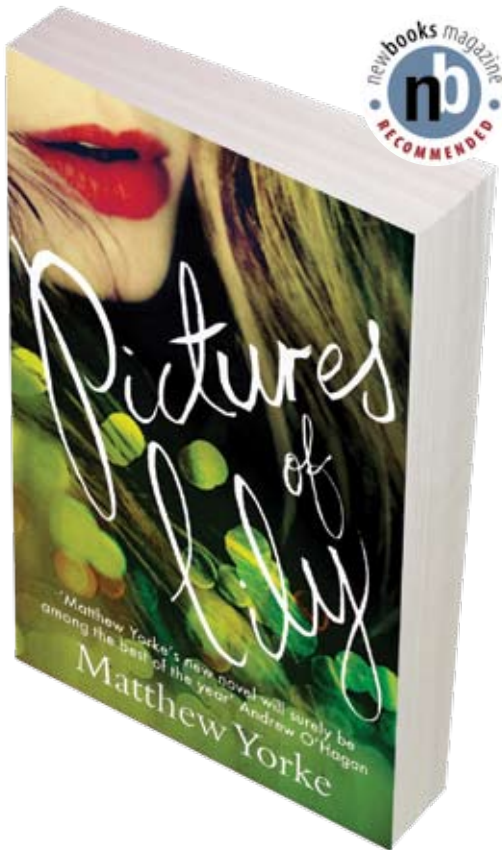


Pictures of Lily

Matthew Yorke



For seventeen-year-old Lily Myers, adopted at birth, there are so many unanswered questions. Most pressing is the simplest question of all: 'Why was I given up?' In Lily's case there is refuge in melody. It's in the dub venues of the north of England, in the fizzing bass lines, the buzz of static. Here is the volume to quell the doubts, the fears, even the truth. Yet these melodies have the power to suggest possibilities of their own – not least when coupled with Ayahuasca, a visionary plant used by Amazonian shamans as a vehicle to commune with the spirit world, a world where there can be no secrets...

So here I am back at Faversham House: second time in nine months. Not good news, as Roger would say.

There's that same smell of cooking, which reminds me of school only it's worse. And there's the same sound of people playing pool down the corridor in the common room. If I listen hard enough to the click-clack of the balls hitting against one another I get wound up, a sort of hot, impatient feeling like I'm going to go mad and there's not one thing I – or anybody else, come to that – can do about it. When that happens I look into the pit, the place I can see into when I close my eyes. It's full of people mainly, but there are strange creatures in there too, ones I can't identify. But, then, who are we to think we've discovered all the species that inhabit the planet?

'Can you spell me the word 'world' backwards?' Dr Murdo asked, when Roger and Diane brought me in and we were all sitting together in the consulting room. And I couldn't. It was like I was staring down a kaleidoscope and the letters were twisting and turning, exploding into colours.

'And what you were doing last Tuesday?'

Now it was as if I was looking over the edge of a well and couldn't tell if what I couldn't see was a few

inches or a few miles away.

'I don't know.'

'Georgia,' Roger whispered, 'we were in Barcelona. In Gaudi's cathedral – don't you remember?'

I looked at him. The way he had said my name had brought me up, made me swallow. 'Can I go home now?' I asked.

And I didn't really need the answer. I already knew.

Dr Murdo cleared his throat. 'No, Georgia. I would like you to stay here,' he said. 'For a few days anyway... just to see how you get on.'

Pause.

'Ideally I'd like you to say you'll stay voluntarily.'

I knew what this meant, too. 'Okay.'

Roger and Diane left. Through my window I watched them talking in the car park. Diane had her head bowed; Roger was holding her by both elbows. After a bit he hugged her. None of that bothered me. What got to me was seeing Fudge sitting in the front seat of our car. He knew what the deal was. His ears were pricked, and even though I couldn't see his eyes I could tell they had that worried expression he gets when people slam doors or start shouting in our house. I wanted to stroke him, tell him how much I

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loved him and needed him, tell him how everything would be okay. And because I couldn't I began to get that intense feeling again. So I lay down and closed my eyes.

Dr Murdo came back into my room about half an hour later. 'I'd like you to take these,' he said, placing a small plastic phial on my bedside table with two blue pills in the bottom.

'What are they?'

'They're sedatives, Georgia. Once you've had a good night's rest you're going to feel a whole lot better.'

I knew he was right. So I took them.

'And I want you to read this,' he said, placing a folder next to the empty phial.

'Read what?'

'It's what you wrote last time you were here.'

Dr Murdo took a step back and folded his arms, trying to be less doctor-like, trying to give the impression that he wasn't in charge of 'a thirty-bedded in-patient unit for people of all ages, with mental-health problems, who require specialist care during an acute phase of their illness.'

'I have to say, you're a very good writer, Georgia,' he said.

'I know that.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because I got an A in my A level.'

He had one finger on the folder, as if he was pressing a button. 'That doesn't surprise me in the least, Georgia, not in the least,' he said. Now he had a hand on the door. 'Once you've read it again and you've had a good rest then we can talk about it. In the context of your present situation I think we'll find it a good starting point. Okay?'

'Okay.'

The next morning, I started to read.

Adopted

What's so strange about wanting to find out where you've come from if you're adopted? Let me tell you: it's the first thing you want to know. Who your parents are. How they met. What they thought, said and did when they discovered they were pregnant with you. How come they decided it was 'in your best interests' that they give you up? And how come it's 'give up' and not 'give away'?

I think about my mother a lot. More than I do about my father. Did she die in childbirth? In pain? Did she have me in prison? Was she a murderer? Or was she a prostitute – what Roger calls a tart and Diane a working girl? Or was she nothing more than just a 1990s version of a chav or a scally? One of those girls you see in the market, with a big belly and pink, pimply skin?

Sometimes when I'm in town, waiting for the bus or just hanging out, I find myself staring down at the pavement and thinking, Yes, I must be the child of a 1990s version of a chav because I know that gutter, that paving stone. This was a place my real mother used to bring me in my pushchair before she gave me up; this place is part of my old life. I don't like the

idea that I may have been two or even three before I was given new parents. It freaks me out.

'We got you when you were five weeks old,' Diane told me, in her matter-of-fact way, when I asked her about this. Not that I believed her then any more than I believe anything she says now.

'And did you choose me?'

'In a sense.'

'What do you mean, 'in a sense'?'

'Well, really you chose us.'

'How come?'

'There weren't as many babies up for adoption in 1991. We had to join a very long queue. Roger used to ring up every day.'

I think even Diane could see that she was digging a hole for herself. Don't adopting parents usually tell their kids they went up and down a line of cots and finally chose the special one – you, of course? Now she was saying how it was.

'So basically it was me or nothing.'

Diane was chopping something at the breakfast bar. She looked like that guy in *Psycho* when she stopped what she was doing, looked up and started stabbing the air with the knife.

'Georgia, when we saw you we couldn't have been any more sure,' she said, with one of her lights on-off smiles.

It's not as if it's been a truly burning desire to know about my parents, but it is a need that is always there, like a sleeping dog. The dog gets disturbed and stands up – it might just flop down the next minute and go on sleeping, or it might start moseying around; it might even start digging. Just like Fudge. You can never tell. All you know is that the question is there, like a dripping tap or daylight around your curtains when you're trying to get some sleep. In the end you're going to have to get out of bed and sort it out.

I am going to find my parents. It's possible – more than possible, actually. In fact, if I don't track them down I'll be one of the unlucky ones. I'm not naïve enough to think that everything's going to be super-cool once we make contact. I've sat in front of the news often enough to know that the world is a pretty unpredictable place and the one thing you shouldn't ever forget is that you never know what's around the next corner. But at least having some of these questions answered is going to stop the spirits.

Barrett

Barrett's an interesting guy.

His dad has got kids the world over, so Barrett's got a brother in Seattle, a sister in Rome, a brother in Miami, another in Frankfurt. He's only seen his father three times but on each occasion he's brought Barrett one of his records as a present. Barrett keeps these albums on display in a locked cabinet, which he says he used to call his museum when he was a kid (and still does now, if I know Barrett, because even though he's twenty-three he's the kind of guy who still sucks his thumb on the quiet).

'That's my dad there,' he told me once, pointing



through the glass at the record sleeve, which was a flag of red, gold and green, with the band silhouetted in black in front of the red bit. They all had a lot of hair.

'Was he a Rasta?'

'Still is.'

'Where does he live now?'

'Between the sea and a river. He's a fisherman when he's not touring.'

Barrett's dad used to play with Bob Marley and the Wailers and Peter Tosh and King Tubby. I'd heard of Bob Marley, of course, but not the others – not until I met Sula and started going to the gigs. You can't really tell if it's true about him playing with the Wailers. I mean, shouldn't he be rich and famous, then? But quite often it's really not important what's true and what isn't. It's more important what you feel to be true. On the whole feelings are more reliable than knowings.

But what interests me about Barrett and his dad is that it just goes to show that you don't really need a father – all you need is to know that you've got one. I mean, what apart from three pieces of vinyl has his dad ever given him? Nothing. But if he hadn't got those albums, if his mother had just told him, 'Sorry, I don't know who your father is, it all happened late at night in a car park', then Barrett would be like me – forever wondering.

Ben hasn't got such a colourful past.

He grew up in Wales in some mountains. His father had a stroke when Ben was twelve – 'One morning he woke up and it was like he'd frozen, Georgia' – and his mother is a colour therapist, which is something she trained to do to help Ben's father, and which is something that earns her good money now. It's true what they say about good stuff coming out of bad, that every cloud has a silver lining. If it didn't the world would be in trouble, I suppose. But sometimes I see Ben looking real sad. It seems the only time he is properly happy is when he's playing bass. Then you see a smile light his whole face and all of a sudden he's so relaxed, as if he's managed to dodge ahead of his trials and tribulations, like you can in a crowd when you think people are following you. So there's someone with a dad absent through illness. You can't win, can you?

Sula has had sex with Ben and Barrett, but only at the beginning when Ozymandias got together. Girl singers usually have sex with the band. That's rock 'n' roll for you. I sleep with her now. If ever we have to stop over we go somewhere like Hotel Ibis, Etap, or Novotel and we'll take a double.

'I really like the smell of you,' I told her one night.

'I really like the smell of you, too,' Sula whispered in my ear, and that seemed like such a perfect compliment it made me wonder if I hadn't unconsciously complimented her to get it back. Which then made me feel a bit insecure. But what's weird is that I've never been properly jealous of Sula. I've seen boys trying to pick her up and I've seen her half flirting back, but it's never bothered me. Maybe I'm not possessive or maybe it would be different if we were having sex – we're not, though.

Ben's brother, Drew, is training to be a shaman.

Clockwise

If I take Fudge for a walk in Meanwood Park, I go clockwise: down to the beck; over the bridge; through the woods; turn right to where the old lady lived in Sunny Nook until she moved and the house was vandalized; then back down to the tennis courts and home.

And that was something I did unconsciously, well before things started to come on top.

They should do a study. Get some athletes to run clockwise and anti-clockwise around a track and see how different their times are. Or get people to write down their dreams and see whether they turned left or right when they were asleep.

A couple of times I've done experiments of my own: gone anti-clockwise around the park on purpose, or into town from the Burleyside, rather than via Mabgate. And always something has happened. One time in the park Fudge got into a fight; another time he just vanished for twenty minutes, and that always puts me in a spin. Once by the bus station a weirdo tried to abduct me: 'My cat has just had a litter of kittens and they're all mackerel. Would you like to see them?' Yeah, right!

I used to think it was my vibe that was deciding these things: that Fudge was behaving differently because of me. Now I realize it's not. Most definitely not. There is energy inside you, and there is energy external to you. The problem is, the boundary between the two is always shifting, like a patch of quicksand. When I take Fudge around the cemetery at the far end of the park, for instance, one day he'll piss on the headstones, the next he'll stick to me like a piece of chewing gum. Why? Because without you being aware of it something has moved.

'Knowing how to handle psychic energy requires training,' Drew is fond of telling me. 'You wouldn't try to tune an engine without knowing about mechanics, would you? Exactly the same principle.'

Dub

Dub. Dub-step.

I like the bass so deep it's sub-bass, so low you can't actually hear it – just feel it in your spine. And it holds you there, like you're a jelly quivering in a bowl.

Oh, Lord! Pull up! Rewind.

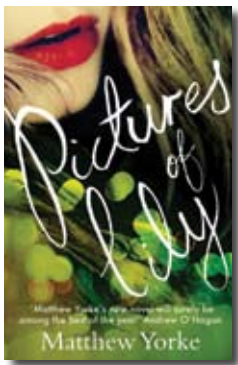
In fact, I like all the bass frequencies: the ones that crackle in your ankles; the ones that fizz in your knees; the ones that make you feel like you're sandwiched between two mattresses and every ounce of air is being pushed slowly and surely out of your lungs. The ones that make your teeth rattle like they're going to fall out on the floor in front of you. *Watch the ride!*

One morning I had missed the bus and Roger was driving me to school. We were listening to *Desert Island Discs*, and there was this guy on who was explaining how he had come to choose a song. He was saying that when he first heard the first line of the first verse – the one that goes something like

“
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Pictures of Lily
by **Matthew Yorke** is published 19 August in paperback by Corsair, price £7.99. To claim your **FREE* copy**, see page 43.



'Well, bless my soul what's wrong with me?' – he knew he was home: he had arrived.

'That's just how it was for me!' Roger said.

'Same song?' I asked, trying to sound interested.

'No, mine was 'Rock Around The Clock' by Bill Haley.'

'Oh, right.'

But if I'm being honest, that's exactly how it was for me, too. And it was such a weird sensation. I queued up for the gig, paid my five pounds, got a stamp on the back of my hand, went in – and bang: there I was. It was as if it was just a question of time before I got there. And what was so odd was that I didn't even know I had been looking for it until I found it. Talk about the Lock and Key Theory.

Ozymandias is Sula's band. Sula's going to be a star. I love Sula.

She's older than me by four years, but when I got invited back to their place by her brother one day we just hit it off. Another of those Lock and Key moments, I took one look at her and thought, This person's going to be a friend and she's going to make some kind of a difference, a big difference.

I think the fact that I'm adopted fascinated her. To begin with anyway. She would paint her own fantasies on me. 'Perhaps your father was a sailor and he sailed away and he didn't even know he had left you behind,' or 'Perhaps your parents want you back, Georgie.' That used to freak me out, the fact that someone had actually said that to me. But that's

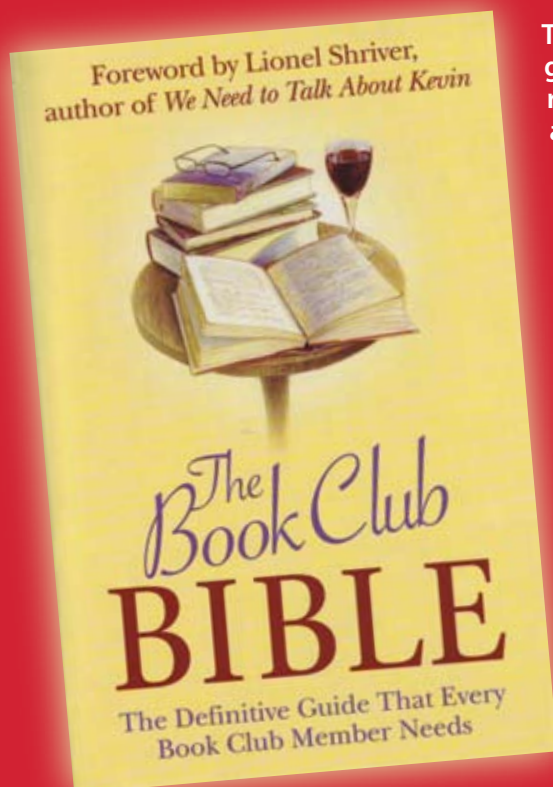
Sula for you – she speaks her mind. 'Everything is the truth; even lies are the truth because they exist,' she's fond of saying.

It was Sula's mum, Christine, who came up with the name for the band. Christine wants to be a writer and when she went on a creative-writing course 'Ozymandias' was one of the poems they had to study. As soon as the band heard the word, they knew it was right. Yet another of those instances where you know something is meant without having to think about it too carefully. The poem was written over two hundred years ago. I don't think any of us has read it through, but Ben puts some of the lines on the flyers, random stuff, like 'Look and despair, ye mighty'; or 'King of Kings'; or 'The lone sands stretch far away'.

I love the gigs, every second of them. Ozymandias play weddings, christenings, birthdays – they've even done funerals! And then, of course, they play bigger venues in places like Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol. At those gigs you have some heavy-duty sound systems, which means the night invariably turns into pretty full-on Drum 'N Bass roast. But at around three in the morning, doesn't matter where you are, you get what I like: dub.

Dub makes me feel totally irie. It's like potholing – there's no better way of describing it – dark, endless, mysterious, like you're walking through dripping caves: drip, drip, crash, crash, echo, reverb. ■

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