

Creation from Destruction

By Bracken Martyn

Tick tock - 'dum dum dum dum, dum dum dum dum.'

Bill joined in with his best Westminster chimes impression as the old clock above his stone fireplace announced the new hour. A feeling of wellbeing and comfort washed over him as the chimes took him back with huge affection to childhood and his grandparents' house. In Bill's world, it was a simple love-hate relationship with sound. The ones he enjoyed brought pleasure and made him feel safe, whilst the ones he detested made him miserable, on edge and frustrated. He wished he could fully control the audio environment and remove all the vexatious noises from his world.

Outside his grimy window, nature was hard at work, breeding, growing and flourishing. He could hear the birds and loved their jolly banter as they chirped away. Sometimes he watched them for ages and wondered what it would be like to fly and look down on things.

Shame, I wouldn't make a good bird, he thought, as I don't do heights.

Sharing Bill's interest in the birds were various cats belonging to unknown neighbours and they fought battles for dominance and ownership of his garden. Basing his opinion purely on looks, Bill liked some of them and loathed others. A mangy brown one *irritated* him and he would tap on the window and have a staring competition with it.

'You lookin' at me?' he'd ask, in his best Robert De Niro voice.

The cat would sometimes engage in the challenge and other times simply throw a cursory glance of contempt before returning to its business. Bill hated that brown cat. Now, the black cat with a large splash of white on its neck, however, was a cool cat.

I'd quite like to talk with you and I might even stroke you if you're friendly. You cats are strange; on one hand you're *lazy louts* and then suddenly you're preoccupied with capturing and *killing* the birds in my garden and you do it just for fun.

When these two contrasting felines battled it out for Bill's plot, they made a *racket*; it cut through him causing stress and loathing in equal portions. Bill wanted the splendid two-tone cat to crush the mangy mog and send it away for good; but he wasn't really sure who was top cat; they hissed, they had stand offs like gunfighters in some B-movie western and, finally, one would chase the other off. He thought all this back and forward territorial action was like a cat version of the *Battle of the Somme*, but that was a bloody daft analogy; or was it a metaphor? He wasn't sure.

'I could have been a professional footballer,' he mumbled, as he shooed away the mangy brown moggy from his garden with an exaggerated kicking motion.

Why don't you just piss off and die, he yelled inside his head.

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Bill had a new neighbour and they didn't talk, Bill wasn't sure if it was down to him to engage, or if these new folks were just rude. They certainly didn't respect Bill's need for peace and tranquility, as from day one their plot was a building site with men and their irritating buzzy machines banging away around the clock.

Bz, bz, bz, bz went the alarm.

'*What!*' he exclaimed, jumping out of bed and peering surreptitiously through the crack between the closed curtains. Bill was horrified to see a gang of men unloading scaffolding from a battered old flatbed truck and it was only 6:58am.

'*Calm down,*' he said to himself, but it didn't help. The pressure cooker effect was kicking in and despite what he thought was a good level of self-awareness, he still couldn't manage the stress triggered by ugly noises.

'*Noise, noise, noise.*'

He spent the rest of the day in a state of high anxiety as the scaffolding gang constructed an exoskeleton around next door's house. This larey bunch of geezers enjoyed plenty of loud blokey chat, which relied on a prolific use of key swear words; these were mainly spat out as emphasis after every other phrase. To add insult to Bill's misery, it was all played out to the habitual radio blasting out jaded pop songs between banal banter from some verbose DJ, who was just trying too hard to be enthusiastic.

After the scaffolders had gone, a man ascended the superstructure which Bill christened the Tower of Babel and proceeded to spend large chunks of each evening playing with an angle-grinder.

Stewing over the latest noise invasion and looking for a plan, Bill was reminded of a short story he'd studied at school for O' Level English Literature. *The Destructors* by Graham Greene was about a boys' gang led by a character called T. The gang broke into a grumpy old man's house when he was away. They'd christened him 'Old Misery' and systematically dismantled his home from the inside, removing all the floors and stairs. They even burnt his savings which were hidden inside an old mattress. The destruction of the building is completed when a lorry pulls away a support pole from the side of the house. Bill couldn't remember all the fine details of the story, but recalled his teacher saying it was meant to be an ironic tale showing how destruction is allegedly a form of creation. He didn't like the story at the time and even as a kid himself didn't like T and felt a little sorry for Old Misery.

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Sod the irony; now, that's what I need; creation from destruction. Wait until no one is home and loosen some of those couplers that hold the scaffolding together. I can reach the lower ones over the fence and all I need is the right sized spanner. It might just create a lack of structural integrity; then, who knows what might happen. They'll never find out it was me; I'll wear gloves and the Health & Safety Executive will blame it on the scaffolders and they'll get done for it.

What a brilliant idea; only trouble is, you're full of clever ideas, but you never see them through. Oh well, I just need to ignore it and not let it get to me; surely it won't be long before they take the scaffolding away and then we'll have some silence.

Night after night the angle-grinder played its song. Bill couldn't hear the birds and even the cats had vacated his patch and were probably digging new trenches for a prolonged battle in some nasty foreign garden.

Bill needed a break from his thoughts. He grabbed a cold beer from the fridge, fired up the TV and melted into his old leather couch ready for the big match. The ref's whistle went and in discordant harmony, the screeching of that hideous angle-grinder filled the air. In an instant red rage he launched himself from the sofa and bounded into the kitchen. As he arrived at the back door there was a nasty graunching noise of metal on metal followed by a badly out-of-time drum roll which nearly drowned out the giant angle-grinder. He paced out of the back door just as a new sonic scream cut through the rest of the percussion section.

Looking up, he saw the Tower of Babel come crashing down with that wretched man riding a scaffold board like a surfer on a giant wave. In a flash, the mighty angle-grinder flew from the operator's hand and sliced his head clean off. A spherical object like a comet trailing blood plummeted to earth and, just as it was about to hit the ground, Bill produced the most majestic half-volley of his life and watched in admiration as the ghastly grinning head flew over the fence and into the neighbour's garden.

'Mr Greene, that's what I call *creation from destruction* and perhaps *now* we can get some bloody peace round here.'

Bill moseyed back indoors just in time to hear an over-animated commentator shout, 'One - Nil, what a fantastic volley.'

'*Fuck it!*' shouted Bill, 'I missed the goal.'