



Inspiration

Jane Borodale

INSPIRATION. I'VE ALWAYS had a problem with this word. I prefer 'impetus', or even 'inkling'; these early scraps towards fully-formed ideas are so elusive — try to look an inkling straight in the eye, and it will scuttle back under its rock.

'Inspiration' implies some sort of divine intervention: the gift of a golden shower of thought from a capricious god. I'm open to persuasion, but this seems unlikely and quite vague. Am sure these gods are too busy to be following us around our daily lives, waiting for a moment to get involved in the process, or to slip us a sign.

No: the procedure for seeking out inklings relies on our methods (often honed over time), chance, and a certain degree of perseverance. There's a lot of ground-work: spending time laying traps to catch inklings, for example, while we patiently wait in the woods. Sometimes they're out there nesting on open ground — like larks. These are the ones we can only ever hope to stumble across.

It helps to scout out their habitats, their special ways. We organise hunts. Complicated hunts that involve travel and overnight stays in unfamiliar surroundings, train journeys, museums and libraries (especially those), long walks, experimental cooking, watching documentaries, mysterious hours spent staring into space.

Sometimes the inklings come inside of their own accord, and sneak up



on us as we brush our teeth or unload the dishwasher. They often do this when we have no pen to hand and have to mutter the precious inklings aloud, until we can find a pen, or someone else's pen, or pencil or burnt stick or even eyeliner, to jot them down. We press them into notebooks for storage, or onto backs of envelopes, cut-up cereal packets, yellow Post-its, urgent memos on our phones, so they can't get away.

We don't always know what they look like, but can hear them, or smell them, or have heard rumours. The rumours alone can keep us awake at night, hour after hour, as we try to remember inklings that we saw in a dream. Sometimes, when it gets really bad, the inklings haunt us.

Looking for inklings makes us mad, sometimes, and sometimes it makes us monstrous, rootling through the darkest, dankest places we can find, on purpose, places belonging to other people, or more often belonging to ourselves.

Sometimes we manage to gather a whole crop of inklings, for them only to die on us, so that they're no use at all, a basket of mouldering, lifeless little idea-corpses rotting away to nothing. A few of these can be revived. Damaged, they can limp on half-usefully, into whatever sunsets we can think of for them, but they'll never be as fresh or as flavoursome as we'd like them to be.

Sometimes the gathered ones fall into cracks in the desk-drawer, or down the back of the writing chair — and lie dormant for a long time, like flea larvae do, waiting for warmth and light and vibrations to reactivate them.

I don't believe in the word 'inspiration': I prefer inklings, gremlins. Nonetheless, there are also a few unexplained inklings that happen from time to time, ones that strike without warning, with none of the normal pre-conditions being in place. Where do they come from? But enough of this metaphor.