



In My Bottom Drawer

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NOT A TEASMADE but my dad's old cigarette lighter.

Not a tablecloth but a box of art postcards.

Not a bedspread but a model of St Francis and the animals.

Not a pair of grey silk gloves but a fading photograph — John Vernon and me on the roof of the sixth-form block in 1975.

I'm not planning on getting married, never have, never was; in any case, I can't imagine I'd ever engage with the old idea of 'a bottom drawer,' those items collected in readiness for my future as a wife.

One of my literal bottom drawers has jumpers in it and sometimes, if I don't shut it fast enough, a cat or two. My other bottom drawer is loosely to do with writing. And it's to do with the future, which isn't to say it doesn't contain things from my past. It's a drawer full of writerly intentions, of things I'm collecting for a day that may never come. My bottom drawer is an act of faith — not only that my writing won't jilt me at the altar, but that it will come into my life at all. It's the bottom drawer of inspiration.

I think it's also a kind of insurance policy — a fall-back position, not only for the day I might run out of paper but in case of days when I want to write but simply can't find a way to begin.



There's a Colonel Mustard keyring in it, a picture of a phonebox in a desert, a photo of 'The Piano Man' — that guy who turned up on a beach claiming to be an amnesiac; there's a necklace I made for my mum when I was twelve, a box of newspaper cuttings, and seventeen notebooks — all of them new and empty. (I clearly plan on writing a *lot*. Or maybe I'm just obsessed with stationery.)

It's an odd and eclectic collection, but *collection* it definitely is. Despite how the list of contents might sound, I don't hoard random crap. At the time of adding any item to my bottom drawer, I've felt a small spark of possibility for something I may one day write — the germ of an idea, or a particular interest. Sometimes, things hibernate in there for ages. I once kept a news cutting for ten years before re-reading it and being kick-started to write a sequence of poems that became my first pamphlet *and* the basis of my first radio play.

Sometimes, though, I must admit, things fester. Like some old jottings in a notebook, I look at them and wonder what one earth I was thinking of. When I was getting my head round this piece, I looked through my bottom drawer and found several items that now mean absolutely nothing to me; I can't imagine they'll ever inspire me to write. A bit like the traditional bottom drawer collected over years with no suitor in sight. The honeymoon underwear that's gone out of style, the hideous purple butter dish you can't imagine you ever chose to buy.