RAY OF LIGHT
Austin Collings

So, he brings me here every day, to his studio: my dog-dad – Ray – and me – Wee Brian. It's not like I can say 'no'. I can't say anything. I can only say a bark.

So, he brings me here every day and I sit and watch him paint. My dog-eyes know some of these figures in the paintings. I've looked up to them before in the flesh with Ray holding my lead, making sure I don't *do one*.

Ray presses play on yet another Marvin Gaye track (will that man ever actually *get it on*?) and cracks on. Ray's paint has the gift of sight. Human beings are a puzzle of need. Ray's paint becomes the missing piece. Through these paintings, I've traversed infinite nights, I've flown the nest of my canine-skeleton and escaped into the imagination of a once-blank canvas. I've been man, woman, sky, car, James Ellroy, Michael Caine and…I've been it all.

Time ages in a hurry, but Ray arrests moments with the voice of light. The paint never knew how wonderful it was, until it hit the canvas. The colours call to mind the past that made them. Your eyes go WOW. Your body goes POW. You're more alive than you usually are. Ray's paint has the gift of sight.

Art does not come easy. You have to tough it out. I have learned this from all my time of sitting and observing Ray, toughing it out day after day, so we can sit and stand together in quiet excitement and stare and *appreciate* his painted world whilst the great tide of daylight pours in through doors and windows.

So, I've been hearing him talking about taking me to a place called Birmingham. He has an exhibition in Digbeth Art Space. But also – get this – some Irish-born bloke called James Hicks lived in Birmingham until he passed away in 1878. He was a character. He did a bit of time in prison before making another name for himself by breeding white bull terriers. This Hicks bloke – this breeder – is God to me in a way, I guess. Without him, I wouldn't be here dictating this press release through this writer about my Dad – Ray. You get the (odd) drift. Birmingham is my spiritual home. Wee Bri' is coming home. Hang the bunting.

So, Birmingham it is. Where's my lead?

Austin Collings is a writer. His recent book is God's Fox (Pariah Press).