[James Ross](http://www.eastoftheweb.com/cgi-bin/read_db.pl?search_field=author_id&search_for=JamesRoss&order_by=author_last,title&page=1)

*Zippo*

John said; 'I had this dream. I'll tell you about it: I'm standing in a bar with some friends and we're talking, drinking, it's Friday night and the bar is pretty full, there's loud music playing. The beer is making me feel good, but not falling-down good, and the vibe is there and all the girls look pretty. I have enough money in my pocket to keep it going like this all night so, you know, everything is fine.'

     He wound down the window and took a deep breath before continuing.

     'It's my round and I go to the bar and there's a huge crowd but I get served right away. As I pass out the drinks and turn back to get my own beer I brush against this girl, I mean, she brushes against me. And smiles. Real eye contact. I think to myself, "This is going to be a really good night" and if I'd woke then I would have woke up laughing. You know how it is with dreams, good dreams, part of you knows it's all fake but if you are really lucky you don't wake up. Everything works alright.

     'Then this kid walks into the bar, I don't see him first, but my dream sees him or maybe I just remember it afterwards. He's just a skinny kid, wired up though, real angry looking, and in his hand he is carrying a bucket full of petrol. It sloshes about as he pushes through the crowd.

     'I look up to see him standing in front of me just as he throws this bucket of petrol in my face. Next thing I'm standing in a crowd of one as everybody backs away, except the kid who is grinning at me, and I am soaked in petrol. My eyes sting as it runs down my face. It is clotting in my beer.'

     John looked at me and smiled, a wry smile.

     'There I am, standing alone in a puddle of flammable liquid, the stuff is seeping through my clothes; it feels clammy and scratchy. I know what is about to happen and I think to myself, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this?" Like it just isn't part of any of my plans to be burned alive in a pub on a Friday night.

     'The kid reaches into his pocket and pulls out a Zippo, holds it toward me and smiles. He has nice even teeth, I notice. I think to myself, "I haven't had time to think this through and I'm not prepared. I'm not ready yet."

     'I'm still waiting for my life to flash before my eyes when he snaps open the Zippo. And it fails. It won't spark. He clicks it again. It fails again. He says to me, almost apologetically, "Just hold on, *Rufus*, it'll work in a moment." He really concentrates on getting this thing to work.

     'Then I woke up so fast. I'd wet my shorts. I was more scared than I'd ever been.'

     John shrugged, played with the air vent, 'I've had this dream four times,' and then he wound down the window again, and spat into the fresh damp air.

     'The first twice it was like a shock to my system, I was so upset by it, I couldn't sleep for days afterwards. The third time it happened I couldn't sleep for days before. And I was ready for it when it came. So ready. I shot out of that dream so quickly he didn't even have time to reach into his pocket.

     'The last time I had the dream, I'd almost forgotten, it had been so long since the last one. I was just standing with some friends, in a pub, you know, having a really good time, and this girl brushes past me. She is wearing a thin top and no bra. I can feel her breast as it grazes past my arm. She looks up and smiles at me, a really warm smile. Comfort and joy. You know, I've never met a girl I couldn't learn to dislike, but this one and me, we have this immediate *depth*. I can tell it's going to be a good night.

     'But the kid hadn't forgot and he took me from behind, and when I turned to him the petrol was already dripping out of my hair and the girl wasn't there anymore.'

     'Maybe she knew the plot,' I say to him, 'maybe she was in on it,' but he ignores me and continues:

     'I can feel this liquid soaking through my t-shirt and my jeans, running down inside my underpants. And this time the Zippo was working, he must have got it fixed, and his hand was moving toward me with this little machine with a small blue flame coming out of it.

     'As I woke up I heard a 'whoomp' sound, but that might have been my heart, or my stomach 'cos I was sick on the floor next to my bed.

     'The first couple of times really pissed me off because I was so unprepared, and I hate that, the feeling of being caught out. But the last time it happened I realised that what I was really scared of was knowing that the petrol would burn me until I died, that sooner or later the Zippo would work and I would not be quick enough.'

     He stopped talking and spent a few moments deep in thought.

     'And then what?' I asked.

     'Then I won't wake up,' he turned to face me, 'Because I can't always be fast enough, can I?'

     For a moment I felt a surge of some emotion toward him but this was extinguished as his hazel eyes hooded over and a lazy serpent smile spread across his face, masking the brief show of fear.

     'Let's do it then,' he said to me.

     We got out of the car.