

## Delirium (Great Balls of Fire)

Freddie Fingers Lee's hat is on fire,  
he has poured petrol into its inner tube  
and is playing the piano blindfolded above  
Dad's boarded-up fireplace. A firefighter  
is fitting a smoke alarm that will fall  
an hour after she has gone. In twenty-four hours,  
Dad will be lying dehydrated under a picture  
of Derwentwater, wanting the hospital to keep him in.  
For now, he is unsteady in the living room Mum's Death  
has whipped through, refusing medication, a stick, care.

Dad was friends with Tongue-Tied, Rocking Jimmy,  
Freddie Fingers when he lived in County Durham,  
next to a woman whose horse had free rein  
of the kitchen. Dad got called 'The Doc'. The doctor,  
hauling him up by the armpits, calls him *lad*.  
The triage nurse *my lovely* when he can't tell her  
what year it is. It is 13 January 2004,

the year of Griff Steel and the Duck and Dive Five,  
Dad writes in 'Now Dig This'. It is 1962, Jerry Lee Lewis  
has just set fire to a reporter's face and shaken  
Dad's hand outside Newcastle City Hall. It is sometime  
in my childhood, Linda Gail (Jerry's sister) is on the phone  
to Mum, telling her she has been married seven times  
because she doesn't believe in fornication, telling her  
she will have Van Morrison's balls. (By then Linda has already  
composed the song whose words will appear on Mum's gravestone.)

What is the point of remembering today with its endless grief,  
its queue of people asking you what day it is and if you know  
where you are. Its cubicle curtains, its social workers  
called Jeff, its stairs tests and its unsatisfactory  
snacks. Dad would pour a coke bottle full of gasoline  
over today and set light to it. *I had no favourites,*  
*I hated you all equally,* he cracks when he is admitted  
to Ward 20. *Beat that, Chuck!* I can hear The Killer  
cackle, playing on, and on and on, on his burning piano.