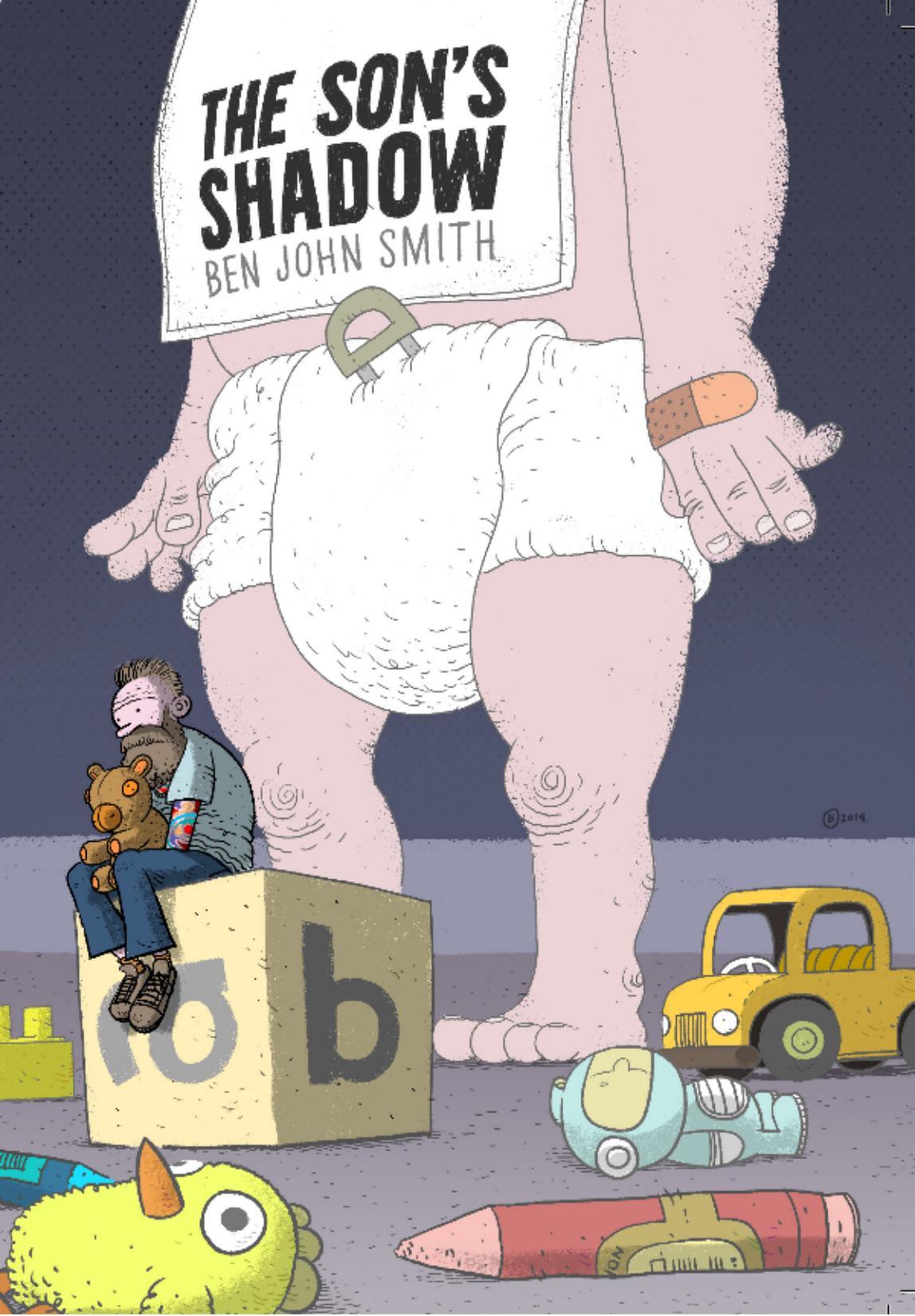


THE SON'S SHADOW

BEN JOHN SMITH



“In chess, it’s called Zugzwang... when the only viable move, is not to move at all.”

- 9 Year Old Nemo, "Mr Nobody"

I have always worn two pairs
Of pants.

One on top of the
Other;

Because I was embarrassed
By my skinny,
wiry,
legs.

Two times in my life
it came in handy.

One time was when I dropped
A huge rock
On a dying rabbits
Body and its shit bag
Burst all over me.

The second time was when
Some Samoan
Dudes I was rolling around
The train tracks with
Stomped a Latino dudes head
so bad that blood had flicked
Up all over the attackers
white jeans.

I gave him my sacrificial layer
So the police wouldn't
Ring him up if they caught us
as we made our way back

To Broadmeadows station.

Whether I was covered in the shit
Of a poor defenseless
Bunny
Or running around
with the
Heartless wolves;

I always had a strange way
Of
Shedding my skin.

The Doctor says I'm dead in 10 years
If I don't put a cork in the bottle

Give my liver a break.

I'm putting together a
Home gym in the dark
While my 1-year-old sleeps.

I have lived through an era of
Crackwhoreconfessions.com

And I wonder if getting fit
Will save me;

Or us...

Or if we are most
Definitely fucking
Wasted.

Forever.

I bet being in space
Could be awful lonely

But the truth is
I could never get far enough
Away from people
Here on earth.

I wish there was a place
Somewhere
dead in the middle.

There probably is
But I bet it's unsafe

And full of an
Uncomfortable
Nothing

I haven't attempted to write sober before
and I have my doubts on whether it will work
or not.

I try and
It doesn't.

I write terrible poems;

but I always have
to be fair.

I rocked up to a camping trip

SOBER

and every one was on acid
hiding under self made wooden teepees.

I fell asleep worrying that
Someone
would snap
and in a RAGE
And put a .22 slug
into my belly
or run a sharp knife
over my throat.

These are the 3 people in my life
who aren't family,
but should be.

some of the only people
in the world I love

but still think
that under the right circumstances
they may one
day kill me.

All this goes through
My mind
As my best friend
Courteously

Tries to hide his
Masturbation
above a mattress
Just a few feet from
The end of my
Bed.
The bed sheet dancing in
the candle light like
a ghost from a cartoon.

I Googled

"What is another name for "Sauce"?"

and used what I found
three times
in this poem.

I have a cat
and not a dog
because I have no desire
to own anything
living.

I stand in the kitchen
Putting milk thistle down my neck
To help my liver recover
with a mouth
Full of whisky
Knowing in two weeks
I gotta go
Clean and serene

But still
on the low

I'm holding up a
stashed

\$250 dollar
Bottle of Xanax
hidden inside a sock
in the medicine
cabinet.

Cause I can't handle the
Shakes without 'em

and I can't handle
the truth
either fucking
way.

The discourse continues
To be boring
Bland
And
Bloated.

Pretty sure they are
Poisoning the local water source...

Not sure who "they" are
But the tap water tastes wrong...

there is something foreign in it.

It tastes like a metal headache.

like the end of a sandblasting hose.

It tastes like
cold steel.

I don't know if it's all this
chamomile tea and Xanax
but I'm thinking
I'll never drink

or think

ever
again.

I'm crying as I watch a
Chinese man
crack yellow yolks
from cream egg shells
into a plastic bucket.

Sometimes it's knowing just enough
to know that you don't know anything
and everything in between
is just a rough guess

and maybe that
is enough
or at very least

understandable

The first night I'm sober
I cut my toenails

Thinking about the time
when my son Hunter
Was only a few months old
and after
A few beers I said
with confidence
that I,

his father

Could trim his longing fingernails.

I miscalculated the depth
and cut a slither of skin
off the top of his finger.

He screamed and there was
a significant amount of blood.

Now,
being very careful
I trim
my own
ivory finger trunks
Like a wood worker

Like a stalking
albino rhino
hunter.

I used to think people
who looked after themselves
suffered from a self-absorbed vanity,

going to the gym was
for egomaniacs.

taking multivitamins was
for cowards

going to the doctor -

"that's what women do"
as my father would say

but I think I get it now.

It's not about dying
it's really more about
not killing yourself

and maybe staying alive
is being braver than the
latter.

I am reading, drawing, playing video games.

Green tea.

I'm doing things,

I'm reading to my son.

Taking care of yourself
Let's you care for others.

I feel like I'm an old man with a bad liver
And I have so many, many regrets
But there is learning left
for the
captain at the helm yet.

My wife is perfect;

devastatingly attractive,

Strikingly Beautiful,

Just like a Ted Bundy victim

Her bath water
Drains with a
Sound that resembles
A strangulation

The last death throes
Of a sinking ship

Her bath water;

The sauce of her
Day

Human soup

like the remaining broth

left in a pot of hotdogs.

Red water,
pink skin,
enamel eyes.

Ships are always
named after a Female
and I understand why
when I see his toy hammer
Sunk into the
Living room carpet.

Submerged.

Like an island
Like a rock
Like an anchor.

No man is an island
And no Woman
Is a ship.

We argue,
all the ways
the sea sways,

like

A wave

like
The tide.

Because
When you cry

Tears are salt water;
Not for science reasons
But for reasons of superstition.

Our eyes are a channel to
the ocean,

the sewer drain holes
from our minds.

The sun may control life
But the sun can't control the sea.

The ocean is a bar fight.

The moon is a beautiful
big breasted woman
who wants you to leave your wife.

The moon makes
monsters of us all
in the kindest way
possible.

The moon is a mad woman
and the sun is a sad man
and the sea is
a murderous whore.

Jake LaMotta died on the day
I first had an isolation tank float.

I think he would be very unimpressed
by my decisions made on that day.

There is a color that is both
black and white at the same time
and everything is beautiful in the void.

There is no such thing as nothing
and I can't wait to die

but I am a patient man.

I brushed my teeth
For the first time in months
The other day.

The sink was

FULL

Of blood.

I guess that's what
It takes to be a
Happy and functional
Member of society.

They say beauty is pain
But
I'm not beautiful.

The Brooklyn abattoirs and boneyards
always smell sweeter when it's raining.

I could live on rats and rainwater
but she needs cheese and wine

My wife has gone away for the night.

I just jacked off in VR.

I feel like making my PlayStation
breakfast in the morning

Smooth
Curved
Black/white
Neon

The
Future.

The future is a perfect noise of static forever.

When you're born all you have is your voice as a
weapon.

As a warning.

Your only born gift of defiance.
To cry for help.

I hope my son never stops screaming.

We watched home videos
and fucked so long my cup of green tea was
ice cold
and Netflix was asking if I was

"Still watching Devilman: Cry Baby"

Talking to cab drivers about God
is like my super power.

I say things to my wife and she pretends to not hear
them,

things like.

*"I'm so thirsty baby,
please spit in my mouth."*

I'm still trying really hard
to be a decent Father

but if I'm still pickled,
and not much can be done,

know that I love you kid.

I'd call you my shadow,
but that wouldn't make any sense;

because you're the brightest thing
that ever stood by my side.

She says

"I just want to sleep forever"

and I say

"that's just being dead, dude."

I tell her I know the feeling.

Everything that God didn't put into its original
place,
and mankind has tried to move, has been a disaster.

Cane toads in Queensland

The fox

The rabbit

White men
In Australia

The original plan
Was the best plan

And every move we make
takes us further away
from how it probably should have been
before we forgot
how unimportant this
whole cosmic
song and dance

can be.

I was shooting targets
(some were photos of police officers)
and at about 60 feet
and clustering pretty well.

I'm slowly getting more confident

I'm getting
more confidence with my abilities.

Booze offered a brash bravado
but it just brought bad
and unnecessary situations.

I can handle my weapon now.

A bigger one if needed.

I'm level-headed, measured.

Know when to pop off and when to keep it calm.

There is a staunch fierceness
in me now that's like a level gauge;

strongest when the bubble
is in between
the lines

My grandmother had a stroke.

She was dying in the bed beside me.

She woke up when she heard my voice
as I spoke to the nurse and said

"Hello Ben, have you just finished work."

I told her I loved her
and she didn't need to talk to me
and that I was just going to sit
beside her and watch TV
for an hour and she fell back asleep.

I drank the remaining liquid
of her plastic cup of apple juice
and fell into a chair to watch
\$9.50 a day/\$144 a month television.

We watched Home and Away.

She died and I miss her.

I even miss her when she was
in her final moments.

When she wasn't even there.

I felt like buying a bottle of wine
on the way home
but I didn't
and that means something.

Death is nothing

and nothing can stop me.

Fuck summer to death
and it's only spring.

I have a heart for winter.

I seem to be
growing muscles,

losing that bloated ET stomach

but there is still a gnawing at my soul.

A restlessness that has been with me forever

but now it seems hungry and violent
like a trailer park
bobcat.

Technology is the new religion;
god is a machine and we created him.

That makes us the creators of god.

The actual immaculate creation was Conception.

The soul isn't bone or teeth or flesh;
it's a blue and grey magnetic frequency
that's rubbing together.

Electricity.

God is a frequency.

God is a frequency
you can't dial into
unless you produced the radio station.

If God could talk he would tell us
to stop having sex,

he would tell us to
stop making babies

let the Human race die out
through strangulation of the womb.

We take up too much space while
the current god exists
in the moat of a light wave

you don't earth or house a body like that.

I keep thinking of doing something
really
really
bad.

But somehow life gives me a moment of art
that's captured in a 2 hour film,

or a minute of music

a phone call to her when she asks if I'm okay;

a split second in which my son smiles
at the opening of a sunflower.

I'm often lost in such a sadness
but these moments to me
are the way a cat must feel
when it's laying on a warm roof.

They have nine lives
but will waste every one of them
just soaking up the sun.

It takes a pistachio twenty years
before it bears fruit

Think about that next time you complain
about a paying \$12 for bag of nuts
but fork out \$3 bucks for a
burger in a Styrofoam wrapper.

Say what you want about the man
but Hitler had a tremendously boyish smile.

I feel like I got nothing left in me
for that mad side of art.

I fucking ripped my heart out
through my throat and splattered it
all over the fucking tiles.

I had nothing left to give,
which meant the people I love got what was left;
and that just wasn't enough.

You can't be a good husband and a good dad
if the only way you can create
is to be a selfish,
miserable and
self-destructive
asshole.

Maybe I could have been a half decent artist
if I stayed on that path
but that wasn't a choice I could consciously make
AND LIVE WITH.

I met some old
Friends at Christmas
In a park.

One Had recently
Been shot
Nine times
For something you
Don't put in poems

Later on someone
Might have been
Getting killed
Over stealing a
Trombone
From a friend's garage.

This is the life I live
between the moments
when I'm holding together a

fake face

a job

and a family

but in reality

I can be a fucking beast
if I get drunk and lost
in a moment of true
madness.

The kids shot
Rubber bullets
At the ducks

I gave them packets of
Sunflower seeds
and some soil in a pot.

My wife makes air quotations and says

*"Hashtag, She's just
had an abortion".*

On a family holiday
there was

A blackout, and while a
Noisy generator was
Trying to turn over,
a loud bang
Woke up my son

He woke up crying
I got a flash light
And growled at him

Even though he is scared
I can't hide my frustration
at waking up at 2am
with a banging hangover.

He cries for a full hour.

A blackout...

The perfect excuse
For a story under the covers
Or a treasure hunt
Maybe we could have watched the
Sunrise.

Instead I told him
To shut up and go back to sleep

And he cried for a full hour
like that.

The night before
We played hide and seek...

He laughed for a full hour.

I was the monster and he
Would hide as I chased him around.

On reflection
I was a much better monster
Than I was a
Father.

The sunshine is a beautiful thing
To a snake
But the opposite to a
Banked fish

Everything is perspective.

The only stories worth telling
are either tales of war and/or of peace;

and peace is dead boring,

and war,

well war

is just
death,

forever.

Life is so simple
until your wife
grows one in her stomach.

On the way to my sisters
I have a boiling hot lasagna

on my lap

I say

*“if I drop this on my groin
imagine having to go to the hospital
with third degree burns on my dick,
and having to have a skin graft
with meat from my ass...”*

She’s says

*“That sounds like something
The old Ben would say”*

And I shake my head as I reply

“Think about the new Ben

*The next time
You have to suck
My dick,*

*Which is really
grafted meat from my ass,
baby”*

I stare like that
with a smile
that’s really a mouth full of
yellow broken teeth.

One last fierce shaking fist.

One last tight-lipped sneer into the void.

A final beating of the chest

before I turn my back on the Abyss,

as its dead eyes
watch me
leave,

like a scorned lover,

the one that got away.

I've had a pretty easy life
Surrounded by good people
With Kind hearts

I've felt loved

But I always felt
Unworthy of it.

I thought that if
Someone didn't
Really REALLY love me
Then they didn't really like
Me at all

Something to do with
Being the firstborn maybe

Something to do with
Having a mum who
Couldn't see my faults
And a dad
Who could see too much
Of him self
In me.

I don't know.

There was times inside
Me that it all felt to real

Like a swell
From
The ocean

A tide

Held back by the moon
And interrupted
By the sun

It got so much
Inside me that I felt like
I would crack open
And just stay
Forever broken

like an egg yolk

I made myself look
As ugly and rough

As possible so
People would take
Me seriously

I had only two sides

Pure love
And pure
white
hate.

I never liked myself
But
I don't know if I have
Ever really been capable
Of loving someone
Other than me

When you wear a wolf's skin
But allow
Yourself to be vulnerable
You invite a pack of animals
To see your throat
And make it easy for
Predators to
Sink
Their
Teeth
In.

I haven't figured
Anything out

I'm still a very flawed
Human being

But I drove my wife to a concert
The other night

...and drove home sober

I took two weeks off the booze

And every day I get home
From work
I'm greeted at the door
By my son who says

"Daddy;

Let's play

Hide and seek"

And I do.

And I play.

And I don't hate myself

I don't get lost
In loathing
And anxiety

I count to ten

Aloud

And stalk the house
Looking for him

Even when
I know where he is.

“You found me daddy”

And he’s too young to know
what I mean
But I whisper

“I have, dude.

I’ve found you.

*And I think
I’ve found myself
as well.”*

*“Thank you,
Hunter.”*