

Counting to Ten

The steel tipped arrow cuts through muscle, impacts on bone, its force deflected into the body's spinning fall. Sky turns to earth and earth to sky. I writhe in the rising dust of death as armoured figures close in, just like it was in the film, and I count to ten.

I'm in a different era in a different uniform, running doubled over, rifle in hand, bayonet fixed, camouflaged to match the mud. Shells erupt from a smoking horizon, detonate in the ground ahead, men that I know are torn to shreds and then it's my turn, gifted for a few seconds with the power of flight before the heavy fall to earth, the spray of blood from severed arteries, just like it is in the imagination, and I count to ten. I seen you looking Lol yells Figgy you're a cheat so count to ten again. I count to ten and then it's my turn.

I raise the weapon in both hands, pull the trigger and watch the surge of flame across the scorched earth. Strange how time slows down, creeping up on Figgy from behind, knocking him over like a ninepin in the electric bowling alley game at the amusement arcade, jerking him like the jackpot pumping pocketsfull of coins, k-k-jaaah, k-k-jaaah, k-k-jaaah. I watch him fall and yell out above the boom of battle I got you Figgy you're dead count to ten.

I'm in the swimming baths at the shallow end, standing in a line of kids who can't swim. The teacher says hold your breath, put your head under the water, and count to ten.

After school we are swaying in the top branches of an elm tree and down at ground level we can see Figgy's mum in her back garden. She calls up to us, Come down now. Tea's ready. I'm counting to ten.