

JAMES FRIEL

Tattoo

I have the Lord's Prayer on my back, a scroll held by angels at my waist and shoulders. A lush jungle rises from my crotch. My belly is a lake with dolphins. My chest is a garden of roses. Spiders web my throat. My skull is inked with birds. My arms are twisting snakes. My hands tell the names of women I pretend I loved.

Whatever I was is written over now.

I believe I am thirty-two. Some age in infancy, I was left by an empty motorway, just me and all that asphalt tapering off into the yellow distance, a truck going the one way, and, on the other, a service station white in the dawnlight when everything, even true stuff, looks unreal.

I have plans for the soles of my feet and the backs of my knees. Dragons will live in my armpits. There will be diamonds in the clefts of my toes. I carry in a roll of leather my needles, my ink and some Dettol. I live for how the needle bites into me, as if it hates me/loves me too.

These days I eat less and less. One day I'll just sup ink and dust. I'll be so thin I'll just be patterned air for folk to walk through maybe.

At night my tattoos come alive. In the dark they glow like cinema.

I am naked underneath my pictures.