camouflaged, well-rehearsed.
Founded in fragility,
It's now routinely being employed;
Chaos as a strategy!
A master plan is being deployed...

Campaigns, whispered and unseen,
Are elegant and are easily won.
No one tasks a submarine;
No one fires off a warning gun.
States of permanent unrest
Bring about numerous rich rewards.
Strategists must be impressed;
Conquest without the crossing of swords!

Why attempt to overpower
An opponent when you're sure to lose?
Weakening slowly, hour by hour,
Is a civilised, alternative ruse!
Simple, when you think it through,
As great ideas so often are.
Those still fighting Waterloo
Have to learn a whole new repertoire!

Everybody knows and sees
And no one tries to conceal the facts.
Out in plain sight, if you please!
It's riveting how the world reacts.
All is fair in love and war –
Even a war that's undeclared –
Yet we remain much as before;
Surprised, astonished and unprepared.

Oh, what's that thing they always say?
The quiet ones are often the worst!
Hidden in their hideaway,
They're covert, camouflaged, well-rehearsed.
Founded in fragility
And now routinely being employed,
Chaos is the strategy.
The master plan is being deployed!

Simple, when you think it through,
As great ideas so often are.
Those still fighting Waterloo
Have to learn a whole new repertoire!

9 Disciples (3.54)

It's always tempting to defend the indefensible when flaws are exposed in a beloved entertainer or politician; particularly if we regard their triumphs as a validation of our own thinking. That's why 'alternative truth' is such a marvellous invention; and so deliciously Orwellian...

“To err may be human; forgiveness divine...”
Oh, what a naïve and ridiculous line!
With so much invested, so much being spent?
Well, that's how I see it in any event!
We never forgive those preposterous few
Who rise up to challenge the orthodox view;
Who somehow have lost our crusader's belief;
Who'll question and quiz the commander in chief.
“There when it started and there to the end!”
We, the Disciples, must rise to defend!

To marshal defences – or simply deny! –
Becomes second nature; a process whereby
Belief and conviction are brought into play
So each of us, here in our own special way,
Can justify all of that faith we've bestowed
No matter the cracks that appear in the road.
Authentic believers can understand why

We have to excuse and of course to deny.
Self-affirmation! And I recommend
We, the Disciples, must rise to defend!

So much of ourselves has been sunk in our cause,
It's surely predictable, settling scores
With those flaky heretics, feeble of mind,
Who at the last hurdle become disinclined
To accept and acclaim the conventional view
Of that which is right and is good and is true;
Denying indeed, as they fade in the mist,
Our reason for being! Our right to exist!
That's why we do it, that's why to the end
We, the Disciples, must rise and defend.

With folly of age and with wisdom of youth,
We know without doubt there are more kinds of truth
Than anyone ever can prove in the courts.
Our own pick 'n' mix miscellaneous sorts
Tend most of the time to be those we prefer;
Truth for the selective and sharp connoisseur!
I guess actuality's not our concern –
Sincerities crash and veracities burn –
But still we're alive! And so to the end,
We, the Disciples, must rise and defend.

Yes, that's why we do it. That's why to the end
We, the Disciples, must rise and defend.

10 Rear-View Mirror (3.25)

... tells of the frailty of memory – collective and, I guess, personal.

If you want your truth to be robust,
There's nothing much out there to trust.
The things you think you most recall
Probably weren't that way at all
'Cos memories fade (if they were ever clear!),
Tailing away in a rear-view mirror.

It's basic truth; it's original sin;
Histories are written by those who win.
For sure, the past is a different place
And history books are a paper chase
The victors always commandeer.
Beware relying on your rear-view mirror!

I guess his comment was untoward –
I can't go along with Henry Ford
The way he said, "All history's bunk!"
You and me, we can call it junk
But take it on board, it's crystal clear;
Accidents happen in a rear-view mirror.

I forget who it was who said it to me,
"Nostalgia ain't a patch on what it used to be!"
But now, at least I can say I tried
To tell you the truth (though perhaps I lied?).
I'll say it again, so we keep it clear;
Never rely upon the rear-view mirror!

So I'm sorry it came as a frightful shock
That pilgrims never landed on Plymouth Rock;
That Washington never touched the cherry tree.
In fact, about all we can all agree
Is much out there we all hold dear
Is myth in a mythical rear-view mirror.

11 The Ballad Of Tom Titterington's Horse (3.11)

In a less candid world, I'd be insisting "The Ballad Of Tom Titterington's Horse" is entirely fictional. However, in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, I have to tell you the bike – or more accurately, trike – was maroon; and it had solid tyres. As was widely recognised back in the day, pneumatics were for softies...

Should ever the curse of morality strike,
I remember the tale of my very first bike
And how it emerged as a matter of course
From the fateful affair of Tom Titterington's horse
Because needs must when the devil drives –
A lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

The aforementioned Tom owned a fruiterer's cart
Which everyone held to be state of the art,
And day after day with his produce displayed
He'd tour the avenues plying his trade
Because needs must when the devil drives –
A lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

Through sunshine and rain, in the warm and the damp,
His wagon was pulled by a horse known as Champ.
A magnet for every neighbourhood fly,
Champ was the apple of Titterington's eye –
Remember, needs must when the devil drives.
It's a lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

It was awful in cold, even worse in the heat,
But Champ had atrociously foul-smelling feet.
It was this that my grandmother stressed with aplomb;
And this that I threatened to mention to Tom
Because needs must when the devil drives.
It's a lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

It would be unfortunate, be in no doubt,
If such observations had ever come out –
The affront she was desperate Tom shouldn't hear,
With sunlight emitting from Champion's rear.
But needs must when the devil drives –
It's a lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

Now, blackmail's a word altogether too wild
Applied to the innocent mind of child.
But somehow she knew how she had to respond
'Cos even in those days, my word was my bond
Because needs must when the devil drives.
It's a lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

The bike that appeared was a flyer indeed
And capable of quite unbelievable speed,
So life carried on; but the message was plain.
The matter was never referred to again
How needs must when the devil drives –
A lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

Needs must when the devil drives –
A lesson we all have to learn in our lives.

12 Child Of Aberfan (3.42)

On the fiftieth anniversary of the 1966 Aberfan disaster, Huw Edwards wrote in the Daily Telegraph, "... (the lessons of Aberfan) are still of profound relevance today. They touch on issues of public accountability, responsibility, competence and transparency." I'd guess, in 2067 when a journo of the time gets the job of penning a memorial piece on Grenfell Tower, they'll be saying exactly the same thing.

"This is the valley where all angels sleep!"
The driver stopped by the gate.
I looked at my watch. "It'll have to keep.
There's nothing to celebrate."
The car pulled away. I didn't look back,
But I remembered that hill;
And why, out there in the velvety black,
A million stars stand still.

Nothing's now left of the slurry and slime.
All that's remembered's the name.
One thing I've learned over too long a time:
Great minds do not think the same!
They always say seven is lucky for some,
But not for the Aberfan tip.
No one had warning of what was to come;
When Seven started to slip.

In less than a minute, so many were lost
Thanks to some Lord of Misrule.
Houses and cottages counted the cost;
And the Pantglas Junior School.
And then came that silence; so deadly and deep,
Nothing like ever before;
Dozens of children already asleep
Or being accounted for.

Lord Alfred Robens, the NCB's Chair,
Thought it best not to attend,
This man of priorities – always elsewhere! –
Looking for someone to send.
So often the same; when questions are raised,
Cover-ups quickly commence,
Showing that lack – we must not be amazed! –
Of moral direction and sense.

We all should rejoice how so much has changed.
The Aberfan tips disappeared.
Mostly, affairs are now better arranged.
In those days, as everyone feared,
No prosecutions; none got the sack;
And nobody now ever will.
And so, out there in that velvety black,
Those million stars stand still.

13 The Party Must Go On (4.14)

... because we know the end always justifies the means.

“Fill your glasses, drink a toast! It's time to celebrate
The accident that brought us here that put food on our plate.
Remember those less-fortunate and keep them safe and warm;
And most of all, bestow on them the freedom to conform.
All of us are captains on the ships we choose to sail,
And who will disagree we are entitled to prevail?
There may be changes, gentlemen, we have to undergo
Whilst carefully ensuring we protect the status quo.

“Tonight's the night we gather to display our common touch
And unrestrained extravagance; and I know there is much
New money out there in amongst the ranks of dukes and earls;
So Maestro, if you'd be so good – bring out those dancing girls!
To you, sir, half a million pounds – this promissory note
So decorously hung around this pretty filly's throat.
A thoroughbred, I guarantee, whatever you intend,
With every penny going to a very worthy end.

“And who is not entitled to a frolic and a jape?
Ignore the gutter press equating fondling with rape.
They're looking for a pretext for their media campaign –
They've done it many times before; they're doing it again!
My friends, the party must go on – it's what we all expect.
Remember, show our lady friends the utmost of respect.
As always, I can tell you that it's been a true delight;
A pleasure and a privilege, so thank you and good night.”