

## Tomorrow, James and the Blue Cat

Ideas are like buses.

No. I'll stop you there. I know what you're doing.

You're trying to predict the next line, aren't you?

Well, it's not that. Two, most certainly do not come along at once.

Anyway, if you'll promise not to interrupt, I'll carry on. Now, where was I? Ah, yes. Ideas are like buses. Some are single storey, short stubby little affairs; others are more substantial, weighty concerns, like double-deckers. And very occasionally, if you wait long enough, a bendy one will come along. A real convoluted, concertina of a tale that can twist as well as it can turn. Much like what I'm going to tell you now I suppose.

JEREMY: (D) Hi it's Jeremy

Oh. That's me on the phone by the way. Yes, that's right. In this story I'm both the protagonist and the narrator. And as you folks who like to predict these things will know, whenever the narrator is also the protagonist it's usually a bumpy ride. OK. Bye. I'll try not to interrupt again.

AGENT: (D) Jeremy. Jeremy. Now, why do I know that name?

What? Oh yes, I should have said. The D in brackets there is short for distort. It helps the Foley editor – he's the sound effects guy. It helps him to know that he's supposed to make the actors sound like they're on the phone. Anyway, back to the action.

JEREMY: (D) Why do you know that name? Erm, because I'm one of your clients. You represent me.

AGENT: (D) Yes of course. Jeremy. You're one of my er, erm...

JEREMY: (D) One of your screenwriting clients.

AGENT: (D) Yes that's it. Now what can I do for you?

And then I sketched it out for her. Best premise ever. Me at the absolute top of my game. Three weeks solid from the kernel of an idea to the final draft. And then she said something I'd never heard before.

AGENT: (D) Sounds intriguing, a bit like that *what if Harry Potter never existed* thing that did the rounds last year. Send it over.

Now, confirmation bias is a funny thing. We see what we want to see. Or in this case hear what we want to hear. See, I only heard "sounds intriguing" and "send it over". The middle bit, yeah that bit, the bit about my idea being a bit similar to something else, didn't register at all. Oh sorry, you're being very good aren't you. I forgot, I told you to stop predicting, didn't I? Right, I'll whizz you through the premise so you're up to speed. Actually, scratch that, seeing as you're interested in ideas, I'll tell you where it came from first.

So, picture the scene. Internal. Day. Piano bar stroke upmarket diner. Staff beginning to set up for the evening service. Of course, I don't work there myself, well, not in any official capacity. And certainly not in any way that HMRC might need to know about. I sort of fell into it really. The perfect little side hustle. Helps with the cash flow between writing jobs. Look, there I am now, just coming into shot. That's me at the piano, back to the camera, engrossed in hunting chords.

F/X: RANDOM PIANO CHORDS

JEREMY:                                   A- minor. Your grip's too strong. No! D no. (HALF SINGING)  
C G FF yes. C G FF. Yes, that's it.

Then I hit upon the lyrics that started it all and so I began to belt them out on top of the chords I'd just found.

*Now your grip's too strong,  
you can't catch love with a net or gun.  
Gotta keep faith that your path will change,  
gotta keep faith that your luck will change  
tomorrow,  
tomorrow.*

Now, Annabel must have arrived for work at that point. She sidles up, sits down next to me on the wide piano stool, and kisses my cheek.

ANNABEL:                                   Oh, that's sounds nice. Defo play it to me when you've finished writing it.

JEREMY:                                   Finished writing it? I wish. It's not mine, it's a James cover I'm trying to do for tonight.

ANNABEL:                                   What, James 'you're boot-y-full' Blunt?

JEREMY:                                   No just James, they're a band.

ANNABEL:                                   They?

JEREMY:                                   Yes, they. There were seven of them.

At this point Annabel's staring back at me with a face like a meme on twitter that says *Nope*. So, I name their most famous song. She's gotta know that, right?

JEREMY: Sit Down?

ANNABEL: I am sitting down.

JEREMY: No. *Sit Down*. It was a massive hit in the 90's. You must have heard of that?

ANNABEL: Nope

JEREMY: *Getting Away With It*. Anthem for the 2008 financial crash?

ANNABEL: Uh, uh.

She's shaking her head like an internet meme again. Anyway, I ran through the lot, all the way up to their Brian Eno collaborations. Not a sausage. She really didn't have a clue what I was talking about. It was as if they'd never existed. Bang! And there was my premise right there.

Are you ready? Right. Picture this: Piano bar lounge lizard wakes up after a heavy night out to find he's the only person alive who remembers James. Knows the whole back catalogue off by heart.

Came up with it all there and then, I did. Told her straight away what an inspiration she was – even went so far as to call her my muse. Annabel loves it. She even starts suggesting plot points. He becomes famous, is tempted by the groupies, yada yada, but ultimately returns to the arms of his first love. Typical beginner's story arc. So I say no, no, my non-screenwriting princess, a more interesting angle would be if, as good as he is and as good as the songs are,

because of who he is – an unknown lounge lizard with zero connections – he goes absolutely nowhere. Like it? Anyway, fast forward to three weeks later.

I'm just stepping out of the shower and I hear my phone ring. It's my agent. Now I'd only emailed the script across that morning. So I'm thinking Oops! Schoolboy error, must have forgotten to attach it before hitting send. But no, I'm not a schoolboy. It turns out I'm the consummate professional. Watch.

F/X: Mobile phone ringing

AGENT: (D) Jeremy, this is great! Film-slash-music is *so* hot as a genre right now – I'm looking at Mamma Mia, that Freddie Mercury biopic. Oh and, what with the piano connection, La La Land.

JEREMY: (D) Really, does it come across like that? I was hoping you'd see it as something a bit less, well, commercial, more arty, you know like A Star is Born or gritty, like that Hacienda docudrama.

AGENT: (D) Yeah that could work too. Listen, don't get your hopes up, but I'm getting a good vibe about this one. I'll put some feelers out and get back to you.

She'd get back to me. Now that was an alien concept. No one ever gets back to me; I'm always the one that does the chasing. But true to her word things moved pretty fast and over the course of the following few weeks she did indeed get back to me – several times.

F/X: Mobile phone rings

AGENT: (D) Jeremy, great news! Blue Cat Productions want to option it.

JEREMY: (D) Who?

AGENT: (D) You know, they did Walking on Sunshine, and the Elton John story.

JEREMY: (D) What, really? I thought I said I didn't want to go too commercial with this one.

AGENT: (D) Yeah I tried that love. The indies won't look at it, music purchase rights would have been too steep. Blue Cat were the only ones with the pockets and connections to clear the soundtrack.

JEREMY: (D) Yeah, I'm not sure they're the best fit I don't want it to be too chees--

AGENT: (D) Listen Kubrick! Unless you want to change the premise to piano player from Poughkeepsie is the only guy on the planet that remembers S Club 7's back catalogue, then I'm afraid this is the only offer on the table.

JEREMY: (D) Ok. When do they want to meet?

AGENT: (D) Ah. That's just it.

BEAT

(D) They're saying this isn't going to be a hands-on project for you.

JEREMY: (D) What does that mean?

AGENT: (D) Well, now are you sitting down for this?

BEAT

(D) They showed it to Curtis Richards. He not only loved it, he said he wanted to write the screenplay.

JEREMY: (D) But I've done the screenplay. It's not a treatment. Surely it's just script editing now?

AGENT: (D) I hate to break this to you love, but it doesn't really work like that in those echelons.

JEREMY: (D) So what are you saying? It's gonna be like that ghost writing gig you got me last year?

AGENT: (D) Not really. As I say it's not a hands-on one for you writing wise. They're paying for the idea, the concept. You'll get a minor credit. Script Consultant I should think, but I'll try and negotiate for a 'Co-story by'. Well look, have a think about it. It's five grand plus a share of net residuals. I'd take it if I were you.

JEREMY: (D) What's net residuals?

AGENT: (D) Zero usually – it's a tax avoidance thing, there's never any net.

JEREMY: (D) So 5k and a minor credit for the best thing I've ever--

AGENT: (D) Less my twelve and a half percent of course. Yeah I know, it's not what you dreamed of, but it's a start. And 5k for a first draft. That's a lot better than what my other clients are getting.

I know what you're thinking. A bird in the hand. And five grand is a fair old sized bird. OK. You got me. I sold out. So I spent a blissful fortnight lounging around trying to decide what I'd spend five grand on once the cheque came through. Problem was, after a fortnight of lounging around with the sort of financial confidence that can only come from the expectation of guaranteed payday, my credit card was steadily creeping up on the 5k mark. And that was pretty much when I got the next phone call.

F/X: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile phone rings

AGENT: (D) Jeremy. Bad news I'm afraid. Deals off.

JEREMY: (D) What! Why?

AGENT: (D) Apparently your film's been done already. So as a concept, what you've written is worthless. Richards is pissed.

JEREMY: (D) Nah. That's impossible. If there was a movie about James, I'd have seen it.

AGENT: (D) No, no. It wasn't about James, it was about the Beatles. Or was it the Stones? Yeah that's right the Stones, 'Can't Get No Satisfaction' they called it.

As you can imagine I was a bit stunned. And then she accuses me of plagiarism.



AGENT: (D) Look, Are you sure you haven't seen it? Because the plot looks pretty damn identical to me. I'm starting to wonder if anyone on my books can come up with an original idea.

So I said

JEREMY: Well you can't always get what you want.

But in the millisecond or two that it took even a writer of my calibre to come up with such a line of denouement defining dialogue, I think she'd already put the phone down. What's the rest of that lyric now? Ah yeah. But if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need. And that's how I came up with my libretto. Struggling writer gets his best script taken up by a big studio, he's paid off but no writer's credit. Cut from his screenplay he descends into a spiral of self-loath... [FADE]

<sup>1</sup>END