

EXHUMATION: HOW CREATIVE WRITERS USE AND DEVELOP MATERIAL FROM AN ARCHIVE

Margaret Jane Wilkinson

Doctor of Philosophy

School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics

November 2016

ABSTRACT

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This thesis is composed of five original creative pieces of previously published, commissioned, performed or broadcast drama for stage and radio and a critical component investigating the creative writer in the archive. All of the previously published creative pieces have been developed with archival research but I have never before used an archive as a starting point for the creation of a drama. The critical component looks specifically at my experiences researching and developing a radio drama from the archive of the Stannington Children's Sanatorium, Morpeth, the first children's tuberculosis hospital in the UK, 1907-1953, as my starting point. In this critical section of the thesis I investigate and interrogate archival theory in relation to creative writing and explore the writer's occasionally uncomfortable, ultimately valuable, involvement with documents (actual and electronic), archivists, and libraries. This critical inquiry goes on to investigate the writer as collector; the specific items the writer may collect from the archive and how working in the archive presents the writer with a conflict, tension, and paradox which can be valuable in the development of creative work. As an addendum I include two plans, or working synopses, for future dramas based on excavations in the Stannington archive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Professor Linda Anderson for her subtle and well-judged direction and the permission it afforded me to explore this topic.

I would also like to thank the archivists at the Woodhorn Colliery Museum for their guidance and patience and for the steadfastness and devotion with which they serve the archive.

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Exhume v. To take out of the ground or place of burial; to bring to light out of humus; to remove the overlying soil from (rare). Hence **Exhumation** the action or process of removing a body from beneath the ground.¹

*The archive is a vantage point from which the symbolic and intellectual constructions of the past can be rearranged. It is a matrix that does not articulate “the” truth, but rather produces, through recognition as much as through disorientation, the elements necessary to ground a discourse of truth telling that refuses lies.*²

Chapter 1. THE STANNINGTON ARCHIVE

*The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). [...] We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life.*³

I arrive uncertain. The Woodhorn Colliery Museum, built on the site of a 19th Century coal mine in Ashington, Northumbria, where I imagine the archives for Stannington Children's Sanatorium are stored, is visually arresting. Called 'The Cutter,' the main building, designed by architect Tony Kettle and opened in 2006, is inspired by the enormous blade of a cutting machine used to penetrate an underground seam. I feel this to be a good sign, apposite to my current purpose, but am quickly disappointed to find no archives stored in this place which is a museum only. The archive building, a windy walk from The Cutter is depressingly ordinary. As a creative writer specialising in stage and radio drama, I've little previous experience with a proper archive. Although much of my drama has been based on researched material, research has never been my starting point. This time I come to the archive empty handed, looking, as it were, for inspiration.

Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word “archive”- [...] Arkhe, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the

¹ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

² Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. by Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 96-97

³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 211

principle according to nature or history, there where things commence [...] - but also the principle according to law, there where men and gods command [...] where authority, social order are exercised [...]

According to what I have read on the museum website, 120 linear feet of records, including 14,674 x-rays, are deposited at Woodhorn by Northumberland Archives in 2003, to be categorised, digitized and made available for further research with funding from the Wellcome Trust, recording the 11,000 children who are treated at Stannington, from its opening in 1907 by the then Duke of Northumberland until its closure as a tuberculous hospital in 1953.⁵ That, I think, is a lot of material. What does 120 linear feet of documents look like? Are they stored end to end, or baled like hay?

Archivists and archive staff do not lose their bearings in this ocean. They talk about the archives in terms of how many kilometers they span, of thousands of linear meters of shelves. This is another form of gigantism, or maybe it's just a clever way of coming to grips with the archives, of taming them while at the same time recognizing the impossibility of ever taking full possession of them.⁶

Anxiously contemplating the burden of too much information, I push an ordinary waist-high metal bar and enter an ordinary building through an ordinary plate glass door. This is it. I look around.

The meaning of "archive" its only meaning comes from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house or domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrate, the archons, those who command [...] The *archons* are the first of all the document guardians.⁷

No time to contemplate the relationship between the archive and its apparent storehouse, I am led, as in a dream, down long windowless corridors by the least senior archivist who will not be drawn into small talk. Although the building is modern, it's dark, the ceilings low and flat. I am expecting a library, long tables, other researchers, but our destination is

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.1

⁵ Northumberland Archives, Stannington Sanatorium
<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=stannington+sanatorium&qpv=stannington+sanatorium&qpv=stannington+sanatorium&FORM=IGRE>

⁶ Farge, pp. 4-5

⁷ Derrida, p. 2

an underground office with the acoustics of a bunker, where the other two archivists wait. The very name ‘archivist’ suggests disturbing probity.

It is [...] in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that the archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks the institutional passage from private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret.⁸

Derrida defines traditional archontic power as not only a function of unification, identification and classification, but of consignation, the gathering together, the organising and synchronising of signs unified in a single corpus. As he says, ‘In an archive there should not be any absolute dissociation.’⁹ As a writer entering the archive, I am about nothing if not dissociation. My strategy, to seek out and juxtapose disparate images, ideas, objects and place them in a new, possibly incongruous, context, may even be forbidden.

Gaining access to the stacks [...] has always seemed to me an adventure verging on trespass [...] What I love [...] is that they always seem slightly off-limits, therefore forbidden. I feel I’ve been allowed in with my little identity card and now I’m going to be bad. I have the sense of lurking rather than looking.¹⁰

The three *archons* speak in whispers. In whispers, they refer to what they reverently call the ‘Stannington File.’ They watch me closely as if my very presence threatens the catalogued and indexed past. They ask what I am looking for, these whispering archons. But I don’t know myself. ‘It’s hard to say,’ I say. This little room, these whispering archivists, are powerful inhibitors. Eventually they hand over a thin A4 manila folder. Inside there are 14 thinner A4 manila folders. This is the Stannington File:

- A collection of oral histories, summarised and transcribed in 2003 from interviews with 28 patients and staff who were at the sanatorium from 1930 to 1953s, listed only by title but available to order at £3.52 per summary, plus vat;
- Two annual reports of the Poor Children’s Holiday Association from 1905 and 1906, discussing the need for a sanatorium and the building of it;
- A matron’s journal 1908- 1914;
- Photographs which are as follows: patients and nurses on the wards, c. 1918; exterior of the sanatorium building, c.1912; group photo in front of trees, c.1912; original sanatorium building, c.1910; group photo of staff and patients outside the

⁸ Derrida, pp. 2-3

⁹ Derrida, p. 3

¹⁰ Susan Howe, ‘The Art of Poetry No 97’, *The Paris Review*, No. 203 (2012)

main building, c.1920; patients on the balcony of one of the wards with nurses in the background cleaning windows, c. 1930;

- X-ray c. 1933. Labelled: *Male aged 14, cyst of the humerus mid-shaft with intra-medullary as osteo-periosteal grafts. Taken six weeks after operation.*
- The register of splints and appliances issued to children, 1933- 1945
- Reminiscences from the builder who erected the vita glass solarium in 1928, available on request.
- A 1947 note regarding a girl aged seven fitted with a walking splint and crutches. *'Delayed discharge. Appalling home conditions. Four adults and five children living in two rooms.'*
- An undated note from a registrar to another doctor discussing a child aged 1½, whose father died of TB. *'Mum cannot be located, Aunt anxious to be rid of the responsibility. Child admitted for social reasons.'*
- A 1949 (very brief) letter from a woman who is herself in a sanatorium with TB, and is the mother of a two year old child currently a patient at Stannington but scheduled to be released, informing the administration that, *'the people who would take him have changed their mind.'*
- A 1947 letter which informs the administration that the father of a four year old currently in the sanatorium has disappeared. His uncle enquires about the child's health.
- Another note dated 1953, pertaining to a child aged six. *'Father located in Coventry. Child transferred to Coventry. Callipers and sticks.'*

I'm puzzled, aggrieved. Is this it? These few thin files? Where are the 120 linear feet of records I had previously feared would overwhelm me? I stare at the lone x-ray.

The Archive is not potentially made of *everything*, as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away that is the unconscious. The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there.¹¹

I begin to take notes, more for effect than necessity, anticipation and regret already overshadowing immediate experience. The *Archons* will not leave me alone even with these few files. They watch and wait, a hovering presence I cannot ignore. I wonder how soon I can leave. Perhaps I can make something up. Even historians have questioned the solidity and the sanctity of the archive and the facts it preserves.

The 'factuality' of history- precisely what supposedly distinguishes it from 'fiction' – has itself come into question. To what extent can 'facts' be relied upon to serve as a firm basis for historical knowledge? As soon as 'what happened' is described for use as historical evidence, it is subject to differing interpretations

¹¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 68

from different perspectives, and is prone to all the difficulties that any use of language inevitably entails- that shadow which falls between a word and its referent, that inadequacy, inexactitude, incompleteness of which we are aware in any attempted description. And how anyway are 'facts' established? How and why have they, and not others, been chosen- selected (on what basis and by whom?) [...] by what process have those facts been incorporated into a narrative [...]? How does the 'emplotment' of those facts into an *historical* narrative differ from their use in an alternative narrative that is admittedly *fictitious*?

In the end, 'factual' history is revealed as subjectively chosen, subjectively interpreted, subjectively constructed and incorporated within a narrative, in a language with has questionable relation to the external world and must always be less than 'perfect', and in a form that is inevitably subject to cultural constraints and limitations.¹²

This archive, I decide, fixed in its narrow aggregation of objects is without promise. And yet...

This (reading archives) is an odd way of being in the world, and a type of activity that has given rise to a particular form of writing [...] a form of writing which celebrates the constraints on it, constraints which [...] are made by the documents themselves: what they forbid you to write, the permission they offer.¹³

By remaining, I begin to think, within the hermetic confines of the archive- the world described and restricted by its context, landscape, characters, etc.- and celebrating these constraints- the writer can achieve spatial and/or temporal unity and cohesion. I find this somewhat promising. The paper I am handling feels, in fact, vaguely porous, indicating something more, if I could just penetrate it. I feel emboldened. I sift through the material again, surprised by the lack of personal correspondence, particularly letters from parents enquiring after their children, denoting something significant perhaps about class, literacy, poverty in the early 20th Century.

If we find nothing, we will find nothing in a place, and then, that an absence is not *nothing*, but is rather the space left by what has gone; how the emptiness indicates how once it was filled and animated.¹⁴

The archive is not only its objects, is also its missing objects and the space they once occupied. In other words, the archive is always, if not empty, incomplete, begging as it were, narrative discourse.

¹² Beverly Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2009), p. 45

¹³ Steedman, p. xi

¹⁴ Steedman, p. 11

So there is a double nothingness in the writing of history and in the analysis of it: it is about something that never did happen in the way it comes to be represented (the happening exists in the telling or the text); and it is made out of materials that aren't there, in an archive or anywhere else.¹⁵

I begin to think of the archive as a scene in a particularly opaque short story by Anton Chekhov, vivid and apparently unmediated; one that tells the reader everything but what she really wants to know, inspiring her to read on, until later realising each scene is more abundant, more mediated, than she thought. Similarly the archive hides its treasures. Its limitations are both fixed and unfixed. For Paul Voss and Marta Werner, the archive is necessarily constituted by borders; it 'is both a physical site - an institutional space enclosed by protective walls - and an imaginative site - a conceptual space whose boundaries are ever changing.'¹⁶

Before I depart that first encounter, the Archons indicate further riches I can access once I am approved by a group they call, 'The Trust.' (Just when I've made my peace with its limitations, the archive expands in an unexpected way.) Then I hear, or think I hear, that the material I cannot yet access is largely patient files and technical correspondence between medical staff, from 1939 – 1966, which is of little interest to me - and the archive shrinks again. This is a disorientating, but not unpleasant experience. Or perhaps I have misheard. I can barely make out their hushed voices. I wish they'd speak up. Later I read in *The White Plague* by Rene and Jean Dubos about the silence cure for TB undertaken by Franz Kafka, either no talking, or no talking above a whisper. I imagine little slips of paper on which he has written 'Close the window please' or 'No lunch today.'

'Severe pulmonary Tuberculosis is often accompanied by lesions in the larynx and in the intestines; laryngeal tuberculosis renders swallowing extremely painful and can bring about an almost complete extinction of the voice.'^{17 18}

¹⁵ Steedman, p. 154

¹⁶ Paul Voss, and Marta Werner, 'Towards a poetics of the archive: Introduction', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. 32 (1999), pp. i-viii, cited in Lisa Stead, 'Introduction', in *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive*, ed. Carrie Smith, and Lisa Stead (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 2

¹⁷ Rene Dubos, and Jean Dubos, *The White Plague, Tuberculosis, Man, and Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 3

¹⁸ His throat making it too painful for him to eat, Kafka died of starvation, aged 39.

Although the archive is not what I first imagine, I am intrigued by its paradoxes- and want to explore the relationship between the instability of the archive and the use of conflict, discord and incongruity fundamental to my own writing process- the enclosing of disparate material and the development of contradictions, a process which I will attempt to set forth in this thesis as I chart the movement from first inspiration to final synopsis.

(I already have a headache brought on by megacognition - thinking about thinking about the process of writing- the logical development of an argument placed beside leaps of imagination, not spliced together, but co-existing, generating creative friction.) Is it, I wonder, the very paradoxical nature of the archive that lures writers in the first place?

The attitude of the archival researcher towards the archive, and the labour undertaken within it, has always been ambivalent. Researchers' work is reported as being demanding and exhausting yet also compelling and pleasurable. Indeed, this attraction has been described in terms of sexual attraction or addiction [...]¹⁹

Following my first visit, I find I must return again and again. A reading room where I may view the archive, very different to the underground office I first encounter, is open every Wednesday morning. Each time I return I see something different; or see something differently. When I get home, I find something missing, or something unclear. This necessitates yet another visit. I try on this, and subsequent visits, to improve my note taking. Not note taking, but recopying. Hours pass unnoticed in this way.

The allure of the archives passes through this slow and unrewarding artisanal task of recopying texts, section after section, without changing the format, the grammar, or even the punctuation. [...] As if the hand, by reproducing the written syllables, archaic words, and syntax [...] could insert itself into that time more boldly than thoughtful notes ever could. Note taking, after all, necessarily implies prior decisions about what is important, and what is archival surplus to be left aside. The task of recopying, by contrast, comes to feel so essential that it is indistinguishable from the rest of the work. An archival document recopied by hand onto a blank page is a fragment of a past time that you have succeeded in taming. Later, you will draw out the themes and formulate interpretations.²⁰

¹⁹ Helen Freshwater, 'The Allure of the Archive', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2003), 729-758 (p. 734)

²⁰ Farge, p. 17

Chapter 2. SOUVENIRS FROM THE ARCHIVE: THE WRITER AS COLLECTOR

*'Animals (birds, ants), children, and old men as collectors.'*²¹

What will I write about? Is there anything here to inspire me?

Creative writers might be said to search for significant detail that has emotional weight which can be found in over-looked or unremarkable elements, the flotsam, of an archive. Unlike the historian, the writer's aim is to create refractive rather than reflective pieces that access and re-purpose found material, often dissociating and exaggerating the mode of significance. (Available recent texts on archival studies largely relate to how the contemporary historian investigates the archive. However, as a creative practitioner, I have found these invaluable.)

For the creative writer, for example, transforming archival material refers not only to choosing, collecting (perhaps idiosyncratically) from the archive, but to dis-aligning her gaze, altering the significance of the original fact, or object chosen, enlarging, giving weight and primacy to it, making it proximate or intimate, together with a corresponding minimising, distancing or ignoring other facts or objects.

Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of forming images. But it is rather the faculty of deforming images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of changing images. If there is not a changing of images, an unexpected union of images, there is no imagination, no imaginative action. If a present image does not recall an absent one, if an occasional image does not give rise to a swarm of aberrant images, to an explosion of images, there is no imagination.²²

Selections can be made from shadows, silences, absences, and omissions. Silences provoke questions which are especially valuable to the playwright, whose job it is to hint, misdirect, delay - because drama often requires the audience to engage in a cerebral way: to question what they are seeing, make assumptions (sometimes wrong assumptions); and predict future action. Moreover, the very act of selection is also an act of magnification. As the writer manipulates and progresses the selection (vital to the construction of meaning) she creates narrative hierarchy, in other words, focus. Selection, therefore, is also an act of transformation. The object is changed by the very search for it; and the

²¹Benjamin, p. 211

²²Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (Dallas: Spring Publications., 1987), p. 19

pleasure in finding it. It becomes, therefore, a creation of the search itself. Indeed the very existence of a collection (an archive) denotes a choice has already been made by someone, somewhere; the original material has already been transformed by the act of collecting.

The souvenir by definition is always incomplete. And this incompleteness works on two levels. First the object is metonymic to the scene of its original appropriation in the sense that it is a sample [...] Second, the souvenir must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse [...] It will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins [...] The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity as it itself becomes the point of origin for narrative.²³

Viewed in this way, we might also usefully replace the word 'souvenir' with the word 'archive' and read the above quote as a comment on the relationship between the archive and the past it claims to represent, such is the connection between history, the artefact, and the archive - and the subjectivity of each. Stewart goes on to explore how the souvenir reduces the monumental to a miniature, the public to the private, and argues that this transformation is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the object's significance supplied by narrative. According to Stewart, 'The collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property.'²⁴ The writer's selection is then both miniaturised and magnified- and both actions seem to me to be essential to the creative process. When considered a miniature, the artefact might also evoke the world of childhood, of toys, and the intensity and significance of childhood experience; and in the sense that narrative, in part, seeks to re-invent, re-construct, or re-envision a recognisable world, we can say that even the narrative itself is a model, or miniature. One thinks of Walter Benjamin's fascination with smallness and miniaturisation, Benjamin's tiny handwriting, his collection of Russian toys.

The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition passes over them [...] The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership- for the true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of the object.²⁵

²³ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 136

²⁴ Stewart, p. xii

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (NY: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 60

The writer, like the collector, is under an enchantment. Single objects, details, or ideas, a profusion of miniatures, gleaned from an archive can be viewed as relics of a larger lost narrative, or keys to a counter narrative - the inanimate made animate. Objects can be appropriated, disconnected from their meaning, or just set adrift so that the writer can work in the gap between the thing and its meaning. Stewart views narrative as a process and device that both invents and distances its objects and thereby reasserts again and again the gap between signifier and signified, calling it, 'the place of generation for the symbol.'²⁶

Even when removed from the archive and transformed with new meaning, the object still bears traces of the collection as a whole. The collection as a whole, in turn, relates to what purports to be authentic experience, events, people and places, giving it a hidden gravitas, authority, authenticity, status. Thus while objects may be supplied with a new context by the writer, an intense emotional resonance, or lyricism, they keep their shape for the reader because of their origin. According to Steedman, these objects retain the shape of '*what they are*, no matter who imagines them, because they are things with histories of their making, purchase, consumption [...]'²⁷ It might in fact be argued that the fugitive object, even when transformed beyond recognition without obvious relation to the archive, or its original context, creates shadows, or ghosts, around itself, longing for their place of origin.

There may also, of course, be a sense of the accidental about the writer's selection.

Often by chance via out-of-the-way card catalogues, or through previous web-surfing, a particular "deep" text, or a simple object (bobbin, sampler, scarp of lace) reveals itself *here* on the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy. Quickly- precariously- coming as it does from the opposite direction. If you are lucky, you may experience a moment *before*.²⁸

The evocation of telepathy, the instant communication of one mind with another independent of the recognised channels of the senses, is a wonderful expression of this process. Writers tend to select idiosyncratically, if not telepathically, reflecting perhaps their own histories, visions, inner lives, so that the individual merges, as it were, with the

²⁶ Stewart, p. ix

²⁷ Steedman, p. 135

²⁸ Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars, The Telepathy of Archives* (New York: Christine Burgin Books, 2014), p. 18

archive, at the point of selection. As Stewart asks, ‘What is this narrative of origins? It is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is the narrative of the possessor.’²⁹ The partiality of perspective that the writer brings to the archive is significant.

Such a narrative cannot be generalised to encompass the experiences of anyone; it pertains only to the possessor of the object. It is a narrative which seeks to reconcile the disparity between interiority and exteriority, subject and object, signifier and signified.³⁰

When I was a child my mother disappears for two years. She is in a sanatorium with TB, but I’m never told where she is. I examine a photograph I find. My mother wearing a topper coat, only weeks before she is hospitalised, looking as if she’s suppressing a cough. I remember nothing concrete about my mother’s long illness, the bright red spot on her pillow, her heavy-eyed flushed indifference, her breath labouring as she climbs the stairs of our apartment building when the elevator breaks down, are figments of my imagination. But I remember her topper coat, the white rings on white fabric, (the colour white fusing in my mind with tuberculosis or the white plague) slightly raised so that the feel of the garment is vivid. As a child I am a toucher, a feeler, a stroker. I remember hanging onto this coat, the rings providing purchase, to keep my mother beside me when she returns from being away. (‘Away’ is always how we refer to her time in the sanatorium.) In this way, the Stannington archive, perpetually incipient, becomes a technique to order and discover my own thoughts and responses to tuberculosis as well.

Memories in all their complexity, compiled (as they often are) from the stories and recollections of others, from photographs, cultural influences, anachronistic assumptions, biases, distortions, desires, and impressions (including sense impressions), like the relics and flotsam thrown up by the archive, allow access (even flawed access) to the past. Both, however, are always provisional.

Every historical narrative- even a personal one composed of an individual’s reflections, recollections, and redactions on available family information- is, for Howe, intrinsically fallible, conjectural, and unstable. Howe foregrounds the presence of history’s tellers and the crucial impact of their particular vantage points, interests, and intentions on historical renderings that, contrary to common

²⁹ Stewart, p. 136

³⁰ Stewart, pp. 136-137

belief, are always variable, always versions of a tale that scrutiny and contemplation open to debate and further interpretation.³¹

Few memories come unbidden, if not mediated by other factors they are mediated by language. Our past, the narrative of the self, contains not only an imposed shape and order, but fragments - traces and absences, again mirroring the archive - and can be said to be fluid, constantly changing and always open to interpretation.

The images we unearth when we explore the past have no fixed relationship to the original event they purport to represent, but are recreated out of new connections each time they are revisited. This is memory as an imaginative act [...] ³²

Sometimes even the self, particularly the past self, is other. I contemplate the temporal and spatial discontinuities of my own childhood: the afternoons that last a lifetime; the too-brightly lit interiors; the eavesdropping I do on the adult world. What might have happened can become more valuable to the writer than what actually happened. The writer's selection from the archive might therefore be said to be inspired by the possibilities the artefact suggests, rather than the evidence it provides. As Joan Didion asserts: 'Not only have I always had trouble distinguishing between what happened and what merely might have happened, but I remain unconvinced that the distinction, for my purposes, matters,' ³³ Didion's 'purpose' is that of a writer. While she is referring to her old writer's notebooks, we might also ask this of the archive. We might even say that all writers are archivists preserving what is lost. Perhaps it is a presentiment of loss that drives the writer; that imbues the archive, for the writer, with an elegiac drift. Like a notebook I kept long ago and have forgotten, as I read the archive I try to imagine who I was then. In this way, the writer, letting go of evidential truth, sometimes gets closer to emotional truth.

In some cases, indeed, what is nominally presented as 'fiction' may be as close as it is possible to get to the 'truth' about the matter; for that truth may be expressive of a 'reality' that is not susceptible to the empirical procedures and validation that history strictly requires.³⁴

³¹ Rachel Tzvia Back, *Led by Language, The Poetry and Poetics of Susan Howe* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002) p. 12

³² Helen Freshwater, 'The Ethics of Indeterminacy: Theatre de Complicite's 'Mnemonic'', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 17 (2001), pp. 212- 218 (p. 214)

³³ Joan Didion, *Slouching to Bethlehem*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), p. 134

³⁴ Southgate, p. 176

Not only can the archive provide the writer with access to a world beyond her present lived experience, it can propel her into the role of witness accessing catastrophe, injustice, and suffering, processing, what poet Carolyn Forché calls, ‘The impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination [...]’³⁵ as the archive offers up the un-sifted evidence which we might consider the aftermath of the extreme experiences of others. Forché goes on to explore the difference between writing *after* such experiences and writing in their *aftermath*. ‘Aftermath is a temporal debris field, where historical remains are strewn (of large events as well as those peripheral or lost); where that-which-happened remains present [...]’³⁶ Quoting Emmanuel Levinas’ *Ethics and Infinity*, Forché considers the act of writing in the aftermath as occupying a unique temporal plane.

A poetic work is at the same time a document, and the art that went into its making is at once a use of discourse. This discourse deals with objects that are also spoken in the newspapers, posters, memoirs and letters of every passing age [...] It is the essence of art to signify only between the lines- in the intervals of time, between times- like a footprint that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice.³⁷

The act of writing in the aftermath, according to Forché, also occupies a unique spatial plane. ‘In the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us the experience of the other, the poem is the experience ... not a translation of experience into poetry, but is itself an experience.’³⁸ The mode is neither subjective nor objective, but a movement by the poet to a place beyond both. Forché calls this place, ‘An inter-subjective sphere of lived immediacy,’ and goes on to state: ‘When we read the poem as witness, we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us. [...] Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive.’³⁹

The writer bears witness to the experience of others, and tells the story of the self. ‘History is, for Howe, the site of the other, though it is always and only through one’s own involvement and identification with the sought-after other that the other is accessed.’

³⁵ Carolyn Forché, ‘Reading the living archives: the witness of literary art’, *Poetry*, Vol 198 (2011), pp. 159-168.

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Forché

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ Therefore every story may be considered the story of one's own story, as Steedman asserts,

'You understand- and write- the self through others, who are not like you.'⁴¹ There is no paradox here, only the creation of a gap, both temporal and spatial, between things and their meaning, between self and others, public and private, gain and loss. 'The movement towards the lost other is also a movement towards the self, which is, for Howe, the self defined and marked *by* loss.'⁴²

The writer is both present and not present in the work. The self is included, then the self is erased- leaving the barest trace behind. The writer is like the embedded journalist sending reports from a place that is not her place, but a place she inhabits for a time. The archive, often distant in time and/or space from the writer's lived experience, affords therefore a particular spatial freedom, a scope, and a breadth of vision, the opportunity to put oneself between fact and fiction. It can also erase distance by bringing artefacts within the writer's immediate field of vision. Thus the writer is both the possessor and the dispossessed outsider. This paradoxical estrangement from, or connection to, ideas and artefacts in the archive can actually be said to encourage creative exploration if the writer can, not only accept, but mine this dissonance, seeking not to resolve, but to juxtapose, making the dialectic tension between opposing elements the hub of her creativity. With this in mind, I try to settle my mind and focus on the available objects, events, notes and letters from the Stannington archive. For a while there is nothing. Then I select the Matron's Journal 1908 – 1914.

⁴⁰ Back, p. 12

⁴¹ Steedman, p 127

⁴² Back, p. 13

Chapter 3. THE MATRON'S JOURNAL

*'All these old things have moral value.'*⁴³

The journal is a 26cm x 21.5 cm book containing monthly reports. It is covered in black watered silk faded to petrol grey with a leather binding and corners. A curiously patterned frontispiece resembles cells under a microscope. The journal, material yet permeable, is little worn but carefully repaired from within with fabric tape and white thread.

The most common methodological move to accompany the call for precision is the return to the archive of material things. Alan Sinfield notes that the current mode of criticism, marked by “attention to clothes, pots and pans, needles and pins, and to books and manuscripts as objects” is motivated by the most basic empiricism: “They are, after all, *stuff*, they are *made of* material, let’s *touch* them, you can’t get more material than that.” As Sinfield notes, this new materialism is often uninterested in the notion of materiality that is descended from Marx; rather than gaining a political advantage through an attention to “material conditions” en route to a political critique, the new materialism often uses the material stuff to focus on the “thingness” of cultural forms, to anchor an account of cultural history in the actual conditions of existence.⁴⁴

The pages have faded to the palest pink. Inside are the entries of three successive matrons all using black ink. The notation starts in 1908 listing the first six patients admitted to Stannington Children’s Sanatorium by name, age and home address. (*‘Maggie Smith, aged 17, sent from the Gateshead Workhouse.’*) Weight gain is occasionally noted.

What follows is rather colourless (but chilling) reportage, from all three matrons, concerning current patient numbers (rising from six in 1908, to 41 in 1909, to 60 in 1911) and information about the staff, and the condition of the building and grounds. These reports are interesting precisely for their neutral presentation of sometimes shocking material, the death of young patients, for example, as an expression of routine despair. Sometimes the name is not even mentioned. (*‘One gone home to die; another home to die; three gone home to die; one too ill to benefit from treatment; one sent back as incurable.’*) Sometimes a name is mentioned. (*‘The child Harry Bruce died on Monday April 29th. The expenses for his funeral met.’* And *‘Clara Todd died on Thursday is to be*

⁴³ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 203

⁴⁴ Alan Sinfield ‘Poetaster, the Author and the Perils of Cultural Production,’ in *Material London c. 1600*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 75-89 (pp. 75-76) cited in James Knapp, “‘Ocular Proof’: Archival Revelations and Aesthetic Response,” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 24, No 4 (2003), pp. 695-727 (p. 697)

buried Sunday at 3:30. She left in my care sufficient money to cover her funeral expenses. This money has been sent from time to time by relatives who have requested me to use it for the purpose mentioned.’) The brevity of notation is almost poetic in its condensed form, exciting the reader with what is not said. The handwriting is delicate and spidery as if the words themselves are holding back, obscurely tangling; the marks are faint, the vigour of the pen suppressed. (Or is it just the ink faded with age?)

All three matrons write without crossing out, revision, spelling mistakes, incomplete sentences, doodles, blots, smears, or exclamation marks. All use cursive script first designed to make writing faster (from the Latin, *curcivus*, meaning to run) although to my eye this writing looks slow, elaborate, protracted. I wonder whether they use a steel nib pen or one of the new fountain pens with an internal reservoir of ink, avoiding the frequent dipping said to distract, exhaust and disturb the mind of the writer.

When I return to the archive, however, some months later, I realise I have misremembered the handwriting.

Archives are incomplete sites of knowledge, necessarily fragmentary and changeable- subject to growth but also to diminishment [...] They are sites whose physical and ideological boundaries are continually being reconstructed as the status of the writer, or area of study changes [...] ⁴⁵

The first two matrons start off with neat penmanship, but with the pressure of work, I presume from the content of their entries, this soon deteriorates, the words becoming spikey and faint as if the matrons have not bothered, are too exhausted, or are in too much haste, to re-dip, or re-fill their pens. Over time their entries become briefer and briefer, messed with crossings out, and inserted words. (When noting ‘*a striking weight gain*,’ the first matron, never named, (1908- 1909) has crossed out the word ‘*striking*,’ and replaced it, in pencil, with the word ‘*satisfactory*.’) Passed from matron to matron, the journal has become a ‘gritty palimpsest of heavy use,’⁴⁶ as Deborah Lutz describes many books the Bronte’s (and others) owned in the past. There are signs of a nib dug into the paper and a drag mark along the side of one page, as if the first matron is attempting to clean a clog in this way. Her journal, which has a box-like quality, bears signs of heavy use and I

⁴⁵ Lisa Stead, ‘Introduction’ in *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive*, ed. by Carrie Smith, and Lisa Stead (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), pp. 2-3

⁴⁶ Deborah Lutz, *The Bronte Cabinet, Three Lives in Nine Objects* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), p. 14

imagine her storing things in it, scraps of paper, old letters. I try to imagine her hands holding the pen, the letters dipping and swaying as if she were writing in a moving vehicle. In time, her writing so disintegrates, the ink so thin, as to be barely legible, I actually find myself making up her entries, imagining words that might or might not be written. There is even one large smear, like a sob, acoustic rather than visual. Or am I just finding (expecting) a hinterland of suffering in an everyday accident?

Reading her words and noting her disintegrating handwriting, I feel as if I am witnessing a matron's breakdown, due perhaps to the increasing number of patients with no additional staff mentioned in the journal, or the lack of support, which I infer by the repeated requests for various items which appear never to be met. Originally funded by philanthropist Roland Philipson, perhaps after his untimely death, there are financial difficulties as well.⁴⁷ There is also the stress of controlling teenagers and children. In an intriguing passage in the Journal, the first Matron refers to the children's moral tone, which needs improving. *'It is becoming increasingly desirable that the boys should be separate from the girls by occupying wards on different floors. This would mean that another nurse would be necessary, her help during the day would also be most valuable as we find it impossible to leave the children for five minutes without regretting it.'*

The relationship between TB and sex is frequently noted in accounts from various sanatoria.

Any thoughts or activities that "heated the blood" (i.e. stimulated the libido) were forbidden. Public perception of tuberculosis included the notion that a frenzied sex drive accompanied the disease, and other sanatoria were rumoured to abound with nocturnal trysting places. Director Stith guarded against this kind of activity at Firland (Sanatorium) by strictly segregating the sexes.⁴⁸

In April 1909 there is a new matron.⁴⁹ *'I found the sanatorium in an unexpected condition distinctly neglected especially the kitchen, back kitchen, store cupboard and meat safe. The food is almost unfit to eat, badly cooked and cold.'* Her tone is direct, but often becomes tentative. *'More thorough cleaning through the sanatorium, I think, is*

⁴⁷ Philipson donates £5000 from his hotel in Naples, but dies suddenly in 1906, one year after the building of the sanatorium begins, in a railway accident when the Kings Cross to Edinburgh train derailed and the carriages, illuminated by gaslight, catch fire. He is travelling to Newcastle to see the launch of the Mauretania.

⁴⁸ www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=3928

⁴⁹ Miss Davina Wilson from Musselburgh is named as the second Matron. Matron Wilson, an assistant and three nurses make up the live-in sanatorium staff.

required. If you agree to this, I would ask for extra help; The condition of the sanatorium continues satisfactory except perhaps I thought to mention the difficulty in getting any heat into the radiators.’ Soon this second matron seems to be buckling under the pressure too. Her brief entries become ragged and ill-written. A patient is ‘*sent back*’ for insubordination and fighting. A former patient is enlisted as a ward maid, another as a probationary nurse, neither work out. The various entries are also pleas for assistance and supplies to a distant Managing Director, who never seems to respond, or whose response is never noted. This lends the entries a Kafkaesque tone of hopeless entreat, ending as they often do with disordered lists of requests: ‘*Window clasps, children’s tools, bedlinen, rise in wages for Charlotte Graham and Mable Robson, condition of front stairs, lamppost at door, bell in servants room, clocks, hole in door, joiner, hot water, ropes, fender, poss tubs, condition of donkeys ...*’

By 1912 the second matron is gone, her last entry reads as follows: ‘*I regret to report an unfortunate incident reflecting on the morality of patients has occurred making it absolutely necessary that some provision should be made to keep boys and girls separate.*’

In March 1912, a third matron takes over. ‘*On Tuesday March 26th, I took up the duties of Matron in the sanatorium.*’ This third matron is the only one who has signed her name in the journal: S. M. Robson. Her entries are more authoritative in tone, the handwriting firmer and also more fluid. As with the second matron, the third matron’s notes begin with criticism of her predecessor. Yet here there is a new strength and determination. ‘*So much needs attending to.*’ ‘*Nursing staff out of hand.*’ ‘*Intemperate laundress.*’ ‘*Unsatisfactory maids.*’ She writes about bringing the sanatorium to a recognised hospital standard, enquires about the erection of a ‘*perimeter fence,*’ and complains about visitors, her tone verging on strident. ‘*May I bring to your notice the very exposed condition of the sanatorium [...] might I suggest to you and other members of this committee, that you erect at your very earliest convenience a strong fence round the back of the sanatorium as at present we cannot possibly have any hold on the laundry maids, the bakeress, or any of the kitchen maids.*’

She expresses antagonism to visitors too, indicating a determination, I think, to protect the sanatorium from any outsiders. ‘*May I draw your attention to the system of visiting. For many weeks new visitors to the patients have been coming at all times. Besides interfering with the treatment laid down, the expense of getting here must be*

considerable for people of their condition and I think it should be stopped. May I suggest a visiting day be fixed to the first Saturday of every month.'

In June and July of 1912 there is an outbreak of scarlet fever, which Matron Robson blames on 'visitors' confirming her worst fears. In August she writes: *'To complete the enclosure of the sanatorium, may we have a gate put at the bottom of the plantation which can be locked at night.'* Like an Archon herself, I imagine Matron Robson guarding the boundaries of Stannington as she nightly patrols, in my imagination, the gates.

She is also unyielding in relation to the patients. *'As regards the children, they need to be taught sanatorium methods; as a beginning I have kept all the children in bed for a week until they show signs of gaining weight and going quietly in every way.'* The nurse probationers cause problems too. *'During the few weeks I have been here, I have evaluated carefully the attitude taken up by the nursing probationers towards the patients; in the case of 3, I strongly disapprove. The class of nurses we have do not know how to treat patients- at times they are altogether too friendly.'* This surprising comment (I thought she was going to accuse the probationary nurses of being too uncaring) conflates two ideas which excite my imagination: the mention, in this context, of class and the idea that nurses can be too caring. Her journal (when read in a particular way) hints at her desire, her personality, and most importantly for a dramatist, anticipates the conflicts she will encounter, the future buried, as it were, in the Matron's present, which is now the past. It is in this very space that the writer works, determining a (fictional) future from a past which predicts, or is re-configured to predict, alternative or future action.

Matron Robson's entries extend from April 1912 to September 1914, at which point the journal stops, or is abandoned. (The only mention of the First World War is a note concerning a nursing sister joining the Territorial Nursing Force and an enquiry as to whether or not her post can be kept for her.) What happens to Nurse Robson after September 1914? The archive won't tell. It asks questions it cannot answer and stubbornly fails to explain itself. It is secretive and withholds meaning, or teases with meaning that can never be precisely understood. The possession of the metonymic object is even in its wholeness a kind of dispossession, as its existence is also fragmentary, partial and incomplete.

I begin to read the blanks, not as voids, but as the thinnest veils concealing story. In this way absence becomes a type of presence. This journal then is the inspiration, the

token, object, souvenir, or keepsake I will take away, as it were, from the archive, the relic upon which I will build a drama, delighting in Howe's mediation on the word. 'Relic is itself a beautiful word. The archaic relic - a widow, a survivor - from Latin *relictus* is even sharper.'⁵⁰

Like an object in a fairy tale, the journal itself has life, intention. I imagine Matron Robson writing at a large desk, or maybe as she is busy and efficient, she uses a (once ubiquitous) portable desk that she can carry around like a laptop. It's made of wood or papier mache, not elaborate like some I have seen with inlaid mother of pearl for example, but serviceable, ink stained with use. When closed it will resemble a hinged rectangular box of a size she can carry under her arm as she walks the corridors of Stannington. When open, it will reveal a sloping surface for writing. There are drawers for papers and books as large as her Matron's Journal, cubbyholes for pens and inkbottles, secret compartments accessed by hidden springs, levers and buttons and locked drawers. (She carries the key, along with all her other keys, on her person.) In this way, the imagined portable desk⁵¹ becomes a private space. What might she hide? Money? (How much?) Private letters and locks of hair? (From whom?)

My desire to focus on Matron Robson as the protagonist of the drama I want to develop, to merge myself in some way with her, is like adding some comment of my own to her Matron's Journal (something the Managing Director will also ignore) or putting a keepsake of my own in her (imagined) desk box- a mingling of our ideas and experiences.

Matron Robson as improver from the outset is active, an active character creates movement and conflict. Tuberculosis itself, the isolation of the sanatorium (a setting that both intensifies and propels action), the stigma of infection and contagion, and the odd and desperate cures attempted throughout the history of the disease, offer additional thematic and narrative inspiration. My synopsis, for this drama, which I will later provide, re-purposes Matron Robson's journal and the various 'facts,' I accumulate about tuberculosis. Progression, particularly compression and elaboration, transforms, re-interprets and re-structures the selected material. The juxtaposition of fact and fiction, the collapsing of distance into proximity, and the embellishing of things (objects, deeds, information) with ideas, creates tension, dialectic, and paradox that fuels both narrative and characterisation. Allegorist or collector? The writer is both.

⁵⁰ Howe, *The Paris Review*

⁵¹ I want one. Do they still make them? I google desk boxes and find only antiques in various condition for sale on e-bay.

The allegorist is, as it were, the polar opposite of the collector. He has given up the attempt to elucidate things through research into their properties and relations. He dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on his profundity to illuminate their meaning. The collector, by contrast, brings together what belongs together; by keeping in mind their affinities and their succession in time, he can eventually furnish information about his objects. Nevertheless- and this is more important than all the differences that may exist between them- in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector.⁵²

There is also a Gothic element worth emphasising as a mode of inquiry. The archive as a portal to another sphere - one with ghosts - excites my interest, providing a vocabulary to articulate destabilisation.

One of the principal border breaches in the Gothic is history itself- the insidious leakage of the pre-modern past into the sceptical, allegedly enlightened present [...] the ghost, for instance, is structurally a stubborn trace of the past that persists into the present and demands historical understanding [...]⁵³

The TB sufferer is herself a ghost. The sanatorium, dealing with pathology and sickness, reflects the tropes of Gothic fiction. A gloomy pile, falling into ruin even in its heyday if the Matron's Journal is to be believed, it is isolated, prison-like; the germ-laden atmosphere, poisonous, noxious.⁵⁴

I visit the actual remains of Stannington Children's Hospital, formerly Stannington Sanatorium, near Tranwell in Morpeth, Northumberland, closed in 1984. The site, which is difficult to find, is almost indistinguishable from an overgrown wood; the buildings completely demolished. I look around in disbelief. Surely such grand structures might have been repurposed. Or is the notion of contamination too strong, too pervasive, too fundamental? Nothing survives except a sign nailed to a tree reading, KEEPOUT; the broken remains of a building that might have been the old boiler house (once containing pipes wrapped in white asbestos); and the debris of an old water tower. Mostly there's prickly shrubs, woody vines, large coarse ferns, nettles, creepers, bracken, dead leaves, rusty pipes (I dare not touch), large shadowy bolts, lone bricks, jagged pieces of concrete.

⁵² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 211

⁵³ Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction', *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. xiii

⁵⁴ 'Henry James probably got the idea for *The Turn of the Screw* from Hinton Ampner, a Hampshire house so haunted it was knocked down.' Roger Clarke, *A Natural History of Ghosts: 500 years of Hunting for Proof* (London: Particular Books, 2012) from a review of the book by Theo Tait, *A Dreadful Drumming*, in *London Review of Books*, 6 June 2013

(Picture Bly, the large house in “The Turn of the Screw”, reduced to rubble- and not even that much rumble.) I am told that the land, which belonged to the Health Authority, is now privately owned. If not altogether obliterated, it is largely obliterated, a place of absence, as if everything has disappeared except for a sense of dread, isolation and emptiness- that inspires me. I am, in fact, almost giddy with a desire to begin writing. As Susan Howe remarks, ‘The tale and the place are tied in a mysterious and profound way [...] trust the place to form the voice.’⁵⁵ And it is not just decay that excites me. The sanatorium as it once was (the grand house and its lost interiors) is also inspiring. As Anderson notes, ‘The house which Bishop imagines as a container of objects is also a house for dreaming, a place where the activities of amalgamation and metamorphosis, the transformations associated with art, can happen without the conscious volition of the artist.’⁵⁶

This is a place of ghosts. ‘There is a *truth of delusion*,’ Derrida tells us, ‘a truth of insanity or of hauntedness.’⁵⁷

When digging up the details of the past hidden in the archive, we must remember that we are dealing with the dead. As Derrida notes, “the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is a spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.” Any figures we encounter in the archive are ghosts, mere shadows of the past. Their actions are complete, and their original significance will remain undetermined, open to interpretation.⁵⁸

According to T.J. Lustig: ‘To see a ghost is to become a ghost. But *The Turn of the Screw* gives a further twist to this insight. To see a ghost is also to become what one thinks ghosts are.’⁵⁹ The governess, (the main character in ‘The Turn of the Screw’) Lustig goes on to suggest, becomes the image of the ghost(s) she sees, sharing ‘a common intensity’ and ‘a fury of intention,’ which brings to mind the Matron in her rigour and

⁵⁵ Susan Howe Interview, *The Talisman Interviews*, ed. by Edward Forster (Northfield MA: Talisman House Publishers 1994) cited in Back, p. 8

⁵⁶ Linda Anderson, *Elizabeth Bishop, Lines of Connection* (Edinburgh,: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 53

⁵⁷ Derrida, p. 87

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 84 cited in Helen Freshwater, ‘The Allure of the Archive’, *Poetics Today*, Volume 24, Number 4 (2003), 729-758 (p. 738)

⁵⁹ T.J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 189

determination, her perimeter fence. Perhaps the Matron is also the ghost in that she haunts the sanatorium with her furious purpose.

Besides attempting to enforce hierarchical distinctions, the governess spends much of the narrative attempting to create stable and impermeable boundaries between inside and outside [...] The governess believes she must herself act as a threshold.⁶⁰

Matron Robson, like James' governess, silently battles on with no help from her superiors. As T.J. Lustig observes: 'To be silent is also to observe the master's injunction not to trouble him.'⁶¹

I remember the over-zealousness, disapproval, and restraint (perhaps fuelled by ambition) that resonated (for me) through Matron Robson's journal entries. Might she also be capable of tenderness? What if she fell in love? I find indicators in her writing of rigour, determination, and self-reliance. What if these traits were opposed by other characters, or by circumstances, or by her own unacknowledged needs? This develops various complications which might shape the character's journey. An ambitious character finds her ambition thwarted. The failure of intention crystallises into plot.

⁶⁰ Lustig, p. 130

⁶¹ Lustig, p. 171

Chapter 4. TUBERCULOSIS: A BRIEF STUDY

*'Collecting is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge.'*⁶²

I decide to research tuberculosis, one of the oldest diseases in human history. According to Rene and Jean Dubos, there is evidence of TB in Neolithic burial grounds near Hedelberg; and in bodies exhumed from Egyptian tombs, circa 1000BC. The following description by Aretaeus (who practiced medicine in Asia Minor in 200BC) on how to recognise those suffering from TB (characterised by emaciation) is both beautiful and terrible: 'The whole shoulder blades apparent like wings of birds.'⁶³

In the 16th and 17th Centuries, it was believed TB could be cured by the touch of a King; the king's hand restoring the body's balance.

Royal records reveal that on both sides of the Chanel many thousands of pilgrims travelled yearly to be touched and cured by the king. The first act of Henry of Navarre, when he entered Paris as Henry IV in 1594, was to touch 600 scrofulous persons [...] According to Boswell, Samuel Johnson was one of the scrofulous to be touched in 1712 by Queen Anne, but he was not cured [...] In England, the largest number of persons applying to be touched was recorded in 1684, when many of them were trampled to death in attempting to reach the hand of the king.
^{64 65}

Janet Malcolm, in her literary pilgrimage, *Reading Chekhov*, notes other historic attempts to cure TB.

In *The White Plague*, the Duboses⁶⁶ devote a chapter to some of the odder forms of therapy that were thought up during the premodern period of tuberculosis. One of these was the horseback-riding cure, popular in the eighteenth century. They cite several cases of patients (one of them John Locke's nephew) who recovered from tuberculosis after strenuous daily riding, and note a Dutch physician's recommendation that consumptives of the lower classes who were confined to sedentary occupations endeavour to find employment as coachmen."⁶⁷

⁶² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 210

⁶³ Dubos, p. 71

⁶⁴ Dubos, pp. 7-8

⁶⁵ 'Touchpieces were used by royals who didn't like direct contact with commoners but who knew their subjects would want the benefit of their touch. The Wellcome collection has a few of these.' Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (NY: Zone, 2011)

⁶⁶ Rene Dubos and his wife Jean originally publish *The White Plague* in 1953. Dubos' first wife died of tuberculosis in 1942, his second wife and co-author, Jean, suffers from tuberculosis while the book is written.

⁶⁷ Janet Malcolm, *Reading Chekhov, A Critical Journey* (London: Granta, 2003), p. 130

The involuntary motion of seasickness and the construction of revolving chairs to provide TB patients with an effective source of nausea, is also cited as curative, as is the playing of the saxophone, never playing the saxophone, the eating of twelve eggs daily, or starvation. The drinking of mare's milk, is a cure prescribed for Anton Chekhov; sleeping in a barn to inhale the breath of cows, is prescribed for Katherine Mansfield. The rapidity with which TB seemed to claim lives, earns it the name, galloping: 'The case of Keats dying within one year after becoming sick, with both lungs completely destroyed is often quoted to illustrate the virulence of the disease.'⁶⁸ What appeared to be an extensive destruction of lung tissue within months, thus characterised as galloping, is now believed, according to the Duboses, to be due to late medical diagnosis. One proposed reason for this is the stigma associated with the disease. Adolf Hitler predictably blamed tuberculosis on the Jews.

This is not a problem you can turn a blind eye to- one to be solved by many concessions. For us, it is a problem of whether our nation can ever recover its health, whether the Jewish spirit can ever be eradicated. Don't be misled into thinking you can fight a disease without killing the carrier, without destroying the bacillus. Don't think you can fight radical tuberculosis without taking care to rid the nation of the carrier of radical tuberculosis. The Jewish contamination will not subside. This poisoning of the nation will not end until the carrier himself, the Jew, has been banished from our midst.⁶⁹

Throughout most of the 20th Century TB is seen to be connected to dirt, disorder, overcrowding, malnutrition, smoke, fumes, dust, and poverty. Poverty, in fact, hangs over TB like a shadow presence. The disease is shrouded in shame.

My mother warns me never to speak of her Tuberculosis, ever. (I am, in fact, feeling slightly guilty now.) She saves nothing from this time in her life. My mother, who had trouble throwing anything away- keeps no relics of her illness. There is a sweater I wear in a photograph, aged two, which is said to have been knitted by mother in the sanatorium. Other than this, nothing. On occasion in later life, my mother mentions she has half a lung. She lives until she is 94, with one whole lung and one partial lung, surely

⁶⁸ Dubos, p. 205

⁶⁹ From a speech delivered by Adolf Hitler in Salzburg on August 7, 1920.

not half. She was probably treated by the surgical removal of the effected lobe of one lung.⁷⁰

It was an accidental observation that revealed the potential usefulness of thoracic surgery in tuberculosis. In the course of surgical treatment of diseases erroneously diagnosed as bronchial carcinomas, tuberculous lungs were removed by error on several occasions, the correct diagnosis being made only after the operation. Some of the patients so treated did well, and their recovery gave impetus to the surgical resection of tuberculosis lung tissue.⁷¹

Chekhov's shame, my mother's, my own, the shame I read about in the transcribed interviews with young patients and their parents in the Stannington archives, the shame of having become infected, and the shame of infecting others, which is also a fear of intimacy- excites my narrative instincts.

Historically, the sufferer, haunted by shame and guilt, is an object of fear. The Duboses note the suspicion and ostracism (consumptive) Frederick Chopin encounters in Majorca where he goes to try and to recover his health. According to George Sand:

“We went to take residence in the disaffected monastery of Valdemosa [...] but could not secure any servants, as no one wants to work for a phthisic [...] At the time of leaving the inn in Barcelona, the innkeeper wanted us to pay for Chopin's bed under the pretext that it was infected and that the police had given him orders to burn it.”⁷²

Keats knew that death was coming and, anxious for a devoted friend, begged him not to jeopardise his own health. “You must not look at me in my dying gasp, not breathe my passing breath- not even breathe on me.”⁷³

The descriptions of sufferers are like descriptions of those already dead, ghosts and phantoms, such as this one from ‘The Magic Mountain’ by Thomas Mann, ‘He was unusually pale, of a translucent, yes, phosphorescent pallor, that was further accentuated by the dark ardour of his eyes [...]’⁷⁴ Sometimes they are described as invisible, as if they were already underground. ‘Like someone one has heard cough, but never seen.’⁷⁵ Their

⁷⁰ ‘As early as 1696 Baglivi had reported in Italy cases of soldiers who had recovered from phthisis after having received deep wounds in the chest.’ Dubos, p. 149

⁷¹ Dubos, p. 151

⁷² Dubos pp. 32- 33

⁷³ Dubos, p. 17

⁷⁴ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Minerva, 1996) p. 16

⁷⁵ Mann, p. 17

place of habitation, the sanatorium, even when described with apparent neutrality by Mann, causes profound unease.

They went noiselessly along the coco matting of the narrow corridor, which was lighted by electric lights in white glass shades set in the ceiling. The walls gleamed with hard white⁷⁶ enamel paint. They had a glimpse of a nursing sister in a white cap and eyeglasses on a cord that ran behind her ears [...] As they went along the corridor, Hans Castorp saw, beside two of the white enamelled, numbered doors, certain curious, swollen-looking, balloon shaped vessels with short necks. He did not think at the moment to ask what they were. [...]

“An American woman died here day before yesterday,” said Joachim. “Behrens told me directly that she would be out before you came, and you might have the room.”⁷⁷

According to the Duboses, by the early 20th Century:

The tuberculosis patient has been indoctrinated to believe that it is his responsibility to take measures to minimise the spread of the bacilli, either by accepting segregation in a sanatorium, or by learning to behave in such a manner that does not contaminate his surroundings.⁷⁸

Concurrent with the idea of segregation in the sanatorium, is the idea of ostracism and exclusion from society. The sanatorium movement, by segregating sufferers, may have added to the negative perception of the disease.

The driving idea behind the sanatoria movement was that isolating infected patients could check the spread of the disease [...] In Seattle (in 1910) the first attempt to set up a sanatorium [...] met with outrage, expressed by threats and waving broomsticks, at the idea of a resident “pesthouse.”⁷⁹

Anton Chekhov kept his pulmonary (and intestinal tuberculosis), well-hidden from himself and others. ‘He would not admit to TB.’⁸⁰ In *Reading Chekhov*, Malcolm and her Russian guide and translator Nina visit the houses where Chekhov lived.

⁷⁶ The colour white seems to haunt various accounts of tuberculosis, also known as ‘the white plague.’ The colour brings to my mind images of the white lady, a spectre whose appearance foretold a death in the house.

⁷⁷ Mann, pp. 10-11

⁷⁸ Dubos, p. 219

⁷⁹ www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=3928

⁸⁰ Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov, A Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 374

“They say that Olga (Chekhov’s wife) refused to sleep with Chekhov because she was afraid of catching TB,” Nina says as we walk back to the car along the footpath above the sea to Oreanda (Yalta).

“I’ve never heard that,” I say. ‘From their correspondence it was clear that they *did* sleep together.’”

“Don’t you remember at Gurzuv, (Chekhov’s dacha in Yalta) when you asked about the narrow bed in Chekhov’s room.”⁸¹

As a medical doctor, Chekhov must have realised his condition, but is in apparent denial.

We hear a lot about these haemorrhoids in Chekhov’s letters. They evidently bothered him a good deal more than the symptoms of tuberculosis, which appeared as early as 1884, but which he was not to acknowledge as such for thirteen years. “Over the last three days blood has been coming from my throat,” he wrote to Leikin (newspaper editor and friend) in December 1884. ‘No doubt the cause is some broken blood vessel.’⁸²

The disease was finally and dramatically revealed in a restaurant at dinner.

On the 22 March (1897) Anton (Chekhov) took his room in the Great Moscow (hotel), and in the evening he went to dine with Suvorin (newspaper tycoon, publisher and friend) at the Ermitage. Before they had begun to eat, Anton clutched his napkin to his mouth and pointed at the ice bucket. Blood was gushing up uncontrollably from a lung.⁸³

This is a scene I have long imaged. Chekhov’s blood, the white table linen. What if, like Chekhov, the third Matron, Matron Robson, my protagonist, is infected herself and hiding the symptoms of TB while in charge of Stannington Sanatorium? (How has she become infected? Some intimacy in the past?) How will she act now? What conflicts and complications will arise from these actions? Will she view intimacy as dangerous, shunning physical contact and insisting that other infected sufferers (the children in the sanatorium for example) be avoided (hardly touched) by the nurses caring for them? Building a narrative denotes building events that conspire to confront, challenge and reveal this secret. What if her secret is revealed as dramatically as Chekhov’s - and as

⁸¹ Malcolm, p. 57

⁸² Malcolm, p. 117

⁸³ Rayfield, p. 420

publicly? And what if this rational and ambitious woman believes she could be cured by the touch of a king? ⁸⁴

I begin to wonder if there are issues of class in the secrets Matron keeps. According to Rene and Jean Dubos, at one time TB is considered a romantic experience, an aristocratic decline inspiring creativity. Throughout much of the 20th Century, however, TB is deemed a disease of the poor.

The attitude of perverted sentimentalism towards tuberculosis began to change in the last third of the nineteenth century. In reaction against the artificialities of the Romantic Era, writers and artists rediscovered that disease was not necessarily poetical, and health not detrimental to creative power. Turning their eyes away from the languorous, fainting young women and their romantic lovers, they noticed instead the miserable humanity living in the dreary tenements born of the Industrial Revolution. ⁸⁵

Sanatoria, like Stannington, take a keen interest in conditions at home which could delay a child's release. Some children, with no signs, or only minor signs of TB, are hospitalised if there is a particularly 'bad' home environment, or TB in the family. As the Duboses note:

Sanatoria play an important role in the complex system of public health measures. First devised, and still primarily used as havens where patients are sent to recover their health, they also help in protecting society against the spread of infection [...] ⁸⁶

The most important treatment, and sometimes the only treatment, is rest.

The rationale for rest was an attempt to wall off tubercle bacilli in the lungs with fibrosis. In order for the delicate fibroid tissue to form, lungs must be kept as close to completely still as possible. Coughing, except to produce a morning sputum sample, must be suppressed for fear of stimulating a coughing frenzy among other patients and in order not to disturb delicate healing lungs [...] ⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Chekhov died of TB aged 44; Kafka aged 39; Chopin aged 39, Katherine Mansfield aged 34; Keats aged 25.

⁸⁵ Dubos, p. 65

⁸⁶ Dubos, pp. 172-173

⁸⁷ www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=3928

The introduction of Streptomycin in 1947 (although not widespread in the UK) and more reliable surgical techniques, revolutionises the treatment for many. But at the beginning of the 20th Century TB (also known as: phthisis,⁸⁸ consumption, scrofula,⁸⁹ and the white plague⁹⁰ and hectic fever) is responsible for more deaths than any other disease in the UK and elsewhere.⁹¹ The following description, from ‘The Magic Mountain,’ first published in 1928, relating a young TB sufferer receiving last rites is terrifying in the extreme.

“It was when they brought the Sacrament to little Hujus, Barbara Hujus [...] She was still about when I first came up here, and she could be wildly hilarious, regularly giggly, like a little kid. But after that it went pretty fast with her, and she didn’t get up any more- [...] and then her parents arrived, and now the priest was coming to her. [...] The minute the priest sets his foot over the threshold, there begins a hullabaloo from inside, a screaming such as you never heard the like of [...] and then a shriek- on and on without stopping. [...] So full of horror and rebellion and anguish. [...] And in between came a gruesome sort of begging [...] as though it were coming out of a cellar. [...]

She had crawled under the covers,” said Joachim.⁹²

The youth and (recent) liveliness of the sufferer, the rapid spread and intensity of the disease, and the powerlessness of medicine to stop it, are all evoked in this affecting passage. Moreover, the desperate attempt of the young girl to hide under the covers arouses in the reader an empathetic fear beyond reason.

⁸⁸ ‘*Phthisis* from the Greek to decay or waste away.’ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

⁸⁹ ‘*Scrofula* from the Latin, *scrofulae*, a swelling of the glands; or *scrofa*, a breeding sow supposed to be subject to the disease.’ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

⁹⁰ The origin of the term ‘The White Plague’ is unknown but may be traced back to Oliver Wendell Holmes distinguishing, in 1892, tuberculosis, “the white plague”, from cholera, “the black death” according to Allen B. Weisse, Tuberculosis: Why “The White Plague”? *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, Vol. 39, (1995)

⁹¹ Chekhov died of TB aged 44; Kafka aged 39; Chopin aged 39 ; Katherine Mansfield aged 34; Keats aged 25.

⁹² Mann, pp. 53-54

Chapter 5: THE REDACTED LETTER

Redact v. To bring (matter of reasoning or discourse) into or to a certain form. To reduce (a person or thing) to into a certain condition, state or action. To put matter into proper literary form. To work up arrange or edit.⁹³

The head *archon*,⁹⁴ has the softest voice of all. She is pale, unsolid, not thin but not existing, as it were, wholly in the present- not here, not there, not near, not far. A woman of middle age, she walks with a stick and a dragging foot. I wonder if she suffered childhood TB herself. The knee is considered the third most likely site for TB of the bones and joints, following the spine and hip, and most often seen in children.⁹⁵ First there is swelling, indicating fluid within the joint, perhaps evidence, if x-rayed, of bone lesions or cysts resulting in a narrowing joint space and the eventually destruction of the bone, disorganisation of the joint and loss of movement. It is noted that those children admitted to Stannington with tuberculosis of the knee, many have had recent trauma to the joint, ‘a fall whilst playing, or a knock’⁹⁶ which can activate dormant TB. Was the Head Archon treated at Stannington? (She’s the right age.) Did she have a violent childhood blighted by poverty, falls and knocks? The stigma of TB comes immediately, easily, to mind. The second time I visit the archive, she’s not there at all. I fear for her well-being. Then I receive this e-mail message from her.

I have now obtained permission to provide you with a redacted copy of the particular letter that you were interested in. Am appending to this message. The Caldicott Guardian has advised that in order to obtain permission for you to look generally through the patient files we would need to apply for a section 251 exemption. This is likely to be a long process and I suspect may not fit within the timeframe of your project.

I do not remember requesting a particular letter. How would I have known such a letter existed? Maybe she is trying to tell me something, maybe she knows this letter will be of

⁹³ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

⁹⁴ The third archon is the youngest; the second, most beautiful; but the first (or head) archon is the wisest.

⁹⁵ According to Marjorie Wilson, a student nurse at Stannington 1948-1952, whom I interviewed in February 2016, children hospitalised in the sanatorium lay immobilised in plaster forms, made to the exact outline of their bodies, for weeks, even months. Stressed and over worked nurses, unwound by jitterbugging with airmen from nearby RAF Acklington at frequent dances held at Stannington.

⁹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stannington> Sanatorium

the utmost importance to me. For a moment I even consider applying for a section 251 exemption, remembering the 14,660 x-rays and patient notes I initially rejected.⁹⁷

You came in search of a particular volume, but right away you feel the pull of others [...] That sense of the spurned book, the hidden one, is intuitive. It's a sense of self-identification and trust that widens to delight—discovering accidental originals or feeling that you're pulling something back. You're rescuing or bringing them into the light.⁹⁸

The wish to see everything is hard to resist. As Steedman states, recounting the anxiety of the researcher in the archive, 'You know you *will not finish*, that there will be something left unread, unnoted, untranscribed.'⁹⁹

Patient notes, I learn, come in a standard format bifolio (a sheet of paper folded in half to make two leaves), often with additional sheets or photographs attached. After the patient is discharged these bifolios are bound together into volumes called 'Discharge Books.' The buckram¹⁰⁰ bindings are very tight, and it is difficult to read text written in the fold or gutter. Small pieces of paper adhered to the notes are also trapped, obscuring the text beneath.¹⁰¹

Whilst normally all care is taken to preserve bindings as part of an object's historical context, the decision was made that the information that was inaccessible due to the binding structure was more important than the bindings themselves. As such, I and two Conservators at Durham County Record Office have been dis-binding the volumes.¹⁰²

Dis-binding suggests a surgical or medical procedure. The bindings are removed stripping leather from the spine. (Once upon a time this leather had been adhered directly to the text-block paper with a thick animal glue, a jelly-like protein substance with a distinctive smell not easily forgotten). To remove the glue, a poultice of sodium carboxymethyl cellulose, a heated and medicated mass like those applied to a sore or injury, is

⁹⁷ The 14,660 x-rays are grouped by patient into 2,243 files, some patients having been x-rayed only once, others up to 80 times.

⁹⁸ Howe, *The Paris Review*

⁹⁹ Steedman, p. 18

¹⁰⁰ A kind of coarse linen stiffened with gum or paste; a false appearance of strength. 'A fine [...] unaffected lad, no pride or buckram.' Cornwallis, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

¹⁰² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stannington> Sanatorium

administered which gradually softens the glue without wetting the paper beneath, reactivating the scent, animal and dark. When the glue is sufficiently softened it is gently scraped away, exposing the sewing and paper beneath. Conservationists are then able to cut the stitches and separate one bifolio at a time from the rest of the text-block. Patients who spend years in the sanatorium have additional sheets added to their notes. These are attached to their bifolios with linen tape. Over time the adhesive on the tape becomes dry and grainy like an old elastoplast. The tape is easy to remove, but the adhesive remains on the paper and must be manually scraped off each sheet. Some damaged bifolios, are 'repaired' with traditional bacteria-free Japanese paper¹⁰³ and wheat starch paste.¹⁰⁴

There are 15 large volumes of notes. They are unbound and folded into archival-grade four-flapped envelopes, given a printed label with the file's reference number, and tied together using acid-free tape with a quick-release knot. Three different colour files are used, each one indicating the type of tuberculosis the patient was suffering from. Blue files for sufferers of pulmonary TB; pink for non-pulmonary TB, and green for TB of the bones and joints. Digital copies, called 'surrogates,' can be viewed electronically from anywhere in the world, once the originals are electronically redacted to remove any names or personal information and attached to an online catalogue, minimising further handling. They are then stored, in their original order, as individual sets of notes in bespoke clamshell boxes, as if to emphasise their awayness, their inaccessibility.

Consulting a document by leafing through it, going over it backwards and forwards, becomes impossible with this [...] technology, which perceptibly changes the act of reading and with it the reader's interpretation. These systems of reproduction are useful for preservation, and undoubtedly allow for new and fruitful ways of questioning the texts, but they can cause you to forget the tactile and direct approach to the material, the feel of touching traces of the past.¹⁰⁵

Holding the Matron's Journal in my hands (once an ordinary book, in an ordinary time) and feeling the heft of it, excites me. 'Possession and having are allied with the tactile,

¹⁰³ Sometimes called 'Japanese tissue' it is made from the bark of the kozo tree in winter because cold inhibits bacteria decomposing the fibres; cold also makes the fibres contract giving the paper a crisp feel.

¹⁰⁴ Traditionally the re-binding and making of books was a handicraft practiced by women. 'I am tempted to imagine that the scissors she used are the rusty steel ones, one handle partly bound in kid, that still exist in the Bronte Parsonage Museum. Her (Charlotte Bronte's) process of making the (miniature) book can be seen when one holds the book itself- no record of her making it survives,' Lutz, p. 258-259

¹⁰⁵ Farge, p. 15

and stand in a certain opposition to the optical [...]’¹⁰⁶ The physicality of the object is nearly a magical quality. As Howe states: ‘The paper relic rustles when turned. That could almost be a wing.’¹⁰⁷

I touch the pages of the Matron’s Journal tenderly when I visit the archive, the way I might touch the hand of a friend. However, without going back to the archive, I cannot bring to mind the quality of the paper, or the binding. (Why don’t I take better notes?) I try to picture the Matron’s Journal, closed, then open. Are the papers sewn to the binding along a seam with large or invisible stitches? I chide myself for not smelling the journal when I had the opportunity- and almost return to Woodhorn just to do so.

The trouble *de l’archive* stems from a *mal d’archive* [...] to be *en mal d’archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble [...] It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive even if there is too much of it. [...] to have a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness [...] for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.¹⁰⁸

I decide to forgo the Section 251 exception and settle for the letter only, which I hope to be able to handle, maybe wearing gloves. I pay the required £4.25 and a redacted letter arrives via e-mail. Obviously there will be no handling. I send an e-mail back asking if I can please see the original document if I come to Woodhorn, but it has already been shut up in its clamshell container and I feel bereft.

A nostalgia for color or weight, the thickness and the resistance of a sheet- its folds, the back of its recto-verso, the fantasies of contact, of caress, of intimacy, proximity, resistance, or promise: the infinite desire of the copyist, the cult of calligraphy, an ambiguous love for the scarcity of writing; a fascination for the word incorporated in paper [...] ¹⁰⁹

The ‘surrogate’ letter on my computer screen appears to be written on three pages, penned on one side only. On screen, the paper looks flimsy, feathered. It may have originally come from a box of seldom-used stationary, or purchased especially for the purpose. I print it out in colour. The paper appears pale green, maybe marbled, unlined;

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 206

¹⁰⁷ Howe, *The Paris Review*

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 91

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine* trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) p. 63

the ink, blue-black. It is reduced in size so that all three pages fit horizontally onto one A4 printout. A dog-eared edge and the rusty ghost of a paper clip are strangely affecting. Dated 20th May 1955, the letter is written in an ordinary round hand, made remarkable by its recent disappearance, like most handwriting, in these electronic times. The margins are regular and wide so that the letter takes up more pages than it needs to. The writing is very regular - a lined sheet of 'rough' paper (hand-ruled perhaps) may have been put behind the 'good' paper, to keep the writing straight. There are erratic paragraph indentions but no misspellings, or crossed out words- other than the word 'admirably,' spelt admiably with an 'r' inserted later. Curiously there are no signs of the letter having ever been folded. The original envelope has not been included, or is missing. This bothers me more that the redacted material, (heavy black bars, stark against the flimsy paper). Something, I think, is always missing.

What we are searching for is for a lost object, which really cannot be found. The object (the event, the happening, the story from the past) has been altered by the very search for it [...] what has actually been lost can never be found. This is not to say that *nothing* is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself [...] ¹¹⁰

Not only is the envelope 'lost,' the letter is also 'lost.' Even what is there is 'missing.' As Steedman tells us: 'There is actually *nothing there* [...] only silence, the space shaped by what once was; and now is not more.'¹¹¹ I refer to this (lost) letter frequently (something I cannot do with the Matron's Journal which I can view only at Woodhorn); none the less, my impressions are as fleeting, as mobile- the *virtual* letter, ghostly and spectral, rather than physical. I contemplate the hand and the eye. 'The acute sensation of the object - its perception by hand taking precedence over its perception by eye- promises, and yet does not keep the promise of *reunion*.'¹¹² The Matron's Journal, which I have touched and held, also exists beyond my grasp; while the letter, that I can read and re-read, blurs my vision. However, the intimacy of significance, I have always tried to establish in my work with ordinary objects, is realised; the idea that I am intently contemplating both objects and something beyond both objects.

I try from the writing to determine if the letter is written in haste, but come to the conclusion that it only appears that way as it seems to be penned with an unreliable

¹¹⁰ Steedman, p. 77

¹¹¹ Steadman, p. 154

¹¹² Stewart, p. 139

ballpoint that skips, so that some of the words are unclear- the words ‘swimming,’ for example, ‘working’ and ‘other children’ are particularly hard to read. Nouns are generic, unfancy. They are, in their right order: ‘hospital, mind, doctor, terms, mothers, child, TB, people, books, years, employment, people, word, TB, list, words, hospital, minutes, lady, work, home, parents, child, community, life, illness, time, child, danger, children, home, kindness, son.’ The contents of the letter can almost be imagined from these words- the only specific noun is ‘TB’. According to Farge: ‘Words carry their present with them, and they tell us of the way things were recognized and differentiated.’¹¹³

The letter is a letter of complaint from the mother of a young boy to the chief consultant at Stannington, Dr Stobbs.¹¹⁴ It is written in anger, I imagine, but not, I suspect, the heat of anger, deferring to a figure of authority, but not without a feeling, I believe, of justifiable outrage. The writing is fluent, as if the writer has been lying awake at night, phrasing and rephrasing her thoughts. Perhaps it has been drafted on a scrap of paper with a stubby pencil, to make sure she gets it right. Perhaps the scrap of paper on which the rough draft is written is the back of another letter, a paid or unpaid bill, for example, then copied over whilst sitting at the kitchen table (oilcloth removed). Perhaps she has consulted a book on letter writing, looking particularly at how to write a letter of complaint.

She has successfully included all the components making up a letter of complaint in their right order: ‘the background,’ ‘the problem’, and ‘the closing’. What she has not included is ‘the warning’, given as optional in various manuals, and placed between ‘the problem’ and ‘the closing’. Nor has she prompted a reply, such as the recommended: ‘I look forward to receiving your explanation of these matters.’¹¹⁵

Or am I imagining things again?

As you work, you are taking the pre-existing forms and readjusting them in different ways to make possible a different narration of reality. This is not a question of repetition, but of beginning anew, of dealing the cards over again.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Farge, p. 82

¹¹⁴ Dr Stobbs takes over in 1944 as Stannington’s Resident Medical Officer.

¹¹⁵ J. Willis Westlake, *How to Write Letters: A Manual of Correspondence* (Philadelphia: Sower, Potts & Co., 1876) p. 108

¹¹⁶ Farge, pp. 62-63

The house is probably quiet, her son in bed; her husband working backshift. The letter concerns her lad who has been treated for TB at the sanatorium and sent home cured. After returning home, there is a follow-up appointment with a GP. Two doctors are mentioned by name and not redacted, while the third doctor (the one who upsets her and inspires the letter) is never actually named by the writer - perhaps, in deference to his position, she does not want to get him into bother. But why not? Or does she want to get him into bother? The letter both reveals and conceals her intentions, condemning and demurring. As Giles Constable asserts in *Letters and Letter Collections*, ‘Some link across the epistolary gap, some motive to bridge it, was essential to the writing of letters.’¹¹⁷

The visit leaves her ‘troubled in mind’, as the unnamed GP, discourages her son ‘in no uncertain terms’ from using the local swimming baths. Moreover, as his mother, she is requested to consider the feelings of other mothers and ask herself if, ‘she would like her child to swim with someone so recently treated for TB’. The GP justifies his advice by pointing out that he has former TB patients who have been negative for years but who cannot get employment because people object to working beside them. He goes on to say, ‘we never use the word ‘cured’ in regard to TB.’

Meanwhile, her son listens ‘intently,’ and she sees all the good work done at Stannington ‘being thrown away in a few minutes.’

I feel outraged myself; outraged and something more. Writing the other and writing the self, I cannot help but imagine the young lad’s shame. He doesn’t know where to look. His mother has the chair. He is sitting on a cold metal stool. He hangs his head.

The mother refers to advice she was given at the sanatorium. Parents were encouraged to make their child feel one of the community. ‘To make them feel that at last they were back to normal life and to forget their illness,’ once they return home. She ends her letter by thanking the sanatorium for all the kindness shown her lad and noting that he is remarkably well, pulling, as it were, against the letter’s covert meaning, the apportioning of blame for the shame she is made to feel. (The image of a neighbour covering her mouth and nose with her headscarf, when mother and son pass in the street, comes to mind.)

It (language) is a place [...] typified by constant movement, by an awareness of what is not being said, by the risk of disturbing consensus and being censured,

¹¹⁷ Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections* (Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1976), p. 15

silenced or banished and finally, by a deep and compelling desire for the other, the absent and the always faraway.¹¹⁸

I read the letter again noting that she describes herself as ‘troubled,’ and ‘disheartened.’ This is a reasonable, modest woman, who is not given to exaggeration, or intense emotion. The adjectives she uses, in order of use, are as follows: ‘very, first, very, second, uncertain, other, good, few, normal, one, very’- the adverbs: ‘recently, intently, admirably’. The work of the hospital is ‘good work’.

Can she be said to have redacted her stronger emotions in this letter in which she articulates her life (a woman’s life in 1955) in relation to authority?

The archives do not necessarily tell the truth, but, as Michel Foucault would say, they tell *of* the truth. Namely, the unique way in which they expose the *mode of speech* of an individual, wedged between relationships of power and herself, relationships to which she is subjected, and that she actualizes by expressing [...] in these sparse words, are elements of reality that produce meaning by their appearance, in a given historical time. It is with the conditions of their appearance that we must work; it is here that we must try to decipher them.¹¹⁹

Posting the letter before she changes her mind, is she vexed by frustration (she could have said it better); bothered by guilt or regret; or buoyant with satisfaction, with doing what is right?

At times the archive isolates and miniaturises its objects, encouraging obsession. I read and re-read the letter on my computer as if under an enchantment. Its existence is always just beyond my grasp. It is this quality of attention to a single object that is both exciting and destabilising, this giving oneself up to its sameness, its ordinary language, its repetition (which forces the observant reader to assess small differences); then coming-to, detaching, looking away.

In her notebooks she (Bishop) explored states of not seeing as well as seeing and noted the duplicity of a look which could encompass both surface and depth: ‘The water so clear & pale that you were seeing *into* it at the same time that you were looking *at* its surface. A duplicity all the way through.’ The same duplicity is present in language where signs seem to interpose their own reality as well as provide the only way of guiding us towards depths.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Back, p. 9

¹¹⁹ Farge, pp. 29-30

¹²⁰ Anderson, p. 25

Centring and decentering the letter from my gaze, I wonder if the object is a focus for, or a deflection from, the difficult experience it evokes.

In its completeness however, the letter is still a fragment, evidencing how it came to be written in the way it was written, and the world into which it was written. I gaze at it and beyond it, as one is apt to do with a fragment, inspired by its edges. There is no indication if the letter was ever answered by Dr Stobbs, and I wonder about the way in which he would have replied. Like the Managing Director referred to in the Matron's Journal, he is the absent (and, as it turns out, silent) reader whose approbation, explanation, or intervention is (unsuccessfully) sought. (Unsuccessful only perhaps in the world of the archive, where no response is recorded, and in which absence becomes a form of presence.)

When I think about the *archon* obtaining this ordinary but remarkable letter for me, I feel obligated to protect it myself, taking special care not to leave the printed copy around the office, or the photocopier. I consider including it in the thesis and change my mind, then change it back again. I am still undecided. It is as if I have become an *archon* myself. As Derrida reminds us, 'The archons are first of all document guardians.'¹²¹ According to Steedman, the researcher always reads an unintended, purloined letter. 'The historian who goes to the archive must always be an unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes.'¹²² Some theorists go even further.

According to Shanks, the archival fragment operates as a literal substitute for the lost object, the unrecoverable past. However, he surmises that this ultimately unsatisfying intimacy is an uninvited familiarity, an intrusion on the part of the antiquarian. For him, this relation to the past is voyeuristic violation, a pornography.¹²³

It feels furtive and wrong - but also exciting and pardonable. The archive is, as Derrida asserts, 'always at the unstable limit between public and private.'¹²⁴ Like the souvenir, its

¹²¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 2

¹²² Steedman, p. 75

¹²³ Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Reconstructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992) as cited in Freshwater, *Poetic Today*, p. 735

¹²⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 90

scandal, according to Stewart, is 'its removal from its natural location. Yet it is only by means of its material relation to that location that it requires its value.'¹²⁵

Letters broach gaps of time, between the recounted action and the writer's present experience; of distance between the writer of the letter and the recipient; and of time and distance between the writer of the letter and the writer in the archive.

Scholars have referred to this distance between the writer and the recipient of a letter as the epistolary situation, without which no letter would be written. The letter is thus [...] a desire to bridge the gap between two people, and of writing, which provided the means to do so. The gap was temporal as well as spatial. The writer of a letter knew that it would be received, if at all, some time in the future, and the use of tenses in letters may reflect this temporal gap.¹²⁶

Time is also broached in the archive itself, in the fragments of the archive, and in the writer's response to the archive. 'The past can be remembered,' according to Anderson, 'as a series of particular 'things' but it is something else as well - an aura or atmosphere which creates a sense of intimacy or osmosis between things, and between the objects and the writer's self.'¹²⁷

The archive evoking, among other things, personal memory for the writer, disrupts its chronology. Its fragments conjure up an a-temporal place. In my own practice, it inspires drama which achieves immediacy (a present tense) in dramatised scenes on stage or radio which evoke, even when set in the past, the here and now for the audience.

In the sanatorium time is also disturbed. "They make pretty free with a human being's idea of time, up here. You wouldn't believe it. Three weeks are just like a day to them. You'll learn all about it," he said, and added: "One's ideas get changed."¹²⁸

"Three weeks! Do you hear Lieutenant? Does it not sound to you impertinent to hear a person say: 'I am stopping for three weeks and then I am going away again'? We up here are not acquainted with such a unit of time as the week [...] Our smallest unit is the month. We reckon in the grand style- that is the privilege we shadows have [...]"¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Stewart, p. 135

¹²⁶ Constable, p.p. 13- 14

¹²⁷ Anderson, p. 53

¹²⁸ Mann, p. 7

¹²⁹ Mann, p. 58

I am greatly moved by this mild letter from 1955, both illuminating and opaque, and inspired to use it (as I used the Matron's Journal) as another starting point for another drama. With this in mind, I return to the archive, in order to re-view items from 1945-1955:

- The splint book, 1945 (not very promising)
- A 1947 note on a girl aged 7 fitted with a walking splint and crutches. *'Delayed discharge. Appalling home conditions. Four adults and five children living in two rooms.'*
- A letter from a registrar to another doctor discussing a child aged 1½, whose father died of TB. *'Mum cannot be located.'* Dated 1949.
- A 1949 (very brief) letter from a woman who is herself in a sanatorium with TB, and is the mother of a 2 year old child in Stannington who is due to be released, informing the administration that, *'the people who would take him have changed their mind.'*
- A 1947 letter which informs the administration that the father of a 4 year old currently in the sanatorium has disappeared. His uncle enquires about the child's health.
- A note pertaining to a child aged 6 in 1954. *'Father located in Coventry. Child transferred to Coventry. Callipers and sticks.'*
- The collected oral histories, summarised from retrospective interviews conducted in 2013 with 28 patients and staff who were at the sanatorium from the late 1940s to mid-1950s, and cds of the actual verbatim interviews, available to order for £8.33 each, plus VAT.
- A photograph of patients on the balcony of one of the wards, smiling nurses in the background washing windows.

The archivists also find for me: a log of room temperatures from 1951; and a note on coke, coal and vegetable consumption from the same date. I request, pay for and read printouts of the collected and summarised 2013 interviews with staff and patients and get a strong and immediate sense of the experience for many child patients - vivid images with little or no overview, or context. I am shocked anew by how little these young patients know, or are told, about their situation and condition, how frequently they are lied to, how isolated they are, how infrequently they are allowed visitors, and how feared the disease is in the community, filling the patients with shame. Many of those patients interviewed in 2013 mention having never spoken of their TB before.

I am, at first, inspired to create a drama with the young lad mentioned in the redacted letter as the protagonist- abruptly institutionalised, fitted into new clothes, surrounded by new rules, wanting only to return home; the sanatorium, from his point of view, transformed into an imaginative space - expansive and contracted, real and interiorised, a metaphorical space existing between the fragments I have selected from the

archive, and surrounded by a pine forest evoking fairy tales, which is a source of refuge and danger. He is ill, then cured, but bearing the stigma of the disease, existing in a fixed yet provisional, unstable place. What if he is given a voice, cheeky, not silent? Or perhaps, I will create a drama from the point of view of a young student nurse, not much older than he is, who cares for him. What if she is passionate, enthusiastic, gobby, silenced by strict hospital rules?

I am put in touch, by the wisest *archon*, with an 83 year old woman who was a student nurse at Stannington from 1949 to 1952, and she agrees to be interviewed. When we speak, however, her idealised recollections, dispute the many sad accounts from both patients and staff I have already read and listened to. Time may have cast a rosy glow over events, but can I make use of her testimony in a drama without significantly altering it? If her rosy retrospective monologue is juxtaposed with dramatised scenes, in which, as a young student nurse, she is challenged by difficult conditions in the sanatorium, I believe I can create tension, hinting at another story she wants to tell, a story hidden under the story she is retrospectively telling. In this way I might open gaps between the told story and the dramatised story; creating in the listener's mind the idea that the retrospective version is only one version, thereby exploring memory and the failure of memory, as well as the themes inherent in the sanatorium.

There is no direct route to any historical 'truth' – or even the truth of any historic event. Whether dealing with oral testimony or with written texts, the complexities seem overwhelming. In relation to the former, witnesses have their own perspective on events they experienced- their own highly (and necessarily) selective memories, their own interests and agendas [...] ¹³⁰

Themes arising might include: shame and the images of shame, blame and the shifting of blame (blame is more active than shame), as well as images of forgiveness and the seeking of forgiveness, isolation, confinement and escape; orphans of all descriptions (first time home-leavers like young student nurses, runaways, abandoned children, children that are given away); childhood innocence and deceit, the anomalous concept that children need to be protected as well as controlled; the sanatorium as a paradoxically repressive and benign institution like a parent, a father, the King, society, the new NHS, the family. In addition there's a theme of interiority and exteriority, the sanatorium itself

¹³⁰ Southgate, p. 186

as a confining interior space that expands and contracts around the characters, pivotal and digressive.

Chapter 6: EMBRACING PARADOX

*There is a tension here, even a conflict. The passion for gathering everything and reading it in full tempts us to revel in the archives' spectacular richness and limitless contents. But, logically, we know that for a document to take on meaning it must be questioned pointedly. The decision to write history from the archives comes from somewhere between passion and reason.*¹³¹

In the Matron's Journal and the redacted letter I acquire, I look for characters, conflicts, and complications in the margins of a written text; for disruptive energy inherent in the words themselves, the syntax, the penmanship, the page, the line. In the lengthy (untranscribed) retrospective verbatim tapes I now obtain, and a recorded interview with a former student nurse I conduct myself, I listen to voices - pauses, ellipses, repetitions, and breath; the breath and the limits of breath. One interviewee, aspirates a puff of breath before the word 'tuberculosis' every time; another with her breath released as if to slightly slur her words, fogs the surface, as if were, of her experience. In this way I can explore a transparency of hearing, as well as seeing, the voice shifting my attention away from conventional narrative.

Noting anything and everything that interests me, I now end up with a jumble of inchoate items, circa 1950: TB runs in families; student nurses clean ward windows; children frequently attempt escape; some of the nurses are former patients; there is a greenhouse full of exotic plants; there is a large radio on every ward; there is a posh nurses' dining room; and more. These are the fragments that for some reason resonate. I carefully collect them, trusting they will yield more. Fragments such as these are both complete and incomplete, suggesting the actual experience metonymically, and the experience the fragment cannot represent as it is only a sample, a piece, a remnant.

By virtue of being a fragment, already complete in the breaking up from which it proceeds and of a sharpness of edge that refers back to no shattered thing. It thus reveals the exigency of the fragmentary, which is such that the aphoristic form could never suit it.'¹³²

The fleeting impressions yielded by this ephemera (provisional, temporal, theoretically endless) and the odd facts I've collected about TB, are valuable individually, but when I

¹³¹ Farge, p. 14

¹³² Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 158

put them together, juxtaposition becomes connectivity. ‘Virginia Woolf writes of biographies- or in her case accounts of fictional characters- as requiring writers ‘to tack together torn bits of stuff, stuff with raw edges.’¹³³

The very attempt to hold together contradictions and the search for an appropriate hold-all, a place to put what one has found, becomes the act of creation. Linda Anderson, quoting Elizabeth Bishop, a writer who, as she puts it, is ‘haunted by her own material’ evokes the poet’s search for such a place.

“Sometimes I wish I had a junk-room, store-room or attic, where I could keep, and had kept, all my life the odds and ends that took my fancy [...] *-Everything and anything*: If one had such a place to throw things into, like a sort of extra brain, and a chair in the middle of it to go and sit on once in a while, it might be a great help – particularly as it all decayed and fell together and took on a general odor.”¹³⁴

Unity achieved not only by place but by odour, intoxicates me.

Juxtaposing separate units with seemingly disparate approaches to the theme (or themes) at hand- insists that just as history must be read as the jagged discontinuum it has always been, so must the individual’s intellectual and artistic activities emanate from and reflect that discontinuum.¹³⁵

Fragments, disturbing a sense of coherence and wholeness, become not only the point of origin for narrative, suggesting meaning when put together or juxtaposed, and a representation of an experience of the past; they are a point of disassociation and a basis for interrogation, when the writer looks beyond their edges. Fragments are also an evocation of the archive. In discussing the work of Walter Benjamin, Rachel Tzvia Back, draws on Rolf Tiedermann to make the point that there is no explanation at the centre of Benjamin’s texts, but an image subverting logic. Moreover, transforming concepts into images allows for contradictions.¹³⁶

The collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art,

¹³³ Southgate, p 18

¹³⁴ Anderson, pp. 52-53

¹³⁵ Back, p. 60

¹³⁶ Back, p. 60

its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context.

In Benjamin's own words: 'For the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects. Ordered, however, according to a surprising, and, for the profane understanding, incomprehensible connection.'¹³⁷ The use of the word, 'present' intrigues me- the archive not only coupling, but uncoupling past and present. As Susan Stewart states, 'What lies between here and there is oblivion, a void marking a radical separation between past and present.'¹³⁸ Later, she goes on to say, 'In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world.'¹³⁹ While this seems paradoxical it is also liberating suggesting that, especially for the creative writer, the object and the collection of objects (the archive) can play havoc with the distance between now and then.

To ask which principles of organisation are used in articulating the collection is to begin to discern what the collection is about. It is not sufficient to say that the collection is organized according to time, space, or internal qualities of the objects themselves, for each of these parameters is divided in a dialectic of inside outside, public private, meaning and exchange value. To arrange the objects according to time is to juxtapose personal time with social time, autobiography with history, and to thus create a fiction of the individual life, a time of the individual subject both transcendent to and parallel to historic time. Similarly, the spatial organization of the collection, left to right, back to front, behind and before, depends upon the creation of an individual perceiving and apprehending the collection with eye and hand. The collection's space must move between the public and private, between display and hiding.¹⁴⁰

With so much flexibility, the archive and its objects can be said to be mobile- alive. As Bachelard states: 'We must therefore systematically add to the study of a particular image the study of its mobility, its fertility, its life.'¹⁴¹

What I find in the archive is everything and nothing; a glut and a paucity of material; spaces both open and closed; incongruities; evanescent objects; a collection that

¹³⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 207

¹³⁸ Stewart, p. 139

¹³⁹ Stewart, p. 151

¹⁴⁰ Stewart pp, 154-155

¹⁴¹ Bachelard, p. 19

maintains its boundaries and blurs them; the paradox of relativism, the present, as it were, haunting the past.

It is fruitless to search through the archives for something, anything that could reconcile these opposites. Because the historical event also resides in this torrent of singularities, which are as contradictory as they are subtle, sometimes even overwhelming. History is not a balanced narrative of the results of opposing moves. It is a way of taking in hand and grasping the true harshness of reality, which we can glimpse through the collision of conflicting logics.¹⁴²

The discomfort that arises from the ephemera I've collected (the often inexplicit relationship of the parts to the whole) and the omissions (the ellipsis and elisions) elusive and allusive, particular to the archive, raises more questions.

The physical pleasure of finding a trace of the past is succeeded by doubt mixed with the powerless feeling of not knowing what to do with it.

Yes, the cloth letter is moving, and no doubt quite a few museums would be happy to put it under glass and on display. But its importance is elsewhere. Its importance lies in the interpretation of its presence, in the search for its complex meaning, in framing its "reality" within systems of symbols for which history attempts to be the grammar. [...] (these traces) are at the same time everything and nothing. Everything, because they can be astonishing and defy reason. Nothing because they are just raw traces, which on their own can draw attention only to themselves. Their story takes shape only when you ask a specific type of question of them [...]¹⁴³

A photograph from the archive images my dilemma: the exterior of the main building in Stannington - a brick and stone fortress, a prison¹⁴⁴ with all the windows flung wide open so the patients can benefit from fresh air. Two nurses, wearing enormous pleated coifs; a man hovering half inside, half outside an open door.¹⁴⁵

When I begin to create drama, constrained by the construction required to hold an audiences' attention, the paradoxes multiple. I have been a Classicist in the thrall of Aristotle. Now I find myself in conflict with the freedom I experienced in the archive. Because the craft of dramatic writing determines that an idea is often developed in a particular way to create a narrative which is internally coherent with forward trajectory,

¹⁴² Farge, p. 86

¹⁴³ Farge, pp. 11-12

¹⁴⁴ Children frequently attempting escape from Stannington are found in the pine woods surrounding the sanatorium and returned by the police.

¹⁴⁵ The nurse's coif is seen today as a carrier of bacteria and other disease-causing pathogens.

(found) subject matter must be manipulated, constructed, emplotted and encoded. (Even these words seem harsh, unforgiving, inflexible to me now.) I wonder if there is a way I can construct drama without losing the anarchic energy I've found working with archival material; if my encounter with the archive can inform my practice, embracing rather than rejecting the conflicts inherent in the process? 'Children,' as Lutz reminds us, 'can hold in their minds two contradictory ideas: that a toy is made just of wood and paint and that it is a quivering thing, breathing and rushing into adventures.'¹⁴⁶

In a famous passage of his Preface to *The American*, (Henry) James described those writers of the 'largest responding imagination' who were prepared to commit themselves both to the 'air of romance' and to the 'element of reality' without finally deflecting in either direction. Such writers instead performed a 'revolution', created a 'rich and mixed current' capable of dealing successively with the 'near and familiar' and the 'far and strange'. This vision of a rotary movement which plays from the familiar to the strange and from the unknown to the known, connecting whist continuing to make distinctions, is vital to James's work and to his ideas about consciousness. [...] At a very general level a great deal of James's fiction is ghostly in its enigmatic impalpability, its vague precision, its subtle allusiveness, its hovering uncertainty, its fascination with anxiety and awe, wonder and dread.¹⁴⁷

This can be clearly seen in James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and its history of controversial and conflicting readings by critics.

Edmund Wilson's argument that the governess is 'a neurotic case of sex repression' and that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are 'merely the governess's hallucinations' or [...] Robert B. Heilman's counter-claim that the ghosts are not hallucinations and that Miles and Flora have indeed been corrupted.¹⁴⁸

Focusing on compression and elaboration might allow me to transform, re-interpret and re-structure divergent material- merging, as it were, the inspiration of the archive and the structural demands of dramatic writing: elaboration to develop conflict, circumstances and characters; compression to yield fundamental truths, as the writer squeezes the idea to its universal elements to evoke Aristotle's - *eleos* and *phobos* - pity and fear,¹⁴⁹ to create empathy. Henry James, discussing his process in relation to developing the narrative for *The Aspern Papers*, (inspired, in fact, by a true story James overheard regarding an

¹⁴⁶ Lutz, p. 7

¹⁴⁷ Lustig, p. 2

¹⁴⁸ Lustig, p. 5

¹⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996) p. 10

obsessive collector and his pursuit of the Percy Shelley archive), alludes to elaboration and refers directly to compression:

Nine tenths of the artist's interest in [facts], is that of what he shall add to them and how he shall turn them. Mine [...] had got away from me [...] So it was, at all events, that my imagination preserved power to react under the mere essential charm [...] of the rich dim Shelley drama played out in the theatre of our own modernity. This was the beauty that appealed to me; there had been, so to speak, a forward continuity, from the actual man, the divine poet, on: and the curious, the ingenious, the admirable thing would be to throw it backward again, to compress-squeezing it hard! ¹⁵⁰

James is also touching upon the confluence of fact and fiction, reality, as it were, and imagination, each informing and enhancing the other to inspire his novella. 'Much of his work [...] deals with problematic oppositions and thresholds, and Adrian Poole has argued that James is attracted to the paranormal precisely because it 'raises questions about boundaries'.¹⁵¹

Charles Dickens, as quoted by Walter Benjamin, comments on the elaboration that precedes the development of the character of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

I am not sure I should have been so thoroughly possessed by this one subject, but for the heaps of fantastic things I had seen huddled together in the curiosity dealer's warehouse. These, crowding on my mind, in connection with the child, and gathering round her, as it were, brought her condition palpably before me. ¹⁵²

In Chekhov's short story, 'Lady with Lapdog', ¹⁵³ the paradoxical (and mobile) character of the protagonist, a serial womaniser who falls hopelessly in love, creates (and fuels) the narrative. The woman he falls for, a naive temptress (another paradoxical character) is not his usual type at all.

¹⁵⁰ Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2013), p. xxxi

¹⁵¹ James Poole, *Henry James* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1991), p. 142 cited in Lustig, p. 7

¹⁵² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 208

¹⁵³ Reading more about Chekhov, I come across a passage by Vladimir Nabokov from his book, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, in which he mentions Chekhov's work as a doctor and member of the Board of Guardians for the Visiting Sick in Yalta, asserting that many tubercular people came to Yalta at the time seeking rest and fresh air to manage their condition. I begin to think of Yalta as a large sanatorium and wonder if I could respond to *Lady with Lap Dog* with a short story of my own in which the guileless Anna suffers from tuberculosis (the real reason she is in Yalta without her dreary husband). Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature* (New York: Mariner Books, 1991)

Going to bed he recalled that until quite recently she had been a schoolgirl, had studied just as his daughter was studying now, recalled how much timorousness and angularity there was in her laughter [...] her slender, weak neck, her beautiful grey eyes. 'There's something pathetic in her all the same,' he thought and began to fall asleep.¹⁵⁴

Incidentally, it is widely believed that Little Nell suffered from tuberculosis.

The apparently tubercular characters in Dickens's works reinforces our appreciation of Dickens's powers of observation and description. Dickens uses a prevalent disease in a variety of its manifestations in novels ranging from the fairy-tale/allegory ambience of *The Old Curiosity Shop* to the realism of *Our Mutual Friend*. Consistent with its occurrence at the time, tuberculosis is the disease claiming the greatest number of victims among Dickensian characters- [...] ¹⁵⁵

Dickens also uses paradox in creating character as he goes on to say in his discourse on the development of Little Nell.

I had her image without any effort of imagination, surrounded and beset by everything that was foreign to its nature, and farthest removed from the sympathies of her sex and age. If these helps to my fancy had all been wanting, and I had been forced to imagine her in a common chamber, with nothing unusual or uncouth in its appearance, it is very probable that I should have been less impressed with her strange solitary state.¹⁵⁶

These are characters who will intrigue, allowing the writer to create narrative in part to understand and encompass their paradoxical traits.

In classical antiquity, while Thucydides was insisting on the longevity (or even immortality) of a consistent 'human nature' [...] the dramatist (and so for our purposes representative of poetic fiction) Euripides revealed some consequences of a 'split' (far from consistent) personal identity To take but one, albeit extreme, example from his play *The Bacchae*: the mother of Pentheus [...] manifests that 'divided selfhood' about which Plato had already theorised when he wrote of the different 'pulls' or internal pressures to which humans are subject- [...] ¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Anton Chekhov, *Lady with Lapdog and Other Stories*, (Middlesex: Penguin Classics 1964), pp. 266-267

¹⁵⁵ Joanne Eysell, *A Medical Companion to Dickens's Fiction* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 140

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 208

¹⁵⁷ Southgate, p. 129

Rather than reconciling paradox, I decide, at last, to broach it. ‘To allow differences to become encounters [...] variation itself becoming an actor in the text- this would be the ambition of the text enriched by its own development [...]’¹⁵⁸

Our task is to find a language that can integrate single moments into a narrative capable of reproducing their roughness, while underlining both their irreducibility and their affinity with other representations. We need a language that is capable of reconstructing and deconstructing, playing with the similar and the different.¹⁵⁹

The dead, I determine, can be made to speak again, and say new things. In this way I might retain the sense of being I feel in the archive; the hunt for the unfinished that is the archival experience - one reference directing the research to another and so on and so on; the search for elements yet unknown; the piercing of time that is the reading room at Woodhorn where hours pass unnoticed.

You do it almost unconsciously, going through a series of motions and gestures, interacting with the material through a joint practice of contradiction and construction. Each process corresponds to a choice, which can sometimes be predictable and sometimes appear surreptitiously, as if it were imposed by the contents of the documents themselves.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Jacques Neefs, ‘With a Live Hand: Three Versions of Textural Transmission’ in *Genetic Criticism: Tests and Avant-Textes*, ed Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer and Michael Groden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 108

¹⁵⁹ Farge, p. 92

¹⁶⁰ Farge, p. 63

Chapter 7. CONCLUSION

*We have always, then, written in the mode of magical realism. In strictly formal and stylistic terms, a text of social history is very closely connected to those novels in which a girl flies, a mountain moves, the clocks run backwards, and where (this is our particular contribution) the dead walk among the living. If the Archive is a place of dreams, it permits this one, above all others [...] of making the dead walk and talk.*¹⁶¹

Reviewing a recent book by Deborah Lutz, *The Bronte Cabinet: Three lives in Nine Objects*, which she describes as an attempt ‘To talk to the dead by looking at (holding, sniffing, weighing) the Bronte’s things.’ Samantha Ellis goes on to contemplate the importance of relics. ‘Deborah Lutz writes, “Death doesn’t just bring about the tragedy of turning people into things. It might also start inanimate objects into life, cause them to travel, move about, and generate meaning.”’¹⁶² Not only is the past exhumed, it is made animate. As Lutz states:

Yet as much as I favour the idea of inanimate things having lives concealed from us, I still feel that an object’s meaning- its slumbering life- comes from our own desires and passions, the shadows we let play over it. All such theories have their roots, I believe, in ancient faiths. The body parts of saints, their clothing, and the objects they had touched exuded oils, perfumes, miracles and healing. They could suddenly bleed, cry, levitate, or gain weight in a desire not to be moved. Matter, for Catholic believers in the Middle Ages, was fertile, “maternal, labile, percolating forever tossing up grass, wood, horses, bees, sand, or metal,” as historian Caroline Walker Bynum explains. Spontaneous generation and spontaneous combustion- ancient notions that animate bodies could emerge from nonliving substances or could suddenly disappear altogether- still had currency in the nineteenth century. So did “animal magnetism,” the belief in a fluid that permeated everything and that allowed objects (and people) to influence each other from afar.¹⁶³

The writer re-animates the dead archive through both appropriation and transformation, invigorating its objects for the reader in the present tense, as it were- active and immediate, as if apprehended for the first time, yet also evoking, as we have seen, its origins.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Steedman, p. 150

¹⁶² TLS January 22 2016

¹⁶³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011) p. cited in Lutz, p. xxiii

¹⁶⁴ The only other evocation of the dead, I have recently come across which is as powerful- is walking- ‘Roads are a record of those who have gone before, and to follow them is to follow people who are no longer there.’ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin, 2001), p. 72 cited in Lutz, p. 267

They (archival artefacts) appear to have the ability to reattach the past to the present. When exploring these sources you can find yourself thinking that you are no longer working with the dead- [...] ¹⁶⁵

Without our intervention, however, the archive, (like the children at Stannington who were ordered not to weep), sits in silence. ‘As stuff it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised.’¹⁶⁶ This writer, always fearful of lapsing into silence, wants stories, voices, weeping. By viewing engagement with the archive (and the archive itself) as a live process, the archive becomes a tool for thinking, imagining, remembering, dreaming, transforming, interrogating, visualising, vocalising and finding emotional truth in the artefact, the thing. As Leon Deubel notes in *Oeuvres* (Paris 1929): ‘I believe [...] in my soul: the thing.’ ¹⁶⁷

[...] in 1833, when the young Jules Michelet described his very first days in the archive [...] and wrote of the historian restoring its ‘papers and parchment’ to the light of day by breathing in their dust, this was not the figure of speech that he intended, but a literal description of a physiological process. ¹⁶⁸

Later Steedman observes:

This is what dust is about; this is what Dust *is*: what it means and what it is. It is not about rubbish, nor about the discarded; it is not about a surplus, left over from something else; *it is not about Waste*. [...] It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone. Nothing *can be* destroyed. The fundamental lessons of physiology, of cell-theory, and of neurology were to do with this ceaseless making and unmaking, the movement and transmutation of one thing into another. ¹⁶⁹

Like the skin of the body, the paper of the archive holds the trace - the scar, the shadow on an x-ray, for example - of what was suffered and done. As Howe remarks, ‘There is a level at which words are spirit and paper is skin, that’s the fascination of archives. There’s still a bodily trace.’ ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Farge, p. 8

¹⁶⁶ Stewart, p. 68

¹⁶⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, p. 203

¹⁶⁸ Steedman, p. 26

¹⁶⁹ Steedman, p. 164

¹⁷⁰ Howe, *The Paris Review*

And it is not only the living animating the dead- it is also the dead animating the living- as Susan Howe notes, ‘While I like to think I write for the dead, I also take my life as a poet from their lips, their vocalisms, their breath...’¹⁷¹

Throughout, I now realise, I have been following the breath- exchanging breath with the breathless and afflicted, and with those who cared for and managed them. In some sense, I have also been searching for my mother in the evocation of her most mysterious illness. In the end, however, the story becomes not only what I have found, but how I have found it. This discourse between the living and the dead is the agency of movement, of pace and balance beyond the realm of historical temporality- and I write, and will write, in order to enter into this conversation.

¹⁷¹ Howe, *The Paris Review*

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ADDENDUM A

What follows is a radio play inspired by the Stannington archive and based on characters and situations suggested by the redacted letter.

STANNINGTON¹⁷²

A WORKING SYNOPSIS IN PROGRESS¹⁷³

CHARACTERS

MAJORIE (OLD) narrates the drama. A secretive storyteller, one who conceals as well as reveals, determined to be chirpy, positive, nostalgic, but overwhelmed by sorrow, anger and shame unable to keep these emotions from her narration. (Based on verbatim recordings from interviews conducted in 2013 and 2016.)¹⁷⁴

MAJORIE (YOUNG) At 17 she is over-awed by Stannington, but disillusioned with its hierarchy and its rules. Small of stature, with tiny childlike teeth. Impressionable, compassionate, fearful of reproach, keen to succeed but seething with frustrated purpose, creating movement and conflict with her intensions. Sometimes homesick (everyone at Stannington wants to leave) she is frightened by the sluice room at night. She has a young girl's crush on handsome dying KEN.

¹⁷² Commissioned by the BBC for the series, *Writing the Century*, to be broadcast, August 2016.

¹⁷³ When viewed as a process rather than a product, a synopsis can become a technique for organising drama. Generally understood as a brief summary or an outline that maintains a point by point sequence, a synopsis is often written after the book, film or play script has been completed. However, when regarded NOT as something the writer submits with a covering letter when seeking publication for a finished manuscript, the synopsis can act as a tool for developing raw material. This framework functions creatively as well as structurally. It allows the dramatist to have a snapshot of the whole play so that the shape and build becomes apparent and can be adjusted accordingly. It also allows the writer to explore diverse images and digressions, while maintaining unity and connectivity. The development of a synopsis before I start writing does not, I find, hamper discovery once I start writing. In one sense, the synopsis is merely an articulation of the relationship in time and space of all the elements I have collected. As I proceed these relationships can mutate if I hold the synopsis lightly and keep looking out for the surprising, the unforeseen. The emphasis is on process. The synopsis, in my practice, is an evocation of process. For a while, therefore, the synopsis becomes the text.

¹⁷⁴ Based on (Old) Marjorie's verbatim recollections, the narrative she is now creating, can be said to be mediated by the writer in the interest of drama and meaning, without actually being rewritten- by positioning them against the dramatized scenes. Her recollections will, by necessity, pervade the whole drama, anticipatory and elegiac, creating a meeting of present and past and destabilising both. We might even ask what is the present? Marjorie's recent (2013) recollections? Or the dramatized scenes (the dramatic present) which, while set in 1950, are more immediate in some way?

ALAN (12) Mischievous, baffled by his circumstances, wants to run away to sea with his brother KEN (like an uncle who was never seen again). Although he's been abandoned by his MAM, he won't hear a bad word said about her, protecting her even from his own anger and unhappiness. A really bright child who asks incessant questions, destined to go on to one of the new grammar schools.

MAM (30) May be expecting another child by a new man. (KEN and ALAN's father is long gone). Easily offended, unreliable, apologetic, exhausted, proud. She tries to hide her shabby coat. Won't be pitied.

SISTER (40) A competent, authoritative woman who seems to have never been a child. Critical, hard to please. Fault-finding. ('Take your hands out of your pockets.') She believes things will always continue as they have done. ('A well-run ward is a happy ward.') But her way of life, her ward, her values, will soon be overturned. Plagued (like my real mother-in-law) by the artificial teeth she got fitted as soon as NHS dentistry becomes available. Repressing a secrets- she had TB as a young girl, was a patient at Stannington herself, recovered now she walks with a slight limp. Does not want children of her own.

KEN (15) Hiding from ALAN the fact that he knows he is going to die, an effort which leaves him exhausted. A funny, bright, adventurous role model. He may be in total body plaster but his mind roams free. In his final decline, ethereal, beautiful, evanescent.

Episode 1: ¹⁷⁵ Alan's friends are building a go-cart in the back lane of a North East pit row. Alan watches from the window. Then it's time to leave. Alan and mam are going visit his brother Ken in hospital. Visiting is infrequent. They take a long bus ride. Alan has never been before. Ken is on an eerie empty ward. (Children are not allowed, but a Student Nurse, Marjorie Wilson, little more than a child herself, lets him in.) They've brought Ken cowboy pyjamas which he can't wear because he's in scary plaster and sweets which are confiscated. (Alan and his mam are witnessing, although they do not

¹⁷⁵ Each episode will be topped and tailed (structured) by the verbatim reminiscences of student nurse Marjorie Wilson, tinged (like the archive itself) with the shadow of mortality.

know it, Ken's final illness.) Mam asks Student Nurse Marjorie when Ken can come home. He is her first born, her favourite. (Da wanted to visit too, but could not get the day off work.) Alan is excited to see Ken, but upset when he realises Mam has also lied to him and he is going into hospital too. Marjorie shows him to a bed of his own on a busy ward. His Mam's told him nothing, so Marjorie has to break the bad news- he has early signs of TB, same as Ken.¹⁷⁶

Episode 2: Sister informs Marjorie that although he's not very ill, Alan's been hospitalised for social reasons, there is no Da, and his home conditions are 'appalling'. A relative with no children of her own offered to take Alan, but when she found out that Ken was sick with TB, and Alan may have been infected, she reneged. Marjorie's protective instincts aroused, she showers Alan with attention and praise, is reported, and later accused by Sister of playing favourites and sent off to clean the scary sluice. Can she do nothing right? She continues to favour Alan but her attempts to bond with him are rebuffed by Alan's shame and humiliation. (The little ceramic bed pan.) Eventually with Marjorie's help, Alan comes to terms with life in the sanatorium. He goes to 'boring' sanatorium school. He sits in the solarium wearing 'girl's' sunglasses. He follows Marjorie around complaining, while she serves the lunch and cleans up. (Is he a little in love with her?) Between scheduled activities and treatment, he fantasises a letter from his Mam, but no letters are received because she cannot write without great difficulty. When she's disciplined by Sister for singing along with the ward radio, Alan tries to stick up for Marjorie and the other nurses take against him.

Episode 3: When Alan is blamed by the other nurses for an outbreak of head lice on the ward, Marjorie attempts to cheer him up by flaunting the rules and taking him to visit Ken, abandoning a pile of patients' clothes she's been given to mend. At first Alan is upset to see his brother who is now in traction, but Ken makes Alan laugh with his jokes and crazy escape plans. When it's time to go, the lads won't be parted and both become distressed. After which Ken takes a turn for the worse. Feeling responsible, Wilson asks

¹⁷⁶ All accounts published by physicians and laymen in the past emphasis the tendency of tuberculosis to run in families. It is now realised that familial occurrence is, to a large extent, the result of a common source of infection in the household; but it is also probable that the manner in which the body responds to infection is conditioned by certain inborn traits that are hereditary, and that often bind several members of a family to a common destiny of disease. Dubos, p. 188

to help with a medical procedure (to ease Ken's discomfort) and is told off by Sister. Later she's caught sitting on Ken's bed reading to him when she ought to have been damp dusting the ward. Sister tells Wilson nursing may not be for her. Sister disapproves of fraternising with the patients and warns Marjorie about too much caring. That night, Wilson is made to sing for the consultants in the posh nurses' dining room after dinner. Next morning, when Alan wants to see Ken again, an unhappy Marjorie says no, not today. He sneaks off to visit his brother anyway, but Ken has disappeared. (Trying earnestly to obey hospital rules after her telling off, Wilson can't inform Alan that Ken died in the night.) Alan thinks he's run away and decides to join him.

Episode 4: After lights out, Alan creeps out of bed, steals some food from the kitchen and searches the forbidden nooks and crannies of the sanatorium where he thinks it is likely Ken might be, ending up in the sanatorium greenhouse, a fantastical exotic place like none he has ever seen before. Wilson is studying a book on nursing rather than doing the required bed checks. When she finds Alan's bed empty, she goes after him. This is all her fault. She should have told the little lad the truth. When Alan hears footsteps, entering the greenhouse, he hides. The footsteps come closer and closer. He holds his breath, but has to cough. Wilson finds him. He expects to be punished, but she takes him gently back to bed and sings him to sleep. When Sister sends for her, Wilson is expecting the sack, but instead she is comforted by Sister who tells her the first death is always the worst.

Episode 5: Mam is summoned and Alan is told good news, he's going home cured and if he should get bad again there's a new NHS GP nearby. The family have moved from the pit row to a new housing estate with running water and an indoor toilet. There's a swimming baths nearby too, and Alan is keen to learn. Unfortunately there's bad news too. Mam starts to weep and Wilson must tell him Ken is dead. Mam takes home Ken's clothes wrapped in newspaper. It is understood that Alan will wear them. A ghost's childhood might be predicted for poor Alan who will take Ken's place. Unhappy Alan promises to write to Wilson, but their goodbyes are cut short by a new arrival and Wilson is sent off to make up the bed. The drama ends with the letter Alan writes to Wilson about learning to swim, trying to hide (but revealing) that he is shunned by the other children and banned from the swimming baths, because the neighbours still fear contagion.

ADDENDUM B

What follows is a radio play inspired by the Stannington archive and based on characters and situations suggested by the Matron's Journal.

THE MATRON

A WORKING SYNOPSIS IN PROGRESS

CHARACTERS

MATRON: The protagonist. (35) Principled, capable, ambitious, responsible, determined but troubled, secretive, socially inept, a shopkeeper's daughter with a terror of slipping back into the working classes. Small in stature with a weak chin. She suffers with her feet. An unsupervised supervisor. Left in a highly responsible position with hardly any guidance by a distant manager, like the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw,' hoping to prove herself, but destined to fail. (Does she also see ghosts?) In her Journal entries she will prove an unreliable witness, creating a gap between what the audience knows from the dramatic scenes and what the Matron reports.

ELLA: The antagonist. (21) A quick witted, cheeky young nurse, a natural leader, passionate about her profession but rebellious. Fiercely loyal to her working class family. Quick to anger, a tense ire spoiling her pretty face. (What if these traits are thwarted? A quick-witted character is thought by others to be slow, unintelligent because of her background). Rebellious, she is given something (petty rules) to rebel against. Her family loyalty leads her into trouble at work. A magpie collector of bits and pieces, she accumulates things in order to restore what is missing, her father who has recently disappeared, abandoning the family.

FLORA: (26 but seems younger) a new nurse with a trunk full of treasures, innocent, untrained, in Ella's thrall, gauche but tender. Helpless and persistent. Wears pince nez. (Although this is a radio drama, I find I need to visualise the characters in this way, choosing significant physical characteristics.) Escaping a disapproving middleclass family. A vulnerable protector struggling to be content with less.

MARY POAD (TOAD): (40) An intemperate laundress, big hearted but superstitious, wary, lazy, hungry, defiant, unclean, her cheeks bulging as if she'd been caught eating forbidden food. A dirty laundress.

April (Arrival)

In April 1912, with TB endemic amongst the urban poor, a new matron arrives at Stannington Children's Sanatorium and is greeted by disordered wards and filthy visitors sleeping in the corridors. The patients have lice, someone is stealing their food from the kitchen, and their milk has been watered. The small live-in nursing staff is ill-dressed, undisciplined, immature and overwhelmed, but Matron is impressed by the house with its high domed ceilings and its vast grounds. Feeling herself lucky to have been appointed to this responsible position, she approaches the task with strong determination. She can and will change things. The staff and patients deserve better. She is critical of the previous matron who has let standards slip and sends her first monthly report to the Managing Director in the form of a journal. Matron's Journal for April is a confident list of requests, questions and complaints. But she receives no reply.¹⁷⁷

May

Matron disapproves of young Nurse Ella's fraternising with the patients and warns all her nurses about too much caring. Ella and Flora have been seen playing games with patients and sitting on their beds. According to matron, indulging the patients in this way makes them needy, weak, and more vulnerable. Matron institutes roll call. She spends the little money she has on nurse's uniforms. A seamstress is summoned. In their new uniforms the nurses visit the nearby village. Their clothes provoke astonishment and laughter.

Matron's Journal for May is more emphatic. Still no reply.

June

Obsessed with contagion,¹⁷⁸ which her staff either don't understand or ignore, Matron requires frequently boiled bedclothes, putting pressure on hapless Toad who stares at her

¹⁷⁷ While the synopsis for THE MATRON is linear, the perspective of the audience shifts, inspired by unreliable narration provided primarily by Matron's (spoken) journal entries to create more complicated movement, which will be enhanced on radio by a shift of tone.

¹⁷⁸ Nursing tubercular patients was particularly unpleasant: infectious sputum, pulmonary haemorrhages, frequent vomiting especially during mealtime, and the high death rate made this arduous work. The highly contagious tuberculosis bacilli made it extremely dangerous work, and not a few nurses became tubercular

with dim contempt. According to Toad, voicing a common belief, TB is spread by vampires, not dirt.¹⁷⁹ Matron threatens to sack Toad, but in truth, she would be difficult to replace as all the locals are frightened of working at the sanatorium. Matron prays for guidance. She disapproves of parents visiting, coming as they do from the overcrowded, infected city slums. She ejects a coughing feverish father, whose wife has already died of the disease. He threatens to return, but his child dies. (Or he dies. Or both die.) Matron feels terrible but she cannot falter, there are too many others to think of. It is like a war which must be fought at any cost. She suggests the erection of a perimeter fence after she sees a man walking in the grounds at dusk. Is it a thieving intruder from the nearby village? A desperate parent hoping to catch a glimpse of his child? The father she has recently ejected? Or his ghost? Matron's Journal for June hints at weariness and disillusionment. This time she receives a reply. The Director is relying on her to sort things out, further promotion is hinted at if she proves self-reliant.

July

New patients arrive. Perhaps more than they can handle. Matron exhorts her troops. (The drama and imagery of a war is evoked: loyalty, heroism, morale.) They are fighting a common enemy. She expects them to rally round, but Flora must be disciplined again for showing too much tenderness. Nurse Flora finds an unhealthy excitement in comforting, tending, and cheering her favourites. Her fondness seems to hide a deeper longing. She is forbidden further contact and sulks; her need for intimacy clashing with Matron's stony detachment. As she encounters greater obstacles, Matron's July Journal is paradoxically upbeat, the journal becoming a way of creating and controlling reality.

August

There is an outbreak of scarlet fever, which seems to justify Matron's attitude towards visitors. Ella proves herself to be capable and hardworking during this crisis and Matron begins to grudgingly value her- and maybe more, a growing attraction and tenderness for

and were admitted as patients. Many did not survive.

www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=3928

¹⁷⁹ Before the Industrial Revolution, folklore often associated tuberculosis with vampires. When one member of a family died from it, the other infected members would lose their health slowly. People believed this was caused by the original person with TB draining the life from the other family members. Paul Sledzik and Nicholas Bellantoni, 'Bioarcheological and biocultural evidence for the New England vampire folk belief', in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Vol 94, (1994), 269-274

Ella is felt, then quickly suppressed. They take a walk together. Being close to Ella arouses in Matron pleasure and excitement. Although they never touch, Matron feels the sensation of touching. They work to the point of exhaustion but there are deaths amongst the children that dishearten all. Morale is low. There's a thief haunting the hospital too. Flora's trunk has been broken into and a costly silk scarf is missing. Matron begins to cough. Ella asks for, but is denied, a weekend home and takes offence. In the face of numerous setbacks, Matron's August Journal expresses progress, denial and outright lies.

September

Toad is fired for thieving when she is found in possession of a pie from the kitchen. She is questioned but will not confess to taking Flora's scarf. Defiant until the end, she curses the hospital and the Matron as she is driven away. Thoughts of Ella never far from her mind, Matron takes to walking alone at night, her restlessness an articulation of her longing. Unbalanced by her visions of intruders, thwarted in her efforts to tighten the hospital regime, abandoned by surly staff and absent management, Matron becomes convinced that the figure haunting the grounds is one of the nurses playing a cruel trick. Suspecting that they are plotting against her, Matron opens and reads their letters home. Flora's letters are full of hidden animosity toward her suffocating family who do not approve of her vocation. Ella's letters contain indications of the chaos and poverty at home, an absent father and hints that it was she who stole Flora's scarf for her poorly sister who it is feared is suffering from TB. Frustrated and guilty, Matron burns the letters. Matron's September Journal entry is paranoid, guilty and self-justifying.

October

Matron has lost weight. She has lapses of memory. At night she is either too hot or too cold and sleeps badly. Always remote, refraining from touching anyone even in the most casual way, she is now a virtual recluse, spending days alone in her office. Ella finds Matron's privacy, her distant formality, baffling and impossible to breach. She cannot help but push against it, sneaking into Matron's study and penetrating the recesses of her desk, she finds nothing- metal pen nibs, stationary- while Matron, obsessed with vengeful and passionate thoughts of Ella, sobbing and breathing with difficulty, haunts the perimeter checking for intruders. From this entrenched position, her October Journal entry is desperate and delusional.

November

Realising that her family have not been receiving her letters, Ella goes to see Matron, who claims ignorance. Then, overcome with remorse, she grasps Ella and they almost kiss. Later, embarrassed by her own needs, she contrives to fire Ella for her refusal to participate in an upcoming royal visit. (Matron wants, subconsciously, to be touched by royalty as a cure for her as yet undisclosed TB.) Matron's November Journal entry is a return to normal. She has dealt with her problems and proclaims herself back in control.

December

At lunch for visiting minor royals, Matron (like Chekhov) has a haemorrhage at the table and the shameful secret she's been hiding is revealed. She's been suffering from TB since before she took up her position. Now the infection has invaded her pulmonary artery resulting in massive bleeding, blood gushing uncontrollably from her mouth. Nursed by Flora, Matron is grateful for the loving care she previously tried to deny others. Delirious with fever, she's visited by a presence- and understands that this is the intruder she's been seeing in the grounds- the spectre of her illness. If she recovers, Matron vows to re-instate Ella, if she can find her.

ADDENDUM C

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORK

Interrogating my previously performed, broadcast and published work in relation to my thesis, I find an intriguing journey, one in which I have developed, expanded, made and un-made, distorted and de-formed a discourse with the dead. In my earliest work, this discourse was, in fact, literal, as my dramas explored ghosts haunting the living. As my work has progressed, I have gained new realisations. Through working in the archive with events from the past, I have, paradoxically, become increasingly aware of drama as being always alive, always immediate, always, as it were, in the present tense, and the emphasis of my writing has changed. In my most recent radio play, *Stannington* (2016), which I discussed in the body of my thesis, I have actually been able to let the dead walk and talk in the present without having to rely on ghosts. The discourse between the living and the dead, the conversations that hold me in their thrall as a writer, I now understand can be more subtle: an allusive sometimes elliptical interaction between characters, past and present, living and dead; and between characters and audience. This interaction heightens the a-temporality which has always been a fundamental focus and goal in my writing. The poet Carolyn Forché puts this concern most eloquently:

It is the essence of art to signify only between the lines- in the intervals of time, between times- like a footprint that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice.¹⁸⁰

Forché seems to be describing, in this very profound comment, the place I search for in my own creative work, where time is upended and re-made so as to disturb its ordinary progression. This is more than fractured chronology however; it is the study of the interval, the place where true meaning is found. It is the powerful pause in drama, anticipating, echoing and yet existing in the present.

In *Queen Bee* (2006), my Gothic stage play in which a nurse and a housekeeper battle for possession of a young agoraphobic (who is herself possessed by her dead father), ghosts

¹⁸⁰ Carolyn Forché, 'Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art,' *Poetry*, Vol. 198 (2011), pp. 159

abound. But are they real? Or products of disturbed minds? And if so, whose minds? Do ghosts exist? Or not? Can they exist and not exist simultaneously? Or is our need to view the uncanny situation (or any situation for that matter), in one way or the other, illustrative of an even deeper anxiety- our fear of paradox and contradiction? With these questions in mind whilst developing the play, I tried to work in a place between the natural and the supernatural; a liminal place where opposites blur.

There is an emphasis in *Queen Bee* on the ghost story and how it is told. The classic (but re-purposed) ghost stories that the characters tell each other are indeed frightening as narrative, but also, more importantly, clues that both reveal and conceal secrets. In their apparently innocent storytelling, the characters not only inform on each other, but unconsciously inform on themselves. Linked to psychoanalysis in which the patient might tell the truth about themselves in a coded or hidden way, these stories function to merge the psychological and the supernatural. They heighten the a-temporal concerns of the play, as sometimes they are enacted in the play's present, sometimes they refer to something that has happened in the past, or will happen in the future. Stories in *Queen Bee* blur past, present and future, presaging the way I will develop subsequent work.

The characters in *Queen Bee* are contemporary, but their language (occasionally slipping into slang, or heightened by Gothic tropes), creates an a-temporal present haunted by the past. This raises further questions about time, particularly the borders between past and present. According to Roger Luckhurst these borders are permeable in the Gothic mode.

One of the principal border breaches in the Gothic is history itself- the insidious leakage of the pre-modern past into the sceptical, allegedly enlightened present ... the ghost, for instance, is structurally a stubborn trace of the past that persists into the present and demands historical understanding.¹⁸¹

More than an accumulation of particular tropes, Luckhurst presents the essence of Gothic as a border breach or broach, breaking, interrupting, opening, transgressing, undermining, dis-aligning, piercing (and therefore leaking, seeping, issuing, flowing one into the other) and thus challenging conventional notions of time.

¹⁸¹ Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction', *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. xiii

The idea of ghosts as more than spirits of the dead, but as representations of the past invading and interrupting the present (violating temporal borders between past and present with their very presence), informed even an early drama like *Queen Bee*. *Queen Bee* is also funny. As I believed, and still do, that humour and darkness can co-exist, and that these contradictions, lightly held, can heighten one another.

In the second stage play I have submitted, *Blue Boy* (2010), there is also slippage between the natural and the supernatural, as well as slippage between contemporary social issues and fairy tales. I was primarily influenced by a number of high-profile cases that involved the death of a child in care, along with our apparent national obsession with assigning responsibility, or blame, when something goes tragically wrong. Curiously my influences also included the tales of *Pinocchio* (who wants to be a real boy) and *Rumpelstiltskin* (who threatens consequences if his name is not disclosed). As a result of these influences, *Blue Boy* slips between real and unreal worlds. The drama explores, among other things, the idea that social realism is not the only way of tackling social issues. Researching newspaper archives, fairy tales and fairy tale theory, I found myself working again (albeit unconsciously) in a paradoxical, and therefore liminal, place, a threshold between two states which is both states and neither state. Only my recent interrogation of the Stannington Archives has made this position, which I have often sought out in order to create, purposeful and considered.

Reagan, an overworked, underpaid manager stays late in his office one night to finish a report when an unnamed boy appears, asking for his help. But the boy may not be who he seems and, as this two-hander progresses, we wonder if he is a real homeless lad, the ghost of a young teenager who recently died in care, or a figment of Reagan's guilty imagination? The changes in status between the two characters and slippage of identity, also puts the audience in an uncomfortably liminal place as boundaries between the living and the dead dissolve and the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary increases. This then is a different discourse between living and dead, a progression in my thinking, and a recognition of how portable the Gothic can become. In *Blue Boy*, the dead and the living might be one in the same. Can we even distinguish the living from the animate dead who, like the living, have purpose, motivation?

Everywhere, in this ‘Neo-Gothic’ or ‘Office Gothic,’ I tried to blur the boundaries between opposites, not only on stage, but in my method of working. Gaston Bachelard refers to this process as key to the workings of the imagination:

Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of forming images. But it is rather the faculty of deforming images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of changing images. If there is not a changing of images, an unexpected union of images, there is no imagination, no imaginative action. If a present image does not recall an absent one, if an occasional image does not give rise to a swarm of aberrant images, to an explosion of images, there is no imagination.¹⁸²

Bachelard’s idea of deforming images as crucial to the creative process suggests activity, an active creative practice. The creative writer, when faced with the immediate images (and objects) offered by perception, often breaks or refracts to create movement, irregularity, fluctuation, instability and (paradoxically) meaning. According to Bachelard, imagination is not only the transformation of images, but also the unexpected, therefore paradoxical, union of images. The breeching and broaching of opposites, in Bachelard’s opinion, is the essence of the imagination in action. This action, suggested by Bachelard’s very words, is palpable. It is the ‘forming,’ ‘deforming,’ ‘freeing,’ ‘changing,’ ‘swarming,’ and ‘exploding,’ he mentions, necessary for, and fundamental to, creativity.

In *Blue Boy*, and many of my other dramas, there is the theme of care, safe-keeping, protection, control, guardianship, responsibility; especially how we care for the vulnerable in society. In order to develop this theme truthfully I have relied on carefully balancing facts (visible truths) and fictions (fundamental and/or hidden truths). In *Blue Boy* I wanted to evoke a familiar, contemporary, setting and a plausible situation, in order to (eventually) heighten and distort both situation and setting. I did this with the intention of accessing emotional and atmospheric, rather than objective, truth. Historian Beverley Southgate, addresses the problem of recreating current or historical setting and events objectively:

In some cases, indeed, what is nominally presented as ‘fiction’ may be as close as it is possible to get to the ‘truth’ about the matter; for that truth may be expressive

¹⁸² Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (Dallas: Spring Publications., 1987), p. 19

of a 'reality' that is not susceptible to the empirical procedures and validation that history strictly requires.¹⁸³

What Southgate appears to be saying is that an accurate reflection of a situation, in all its complexities, may be further from the truth of the situation than a fiction developed from the facts. She goes on to suggest that truth is paradoxically not best served by what we conventionally think of as accurate reproduction.

Seeing the exchanges of objectives between the two characters in *Blue Boy* as an exciting and relevant way of holding text (often a lie), and subtext (an inner unspoken truth), I've privileged dialogue. (Another meaning of the word, 'broach,' is to begin to utter what is incipient, or almost cannot be uttered.) Holding opposites or conflicts (in this case text and subtext), and working from that uneasy yet fertile place, again typifies my practice.

My radio play *Can You Hear Me?* (2011), a love story set in 1940, engages with the supernatural when a linguist who works at a listening station during the Second World War monitoring enemy domestic radio, hears the voice of her fiancé (a POW who is missing assumed dead on a torpedoed prison ship), coming over the airwave. Is she monitoring? Mis-monitoring? Or both? My original inspiration was a newspaper obituary I read for a linguist who had been a monitor in 1940 at a secret army listening post at Evesham. Evesham Station (and the sinking of a former cruise ship, The Arrandora Star, transporting so-called enemy aliens to Canada), required archival research. This research, the experience of being in the archive, was, at the time, largely unexamined. However, of all the past work submitted, this radio play was most directly created from an archive, and from the paradoxical injunctions (the allowing and disallowing) that activity provided.

The historian Carolyn Steedman notes:

This (reading archives) is an odd way of being in the world, and a type of activity that has given rise to a particular form of writing ... a form of writing which celebrates the constraints on it, constraints which ... are made by the documents themselves: what they forbid you to write, the permission they offer.¹⁸⁴

Steedman is referring, I believe, not only to the permission offered by the archive, and the constraints it imposes, but the experience of working simultaneously with both. It was not

¹⁸³ Beverly Southgate, *History meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2009), p. 176

¹⁸⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2001), p. xi

only the fantastic facts I unearthed about Evesham Hall (where monitors listened to weather reports, dance music and soap operas on German and Italian domestic radio), or the sinking of the Arrandora Star (the prisoners drowning in their pyjamas) that freed my imagination, but the rigour those facts simultaneously imposed: the dates, conditions, settings. The things I could not do, as well as the things I could, framed and structured the drama. Moreover, I found, and still find, my imagination flourishes when it adheres to what is purportedly real. Facts are points of departure and return. Gaps (found or created), are openings and possibilities, in other words permission. Re-reading *Can You Hear Me?* I feel the archive not haunting, but animating this narrative, as if the material I retrieved, was buried alive. Once unearthed, it proved restless and driven.

Can You Hear Me? is an emotional work, which may also be my most radiophonic. In it I gave prominence to the universals of love and loss, bringing a very specific event from the past into the listener's present. Exploiting the medium of radio to emphasise intimacy, I tried to build empathy, a feeling for others which in itself broaches and breaches time and space. Although set in the past, the heightened sound effects, the dramatized scenes, and the intimate monologues become immediate, present, evoking an empathetic response. As Steedman suggests, the archive has the power to fuse past and present, to re-attach them, reminding us that they may have drifted off, one from the other, in our thinking.

They (archival artefacts) appear to have the ability to reattach the past to the present. When exploring these sources you can find yourself thinking that you are no longer working with the dead.¹⁸⁵

As Steedman intimates, it is not only the artefacts that animate. It is the process, the way of working, that those artefacts themselves encourage, that brings the past to life. It is because the archive is incomplete, various, biased, dis-unified, provisional, that working with the past becomes a live process for thinking, remembering, imagining, transforming, making and unmaking, both for the writer, and perhaps the listener. And of course there is a ghost in *Can you Hear Me?* possibly two ghosts. There is the ghost of Anna's fiancé: is he alive or dead? And there is the ghost of Mrs Fellows' husband. Although, it could be argued, that all the characters the writer assembles, or raises from the archive, are ghosts.

¹⁸⁵ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. by Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 8

As Derrida notes, ‘the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is a spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent “in the flesh,” neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met. Any figures we encounter in the archive are ghosts.’¹⁸⁶

Derrida is commenting on the nature of the archive as more than a physical space. It is also a conceptual space, an imaginative space. The archive is a shadow presence because it is neither fully existent, nor fully absent. Like the ghost, it is elusive, neither alive, nor dead, but bristling with unfinished business. The people we encounter in the archive (even if they are still living) are also ghosts because they are faint appearances, inhabitants of an unseen world requiring form and elaboration.

Nocturne (2014), broaches time with music when fragments of piano music played by her daughter inspire fragments of a mother’s repressed memories. Recurrent sounds involving water and music (Chopin’s *Nocturne Op 9 No 2*), introduce and build tension stimulating the monologues which structure this radio drama. In these monologues, the mother speaks in the present to her (dead) sister, recounting an outing in a stolen rowing boat on a lake when they were teenagers. In this way, memory and present experience co-exist, creating another a-temporal world. Although set in the present, the mother’s monologues delivered close to the microphone, often in a whisper, to enhance audience empathy, compress time with memory and space with intimacy. Ironically, however, these monologues, which seems to confess and confide, also hide and delay, misdirecting the listener. Dramatised scenes also destabilise. Ordinary domestic routine hides disintegration, chaos and fear.

There are two distinct (but related) narratives in this two-hander: the daughter’s story (a failing marriage and a difficult relationship with her headstrong mother who refuses to go into residential care); and the story of the mother’s long buried secret, with both narratives coming together, breached and broached, in the end. However, all my submitted work, *Nocturne* included, ends with a question, a new problem, or decision. In *Nocturne*, for example, there is the hint of a further, deeper secret: that Judith’s father is

¹⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 84 cited by Helen Freshwater, ‘The Allure of the Archive’, *Poetics Today*, Volume 24, Number 4 (2003), 729-758 (p. 738)

not really her father. Even when my work ends in death, it is only provisional, Anna's fiancé might still be alive, Angel may not have been given a fatal dose of poison; Reagan may get down off the chair and untie the noose. These endings are open, bringing the past and the present into the future.

In *Nocturne* I again examine how we care for vulnerable people, exploring the problems experienced by loss of independence in the ageing; and the dilemma of middle-aged children trying to help their ageing parent. The Gothic trope of disinheritance becomes expropriation as Anna struggles to hang on to her possessions and her rights to own. This drama about memory was inspired by memory. It is loosely based on my relationship with my own mother and my relationship with my mother's baby grand piano, a personal relic, which metaphorically hovered over my childhood in the way it hovered over all the cramped apartments I lived in as a child.

I researched pianos, their care and maintenance and the life and work of Frederick Chopin, but the real archive here was memory, like the more traditional archive, an incomplete site of knowledge, fragmentary, biased, changeable, unstable. As Susan Stewart asks, 'what is this narrative of origins? It is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is the narrative of the possessor.'¹⁸⁷

Such a narrative cannot be generalised to encompass the experiences of anyone; it pertains only to the possessor of the object. It is a narrative which seeks to reconcile the disparity between interiority and exteriority, subject and object, signifier and signified.¹⁸⁸

The partiality of perspective that the writer brings to the objects she chooses, according to Stewart, reconciles exterior and interior, creating narrative. Reconciliation meaning bringing back to union. This restoration is a process which resonates through all my writing. This approach is not the homogenisation of opposites. It is the re-alignment (which might mean the distorting) of opposites, to enable discourse between the interior invisible world and the exterior visible world. The writer creates an unstable, provisional union comparing what was previously difficult to compare, and activating (or animating)

¹⁸⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Minature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007) p. 136

¹⁸⁸ Stewart, pp. 136-137

something new. The very business of making art is this. Benjamin puts it best in his description of the allegorist and the collector:

The allegorist is, as it were, the polar opposite of the collector. He has given up the attempt to elucidate things through research into their properties and relations. He dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on his profundity to illuminate their meaning. The collector, by contrast, brings together what belongs together; by keeping in mind their affinities and their succession in time, he can eventually furnish information about his objects. Nevertheless- and this is more important than all the differences that may exist between them- in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector.¹⁸⁹

While Benjamin is describing, then combining, two states of being, collector and allegorist, I believe he is also referring to process. It is both the act of collecting (the rigours of creating a collection, establishing affinities and succession) and the act of making allegory (the freedom to refract, repurpose, uncover) not as independent actions, or successive actions, but as one action. This action is, and has always been, whether conscious or unconscious, central to my practice.

¹⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 211

PhD by previous publication

Margaret Wilkinson

School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics

November 2016

The five previously published, produced, broadcast or commissioned pieces of work and the thesis submitted are as follows:

Thesis - Exhumation: How Creative Writers Use and Develop Material from an Archive

1. Queen Bee

An original stage play, toured, Northern Stage, West Yorkshire Playhouse, The Customs House, first performed, April 30, 2009. Submitted in script format.

2. Can You Hear Me?

An original radio drama, first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 Afternoon Play, June 27, 2011. Submitted in script format.

3. Blue Boy

An original stage play, first performed Northern Stage, October 24, 2012. Submitted in script format.

4. Nocturne

An original radio drama, first broadcast on BBC Radio 4, August 21, 2014. Submitted in script format and on cd.

5. Stannington

An original radio drama, first broadcast on BBC Radio 4, Woman's Hour, Writing the Century, October 3- October 7th, 2016. Submitted in script format.

QUEEN BEE

ACT 1 SCENE 1

A cold early summer. A sitting room with an adjoining hall, stairs and a shadowy landing. Eusapia is wearing her church hat. One arm in a sling. Angel is wearing a dressing gown. All the curtains are drawn and the room is dark and cold. It's evening. They sit on an settee in front of a wood burning stove, Angel with a blanket on her knees. All the furniture has been covered with dust sheets. There's a woodpile and an axe. Teacups, a tea pot and a large cake have been laid out on a table.

EUSAPIA

Once upon a time, a young man came to the door of a big old house that was very far from anywhere, asking after a scarf he said he'd left there the night before. Now the old woman who answered the door, and lived in the house, was puzzled, because no young man had been to visit the night before. She never had any visitors.

ANGEL

She didn't let him in, did she?

EUSAPIA

She did.

ANGEL

She didn't?

EUSAPIA

She did.
She was even more puzzled when the young man recalled a beautiful young woman who had entertained him in that very house the previous evening. He claimed to have been given dinner and drinks in a grand room with good thick carpets from wall to wall, and even on the stairs.

ANGEL

(Enjoying herself)

Was he after the silver? Or my father's rare books?

EUSAPIA

When he looked around, he shook his head.

ANGEL

Then he took out a knife.

EUSAPIA

Not yet.

ANGEL

An axe?

EUSAPIA

The hall was rather shabby.

ANGEL

I know! A gun.

EUSAPIA

There was no carpet on the stairs like the young man remembered, no drinks trolley neither. No chandelier. No pictures. No candlesticks. But there, hanging from the bannister, was a long, black cashmere ...

ANGEL

Garrotte.

EUSAPIA

Scarf.

ANGEL

(Shivering with excitement)

And he grabbed it in his hands which were like two big claws dripping blood on the carpet.

EUSAPIA

She didn't have a carpet.

ANGEL

We don't have a carpet.

There's a loud knock.

Eusapia and Angel stare at each other in terror.

EUSAPIA

Did you hear something?

ANGEL

I don't think so. Did you?

Another knock. Even louder this time.

EUSAPIA

Are you expecting anyone?

ANGEL

Me? Are you?

EUSAPIA

Me?

Loud urgent knocking.

EUSAPIA

Don't worry. They'll go away.

Knocking stops.

EUSAPIA

See.

Knocking resumes.

EUSAPIA

We've got to answer it.

ANGEL

Wait!

EUSAPIA

(Stands)

It'll be the post.

ANGEL

It's after dark.

EUSAPIA

Or them men selling sticks ...

She exits.

ANGEL

Don't. Eusapia? Only a crack. Shut it quick. Please.

Eusapia reenters followed by a woman in a hurry. The woman is carrying a suitcase and a briefcase. She is wearing summer clothes. She looks around the cold room.

RUTH

Just a minute.

She crosses quickly to the window and starts to push aside the curtains.

EUSAPIA & ANGEL

No!

RUTH

(Breathless)

Sorry.

(Catches her breath)

I'm Ruth.

(She smooths her dishevelled hair.)

You must be Eusapia. And is that Angel?

Angel smiles weakly. Picks at her blanket. Looks terrified.

RUTH

May I sit down? Sorry. I'm exhausted. Took me forever to...

EUSAPIA

Who are you?

RUTH

I told you. Ruth.

Angel inches up her blanket until she is sitting with it over her head.

RUTH

It's a lovely old house. So quiet.

EUSAPIA

I see you brought a suitcase.

RUTH

First thing in the morning we'll crack on.

EUSAPIA

Crack on?

RUTH

Can I have a cup of tea first? Sorry. I'm gasping.

Ruth pours herself a cup and cuts a huge slice of cake.

RUTH

I haven't eaten all day.

She chews, nods.

Very good.

EUSAPIA

That's real sticky honey cake. From bees.

Eusapia studies Ruth.

EUSAPIA

Can you do heavy lifting?

Ruth finishes her tea.

RUTH

(Laughs uneasily)

She doesn't look that heavy.

EUSAPIA

Chop wood?

RUTH

Excuse me?

EUSAPIA

Ever held an axe?

RUTH

I think there must be some mistake.

EUSAPIA

Not work shy are you?

RUTH

I'm Ruth.

EUSAPIA
Let's see you with an axe.

RUTH
Ruth.

Eusapia picks up the axe.
Ruth shifts away.

RUTH
I've come to do therapy.

EUSAPIA
Therapy?

RUTH
With Angel.

EUSAPIA
Angel?

RUTH
To uncover the trauma leading to her ...

EUSAPIA
What?

RUTH
I'm a qualified psychiatric nurse. Didn't you get my references? Until recently I held an important position in a hospital. Treating all kinds of phobias.

EUSAPIA
Not in this house!

RUTH
It's Ruth.
(Louder)

Ruth.
EUSAPIA
This is a normal house.

RUTH
(To Angel)
Don't you want to get well?

Angel lowers her blanket.

RUTH
Get on with your life?

ANGEL
(Enjoying the attention)
Me?

RUTH

Go out?

EUSAPIA

She cannot do that.

ANGEL

(To Ruth)

You mean go out?

EUSAPIA

(To Angel)

No talking!

ANGEL

I'd like to go ...

EUSAPIA

She's got agoraphobia. Don't you know what that is? Means she can't go out. She's too frightened. She thinks there's monsters. Big men with ...

RUTH

She can change.

EUSAPIA

She's happy as she is.

RUTH

(To Angel)

Don't you want to change?

ANGEL

Eusapia won't like it.

EUSAPIA

She's an invalid.

RUTH

(To Angel)

It isn't up to Eusapia. It's up to you. If you work really hard.

ANGEL

I wouldn't want to work too hard. I get tired.

Eusapia picks up Ruth's empty teacup, sloshes around the dregs and stares into it. Slowly a look of horror comes over her face. She puts down the cup with a clatter.

EUSAPIA

(To Ruth)

Where's your coat?

ANGEL

I want her to stay.

EUSAPIA

The lassie wants to go.

ANGEL

(Whines)

Eusapia. Please.

EUSAPIA

She's got things to do.

(To Ruth)

Let's go.

RUTH

No. Well I'm not. At this time of night? I just got here. Who are you anyway? Bloody hell. I came all this way. For what? You can't just show me the door?

(Stops herself)

Sorry. I didn't mean ... I'm tired ... it was the bus. There was this man got on the bus, this man with a scruffy beard. And he was sitting in the front. But when he turned around and saw me, he moved to the back. I guess he lived alone. Because he started to tell me his life story. He was married and his wife recently died. If you must know, she killed herself ... and he blamed her carer. Can you imagine ... telling a complete stranger something like that ... on a bus?

EUSAPIA

This is not a hotel.

ANGEL

I'll be sick.

EUSAPIA

She can't stay here.

ANGEL

Really sick.

EUSAPIA

We don't know her.

ANGEL

Really really sick.

Angel holds her breath,
chokes, gasps, gags.

EUSAPIA

Where will be put her?

ANGEL

(Instantly recovered)

Mother's room?

EUSAPIA

We can't put her in there.

ANGEL

Why not?

EUSAPIA

You know why.

(Pause)

The bed's not made up.

RUTH

I'll do it myself.

EUSAPIA

It's a damp room. You won't like it.

RUTH

Is it at the back of the house? Away from the road?

EUSAPIA

There's a trap door right over the bed.

RUTH

I don't mind.

EUSAPIA

Some would. There was a young couple staying in a bed and breakfast round here, years ago. They gave them the worst room in the house. Right below a trap door it was. And all night long they could hear a thump, thump, thumping from above.

(She thumps on the arm of her chair.)

The girl said no, leave it, but the man was curious. So he stood on the bed with his big shoulders against the ceiling and his head bent like this.

(She demonstrates)

It looked like an ordinary trap door, but the handle had been filed away. So he worked at the rusty bolt with his pliers. You know men and their pliers.

(Shadows crowd around the lit place where they sit.)

The bolt was very stiff, but he worked it and worked it, sending flakes of rust like dried blood falling on the girl who was only a teenager.

ANGEL

Her mum probably didn't even know where she was.

EUSAPIA

Finally the bolt turned and with a push, the man raised the trap door and put his head and shoulders into the loft.

RUTH

And?

EUSAPIA

Are you sure you want to know?

RUTH

Of course. What's the point of telling the story if you aren't going to ...

EUSAPIA

It's unpleasant.

ANGEL

Very unpleasant.

EUSAPIA

You won't sleep.

RUTH

You can't not say.

EUSAPIA

I'm thinking of Angel.

ANGEL

I know what was there.

EUSAPIA

But you don't want to hear it. Do you? Every time you hear it you ...

ANGEL

I won't.

EUSAPIA

No.

RUTH

Please.

EUSAPIA

Are you sure?

(Pause)

There was an old filthy smell and he felt something moving around in the darkness

RUTH

What?

EUSAPIA

Thin damp hands touched the side of his face

Angel screams.

EUSAPIA

And he screamed and fell to the floor.

RUTH

What was it?

(Pause)

Eusapia?

EUSAPIA

(Pause)

A poor mad soul.

RUTH

What!

EUSAPIA

That's what they did in them days.

RUTH

That's horrible.

EUSAPIA

Happened all the time.

ANGEL

It was a baby.

EUSAPIA

It wasn't.

ANGEL

A baby nobody wanted.

EUSAPIA

You've got the story all muddled up.

ANGEL

That very night the young girl herself fell wrong.

EUSAPIA

That's not true.

ANGEL

And the man ran away and left her.

EUSAPIA

You don't know.

ANGEL

She tried to get rid of it with herbs in a drink. But the herbs didn't work and her mum found out, and after it was born she made the girl give it away to the nuns ... and the nuns gave it away to a good family ...

EUSAPIA

Not it ... Her.

ANGEL

She'd be a grown woman by now. Isn't that right Eusapia? Living in Bradford, or Hull, or I don't know where.

EUSAPIA

(Staring at Ruth)

Sometimes them lost daughters just turn up.

ANGEL

They put her in the loft.

EUSAPIA

No!

ANGEL

Where she died.

Sudden thumps on the ceiling and
dragging footsteps from above.

RUTH

(Looks up, alarmed)

What's that?

EUSAPIA

Never you mind.

A sound like something bumping
down the stairs.

RUTH

Maybe I should go after all.

EUSAPIA

Angel wants you to stay.

RUTH

Does someone else live here?

EUSAPIA

It's the plumbing lassie. Now come with me and I'll
show you your room.

Eusapia leads Ruth to the hall at
the foot of the stairs and hands
her her coat.

EUSAPIA

I'll tell her you've changed your mind. There's a bed
and breakfast nearby.

Ruth starts to ascend the stairs.

EUSAPIA

(Call after her)

Where do you think you're going? Do you want to end up
like me?

Ruth ignores her.

EUSAPIA

You'll not change her. Mark my words. Real doctors have
tried. You'll just provoke her. You don't know what
she's like if she don't get her own way.

RUTH

(From the top of the stairs) Which one's mine?

The sound of Ruth trying several locked doors. Finds one open. Enters.

EUSAPIA

(Calls upstairs)
Angel's Mam died in that room.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

Next morning. Eusapia is alone in the sitting room nursing a cushion like a baby. She's wearing a pinny and a scarf tied over her head. She stops abruptly. Shivers. Turns. There's no one there. Eusapia resumes singing and rocking. A glass of something milky and frothy stands on a table beside her.

Angel and Ruth enter. Angel is wearing a dressing gown. Ruth is wearing a nurse's uniform. She is carrying her briefcase and holding a box of tissues. Eusapia seeing them slips back into her sling, whacks the cushion she's holding against her knees, then returns it to the settee.

EUSAPIA

Don't sit down.

They sit.

EUSAPIA

I just plumped those.

A sound, like a baby crying, comes from above.

Ruth freezes.

EUSAPIA

That's the plumbing.

RUTH

Are you sure?

Ruth tip toes to the window. Twitches the curtains anxiously.

ANGEL

(To Eusapia)
Is this my glass? There's a mark on this glass.

Eusapia examines the glass.

ANGEL

I want another glass.

Eusapia exits. Angel smiles sweetly at Ruth.

ANGEL

I like my own glass.

Eusapia shuffles in with a new glass on a tray.

EUSAPIA

Happy?

Angel watches Eusapia struggle with one hand.

EUSAPIA

(To Ruth)

Frozen shoulder.

RUTH

You're supposed to move a frozen shoulder. Worst thing you can do is ...

ANGEL

She hasn't got a frozen shoulder. If anyone's got a frozen shoulder it's me. Well it's freezing in here.

Ruth's gaze wanders to the curtained window again. She stands. Looks at her watch. Paces. She turns on and off the lights. There are lamps without bulbs, overloaded sockets, plugs mended with cellotape.

Behind her, Eusapia and Angel squabble over Eusapia's sling.

RUTH

Is there no other room we can use?

Ruth begins re-arranging the furniture. Eusapia follows her around putting it all back.

EUSAPIA

This is a home not a hospital.

Ruth pulls the dust sheets off the tables and chairs.

EUSAPIA

What are you doing? No!

Ruth ushers Eusapia out.

RUTH

Therapy's just talking.

EUSAPIA

She don't like talking.

Eusapia walks away. Stops.
Sneaks back, listens.

Angel is sitting tensely. Ruth sits
tensely beside her. She puts the box
of tissues down between them.

RUTH

Get comfortable. That's right. You're warm and safe. Now
concentrate calmly on your breathing. Breathe in, and out.
In and out. Each time you breathe out say the word, peace.

(Ruth demonstrates)

Peace. Say it with me, Angel.

RUTH & ANGEL

Peace.

Ruth's gaze wanders to the
curtained window yet again.

RUTH

(Tensely)

You've never felt more relaxed. Now close your eyes
and imagine you're in a garden. Not just any garden,
but the most beautiful garden you've ever seen.

While Angel lies back in her seat,
Ruth gets quietly to her feet, tip
toes to the window, steels herself,
then parts the curtains and peers
out anxiously.

RUTH

There's nothing to worry about.

Ruth searches the garden.

In the hall, Eusapia shrugs, then
retreats into the vast darkness
of the house.

RUTH

You are surrounded by green trees and lilac bushes.
You bend over and smell one.

Angel sniffs deeply and smiles.

Eusapia, industrious as a bee,
scuttles up and down ladders and
stairs in the dark bowels and nether
regions of the house. The house
appears endless, boundless. Eusapia
is very tiny in the vastness.
Occasionally she stops and tilts her
head, as if listening for something.

RUTH

It's a very private garden with a high stone wall, so you feel safe.

(Ruth breathes a sigh
of relief)

There's a winding path, trees, an old wooden bench, and in the distance two, no three, little houses, like little sheds on four legs ...

Angel sits up straight.

RUTH

... with very slightly pitched roofs and...

Angel starts to scream and scream.

In her bedroom, Eusapia is watching rubbish TV on an old black and white telly with an antenna wrapped in tin foil. When she hears Angel scream, Eusapia jumps up, runs through the burrows and bowels of the house to the sitting room.

Angel sobs and shivers while Ruth tries to comfort her.

Eusapia bursts in.

Ruth looks up coldly.

RUTH

Go fetch some wood.

Eusapia doesn't move.

RUTH

Angel's freezing.

EUSAPIA

I need me axe.

Eusapia picks up her axe. Exits.

RUTH

Was it something I said?

No response from Angel.

RUTH

I can't help you if you won't talk to me.

Outside the room, Eusapia is eavesdropping.

ANGEL

I promised ... It's private ... very private ... very, very private ... Talking's wicked ... It's nothing ...

Nothing but ... Hives ... All right? ... My father's beehives. I don't want to talk about him. I don't have to, do I?

RUTH

Is he still alive?

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

Was he a good father?

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

Did he die when you were a child?

ANGEL

No. Can we stop now? I want to stop. I'm getting tired. And I feel sick. Dizzy and sick. I need the toilet. I might throw up.

RUTH

It's anxiety.

ANGEL

It's real.

(Angel gags)

Have you ever seen anyone as bad as me?

RUTH

You're not bad.

ANGEL

I know I'm not bad. I mean ill.

RUTH

I've treated hundreds of psychiatric patients in hospital...

ANGEL

But I'm the worst.

RUTH

They were much worse than you.

ANGEL

Oh.

RUTH

They gave me the hopeless cases.

ANGEL

Is that why you left? Or was it a man?

RUTH

(Ruth looks terrified)

This isn't about me, Angel.

ANGEL

Why did you want to be a mental nurse anyway?

RUTH

Psychiatric nurse.

ANGEL

Power?

RUTH

Of course not.

ANGEL

Men?

In the hall outside Eusapia is
sharpening her axe on an treadle
operated grindstone, sparks fly.

RUTH

I think we should talk about you.

ANGEL

Me?
Why?
There's nothing to talk about.
Really.
I'm fine.

A tense silence.

RUTH

Whatever we say here, stays here.

An ever tenser silence.

RUTH

Why don't you tell me a little more about yourself?

No response from Angel.

RUTH

How would you describe yourself?

ANGEL

I don't understand.

RUTH

Well ... What kind of person are you?

ANGEL

Happy.

RUTH

Really?

ANGEL

No. Well. Yes. I'm fairly outgoing. I love people. New experiences.

Ruth just looks at her.

ANGEL

This was a happy house. Although someone was murdered in this house long ago. No one wanted to live here after that. They said it was haunted. That's why my father bought it. He didn't believe in ghosts. He was a man of science. They knocked thousands off the asking price. He thought he got a good deal.

RUTH

I'd rather we talked about you ... Well?

Ruth gathers up her things. Stands.

ANGEL

Wait! Once upon a time there was a man named George who went on a bender.

RUTH

I thought we were going to talk about your panic attacks.

ANGEL

And while George was boozing, his girlfriend, who was married to another man, and had a little daughter, died. It was very sad. But George didn't know. So George went to visit her. George knocked on the door, expecting her to open it, but instead, an ugly old crone, who called herself the housekeeper, showed George into a room just like this, and told him to wait. And George waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and ...

Ruth looks at her watch.

ANGEL

Then his girlfriend came in.

RUTH

Let's talk about why you don't want to go out.

ANGEL

You don't understand. His girlfriend was dead and she came in ... to fetch something ...

(Angel looks around
for inspiration)

A book. From that shelf there. One of her story books. That's what her husband called them, story books.

RUTH

That's very interesting, but let's explore ...

ANGEL

Later the housekeeper found George smoking a cigarette all on his own. When he mentioned he'd seen his girlfriend, who was the lady of the house, the ugly old crone went bonkers because the lady of the house, George's girlfriend, was dead. She's not dead. She came down to get a book. And George pointed to the book shelf there, and a book was missing. And that was the book his girlfriend, the lady of the house, got. But it wasn't a story book. Because all her story books were packed away. It was one of her husband's most valuable bee books. An antique. A first edition. The housekeeper suspected George had stolen it. And the housekeeper searched him, thoroughly. The housekeeper searched the whole house. But the book was never found. After that, lots of books just disappeared. The dead lady, George's girl friend, who was also the wife of the man who owned the books, and the mother of the little girl, got up to all kinds of mischief after that. Once, just for fun, she tied a very thin piece of string across the top of the stairs ... or maybe she asked her daughter to do it.

RUTH

Are you trying to frighten me?

ANGEL

Do you want to leave now?

From outside we hear the sound of
Eusapia furiously chopping wood.

RUTH

I'm not leaving, until you're
well. (Stands)
Next time let's try to talk more about your feelings.

ANGEL

Wait! Ever looked inside a hive? You get this ... low
down in your stomach because ... well ... you've opened
something that should stay shut ... like a coffin.

RUTH

(Sits, nodding)

Are you saying that sometimes you feel you're in a coffin?

ANGEL

No. You're not listening. The hive was like a coffin.

RUTH

Um, I see. But what does this have to do with ...

ANGEL

Bees dance. Did you know that? It's how they talk to
each other. There's the round dance and the waggle
dance. Would you like to see the waggle? It involves
shivering your abdomen from side to side while ...

RUTH

It seems to me you're still trying very hard not to talk about your feelings.

(Stands)

ANGEL

Wait! After he died all his bees just ... disappeared ...

(Pause)

Isn't that weird?

(Pause)

He used to call me his Queen Bee. How about that? Is that what you want me to say?

(Pause)

A Queen Bee never leaves the hive.

Ruth sits.

Eusapia, with a bucket and brush, climbs the stairs.

ANGEL

Once upon a time a little girl killed a bee on the stairs with a rolled-up newspaper.

RUTH

She must have been very angry.

ANGEL

She was.

Eusapia, on her hands and knees, manically scrubs and polishes the uncarpeted stairs to a dangerous slick shine.

ANGEL

In the middle of the night he got up.

Ruth listens attentively. Nodding. Making eye contact.

ANGEL

And he put on his dressing gown. It was a good blue dressing gown. But too long. And the stairs were dark. And he slipped and fell. He was an old old man. He should have been in bed. Maybe he was going to get a book. I don't know. I wasn't there. I was fast asleep in my own room. Alone. Why wouldn't I be? Or maybe I wasn't alone. Maybe I was with a man.

The sound of running on the stairs. Shrieks followed by laughter.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

The sitting room. The house is even colder. It is the middle of the afternoon, but it feels like night. Angel

climbs up to the very top of a ladder to get a book. She can't quite reach. She perches precariously. Eusapia enters. She is no longer wearing her sling, but has a heavily bandaged knee. She sees Angel, gasps and tip toes to the foot of the ladder.

EUSAPIA

(Screams)

What are you doing?

Angel is startled. She loses her balance and almost falls.

EUSAPIA

Come down! Slowly.

Angel descends, slowly, unsteadily.

Eusapia leads Angel to the settee. They sit.

EUSAPIA

Remember 'The Little Girl Who Thought She Could?' Her father told her not to go out at night. But did she listen to her father? She did not. Then her mother told her not to go out at night. But did she listen to her mother? She did not. Then her faithful housekeeper, who was wise and good, told her not to go out at night. But did she listen to her housekeeper?

(Pause)

Well?

ANGEL

Ruth wants me to do things.

(Pause)

She did not.

EUSAPIA

And when she should have been tucked up in bed, she went out because she thought she could. I'll be careful, she told herself. So she put on her coat and tiptoed down the stairs and unlatched the back door. And she walked through the garden and down the road and into the village because she thought she could. It was the night of the full moon and in the distance she could see something twinkling in the window of the village church. So, instead of going home like a good girl, she walked towards the church, because she thought she could. The church tower loomed very dark against the sky and now she could hear chanting coming from inside, in a language she didn't understand, that sounded like her language spoken backwards. Still she crept closer and closer through the gate and into the churchyard. And right up to the door. She wasn't afraid, because she thought she could. The church was full of voices. And she wondered who could be holding such a strange service in the middle of the night. So she turned the great iron ring that served as a door handle and went right in. In the morning, they found her lying on the altar with her heart cut out.

Then Social Services got involved. And there was one of them public enquiries and questions were asked and people lost their jobs and lads from the tabloids came to the village, calling everyone 'luv' and luvver.' And children got taken away into care. All because of that one little girl who thought she could.

Ruth enters.

RUTH

(To Eusapia)

Have you been in my room?

EUSAPIA

That's Angel's mother's room.

RUTH

Someone's been looking through my things.

EUSAPIA

Not me.

RUTH

I've got important documents. Private correspondence. I'd rather you didn't touch anything in there.

EUSAPIA

I'd rather you didn't touch anything in here. Things have been moved. Things have disappeared. I didn't leave that cup there. Did you?

Eusapia picks up a cup and saucer, blows dust off it.

EUSAPIA

We've got valuable antiques.

(To Angel)

She'll clean us out.

Eusapia bustles around, rearranging various items.

Ruth meanwhile is pacing like a caged animal.

They bump into each other.

Eusapia stops. Listens. Shivers.

EUSAPIA

There's a book missing.

Eusapia points to an obvious gap in the bookshelves.

ANGEL

It wasn't me.

EUSAPIA

Well it wasn't me.

ANGEL

Maybe Ruth took the book to read.

Ruth is still pacing.

EUSAPIA

A book reader? I knew it. First time I laid eyes on her. Never trusted them book readers. Your father was a book reader. Your poor dead father. You'll not get rid of me, You and her. Remember I know things.

RUTH

I don't even like bees.

EUSAPIA

Are you still here?

Angel meanwhile puts on a pair of goggles and sits under an old fashioned tanning lamp. When she turns it on it fizzes and flashes ominously.

EUSAPIA

Could have been Angel poking through your property. Ever think of that?

ANGEL

(Lifts her goggles)

Me?

EUSAPIA

Oh that's right. I'm forgetting. It couldn't be Angel. Not Angel. She wouldn't enter her Mam's room on her own. She's afraid of the wallpaper ... them flowers and leaves. But one night..

ANGEL

Eusapia!

EUSAPIA

He made her. Then he locked her in. That was expensive wallpaper she ruined, clawing with her nails. All that moaning and crying. And the back of her neck, and her arms and legs covered with ... What were they covered with Angel? Them eruptions?

ANGEL

I don't know.

EUSAPIA

She thought she'd been stung all over by bees on the wallpaper.

ANGEL

I was.

EUSAPIA

There weren't no bees on the wallpaper.

RUTH

Sounds like a psychosomatic episode. A cry for help.

EUSAPIA

She was a bad girl and she got punished.

RUTH

We don't say bad.

Eusapia glares at Ruth. Ruth
glares at Eusapia.

EUSAPIA

(To Angel)

Turn that thing off.

(To Ruth)

Why don't you go out?

RUTH

Not today. Maybe tomorrow.

EUSAPIA

There's shopping you can fetch in. Them delivery boys
is always forgetting something. I'll get your coat.

RUTH

Actually I'm a bit tired.

EUSAPIA

Do you good.

RUTH

No! I mean, no thanks.

Ruth paces from one end of the
room to the other.

EUSAPIA

Can't be much fun for you stuck in here, with us. Have
you been out yet?

Ruth stops pacing.

RUTH

Why don't you go out?

EUSAPIA

Me? I can't go out.

(Eusapia points to
her bandage)

Housemaid's knee. I'm up to me eyes. Who'll mind the fire?

RUTH
I'll mind the fire.

EUSAPIA
You?

RUTH
Angel'll help me.

EUSAPIA
Her? That's a good one. She don't. Well she can't. She's an invalid.

They all sit, trapped, bored to tears, looking at each other.

A bee enters the room. Half asleep, head lolling, Angel lazily follows it round and round with her head and eyes. Suddenly she realises what it is and screams.

Eusapia kills it.

They all sit, trapped, bored to tears, looking at each other again.

ANGEL
(To Ruth)
Do you know any stories?

EUSAPIA
She don't know any stories.

RUTH
I know a lot of stories.

ANGEL
(To Eusapia)
See.

EUSAPIA
(Snorts)
Hospital stories.

RUTH
Not just hospital stories.

ANGEL
We like scary stories.

RUTH
Okay. There was once a nurse I knew who took private patients.

EUSAPIA
I told you. That's a hospital story.

RUTH

Not really.

EUSAPIA

Sounds like a hospital story.

ANGEL

Is it scary?

RUTH

Very.

Eusapia snorts.

EUSAPIA

I've got work to do.

Eusapia picks up a cloth and starts to clean. She's busy polishing, bustling around, but listening.

RUTH

She was called to attend a dying woman in a remote country house like this one. She could hardly find the place and she travelled all day to get there.

ANGEL

Like you did when you first came. Remember?

RUTH

She was met at the door by the woman's husband who took her upstairs. The house was very nicely furnished with expensive wallpaper, chandeliers, a drinks trolley and thick rugs even on the stairs.

EUSAPIA

Not this house then.

RUTH

When she entered the bedroom, my friend was surprised to see that the woman in bed didn't seem that ill, certainly not dying.

EUSAPIA

She was one of them drugs mules. Now that would be a good story ... and she's in bed because she swallowed three balloons full of ...

RUTH

But her husband hovered anxiously. 'Look after her,' he said. 'She's restless tonight.' He had a scruffy beard and piercing eyes. He smiled at his wife and patted her cheek, then left the room. My friend was a good nurse, a great nurse. In the hospital where she worked during the day, they gave her all the hopeless cases ... An older nurse. Older than me. Very experienced. She took the woman's temperature, pulse, blood pressure and listened to her heart. All normal.

EUSAPIA

(Snorts)

What's the point? Get to the point. She don't know how to tell a story.

ANGEL

I think she tells a good story.

RUTH

My friend sat up all night, ready and waiting should her patient need her. Well maybe her mind wandered just a bit. She wasn't that keen on night work and longed for her own little ...

EUSAPIA

Computer.

(Pause)

She'd be online by now if she was home, in them chat rooms and social networking sites with ...

ANGEL

Let her tell it her way.

RUTH

Her patient was good as gold and quiet as a mouse, and soon my friend fell asleep. In the middle of the night, however, she awoke to find the woman lying on a red sheet.

EUSAPIA

That's not very scary.

RUTH

In a pool of blood. A razor blade clutched in her hand.

EUSAPIA

I could tell a much scarier story than that.

RUTH

My friend the night nurse almost fainted. Then she heard the husband's footsteps on the stairs. He took one look inside the room and started to scream. 'I told you to watch her.' His wife lay against the pillows, her lips drawn back and her eyes opened wide. He clasped her and kissed her, but she was quite dead. Then he turned to my friend with a terrible face. 'I'll destroy you,' he promised. 'You'll never work as a nurse again.' ... 'No,' she whispered. She loved being a nurse.

Eusapia sits down to listen,
fascinated despite herself.

ANGEL

This is the best story ever. Are you taking notes?

RUTH

When the night nurse woke up the next morning, her patient was gone and the room had been stripped of all furniture, wallpaper and carpets. How was this possible?

Dust hung in the air and cobwebs. Terrified she ran into the corridor and down the stairs. The stairs too were nothing like the night before. There was no carpet and they seemed dangerously steep, the wood old and rotting. She ran out the door and into the road but saw no one. Finally a car came past and the driver stopped and gave her a lift to the nearest village. The driver knew nothing of the well-furnished house she described. But there was a house in the neighbourhood, he recalled, as derelict as the one in which she woke up. A house where a woman had committed suicide and her nurse was ... well ... murdered.

EUSAPIA

Them nurses is always getting themselves killed.

RUTH

The most unusual thing about the murder and the suicide was that they happened not the night before, but twenty years before. Well that's what the driver said. And the dead woman's husband had been caught and was safely behind bars for murdering the poor nurse.

(Pause)

EUSAPIA

Is that all? That's the story? If I was you I'd stick to nursing. Angel could tell a better story than that. And she don't know any stories.

ANGEL

I know one story.

(Pause)

It's about a woman like Eusapia who lived in a big house like ...

EUSAPIA

Bigger.

ANGEL

With a husband who whistled. They were in service. She was the housekeeper. He was the manservant.

EUSAPIA

Butler.

ANGEL

Manservant.

EUSAPIA

Butler in livery.

ANGEL

One night, when her husband was away in town with his employer and she was all alone in the house getting ready for bed, she saw something.

EUSAPIA

The pay was better too.

RUTH

How much better?

ANGEL

Doesn't anyone want to know what she saw? Well?

RUTH

Go on. What did she see?

ANGEL

Hands.

RUTH

Hands?

ANGEL

Dangling from the sides of an armchair which stood with it's back to her.

RUTH

Did she scream?

ANGEL

No. She sat in bed without moving all night and watched the hands ... Well you know Eusapia, she'd rather die than ask for help ... In the morning, the hands were gone! So she thought it was a dream. The next night her husband, who whistled and drove everyone mad, was due back on the late train. She was tired from the night before, but she wanted to wait up for him. This time she turned the armchair round, so she could see the seat from her bed ... but five minutes later she was asleep. During the night she heard her husband return. There was a slight rustle as he entered the room and prepared for bed, a cold kiss on the cheek because it was a cold night, and then ...

(Pause)

RUTH

What?

ANGEL

She felt the bed clothes gently lifted as he slipped in beside her ... and when he touched her beneath the sheets, she shivered because he was strangely chilled. A cold drive from the station, she thought. So she held him and ... well ... you can imagine the rest ...

RUTH

(Disbelief)

Eusapia?

EUSAPIA

You didn't know me in them days.

ANGEL

Later she was awakened by the sound of tyres on the gravel below her bedroom window and a sweep of light. A car door slammed.

She heard her husband whistling as he and the master entered the hall below. They were talking loudly about how cold it was, and late, and how their train had been delayed due to a suicide on the line.

RUTH

You mean the man in bed with Eusapia wasn't her husband?

ANGEL

If you could call him a man.

EUSAPIA

Wait a minute.

RUTH

What was he?

ANGEL

A ghoul.

RUTH

Eusapia slept with a ghoul?

EUSAPIA

That's sickening. You're sick you are.

Eusapia stands. Stomps out of the room in a huff.

ANGEL

Eusapia! Wait!

RUTH

Don't mind her.

ANGEL

It was only a bit of fun.

Ruth walks restlessly around the sitting room again.

RUTH

What would you like to do now?

Meanwhile, holding a candle like a tongue of light in the vast darkness of the rest of the house, Eusapia wanders from room to room.

ANGEL

See Eusapia. Say sorry.

RUTH

If you were well, I mean?

Somewhere deep inside the house, Eusapia opens (Ruth's) suitcase and gropes inside.

ANGEL

(Thinks. Shrugs)

I dunno. Go for a walk? Get married. I'd like to get married someday. But that's not going to happen. Is it?

Ruth stands.

RUTH

How about looking out the window? Do you think you could do that?

ANGEL

No.

Ruth twitches the curtains.

RUTH

We'll close them the minute you get uncomfortable. I promise.

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

Eusapia will be so pleased.

ANGEL

She won't.

RUTH

All right, she won't, but I will.

Somewhere high up in the house, Eusapia is reading a tabloid. (Killer Bee headline.)

Ruth opens the curtains slightly. A shaft of light pierces the room. Angel shifts uneasily.

RUTH

More?

ANGEL

Better not. In case of fire.

RUTH

Fire?

ANGEL

Those are fire curtains.

RUTH

Is that what she told you?

ANGEL

If there was a fire, I couldn't ... I'd have to ... but I couldn't ... and ... and ...

(She becomes agitated and
looks around wildly)
well ... I'd be burned to a ...

RUTH
There isn't going to be a fire.

ANGEL
I like it when she's here.

RUTH
But you don't need her. You're an adult.

ANGEL
An agoraphobic adult.

RUTH
A recovering agoraphobic adult. Let's open the curtains
a little more. She'll never know.

A bit more light enters the room.

RUTH
Doesn't that feel nice?

Ruth inches the curtains open
a little more.

Finally, in a shower of dust, she
pulls them back entirely.
Sunlight floods into the room.

ANGEL
It's so warm!

Angel basks in the light. She takes
off her dressing gown. She is
wearing a party dress underneath.

RUTH
Come over here.

ANGEL
Where?

RUTH
Here?

Ruth coaxes Angel to the window.

RUTH
Come closer. Closer. You can do it. I know you can. I
think you want to.

ANGEL
(Dithers)
I'm not sure.

RUTH

Only if you want to.

Angel stands. Ruth holds out her hand. Angel approaches, joins her in front of the window. But facing away from the view.

RUTH

Oh Angel. I'm so proud of you. I know that took courage and determination.

ANGEL

It's you that helped me.

RUTH

It's you that let me. You trusted me. And yourself. Now I want you to look out. I think you can. Turn around. Take your hands away from your eyes.

ANGEL

I'd like to but ...

RUTH

Eusapia isn't here. It'll be our secret.

ANGEL

She doesn't mean it.

RUTH

Hands.

ANGEL

She's just old and ...

RUTH

Angel.

Eusapia hauls a huge sack through the winding passageways, from one end of the house to the other.

RUTH

Angel.

ANGEL

I can't.

Angel retreats.

ANGEL

I guess I'll never get well now.

RUTH

(Sharply)

You won't if you think like that. Remember what I told you about negative thoughts.

ANGEL

I'm rubbish. You're wasting your time with me.

RUTH

(Impatiently)

Shall I close the curtains then?

ANGEL

I'm not going to see anything scary am I?

RUTH

Of course not.

ANGEL

The beehives?

RUTH

You can hardly notice them from here. The garden is so overgrown. Anyway they're just empty little ... When you see them you'll laugh ... Tiny little empty ... practically falling down ... And the bees have gone. No bees. I don't see a single ...

Angel returns to the window and looks out.

RUTH

Now isn't that lovely? That's your back garden. It's so private. So hidden. I mean, you'd never know it was here from the street. And those walls. They look like solid stone. Taller than a man, I'd say.

ANGEL

Look there's the path and the pond, the oak tree and the poplar ... I used to sit on that bench in the sun, working on my tan. Oh Ruth, I want ...

RUTH

I know. It's all to come, believe me. From now on it'll be easy. And before you know it you'll be ...

Angel strains closer to the window.

RUTH

Angel?

ANGEL

What's that?

RUTH

What?

ANGEL

That? Right there. Behind the hives?

Ruth looks.

RUTH

I don't see anything.

ANGEL

There! Right there! OhmyGod it's a filthy old man!
Close the curtains! Quick.

RUTH

Where?

ANGEL

The curtains!

RUTH

There's no one there.

Ruth looks, gasps and closes
the curtains, quickly.

RUTH

There wasn't anyone.

(Pause)

A trick of the light, a shadow, the wind.

ANGEL

I saw someone.

RUTH

It's anxiety.

ANGEL

I know what I saw.

RUTH

Anxiety can make us see things that aren't there.

ANGEL

An old man.

RUTH

How old?

Ruth parts the curtains and peers
nervously out the window again.

ANGEL

I saw him!

Angel starts to hyperventilate.

RUTH

Don't move.

Ruth exits and re-enters with a
paper bag.

RUTH

Breathe into this.

Angel pushes the bag away.
Ruth insists. They tussle.

RUTH
It's just a panic attack. It'll pass.

Angel is breathing into the paper bag when Eusapia enters. Eusapia runs to Angel.

EUSAPIA
What's wrong?

RUTH
Nothing.
(To Angel) Keep breathing.

Angel drops the bag.

ANGEL
(Gasping for breath)
Lock all the doors.

RUTH
Breathe into the bag.

ANGEL
The windows too.

RUTH
The bag.

ANGEL
(To Eusapia)
We opened the curtains.

EUSAPIA
Who opened the curtains?

ANGEL
And ... and ... looked out ... and ... and ...

EUSAPIA
Don't try to talk. You've had an upset. Best lie down for a bit.

Angel is still sobbing.

ANGEL
I ... I saw a man.

EUSAPIA
What man?

RUTH
She didn't see anyone.

ANGEL

In the garden.

RUTH

She thought she saw a man in the garden.

EUSAPIA

Stay out of this. You're incompetent. Dragging an invalid to a window. Opening curtains in the middle of the afternoon.

(To Angel)

I told you she was going to cause us problems.

RUTH

There was no man.

EUSAPIA

Now we'll have to get rid of her.

ANGEL

I saw him.

RUTH

It was wind in the long grass.

ANGEL

It was my father.

EUSAPIA

(Gasps)

Your father walking in the garden?

RUTH

Your father's dead.

EUSAPIA

Holy Jesus and Mary.

ANGEL

He had a mark where he hit his head.

RUTH

You couldn't have seen that. Not from this distance.

ANGEL

And he was holding his neck like this and nursing his head.

RUTH

There was no one.

ANGEL

I'm not blind. I saw him. She made me open my eyes. Wide.

EUSAPIA

What was he wearing?

ANGEL

I don't know. Something loose.

RUTH

It's your mind Angel, playing tricks. You were stressed. You haven't looked outside in a long time. It's a perfectly normal...

ANGEL

Like a graveyard out there ... overgrown ... dank...

RUTH

It's a beautiful day.

ANGEL

A graveyard full of weeds with stinging hairs ... and he was stood there surrounded by ... by ...

EUSAPIA

Mist? Vapor? Ectoplasm? Them silvery clouds from the other world?

ANGEL

(Whispers)

Bees.

RUTH

There were no bees.

ANGEL

He was covered in bees ... his whole head ... was ...
... And then he started coming towards me. And he staggered when he walked. So I knew ...

EUSAPIA

He's out there. Doing his dirty business with the queen. Fertilising them eggs. Swelling the ranks with his seed.

RUTH

Let's all take a deep breath.

EUSAPIA

(Screams)

We're doomed!

RUTH

It's only a small setback, something you have to expect whenever pent up emotion ...

Angel sobs in Eusapia's arms.

RUTH

There's nothing wrong. Nothing!

Ruth walks to the window. Angel and Eusapia are too busy comforting each other to notice. Ruth takes a deep breath and peeks out. She searches the garden anxiously then starts to laugh.

RUTH

(Giddy)

Nothing! No one!

(More laughter)

He isn't here! Not here!

(Manic laughter bordering
on hysteria)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT 2 SCENE 1

The sitting room has been barricaded. Old boxes, doors, planks of wood and pieces of furniture have been piled up in front of the window. It's late in the afternoon. A sudden heatwave. The room is dark and stifling. The dust sheets have been put back over the furniture. Angel is in her ratty dressing gown again. Pale. Nervous. On her head she is wearing something resembling a wimple, which is already askew. She is listlessly holding her milky drink. Eusapia sits beside her knitting. She is dressed in a black satin robe. She is wearing dramatic makeup, rouged cheeks and heavy black eyeliner.

EUSAPIA

Once upon a time ...

ANGEL

I'm not interested.

EUSAPIA

There was a knock at the door ...

ANGEL

I've heard that one.

EUSAPIA

Of a remote, old ...

ANGEL

(Bored)

House.

EUSAPIA

It was a flat.

ANGEL

A remote old flat?

EUSAPIA

That's right. An old man lived in the flat with his ...

ANGEL

Housekeeper.

EUSAPIA

Cook. Who was even older.

ANGEL

Flats are not remote.

EUSAPIA

This one was.

ANGEL

I don't care.

EUSAPIA

You will.
They never had any visitors, so it was a surprise, and a worry. But when the cook opened the door she saw a young woman dressed all in white ...

ANGEL

Like a nurse?

EUSAPIA

That's right.

ANGEL

Or a bride on her wedding day?

EUSAPIA

Like a beautiful bride with them breast implants.

ANGEL

I'm still not interested.

EUSAPIA

And liposuction.

ANGEL

I want to get started. When are we going to get started?

Angel gets up. Paces.

EUSAPIA

Where are you going? Come back and finish your drink.

ANGEL

I don't want to. I don't like it.

EUSAPIA

Have a sip?

ANGEL

No.

EUSAPIA

One little sip?

ANGEL

No.

EUSAPIA

Do you want me to continue?

Angel shrugs.

EUSAPIA

Is that a yes or a no?

ANGEL

Suit yourself.

EUSAPIA

The young woman said she was a distant cousin who had come to visit and could she stay the night as she lived very far away and had travelled all day to get there. And so the cook let her in.

While Eusapia is talking, Angel sits down again, opens a book and starts reading.

EUSAPIA

The old man, who was very kind, couldn't exactly place her, but he offered his hospitality. The young woman had a terrific appetite, and a terrific thirst. And when the old man saw her enjoying her food and drink, it made him very very happy. And his cook, who had prepared the meal and made the drink, was over the moon. And later ... Are you listening?

ANGEL

I'm listening.

Angel carries on reading.

EUSAPIA

Is that a bee book?

ANGEL

No.

Angel hides the book she's been reading.

ANGEL

It's hot in here. Fan me.

Eusapia fans Angel.

ANGEL

Worker bees fan with their wings. Did you know that? If it gets too hot in the hive.

Eusapia stops fanning.

EUSAPIA

Give me that book.

ANGEL

What book? Well if we're not going to start yet.

EUSAPIA

I told you, we have to wait until nightfall.

ANGEL

That's hours.

EUSAPIA

Do you want to hear the rest of this story or not?

ANGEL

Not.

EUSAPIA

Well, the long and the short of it was that the young woman...

ANGEL

I said not.

EUSAPIA

... who claimed to be the old man's cousin, stayed and stayed and the old man, who was not partial to company, grew fonder and fonder of her.

Angel scratches under her wimple.

ANGEL

I thought we were going to ... you know ... start right away.

Eusapia straightens Angel's wimple.

EUSAPIA

No use moaning on.

ANGEL

What time is it now?

EUSAPIA

Listen to the story.

(Pause)

Where was I?

ANGEL

(Bored)

He grew fonder and fonder.

EUSAPIA

But there was something more. This young woman had very long fingers and always wore gloves, even while eating. She said it was to protect her hands because she was a pianist. But the old man had no piano so she could never play for him. As time passed she grew more and more self important as if the old man's house was her house. She moved cushions, took books from his study, twitched the curtains, asked too many questions and encouraged the old man to do things he'd never thought of doing.

ANGEL

Like what?

EUSAPIA

I don't know what.

ANGEL

You have to say.

EUSAPIA

Use your imagination.

ANGEL

All right. Like snog?

EUSAPIA

Like climbing ladders and opening curtains and
talking. (Pause)

That young woman loved to talk. She talked and talked,
but said nothing about herself. After a while, the cook,
who was wise to the ways of the world, became suspicious.
And she watched the young woman while pretending to get
on with her chores.

ANGEL

Really?

EUSAPIA

Yes really.
Then one day the old man found his faithful servant with
a needle and thread mending a bed sheet, which was torn
into five long slits ...

ANGEL

(Drawn in despite
herself) Slits? And? Well?

EUSAPIA

I don't know as I can tell you.

ANGEL

Knife slits?

EUSAPIA

Worse.

ANGEL

Worse?

EUSAPIA

You cannot imagine what made those slits.

ANGEL

What?

EUSAPIA

Never mind. It's getting late. I'll tell you another
time. I've got things to do. Can't be sitting around
telling stories all day.

ANGEL

Please.

EUSAPIA

Well ... all right ... on one condition ...

Angel nods.

EUSAPIA

Drink your drink.

Angel drinks a little.

EUSAPIA

The cook, who was not very handy with a needle and thread, berated the old man for inviting his young cousin to stay on account of all the trouble she'd caused the fine linen. 'I'll speak to her,' he said. But the next morning they discovered him dead in his study with his head thrown back. And on the left side of his body, there were five terrible bloody slits. Well you cannot trust anyone these days. The police finally caught the young woman, in the house of another old man, and when they tore off her gloves they found she had one ordinary hand and one wolf's paw.

Ruth enters.

Eusapia and Angel stare at her.

RUTH

What's going on?

EUSAPIA & ANGEL

Nothing!

Eusapia stands.

ANGEL

Where are you going?

EUSAPIA

I've got bed sheets to mend.

RUTH

Is something wrong? Why are you dressed like that? And you? What's going on?

ANGEL & EUSAPIA

Nothing!

EUSAPIA

Angel's just finishing her drink.
Drink it down lass.

Angel starts to drink, but Ruth stops her.

RUTH

(To Eusapia)

What's in that?

EUSAPIA
Herbs.

RUTH
What herbs?

EUSAPIA
I can't tell you. It's a secret recipe.

RUTH
Is that so?
(To Angel)
Give it here.

EUSAPIA
Don't.

RUTH
(Firmly)
I said give it here.

Angel gives Ruth the drink.
Ruth sniffs it. Recoils.

EUSAPIA
It's only a pep-up tonic.

Ruth tries to take a sip of
Angel's drink.

EUSAPIA
Noooo. That's for Angel. Them ingredients is expensive.

RUTH
Have you ever heard of Munchausen by Proxy?
Eusapia shakes her head no.

RUTH
That's when a carer deliberately makes her patient sick.

EUSAPIA
Why would anyone do that?

RUTH
Power.

She hands the glass to Eusapia.

RUTH
You drink it!

EUSAPIA
Me? No.

RUTH
Drink it. Go on, drink it.

EUSAPIA

I ... well ... I'm not really thirsty.

RUTH

We're waiting.

Ruth glares at Eusapia.

EUSAPIA

Always wondered what this tasted like.

Eusapia lifts the glass to her lips.
She takes a little sip.

EUSAPIA

Delicious. I feel better already.

Suddenly Eusapia's hand shakes
and she spills the drink.

EUSAPIA

Someone pushed me.

She looks around accusingly.

RUTH

You spilled that yourself.

EUSAPIA

I never.

(To Angel)

You saw. I never. He's here.

ANGEL

Where?

EUSAPIA

He pushed me.

She bats away an invisible presence.

RUTH

You're disgraceful.

EUSAPIA

No! No! Get off.

She continues to struggle
with someone.

RUTH

(To Eusapia)

From now on I want you to keep away from Angel.

EUSAPIA

Keep away from me lass?

RUTH
No talking!

EUSAPIA
But ...

RUTH
I said, No talking!

Ruth glares at Eusapia.

Eusapia starts rearranging
the furniture.

RUTH
What are you doing?

Eusapia sets chairs around a table.

EUSAPIA
(To Angel)
Don't you worry. I'll smoke him out.

RUTH
Smoke who out?

ANGEL
I didn't kill him.

RUTH
Of course not. Eusapia told me.

ANGEL
(To Eusapia)
What did you tell her?

Eusapia is busy exchanging an
ordinary light bulb for a red one.

RUTH
She told me everything about his heart and his
medication and his wandering through the night. How
your agoraphobia started after the funeral.

ANGEL
Everyone was looking at me.

Eusapia turns on the light, bathing
the room in a strange crimson glow.

RUTH
You weren't responsible.

ANGEL
I didn't like their eyes. Big angry men. With eyes.

RUTH
When the funeral was over, you went right home, didn't you?

ANGEL

I ran.

RUTH

And when you got in?

ANGEL

Thank God.

RUTH

You connected the relief you felt with being at home.

ANGEL

At last.

Eusapia bustles around, moving Ruth out of her way and disturbing her train of thought.

RUTH

So you decided never to leave again.

ANGEL

No. I just like it here.

RUTH

You felt guilty.

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

Everybody's guilty when a loved one dies.

Eusapia starts taking skulls, black candles, crystal balls from a box.

RUTH

It doesn't mean you are guilty. Guilt is a normal bereavement reaction. One of the stages of bereavement.

ANGEL

Leave me alone.

Angel turns her back on Ruth.

EUSAPIA

(To Ruth)

Not making much progress are you?

RUTH

Not with you barging in.
What are you doing anyway?
We were just about to ...
But ... well ...

Angel hangs her head.

RUTH

She's not responding.

EUSAPIA

And how does that make you feel?

RUTH

I don't know. Don't ask me that. I don't want to talk about that.

(Pause)

Helpless I guess.

EUSAPIA

So you're saying you feel helpless?

RUTH

Yes.

EUSAPIA

You're very good at your job aren't you?

Long silence.

EUSAPIA

I can't help you if you won't talk to me lassie.

RUTH

Yes I'm good at my job. I have to be. Patients depend on me. They need me.

EUSAPIA

So you're saying that your job makes you feel needed?

RUTH

Yes needed.

EUSAPIA

And that's important to you?

RUTH

Of course. I don't ... well ... I don't ... have anyone ... or... well ... it takes time to make friends ... and well...

EUSAPIA

I'm listening.

RUTH

My work is ... important ... very important. It has to be ... lives are at stake ... and I try to do it ... perfectly.

EUSAPIA

Um, yes, I hear what you're saying.

RUTH

All the time.

EUSAPIA

I see.

RUTH

Of course I can't do it perfectly perfectly ... No one can ... but I try ...

(Pause)

I know I'm too hard on myself ... Is that what you think?

EUSAPIA

Is that what you think?

RUTH

I just said so.

EUSAPIA

And you find it difficult to give up control.

RUTH

I wouldn't say that.

EUSAPIA

So you wouldn't say that you find it difficult to give up control? Or even admit that others can help you do your job?

(No response from Ruth)

Well?

RUTH

Yes. No. What do you want me to say?

EUSAPIA

It's not what I want you to say.

Eusapia begins arranging black candles on the table, then lighting them.

EUSAPIA

Sort yourself out lass. Or maybe you'd really like my help. I'm a qualified spiritual medium. Ask Angel. She loves a good seance.

Angel and Eusapia look at each other, smile, then scream.

ANGEL

Eusapia's got the gift.

EUSAPIA

Could have gone on stage with them sealed envelopes, guessing secrets and numbers and like that. Carrying messages from the departed. You can't hide nothing from me. I could have been a professional.

(To Ruth)

You're not the only professional in this house. (Pause)

Not frightened are you?

RUTH

Me? Frightened? Of a seance? A seance is like a joke. A party game, as far as I'm concerned. I don't believe in spirits. There are no spirits.

A thudding sound from upstairs.

RUTH

When you're dead, you're dead. There's only one way to help Angel ... Therapy. Therapy is based on years of research, scientific study, accumulated data, measured ...

EUSAPIA

It's all talk. Talk, talk, talk. Only the dead can see. They're watching us right now.

RUTH

We're not having a seance!

EUSAPIA

They can see right into our deepest, darkest ...

RUTH

I'm in charge. And I said ...

EUSAPIA

Hidey-holes.

RUTH

No!

EUSAPIA

We can always do it without you. Right Angel?

RUTH

Never!

I won't have it.

It could be dangerous.

It could send her into a psychotic ...

EUSAPIA

You can't stop us. We'll do it when you're asleep.

RUTH

I won't sleep.

EUSAPIA

You have to sleep. And when you do, we'll be ready.

RUTH

No! Not without me. I ... I need to be there ... to look after Angel. To see no harm comes to her with this ... this ... It's my duty. I'm her nurse. Me. Not you.

EUSAPIA

Then you'll sit beside me in a dark circle?

RUTH

No. Yes. But if I think Angel is becoming upset, we stop.

EUSAPIA

Of course.

RUTH

Promise?

EUSAPIA

I only use my powers to benefit others. How would you like a little demonstration?

RUTH

No thanks.

EUSAPIA

Have you got a sealed envelope? Anything will do.

Angel comes out from behind the settee with Ruth's briefcase.

RUTH

I'd rather you didn't ...

Angel ignores her and starts looking through the case.

EUSAPIA

Found anything?

RUTH

Please.

ANGEL

Just papers.

RUTH

Don't.

ANGEL

How about this?

She holds up an envelope.

ANGEL

It's been opened but you can't see inside.

Ruth makes a grab for it, but Angel is too quick. She gives the envelope to Euspaia.

RUTH

It's private!

EUSAPIA

I'll take that.

That's mine.

RUTH

This?

EUSAPIA

Eusapia dangles it in front of Ruth.

RUTH

Give it to me!

Eusapia stands in the centre of the room with her eyes closed, holding the envelope to her forehead.

She opens her eyes.

EUSAPIA

Why, it's a threatening letter.

RUTH

Okay. That's enough.

Ruth reaches for the envelope again.

EUSAPIA
(Evading Ruth)

No that's not right.

She closes her eyes again.

EUSAPIA

Why, it's a caution from the police. No, no, wait! It's a notice of non renewal of contract. Your services are no longer required.

Ruth snatches away the envelope.

RUTH

It's a gas bill.

Ruth tears it in two. Angel looks at her in disbelief.

RUTH
(To Eusapia)

You're a fraud.

EUSAPIA

You are.

Angel looks from one to the other.

RUTH

I'm a fucking great nurse!

Ruth storms out.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

Eusapia, Angel and Ruth sit around a small table holding hands. Angel and Eusapia are dressed as before. Ruth is now wearing a wimple similar to Angel's. It's evening. The lights are dim. A single crimson bulb glows in the dark casting reddish shadows.

RUTH

(Whispers)

What's taking so long? Eusapia?

EUSAPIA

Madame Eusapia.

RUTH

Get on with it.

ANGEL

Is he coming?

EUSAPIA

Shush!

A deep silence.

They listen, but there's nothing.

Eusapia bows her head and closes her eyes.

EUSAPIA

Master? If you are among us, rap once.

They wait.

The table raps once.

ANGEL

Is it my father?

RUTH

It's a trick.

Suddenly the table begins to vibrate violently.

Angel looks on in horror.

RUTH

It's Eusapia. She's doing that with her knees. Isn't she?

The table tilts.

RUTH

That was definitely Eusapia.

The table tilts even more.

RUTH

(Whispers)

She's using her thighs.

ANGEL

Her thighs?

RUTH

As a ... a ... fulcrum.

ANGEL

A what?

RUTH

Lever.

ANGEL

Eusapia doesn't have thighs.

Eusapia throws back her head.

EUSAPIA

(In a stagey voice)

You who are in spirit and have no earth-life ... come to me.

ANGEL

(Shivers)

Did you feel that? Ruth? Something touched the back of my neck.

EUSAPIA

Let the dead speak!

Eusapia grunts, groan, moans, then opens her mouth and pulls out yards of filmy grey stuff resembling muslin.

EUSAPIA

(Coughs)

Ectoplasm.

Eusapia stands and in a trance-like state walks into a dark corner of the room.

The light grows even dimmer.

ANGEL

I don't like this.

RUTH

Shush. I won't let anything happen to you.

A moment later, Eusapia emerges with a dust sheet thrown over her head.

EUSAPIA

It's your mother Angel.

ANGEL

Mum?

Angel stands.

RUTH

That's not your mum.

ANGEL

Mummy!

RUTH

That's Eusapia.

Angel lurches towards the veiled figure.

ANGEL

Do you think I don't know my own mum? Isn't she beautiful? I wish Eusapia was here to see this.

Angel sobs in Eusapia's arms. Eusapia gently rocks and soothes her.

EUSAPIA

I have an important message for you. You must listen only to Eusapia, my child. Eusapia is a true friend. That is my message. Only Eusapia. Now I must depart.

RUTH

Oh come on.

ANGEL

Don't go!

Angel tries to follow the spirit. Ruth restrains her, seizing her by the wrists.

The figure grows smaller and fainter until it becomes a mere glimmer.

Angel and Ruth look around bewildered.

RUTH

Eusapia?

A moment later Eusapia reappears as herself and returns to the table.

RUTH

I think we've seen enough.

Eusapia groans, goes rigid.

The table raps again.

EUSAPIA

It's the Master. He's here!

The shadow of a figure crosses
from wall to wall.

ANGEL

(Cringes)

Daddy?

(Visibly shrinking,
crying under her breath)

EUSAPIA

(To an unseen presence)

Why have you returned, departed soul?

(Talks in a man's voice
that sounds like her own)

Because there is evil in this house.

Eusapia rises again. This time she
crosses the room, bumping blindly
into a chair which falls over,
then goes to the bookcase and
feels the shelves.

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

My books. Where are my books?

ANGEL

Mummy's friend George took them. Does your head still
hurt Daddy?

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

Never you mind.

ANGEL

It was an accident.
Ask Eusapia.
You slipped.
I tried to ...

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

Get them stairs carpeted.

ANGEL

Please ... Don't punish me ...
(Angel sobs and cries)
I'm sorry ... From the bottom of my heart ... And I
won't do it again.

(Cathartic sobbing)

I fainted when I saw you ... I didn't want you to be ...
I could have reached out ... and ... and ...

(Angel sobs on
Ruth's shoulder.)

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

That's enough.

ANGEL

No. I want to ...

RUTH

Eusapia's right.

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

I'm not Eusapia.

RUTH

We'll revisit this territory tomorrow.

ANGEL

I hated him!

The sound of running on the stairs,
shrieks followed by laughter.

ANGEL

So I waited ... and waited ... until he was old and feeble
... And then ... I killed him!

EUSAPIA

(In her own voice,
cutting Angel off)

He wants to leave now. He's leaving.

ANGEL

I said I killed him!

RUTH

You didn't kill him.

ANGEL

Didn't I? Eusapia?

RUTH

You just feel like you killed him. Because you wished
he was dead.

(To Eusapia)

Turn on the lights.

Ruth starts to blow out the candles.

EUSAPIA

One moment. He wants to say something more.

RUTH

I thought he was leaving.

Ruth tries the light switch. It doesn't work. Frantically she clicks it on and off, on and off.

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

(Contorted face, proper man's voice, his voice, deep, dark, booming- something has changed, this is real.)

The evil is not Angel.

ANGEL

It's not?

EUSAPIA/SPIRIT

(An inarticulate, weird noise in her throat, she kicks, twists, struggles as if trying not to say what she must say.)

The evil in this house is Ruth!

RUTH

Me?
What is this?
Eusapia?

ANGEL

Look at her eyes!
Her eyes!
Those aren't Eusapia's eyes!

A series of heavy blows strike the walls.

Bees buzz furiously in every corner of the room.

Then an even more terrifying silence.

SPIRIT

Get rid of her.
(Darkly)
Or else.

Angel pulls away from Ruth.

SPIRIT

Do not hesitate. She must not remain.

RUTH

That's not funny.

SPIRIT

Ask her where she's been.

RUTH

Been?

SPIRIT

What she's done.

No response from Ruth.

SPIRIT

Not speaking? Very well, Ruth, if that's your name.

Ruth's chair starts to rock back and forth, faster and faster. Then stops abruptly throwing her to the floor.

SPIRIT

(Roars)

Why have you come to my house? This is my house!

Ruth gets to her feet.

RUTH

(Passionately)

Because ... because ...

Because I care. It's
my job to care.

And if I can cure Angel ...

(Falters)

Maybe I can prove to the world ...

I'm ... I'm ... still ... a good
nurse. A great nurse.

(Weeping)

It wasn't my fault. I don't know where she got that
razor blade. He said I pushed her too hard. But I never.
She was my patient. One of the hopeless cases.

(She can't go on, but
forces herself)

He ruined me, her husband, with his lying accusations ...
and his ... his ... scruffy ... scruffy ... beard. I hate
a man with a beard!

(To Angel)

Why is he still hounding me? Following me wherever I
go? Peering in windows? Tramping through gardens? It
was suicide! Why can't he just accept it? His wife
committed suicide, in my care, I admit it. She didn't
want to live. What was I supposed to do?

(To Angel)

But you, you want to live, don't you?

Angel nods, terrified.

RUTH

And I'm going to help you.

SPIRIT

And if you cannot?
Someone else will die!

Eusapia suddenly claws and clutches the air with her bare hands, then lunges at her own throat and begins to throttle herself.

Angel screams.

Eusapia tries (unsuccessfully) to repel the hand, as if it were not her own. She splutters, opens her eyes, rolls her head.

EUSAPIA

Oh sir, please, you're hurting me.

Eusapia swoons.

ANGEL

Not Eusapia!

Ruth stands abruptly knocking over her chair.

RUTH

(Crying with rage)

That's enough. Stop it! Now!

(Struggling with herself and almost suffocating in her attempt to contain her emotions.)

For God's sake will someone get me a paper bag.

Neither Eusapia, nor Angel can move.

RUTH

(Achieving a bit more control)

I'm not playing these games.

(To Angel)

Can't you see what she's doing?

(To Eusapia)

It won't work Eusapia. You'll never drive me away. I'm not leaving!

EUSAPIA (Coming-to and rubbing her throat)

What? Huh?

(Hoarsely)

Where am I?

Did he come?

ANGEL

He came.

The curtains billow. The dust sheets lift off the furniture and hover in the air.

EUSAPIA

I said he would come.

One by one, the candles illuminating the room are snuffed out as if by an invisible hand.

EUSAPIA

What did he say?

Ruth fumbles for the matches, but as soon as she relights one candle, another is extinguished. Eventually they are left in darkness.

EUSAPIA

(Panicky)

Isn't anyone going to tell me what he said?

At that moment the window bursts open with a terrifying crack. There is a scream of wind. Objects rise up and fly madly around, then crash to the floor.

Silence.

RUTH

(Shaken)

Well. That was impressive. I mean, I'm impressed. Good trick. How did you do it, Eusapia? With magnets?

ACT 2 SCENE 3

The morning after. Ruth and Angel are trying to tidy the sitting room which is still a mess from the night before and looks as if it's been the scene of a wild party. Ruth is wearing her nurse's uniform and nurse's hat. Angel is barefoot and dressed in a nightgown. Eusapia is out.

Ruth briskly and efficiently repositions furniture.

RUTH

(Lightly)

What a night, huh?

(Laughs)

Things flying around.

Angel picks up a candlestick from the floor and places it on the table. It falls down again. She picks it up again.

RUTH

We got a little crazy, didn't we? Last night?

Angel doesn't respond. Now she is awkwardly folding a fallen dust sheet.

RUTH

(Uneasily)

I can't even remember what I said. Can you?

ANGEL

(Not really interested)

No.

RUTH

(Determined, but trying to hide it.)

You can't remember what I said?

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

At all?

ANGEL

Can you remember what I said?

RUTH

Yes. Of course. I mean, no. Are they always like that? Those seances?

ANGEL

(She holds up a book) Where does this go?

RUTH

(Probing)

Eusapia probably doesn't remember either.

Angel shrugs.

RUTH

If I said anything ... funny ... last night ... I didn't mean it. I was only ... You know ... I'm not ... well seances don't ... I was just playing along. Between you and me, I was telling Eusapia what she wanted to hear, that's all.

ANGEL

(With more interest)

You did say something about a razor.

(Long pause)

Or a razor blade, I think.

RUTH

Did I really?

ANGEL

I expect you were ranting.

RUTH

Pretending to rant.

ANGEL

For Eusapia's benefit?

RUTH

That's right.

ANGEL

Sorry that's all I remember. Maybe Eusapia remembers more. She's usually very attentive.

RUTH

But not last night. You wouldn't say she was attentive last night, would you?

ANGEL

You never know with Eusapia. She's different from what she seems.

RUTH

Where is she this morning? She's usually ... well ... lurking.

Ruth looks around.

ANGEL

She went to church.

RUTH

Are you sure?

ANGEL

It's Sunday, isn't it? Wait a minute! I think I remember something else you said.

RUTH

What?

ANGEL

I don't know.

Angel is listlessly brushing broken crockery into a pan with a dust brush.

RUTH

Well forget it. It doesn't matter.

ANGEL

(Wanting to please)

I know! A patient! A patient with a razor blade!

RUTH
I said that?

ANGEL
And her husband!

RUTH
I'm sure I didn't say anything like that.

ANGEL
You did!

RUTH
I didn't

ANGEL
She was one of the hopeless cases, like me.

RUTH
You're not hopeless. You've got it all wrong.

ANGEL
Do I? Sometimes I do. I'm very bad at remembering. (Pause)
Once upon a time there was a man who did nothing but remember.

Angel sits down, still holding the dust brush and pan.

RUTH
Not now Angel.

ANGEL
He could not forget.

RUTH
Frankly I'm not in the mood.

Ruth begins tidying again.

ANGEL
He had a scruffy beard.

Ruth freezes.

ANGEL
He wanted a nice beard, but scruffy was all that would grow on his chin. The reason he had a beard in the first place, was that his wife loved it, and he loved his wife. She always had a pleasant, happy nature, but after they moved house, she became depressed, although it had been their dream house, and he tried to make it nice for her with chandeliers and fitted carpets.

RUTH
Is this one of Eusapia's stories?

ANGEL

No.

RUTH

So you're the only one who knows this story?

ANGEL

As time passed, she became more and more depressed and even suicidal ... Like me.

RUTH

You're not suicidal. You want to get well. You have to get well!

ANGEL

Her husband hid all the knives and pills and ropes and belts, but was still frightened to leave her alone even for a moment. One night he had to go out on business, so he hired a special nurse to come and watch over her. A night nurse ... The man's wife begged him to stay...

RUTH

She'd be incapable of that kind of request. If she was really suicidal.

ANGEL

And when he kissed her goodbye, she flung her arms around his neck and held him as if she would never let him go.

RUTH

I told you ... that wouldn't happen.

ANGEL

But just then there was a knock at the door ... The night nurse had arrived. She told him not to worry, that she was very experienced. She'd worked in the psychiatric department of a busy hospital and could cope with anything. But when he came home, much later, he found, to his horror, his dear wife with her wrists cut and the negligent night nurse asleep in a chair.

RUTH

Wasn't he partly to blame? How much did he tell the nurse? Was she really aware of his wife's condition? Shouldn't the woman have been in hospital?

ANGEL

Thereafter, the man was so tortured in his mind with the desire for revenge, that he promised to follow that nurse to the ends of the earth and ruin her good name. Some say he died trying. And now, wherever that poor nurse goes, he comes up behind her and puts two cold hands around her neck so she can feel his icy fingers, and even the wedding ring he still wears, press into the soft flesh of her throat. She might cry out, and try to wriggle free, but when she looks around, there's no one there.

No one behind her in the street, no one lurking in the garden, no one staring at her on the bus.

(Pause)

At first, she tries never to be alone. But even among people, he appears. Then she tries to hide herself away. She searches for a hiding place.

RUTH

How? How does she search?

ANGEL

I don't know.

RUTH

Well think.

(Pause)

She searches the hospital outpatient files. Then, pretending she's been offered a job, she shows up one day ... and they let her in.

ANGEL

But the man follows her. And she feels him coming closer and closer, until his cold fingers circle her neck once more. This time he will not be flung off and she can no more escape his icy grasp than she can escape death itself!

RUTH

That's a good story. I didn't know you could tell such a good story.

(Coldly)

We better get on. Eusapia'll be back soon.

Angel doesn't stir.

RUTH

Didn't you hear me? Give me that.

Ruth takes the dust brush and pan from Angel.

RUTH

Stand up!

Angel still doesn't budge.

RUTH

Do you want to get well? Or not? If you don't help yourself, I can't help you. Perhaps you need hospitalisation. Is that what you want? You want to be stuck in hospital with really mad people?

ANGEL

Don't talk to me like that. I'm an invalid.

RUTH

Where are your slippers?

ANGEL

(Wimpers)

You're frightening me.

RUTH

It's therapy.

Ruth grabs Angel by the neck of her nightgown and pulls her to her feet.

Angel cries, sputters, chokes.

Ruth starts to drag Angel out of the room.

ANGEL

Where are we going?

RUTH

Out.

ANGEL

No!

RUTH

It's a perfectly valid therapeutic technique called flooding.

ANGEL

(Gasping)

I can't breathe.

RUTH

It works. In extreme circumstances. Especially for phobias.

Ruth hauls Angel further across the room.

RUTH

If the patient is forced to confront the very thing they fear, their anxiety increases, but then stops increasing, no matter how intense the fear. In this way the patient learns that their anxiety won't kill them.

ANGEL

No!

RUTH

And I'm going to prove it. I'm taking you into the garden.

ANGEL

No!!

RUTH

Right now.

ANGEL

No!!!

RUTH

And leaving you there.

ANGEL

No!!!!

RUTH

And locking the door so you can't get back in.

ANGEL

No!!!!!!

RUTH

After a few minutes your anxiety will start to fall. It's a structured procedure. You won't suffer long.

(Smiling

grimly) You think I'm enjoying this? Well?

It's medicine. Take your medicine!

ANGEL

I don't want to. Please!

RUTH

Let's go.

Angel tries to grab onto the furniture.

RUTH

We've wasted enough time.

Ruth drags her.

Angel screams in terror and tries to resist. Finally she manages to break away from Ruth's grasp. She runs out of the room, up the stairs, across the landing, into her own room and bolts the door. Ruth grabs Eusapia's axe and follows her to the landing.

RUTH

Open up or I'll break it down. You've only got yourself to blame. Time is running out. They'll take you away. Don't you see, you're condemning yourself to a life of misery. You're still young. Do you want to spend the rest of your life in an institution? You'd be better off dead. You hear me Angel, fucking dead!

Ruth raises Eusapia's axe and aims it at the door.

RUTH

I know what has to be done. I'm a good nurse. A great nurse! It's the bloody patients who won't get well. I give them every opportunity. But they always resist.

Luckily I'm stronger.

(Pause)

I did them a favour. That's right. I released them. Just like I'm going to release you. I'm counting to three Angel. On three you better open this door, or stand back because I'm breaking it down.

She raises the axe higher.

One ... Two ...

No response from Angel.

Ruth drops the axe and sinks to her knees.

RUTH

Please. All I want you to do is trust me. I'm not going to hurt you. I want to help you. I'm too caring. That's the whole problem. Can't you see that?

(In a soft, soothing voice.)

Let's just talk. All I want to do is talk. Open the door Angel. I know you're upset. Open the door so I can give you a cuddle. I just want to give you a cuddle. I'd never hurt you. I'm sorry for frightening you. I was desperate. You weren't getting any better. I'd try anything to make you better ... Angel?

Angel opens the door.

There's a scuffle on the dark landing and a scream. The sound of a body falling. Footsteps running down the stairs.

ACT 2 SCENE 4

Late morning. The hall. Eusapia returns. She wearing her church hat. She finds Angel sitting at the foot of the stairs cradling Ruth's dead body. Eusapia kneels beside Angel.

EUSAPIA

Put her down.

Angel lets go of Ruth and goes to Eusapia.

Eusapia puts her arms around Angel.

ANGEL

She was trying to kill me.

EUSAPIA

Hush.

ANGEL

With an axe.

Eusapia gently rocks and soothes Angel.

EUSAPIA

I know bonny lass.

ANGEL

I didn't push her. She tripped and fell.

EUSAPIA

Them stairs is a death trap. I tried to warn her. Do you want to say a prayer or something?

Angel shakes her head.

EUSAPIA

How about a story?

Angel nods.

EUSAPIA

Shall I get your drink?

Eusapia shuffles into the sitting room and comes back with a new milky drink for Angel, stirring it.

EUSAPIA

A special drink.

(She hands it to Angel)

There now. Would you like to hear, The Little Girl Who Knew She Couldn't?

ANGEL

I don't know that one.

EUSAPIA

You don't?

ANGEL

Is it a good one?

EUSAPIA

It's the best one.

Angel drinks.

EUSAPIA

Once upon a time there was a little girl who knew she couldn't, so she locked the doors, front and back, and all the windows and stopped the milk, and paid her bills, unplugged the electricity and even had the telephone disconnected. Then there was nothing left to do but enjoy the quiet and the darkness.

(Whispers)

Because it was very quiet and very dark. And soon the little girl felt a bit sleepy ... and then very sleepy ...

and then so sleepy that all the things around her began to disappear as if they never were, and all she could see, looking down at her, was the dear old face of her faithful housekeeper, who loved her very very much.

Angel falls asleep in Eusapia's arms.

THE END

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

(FX) Radio static, a lone voice calling Anna, Anna-

ANNA: (VO) I see you standing at the window where the light is best, but you don't look up. You are cutting very slowly and carefully before sewing the quarters and the vamp. I watch your hands as they guide the knife, sleek and lean and dark and deft- The repairs hang by their heels from a wooden bar behind you, and before you, the work of your heart, your whole body leaning gently into the task. It's late afternoon and the light is soft, and I walk with papa past your window, and I fall in love.

(FX) Sound of an explosion. Glass shattering, pipes bursting, the heavy crunch of metal against metal.

1. The monitoring hut. Day.

Translators move around or sit in cubicles with headphones. The hum of disc recording equipment. An engineer comes and goes. A teleprinter clatters. Suddenly all is stilled as Anna puts on and adjusts her headphones- a hollow sound. A station is tuned in to Italian martial music. We hear what she hears through the headphones. A faint crackling, a record ending. An Italian announcer's patter fades into static. A voice urgently whispers- 'Anna? Anna?' Anna turns up the volume. A plaintive cry- 'Anna?' grows fainter- 'Anna?' (And fainter) 'Anna?'

ANNA: (A sharp intake of breath) Carlo?

CARLO: Cara mia.

ANNA: Where are you?

A crashing sound.

ANNA: Have they sent you home?

CARLO: Ti amo.

Static

ANNA: Carlo

2. A wood in summertime. Evesham, England July 1940. Day

Anna and Fred paddle in a woodland lake. (FX) Splashing, laughter, birdsong- the gentle chirrup, hum and buzz of an English wood.

FRED: *(He splashes her.)* Fancy a swim?

ANNA: I haven't got my costume.

FRED: So?

ANNA: *(Laughing)* No! *(She splashes him.)*

FRED: Come on.

ANNA: I can't swim!

FRED: I'll teach you.

ANNA: You?*(Laughing and splashing)* Get away!

FRED: Nice here, isn't it? *(She doesn't respond.)* You're glad you came out now admit it-*(She doesn't respond.)* Have they found you a permanent billet yet? Never mind they'll sort it. *(No response)* What's wrong?

ANNA: Nothing. I'm fine.

FRED: Not missing home, are you?

ANNA: No. *(Pause)* Stop it!

FRED: Stop what?

ANNA: You're doing it again-

FRED: Doing what?

ANNA: Looking at me-

FRED: Well, you're very nice to look at. Now what have you brought to eat? Sandwiches? Cake?

(CT) Sounds of debris falling.

ANNA: (VO) There were glass shelves black with prune cakes in my father's shop and pink with iced buns, remember? English cream horns and tarts, lemon crescents, your favourites, and pastry with a thousand leaves, but I loved the baked hats best, glazed with honey like the golden crown of a handsome king, who died for the love of an unfaithful princess, who died herself of great

remorse. That was the story my mother told. She had stories for everything- even pastry. And that was what I understood as love: Repentance. Suffering. Dying-

3. Another part of the woods. Later.

Pushing aside low branches and strands of bramble, Fred and Anna emerge from woodland into a clearing and approach a hidden quarry.

FRED: Careful. It's deep.

ANNA: How deep?

FRED: I dunno. Don't get too close. *(He throws a stone into the water.)* Fifty feet? That's a guess mind. These quarries can be very deep. But kind of exciting, don't you think, like a place where lovers meet. Come here *(He draws her close, wraps his arms around her and tries to kiss her, but she resists.)* Anna, please. You must know how I feel.

ANNA: I can't.

FRED: Why not?

ANNA: I shouldn't have come-

FRED: Can't you forget work for a moment? *(He tries to nuzzle her ear. Kisses her neck.)*

ANNA: You don't understand- Please Fred- I've got to- *(She breaks away.)* I could be missing something important.

(CT) Chaos, curses, screams, running, falling, metal grinding, prayers. (Italian voices.)

4. The monitoring hut. Later.

Anna hurries to her desk, sits down in front of her radio, breathes a sigh of relief and switches it on. She puts on her headphones and hears an Italian broadcast. Then there's static.

ANNA: *(Eager)* Carlo?

More static.

ANNA: Are you there?

Nothing but static.

ANNA: Carlo? Please? Speak to me?

The static clears but it is replaced by a thin trickle water, which gets louder and louder.

ANNA: Carlo? Carlo?

The sound of water rushing and gushing.

ANNA: Carlo!

5. Mrs Fellows' house. A bedroom. Day

(FX) A door slowly creaks open. The sound of dripping water.

MRS F: All it needs is a lick of paint- *(She tries the light, clicking it on and off.)* Must be the bulb. *(She walks to the window.)* Size of a coffin, but

it's all yours. There's a nice view. (*She opens the window.*) Have you just arrived?

ANNA: I've been billeted at the old vicarage- but that was only temporary-

MRS F: There's a bath down the hall.

Anna follows Mrs F to the bath. Mrs F turns on the taps. They clang and roar, but the water comes out in a trickle.

MRS F: Can't get a plumber these days for love nor money-

ANNA: Have you others staying here?

MRS F: Not many come.

ANNA: With rooms so scarce in Evesham?

MRS F: It's too far out. Most of them like to be closer.

ANNA: I'd like to be closer.

MRS F: Them billeting officers must be getting desperate, that what you're thinking?

ANNA: I don't mean to be ungrateful-

The taps continue to slowly drip.

MRS F: You'll do just fine.

ANNA: But I was rather hoping for company-

MRS F: Never mind. You must go where they send you.

ANNA: I know- there's a war on-

MRS F: We'll look after you. What a pretty lodger we've got, eh?

A low sound of distant tuneless whistling gets louder.

ANNA: What 's that?

MRS F: What? Oh that. Only the old plumbing. Now, how about a cup of tea?

(CT) A large wave breaking. Water sweeping over a ship's deck. A lone lost scream. An enormous splash.

6. Mrs Fellows' front room.

Mrs Fellows and Anna are drinking tea. There is the sound of dripping water throughout the house.

MRS F: No biscuits I'm afraid. Nor cake. *(She hands Anna a cup.)* My husband, Mister Fellows, is very partial to a piece of cake.

ANNA: Does he live here too?

MRS F: Now that's a story. *(She pours milk)* Work at the big house, do you? Evesham Hall? Down at Wood Norton?

ANNA: I can't really discuss-

MRS F: Of course not. Where they make the drama and music?

ANNA: I couldn't say-

MRS F: With them radio personalities?

ANNA: Sorry I'm not allowed-

MRS F: Maybe you could get me an autograph-

ANNA: Please- I could lose my job-

MRS F: Not stuck up are they?

ANNA: No! I mean I can't. I don't work in the big house.

MRS F: I thought everyone worked in the big house-

ANNA: I work in a little out building- a hut.

MRS F: A hut? That doesn't sound very nice.

ANNA: Near the house- well on the grounds.

MRS F: Whatever do you do there? Something secret?

ANNA: (*Whispers*) Yes.

They drink in silence.

MRS F: Lovely shoes-

ANNA: Thank you-

MRS F: And such a beautiful colour. What do you call that colour?

ANNA: (*Embarrassed*) Pistachio-

MRS F: You don't see shoes like that these days.

ANNA: They were handmade-

MRS F: Like a princess would wear.

Uncomfortable silence.

ANNA: (*Murmurs*) I love shoes.

More silence then a thin, reedy whistle.

MRS F: Mice.

ANNA: Are you sure?

Silence.

MRS F: Mr Fellows loves a trim ankle and them dainty shoes. He's very refined. (*Pause*) You'll be courting I expect.

ANNA: Me? No.

MRS F: Nice young lad in uniform? Of course I don't hold with gentleman callers. Maybe in the front room. Not upstairs.

ANNA: No.

MRS F: Maybe there's a lad overseas? And the letters'll be flying back and forth-

ANNA: No.

MRS F: Or a lad waiting back home? Now why would that be, I wonder? Not fit to serve?

ANNA: (*Jumps up*) That's a lovely carriage clock Mrs Fellows- And what's that? Beside the clock- that little -

MRS F: My husband's shaving brush- I'd rather you didn't-

ANNA: (*Recoils*) It's all wet!

MRS F: It's a damp wall dear. (*Pause*) Now sit yourself down-

ANNA: Is he at work?

MRS F: Who?

ANNA: Mister Fellows.

MRS F: He passed.

ANNA: Oh. I'm sorry.

MRS F: He was taken in the first war. Just back off leave and in for a commission. He was dead pleased. That's what he wrote in his last letter. Then they

sent him up the line. It was a shell got him- He's in the next life you see. Wearing spirit shoes and eating spirit cake. But sometimes he gets lonely.

ANNA: And you never re-married?

MRS F: He was the love of my life. Always had an eye for the girls, but I nabbed him. Happy days. Never mind. He's with me in spirit. *(Pause)* Do you believe in spirits dear?

ANNA: I don't know. My mother believes-

MRS F: She has stories does she?

ANNA: My nonna came to visit once, if that's what you mean, and stood at the foot of mum's bed. She was all dressed up in old fashioned clothes that looked brand new. And when mum asked about them, my nonna said they were her travelling clothes- Then we heard that nonna was dead.

MRS F: But that isn't all, is it?

ANNA: No. There was someone else in the room. A little girl.

MRS F: A little dead girl-

ANNA: My mum had a little sister with golden hair-

MRS F: Who died years before I reckon-

ANNA: In Scotland-

MRS F: It seems so sad that they must go.

ANNA: And on the day she died, my great aunt in Italy saw a little girl standing in a field with her golden hair falling down around her shoulders-

MRS F: The dead can dawdle, same as the living. They hate to leave, and when they can't let go, someone dear to them, who is in spirit, must come to lead them away- Isn't that what your mum says?

ANNA: Yes, someone they love, or respect, mum says, comes to guide them-

Anna puts down her cup abruptly.

I'd love to sit and chat, but it's getting late and I really need to unpack, so-

MRS F: Wait! Have you got a handkerchief?

ANNA: Excuse me?

MRS F: A handkerchief- Or a comb?

ANNA: I don't understand.

MRS F: You give me something- A handkerchief, or a comb- And I'll tell you all about yourself. You'll be amazed what I can tell-

ANNA: Maybe some other time.

MRS F: Holding something, warming it in my hands- It's a gift my dear.

ANNA: I'd rather not.

MRS F: (*Laughs*) I don't read private thoughts if that's what you're fretting about. Just a bit of harmless fun. I'm not a mind reader.

ANNA: (*Rummages in her handbag*) Will a headscarf do?

MRS F: Do nicely-

ANNA: (*Uneasy*) You won't be going into a trance?

MRS F: It's mostly listening. I just tune in and objects speak to me. Now let's see. (*She takes the scarf.*) You're a Scots lass.

ANNA: Anyone could tell from the way I speak.

MRS F: From Glasgow. But your folks, they aren't Scottish people are they?

ANNA: is that going to be a problem?

MRS F: I see an older man in a white apron with a very pale face, pale arms and hands-

ANNA: My father-

MRS F: He passed away.

ANNA: That's right.

MRS F: He was a baker, wasn't he?

ANNA: How did you know?

MRS F: *(Suddenly Mrs F gasps, stifles a cry.)*

ANNA: What?

MRS F: Nothing. Here. Take this back.

ANNA: What? Why? You're frightening me Mrs Fellows-

Mrs F stands abruptly.

MRS F: I have to make the tea.

7. Anna's bedroom. That evening.

Anna opens a drawer as she unpacks her suitcase.

ANNA: (VO) I put it with my underwear. That's the safest place. Tucked in a drawer. But just before I do, I unwrap it- and breathe in the sweet scent of currants and candied fruit. Then wrap it up again tight. You can laugh but I will save this slice forever. It's lost some of its height recently, but that's to be expected as it dries. *(She closes the drawer and sits on the bed. The bed springs creak.)* I take off my shoes because I think I'm going to bed, then I put them back on. The stitching is so fine, and the peep at the toe is so- but you know all that. You laid them beside my place at the table in an ordinary paper bag- and watched as I *(the sound of something being*

withdrawn from a paper bag and an exclamation of pleasure) Pistachios, you called them. And when I tried them on- they fit perfectly. You didn't even need a last.

She opens the bedroom door. Pauses. All she hears are the sound of drips. She tiptoes down the stairs and lets herself out.

8. The monitoring hut. Night.

Anna is listening to an Italian radio programme of dance music, scratchy and distant. Suddenly there is a distinct crackling. Anna tenses. Touches the dial.

ANNA: *(Tentative) Carlo?*

The Italian dance music resumes with vigour- Anna tries to find Carlo again. The radio crackles and moans as she fiddles with the dial, then the reception clears.

CARLO: *(Croaks) Water.*

ANNA: *What's wrong? Are you thirsty Carlo? Where are you?*

CARLO: *There is an old man with me. He is very pale.*

ANNA: *Is he hurt? Are you hurt?*

Silence then static

ANNA: *Hello? Hello? Hello? Hello? Hello? Hello? Hello?
Hello? HELLO! (Anna frantically turns the dial.
Just static, then dance music.) Carlo? Come back!*

Carlo please! Where have they taken you? Carlo?
Carlo? (*The radio goes dead.*)

ANNA: (VO) There was a stale smell in that place and the walls were yellow. Some women were crying and some men. At first I couldn't see you- There were so many. And then I saw you. And you put out your hand and we held hands for a while. Your lovely hands that could fashion such miracles were cold. I tried to warm them while the guards, who were soldiers, cried, 'Hurry up,' and 'Move back.' They couldn't keep you in Glasgow. And there was talk of a prison camp in Wales, or deportation on a ship. I wanted to stay with you, go with you, hold you, but the soldiers cried 'Time's up.' Then I put my face right to the metal bars so we could-

FRED: Anna!

ANNA: (Jumps) Fred! You startled me.

FRED: What are you doing in the hut? (Suspicious) You're not on nightshift-

ANNA: It's all so new. I get confused.

FRED: You shouldn't be here.

ANNA: I left something-

FRED: What?

ANNA: My headscarf.

FRED: You came all this way for a headscarf?

ANNA: That and well I wasn't sure about the shift and rather than let anyone down-

Fade in sounds of a busy canteen.

9. The canteen at Evesham Hall.

The canteen is busy even through the night. Anna and Fred sit down, with their cups of tea.

FRED: Have you seen the newspaper today? You might even know someone- God forbid-

ANNA: What?

FRED: Listen to this- (*He takes the paper out of his pocket and reads aloud*) 'BRITISH LINER TORPEODOED OFF IRISH COAST, 1,500 ENEMY ALIENS ON BOARD-'

FRED: (*Reading*) 'At 6:58 am on the 2nd July, off the west coast of Ireland, the British liner, Arandora Star was struck by a torpedo from a German u-boat. Bound for Canadian internment camps carrying both German and Italian internees and their guards, the ship sank 35 minutes after impact. A large number of those on board were asleep at the time. Survivors had terrible stories to tell ...'

Anna drops her cup, shattering it.

FRED: Anna!

ANNA: He was on that ship!

FRED: Who?

ANNA: Carlo-

FRED: Who?

ANNA: My fiancé, Carlo Soressi.

FRED: Fiancé?

ANNA: Carlo -

FRED: You have a fiancé! You never said! Why didn't you tell me? (*He picks up the pieces of Anna's cup and speaks to the room in general*) It's nothing. An accident. She's fine. Show's over-

ANNA: He didn't do anything wrong.

FRED: Keep your voice down.

ANNA: Carlo hates Mussolini-

FRED: Anna your voice. (*Whispers*) People are listening.

ANNA: The *Fascisti*- The *Camicie Nere*-

FRED: Who?

ANNA: The Black Shirts-

FRED: I don't think we should be talking about-

ANNA: He stayed in Glasgow. Not Italy. He was going to get his citizenship- But he never ... and ... and then Mussolini declared war- and they arrested him- and all the others-

FRED: A prisoner of war?

ANNA: He's a shoemaker. Not a spy!

FRED: Shush! (*Whispers*) You must be careful. If they find out you're engaged to a Prisoner of War- they might ...

ANNA: What?

FRED: Consider you a security risk. You'll lose your job. They'll send you home. (*Whispers*) Anna- I couldn't bear that-

10. The monitoring hut. The next day

Anna is sitting at her cubicle.

ANNA: (VO) The next day I try work as normal, but my heart is breaking thinking of you, and my head aches. I take an aspirin from the first aid box, and then another, and then another, and then-

Anna puts on her earphones, listens to, and transcribes a speech by Mussolini. The radio hisses and moans as Mussolini's voice becomes lost in a sea of static. Suddenly the static clears and a new voice whispers- 'Anna? Anna?' Anna turns up the volume. A plaintive cry- 'Anna?' grows fainter- 'Anna?' (And fainter) 'Anna?'

ANNA: (*Startled*) Carlo? Where are you?

Footsteps approach from behind. Someone taps her on the back. Anna jumps. Removes her headphones.

FRED: Who were you talking to?

ANNA: No one.

FRED: I heard you.

ANNA: I wasn't.

FRED: You were- (*Sternly*) Anna?

ANNA: Please-

FRED: I know you're upset-

ANNA: I'm right in the middle of-

FRED: Anyone would be-

ANNA: I'm fine.

FRED: -but you must put it behind you.

ANNA: Okay.

FRED: I'm watching you Anna.

ANNA: I just want to get back to-

FRED: You're happy here aren't you?

ANNA: Of course.

FRED: How are your new lodgings?

ANNA: Fine. *(Pause)* Can I get back to work now?

Anna puts on her earphones again. Fred walks away.

ANNA: *(Whispers)* Carlo?

She hears the Italian Fascist anthem.

ANNA: Where are you? Were you on that ship? Carlo?

CARLO: Anna? Mi senti? *(His voice begins to break up.)*

ANNA: How did you get off that ship? Carlo?

CARLO: If you can hear me-

Radio static, various sounds of interference.

CARLO: *(Indistinct)* Help me! Aiutami.

A sound like wind rushing through the speakers.

ANNA: Carlo? Carlo?

FRED: *(Coming up behind her)* What are you doing now?

ANNA: Nothing.

FRED: I saw you.

ANNA: I wasn't-

FRED: Your work here is secret.

ANNA: Please Fred. Not now.

FRED: You monitor domestic enemy broadcast- You listen to the news-

ANNA: I'm trying, but-

FRED: - the bulletins, the speeches, you make notes, you translate your notes, you type your notes. You don't fiddle with your set, you don't touch the coils, or the dials. You don't make contact with anyone-

ANNA: I wasn't-

FRED: You do not let personal problems get in the way. Now is that understood?

ANNA: I'm sorry ... I won't ... (*Breaks down, her voice shaking*) But ... but ...

FRED: What is it Anna?

ANNA: (*Whispers*) Carlo-

FRED: What?

ANNA: My fiancé- Carlo. He just came over the airwaves.

FRED: That's impossible.

ANNA: There was this sound- and then the music faded and-

FRED: You've been listening for hours without a break.

ANNA: I heard him.

FRED: An auditory hallucination. Happens all the time. You aren't the first and you won't be the last. When listeners get tired they hear things that aren't there. It's called mis-monitoring. That's all there is to it.

ANNA: It was him.

FRED: Really? Let's check the wax cylinder.

ANNA: I wasn't using a wax cylinder.

FRED: Then it's a malfunction. Let me check the valves. Maybe it's the variable capacitor.

ANNA: There's nothing wrong with my radio.

FRED: If it wasn't the equipment it was interference.

ANNA: It was Carlo.

FRED: All right. What did he say?

ANNA: He said- 'Anna, Anna.'

FRED: How's that possible? Over the airwaves?

ANNA: It's possible. If Carlo had a transmitter set to the same frequency he could-

FRED: I doubt it. From where?

ANNA: From anywhere-

FRED: Extremely unlikely-

ANNA: You don't know Carlo.

FRED: Where would he get a transmitter?

ANNA: He was very good with things. (*Pause*) He made things. He could make a radio with a transmitter.

FRED: But how would he know you'd be listening on this frequency? How would he know you were here? Unless- Oh Anna you didn't, did you? You did! Blimey. It's a secret. You signed the Official Secrets Act. Anna? Look at me. Anna!

ANNA: He's alive.

FRED: Alive how?

ANNA: He jumped.

FRED: It was a fifty foot drop.

ANNA: Men survived. He clung to the wreckage-

FRED: Eight hours? Ten? Twelve? More?

ANNA: Then he swam ashore.

FRED: Too far.

ANNA: All right. Maybe he was rescued. And after he was rescued, he got away-

FRED: In that case, you can't help him. You must report him.

ANNA: What!

FRED: For his own good. If he's alive, he's a fugitive- It's your duty to report him. You could get into big trouble aiding a fugitive. -It's more than losing your job. You could be put in prison.

ANNA: He isn't a criminal Fred.

FRED: You're being naïve.

ANNA: He's done nothing wrong. What crime has he committed?

FRED: He's an enemy national- We're at war with Italy Anna. Or didn't you know?

ANNA: You and your war- You're as bad as Churchill-

FRED: What are you saying? I can't believe you just said-

ANNA: 'Collar the lot.'

FRED: That's right! It's national policy, Churchill's policy, and it makes sense.

ANNA: It makes sense to arrest every Italian national living in Britain the day after Mussolini declares war?

FRED: Keep your voice down.

ANNA: That's what your precious Churchill did.

FRED: Your voice-

ANNA: They came for Carlo in a police van.

FRED: Better safe than sorry. There are fascists and Nazi sympathisers everywhere.

ANNA: His shop was attacked, Fred.

FRED: Fifth Columnists-

ANNA: All the Italian shops- Now there are signs in the windows: 'These proprietors have sons serving in the British forces'- Still they throw stones. They've taken everyone as a *Fascista*, even those full of hatred for them- like Carlo. They've even confiscated my mum's radio. She cannot own a bicycle-

FRED: You want to blame someone- Blame Mussolini-

ANNA: Churchill panicked.

FRED: Churchill does not panic.

ANNA: It was a bad order.

FRED: Lower your voice-

ANNA: You're always telling me to lower my voice- well I won't. (*Shouts*) They're innocent! He's innocent!

FRED: (*Whispers*) We don't even know if he was on that ship- Let me find out exactly what happened to him. (*Pause*) What's his name?

ANNA: Carlo Soressi

FRED: Can you spell that?

ANNA: S-O-R-E-S-S-I

FRED: Okay. I'll enquire.

11. Mrs Fellows' house. The hall. Evening.

Anna enters with her key.

MRS F: (From the kitchen) You should have seen her face when I said (She mumbles something indistinct, then hears Anna and calls out) Anna?

Anna enters the kitchen find Mrs F alone-

ANNA: Who were you talking to?

MRS F: No one. (Pause) There's fish for tea.

ANNA: I thought I heard-

MRS F: Will you lay the cloth?

ANNA: Sorry Mrs Fellows, I'm not very hungry tonight.
(She starts to exit)

MRS F: Not hungry? But you have to eat. Anna? (Calls
after her) Are you all right?

Anna climbs the stairs.

12. Anna's bedroom Mrs Fellows' house.

*Anna closes her bedroom door. Locks it. She gets into bed.
Silence, we hear a ticking clock, then the distant sound of
tuneless whistling. Anna sits up.*

ANNA: Who's there?

There's a knock at the door. The door knob is rattled.

MRS F: (Outside the door) Anna? I thought you might like
a hot water bottle dear.

ANNA: Oh, it's you-

Anna gets up, unlocks, then opens the door.

MRS F: Are you sure you won't have something to eat?

ANNA: I'm fine.

MRS F: I get premonitions dear- Warnings of illness and death-

Sounds of dripping water, at first very faint.

MRS F: Be on your guard. Do you understand? Someone is trying to confuse you. Do not listen to him Anna. He will lead you astray-

ANNA: Who?

MRS F: A man. That's all I know.

ANNA: Is it Fred?

Drips fade.

MRS F: You must take care.

ANNA: (Relieved) Of course. There's nothing to worry about. Its Fred. And I'm not listening.

MRS F: Good girl! And no wandering about tonight. I've set them mouse traps downstairs-

13. Anna's bedroom. Later that night.

Anna wakes. We hear a ticking clock at her bedside. She gets out of bed and tip toes into the hall. She hears a door quietly open and close, nearby. Light footsteps, a young man's footsteps, quickly descending the stairs. Faint whistling.

ANNA: (From the top of the stairs) Carlo?

14. Outside the monitoring hut. Day.

Anna bumps into Fred on the gravel path.

FRED: Anna!

ANNA: I'm late.

FRED: Your shift doesn't start for ten minutes. How are you?

ANNA: Fine.

FRED: Happy in your new lodgings?

ANNA: Fine.

FRED: Dragon of a landlady?

ANNA: No. Not at all. She's ... well ... different.

FRED: Different? How?

ANNA: (Dismissive) I don't know. Look I have to get back-

FRED: Get back? You haven't even started.

She turns away.

FRED: Anna!

She keeps walking.

Enters the hut. Sits down. Turns on her radio. Lively Italian music.

ANNA: (VO) I sit all day at my radio, but hear nothing from you, Carlo mio. I remember your hands in my hands-

15. Mrs Fellows' sitting room. Next day. Early evening.

Mrs F is in the middle of a conversation as Anna enters.

MRS F: I cannot get a plumber for love nor money. They've all been called up- If there was something I could do myself- or ask the girl to do? Don't make those fish eyes at me. I know she's very pretty- but there'll be water damage if we don't do something soon- mark my words Harold- (*She turns, noticing Anna*) Oh hello dear-

ANNA: Who were you talking to?

MRS F: No one dear- just a silly habit-

ANNA: It sounded so real-

MRS F: Well if you must know- (*Pause*) It was Mr Fellows-

ANNA: Mr Fellows!

MRS F: I was asking his opinion. I often do on household matters-

ANNA: And does he talk to you?

MRS F: Oh yes dear- Would you like to talk to someone? Someone on the other side? I could do a little séance for us right now if you like. Don't you want to speak to your father? Your poor dead father? (*Coaxing*) Sit beside me at the table. This won't take long. Go on, humour an old lady. What harm could it do?

ANNA: Just for a little while then- (*She sits*)

MRS F: Squeeze in. Now close your eyes. That's right. Now take my hand. (*In an otherworldly voice she declaims*) You who are in spirit and have no earthly form, come to me!

Silence.

MRS F: Rap once if you are here.

Silence.

Even deeper silence.

MRS F: Are you there?

No response- Then suddenly the table raps once loudly.

MRS F: Who's there?

Another louder rap.

MRS F: I think he's here.

ANNA: Papa?

A water pipe bursts overhead with a terrific crack.

16. Mrs Fellows' sitting room. Later.

Anna is mopping up.

ANNA: (VO) It was a small room with a big bed. Papa's blanket had been soaked in mustard water. But nothing helped his breathing. His shrivelled lungs and yellow face. Even then he wasn't ready. He didn't want to say goodbye. He clutched mum's hand, until ... They said he was drowning in his own bed for want of air. And then ... remember? A peacefulness came over him, as if someone he knew had come ... to guide him somewhere.

Anna wrings out a cloth into a bucket.

Mrs F enters clanging another bucket.

MRS F: Use the mop-

ANNA: Did my father say anything?

MRS F: Hang them wet ones on there- There's a good girl-

ANNA: Mrs Fellows- My father?

MRS F: It was nothing.

ANNA: Nothing?

MRS F: the pipe cut him off. He didn't have a chance
 love- It was the water- All that water. *(Pause)*
 You look shattered. Never mind them cloths now,
 just get yourself to bed. Try another time, eh?

17. Anna's bedroom. That night.

*Anna has been sleeping but something wakes her. The bedside
clock ticks. The bed clothes rustle. The bed springs creak.*

There is the sound of very faint whistling.

ANNA: *(She feels a presence, a slight movement on the
 other side of the room, a drawer quietly opens and
 closes, a slight tearing of paper, she calls out
 sleepily) Who's there? Is someone there? Carlo?
 (She sits up) You aren't Carlo! Who are you? (She
 screams) Get out!*

Light retreating footsteps.

ANNA: *(Anna notices someone else) Mrs Fellows! What are
 you doing in my room?*

MRS F: You were screaming.

ANNA: Did you see him?

MRS F: Who?

ANNA: A man, dressed in brown. Or grey. *(She shudders)*
 Or dirty green.

MRS F: There's nobody here.

ANNA: He left.

MRS F: You were dreaming.

ANNA: There was someone!

MRS F: It was only a dream.

ANNA: Listen! He's still in the house. (*Faint distant sounds from downstairs*)

MRS F: That's mice.

ANNA: It's not mice.

ANNA: (*Gasps*) The light. Put on the light.

MRS F: All right dear. (*She puts on the light*) Is that better dear?

ANNA: Yes thank you.

MRS F: Would you like a cup of tea?

ANNA: Mrs Fellows-

MRS F: Yes-

ANNA: What's on my sheets? Ohmygod what's on my sheets?

MRS F: Calm down Anna. It's nothing, just a little (*pause*) mud.

ANNA: Why is there mud on my sheets?

18. Anna's bedroom. Morning.

Anna opens a drawer, removes something.

ANNA: (VO) First thing I notice- the paper is torn. I make a mental note to replace it. (*Sounds of Anna unwrapping a parcel and reacting with pleasure*) We cut a slice just like this one, with a silver knife and put it to each other's lips. Now I hold it close, expecting to see the hard icing still white and silky as a prayer book but (*She screams*) Teeth marks!

19. The road outside Anna's lodgings. Day.

Anna is walking to work. She finds Fred waiting under a tree.

ANNA: What are you doing here?

FRED: Nothing. Just walking.

ANNA: You're not walking. You're lurking. What do you want?

FRED: I'm worried about you.

ANNA: I told you I'm fine.

FRED: (*Pause*) I've had a letter-

ANNA: What?

FRED: From the War Office. I came to tell you. I think you should prepare yourself-

ANNA: Go on-

FRED: There's a Carlo Soressi on their list of prisoners in transit to Canada on the Arandora Star. (*She gasps*) But there is no Carlo Soressi on their list of survivors.

ANNA: What about those who died?

FRED: He's not on that list either.

ANNA: Then he's alive.

FRED: Not necessarily. Many bodies have not been recovered yet. I shouldn't get my hopes up. (*Pause*) I'm sorry.

ANNA: But I heard him!

FRED: You think you heard him.

ANNA: I know I heard him.

FRED: What if it wasn't him? What if Carlo told someone about you, and what you do- and that someone is using his name?

ANNA: Who?

FRED: Some enemy agent picking up the scent-

ANNA: It's Carlo.

FRED: Are you sure? How can you be sure?

ANNA: I know his voice.

FRED: It can't be very clear.

ANNA: He's out there-

FRED: He's dead.

ANNA: No!

FRED: And someone is using his name to get information from you.

ANNA: I have to go-

FRED: Careless talk Anna- It's a crime.

ANNA: He just wants help.

FRED: We've been warned to be on the lookout for spies posing as family and friends.

ANNA: It's not someone posing-

FRED: People are watching-

ANNA: What people?

FRED: Someone could be watching you right now.

ANNA: Goodbye Fred-

She walks away.

FRED: (*Calls after her*) I'm watching. You're already in trouble Anna. I've been asked to keep an eye on you.

She keeps walking.

FRED: There's been talk.

 (*He follows after her*)

I'm your supervisor, I could have you sacked. I could sack you. This is your last warning!

 (*Cries*) Anna- My heart is breaking-

She stops.

FRED: I'm thinking of putting in for a transfer-To active service-

ANNA: (*She turns around*) But you're needed here. You have a skill. Your German language. What would you do on active service?

FRED: Infantry, I imagine- It's frightfully dreary I know. But well (*Pause*)

ANNA: What am I supposed to say?

FRED: I don't know-

ANNA: I'm late- (*She turns to go.*)

FRED: *(He calls after her)* Anna! *(Whispers)* Say, please
 don't go-

20. The bustling monitoring hut. Day.

Anna is not at her desk. But her radio is on emitting static- A desperate voice calling 'Anna, Anna-'
Anna rushes into the hut. She sits down, puts on her headphones, tunes in Italian patter- Then there's sudden static.

CARLO: (Urgent) Anna? Anna?

ANNA: Carlo. My darling.

CARLO: There's so much- *(He gasps for air)*

ANNA: What is it Carlo?

CARLO: I want to say- *(He splutters and coughs)*
 Anna I am lost-

21. The monitoring hut. Midnight.

Silently Anna lets herself into the hut, tip toes to her radio and turns it on. We hear the radio hum into life. There is light classical music broadcast. Anna sits down. Waits. The music fades.

CARLO: Anna? My Anna? I miss you.

ANNA: And I miss you. Carlo?

CARLO: Are you alone?

ANNA: Alone? Why do you ask? (*Hesitates*) Carlo? Is it really you?

CARLO: I wake in the night in the rough place I sleep and for a moment, one happy moment, I think you are beside me like (*static*). We are breathing together. And I know that everything that has happened between us (*his voice fades*)

ANNA: Carlo?

CARLO: I hear them pacing, calling-

ANNA: Who?

CARLO: Many are calling-

ANNA: They must be searching for you, the military police.

CARLO: As soon as I finish working- stretching and marking the points to be sewn-

ANNA: What? What points?

CARLO: We can be together. I will come to you cara mia. Will you meet me at the gates?

ANNA: Here? It's too risky.

CARLO: I want to be near you-

ANNA: You can't! You need a security pass-

CARLO: Say you'll meet me-

ANNA: In a heartbeat! But not here. I know a deserted place beside a quarry.

CARLO: Perhaps there is a place?

ANNA: Near Wood Norton? I'll wait for you. Every night. No matter how long it takes! I'll look after you. You'll be safe in the woods with me-

No response.

ANNA: Carlo?

CARLO: I'm so cold.

ANNA: Don't worry. I'll bring you a coat.

CARLO: I want-

ANNA: What?

CARLO: A kiss. One more kiss-

ANNA: No, no, many kisses. A lifetime of kisses-

He tries to say something but his voice fades.

ANNA: Carlo?

CARLO: I see you from my window ... out walking with your papa, but I make myself look away ...

ANNA: Don't look away!

CARLO: I am cutting very slowly, very carefully the quarters and the vamp to stitch and sew the shoes that I am making just for you. And then I cannot help myself, and I lift my eyes to your face, to your wide smooth brow and your hair swept back with a little comb and your lips parting as if you might start to sing- and my hand shakes, and the knife almost slips-

22. Anna's bedroom. Night.

Anna is half asleep in her bed. A clock ticks. Otherwise there's silence. Her bedroom door creaks open.

ANNA: *(Murmurs, half asleep)* Carlo? *(Footsteps approach the bed.)* Carlo. Is that you? Carlo! You came! I knew you would come. *(The bedclothes gently lift. She moves over in the bed. Carlo slips in next to her.)* You're cold. Poor Carlo. And wet. Let me warm you. My Carlo- *(They kiss. Anna screams.)* You're not Carlo! Who are you? Get away from me! *(She tussles with someone)* I don't want to! No! Get out!

The sound of thin tuneless whistling turns into Anna screaming which joins the whine of an air raid siren, getting louder and louder. Mrs F is shaking Anna.

MRS F: Stop screaming! *(Anna's screams turn to sobs)*

ANNA: *(Gulping for breath)* Someone was here!

ANNA: (*Repulsed*) I can still feel his hands on me- And his lips- (*Pause*) What are you doing in my room?

MRS F: I came to fetch you.

23. Mrs Fellows' cellar/air raid shelter

Anna and Mrs Fellows huddle together in the dark.

MRS F: We'll be safe down here- (*She strikes a match, tries and fails to light a candle.*) Everything's wet-

ANNA: It's so dark-

Silence.

ANNA: (*Whispers*) Mrs Fellows. Are you there?

MRS F: I'm here child.

Silence.

ANNA: What's wrong with me, Mrs Fellows? Was there really no one there? I'm so confused. Everything is- and I keep hearing- and seeing- and feeling-

MRS F: Shush.

ANNA: Am I going mad?

MRS F: Not mad.

ANNA: I could hear him near me- and then I felt his cold breath-

MRS F: Hush now-

ANNA: My skin is crawling- (*She rubs furiously at her arms and legs*)

MRS F: Never mind.

Silence.

ANNA: (*Whispers*) Mrs Fellows?

MRS F: What is it?

ANNA: Did you love Mister Fellows?

MRS F: From the moment I laid eyes on him- So handsome in his green uniform. Khaki green it was. And such a very tidy man. Poor soul. He hated those trenches- the mud, the filth, the lice- He was used to hot baths and clean linen. His mum always did for him you see. (*Pause*) She never approved of me mind. Didn't think I was good enough for her Harold. But we married anyway. And then he drowned-

ANNA: I thought you said a shell got him-

MRS F: No, he drowned- in a shell hole on the Somme. Them holes were deep- They didn't realise-

24. A cloakroom at Evesham Hall next to the canteen. Day.

Anna is lifting a man's jacket off a peg. Fred enters.

FRED: Anna! Come have some lunch. They say it's fishcakes. *(Pause)* What are you doing?

ANNA: Putting on my jacket. Do you mind?

FRED: That isn't yours. It's too big. That's a man's jacket Anna- *(Pause)* What are those marks on your legs? Those red marks?

ANNA: Stay away from me!

She runs off.

FRED: *(He calls after her)* Anna! Stop!

25. Anna's bedroom. Mrs Fellows' house. Night.

ANNA: (VO) I wet the sleeve at the sink and rub it with soap. But the soap is hard and the water is cold. It's either blood or brown sauce. I leave it to soak. It pales slightly- and dries stiff. Not your style at all. There's one baggy pocket in which a big man clenched his fist. Another in which a hymn sheet is folded small, and a place on the elbow where it has been carefully mended by a woman, I think. Hairy as a cat, dusted with ash, an Englishman's jacket, it's the colour of something edible, mushrooms browned in good olive oil. *(Pause)* Maybe you will like the colour, I think.

There's a knock at the door.

FRED: *(Whispers)* Anna. Anna.

ANNA: (*Whispers*) Fred? What are you doing here? Go away.

FRED: Open the door.

ANNA: You can't be here. You're not allowed. You'll wake Mrs Fellows. How did you get in?

FRED: Please-

ANNA: It's too late. I'm going to bed.

FRED: I've had another letter from the War Office. Carlo Soressi is dead. They found his body washed up-

ANNA: No!

FRED: Turn on the radio. It's on the news.

ANNA: I won't-

FRED: They found a great many bodies-

ANNA: I don't care. Now leave or I'm calling Mrs Fellows!

We hear Fred sigh, then slowly descend the stairs.

In her room Anna paces.

Anna turns the radio on and adjusts the volume.

NEWSREADER: Four other victims were also discovered further along the coast. Many more are expected as over one hundred

bodies were sighted floating in rough seas following the attack. One survivor said he had seen hundreds of men cling to the ship just before it sunk.

The newsreader's voice morphs into Carlo's voice.

CARLO: Anna? Where are you?

ANNA: Carlo? Where are you?

CARLO: Not far. Getting closer. A pale man is with me. Now he reaches out his hand-

ANNA: *(With dread)* His pale hand?

CARLO: He has come to guide me.

ANNA: Do I know him? *(Pause)* Not papa. Say he isn't papa. Papa died, before the war, remember? No! Oh please no!

CARLO: Do not worry. I wear my travelling clothes, not pyjamas.

Nothing.

ANNA: Carlo? Oh Carlo!

She runs down the stairs. But is caught by Mrs Fellows.

MRS F: Where are you going dear? This time of night?

Anna tries to push past her.

ANNA: I've got to-

MRS F: Come away from the door Anna. There is only one man for you- (*A man begins to whistle a spooky version of 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary.'*) And you must do as he bids.

ANNA: Please let me pass!

MRS F: Your screaming frightened him.

The whistling gets louder.

MRS F: He's coming now.

ANNA: Let me out!

MRS F: Don't be a fool. This is his house! (*Menacing*) You should not have stayed here if you were not prepared to entertain him- Did you really think you were alone with me in this big house? He's been back and forth quite a few times. He's been watching you,, he likes what he sees-

The whistling gets louder.

MRS F: When he comes- no more screaming-

She twists Anna's arm.

ANNA: Let go. You're hurting me.

MRS F: Mister Fellows doesn't like screaming. You must do as he bids. Should he come all this way only to be sent back by the like of you? (*Hisses*) Let him in!

Anna struggles with Mrs F, finally opens the front door.

MRS F: Why won't you let him in? He's reaching out for you-

Anna runs away.

MRS F: (*Calls after her*) Anna! Anna! Can you hear me? Come back!

26. The woods beside the quarry. Midnight.

Animals rustle in the underbrush. An owl hoots. A thin whistling sound resolves into birdsong. Anna enters the clearing.

ANNA: Carlo. I've come. I'm here.

A faint voice whispers- 'Anna. Anna. Cara mia. Ti amo.'

ANNA: No more waiting. No more longing. No more waking without you, in the night, no more thinking for one happy moment that you are beside me, that we are breathing together, and then- remembering. I want to be where you are Carlo, so you can take me in your arms. (*Pause*) Carlo? Can you hear me? It's the only way. Non posso vivere senza di te. I cannot live without you. Mi manchi. I miss you. (*She takes a few footsteps forward*) I'm right on the edge now. I will not be long. I am not afraid.

The sound of footsteps approaching from behind.

ANNA: When I look down, I do not see dark water, I see you standing at the window where the light is best. You are cutting very slowly and carefully before sewing the quarters and the vamp. I watch your hands as they guide the knife, sleek and lean and dark and deft- The repairs hang by their heels from a wooden bar behind you, and before you, the work of your heart, your whole body leaning gently into the task. It's late afternoon and the light is soft, and I walk with papa past your window, and I see you look up at me-

The footsteps come closer.

The footsteps stop.

ANNA: Carlo?

FRED: Anna?

ANNA: Fred?

FRED: Anna listen to me. Please Anna. Move back a bit. You're right at the edge of the quarry. It's very very deep.

CARLO: *(A haunting whisper becomes fainter and fainter)*
For you cara mia, the softest Italian leather, the stitches fine as my eye and hand could make ...

ANNA: Carlo!

CARLO: ... like a princess would wear.

*There's a small splash of gravel falling into the quarry,
Fred lunges, grabs her from behind and pulls Anna to safety.*

FRED: You nearly fell in.

She struggles in his arms.

ANNA: No!

FRED: What were you doing?

ANNA: Let go!

FRED: You don't belong here.

ANNA: Please!

FRED: You can't! I won't let you. (*Anna sobs*) Shush.
(*He holds her close*) I love you Anna. And we'll
get through this somehow. Together.

ANNA: (*Sobs*) But he's dead. Carlo is dead.

27. A garden in Evesham. Day.

ANNA: ANNA: (VO) I choose a hidden place in one
corner under a tree. No one will see me here,
doing what I must do. (*She grunts with effort.*)
It's baked hard this time of year. But below the
surface- it's soft and dark and loamy and warm. I
wore them on our wedding day remember? Blessed in

secret by a priest, we cut a cake with a silver knife and put it to each others lips. And then one night alone together before they took you away mio marito secreto. (*She kneels down.*) When the hole is deep enough and wide enough, I touch the tiny perfect stitches, one last time. After that, I gently put them inside- first one, then the other. (*Pause*) And then they're gone- like you. Rest in peace, I say. (*She begins to fill the hole with earth again.*)

28. The monitoring hut. Some time later.

Fred and Anna are hard at work, listening. Fred stands. Stretches.

FRED: Shall we go to the cinema tonight? My treat?

ANNA: All right.

FRED: (*He stoops over and kisses her.*) That's my girl.

ANNA: Do you want a cup of tea? (*She gets up.*)

FRED: I know it's not been easy. But you're getting better. It just takes time my darling. We'll go fishing soon. I'll teach you to bait and cast. You'll love it. I'll teach you. Then I'll teach you to swim. We'll have great fun- you'll see. Everything will be fine. You like your new lodgings, don't you? There's other girls, and a beautiful garden. (*No response*) Anna?

ANNA: (*She opens the door.*) I'm going to the canteen now.

FRED: *(Tries to hide his concern)* On your own? We'll knock off for tea then. *(Pause)* Promise you won't dawdle. Anna? Come right back won't you? And see if they have a bun. We'll share a bun- *(Pause)* Anna. Wait. Where are your shoes? Your lovely little green shoes? Why don't you wear those shoes anymore? Anna?

She leaves. We hear the door shut. Fred sighs. He sits down, picks up his headset. Fiddles with the dials of his radio tuning something in. We hear a German news report. Suddenly it is interrupted- A desperate voice, Carlo's voice, at first plaintive then getting louder and louder: 'Anna? Anna?'

FRED: What's that? What?

CARLO: Anna! Anna!

Fred turns off the radio with a click.

Silence.

THE END

BLUE BOY

CHARACTERS

REAGAN- A Social Services manager (45)

BOY- A lad (15)

ACT 1 SCENE 1

An untidy office. Cheap furniture that characterises under-funded government buildings, a door with a frosted glass panel, worn shiny carpet, dented filing cabinets, a small low table, a stack of chairs, a utility desk and desk chair, an open bottle of whiskey on the desk, a chipped mug, files scattered everywhere.

Reagan (45) is working late. A boy (15) but looks younger, wearing a hoodie and ragged old coat, sits on a high shelf looking down at him. The overhead fluorescent lights flicker. The boy disappears. There's a noise in the corridor.

Reagan gets up, opens the door. Looks into the corridor. Finds no one. Comes back. Closes the door. The boy is standing behind the door.

They both jump away in shock.

REAGAN

- !

BOY

- !

REAGAN

Who are you?

BOY

- Nobody.

REAGAN

What are you doing here?

BOY

Nothing.

The door was open.

REAGAN

So you just walked in? Did you buzz?

(Standing in the doorway Reagan
blocks the boy's path)

Downstairs? There's an entry system? A buzzer?

BOY

I didn't-

REAGAN

Wasn't anyone on reception? Anyone from security? They should
have told you. We're closed.

BOY

No one said anything. I was just looking.

REAGAN

Looking?

BOY

Yes.

REAGAN

Looking at what? It's the middle of the night. Is there something
you want?

BOY

Are you in charge here?

REAGAN

What's your name son?

BOY

-

REAGAN

Well?

BOY

-

REAGAN

Don't you want to tell me your name?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

You shouldn't be here. Are you lost?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

Where do you live?

BOY

(Whispers)

Nowhere.

REAGAN

Where?

BOY

Outside.

REAGAN

You're a young lad.

BOY

I was walking around like always-

REAGAN

It's not safe.

BOY

The street door was open.

REAGAN

How old are you?

Reagan tries to approach. The boy cringes away.

REAGAN

How old are you?

BOY

There was a big room and a big desk inside. It was very quiet. And warm. Usually people tell me to go away. But there was no one. Wait- there was someone. Sitting behind the big desk but I don't think he noticed me.

REAGAN

He didn't make you sign-in? Sign in, in the sign-in book?

BOY

He looked right past me.

REAGAN

And you're all alone?

BOY

(Looks pathetic)

I got no one. No family, no home, no friends. Wait- you think I have a friend? And he's hiding here? And ... and ... we're going to do something? To you? Me and him?

REAGAN

Okay. All right.

BOY

It's just me. And I'm all alone. And it's cold and dark outside. And don't forget I'm young and small and tired. And it's not safe, so please, please- can I stay?

(The boy shrinks into himself
and appears even smaller.)

Just til I warm up? Ten minutes? Five? Where it's light and safe and warm. I won't be no bother.

REAGAN

Maybe I can help? Is there anyone I can contact?

BOY

(Backing away)

No please.

REAGAN

Let me make some calls. It's my job son. Find you a real bed for the night-

BOY

No!

REAGAN

With a pillow.

BOY

No!

REAGAN

And a locker.

BOY

I'm leaving-

REAGAN

Don't you want a real bed?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

And a locker

BOY

No!

REAGAN

For your backpack?

BOY

No!

REAGAN

There are places.

BOY

I don't like them places.

REAGAN

Decent places.

BOY

I heard bad things about them places.

REAGAN

Safe places. Supervised places.

BOY

Them safe places have all closed down.

REAGAN

Nonsense. For young people only. With managers who look out for boys.

BOY

Yeah but ...

REAGAN

What son?

BOY

I want to stay here.

REAGAN

You need a proper bed.

BOY

Just one night?

A moment passes. Reagan looks at the boy.
The boy looks away.

REAGAN

I can't ... it's not ... regular ... it's irregular ... very irregular.

BOY

No one'll know-

REAGAN

There's fire laws, building laws, codes of practice.

If I let you-

BOY

Please let me-

REAGAN

Do you promise you'll let me-

BOY

What?

REAGAN

Organise a proper place for you to stay.

BOY

One of them hostels? For how long?

REAGAN

Do you promise?

BOY

Yeah. Okay.

REAGAN

Good. Now let's find you an empty office. Nice empty office. Big radiator. Stay there. Be quiet. Don't touch anything. Lie down. Go to sleep.

(The boy's attention wanders
and he looks around the office)

Because if a boy's not quiet- if he's noisy and restless- security'll hear him. If security find him, they'll kick him out. They won't be understanding like I am. Okay? I'm talking to you like a grown up now. You have to act as if you're not here- there. Okay? No wandering around the corridors. Okay?

BOY

Okay.

REAGAN

Whatever you do- don't mention me. You'll get me in trouble. You wouldn't want that, would you? So if security ask, we never met, I never said you could stay.

BOY

But that would be a lie sir.

REAGAN

If they knew I knew, they'd hold me responsible. I'd have to stop what I'm doing and write a report. Which I don't have the time or the energy to do tonight. But I'm willing to find you a place to sleep-

BOY

Here?

REAGAN

In this building- because I care.

BOY

Oh sir! Thank you sir. But ... well sir ... there's only one problem ...

REAGAN

What's that?

BOY

Lying. I never lie. Lying is a wrong thing.

REAGAN

Just don't say anything about me. It's not a lie. It's an omission. Something you don't say. You don't tell an untruth- you leave something out. Can you do that? Okay? Let's go.

BOY

Go where?

REAGAN

Haven't you been listening?

BOY

I don't want an empty office. I want to stay here ... with you.

Reagan looks at him.

REAGAN

With me? I'm working. I've got a lot of important work to do.

BOY

You're the only one's been kind to me.

REAGAN

I'm sorry but no.

BOY

I won't-

REAGAN

Listen to me-

BOY

Steal or nothing.

REAGAN

-You need a good night's sleep don't you?

BOY

Yeah.

REAGAN

You'll not get one here. I can guarantee that. I'll have the lights on.

BOY

Don't care-

REAGAN

I might pace. Or use the phone. Or the office machinery. I might slam a drawer. Or throw something. Someone might drop in. I can't be walking around on eggshells all night. I might disturb you. Or you might disturb me. I've got serious work to do. Mental work. I won't be able to concentrate with you here.

BOY

Please ... I miss ...

REAGAN

What?

BOY

People. That's the thing about being out ... on the streets ... without a home ... or family ... or friends ...

REAGAN

(Shakes his head sadly)

I feel for you son. But it's not appropriate- You, here, alone with me.

BOY

I won't make a mess. I won't make a noise. No rustling, or whistling, or quarreling, or shouting. I won't ask for nothing. I'll just sleep. I'm a very quiet sleeper. Be like I'm dead.

REAGAN

No lad.

BOY

Be gone in the morning. To the hostel. Like you said. Like I never been.

REAGAN

I told you. It's not possible.

(He bends down and picks up the
boys backpack)

I'll help you carry your things.

BOY

(Cries)

Nobody wants me. What's wrong with me?

Long pause.

REAGAN

(Sighs, relents)
You'll have to sleep on the floor.

BOY
Thank you sir. You don't know what this means to me. Someone
I know watching over me ... like an angel.

REAGAN
No interruptions.

BOY
I promise.

REAGAN
Or talking.

BOY
Don't usually like talking. No one listens. So I don't talk.
(Looking around the office)
Where should I go?

REAGAN
Anywhere.

BOY
Anywhere?

REAGAN
Anywhere out of the way.

BOY
On the floor?

REAGAN
There's a carpet.

BOY
If you can call it that. Not a very nice carpet.
(Small and hunched, the boy
looks around, then lies down
right in front of Reagan's
desk)
It's a very thin carpet.

REAGAN
Can you move over there son?

BOY
Where?

The boy gets up, moves a few paces away and lies down again.

REAGAN

A bit further.

The boy gets up, moves a few paces back.

BOY

Here?

REAGAN

Over there?

Reagan indicates the far corner. The boy gets up.

BOY

Way over there? I don't know about that. It's very far away.

The boy moves reluctantly into the corner. There's a small low table in the corner. The boy looks at it.

BOY

This is here.

REAGAN

Just move it out of the way. It's not heavy. That's good. Very good. That's your side of the room.

The boy looks around.

BOY

Excuse me sir?

REAGAN

What?

BOY

I don't mean to be funny, but ...

REAGAN

But what?

BOY

Your side's larger.

REAGAN

It's my office son. Now go to sleep.

Reagan gives the boy a stern look.

The boy takes a filthy blanket out of his backpack, shakes it in the air and lies down under the table.

BOY

You won't know I'm here.

Reagan turns back to his work. A moment passes. The boy sits up.

BOY

Excuse me sir. Could you close the window?

REAGAN

What?

BOY

The window.

REAGAN

I'd rather not.

BOY

No?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

It's me isn't it?

He sniffs himself.

REAGAN

I like a little air while I work-

BOY

There's a draft though.

The boy can't get comfortable. Reagan can't concentrate. The boy shivers.

BOY

It's my coat. My coat's too thin. My blanket's thin too- but if I had a thick coat-

Reagan grabs an overcoat from a coat stand.

REAGAN
Try this one. Take this one.

BOY
That's yours.

REAGAN
It's an old one. I don't wear it any more.

BOY
You don't wear this one?

REAGAN
Not any more.

BOY
I couldn't sir.

REAGAN
Try it on.

The boy tries it on. It fits okay. But the boy looks unhappy.

BOY
It's too big.

REAGAN
No it's not. You can roll up the sleeves.

BOY
I'll look stupid.

REAGAN
You look fine.

BOY
Have you got a mirror?

REAGAN
A mirror? No. Sorry.

BOY
I'm not sure about the colour-

REAGAN

It'll keep you warm son.

BOY

Too warm. Is that why you don't wear it sir? I don't want to get over-heated when I'm walking around. And it's bulky sir. It don't fold. I need something that folds up small. What am I going to do with it in the summer?

REAGAN

If you don't want it-

BOY

Mine's too thin, but at least it fits- it's a good colour and it folds up small.

The boy tries to hand back the coat.

REAGAN

Keep it as a blanket just for tonight.

The boy lies down under Reagan's coat.
But continues to shivers.

BOY

Must have caught a chill.

Reagan closes the window, tries to get on with his work.

But the boy continues to toss, sigh, rearrange himself. Puts an old sweat shirt over his eyes.

BOY

It's the light.

REAGAN

I can't turn out the light.

BOY

No sir, or course not- Sorry.

REAGAN

Good. Now go to sleep.

BOY

I can't sleep.

REAGAN

Lie on your back.

BOY

Is that the way you sleep sir?

REAGAN

Look at the ceiling.

BOY

It's a very high ceiling. If you can call it a ceiling. And there's cracks. Right over my head.

REAGAN

Close your eyes.

BOY

Can I have a bath? I think it might help.

REAGAN

What? Where?

BOY

In the bathroom? At the sinks?

REAGAN

You can have a real bath tomorrow, in the hostel.

BOY

Not tonight?

REAGAN

In a sink?

BOY

Haven't had a wash in a long time.

REAGAN

Best wait until tomorrow. Next thing you'll want's a story.

BOY

That would be nice sir.

REAGAN

And a drink.

The boy looks hopeful.

REAGAN

Go to sleep.

Good night sir.

BOY

Good night son.

REAGAN

Night.

BOY

Night.

REAGAN

Night, night.

BOY

That's enough.

REAGAN

Reagan picks up his mug, takes a long drink and returns to work.

The boy sits up again.

BOY

Thing is sir, I get these nightmares. There's these bad men- and I see how they look- lying on their backs- with a knives sticking out of them. It's horrible and everyone screams, including me.

REAGAN

Well you're safe now son.

BOY

If you hear me screaming, will you wake me up sir? Sir?

REAGAN

(Distracted)

Don't worry. I'm here.

BOY

Used to dream about nothing. Used to think about nothing. What's wrong with me?

REAGAN

We'll get you sorted son. Tomorrow morning.

Reagan resumes trying to work. The boy pretends to sleep. Slyly the boy watches Reagan, then gets up and creeps over to

Reagan's side of the room trying not to make a sound- but bangs into the small low table and gives it a kick.

Reagan looks up and frowns. The boy shrugs.

BOY

(Whispers)

I'll be very quiet-

Can I come up to here?

(The boy indicates an invisible line on the carpet dividing the room in half)

What about here?

(He puts his toe over the line)

Reagan continues to ignore him.

The boy opens a book at random, studies a pencil, examines a box file. Wipes dust from his hands.

Reagan tries to ignore him.

The boy opens a file drawer. It's crammed with files. Slams the drawer. Reagan jumps.

BOY

Sorry sir. Have you got anything to eat? Can't sleep on an empty stomach.

The boy empties the bin and sifts through its contents. But finds nothing to eat.

Reagan watches out of the corner of his eye- then hands the lad a leftover sandwich.

BOY

Is that ham? Sorry sir I don't like ham.

The boy pulls out a plug. The desk lamp goes off.

REAGAN

Are you trying to wind me up?

BOY

Sorry sir. Just thinking of you. You could get a shock. Or start a fire.

(He holds up a frayed wire)

You need a new one.

When Reagan goes back to work, the boy creeps up behind him and tries to examine the items on his desk. Reagan tries to ignore him. The boy picks up a stapler. He tries unsuccessfully to staple his fingers together. Then something else catches his eye.

BOY

Excuse me sir- What's this called?

REAGAN

(Briefly looks up)

Paper shredder.

BOY

(Whistles appreciatively)

Can I have a go?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

It only takes paper right?

The boy starts to play with the shredder.

BOY

Ever put anything in there you shouldn't? And like shred it?

REAGAN

You'll break it.

The boy ignores him.

REAGAN

Can you stop that? We need to decide something right now son. If you stay here, in this office, with me- no more interruptions. Okay?

BOY

Okay.

Reagan gives him a stern look.

BOY

Never knew anyone who worked on a desk before.

REAGAN

That means talking.

BOY

Or wore a tie. Where's your tie sir? Can I get you one? What colour? Do you like wide? Or narrow? Stripes? Or plain?

REAGAN

No more talking.

BOY

I can tie all the different knots. I'll have to stand behind you mind. Can't do it facing you. But I'm canny from behind. Twisting the ends about each other and drawing them tight. But not too tight.

REAGAN

I thought you didn't like to talk.

BOY

There's ties downstairs in one of them nice offices hanging over a chair.

REAGAN

What nice offices?

BOY

This is the worst office in the whole building. Don't get me wrong. I'm happy to be here. Very happy. But there's some ...

REAGAN

How do you know?

BOY

I don't know.

REAGAN

That sounds like a lie son. Have you been right round the building looking for something?

BOY

I don't know sir. Must be some nice offices in this building, but I was pulled up here. Did you pull me up here?

REAGAN

Don't be ridiculous.

(Has had enough of this
nonsense)

You weren't going to bother me. I've got work to do.

BOY

With them files?

REAGAN

And other important papers.

BOY

And you have to finish by sun-up?

REAGAN

Something like that-

BOY

Or else-

REAGAN

Deadlines son-

Reagan tries to get back to work.

BOY

Can I help?

Reagan laughs.

REAGAN

No son.

BOY

I'm good at sorting ... things.

Reagan is preoccupied, he checks inside
a filing cabinet, makes a note in a file.

BOY

What are you doing with them files sir?

Reagan looks up.

REAGAN

Hmmm?

BOY

In the filing drawer?

REAGAN

Cabinet-

BOY

You need a new one-

REAGAN

If I tell you, will you promise to go back to sleep?

BOY

Never was asleep.

REAGAN

All right. Will you promise to stop bothering me?

The boy nods.

BOY

If you tell the truth-

REAGAN

Of course. Why would I lie?

BOY

The files sir?

REAGAN

I'm ... er ... reading them ...

BOY

Because?

REAGAN

Aren't you getting sleepy?

BOY

Not yet.

REAGAN

Do you know what kind of work we do here-?

BOY

Deskwork? Important work? You keep things quiet here. Don't you? All quiet and in order. The work comes in. It goes out. In. Out. In. Out.

REAGAN

It's not that simple son.

BOY

There's money and you put it places. Some goes here and some goes there. But most of all, most important of all- I'm not being funny because this is important- you look after others who can't look after themselves. Am I right? So young people can have it better.

REAGAN

How do you know that?

BOY

(Shrugs)

I saw it somewhere ... I think there was a poster ... in the big room downstairs-

So I know what you are- do.

REAGAN

We have young clients who need our services- yes.

BOY

So you open them drawers.

REAGAN

Sometimes.

BOY

And look in them files.

REAGAN

If I have to.

BOY

You have a lot of files.

REAGAN

(Getting tired of this)

Too many.

BOY

Why's that?

REAGAN

Because I'm the manager.

BOY

What exactly do you manage?

Reagan looks at his watch.

BOY

I'm really interested.

REAGAN

I manage people who manage other people. It's a big job.

BOY

How big?

REAGAN

(Sighs)

Very big.

BOY

Are you sure you don't need help?

REAGAN

No son.

BOY

Not clever enough for deskwork am I? Not brainy enough?

REAGAN

It's a kind offer but-

BOY

Have you got a broom?

REAGAN

You promised to stop bothering me.

BOY

I could sweep up, or polish something?

REAGAN

Go to sleep.

BOY

Have you got any silver?

REAGAN

What are you talking about? There's nothing of value here.

BOY

Or dust? I could dust. It's very dusty. Have you got a dust cloth?

REAGAN

I'd rather you didn't-

BOY

You think I'm useless, don't you? Poor useless boy cannot do anything. You think I'm stupid and clumsy. You think I'll break something.

REAGAN

I never said that.

BOY

You did. You thought I'd break the ... the ... finger shredder.

REAGAN

Paper shredder. It's very temperamental.

(Patiently)

Do you remember what we decided?

BOY

You need a new one.

REAGAN

We decided you can stay, if you didn't interrupt. But what have you been doing?

BOY

Interrupting.

REAGAN

That's right.

BOY

I'm sorry.

REAGAN

No more interruptions, or I'll have to ask you to leave.

BOY

-Because now you really, really have to get back to work, because it's getting really, really late. And there's your thing tomorrow-

REAGAN

My thing tomorrow?

BOY

Don't you have a thing tomorrow?

REAGAN

What do you know about tomorrow?

BOY

Nothing. It was just a guess. You're working late. Must be something you're trying to finish- or clear up. I dunno. Everyone has a thing tomorrow, don't they? Everyone with a job.

REAGAN

What are you playing at son?

BOY

(Bewildered)

I'm not being funny.

REAGAN

I'm sorry son, I don't believe you.

BOY

I never lie.

Reagan picks up his mug. Drinks.

BOY

Excuse me sir-

REAGAN

What now?

BOY

I don't mean to interrupt but ...

REAGAN

(Exasperated)

But what?

BOY

Can I ask you something? (Pause)

REAGAN

What?

BOY

Is that coffee you have there? Must have gone cold your coffee?
Would you like me to heat it up for you? I could take it somewhere
and- Not a very nice mug though, is it sir?

REAGAN
Please don't call me that.

BOY
What?

REAGAN
Sir.

BOY
Yes. No. Sorry. You should have something nice for your coffee
sir.

REAGAN
It's not coffee.

BOY
No?

REAGAN
(Laughs)
No.

BOY
(Whispers)
What is it?

REAGAN
You know what it is.

The boy reaches for Reagan's mug.

BOY
May I?

REAGAN
No.

BOY
A sip sir?

REAGAN
No.

The boy watches Reagan finish his drink.
The boy lifts the bottle on Reagan's desk.

BOY

Can I pour you another?

REAGAN

I'm fine.

BOY

It would be a privilege sir.

(Crouching, stooping, making
himself even smaller)

Drop more?

Reagan relents. The boy pours.

BOY

Anything else I can get you?

Reagan shakes his head.

BOY

Well- Bottoms up-

Reagan drinks.

BOY

It don't taste right though, does it? You need a tumbler for that. One of them good tumblers?

REAGAN

It tastes okay.

BOY

Don't you have any good tumblers? They've got tumblers in them nice offices-

Reagan finishes his drink. The boy holds up the bottle again. Reagan shakes his head, no.

BOY

Are you sure I can't tempt you? Let me tempt you-

REAGAN

Not now.

Reagan tries to go back to work. While he's not looking, the boy tops up Reagan's drink, always keeping it full.

Checking that Reagan is occupied, the boy starts picking files off the floor.

Reagan looks up.

REAGAN

Leave them.

BOY

They're getting dirty sir.

REAGAN

I'd rather you didn't.

BOY

I don't mind.

REAGAN

Don't touch them.

BOY

But ...

REAGAN

Put them back.

BOY

But ...

REAGAN

On the floor. It's where I left them, and where I want them.

BOY

Oh sir, have you got a system?

REAGAN

Now!

BOY

Have I messed up your system?

REAGAN

Did you read any names?

BOY

What names?

REAGAN

On the files?

BOY

Oh sir, I may have.

REAGAN

I'm sure it's not your intention-

BOY

No sir.

REAGAN

But you're really disturbing me son, and for that reason I'd like you to leave. Now!

BOY

Are you throwing me out sir? In the cold? Why sir? I'm only trying to help sir.

REAGAN

I told you not to call me that.

BOY

Of course sir.

REAGAN

I don't need any help. You're taking advantage. We had an agreement son- We agreed you should stay in your corner. We agreed no talking. Or interrupting. There are rules son and if you break the rules you face the consequences. Now get your things together-

BOY

Please. Five more minutes. Ten. I promise I'll be good.

REAGAN

You promised before but you didn't mean it.

BOY

But ... but ... you asked me to stay.

REAGAN

And now I'm asking you to go. Before Security catch you. They'll sniff you out.

BOY

Oh sir that's unkind. I wanted a bath and you said- I've got feelings too you know.

REAGAN

See this is what I mean- I don't have time for this. I should phone Security right now. Tell them we have an intruder. You're trespassing. They'll throw you out.

BOY

(Laughs)

I know all about Security. They're useless. They left the street door open. Maybe they wanted a breath of fresh air, what do you reckon? Or went out for a smoke and forgot. I think a door should be closed, don't you? What's the point of a door if it's not closed? Or maybe the door was closed. Closed and locked. Maybe I opened the door. Sometimes I surprise myself. Know what I mean? When I came in, security looked right past me. One old bloke behind a desk playing cards with himself, eating a ham sandwich and watching DVDs with earphones, headphones, eyeglasses. I said hello, but he didn't hear. Or see.

Reagan watches him suspiciously.

REAGAN

You're high aren't you?

The boy ignores him.

REAGAN

What are you on?

BOY

Nothing sir.

REAGAN

You've got very large pupils for a lad that's not using.

BOY

(Hurt)

You just want rid of me, don't you?

REAGAN

I'm busy.

BOY

You don't want me here, do you? Tell the truth, you never wanted me. You just felt squirmy- like you should want me- but you

didn't. I can see by the look on your face that I'm right.-
Why's that sir? You expecting someone?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

Someone better than me?

REAGAN

(Exasperated)

No.

BOY

And you want me to leave before she gets here? That it? Is she downstairs? Downstairs chatting with Security? Or is she on the landing? On the landing coming up. (Pause) Excuse me sir-

REAGAN

What now???

BOY

I don't mean to interrupt, but ...

REAGAN

But what? What do you want???

BOY

Your mug's empty.

REAGAN

I told you. I've had enough.

BOY

Let me pour you another?

REAGAN

No thanks. You're leaving.

BOY

One more and we'll call it a day.

REAGAN

We've already called it a day lad.

BOY

I won't fill it right up to the top this time.

I said no.

REAGAN

Three-quarters?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

Halfway?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

One third?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

One quarter? Less than a quarter? A shot?

BOY

What are you up to?

REAGAN

Me? Is it me sir?

BOY

Are you trying to get me drunk?

REAGAN

Oh sir, would I do that? Tell you what- I'll put it away, shall I? Out of sight, out of mind. In a drawer. Under the table. Behind the filing cabinet.

BOY

Are you hinting I've got a problem?

REAGAN

No sir. But just to be on the safe side. Only thinking of you sir. You're shaking sir. Is it those tremors you hear about? ... You'll disease your liver if you go on like this. Let me hide the bottle now sir before it's too late? How's that sir? How would you feel if I did that?

(The boy walks away with the bottle)

REAGAN
(Calls after him)

Put it down!

BOY
(Returns)

Of course sir. What was I thinking? You might need it. For emergencies like.

REAGAN
What emergencies?

BOY
Office emergencies.

The boy pours the drink.

REAGAN
Give me that.

BOY
I knew you were thirsty sir.

Reagan reaches for his drink, but the boy is quicker. He holds Reagan's drink just out of reach.

BOY
Say please-

REAGAN
(Sarcastic)

Please.

BOY
Like you mean it.

Reagan makes another grab for the drink, but the boy holds it just out of reach again.

A standoff. Reagan shrugs, turns away, but he wants that drink.

REAGAN
For fucksake-

BOY
F-word. No swearing sir. Swearing's wrong sir. Bad as lying.

REAGAN
(Defeated)

Please.

The boy hands Reagan his mug.

BOY

Bottoms up.

Reagan downs it in one.

While Reagan pours himself another, the boy swipes something off his desk. Reagan catches him.

REAGAN

What's in your hand?

BOY

Me sir? Nothing sir. Well this.

He opens his hand. He's got Reagan's bottle of prescription tablets. He holds them up. Rattles them at Reagan.

REAGAN

Put those down.

BOY

What are they?

(The boy tries to read the label.)

How often do you take these? Do you need one now?

REAGAN

Give them to me.

BOY

I can't sir.

(Reagan tries to wrestle them out of the boy's hands.)

For your own good sir. You shouldn't take these with strong drink. Impairs the judgement sir.

The boy drops the tablets and stares hard at Reagan. A moment passes.

REAGAN

I've asked you to leave and you won't leave. Do I have to pick you up and throw you out?

BOY

You wouldn't do that- sir-

REAGAN

(Tired and maybe drunk)

I don't want to do that. But you give me no choice- Now leave the building.

BOY

The whole building?

REAGAN

That's right. I don't like your attitude.

BOY

What attitude? I'll stop.

REAGAN

What do you take me for, a fool?

BOY

I love this building!

REAGAN

Is that so? Well I'm coming to the sad conclusion that you're somewhat manipulative-

BOY

No!

REAGAN

That you enjoy having a laugh at a grownup's expense.

BOY

No sir I don't. I love this office too! I only wish I had a finger shredder like this, and a desk and a chair, and a carpet, and a filing cabinet, and a stack of chairs ...

REAGAN

Someone put you up to this?

BOY

And a wee small table, and an overhead light and ...

REAGAN

STOP IT!

BOY

Are you telling me off sir? Oh sir, I'll try harder.

REAGAN

It's too late. Now GO!

BOY

Maybe I don't know any better. I'm not a monster.

REAGAN

I said GO!

BOY

(Crushed)

Go?

REAGAN

GO!

BOY

Go out? In the cold? Please sir. It's dark and cold. You took me in sir. You said I was all right.

REAGAN

I never said you were all right- I gave you the benefit of the doubt-

BOY

Where will I go now sir? What will I do?

REAGAN

I'm sorry. This is very embarrassing, but no. You had your chance.

BOY

I feel the cold more than other lads. It's the wind. Oh please. All the good doorways'll be taken by now.

REAGAN

I don't care. I'm very disappointed in you.

BOY

Only the broken-down smelly doorways ...

REAGAN

Why couldn't you just be quiet? That's all I asked, but no, you couldn't be quiet-

BOY

I get numb in them doorways. Can't feel me legs in them doorways.
Like they're someone else's legs-

REAGAN

Bit of a joker are you?

BOY

No!

REAGAN

You seem to think it's funny, winding me up, a man who's tried
to be kind to you-

BOY

They might have to take off my hands and feet sir.

Reagan thrusts some notes into the boy's
hands.

REAGAN

Here- buy yourself a coffee.

BOY

Don't like coffee.

REAGAN

Soup then.

BOY

Just because I can't sleep. It's hard to sleep in a new place.
But I'll try- if you give me one more chance- I know you don't
like me. You never have liked me. Is it my face sir?

He tries to smile, grimaces, smiles.

REAGAN

All right!

I know I'll regret it-

One more chance-

BOY

Oh sir. Thank you sir.

REAGAN

You cannot disturb me.

BOY

Yessir.

REAGAN

No more games.

BOY

No sir.

REAGAN

You want to play games? Find someone your own age to play with.

BOY

Oh sir, you know I have no one.

(He looks pathetically at Reagan)

REAGAN

(Backs down)

All right. Forget it.

BOY

Were you thinking this is a game we're playing sir? Because if you were thinking that, you'd be wrong sir? You don't recognise me do you?

REAGAN

No. Of course not.

BOY

Are you telling me we never met?

REAGAN

We never met.

BOY

I'm disappointed sir.

REAGAN

What are you talking about?

BOY

How would you feel if I didn't remember you? Did I make no impression sir? Maybe I was too unimportant to remember?

REAGAN

What is all this?

BOY

Could it be we have a mutual friend?

Reagan looks bewildered.

BOY

Why do you think I'm here?

REAGAN

You need a place to sleep?

BOY

You really don't remember do you? That's worrying that is. A poor memory could be the first sign of other more serious problems. Have you seen your doctor? Oh sir, if you don't mind me saying, you've been working too hard. You're not yourself are you? You haven't been sleeping Mister Reagan and ...

REAGAN

How do you know my name?

BOY

It's on the door.

REAGAN

It's not on the door.

BOY

If you say so. I must have noticed it somewhere. I know- I saw it on the prescription bottle-

The boy lifts the small low table and moves it from the corner to the centre of Reagan's office.

REAGAN

Where are you going with that? Put it down!

BOY

It's not really heavy. Do you like this table Mister Reagan? The colour of it? The size? The overall appearance?

REAGAN

I'm a fool. I should have known-

The boy continues to ignore Reagan. He moves the table this way and that until he is satisfied with its position. He looks up at the overhead light fixture, then down at the table.

BOY

Would you say that was in the center?

REAGAN

In the centre of what? Someone will knock into it there. You can't leave it there. What's the point? It's in the way.

BOY

Don't worry about it sir. You have to get back to work- and I have to go to sleep.

(He walks to his corner, turns-)

REAGAN

What???

BOY

All these files ... I couldn't tidy them a little? Before I lie down again?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

There's a name on each one. Are they all children?

A moment passes.

REAGAN

That's right.

BOY

It's the children isn't it? Gets you right here. (He indicates his heart) Dead children or live children? I don't envy you sir. The things you must see ... in this business-

REAGAN

It's not a business. It's a service. But you know all about that, don't you? Children's homes?

BOY

A little.

REAGAN

I thought so.

BOY

You didn't-

REAGAN

The moment I saw you- You were in care, weren't you? Before you became homeless?

BOY

Who me? You think I'm some nasty dirty lad who grew up in a children's home?

REAGAN

(With rising compassion even
after all he's been through)

What home were you in son? One of ours?

No response from the boy.

REAGAN

Nothing to be ashamed of. It's not a crime. Were there family problems? (Pause) No. Don't tell me. God no. It's all right. I don't want you to tell me if you don't want to. Not currently residing are you? I'm assuming the home was local. Was it Rosehill? The Old Gables? (Shocked) Don't tell me you were in The Old Gables when it merged with Thornydene?

BOY

It wasn't that bad-

REAGAN

I'm sorry lad. We couldn't support both homes.

BOY

Don't worry about it.

REAGAN

An unfortunate decision with hindsight.

BOY

The beds were good.

REAGAN

So you were there?

BOY

And the bedside lockers were very commodious. More than enough room. Why even a boy could fit. Like a real home it was. Very homey that home. Nice furniture with lots of sharp edges. And big lads. More like blokes- right in with the little lads. Always made some little lad feel special those big lads. Sit here. Fetch that. Stand there. Shut up. Bend over.

REAGAN

Is that what this is all about?

BOY

(Shrugs)

Yeah well- I just wanted to see if you remembered me- and some of the others-

Reagan backs away.

REAGAN

What others?

BOY

Give you the opportunity to apologise, to make things right, to do a good thing for a bad thing, to ...

REAGAN

I ... er ... have to ...

BOY

What?

REAGAN

Go.

The boy looks at Reagan suspiciously.

BOY

You have to go?

REAGAN

I've got a meeting-

BOY

Now?

REAGAN

Right now.

BOY

This minute?

REAGAN

I nearly forgot.

BOY

Can't forget a meeting. Is this a case meeting?

REAGAN

It's an emergency.

BOY

Some poor lad?

REAGAN

Young lad.

BOY

And he's in trouble? And he needs an emergency bed for the night?

REAGAN

Yeah.

BOY

You better hurry then!

A moment passes.

REAGAN

You'll have to leave too.

BOY

Will I?

REAGAN

I need to lock up.

BOY

Of course. I see your point. Me on my own. All these files unattended.

REAGAN

Let's go.

The boy steps aside.

BOY

You first.

Reagan tries to get past the boy. But the boy blocks Reagan's path.

REAGAN

Excuse me.

BOY

Sorry.

Reagan goes one way, the boy blocks him.
Reagan goes the other way, he's blocked
again.

REAGAN

Get out of my way!

Reagan walks towards the door. But the
boy is quicker.

BOY

Where do you think you're going?

REAGAN

I just told you.

BOY

You can't go like that.

The boy finds Reagan's suit jacket and
helps him on with it. Smooths down the
shoulders fastidiously and adjusts the
collar.

BOY

There now. Nice jacket.

Reagan turns towards the door again.

BOY

Wait! Your hair! It's all ...

He smooths down Reagan's hair and steps
back.

BOY

Wait! Your eyes. Have you got any drops sir? And your hands
... Your hands are shaking. Both of them. Never mind. When
you get there, don't look at anyone- and keep your hands under
the table, in your lap. Okay? Now you can go now.

REAGAN

Aren't you coming?

BOY

Of course sir.

BOY

Steady Mister Reagan. Let me get that for you?

The boy opens the door for Reagan. But as Reagan approaches the open door, the boy sticks out his foot and trips him up.

BOY

I can't let you go in your condition. I'd never forgive myself. You're ...well ... It impairs the judgement Mister Reagan. How are you going to figure out what's best for that poor boy?

The boy pushes an enormous double filing cabinet easily across the room and in front of the door, blocking it.

REAGAN

(Shocked at the lads strength,
Reagan staggers to his feet.)

Holy shit. Who are you?

BOY

I think you should sit down.

REAGAN

No thanks.

BOY

Sit down sir.

Reagan remains standing.

BOY

(Shouts)

I SAID SIT. SIR.

REAGAN

No wait. Please I know what's happened. You got the wrong office. It's easy done. Hundreds of offices in this ... this ... I mean ... it's possible you made a mistake. It's not your fault.

(Becoming hysterical)

It's me. I've got one of those faces. I think you must have me confused with someone else. Some other bloke. Who ... who ... knows you. Maybe the Reagan you're looking for left. He might have changed jobs. Might be on the sick. Might have been fired.

BOY

Are you saying you're not Reagan?

REAGAN

Oh fuck. I'm an idiot- letting you in-

(Reagan wrenches open a drawer
in his desk and starts to
rummage. He finds an
envelope.)

I don't know who you think I am- but you got it wrong. I'm
an ordinary bloke. An ordinary bloke in a dead-end job with
too much responsibility and a crap office. Underfunded.
Understaffed.

(He empties the envelope on the
desk top. It contains coins and
some bills.)

With shitty security.

(He looks at it then takes out
his wallet and counts out
more.)

I work too hard. I drink too much. I don't sleep.

(Reagan takes off his watch.
Adds it to the pile. The boy
watches impassively.)

I'm a nobody. An overworked, underpaid nobody.

(He shoves the pile towards the
boy.)

BOY

Not very much, is it?

REAGAN

It's all I've got son.

BOY

Don't call me that.

Reagan nods.

BOY

You've got more at home like?

Reagan nods.

BOY

How much?

REAGAN

Lots.

BOY

And you'll give it to me?

REAGAN

Yes. Certainly. Right away. If that's what you want-

BOY

All of it?

REAGAN

I promise.

BOY

Really? BECAUSE I DON'T WANT YOUR FUCKING MONEY!

Reagan cowers away.

BOY

I shouted at you again didn't I?

(Boy looks a bit bewildered. He
shakes his head.)

Sometimes I do that. I don't know why. You want me to leave?

Reagan nods.

BOY

I never used to shout. I wish I could stop. You can help me
stop Mister Reagan sir-

REAGAN

Me?

BOY

We could end this right now. A happy ending sir? Just tell
me my name.

REAGAN

Is that all?

BOY

That's all.

REAGAN

Your name?

BOY

Me name.

REAGAN

You don't know your name?

BOY

I fucking know me name- you don't fucking know me fucking name-
(Almost breaking down with
frustration)

What's me name? Please just tell me me name- Say me name. That's
all you have to do.

REAGAN

How would I know?

BOY

I was one of the lads, in one of your homes-

REAGAN

There were so many lads.

BOY

One of many- that it?

REAGAN

Too many-

BOY

Just a lad- any old lad-

REAGAN

Sorry. I ... I ... didn't mean ...

BOY

-From a fucking home for fucking children nobody fucking wants?

REAGAN

I didn't don't ... deal directly ... with ... with ...
service users son.

BOY

I'm not your son.

REAGAN

So I wouldn't ...

BOY

We all look alike, is that the problem?

REAGAN

I only manage the service providers who deal directly with
the service users. I have absolutely nothing to do with ...
with ...

BOY

Not directly?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

Let me get this straight. You have absolutely nothing to do with ...

REAGAN

Nothing.

BOY

But you manage?

REAGAN

That's right.

BOY

But you don't manage lads?

REAGAN

No.

BOY

You manage managers who manage lads?

REAGAN

That's right. I'm an area manager. I manage many homes in the area.

Long pause.

BOY

It's an ordinary name.

Reagan shakes his head.

REAGAN

Even more difficult.

BOY

All you have to do is say it. Then I'll go. Thing is, if you don't say it, I'll have to stay-

REAGAN

Why? (A flicker of understanding) Because that's why your here? Because you didn't just happen to come in ... Because this

wasn't all an accident- ... Because ... Oh Fuck ... because you're not just any boy, you're a boy with a ... a ...

BOY

Plan- That's right. You know when you have a idea Mister Reagan, and you think it through, step by step, in your head, and you think about it a lot? I believe that's called planning. But I wouldn't worry about that if I were you. You're supposed to be concentrating. How's it going Mister Reagan? That concentration? Surely you can remember just one of the boys you were helping, serving, making it better for ... Are you thinking hard? Not getting anything yet? How about an initial? Are you getting an initial letter? Or any letter? 'C' or 'A,' or something-? Look at me Mister Reagan sir. What's taking so long?

REAGAN

I am ... I'm not ... No ... Nothing ... I wish ... I can't ...

BOY

Feeling a little foolish are you? A little guilty? I can see you're at a loss. Wondering what to do- Making a promise to yourself never, ever, to let a boy into your office again.

(Shouts)

WHAT'S ME NAME?

Reagan cringes away as if warding off blows.

BOY

Can't be that difficult for a clever bloke like you. Oh dear, have I been unreasonable again? Of course you don't remember- You're a busy man. And there's so many boys. Too many. But we need that name, don't we? What are we going to do Mister Reagan sir? Can you think of a solution? No? Perhaps there's one staring you in the face?- Or should I say lying around-

The boy picks up a file and starts reading.

REAGAN

Put that down! Please.

Reagan grabs the file out of the boy's hands. A tug of war. The boy won't let go. Then suddenly lets go.

BOY

All right- You look. One of them must be mine.

REAGAN

Not if you're not currently residing.

BOY

Yeah but I was currently residing. Until recently.

REAGAN

How recently? Because old records might have been ... well ... uh ... destroyed.

BOY

Shredded? I don't believe you. You can't destroy a boy's records.

REAGAN

Be buried in paper if we didn't ...

BOY

I hope you didn't. Because if you did- well it would be as if a lad like me never existed. And that would be well tragic, if you know what I mean, for everyone concerned.

(Pause)

So I could be too late?

REAGAN

I'm sorry son.

BOY

I told you not to call me that.

REAGAN

Sorry. It's probably here. We save them for awhile.

(Reagan indicates the files
strewn around the office)

It's not how it looks. Every file is important.

(Reagan gets down on his hands
and knees and scrabbles
frantically through the
files)

There's just not the storage.

BOY

It's a name you'll recognise.

REAGAN

Will I?

BOY

I think so. I was a bit special. Does that narrow the field?

REAGAN

Can't you just tell me?

BOY

I'd like to tell you- But that's not the way it works. The way it works is, you tell me. I don't tell you... In the beginning there are many ways a thing will work. Then there is only one way. One best way. Once you start thinking like that- that's it, isn't it? You're in a plan. And the plan goes the way it goes for a reason.

REAGAN

Is it Jimmy?

Reagan holds up a file.

BOY

No.

Reagan holds up another file.

REAGAN

Charles?

BOY

No.

More scrabbling through files.

REAGAN

Dean? Lee? Ross? Russ? Roy? Kyle? Billy? Perry? Joe? Matt? Mickey? Jason? It's Jason! (Pause) Jason Mason!

BOY

You're taking the piss. Look at me! It's ME.

The boy moves aggressively towards Reagan.

REAGAN

No wait!

BOY

(Screams)

What's me name? Me name? I know you know. Who the fuck am I? Cat got your tongue lad? Go on. Spit it out. You little toe

rag ... You tosser ... Crying like a baby ... Soft as shite ... Hiding in a fucking locker for fucksake ... You come when you're sent for you stupid little prick ... You're fucked you are ...

(Pauses, shakes his head)

I did it again, didn't I? Shouted at you while you were trying to think- Made you uncomfortable- But I didn't mean it. I told you, sometimes things just come out of my mouth.

REAGAN

And you think that's all right?

Reagan is beyond caring. He stares at the boy suspiciously.

BOY

What are you staring at?

REAGAN

You look like him-

BOY

Who?

REAGAN

You're his brother, aren't you?

BOY

Whose brother?

REAGAN

That's why you're here-

BOY

How d'you mean?

REAGAN

You want an explanation-

BOY

Huh?

REAGAN

I'm sorry for your loss lad. Truly. But it wasn't our fault- This department cannot be held-

BOY

What?

REAGAN

Did no one talk to you? They just left you? I don't know why no one contacted the family. You should have had a full and frank account. Believe me, heads are going to roll. Now let's just sit down and I'll-

BOY

Whose brother?

REAGAN

(Exasperated)

Callum Doyle's?

BOY

Who?

REAGAN

The Blue Boy's

BOY

Who?

REAGAN

The Blue Boy. You look just like him.

BOY

Yeah but I don't have a brother.

REAGAN

Cousin?

The boy shakes his head.

REAGAN

Some relation?

BOY

I don't have any family sir.

Reagan picks up a newspaper, flicks through it quickly, finds a photo and shows the boy. The boy peers at it suspiciously.

BOY

There's a resemblance all right. But I don't have a brother- That's the whole problem. If I had a brother to look after me-

REAGAN

So this is just an uncanny resemblance-? And you, here, threatening me is just a coincidence-? And-

BOY

Wait a minute! I know!

REAGAN

What?

BOY

Maybe I am him.

REAGAN

Who?

BOY

The Blue Lad. That's why I look like him. I'm him.

REAGAN

You can't be him.

BOY

Yeah I can. I'm him but I don't know it, cos I don't read the papers.

REAGAN

You're not him.

BOY

Why not?

REAGAN

I can't discuss it.

BOY

But I look like him-

REAGAN

Very much so.

BOY

Same age and all?

REAGAN

Don't play games with me son. You can't be him because he's dead. He's a young lad who died in care.

Long pause.

BOY

Then I just resemble him.

REAGAN

I don't know why I didn't see it earlier- Poor lad. What happened to him was a tragedy.

BOY

A tragedy sir?

REAGAN

Don't you know? You don't know, do you?

BOY

I don't get the papers-

REAGAN

Of course not. Well, I can't go into detail. I can only tell you what's been reported in the media. That's all I can say. Callum Doyle ... the ... er ... Blue Boy ... hung himself in an out-building on the grounds of the care home where he'd been residing. And they didn't find him for ... well ... a while ... and his face was- well actually he was blue all over.

BOY

From hanging?

REAGAN

I shouldn't be talking to you about this.

BOY

One of yours was it? The children's home?

REAGAN

No comment.

BOY

Weren't you responsible for that home? The home where it happened?

REAGAN

No comment.

BOY

And you think I'm related to him? This dead boy? And I come here for an explanation?

REAGAN

That's what I think yes.

BOY

Or I come here for revenge?

REAGAN

The thought crossed my mind.

BOY

Maybe, Mister Reagan sir, I'm him and I come to haunt you-

The boy laughs and mimics a ghost.

BOY

Whooooooooo-

The boy spooks around Reagan's office
crashing into things.

BOY

(Taking the piss)

I'm a ghost and I can walk through walls, and steal cars and
get into the pictures for nothing- What do you think about
that Mister Reagan sir?

REAGAN

Maybe you are-

BOY

What?

REAGAN

A ghost.

BOY

I'm joking.

REAGAN

(Getting his own back)

How do I know that?

BOY

C'mon-

REAGAN

Maybe you are dead.

BOY

I'm what?

REAGAN

Dead.

BOY

(Laughs)

Do I look dead? I'm an ordinary lad-

REAGAN

And you're here because you need a place to sleep? Why aren't you asleep then? You must be tired.

BOY

Overtired. It's hard to sleep when your over-

REAGAN

But you don't do you?

BOY

What?

REAGAN

Sleep.

(Pause)

The dead don't sleep.

BOY

That's all they do is sleep you idiot.

REAGAN

Not proper sleep.

BOY

Look I'm sorry for what I done. I was only playing with you- I'm not a fucking ghost. For one thing, I'm not dressed like a ghost, am I? Do ghosts wear hoodies and jeans? I thought ghosts wore sheets.

REAGAN

You are wearing a sheet.

BOY

I'm not.

REAGAN

You just don't know your wearing a sheet. You look at yourself and you see ordinary clothes- but your wearing a sheet.

BOY

Noooo!

REAGAN

(He mimes lifting the edge of a sheet)

Under the sheet you're naked. You're dead lad. Look at yourself. You're a funny colour. Cold to the touch. Poor lad. And your eyes- (He shudders) I thought it was drugs-

Reagan takes the boy's hand.

BOY

What are you doing? Pervert!

REAGAN

I'm feeling for a pulse.

BOY

Get off. That's enough. Get away from me. You're crazy drunk. I'm sorry if I upset you. I'm an ordinary lad and I think I should go- now- Because there are no ghosts- And you're doing me head in. Rather sleep in a doorway than put up with this. So I'm just going now-

REAGAN

Where to? The graveyard?

BOY

I'm alive like you.

REAGAN

Yeah, when was the last time you ate?

BOY

I dunno.

REAGAN

Drank?

BOY

Dunno.

REAGAN

Have a drink.

BOY

Okay. Sure.

REAGAN

Dead lads can't drink.

BOY

I can drink.

Reagan pours him a drink.

REAGAN

Bottoms up!

The boy tries to drink it- sputters,
chokes.

REAGAN

See.

BOY

I can't drink that. What is that?

(He starts to cry)

I'm not dead. Or a ghost. There are no ghosts, not for real-
maybe off the telly, or the pictures, or-

REAGAN

In that case who are you?

BOY

Nobody.

REAGAN

I don't believe you. You've been nothing but trouble since
you got here. Most of what you've told me's lies.

BOY

I haven't told any untruths- I may have left things out-

REAGAN

I did you a favour letting you stay. I took you in-

BOY

And I'm grateful. But you've got no right-

REAGAN

You upset me- You knew things about me- Things you couldn't
have known.

BOY

They were guesses, sir. Lucky guesses. I don't know how I know
what I know.

REAGAN

You'd know if you were a ghost. Ghost are clairvoyant- Unusually perceptive. They have the power to see and know all hidden things.

BOY

No! I don't! I'm not!

The boy runs for the door. He tries and fails to move the filing cabinet in front of the door.

BOY

Let me out! Please!

REAGAN

(Indicates the filing cabinet)

You put it there.

BOY

(Close to tears)

How?

REAGAN

I don't know how.

BOY

I just want to go. Please let me go. I'm a real boy.

REAGAN

Are you sure? You don't look very real to me.

BOY

I only wanted to come in for a minute, because I was cold- I'm not even warm yet- On the street sir, your feet go like ice.

REAGAN

Because you're dead-

BOY

Not because your dead- because it's winter and your shoes are worn down and the pavement's freezing- and your socks are wet, or you have only one sock, or no socks- It's hard on the streets sir, without socks.

REAGAN

(Gently)

Lad?

BOY

You walk and you walk and you walk- and you're on your own- and no one stops to see if you're all right- There's no one to talk to. And you have funny thoughts. And dreams. And days go by- And it's like you're not really there.

REAGAN

You're tired, hungry.

BOY

I never even had a girlfriend. All I want's a place to sleep where it's warm and safe. If I could only get over to Heathrow, I'd be all right. There's nice places to sleep there. On a seat. Or in the tunnel to Terminal Five.

REAGAN

You're just a boy.

BOY

That's a good place. I'd lie down, close my eyes, put my hoodie over my head and fall asleep. And if I could get meself a piece of real luggage- Something on wheels, so I could wheel it around and look like I belonged- that would be heaven-

REAGAN

You need proper looking after son. It's no wonder you have strange thoughts. But you're you. Not some other boy.

BOY

Then I'm not dead? Not some dead boy?

REAGAN

No son, you're not.

BOY

Then why-?

REAGAN

It's not your fault.

(With compassion)

It's society.

BOY

(Feeling himself)

I'm alive?

REAGAN

Society's let you down son. Supposed to take care of the young and vulnerable- like yourself. I'm sorry lad- Let me make amends. I'll find you the best hostel.

BOY

I can breathe and do real things?

REAGAN

Maybe I could help with training. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't try. See, I feel personally responsible when a lad's been let down. I didn't let you down, but taking responsibility means feeling as bad as if I was the one who let you down.

BOY

Is that what responsibility means-? I always wondered sir.

REAGAN

After what you've been through. Losing a brother.

BOY

I told you. I'm not his brother.

REAGAN

(Shakes his head)

No more. Please.

BOY

I swear it.

REAGAN

Enough- I'm exhausted.

BOY

But I'm not his brother- I knew him, it's true- I never said I didn't know him- the lad you call, The Blue Boy, I was his friend.

REAGAN

The Blue Boy's friend?

BOY

We were in the home together.

REAGAN

You and him?

BOY

We were friends.

REAGAN

I thought he didn't have any friends. They told me he didn't have any friends.

BOY

I was his only friend. And we were both bullied by the other lads- The strong lads who picked on the weak lads. He was slow to get things sometimes and ... and ... he talked too much and told stupid jokes. Other times, it was like there was someone more clever than him hiding inside. He had a big imagination, that's what the house manager used to say. She also said he had an attitude. But she didn't get him see. Those other lads used to listen and laugh at his jokes. And he had this dead spikey hair ... and it was all right for a while. Then something happened. Some kind of story must have got round. And those lads started acting funny. They got fed up with his talking and his jokes. They bullied and beat him and ...

REAGAN

Could you not have done something to help him?

BOY

No.

REAGAN

Must be the reason you feel so bad.

BOY

Me?

REAGAN

He's dead and you're sorry. But sorry won't bring him back, will it? So what can you do? Nothing except confess.

BOY

What do you mean?

REAGAN

On the street there's no one to talk to- you said so yourself- so you come here, late at night, to make your confession. Because it's eating you up and you can't keep it in. That's why you're here- isn't it? I know exactly how you're feeling. You'd feel better if you confessed. It would be like a huge burden falling off you- and you'd be able to breathe again. No more looking over your shoulder, wondering who knows what, covering your tracks, living a lie.

BOY

I don't know what you're talking about Mister.

REAGAN

But you're frightened too- because you've got a lot to lose.

BOY

I've got nothing to lose.

REAGAN

You can't go on like this, in your head-

BOY

Where?

REAGAN

Going over and over what you've done- what you haven't done-
How you could have helped that boy-

BOY

Callum-

REAGAN

Maybe he'd be alive today if you had done something. But-

BOY

What?

REAGAN

We all have these thoughts. Even I have them. You try to rationalise your position and excuse your actions- But you can't get rid of the feeling. It haunts you day and night. You can't sleep or eat. You feel unclean. You don't know what to do- so you drink- Maybe you get drunk in a bar and tell a stranger. Then you worry- Is he going to tell anyone else? You can't concentrate, your work goes to pot, your homelife- You make a lot of excuses. You tell yourself you're only feeling bad because you're a good person, a caring person. You tell yourself someone else wouldn't worry- wouldn't lose even one night's sleep over the whole thing. But you- you've blown it out of all proportion-

BOY

Why?

REAGAN

Because you care. On balance you do more good than harm. Much more. But sometimes you find yourself getting sloppy ...then you wonder. You want to say sorry, but you're frightened of

being discovered. Am I right lad? You can't afford to lose your job?

BOY

What job? I don't have a job.

REAGAN

So you cover your tracks and destroy the evidence. But nothing helps- friends disappear- strangers stare at you like they know exactly what you've done- and after a while you would do anything- and I mean anything, to make it stop.

BOY

We asked you for help, Callum and I, and you did nothing. We went to her first like- And she said she'd take care of them bullies-

REAGAN

Alleged bullies-

BOY

But she didn't do nothing-

REAGAN

She sent me a report.

BOY

Then we got beat twice as hard- cos maybe them bullies saw us-

REAGAN

One of my best managers. Suspended now-

BOY

So we did what it said on the protection poster- in the hall in the home near the front door- And we put it in writing like it said on the poster.

REAGAN

I can't be everywhere at once lad. I have to rely on my managers. She kept excellent records.

BOY

It was Callum's idea.

REAGAN

Accurate records.

BOY

I said, don't be daft- let's just run away- But he saw you sometimes ... visiting ... And he thought you looked nice. Managing and that- You were her boss.

REAGAN

When I received Callum's letter, I phoned her-

BOY

So if we told you what was happening, and you told her what to do-

REAGAN

After meeting with Callum, she was of the opinion that, if left alone, the situation would resolve itself. She knew the individuals involved. She thought she could defuse it. She acknowledged something had gone off course- but suggested a cooling off period. It was her opinion that any action would have made the situation worse. I was informed- and on the basis of the available evidence- I agreed.

BOY

She'd do it.

REAGAN

Clearly there was no need to take any further action.

BOY

Or maybe you'd do something yourself, like swoop down and ... and ... protect us.

REAGAN

At the time I had no doubts it was the correct decision.

BOY

But you never. We waited and waited.

REAGAN

No doubts at all.

BOY

I wanted to run. But Callum said wait.

REAGAN

Not one.

BOY

We could of been together on the street-

REAGAN

Happens all the time. A situation arises then resolves without intervention.

BOY

Him and me, looking out for each other ... but ... but ...

REAGAN

Are you implying this is my fault? I would never ignore an honest plea for help.

The paper shredder starts to hum.

REAGAN

I'm a caring professional. What kind of man would I be if I'd done what you say? How could I live with myself? But some lads are very damaged lads and they would say anything to manipulate an adult. No one likes to be hoaxed son. I'm sorry to have to tell you- but your home manager judged some of Callum's injuries to be self-inflicted-

BOY

What??? No!!!

REAGAN

It's all in her report.

BOY

Them Bullies gave him a right kicking. I was there. They went at him proper! It really hurt!

REAGAN

She made a judgement based on years of experience-

BOY

(Incredulous)

You think he beat himself?

REAGAN

He was a boy with personality problems.

BOY

You didn't know him.

REAGAN

He was attention seeking.

BOY

No.

REAGAN

He'd done it before.

BOY

He never.

REAGAN

According to her records-

BOY

That's lies.

REAGAN

The records don't lie.

(Sadly)

I've seen it all son. Every type of pathological behavior you can name-

BOY

It was real! There must be some evidence.

The humming gets louder.

BOY

Where's Callum's file. Look in his file.

The humming becomes whirring, then shaking-

REAGAN

I don't have to look in his file. I know what's in his file.

Suddenly the paper shredder disgorges a snowstorm of shredded paper.

REAGAN

What the fuck! I told you not to fiddle with that.

BOY

I didn't-

REAGAN

I saw you.

BOY

I only looked-

REAGAN

You fiddled. See this is why we don't just believe what lads tell us- we check.

BOY

We trusted you to sort this out.

Reagan drinks directly from the bottle.

REAGAN

I tried. I did the best I could. But I can't be everywhere at once. That's why I delegate. Your home manager was the person on the ground best equipped to deal with the situation-

BOY

But we complained about her doing nothing to protect Callum. It's all in the letter. Which must be in his file. Where's his file?

REAGAN

Don't worry about his file. His file is here.

BOY

Can I see?

REAGAN

Let's just wait until tomorrow. We'll be presenting all the evidence tomorrow.

BOY

You've got a lot to sort out before tomorrow.

REAGAN

We both do. She's taken it harder than anyone.

BOY

But it was your fault.

REAGAN

Me son? No son. I was only following procedure- following procedure and implementing policy. In a complex and-yes-deeply flawed system, such as this one, there is no one person to blame because there are a myriad of factors.

BOY

You should have replaced her.

REAGAN

I don't even like talking about blame. There is no blame. And that's the truth. The whole system is screwed up. There's too

many boys and not enough resources. Intractable problems- you know what that means? Fucking big problems you can't seem to do anything about- no matter how hard you try-

BOY

Will you keep your job?

REAGAN

Even the clients themselves are part of the mess, that's right you boys- needy, manipulative, sneaky, controlling, spiteful little liars, deceitful, brutal- but damaged lads. No wonder no one wants to be a social worker anymore-

BOY

What about your pension?

REAGAN

We've got a skill shortage son. And those of us left- we're all stressed and depressed. Me. Her. All of us. We're understaffed and underpaid- That's right, I'm feeling the pressure too. I'm one of the good guys. But I'm finding it hard to carry on. The bureaucracy, the work load-

BOY

Will they put your picture in the papers?

REAGAN

Every minute I feel like I'm under scrutiny.

BOY

You were the one in charge.

REAGAN

The public don't want to fund us- but when something happens it's a witch hunt. And now you- Listen I know you're upset. We're all upset. But things are not just black and white- There are many shades of grey son- You'll find that out when you grow up. What do you know-? You're a child.

BOY

Young adult.

REAGAN

Why do you think I do this job, eh Mister Young Adult? I could be earning more, working less, having a plush office- but I care. A lot of good it's done me. Look around this dump- Well? It's after midnight and I'm still working- Why? Because, for some reason, I still believe I can make a difference. That's

why I entered this profession in the first place. Back then I had hopes, dreams. (Pause) It's the system. The system grinds you down. Of course I still care, but it's getting harder. Harder and harder.

(Pause)

I didn't do anything wrong.

Ignoring Reagan, the boy drags a plywood chair into the centre of the room. He carefully places it on top of the low table he previously positioned under the overhead light fixture.

REAGAN

What are you doing? Stop it. This isn't a playground. Put that back.

The boy ignores Reagan.

Reagan watches with growing unease as the boy carefully positions and repositions the chair, making sure it's centred on the table and secure.

REAGAN

Stop it, I said!

The boy continues to ignore Reagan, stepping back to check and returning to make small obsessive changes to the chair.

REAGAN

You want a public apology, is that what you want? You want me to stand on a chair and say, it was me, I was personally responsible? Well I'm sorry, it doesn't work like that. Even if I wanted to stand on that chair. This is the real world. My hands are tied. I can't admit liability. That's down to the legal department. They tell me what I can say- and what I can't say- But as far as I know, the service was not negligent. All the correct procedures were followed and as a department, we've done nothing wrong-

BOY

You should write a letter.

REAGAN

I'm not resigning. What good would that do? If I resigned some other bastard would just take my place. He might even be worse. I'm not the bad guy you're making me out to be.

BOY

Not that kind of letter. What's the matter? Isn't there anyone you want to contact? No wife? Girlfriend? Kids? Friends? Acquaintances? No life outside this job? Poor sir. Here's a piece of paper.

Reagan takes the paper but does nothing with it.

BOY

You don't know what to write, is that it? Just tell the truth. Say you haven't been sleeping, you're tired, stressed. You've been drinking too much. You've had enough. You can't live with the guilt.

Reagan shakes his head as if trying to clear his thoughts.

REAGAN

What guilt? I'm not guilty. If anyone's guilty it's for the hearing to decide- The hearing will investigate tomorrow-

BOY

Your thing tomorrow-

REAGAN

And we'll all learn from our mistakes. There are many factors involved. But there's is no evidence of wrong doing. No grounds for taking action against any individual in this department- Any spurious confession now would only muddy the waters and jeopardise proceedings. Preliminary statements have already been given, there's ... there's ... factors ... a myriad of ... and ... people ... complex ... flawed ... grey ... many shades of ... many ... many ...

The boy takes a long thick piece of rope out of his backpack and ties a noose.

REAGAN

What are you doing!!!

The boy looks up at the light fixture.

BOY

I'm really sorry it's come to this.

The boy climbs nimbly up onto the table, stands on the chair, throws one end of the rope over the light fixture and ties it in place so that the noose he's made dangles over the chair.

BOY

Think it'll hold?

Reagan cringes away. The boy tightens the noose.

REAGAN

I'm not Reagan! This is not my office!

BOY

(The boy pulls on the rope.)

Maybe a bit shorter. What do you think?

The boy continues to make small adjustments to the rope.

BOY

That'll do.

The boy steps back to admire his handiwork, looking at it from all angles.

Reagan huddles into himself.

BOY

Take it easy sir- you're trembling and ... well ... we're almost done.

REAGAN

Get away from me. You're not a boy.

BOY

No?

REAGAN

Or a ghost.

BOY

No?

REAGAN

You're one of those delirium tremors you hear about- ... over activity of the nervous system ... with trembling and ... and ... things that aren't there ... not just visions ... sounds ... things men don't normally see ... or hear ... frightening things ... bugs ... snakes ... and boys thinking my most private thoughts ... because I had too much to drink ... and I'm stopping tomorrow ... I've had a bloody good fright ... you can be sure of that ... No more booze ... starting tomorrow ...

(Gathering himself together
but too drunk)

And now that I know that you're not here ... I can bloody well get rid of you ... like you never were ... I'll kick you out!

Reagan shakes, stumbles. Bats away imaginary demons.

BOY

(Laughs)

Oh sir.

REAGAN

All I have to do is close my eyes- and when I open them-

Reagan closes, then opens his eyes- but sees the boy again.

REAGAN

(Cries)

Noooo!!!

BOY

You can't get rid of me because you can't get rid of yourself sir. And if I'm you, I must be thinking what you're thinking. Trying all night to come to a conclusion.

Reagan drains the bottle to the last drop.

The boy takes him by the hand.

BOY

Let's do this without a fuss, eh?

The boy waits patiently at his side.

BOY

Ready?

(Gently)

Always easier without a fuss. I know it's not nice, but really it's for the best. Surely you can see that. I'll be with you the whole time.

The boy shepherds Reagan like a child towards to the chair perched on the table.

BOY

Careful.

REAGAN

Wait. Wait. Wait. I don't want to-

The boy urges him forward.

Reagan tries meekly to resist, then slowly starts to cry.

The boy places Reagan's hand in the crook of his arm and patiently leads him closer to the chair

BOY

You have to. For Callum, sir.

REAGAN

The Blue Boy-

BOY

His name was Callum. A bit of a joker and a wind-up merchant, he was clever and funny. And he talked a lot. He had stories and daft jokes. They just didn't get him, the thick lads. But if you got him, he was- great.

(Pause)

And I miss him-

What happened to him? His remains sir?

Did anyone put flowers on him?

Reagan looks around. He's standing in front of the table and chair.

BOY

Can you step up now. That's it. One big step. You can do it- Let's make this a happy ending, shall we? It's what you wanted sir. How about a smile?

The boy helps Reagan onto the table. The noose dangles above.

BOY

Don't look. It's better if you don't look. Now up on the chair. Easy. Take your time. Don't fall.

Reagan awkwardly climbs up onto the chair.

BOY

Stand there for a moment. Still as you can. Take a deep breath. And another. Are you okay now? Yes? Say yes?

REAGAN

(Whispers)

Yes.

BOY

You might hear some music- when the music starts, you'll know what to do-

Reagan looks around for the boy, but the boy has disappeared.

REAGAN

(Frantic)

What music?

Where are you?

Boy?

Are you going to just leave me here?

I don't even know your name-

The boy reappears sitting on a high shelf. He looks down on Reagan- but Reagan doesn't notice him.

REAGAN

(Whimpers)

Oh God- Look at me. I was stupid. I wish ...

(Sobs)

Boy? Can you hear me? I know this sounds ... Oh God ... I should have ... I could have ... But I was busy with ... with ... and ... and ... then ... a boy died-

BOY

(In an other worldly whisper)

My friend-

REAGAN

Your friend-

(He looks around desperately-
grabs empty air)

Boy? Are you there?

(He peers unseeing up towards
the top shelf.)

I'd do anything to make it right- Tell me you understand- or
... or ... even if you don't understand, you take- you take-
pity on me- because ... because ... I'm sorry-

BOY

(In an other worldly whisper)

Prove it.

Reagan whips his head around- There's
no one there.

THE END

NOCTURNE

SCENE ONE

ANNA

(Whispers)

We took off our shoes. And socks. And paddled. You could see right down to the bottom. Sand, silt and pebbles, a darting fish turned murky as we dabbled along. And you yelped. So I bent over and I splashed you. I couldn't resist. The wind smelled of lake water. 'Don't wet my hair,' you screamed, too late. We had wet snarled hair and cold bare legs. I couldn't feel my fingers.

It was spring. You loved spring. And there was plenty of time. A whole afternoon. What else should we have done? We had to do something. Otherwise we got nervous waiting. It was the fresh air. Country air. Not like the air in the city. That's why we did it. We had spring fever. It made us restless. We spent too much time indoors, with mother going over and over the fingering. We never had any fun. And you loved fun. A bit of harmless fun.

Beautiful piano music ending in cacophony.

SCENE TWO

Anna's front door. Day. Judith lets herself in.

JUDITH

Mum? Mum?

She enters the front room.

JUDITH

What are you doing?

Mum!

ANNA

(Muffled)

What? Huh?

JUDITH

With that rag? On your knees? Your poor knees. Come out from under there.

ANNA

I want to get right behind the pedals Judith.

JUDITH

We discussed this.

ANNA

One minute.

JUDITH

We decided.

ANNA

Give me a minute.

JUDITH

You're eighty years old. Mum? Are you listening?

ANNA

Two minutes.

JUDITH

That's enough. Who dusts under a piano?

ANNA

This isn't a piano.

JUDITH

Get up.

ANNA

It's a Steinway.

JUDITH

I'll do that. Let me do that.

ANNA

I'm almost finished.
Sit down.

JUDITH

You sit down. I'll finish.

ANNA

You.

JUDITH

You.

ANNA

You.

JUDITH

I'm not. Not while you're ...

ANNA

All done. See that didn't take long.

Anna groans to her feet fending off
Judith's helping hand.

ANNA

I can do it.

She groans to straighten.

ANNA

Oh my god! Is that a scratch.

JUDITH

Where?

ANNA

On the double veneer.

JUDITH

I don't see anything. It's fine. Smooth and glassy.

ANNA

Look! You're not looking.

JUDITH

I'm looking.

ANNA

There.

JUDITH

I still don't see it.

ANNA

You don't see that?

JUDITH

I wouldn't call that a scratch. That's a mark. A tiny mark.
A fingerprint.

ANNA

I'm always so careful.

JUDITH

Maybe a careless neighbour? A workman? Piano tuner?

ANNA

No one comes in this room.

JUDITH

Let's leave it for now.

ANNA

You don't understand.

JUDITH

Mum.

ANNA

I played Chopin on this piano. Chopin! I had the lightest touch. Note perfect. The melody in the right hand. Arpeggio in the left. And the pedal! With the pedal, so emotional.

JUDITH

Sit down mum.

ANNA

You sit down.

JUDITH

You.

ANNA

Holding the notes, giving the piece drama.

JUDITH

Did you eat?

ANNA

Like opera. And romance.

JUDITH

You have to eat mum. What did I tell you about eating?

ANNA

The tears!

JUDITH

I'll make you a sandwich.

ANNA

I cried when I played Chopin.

JUDITH

Tuna fish?

ANNA

Too much emotion for me now. Now I prefer Mozart. Play Mozart for me darling.

JUDITH

White or rye?

ANNA

No thanks.

JUDITH

Half a sandwich?

ANNA

You never play for me anymore.

JUDITH

You forgot. I'm not that good.

ANNA

You were very good. But no self belief.

JUDITH

Not as good as you.

ANNA

Better.

JUDITH

Now I know you're lying.

ANNA

For me Judith. Please.

JUDITH

Listen to a cd. I'm putting the kettle on. After that, I'll pop to the shops. Get you a few things in.

ANNA

I can go to the shops myself.

JUDITH

For the heavy stuff.

ANNA

I went yesterday.

JUDITH

Maybe Hoover. Do a wash.

ANNA

There's nothing to do.

JUDITH

There must be something.

ANNA

(Thinks)

Okay. If you want to stay- You can de-scale the kettle.

JUDITH

With pleasure.

ANNA

And the oven needs cleaning ...

JUDITH

I can do that, while you put your feet up.

ANNA

The cupboards need sorting ...

JUDITH

(Warily)

Those big cupboards?

ANNA

I've not been through them in years, just throw it all out. When you're done, there's a few other little jobs.

JUDITH

That's probably enough.

ANNA

Now that I think of it, can you re-wire the toaster? Unclog the bathroom sink? Lift the drains? There's a funny smell.

Maybe peg out the washing. That would be nice this time of year. Or paint. Just the sitting room.

JUDITH

Are you finished?

ANNA

Or the bedroom.

JUDITH

All finished? Because if there's anything else? No? Good. You know what you're doing. You always do this.

ANNA

What?

JUDITH

Take something perfectly reasonable, a daughter offering to help her own mother, reasonable and appropriate, and turn it into ...

ANNA

A little spring clean? What's wrong with a little spring clean?

JUDITH

Something ridiculous.

ANNA

It is ridiculous.
I can manage.

JUDITH

It's normal for someone at your stage of life to need help occasionally.

ANNA

All right. Forget the painting. We'll hire a steam cleaner instead. One of those four bar super steamers. Use it everywhere. Rugs. Furniture. One with a jet nozzle for the corners and an extension tube. Do the ceiling. Do it in an afternoon. This afternoon. What do you think? Then you can play the piano for me. How does that sound? Judith?

JUDITH

Fine. Great. No problem. Except I'm not playing the piano. I'm out of practice. Well it's been a while. And there's plenty of other things to get on with. Now put your feet up.

ANNA

There's nothing wrong with my feet.

JUDITH

How are your hands?

ANNA

Fine. Same as always. Why?

JUDITH

They look cramped. Let me see.

ANNA

Leave me alone.

JUDITH

Can you feel your fingers?

ANNA

It's such a shame.

JUDITH

Make a fist.

ANNA

A beautiful piano doesn't get played. It goes out of tune when it isn't played. Remember the tone? Such a beautiful tone. Good things should be used. It might never get played again if you don't play it.

JUDITH

I'm not playing.

ANNA

Then I guess we better cover it over again.

JUDITH

Where's the dust sheet?

ANNA

Let's just look at it for a while.

JUDITH

I don't think that's a good idea. It'll just make you sad.

ANNA

That's real mahogany.
I'd play myself ...

Mum ...

JUDITH

If I could.

ANNA

Don't.

JUDITH

But my poor hands.

ANNA

Please.

JUDITH

All right.

I'll play.

ANNA

When?

JUDITH

Tomorrow?

ANNA

-.

JUDITH

This afternoon then, after I steam spray the ceiling.

ANNA

Do it now. Judith. Later, who knows I'm an old woman. Anything can happen.

JUDITH

Mum!

ANNA

I'm eighty years old. I'm not going to last forever.

JUDITH

You'll always be here to bully me.

ANNA

What do you mean?

JUDITH

Tell me things. Give me advice.

(Sighs)

What should I play?

ANNA

Play anything.

Judith starts to play Chopin's
Nocturne Opus 9, Number 2.

ANNA

(Whispers)

Anything but that.

Judith plays on with gusto. Music
swells then fades.

JUDITH

(Softly)

Everything was perfect until you got a splinter from the wooden seat and began to cry. Holding your finger out to me, then burying it in your soggy skirt. You weren't a child Charlotte, you were eighteen years old. And there we were without tweezers or the darning needle mother sterilised with a match. You wanted to call for help. But how could we? We'd be caught. And how would that look, two sweet young girls from the city, prized young girls? But it was spring! Not a cloud in the sky, then. And besides it wasn't that big. Well, it didn't look that big, or deep. Not from where we were standing. A beautiful, smallish, shallow, sparkling lake and a rowing boat. Where's the harm in that, we said.

Judith stops playing.

JUDITH

Mum? Mum?

ANNA

(As if waking up)

What?

JUDITH

You were miles away. I know I need practice. I told you. It's this section, isn't it?

Judith begins to play again. Anna
winces.

JUDITH

Does that sound right?

Mum?

You're shivering.

Let me get you a cardi.

ANNA

I'm fine.

Judith exits and returns with the sweater.

JUDITH

Put this on. Properly. Do you need help?

ANNA

No.

JUDITH

Aren't you going to button it? Button it up mum.

ANNA

I'll get too hot.
I'm fine.
Fiddly little buttons.
It's just my shoulders.

JUDITH

You have to look after yourself. Do up the buttons.

ANNA

I hate this time of year. You never know. One minute it seems so fair and the next ...

JUDITH

Shall I make a start on the cupboards then?

Judith opens the cupboards.

JUDITH

Where did you get all this stuff?

ANNA

Throw it out. It's mostly junk.

JUDITH

But there's lots of papers and ...

Sounds of Judith taking things out of a cupboard.

JUDITH

You don't want to throw away anything valuable. There's photographs. Look at this!

(Pause while Judith carefully
extracts some tinkling china)

ANNA

That was your grandmother's.

JUDITH

It's beautiful. Look! Rose sprays. And ... and ...?

ANNA

Forget-me-nots.

JUDITH

Saucers! Cake plates! Service for eight! Why did you put it away? The teapot is magnificent. A creamer and a sugar bowl-with a lid! Tiny gold handles! Look how delicate! How thin! And not a single break.

ANNA

You can have it.

JUDITH

It's yours. Probably very valuable. I'll wash everything and then ...

ANNA

I want you to have it. Why do I need it? Especially now? I don't, do I? Make a tea party for David. He loves good things.

Pause.

JUDITH

Have you come to a decision then?

ANNA

Enjoy it. It's yours.

JUDITH

About Lakeview?

ANNA

Hmmmm. Why do they call it that?

JUDITH

It's a nice name.

ANNA

There's no view. Or lake.

JUDITH

We can put the house on the market. It's no trouble. I'll look after everything, if that's what you're worried about. It's too big for one person. And drafty. You're isolated Mum along this road in a big old house. The plumbing's bad. There's no downstairs loo. The central heating's ancient and inefficient. Nothing works properly. It's dusty. And the stairs!

ANNA

The garden's lovely though. Isn't the garden lovely? Lovely vines. Big hedges.

JUDITH

Very big hedges. Big dark hedges. Long grass. Twisted vines. Thorns.

ANNA

Well I like it.

JUDITH

Just say yes.

ANNA

No.

JUDITH

This is not an emotional issue mum.

ANNA

For me it's emotional.

JUDITH

It's practical. You can't stay here alone. But you have options. If you let me hire someone to look after you, you could stay.

ANNA

No.

JUDITH

Or you could come live with me and David. We've got plenty of room.

ANNA

What does David say?

JUDITH

He's delighted.

ANNA

Is that what he said? Delighted?

JUDITH

You know David. He acted delighted.

(Pause)

Well ... he didn't act un-delighted.

ANNA

Did you even ask him?

JUDITH

He will be delighted ... when I ... er ... ask him.

ANNA

Forget it Judith. I know when I'm not wanted. He's a busy man. And so successful. He needs his privacy. I'm not imposing.

JUDITH

What's wrong with sheltered accommodation then? It'll be lovely. Comfy and cosy. A new beginning. People to meet. People like yourself. Meals to share. And if you need anything there's a manager on call, there's equipment, there's doctors who visit. Hairdressers. They come to you mum, in the flat.

ANNA

I've been very happy in this house, with your father.

JUDITH

But it's time to move on.

ANNA

In his youth he resembled Chopin.

JUDITH

Here we go.

ANNA

Surely you noticed. Everyone else did. Maybe you were too young. I think that's what first attracted me. He let his hair grow over his ears like Chopin to please me and he had that side parting. Clean shaven like Chopin too. Slightly built. Prone to illness, that little cough he had. Chopin coughed too. Both dead by forty.

JUDITH

He wouldn't have wanted you to hang on here.

ANNA

But ...

JUDITH

I don't like the idea of you all alone. This big old house, so many dark rooms. It's not safe. Especially at night. I worry about you alone at night ...

Judith's voice fades.

ANNA

(Softly)

There was a big house beyond the lake where they were preparing. They had thrown open the doors and put all the electric lights on even though it was afternoon. We knew it was there. And when we looked, we got butterflies. So we told each other not to look. A patron was visiting and later we were to be presented with a gold ring. We were excited but jumpy. You were more jumpy than me, naturally. And your hair was wet. And you yelped.

JUDITH

(Interrupting Anna's reverie)

What?

ANNA

Nothing. I'm fine.

JUDITH

I think I should stay tonight.

ANNA

I don't even need you during the day. Maybe once a week.

JUDITH

I'll spend the night.

ANNA

Nonsense.

JUDITH

What if you had a fall?

ANNA

I'm tougher than you think. Tougher and more capable. I'm just taking it easy because you're here. I've put up with a lot in my lifetime.

JUDITH

I know.

ANNA

I'm not an invalid.

JUDITH

I'm staying.

ANNA

What do you think I need 24 hour care?

JUDITH

For your own good.

ANNA

With my hands they'll turn me into an invalid.

JUDITH

It's sheltered accommodation not a nursing home.

ANNA

Let's wait and see.

JUDITH

We've waited and seen.

ANNA

You don't know.

JUDITH

I know.

ANNA

You don't understand.

I can't go.

JUDITH

You can.

Long pause.

ANNA

Where's your coat? David'll be waiting.

JUDITH

David can take care of himself.

ANNA

Who's going to get his dinner?

JUDITH

He'll eat out.

ANNA

He's tired. All that drilling.

JUDITH

It's his job.

ANNA

On his feet the whole day. He needs a home-cooked meal.
Dentistry is very stressful. I was reading an article ...

JUDITH

I'm staying here.

ANNA

You're going home.
Don't you want to go home?

JUDITH

Of course I want to go home.

ANNA

Everything all right at home?

JUDITH

I couldn't be happier Mum. You know that. David is ... well
he's so ... thoughtful ... and everything is ... well ...
great.

ANNA

As long as you're happy.

JUDITH

Just like you and dad.

ANNA

I cannot bear to think of you unhappy.

JUDITH

We sit down together. He tells me about his day ...

ANNA

Does he bring you a cheesecake?

JUDITH

Why don't I stay tonight? I've hardly begun doing all the things you've asked me to do.

ANNA

You father used to bring home two slices of cheesecake. Or a bottle of wine. Then we listened to music. Do you and David ...?

JUDITH

In the front room.

ANNA

That's a beautiful room he made for you.

JUDITH

Bought.

ANNA

So successful. Such a good earner.

JUDITH

I sit on the settee and David sits in his chair.

ANNA

Not together? Why doesn't he sit with you on the settee? Your father used to sit with ...

JUDITH

He likes to look at me. From across the room. Sometimes. Sometimes he just retreats. He has phone calls to make and other things to do.

ANNA

He's a professional Judith. You married a professional.

JUDITH

You can't bother him while he's on the phone with the door closed.

ANNA

Of course not!

JUDITH

If he's home at all. He's always working late these days, if you must know.

ANNA

Celebrities he treats. Didn't you tell me?

JUDITH

One celebrity.

ANNA

They don't keep office hours those celebrities. If he's not home yet you can put your feet up. You look exhausted. Now go.

JUDITH

If you're sure? Are you sure?

ANNA

I'm not a child. Go on.

JUDITH

All right. But I'm coming tomorrow. First thing. And every day after that. Until you make a decision.

She gives her mum a kiss

JUDITH

There's fresh made soup I made with bread.

ANNA

I can cook for myself.

JUDITH

I don't want you lighting the cooker. Use the microwave.

ANNA

That was an accident.

JUDITH

An explosion.

ANNA

I wouldn't call it an explosion.

JUDITH

You could have been killed.

ANNA

But not a drop of blood.

JUDITH

They still aren't right, your eyebrows.

ANNA

They're okay.

JUDITH

Don't stay up too late.

ANNA

Go. Goodbye. I'll be fine.

Judith exits.

Anna, sighing, sits at the piano. Opens the lid. She plays the first few notes of the Chopin Nocturne slowly and badly. Sobs in frustration.

ANNA

Oh Charlotte!

SCENE THREE

Anna's bedroom. Midnight. A clock ticks. Anna lightly snores. Anna tosses and turns. Sits up in bed.

ANNA

(Whispers)

Is someone there? Charlotte? I said, you decide, didn't I? I left it up to you. I wasn't that keen. It wasn't my idea. We decided together. It was a mutual decision. I didn't really care one way or another. There were other things I could have done, on my own, but I wanted to do something with you. You loved it when we did things together. I thought you would thank me. You never even thanked me.

You shrieked when you got in.

Nobody heard but me. Nobody saw either. It was fine, Charlotte. You didn't always have to ask permission in those days. It wasn't even tied up that tightly. And we were going to bring it right back.

SCENE FOUR

Day two. Anna's front room. Morning. Judith is already there, making a noisy breakfast. Eggs sputtering in a pan. Anna enters, having just got up.

ANNA

What time is it?

JUDITH

Seven fifteen.

ANNA

So early?

JUDITH

How do you want your eggs?

ANNA

Just a cup of tea please.

JUDITH

And a piece of toast.

ANNA

No thanks. Do you smell anything?

JUDITH

No. What?

ANNA

Damp?

JUDITH

(Sniffs)

Where?

ANNA

I dunno. Everywhere.

JUDITH

Are you all right? Did you sleep? Let me look at you. You look tired.

ANNA

Stop fussing. It's you who looks tired. What are you doing here so early? It's David you should be making breakfast for. I always made breakfast for your father.

JUDITH

He gets a coffee out.

ANNA

So maybe he isn't hungry.

JUDITH

I've been going through the photographs.

ANNA

Just put them all back where you found them. Or throw them away. I don't care.

JUDITH

Look. Here's one of me as a baby. Me and dad? Don't you want them? Look at this one.

ANNA

Turn off those eggs.

JUDITH

Who's this? Is this Charlotte? You and Charlotte?

ANNA

They'll go rubbery.

JUDITH

She's very pretty.
What's she wearing?
Tell me about her.

ANNA

There's nothing to tell. Put it away. She died.

JUDITH

You never talk about her. Your own sister.

ANNA

She was a pain.

(Pause)

She was difficult all right. Jealous. I was the talented one. And your grandmother focused on me. Everyone did. They left poor Charlotte out. Which made her very unhappy. She loved music and went with me to all my recitals, but she wasn't musical, she couldn't even turn the pages for me. But she dressed up and came along anyway. Sat in the front row watching. It put me off to be honest. As we got older it became more of a problem. She was angry, resentful. We never really got on. You know how it is with sisters.

JUDITH

I don't actually.
(Whispers)
How did she die?

ANNA
(Softly)

We weren't even changed into our good dresses, dresses with seed pearls along the yoke and flounces. It was nothing more than a suggestion. You loved suggestions, little cakes, flounces, seed pearls, gold rings, spring air, frilly socks, fun, doing things together, having your own way. You hated clouds, soggy dresses, limp socks, wind, wet hair, dirty hands, splashing, splinters ... water.

JUDITH

Mum? Was it before or after your accident Auntie Charlotte died? Mum! Are you paying attention? I don't even know what happened to her? And she looks so nice. Beautiful features, lovely hair. It must have been hard for her like you said. Living in your shadow. She was older, is that right? Is this the only photograph? Let me have it framed for you. She doesn't look angry at all. Or resentful. She looks confident and happy. And then she died. How old was she when she died?

ANNA

I don't remember.

JUDITH

How can you not remember?

ANNA

Eighteen.

JUDITH

Your poor mother.
What happened to her?
Did she get ill?

ANNA
(Flounders)

No ... er .. Not ill. Not physically ill. Was she ... well, I mean ...

Anna can't go on.

JUDITH

Mum? I have a right to know. After all these years. Surely. She was my auntie.

ANNA

She wasn't very nice.

JUDITH

Yeah but how ... ?

ANNA

(Holding back a sob)

I'll tell you later.

JUDITH

When?

Anna starts to cry.

JUDITH

Oh mum. Don't. I'm sorry. Please.

ANNA

Never mind me. It was years ago.

JUDITH

Let's talk about something else.

ANNA

No. You're right. There are things I want to tell you.

JUDITH

Maybe later when you're feeling better.

Judith turns on the taps. The sound of water gushing into the sink.

ANNA

(Distressed)

What are you doing?

JUDITH

Just washing up.

ANNA

Turn it off. We're talking.

JUDITH

Why don't you go back to bed for a while? It's early. And later, if you're up to it, we'll go out. Go out for a walk, or the hairdressers. Would you like me to see if they can fit you in at the hairdressers?

Judith's voice fades.

ANNA

(Softly)

Water is a common fear, the way it moves or stands, still and deep, dark and cold, the deeper the colder. Dizzy you said. Kill or cure, I told you. And I was right!

JUDITH

You're shivering again Mum. Mum?

ANNA

What?

JUDITH

You must have dozed off.

ANNA

I never.

JUDITH

Your hands are like ice. How about a bath? Then a lie down? Nice deep bath? I'll run you a bath. Mum? Where are you going. Mum! Come back!

SCENE FIVE

The hallway outside Anna's front room. Later. Judith is practicing the Chopin nocturne. Anna enters. Judith stops abruptly.

JUDITH

You're up. How do you feel? Better? I got the steam cleaner while you were sleeping and listen Mum ...

ANNA

I wasn't sleeping.

JUDITH

While I was out, I had a great idea. Let's have a tea party. This afternoon.

ANNA

Tea?

JUDITH

We'll use grandma's tea set.

ANNA

Party?

JUDITH

Nice things should be used. Isn't that what you always say? And we'll invite the neighbours. So what do you think? Good plan.

ANNA

(Without enthusiasm)

Very good.

JUDITH

Really?

ANNA

Quite good.

JUDITH

Only quite good?

ANNA

Less than quite good if I'm honest.

JUDITH

Why not? We'll invite Mrs What'shername next door?

ANNA

She moved.

JUDITH

The new neighbours then.

ANNA

They work.

JUDITH

What about the woman across the street?

ANNA

Your father never liked her, or her husband.

JUDITH

The couple down the road you used to play cards with then?

ANNA

I'd rather not. They don't go anywhere without their dog.

JUDITH

Okay. How about old Mister Enright?

ANNA

He died.

JUDITH

I didn't know.

ANNA

I just don't feel like a big fuss today.

JUDITH

But I bought-

ANNA

Some other day.

JUDITH

And I polished-

ANNA

You have to invite people ahead of time. They're probably all busy. Too busy. Really Judith. It's too much trouble.

JUDITH

It's no trouble.

ANNA

I'm too tired.

JUDITH

Still tired?

ANNA

I told you. I didn't sleep last night.

JUDITH

What's wrong Mum?

ANNA

Nothing's wrong.

JUDITH

Tell me.

ANNA

Just one of those nights. Must have been the excitement. The Music. The talk. The noise. You. Finding the tea set. Another time. Maybe tomorrow.

JUDITH

Tomorrow you'll have a different excuse. You spend too much time alone.

ANNA

I like my own company. No one bothers me here. That's why I've decided. I don't want to move into sheltered accommodation. Not yet anyway.

JUDITH

But ... but ...

ANNA

You said it was up to me. I could decide. So I decided.

JUDITH

You wouldn't have to be with people all the time.

ANNA

Those old people, all they do is complain. The food won't be nice.

JUDITH

You tried the food. Remember? We had lunch there. You liked it.

ANNA

That was a one off. The rooms are too small.

JUDITH

They were lovely.

ANNA

I'd miss my things.

JUDITH

What things? You'd have your own flat. They let you take your things, mementos, ornaments, papers, photographs, sheet music, tea sets. Mum? I want you to promise me you'll think again.

ANNA

You're just trying to get rid of me.

JUDITH

Never! I love spending time with you. You and me. We've got so much in common. Like sisters. So many things to tell each other. When we get talking ... the memories, the stories, the

confidences, the things I can tell you that I can't tell anyone else. I hope you feel the same. Mum?

Awkward silence.

ANNA

Of course I do.

JUDITH

And I'll tell you things.

ANNA

What things?

JUDITH

I don't know. Things. I'll think of something. Isn't there anything you want to tell me?

ANNA

I don't think so.

JUDITH

I know you had a terrible accident and you hurt your hands badly when you were a child-

ANNA

Young adult.

JUDITH

But I don't know the circumstances.

ANNA

The gory details.

JUDITH

Isn't about time you told me about that?

ANNA

There's nothing to tell.

JUDITH

I understand why you never wanted to talk about it and I respect that, but, you were a pianist, a child prodigy, and it changed your life forever.

ANNA

You're right. I should tell you.

Long pause.

JUDITH

When?

ANNA

When I'm ready.

JUDITH

You probably ought to tell me now, or, well, soon. We might not have much more time and ...

ANNA

You mean I might not have much more time?

JUDITH

I didn't mean that. All right maybe I did. Why not? There's so much I don't know.

ANNA

I'd tell you if I could. But I don't remember. I blacked out.

JUDITH

In the boat?

ANNA

So they tell me.

JUDITH

What were you doing in a boat?

No response.

JUDITH

If you tried, maybe you would remember.

ANNA

I don't want to remember.

JUDITH

(Sighs)

Okay tell me about Auntie Charlotte then. Tell me about when you were children. Did you spend a lot of time together or not? Maybe you were too busy. Practicing? Giving recitals? While you were practicing what did she do? Did she like drawing? Games?

Judith's voice fades.

ANNA

(Softly)

You held up your hands, and I held up my hands and we measured hand to hand all the way to our fingertips. As usual yours were longer. But mine, more beautiful. We started drifting then as the trees on a distant bank filled with wind. There were big dark clouds overhead, flat on the bottom and rounded at the top. Leaves bobbing in the strengthening current and the fallen branches of a dead tree.

JUDITH

Mum. Mum! You were miles away. Are you cold? You look cold. How about a cup of tea? I know, let's have that tea party, just you and me right now? Tea for two with real napkins and doillies. Why not? Think of Grandma. Grandma would have liked it. And ... well ... you've got to make an effort sometimes. You don't want to be lying around all day in a dressing gown. You can put on a nice dress and your cardi with the seed pearls.

ANNA

Now?

JUDITH

Why not? Go on. You'll feel better.

ANNA

I won't.

JUDITH

I'll comb your hair. Like Auntie Charlotte's in the photograph. I can do a French knot. Or a beehive. Whatever you want. First go put on something nice. But warm. No more shivering.

Anna exits.

JUDITH

(Calls after her)

Do you need any help?

Anna slams her bedroom door.

SCENE SIX

Anna's bedroom

As Anna struggles into her clothes, muttering with the difficulty, her

stiff clumsy hands, buttons and zips,
we hear the strains of Chopin's
Nocturne. Is Judith practicing again?

ANNA

(Mutters)

Damn useless hands. Buttons. Zips.

Music gets louder, then softer
continuing under Anna's monologue.

ANNA

(Whispers)

There was plenty of time. But you were a worrier. Seriously Charlotte, what was there to worry about? We were all prepared. We'd even practiced in our recital clothes so we'd be more comfortable. If anyone should have been worried, it was me. I was the one performing, if you know what I mean. While you just sat there and did what you always did. You had it easy, no matter what anyone said, while I ...

(With anger)

Did you mark my piano? Are those your grubby fingerprints on my piano? I don't want you here Charlotte. Leaving your mark.

(Softly again)

It felt very peaceful gliding across the lake. No one but you and me, a rowing boat and two oars. (Uneasy) Yes. Ha. Ha. Oars. And in the distance a man shouting. But I was good with the oars. Graceful, strong. Until. Well we shouldn't have stopped. You were the one wanted to stop and drift and dream. But you weren't dreaming, were you? You were elsewhere, your hair drying in snarls, going over and over in your mind what was coming. But why Charlotte? Why ruin a perfectly lovely moment with that? That was what I was thinking when I got to my feet, lifted one oar out of its lock and splashed you again. You screamed, then you laughed. You thought it was funny, admit it! So I did it again. But this time ...

Oars can slip. It happens. To everyone. Who would guess something so heavy could sink so fast? It wasn't all my fault. I was trying to entertain you. To divert you.

(Chopin's Nocturne Opus 9 No 2
is heard in the distance,
getting louder.)

'We'll never get back in time now,' you sobbed. But we would have. I was coping with one oar, first on one side and then on the other, lifting the heavy oar from side to side, getting oar-burn. And then suddenly, this beautiful music started drifting out of the big house and across the lake and we heard

it, faintly at first, in the way you smell distant perfume or cigarette smoke, because the piano recital we were supposed to take part in had already begun. And it broke us.

(Music grows louder. Louder
and louder.)

ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN

Anna's front room. Later. Judith carries in a tray of tea and cakes. Anna is unimpressed.

JUDITH

I've found sugar tongs. Did they belong to grandma too? I think they're silver. Look. I polished them.

ANNA

I thought you were super steaming.

JUDITH

I bought sugar cubes and petit fours especially for you.

ANNA

We're paying for that machine by the day.

JUDITH

Shall I pour?

ANNA

Did you use the extension hose? It smells damp.

JUDITH

Where?

ANNA

Everywhere.

JUDITH

It smells fine. I don't smell anything. I thought we were going to celebrate.

ANNA

What?

JUDITH

Being together. Like sisters. I'll pour.

ANNA

Go ahead. If you must.

JUDITH

But it's lovely. Have a cake.

ANNA

No thanks. Did you even start?

JUDITH

In the dining room. It's not as easy as it looks. And I had to lug it from the High Street.

ANNA

One shot cleaning.

JUDITH

The ceilings in this house are really high.

(Pause)

Drink your tea then. Isn't this fun?

(She takes a sip)

Mum? Why aren't you drinking?

ANNA

Too hot.

JUDITH

Let me give you a bit more cream. That's real cream.

ANNA

I'm fine.

JUDITH

Such a beautiful cup.

JUDITH

Have you washed these cups properly?

JUDITH

Like a doll's cup.

ANNA

They were very dusty.

JUDITH

And the handles! They must have had tiny fingers in those days. I feel like a proper lady. Tell me what do ladies talk about, when they're drinking their tea? I think they must gossip. Have you heard any gossip? No? Me neither.

(Pause)

Go on mum. It must have cooled down by now.

ANNA

I'll wait.

JUDITH

It'll get cold. Have a cake then, while you wait. They're French. Petit Four. Your favourite. So dainty. Means little oven mum, in French. Isn't that cute? Like doll's food. Have a pink one. Or would you rather yellow? Chopin ate them. With George Sand on rainy afternoons ... in Paris.

ANNA

-.

JUDITH

Okay. You're determined to be miserable, aren't you? You won't even try. I'm really making an effort here you know. But you can't even pretend to be happy or appreciate my going to the trouble of planning something special for you. For us. Is it so hard to drink a lovely cup of tea and eat a beautiful cake I bought from a bakery, a real bakery? Do you know how hard it is to find a real bakery these days? A real French bakery? These aren't fondant fancies you know. They're petit fours.

Anna picks up her cup with difficulty.

JUDITH

Thank you.

The cup rattles loudly in Anna's shaking hands as she tries to bring it to her lips.

JUDITH

Mum?

Anna gasps. The cup falls from her grasp, shattering on the parquet floor.

JUDITH

Oh Mum! Are you all right? You didn't burn yourself did you?

ANNA

No. I'm fine. I just couldn't.

JUDITH

Of course not.

ANNA

I don't know why. I could hold it now.

JUDITH

I should have known. The handle's tiny.

ANNA

Pour me another.

JUDITH

I'll get you a mug.

ANNA

I don't want a mug.

JUDITH

They're worse aren't they? And dressing's more difficult now too, isn't it?

ANNA

I get by.

JUDITH

Are you sure? Your hands are just hanging. Can you hold a pen? A fork?

ANNA

Don't make a song and dance Judith.

JUDITH

I could help, if you let me.

ANNA

You always make a song and dance.

JUDITH

How about a massage? Give me your hands?

(Takes Anna's hands)

They're very cold.

ANNA

I'm not an invalid. I don't need ...

JUDITH

I know you don't need.

ANNA

(Pulls away)

It won't help.

JUDITH

It might. There must be something I can do. Heating pad? Ice? Pain killers? New medication? I'll make you a doctors appointment. Have you told the gp how much difficulty you're having? There's no need to suffer in silence.

ANNA

Just be quiet and leave me alone.

JUDITH

How about if I play the piano for you? You'd like that wouldn't you?

ANNA

Don't trouble yourself.

JUDITH

It's no trouble. Yesterday you wanted to hear me play.

ANNA

Well I'm not in the mood now. Maybe later. I've got a headache starting.

JUDITH

I'll play something soothing. It's because I'm rubbish, isn't it?

ANNA

Not at all.

JUDITH

Don't try to spare my feelings, I was rubbish.

ANNA

Nonsense. You were out of practice.

JUDITH

You hated it. Be honest.

ANNA

Honestly, I had some minor criticisms.

JUDITH

Maybe it's my hand positions?

ANNA

Very minor.

JUDITH

Or the tempo?
What do you think?

ANNA

I think I've heard enough for now. Maybe later. Or another piece. It's me. I'm ... well ... a perfectionist. And it was not ... well ... the way I would have interpreted the piece. And your fingering. A little work on the fingering that's all Judith. I'd show you but ...

JUDITH

I wish I could have heard you play. A child prodigy. Isn't that what they said?

ANNA

I haven't played that piece in more than sixty years.

JUDITH

It's so frustrating. If only you could have recorded.

ANNA

A recording was scheduled. Chopin. Live.

JUDITH

Really? It's just such a tragedy!

ANNA

Don't make a song and dance again.

JUDITH

I ought to buy a piano. But David's not keen.

ANNA

He's probably waiting for the right one. You can't play just any piano.

JUDITH

He needs his peace and quiet.

ANNA

Quite right.

JUDITH

He's never home. I thought you loved Chopin? Do you know the story? The nocturnes were written for the wife of Camille Pleyel. A French pianist and the owner of the Salle Pleyel, a premier concert hall in Paris where Chopin performed.

ANNA

These days I love Mozart.

JUDITH

Pleyel's wife, Marie Felicite Denise was also a pianist. They separated, Camille and Marie after multiple infidelities. His and her's. Mostly his I should think.

It's always the man isn't it? A late disappointing marriage. I can almost see him, drilling his musicians, his celebrities, making money. I don't think Chopin and Marie were ever lovers because there is so much longing in the piece. I wonder what she looked like. Poor thing.

ANNA

Forget Chopin. Play Mozart.

JUDITH

You mean play something simpler? Not as technically demanding?

ANNA

Play the Turkish March. I love that one.

JUDITH

No.

ANNA

I'd like to hear Mozart.

JUDITH

I'd like to play Chopin. But I'm not good enough, am I? Never good enough. Or maybe I was nervous with you listening.

ANNA

Okay play the B-flat minor. Number 1.

JUDITH

I want to play the E-Flat major. Number 2.

ANNA

One.

JUDITH

Two.

(Pause)

Is there some reason you don't want to hear two, other than my rubbish playing? Listen mum.

Judith begins to play the nocturne again.

ANNA

(Whispers)

Listen Charlotte. Do you remember? It opens with a legato, the graceful upward leaps with pretty little tones and trills. The subordinate melody played rubato, reflective in mood until it builds to passion. I would play it for you if I could. Ascending to a higher register and executed with great force, like a swiftly moving current, finally reaching the loudest fortissimo ... After that, the Nocturne subsides, ending with a moment of terrible breathless calm.

JUDITH

Mum. Mum? I thought we could go over it together, section by section.

ANNA

(As if waking up)

What was that?

JUDITH

I thought you could advise me.

ANNA

You want my advice? Play the Mozart.

JUDITH

I just need practice.

ANNA

You never liked to practice.

JUDITH

When I was a child. I was a child. You made me stay in and practice hours a day. Everyday.

ANNA

And you still blame me.

JUDITH

I was never going to be as good as you.

ANNA

You might have been better.

JUDITH

You forced me.

ANNA

You needed discipline. Talent you had. I remember my own mother making me practice. I loved every minute of it. My mind never wandered. Scales and arpeggios. Even away from the piano, I thought of nothing but my music, analysing the piece I was working on, listening to it mentally, singing each line, uncovering the themes and harmonies, the compositional strategy.

JUDITH

That's what I want to do with the Chopin now.

ANNA

I had perfect pitch and recognising a note and it's pitch was as easy for me as recognising a colour. I loved my piano. This piano. It was like it was part of me. Getting a new piece was so exciting. Interpreting the passages. Memorising them. Bit by bit. Finishing each line before moving onto the next. Fixing it in my head, my hands. Until. Never mind. There was nothing in the world I would rather do. And I have my mother to thank for that. Bless her.

JUDITH

Well I didn't feel that way.

ANNA

(Sadly)

You had no ambition.

JUDITH

You had too much. I just wanted to play for fun. I wasn't you.

ANNA

You never heard me play.

(Pause)

I'm not what you think I am.

JUDITH

Really? Don't pretend. It's patronising.

ANNA

I'm not pretending.

JUDITH

Neither am I. I was good but not good enough. I knew that. Everyone knew that. Only you didn't know it. Sometimes I think you don't have perfect pitch.

ANNA

I have perfect pitch.

JUDITH

Not where I'm concerned.

ANNA

Isn't it time you went home and started dinner for your husband?

JUDITH

That's it! I'm never playing for you again! Ever!

ANNA

Don't be ridiculous. Go home. It's late.

JUDITH

It's not late.

ANNA

By the time you get home it'll be late. I always made your father a nice dinner. Your father loved a nice dinner.

JUDITH

I know. You've told me. A hundred times.

ANNA

And don't come tomorrow either. Take the day off.

JUDITH

And what would you like me to do with my day off? Go to the hairdresser? Because when was the last time I went to the hairdresser? And isn't it tragic because my hair used to be so ... so ... And there are many ... many ... other women around with perfect hair ... and nails. Well groomed women who look younger. Or are younger.

ANNA

You're just tired. It's been a long day. You're trying to do too much.

JUDITH

It's no trouble.

ANNA

Promise you'll stay home.

JUDITH

I like coming to see you.

ANNA

What about David? Does he even know you're here? He'll be waiting. At least phone. Tell him you're on your way.

JUDITH

You don't understand. When we're together ... it's not like you and dad. He loves me in his own way of course. But David is ... well ... he's different when you're around. In his own home he's ... and I think ... it's more than disinterest ... it's like ... You wouldn't stand for it mum. Dad was devoted to you and ...

ANNA

I want you to take back that super steamer. I never should have suggested it.

JUDITH

He comes home and I think I can smell ...

ANNA

Well hire someone to do it.

JUDITH

And he's been drinking.

ANNA

You're poor arms.

JUDITH

I've tried to be understanding.
But it's too late.
Are you listening to me?

ANNA

Of course I'm listening to you. I'm all ears. Is there anything else you want to say?

JUDITH

No. Forget it. Not really.

ANNA

Good. Because you had me worried.

JUDITH

Don't think about it.

ANNA

You brought it up. You're probably just missing David. You're very lucky Judith.

JUDITH

I should go.

ANNA

A rich dentist. Who would have thought. You and him? Never mind he was married before. You want my advice? Be patient. Give him the benefit of the doubt. That man plucked you off the shelf Judith.

JUDITH

Mum please. Women are not on the shelf anymore.

ANNA

You were forty-two.

JUDITH

See you tomorrow, all right mum?

ANNA

You're not coming tomorrow remember? Your staying home and looking after your lovely husband. Give him a kiss for me. And Judith, comb your hair before you go.

Judith exits.

SCENE EIGHT

Anna's bedroom. Midnight.
A door creaks open.

ANNA

(Sits up)

Is someone there?
Charlotte?
Is that you?

(A distant trickle of water,
then running water, then the
sound of something falling
into water with a loud splash)

ANNA

(Gasps)

Go away Charlotte. Please. Leave me alone. It wasn't my fault. There were rocks. You didn't see them either. Mostly they were underwater. Solid and firm. We didn't know anything about rocks. Or currents. We hardly left the house. Currants were something we spat out of buns. And big rocks were not supposed

to be in water. I was looking up not down. I should have done something. I might have ... if we hadn't been talking ...

I can't even remember his name now. Can you? He was nice looking though, tall and fair. Not at all musical. More athletic ... You would have done the same Charlotte, if it was me he fancied, you would have. But you couldn't see it. You never were able to see a problem from another person's point of view. How do you think it made me feel? It was as if I didn't exist. He looked like a young Chopin, as I recall, except taller, a better build, with nice hair. No, I did not lift my skirt and show my legs when he came around. No, he was not beginning to take notice of me. And so what if he was? I just did it for fun ... But you couldn't understand ... and you started to cry ... and your eyes went all squinty, and your mouth went all gulpy, and your nose was disgusting, and by the time we realised what was happening

Sound of a boat colliding with rocks.

SCENE NINE

Anna's front room. Morning. Judith is practicing. She stops abruptly when Anna enters.

JUDITH

What time do you call this?

ANNA

I thought you weren't coming in today.

JUDITH

It's half eleven. Another bad night?

ANNA

No so bad.

JUDITH

If you don't want me to come in everyday you have to make a decision.

ANNA

I've already decided.

JUDITH

I thought you were going to think again.

ANNA

I have thought again.
I'm staying.

JUDITH

But why?

From somewhere the sound of dripping
water, getting louder and louder.

ANNA

It's complicated.
I've got my reasons.

JUDITH

What reasons?

ANNA

What's that? Is there a tap dripping?

JUDITH

What reasons mum?

ANNA

Those places are noisy. I'll never sleep. Old people wandering
around all night. And ... and ... teeth. I don't want to get
someone else's teeth.

JUDITH

That won't happen.

ANNA

Men's teeth.

JUDITH

You don't even wear dentures.
It's not a nursing home.

ANNA

I know that.

JUDITH

So what is it? Really?

ANNA

Nothing.

JUDITH

You're just being stubborn then. Just giving me a hard time.
I know it's not easy, but we'll take it step by step. Shall

I arrange another visit? I thought you were warming to the idea. I thought that was why you wanted me to clear out the cupboards. I thought that was what I was doing. It's a lovely place. You're lucky to get in. You'll have your own bed-sitting room. Your own key. There's a beautiful garden.

ANNA

I have a beautiful garden.

JUDITH

Outings, housekeeping, your own little microwave and fridge. What is it mum? Really? You know you can't stay here. Deep down inside, you know.

ANNA

I'm not leaving my piano!

JUDITH

Is that it?

ANNA

Yes!

JUDITH

You don't play!
We'll bring your cds.
You can still listen to music.

ANNA

I like looking at it.

JUDITH

We'll take a photograph.
All you do is worry about it.
It makes you sad.
Mum?
Where are you going?
You can't just walk away.

Anna exits.

SCENE TEN

Anna's bedroom. Later.

Sounds of Judith playing the piano. That piece again. Judith falters. Plays a difficult passage over and over. Finally gets it right. Plays with more confidence. Anna sobs.

The Nocturne continues under Anna's monologue.

ANNA

Fingers Charlotte. More nerve endings than almost anywhere else in the body. That's why the sense of touch is in the hands. Imagine what it is like to have no sense of touch in your fingers like the branches of a dead tree. There's twenty-seven bones in the human hand. I believe I broke them all, when I knelt over the side of the boat and tried to stop us crashing into the rocks.

Judith knocks loudly on Anna's bedroom door.

JUDITH

(From outside the door)

Mum?

ANNA

Charlotte?

(Urgent)

When I trapped both hands between the boat and the rocks with the force of the current, I heard an echo like a plane going past, not really a sound, a pressure in the ears, that's all I remember. After that, I would never play the piano again.

Judith taps on the door.

JUDITH

Mum?

Who are you talking to?

Judith enters.

JUDITH

I brought you a cup of tea mum. Are you all right?

ANNA

I ... er ... I changed my mind Judith.
I'll go.

JUDITH

Drink your tea mum. You're shaking.

ANNA

Did you hear what I said? I want you to sell the house.

JUDITH

Are you sure?

ANNA

You were right all along. I just didn't want to admit it. I've been stubborn. Selfish. This house isn't safe. Is it? Things could happen here to an old woman on her own.

(Her voice shivers)

There are dangers.

JUDITH

You won't regret it. It's a lovely sunny flat.

ANNA

On one condition.

JUDITH

(Wary)

What condition?

ANNA

I want you to promise to look after my piano.

JUDITH

Of course mum. I'll make sure I find it a good home. Perhaps a music school?

ANNA

No! I want you to have it.

JUDITH

Me?

ANNA

Who else? I want you to have it in your home. And I want you to play it and cherish it, like I did. You and David can play duets, he plays doesn't he?

JUDITH

Not well.

ANNA

I wish I could have played duets with your father.

JUDITH

I don't need David ... in order to play.

ANNA

Of course not. You can play on your own, whenever you like. Then, who knows, you might want to give some small recitals for friends or teach. Well? It's my gift to you.

JUDITH

I ... I can't mum.

ANNA

Can't what?

JUDITH

Take it.

ANNA

(Hurt, confused)

I don't understand. Judith? It's a Steinway! Don't you want it?

JUDITH

It's not that I don't. It's just ... It won't fit.

ANNA

Your front room is enormous.

JUDITH

The door's small.

ANNA

That's not a problem. They'll shift it through the windows. They do it all the time.

JUDITH

I'll have to ask David. He's very finicky. About furniture. I can't just say yes. I can't promise to play either.

ANNA

It's the most valuable thing I own.

JUDITH

I think I might find it threatening. I'd like to say yes, really I would but ... but ...

ANNA

What is it Judith?

JUDITH

Nothing.
I'll take it.

ANNA

And you'll fetch me out to visit so I can come and hear you play?

JUDITH

It's not a prison. But ... but on your days out you might want to do something else. Something special. And, well, I'm not sure I ever want to play for you again.

ANNA

Nonsense. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to see my piano in your house. And hear you play.

JUDITH

Mum. There's something I have to tell you first.

ANNA

I'm all ears.

JUDITH

Something important.

(She hesitates)

It's hard to explain. Let me start again.

(More hesitation)

Never mind.

ANNA

Never mind what?

JUDITH

I don't know. Nothing. Listen, it's Friday night. Why don't I stay for dinner? We'll make a chicken together. You and me? You can tell me exactly what to do?

ANNA

When Charlotte and I were little girls we used to have real Friday night dinners. My mother lit the candles and it was like a celebration.

SCENE ELEVEN

Anna's dining room. Evening. Anna and Judith are just finishing dinner.

JUDITH

That was delicious.

ANNA

Just how my mother made it when Charlotte and I were girls. I remember one Friday night we were roller skating up and down the back lane with the other children.

JUDITH

You never told me. I've always wanted to hear these stories.

ANNA

It was spring and we didn't want to come in when Mama called. Especially Charlotte.

(Laughs)

Naughty Charlotte pretended not to hear.

JUDITH

And you were with her?

ANNA

Of course I was with her.

JUDITH

On roller skates? Didn't you have to be indoors practicing? I thought you were always practicing.

ANNA

Mama said five minutes only but Charlotte skated away. She was going too fast and she must have got scared. Or maybe she tried to stop herself because she skated right into a fence, with pointed railings. And she brought her hand down smack on one. So we ran inside to show mama. But mama and papa were already sitting at the table with the friends they'd invited discussing Chopin's last public appearance. He weighed less than 99 pounds and could barely feel his fingers. Papa was talking, telling the others how Chopin, always the romantic, requested his body be opened after death and his heart returned to Warsaw. Papa said maybe he would do the same. And they all laughed. They didn't know we were there. George Sand's son-in-law made Chopin's death mask and a cast of his left hand, his sister carried his heart, Papa told them, preserved in alcohol, to Warsaw, which was when Mama looked up and saw us, but didn't even notice Charlotte's hand. She was more concerned with the story we might have heard ... Finally she noticed and started to sob and wail. Because it was Charlotte who hurt her hand. If it would have been me, she wouldn't have cared.

JUDITH

I thought you were the one she doted on. With your talent. You were the one who had to take care of her hands.

ANNA

It wasn't even that bad. Charlotte just made a fuss.

JUDITH

But when you really hurt your hands ... ?

ANNA

Let's have a cup of tea and a petit four.

JUDITH

It must have been terrible.

ANNA

A real French petit four? Or have you eaten them all?

JUDITH

In your position I would have died.

ANNA

I had to cope. At first for my mother's sake. Later for your father's sake. Then for your sake.

JUDITH

Imagine losing the one thing you love so much, you do so well, so young. Never to play again.

ANNA

Sometimes we have to face difficulties in life.

Long pause.

JUDITH

(Takes a deep breath)

You like David, don't you Mum? Only, he isn't always easy to get on with.

ANNA

That's just men. Your father was the same. He adored me mind. Until the day he died. A perfect marriage. But he had his little ways.

JUDITH

This is more than little ways.

ANNA

I think what he admired most was my courage and fortitude, my acceptance. It wasn't always easy. But he was so in awe of me, I couldn't tell him when I was struggling you know, I couldn't always be ... well ... honest.

JUDITH

In a marriage you need to be honest. That's my whole point.

ANNA

Not always.

Long pause.

JUDITH

I think David's being dishonest. I mean really dishonest. And I don't know how to ... to ...

ANNA

You need a holiday Judith. Get David to take you to Spain. Your dad and I went to Spain once. Like a second honeymoon. The beaches. The sunsets. The palm trees.

JUDITH

That's not Spain.

ANNA

It was Spain.

JUDITH

According to David ... He'd want to go to the real Spain. He doesn't like anything for tourists, or romantic, not with me anyway. Sorry. That's probably more than you want to know. Forget what I just said. Please.

SCENE TWELVE

Anna's bedroom. Midnight.

Anna tosses and turns. Very faint piano music wakes her. She sits up in bed.

ANNA

Charlotte?

(Pause)

I stuck my face in the bathroom sink and turned on the taps once, to see what it was like. The breathing in. The sharp watery smell. You didn't shout. Or call for help. They said you couldn't, couldn't get the air to. Eyes glassy and empty,

head tilted back low in the water, mouth open. 'Close your mouth,' I cried, hands dangling. I was almost unconscious myself with the pain, but I tried to reach you. I tried Charlotte. But ... but ... carried by the current you moved away very fast. And then you sunk.

I wasn't worth it Charlotte.

Whatever were you thinking? Jumping up, lurching towards me, losing your balance, tipping backwards, falling in the lake and drowning? Didn't you realise? There was nothing you could do for me. I was already lost.

The sound of footsteps. Doors creaking. Something falling from a height and smashing.

ANNA

Charlotte!

Anna gets up and follows the sound out of the bedroom into the hall. There's movement in the front room. Anna opens the door.

ANNA

Charlotte?

Sounds of breathing behind her, getting closer and closer. Anna gasps.

ANNA

Oh my God. You're really here!

JUDITH

Mum?

ANNA

Judith!

JUDITH

I'm sorry I broke something.

ANNA

What are you doing here?

JUDITH

I ... er .. I've been staying. For about a week. Only a week.

ANNA
Staying?

JUDITH
I left David.

ANNA
Here?

JUDITH
I didn't know how to tell you.

ANNA
Walking around?

JUDITH
I tried to be quiet.

ANNA
Opening doors?
Running water?
Practicing?

JUDITH
I hardly touched the keys.

ANNA
I heard you.

JUDITH
I'm sorry.

ANNA
Why didn't you tell me?

JUDITH
I tried. I know you think the world of him, but he's cheating.

ANNA
With a celebrity?

JUDITH
His dental nurse.
And there were others.

ANNA
Oh Judith, how terrible for you.

JUDITH

Please don't make me go back to him. He doesn't care about me. He isn't even a good dentist. So please don't change the subject. Or pretend not to hear. And please don't defend him, I don't think I could bear it if you did. I'll go as soon as I can. But I don't have any money, a job, or anywhere to live. That's why I can't take your beautiful piano. I've nowhere to put it!

ANNA

Poor Judith. My little girl.

JUDITH

Please Mum, forgive me. I know you're disappointed. Nothing's worked out. I must be a terrible disappointment. Compared to you. You set the bar very high, Mum. Your wonderful marriage, your musical genius, your perfect hair, your honesty and integrity. How could I ever live up to that?

ANNA

I'm not what you think.

JUDITH

Please mum. Don't.
Just let me stay a few more days.

ANNA

Stay as long as you like. Stay forever. You're my daughter and I love you. My life has not been as perfect as you imagine. No, not as perfect as I've led you to believe. I've been ... haunted. I thought you were ... Charlotte. My sister Charlotte. Who died, drowned, in a boating accident.

JUDITH

When you hurt your hands? That accident? The same accident?

ANNA

I stole a boat. And made her get in. I lost the oar. We crashed against some rocks.

JUDITH

But it was an accident. A dreadful accident. No wonder you never wanted to talk about it.

ANNA

There were times I wanted to kill her. But I didn't kill her.

JUDITH

You don't have to say anymore. I'm sure it wasn't your fault.
Poor mum. Let's sit down.

ANNA

No! Judith. There's something else I should tell you.

(Pause)

I can't play the piano.

JUDITH

I know you can't play the piano.

ANNA

I never could play the piano. Charlotte played the piano. She was the child prodigy. I was the sister without talent. The jealous sister. Angry and resentful, unhappy and ignored. But she was a genius. She was going to play in an important recital that afternoon and be recorded. Live.

JUDITH

What are you talking about?

ANNA

I couldn't even turn the pages for her. I couldn't read music. I didn't have perfect pitch. Then, after she died, I felt so guilty, I pretended to everyone I met, who didn't know her or the family, that I was the pianist. It was a way of keeping her alive I suppose. I taught myself to read music and I listened to music constantly so I learned a thing or two, using the accident to explain why I could never play.

JUDITH

You mean you really can't play?

ANNA

Even your father thought ... But I was living a lie. Even with your father. He never knew. You never knew. It was Charlotte's piano. Not mine. I inherited it and pretended. But you, you're the real thing. You inherited her talent, my beautiful talented daughter, with hands of gold.

(Pause)

I can never forgive myself Judith, but will you forgive me?

JUDITH

Oh Mum.

They embrace.

ANNA

Play something for me Judith.

JUDITH

Now?

ANNA

Right now. Chopin if you like. Anything.

JUDITH

All right.

Judith plays Mozart's Turkish March.

ANNA

Mozart!

STANNINGTON

Episode one

MARJORIE WILSON'S MONOLOGUE

MARJORIE

My name is Marjorie Wilson. I'm 85 next April. I was born Marjorie Dawson at Netherton Hall in Northumberland in 1932. When I was very small, my parents moved to Newbiggin, I think because of my father's work as a coal miner. In 1949, when I was 17, I decided I'd like to leave home. At the time you had to be 18 to train in general nursing, but you could start at 17 in TB nursing. I saw an advert in the local press for student nurses at Stannington Children's Sanatorium near Morpeth in Northumberland and decided to write and ask if I could go. I didn't have much confidence in myself in those days. But I came into my own at Stannington. You might say it was where I grew up.

SCENE 1: OCHILTREE WARD STANNINGTON SANATORIUM. MID AFTERNOON. REST TIME.

Two sets of footsteps echo in the quiet ward. One slow and hesitant; the other hurrying after.

DAWSON

(Urgent whispering)

Excuse me. Excuse me. Where are you going?

Pursuing footsteps catch up.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. No visiting today. There's poorly children here. You'll have to leave.

MAM

But I'm his Mam.

DAWSON

Whose Mam?
Who let you in?

MAM

(Loudly)

I was told to come.

DAWSON
Shush. It's rest time.

MAM
But they said today.

DAWSON
We can't talk here. Follow me.

DAWSON leads MAM out of the ward and down the corridor to a seating area.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
That's better. Now, if you want to see your son, you'll have to visit at the proper time.

MAM
When's that?

DAWSON
Next month. Visiting day was Saturday gone. You, er, missed it.

MAM
They said today.

DAWSON
Who said?

MAM
Beattie ...

DAWSON
Who?

MAM
Me sister-in-law opened the letter. Was addressed to me, mind, but I told her to. And she said they said Alan needs to come in ...

DAWSON
Alan? Alan Stevens? The new admission?

MAM
Tuesday the seventh of March 1950.

DAWSON
I thought you were a visitor. Where is he?

MAM
He was here a minute ago.
(Calls)
Allie!

(To Dawson)
He wanders.
(A door slams)
There he is.

DAWSON
Alan? I'm Student Nurse Dawson.
(No response)
Are you Alan?

ALAN
No.

DAWSON
You're not Alan?

MAM
He's Alan.

ALAN
Me name's Allie.

DAWSON
(Patronising)
We've been waiting for you Allie.
Welcome to Stannington. We're
going to take good care of you here
until you're all well again.

(To Mam)
Can I have your address Mrs ... er
... Stevens? For the form? I have
to do an admission form for Alan.

ALAN
Allie.

MAM
11 Stoddard Street. Walker.

DAWSON
Rent or own?

MAM
What do you think?

DAWSON
Occupants?

MAM
Eh?

DAWSON
Who lives with you?

MAM
Me husband. Me sister in law. Her
husband. Me Mam.

DAWSON
Running water? Indoor lavatory?

MAM
Not yet. Soon as we're re-housed.
Mister Attlee said. Well he's the
Prime Minister, isn't he?

DAWSON
Husband's occupation?

MAM
His job like?

DAWSON
Is he in work?

MAM
(Wary, defensive)
Yes.

DAWSON
Place of work?

MAM
Why do you need to know that?

DAWSON
It's ... er ... on the admission
form.

MAM
Shipyards.

DAWSON
Have you got a name or address?

MAM
Are you a nurse?

DAWSON
Yes. Well ... student nurse.

MAM
'Cause you sound like one of them
social lasses. Can we sit down?

DAWSON
Sorry. Of course.

They sit.

MAM
I come all this way. With him. Had
to drag him.

DAWSON
I don't mean to pry.

MAM

Me husband's a hadder-upper.
That's what they call him.

DAWSON

Hadder?

MAM

Hadder.

DAWSON

Oh holder. You mean holder?

MAM

A plater's assistant.

DAWSON

Annual yearly income?
(Awkward silence)

MAM

We don't want your charity.

DAWSON

It's just for the form. I'll get in
bother if I don't fill out the form
properly. If you don't know the
name or address of your husband's
place of work, or his yearly
income, can you ask him, and write
to us? Or ask him to write to us?
(Pause)

Shall we move on? How old is Alan?

MAM

Eleven.

ALAN

I'm twelve Mam.

MAM

Twelve.

DAWSON

Father's full name?

MAM

Wilf Stevens.

DAWSON

Is that Wilfred?

MAM

He wanted to come. They're dead
strict at them shipyards.

ALAN wanders off, opens a door.

ALAN
What's in here?

MAM
Allie!

ALAN suppresses a cough.

MAM (CONT'D)
Allie!

ALAN
Where are they? Them sick children?

DAWSON
They're resting. I think you must
be tired too.

ALAN
Nah.

MAM
Don't be cheeky.
(To Dawson)
He wants to be a doctor.

ALAN
I don't.

ALAN coughs again.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE
The six symptoms of tuberculosis
are cough, spit, haemoptysis,
which is bleeding bright red blood
from the lungs, loss of weight,
loss of appetite and night sweats.
When Stannington was opened in
1907, tuberculosis was the biggest
killer in the UK and Stannington
was the first TB sanatorium for
children in the country. In 1950
there were six or seven wards that
I can remember and I think the
hospital could look after as many
as 300 patients. Most of the
children came from the poorer areas
of Tyneside.

MAM
Allie! Sit still!

DAWSON
Cough in your hankie Allie. Where's
your hankie?

ALAN

Dunno.

MAM

He had a hankie.

DAWSON

Is it in your pocket?

MAM

He's left it on the bus again.

DAWSON

He must be cold. He isn't wearing socks.

MAM

I told him to wear socks.

DAWSON

We'll sort him out a pair.

(To Alan)

Your Mam's got to go now Alan.

ALAN

Allie.

DAWSON

Say goodbye Allie. There's a brave lad.

ALAN

No.

(Cries)

Mam!

MAM

Come here son.

MAM gives ALAN a cuddle, then cuffs him away hiding her sadness and despair.

MAM (CONT'D)

Off you go lad. Lucky lad. (Laughs)
I'd like a rest meself.

ALAN

But ... Mam. You can't go yet.

DAWSON

Your Mam can't stay Alan.

MAM

(To Dawson, plucking
up her courage)

We want to see the other one now.

DAWSON

Excuse me?

MAM

Me other son who's here. Me older son.

DAWSON

You have another son at Stannington?

MAM

It's not my fault.

DAWSON

Of course not.

MAM

Can I see him now?

DAWSON

I don't think so. I mean, you can't. I know it's a long way ...

MAM

Two buses and a train. Took ages.

DAWSON

But it's not visiting day. Visitors can't come when they please. It upsets the children.

MAM

(Whispers)

I'll be very quiet.

DAWSON

It's not up to me.

MAM

Just a few minutes?

DAWSON

Sister would be angry.

MAM

Please!

DAWSON

I'll get in trouble with Sister.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

Visiting Day was only one day a month and it was Saturday. Two visitors per bed, no children. Although some patient never had any visitors. The sanatorium was in a

very isolated rural location.
Parents and other visitors got
there however they could. They had
one afternoon, possibly two hours.
Then, it was time to go.

MAM

Is this his ward?

DAWSON

You can't go in there. No visitors.
It's the rules. Where would we be
without the rules? That's what
Sister says. I'll get wrong off
sister.

MAM

I'll just give him this, what I
brought him.

MAM opens the door to the ward. DAWSON closes it.

DAWSON

No. You can't! Stop! I'm in charge.

MAM

You're a bairn.

DAWSON

I'm getting Sister.

MAM

Go on get her. You wouldn't stop me
if I was better off like. If I had
a posh coat? It's the coat, isn't
it? Well I won't be pitied. I'm as
good as any.

DAWSON

Of course you are.

MAM

I come all this way.

DAWSON

It's Sister. Not me.

MAM

And the fare's dear. And now I got
two in.

(She starts to cry)

It's me, isn't it? Now Allie's got
it and all.

DAWSON

It's not your fault. It's a
bacillus.

MAM

A what? I don't understand.

DAWSON

(Sighs)

You can go in for a minute, all right? Just a minute, mind. Quick before Sister gets back. Is he on this ward?

MAM

I don't know.

DAWSON

You don't know?

MAM

I've not seen him in a while.

DAWSON

We've seven wards. I'll have to check.

MAM

I'm sorry. I'm a useless mam. Don't even know me own son's ward.

DAWSON

It's all right. I get confused myself.

(Whispers)

I've not been here very long.

MAM

What do they call you again?

DAWSON

Dawson. Student Nurse Dawson.

MAM

You'll be a good nurse some day, I can tell. Must be nice being a nurse. Looking after kiddies. I love kiddies me. What do you have to do to be a nurse?

DAWSON

Well, you have to learn.

MAM

In books?

DAWSON

Sometimes.

MAM

But it's mostly playing with kiddies and taking care of them? I

could do that. And making beds- and wiping noses.

DAWSON

There's more to it than that.

MAM

Really?

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

I wouldn't say we were skivvies, but a lot of cleaning was left to the student nurses. We looked after the sluices- where the bedpans were emptied- and we sterilised everything in- what do you call them? Oh, these words are disappearing from my head- the enclave! Is that it? No, no. Not enclave, autoclave! Yes! We kept the sluices clean, kept the children clean and did the damp dusting around the wards ourselves. I don't think nurses do that now. I don't think they do that kind of cleaning like we used to do.

We learned to make beds with proper corners and all that. The red blanket tucked in at the bottom, the corners just so, the bed wheels lined up straight, facing front because Sister got down and inspected- especially when Dr Stobbs was expected. If the patients were in them, sometimes we lifted them out. But sometimes we just moved them down to the bottom and tidied the top. Or rolled them first to one side then the other. The children on what we called 'the plaster beds' ... well ... we didn't move them at all.

DAWSON

What's your son's name?

MAM

Kenneth.

DAWSON

Kenneth?

MAM

Kenneth Stevens.

DAWSON

I'm looking. We've got five Stevens in.

(Pause)
Kenny Stevens?

MAM
That's right. Can I see him now?

DAWSON
Er ... He's not on this ward.

MAM
Where is he?

DAWSON
He's very poorly Mrs Stevens.

MAM
We brought him sweets.

DAWSON
(Nervous,
uncomfortable)
Did the sanatorium not contact you?

MAM
He loves sweets.

DAWSON
Have you not had another letter?
Not the letter about Alan's
admission. Another letter? About
Kenny?

MAM
He'll perk up when he gets his
sweets.

ALAN
I want to see Kenny too.

MAM
Nurse says your brother's poorly,
so no horseplay Allie.

DAWSON
He's on a plaster bed.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE
We had a lovely plaster room in
Stannington for the little ones who
had tuberculosis in their bones.
Plaster molds of their bodies were
made then set in wooden frames so
they could remain completely

still. We called them plaster beds.
Yes.

Some children were put into a shaft of plaster. Or a cast which included the trunk of the body and one or more legs, a spreader bar between them. It was always a shock, I remember, when the plaster was removed, usually months later. Under all that gauze and quick-setting paste, the children looked tiny. Well we got used to them the way they were you see.

MAM

We'll just pop along for a minute.
What ward did you say?

DAWSON

He's ... er ... on a side ward.
Where ... er ... it's more comfortable. We nurse him there.
He's very brave.

(Becoming distressed)

Excuse me. I've ... well ... I've not been trained for ... news. The thing is ... It's moved and gone everywhere. And Kenny's in his ... er ... final decline. That's what we call it. Do you understand?

MAM

But he's coming home soon?

DAWSON

You should speak to Sister.

MAM

When is he coming home?

DAWSON

He's a fine lad.

ALAN

I want to see him now!

DAWSON

I'm sorry Alan. Not today. I'll take you to see Kenny soon. I promise.

MAM

Is this the side ward where he's at?

She taps on the door.

MAM (CONT'D)

Kenny? It's your Mam.

DAWSON
I'll fetch Sister.

MAM
She'll say no.

DAWSON
No, she'll probably say yes.
There's special rules.
Compassionate concessions for
parents. But Alan will have to
wait.

ALAN
(Shouts)
Kenny!

DAWSON
(Near tears herself)
Keep your voice down please.

MAM
(Cries)
We're seeing him. You can't stop
us.

DAWSON blocks the door. MAM tries to push her away. ALAN cries
out encouragement. Brisk footsteps approach.

DAWSON
No. Don't. Please. Sit down. It's
Sister.

SISTER
(In a raised voice of
authority)
Dawson! What's going on here?
You're making a scene. This is a
hospital. That boy is dying.

Episode two

MARJORIE WILSON'S MONOLOGUE

MARJORIE
At six o'clock in the morning we
were knocked. I don't know who it
was who did that. I never saw
anybody, but there was a knock.
Anyway you got up. You had to be on
the ward for seven so the night
staff could hand over and leave.
I'm trying to imagine it now, all

that hustle and bustle. It was 1950 and I was seventeen years old.

The first thing we did was go around and wash the children. The night staff at Stannington Sanatorium used to put all their wash things out ready on the ends of their beds. Then we used to take breakfast round. Porridge, sausages, eggs.

There was a former patient I met a few years ago at the Stannington staff and patients' reunion- I said 'How old were you when you were a patient?' And he said, 'I was five.' And I said, 'Oh you must have been homesick.' And he said, 'No, there was loads to eat. We got nothing at home.' So some of the children were happy to be there. it was a lovely, lovely place.

SCENE 1: THE WARD OFFICE. DAY.
SISTER is behind the desk writing. DAWSON enters.

SISTER
Close the door.

DAWSON
Yes Ma'am. I mean Sister.

SISTER
This is a busy ward full of very sick children. I need staff I can rely on. I don't have the time or the energy to mollycoddle you Dawson. That scene in the hall yesterday- visitors screaming and crying-

DAWSON
I can explain.

SISTER
Don't interrupt.

DAWSON
Sorry.

SISTER
Grow up Dawson, or you're out. You're immature. How long have you been here?

DAWSON
Almost a year.

SISTER

Let's see.

(She flicks through
her papers)

You started on August 10, 1949.
That's only eight months.

DAWSON

Yes.

SISTER

And you think you know best? You're
a probationer. Your fitness for
nursing is still being tested. This
is not the first time we've had to
have words. I'm not sure you're cut
out to be a nurse.

DAWSON

But I love nursing.

SISTER

Student Nurses do not talk to
patients, or their parents, about
their condition. Ever! Is that
clear?

DAWSON

I thought it was the right thing to
do.

SISTER

Do as you're told.

DAWSON

But, I thought ...

SISTER

You've had your say. I don't care
what you thought. Too much thinking
Dawson.

DAWSON

I won't think anymore. I'll follow
the rules.

SISTER

The rules are there for a reason
Dawson. What do we have without
rules? Well? Dawson?

DAWSON

We have chaos.

SISTER

That's right! Look around you.
Since the war, the world's gone to
pot. Clement Attlee. I ask you?

Interfering in people's lives. And where had it got us? Well? Bureacracy! Paperwork! All I do is paperwork! The Bank of England, nationalised! The Coal Board, nationalised! The railways! Gas! The Health Service! Mark my words- it won't last. The nation's going bankrupt Dawson. Your money's worth less than ever. They're devaluing everything. It's a scandal. Rules flaunted. Standards declining. No one knowing their place anymore. Everyone mixed together. Idleness, complaints, queries, doubts. Not on my ward! Not in here!

(Pause)

You're on borrowed time Dawson. I'm watching you.

DAWSON

I promise I'll be different.

SISTER

Next time-

DAWSON

There won't be a next time.

SISTER

There'll be consequences.

DAWSON

I want to improve. I'm really interested in the patients and their, well, condition and their treatment. I want to learn-

SISTER

(Wearily)

Learn the rules. Just follow the rules, that's all I ask. And keep an eye on young Alan Stevens-

DAWSON

Allie.

SISTER

The new admission. He's willful, cheeky. He needs to learn some discipline. Don't let him get away with anything. His case is mild though. Very early stages. Streptomycin will sort him out in no time.

(Lowers her voice)

He's here primarily for social reasons. His home conditions are

appalling. The mother's uneducated, probably illiterate. There's no dad.

DAWSON

But his Mam told me-

SISTER

It's really time to grow up Dawson. His Mam would say anything. You can't listen to what their Mams say.

DAWSON

Poor mite. I'll make sure Allie's okay. And not too lonely. And gets plenty to eat. And-

SISTER

You'll make sure he learns discipline, and ward routine. No playing favourites. Others need your attention too. Do not get attached to any one child. And Dawson, his name is Alan. Now get back to work. You can start by cleaning the sluice. And straighten your uniform!

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

Student Nurses wore a lovely shade of green. We had the little apron with a starched bib front. The lovely sweet cap just sat on top of your head. We weren't compelled to wear black stockings, so you could wear whatever stockings you wanted- but you did have to wear stockings. Any flat quiet shoe was good. If you were dressed all right and Sister was happy with how you looked, she didn't say anything- but if your shoes made a noise, Sister would say- 'Nurse, change your shoes.'

SCENE 2: A BUSY WARD. DAY.

ALAN is on his bed writing a letter. DAWSON approaches.

ALAN

(Reads)

Dear Mam, This is the worst bad place I ever been. It stinks. The nurses are horrible. The food is nasty. They keep me in bed all the time. It's boring. The laddie in the next bed's got sores that's

disgusting. There's big lads too, hitching round on crutches and they hit *is* and trip *is* up with them sticks. I hate it here. No one is nice-

DAWSON
What are you doing Alan?

ALAN
Nothing, Nurse Whatsyourname.

DAWSON
Nurse Dawson.
Are you writing a letter?

ALAN
No.

DAWSON
Can I see?

ALAN
No.

DAWSON
Sister'll see that. She sees all the children's letters and scribbles out anything that's not allowed.

ALAN
She won't.

DAWSON
She will too.

ALAN
It's like prison here.

DAWSON
Rubbish! Did you have a good breakfast? What did you eat?

ALAN
Dunno.
Toast.

DAWSON
You have to eat if you want to go home. If you don't eat Sister won't let you go home.

ALAN
Don't care. I'm bored. I want to get up. Why can't I get up?

DAWSON

There's cars. Do you like cars? You can play cars in bed. Jigsaws? Colouring in?

ALAN
That's for babies. When can I see Kenny?

DAWSON
What do you like to do?

ALAN
I want to see me brother Kenny.

DAWSON
Maybe later.

ALAN
You promised.

DAWSON
Do you like Meccano?

ALAN
I want to go home.

DAWSON
Ludo? Snakes and ladders?

ALAN
What's wrong with *is*?

DAWSON
We're not supposed to-

ALAN
Please.

DAWSON
You'll get better quicker if we don't talk about it. Sister doesn't allow those gloomy thoughts.

ALAN
I hate her.

DAWSON
Alan!
(Pause)
I'm sure some of the other children will play with you. Shall I ask them? Time'll fly once you make friends.

ALAN
I got friends. At home. We like pitch and toss and pea shooters. We build bogies in the back lane.

DAWSON

Bogies?

ALAN

That's what we call 'em in Walker. Go carts is bogies. There's canny hills down to the street. You go about a million miles an hour and you can steer with your feet or pinch some clothes line and make a steering rope. There's no brakes.

DAWSON

It sounds dangerous.

ALAN

It's not for lasses. Kenny's the best go-carter there ever was. He's not afraid of nothing.

DAWSON

How about a quiet game?

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

They were well behaved those children, most of the time. The older ones used to read or do jigsaws or whatever was available to them in those days. The little ones just stayed in bed and played with toys. Even if they weren't bed bound there was no where for them to go. They spent the day on the ward. It was a lovely happy place.

Sometimes I was bossy like Sister, well I had to be. (Shouts) 'Down in your beds!' You had to impose some kind of discipline on them, that's what Sister said. (Shouts) 'Down on your beds.' Poor mites.

Mostly we didn't have time to give the children individual attention. I would have ... when I think back now, I would have loved it if I could have, but we didn't have time. There were always jobs to do- buttering bread for tea, washing bandages and rolling them up again.

ALAN

I don't like quiet games. I like swimming and looking for sea coal and dead things. Kenny's a champion swimmer. He can dive. He dived off

some big rocks and Mam went mental.
Can I see him now?

 DAWSON
Not right now.

 ALAN
When?

 DAWSON
How about drawing a picture for
him?

 ALAN
What's that big chimney out there?

 DAWSON
I'll get the crayons.

 ALAN
Is that where they burn the plaster
casts they cut off the dead lads?

 DAWSON
Who told you that?
(No response)
How about checkers?

 ALAN
If you play with me?

 DAWSON
I can't. I've got real work to do.
I've got to damp dust the ward and
wash out the milk bottles.

 ALAN
One game?

 DAWSON
Sister won't like it. You don't
want to get me into trouble with
Sister, do you? It's almost lunch
time. I have to serve the lunch and
feed those poor children who cannot
feed themselves and clean up and do
the potty round, and...

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE
In the afternoon there was bed rest
and fresh air out on the veranda
whatever the weather. The bed bound
had beds on wheels and we wheeled
them out. When they came in from
outside we had to do the potty
rounds. I'm trying to think when we

did treatments. It must have been before the teachers came in the morning. Or was it after?

ALAN

This place reeks. I want to go home. When can I go home?

DAWSON

I know what you can do!

(Pause)

It's a special job. I need a clever lad to do it.

ALAN

What?

DAWSON

I need a big lad to get out of bed and turn on the wireless. Do you know how?

ALAN

'Course I do.

DAWSON

All right. Quick before Sister comes.

ALAN gets out of bed.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

Wait a minute! You can't turn on the ward wireless with that face.

ALAN

What face?

DAWSON

That miserable face. Can you smile? That's much better. Now hurry up.

ALAN turns on the wireless. There's static then song- 'Roll Out the Barrels' by Vera Lynn. DAWSON sings along. ALAN joins in. But the music is abruptly switched off. DAWSON doesn't at first realise and continues singing alone. She has a beautiful voice.

SISTER

Dawson! No singing on the wards! These children are ill. They are not allowed to raise their voices. Singing strains the lungs. You've shown very poor judgement- again.

DAWSON

(To Sister)

I'm sorry Sister. No more singing.
If everyone's quite can I turn on
'The Light Programme?'

SISTER

No.

DAWSON

What about 'Listen with Mother' for
the little ones? 'Are you sitting
comfortably?'

SISTER

No.

DAWSON

It's new.

SISTER

No.

ALAN

I like her singing.

DAWSON

(To Alan)

Shush!

ALAN

She's as good as them on the radio.

SISTER

What are you doing out of bed. Get
back. Now! Perhaps we need to
extend your bed rest, hmmm? Maybe
another day? Or two? What do you
think Student Nurse Dawson?

DAWSON

It's not his fault Sister. If you
want to blame anyone, blame me.

SISTER

You do have a beautiful voice ...

DAWSON

(Warily)

Thank you.

SISTER

And you are fond of singing?

(No response)

Dawson are you fond of singing?

DAWSON

Yes Sister.

SISTER

As you're so fond of singing, and have such a beautiful voice, you can sing next week for Dr Stobbs, Matron, Senior Staff, the Managing Director, and the visiting consultants at the Annual Physician's Dinner. I believe we've a minor royal coming too.

DAWSON

I ... er ... don't think ...

SISTER

Nonsense.

DAWSON

Please. I can't. I never ...

SISTER

You can and you will. I'll tell Matron. Won't she be delighted? Have you finished in the sluice? Well, there are beds that need making. Hop to it Dawson.

DAWSON walks away noisely.

SISTER (CONT'D)

Dawson! Shoes!

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE

Sister wasn't cruel. She was just impatient. She would be rough with me sometimes but I knew that really she was quite amenable. There was this mutual understanding. Me agreeing that she was the boss and I was afraid of her- and her knowing in her mind that she wasn't really frightening me. We were very close. Not friends, but there was a strong understanding between us.

Sister was a very caring person really, but she could be unreasonable. One day I was washing milk bottles and I had filled them with cold water and she said- 'What do you think you are doing?' And I said- 'Well, washing milk bottles.' And she said- 'Well cold water's no good.' And I said- 'Well yes it is. You put cold water in first and it gets rid of the milk.' And she said- 'Oh rubbish! Do it again. And this time use hot water.' So that's how she was, but

**you just did what she said and got
on with it.**

SCENE 3: THE SIDE WARD. DAY.
KENNY is lying immobilised on a frame. DAWSON enters.

DAWSON
Is there anything I can get you
Kenny? Water? Juice? Are you warm
enough?

KENNY
(Wearily)
Thanks I'm fine Nurse Dawson.

DAWSON
Are you sure? How are you feeling?

KENNY
Not too bad. Better today I think.
Be up and about before you know it,
eh?

DAWSON
You're a brave lad.

KENNY
I'm not.
(Pause)
Mam told me Allie's here. Me
brother Alan? Has he got it too? Is
he bad? I didn't give it to him, did
I?

DAWSON
Your mam shouldn't be worrying you.
Alan's fine, it's only a mild
infection. No one knows where he
got it. Probably not from you.
You've not been in contact for a
long time.

KENNY
How's he doing? Is he settling in?
Not homesick, is he?

DAWSON
Not at all.

KENNY
Mam said you told Alan he can come
see me. Mam said you promised. Can
he come soon?

DAWSON
I'll have to ask Sister. If Sister
agrees.

KENNY

She won't.

(Suddenly serious)

You know why I want to see him don't you?

DAWSON

Of course, he's your brother. You haven't seen him in a year or more. But you need your rest.

KENNY

If I see him, I can be easier in my mind I think.

DAWSON

What do you mean?

KENNY

Nothing. I'll catch him later, when I'm up and about. Will you fetch me notebook and open the curtains now?

DAWSON

Of course. Do you want to look out? I'll prop you up.

KENNY

Nah. You look. See anything?

DAWSON

Not much. A big sparrow.

KENNY

A spuggy? What colour?

DAWSON

Well, it's all brown. Maybe a grey head.

KENNY

Is the throat white?

DAWSON

Yes it is.

KENNY

How about the underparts?

DAWSON

Grey-brown.

KENNY

And the belly?

DAWSON

I can't see.

KENNY

I think it's a Lesser White Throat.

DAWSON

Really? Shall I write that down? Hold on. There's another different bird. Yellow underneath, more yellow-green, I'd say, black and white head.

KENNY

Hmmm.

DAWSON

I'll open the window, maybe if you hear it sing.

DAWSON opens the window, we hear the distinctive sound of a Great Tit.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

(Laughs)

Sounds like a bicycle pump. Do you know what bird it is? Well?

KENNY

It's a Great tit.

They both laugh with embarrassment.

KENNY (CONT'D)

That's what they call it.

(Serious again)

Nurse Dawson?

DAWSON

What is it Kenny?

KENNY

No! Please! Don't turn round! I can't if you turn round.

DAWSON

Is something wrong?

KENNY

We're like friends, aren't we? If we met somewhere else ...?

DAWSON

(Laughs)

I'm too old for you.

KENNY

I'm nearly sixteen. Just tell me straight Nurse Dawson, I can take it.

(Pause)

Am I ... Am I dying?

DAWSON

Kenny! No! Of course not. It's not as bad as you think.

KENNY

Are you sure? You wouldn't sweet talk me, because, well, I need to know. And I thought I could ask you because you're more trusty-like, more than the others.

DAWSON

You're doing fine Kenny. Everyone says so. Dr Stobbs and Sister. No need to worry.

KENNY

Promise?

DAWSON

I promise.

KENNY

(Quietly)

All right.

DAWSON

I've got to get on now. Sister'll be cross if I stop too long. I'll pop in later. Try to rest now. No more black thoughts, all right?

DAWSON slips out of KENNY'S room. Behind the door she chokes back a big sob.

Episode three

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

The children cried on visiting day after their parents had gone. It took us ages to settle them. But they got over it. And they were fine. It was a lovely, happy place, once they were back into their ward routine. Although some never settled.

One young lad I nursed in 1950, was so terribly, terribly homesick he wanted to run away. Stannington Sanatorium had a long drive and gates at the end, and then a road

outside. Of course there was very little traffic because it was rural. So he ran away and got through the gates and went to the bus stop. And the bus pulled up. And the doors opened- and Sister got off and saw him standing there- ! So he ran back down the road and back through the gates and right back into the ward. He got bed-rest for a week.

SCENE 1: THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE KENNY'S ROOM. DAY.
DAWSON and ALAN walk down the corridor and stop at a closed door.

ALAN

Is this it? Can we go in now?

DAWSON

Not yet Alan.

ALAN

Please Nurse Dawson.

DAWSON

I want to talk to you first. Your brother Kenny's been ill.

ALAN

Same as me.

DAWSON

More than you. His sickness has travelled to his bones. You've seen some of the others, on the ward in their plaster beds? I don't want you to be upset when you see him.

ALAN

He's me brother.

DAWSON

I don't want you to upset him either.

ALAN

Can we hurry up? He'll be waiting.

DAWSON

Alan, are you listening to me?

ALAN

You don't know. He dives off rocks and ... and ... runs and stuff.

DAWSON

Kenny's changed. His leg is attached to a pulley. He can't do those things anymore.

ALAN

He can. What do you know? You're not a doctor. You're just a student in a stupid uniform.

DAWSON starts to walk off down the corridor.

DAWSON

Let's go Alan.

ALAN

Where? Where are we going? Wait up.

DAWSON

Back to the ward.

ALAN

I'll be good. Please Nurse Dawson. He's waiting. You don't want to disappoint him, do you? You like him, don't you? Lasses always like Kenny.

DAWSON

Maybe another day.

ALAN

No! Please! I have to see him!

DAWSON

Calm down.

ALAN

I'm calm. I'm calm.

DAWSON

All right. Remember not a word to Sister. You'll get me sacked.

ALAN

I promise. Are we going in now?

DAWSON

You have to talk quietly. And no sitting on his bed. And when I say it's time to leave- you have to leave without a fuss.

ALAN

You're the boss.

DAWSON

I'm trusting you.

DAWSON opens the door to KENNY'S ROOM.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
Quiet as a mouse.

ALAN
(Shouts)
Kenny man!

SCENE 3: KENNY'S ROOM
ALAN barrels into the room then stops dead.

ALAN
Kenny? That's not Kenny? Where's
Kenny? That's another lad.

KENNY
It's me.

ALAN
You don't sound like Kenny. Kenny's
got a big voice.

DAWSON
It's Kenny.

KENNY
Come closer Allie.

ALAN
No. I want to leave. Kenny's a fit
lad. He does sports. He plays
footie. He runs races in plimsols
and beats them stuck up lads, them
posh cheats, like Alf Tupper in the
Hotspur.

KENNY
Don't you know me face?

ALAN comes slowly closer.

ALAN
Kenny?

KENNY
Yeah.

ALAN
Is it you? What's happened to you?

KENNY
I'm fine.

ALAN
You've got plaster everywhere.

KENNY

What this? I can get out of this any time I like. Yeah. Get out. Go for a run. Thought you might want to see it 'cause I know you're keen on gruesome things. It's like fancy dress this. Don't you like it?

ALAN
Can you sit up?

KENNY
Of course. But I'd rather lie down.

ALAN
Does it hurt?

KENNY
Nah. It tickles.

ALAN
Really? Can you take it off now?

KENNY
I could, but she'll get angry if I do.

ALAN
She leaving.

DAWSON
I'm staying.

KENNY
Please Nurse Dawson. We got things to talk about.

ALAN
Private things.

DAWSON
I won't listen.

ALAN
Don't stand so close then.

KENNY
Never mind her. How are you keeping?

ALAN
Fine.
Canny.
Horrible.
I hate it here. I want to go home.

KENNY
I'd like to go home too.

ALAN
Can we go home?

KENNY
You mean escape? Bust out? You and me?

ALAN
It'll be fun.

DAWSON
You can't leave. Either of you. You have to get better first. Dr Stobbs has to put you on the Discharge Sheet. Kenny knows.

ALAN
Who asked you?
(Pause)
Don't listen to her Kenny. She's a nurse in a stupid uniform. We'll sneak away.

KENNY
At night.

ALAN
And hide in the trees 'til the bus comes.

DAWSON
Sister'll call the police. They'll come after you. You'll not get far.

KENNY
Sister won't know we've gone.

ALAN
Not unless you tell her.

KENNY
We'll have a head start.

ALAN
And run like Alf Tupper in the Hotspur. He's the tough of the track.

KENNY
And rescue lasses.

ALAN
And be selfless chaps.

KENNY
And get there in the nick of time.

ALAN

And sleep rough. And eat sausages.

KENNY
Alf eats fish and chips.

ALAN
Catch fish then. Live with the
animals. Make a den.

KENNY
No more Stannington!

ALAN
No more bed rest!

KENNY
No more Dr Stobbs!

ALAN
No more cod liver oil! No more
needles in the hint-end! No more
lights out! We're going home.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE
I was never homesick. At
Stannington everything was new and
exciting. I went to dances, stayed
out late, missed curfew, got drunk
on Sister's homemade rhubarb wine.
First time I'd ever been drunk.
Sister kept saying, 'Be very
careful. It's four years old.' We
didn't know what four years old
meant and we all got plastered. I
fell into the bath with my cloak on.
Somebody must have turned on the
water and I got soaking wet. We were
all very ill the next day. Sister
must have thought we would just
take a few sips, but she left the
bottle- and we drank it all. And she
was very angry with us, as only she
could be!

There was an RAF station not far
away, RAF Acklington, which is now,
I think, a prison. In those days,
it was an airfield. The aeroplanes
they flew there were called
' Meteors.' We used to invite them
to our dances at Stannington and
they used to invite us to their
dances at Acklington.

Dancing, especially the jitterbug,
was a way of forgetting those poor

little ones on bed rest, or
immobilised on plaster frames.

When I think of them now, the
patients, away from home for the
first time, just like me, I think
how very different Stannington was
for them. How homesick they must
have been.

KENNY

At home we can sit by the fire with
Nan and eat black bullets and
humbugs.

ALAN

She'll be so glad to see *is*, she'll
give *is* a good clout over the ears.

KENNY

And Mam'll cry like she does when
she's happy.

ALAN

And we'll get stotties and meat
pies and go to bed late. Remember
the night bucket out on the
landing?

(They laugh loudly)

We'll piddle in the bucket!

The sound of footsteps coming down the corridor and the swoosh
of starched linen.

DAWSON

Shush!

The footsteps stop outside the door.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

It's her. Sister.

ALAN

(Whispers)

How do you know?

DAWSON

She swooshes.

They all laugh.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

She's got the starchiest apron!

The footsteps move on.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

I think she's gone now.

KENNY

What about me rabbits Allie? How's me rabbits?

(Pause)

Allie?

ALAN

We ate 'em.

KENNY

Me rabbits? No way.

ALAN

We'll get new ones and fix up the hutch and play footie and collect pop bottles ...

KENNY

And pinch tabs off Uncle Beattie. And bike over to Tynemouth. Just to see the sea again.

ALAN

Mam sold the bike.

KENNY

We'll build a raft and paddle.

ALAN

There's palettes on them building sites where they're putting up them new council houses. One of 'em's going to be ours. Clement Attlee said.

KENNY

Float downstream. Walk back home.

ALAN

There's no guards or nowt. We can play on a digger, climb into a half-built house and walk along the rafters.

KENNY

Then paddle to Tynemouth and watch the moon rise up and the stars come out over the sea- and the birds Allie! Be like heaven.

ALAN

You'll have to take that plaster off first.

KENNY

All right. I will.

DAWSON

I think that's enough dreaming
Kenny, don't you?

ALAN

What do you mean? We're going and
you better not tell. Don't listen
to her Kenny. She's scared of the
rules.

DAWSON

Alan thinks you're serious Kenny.

KENNY

I can pretend for a minute, can't
I?

ALAN

It's not pretend it is Kenny?

KENNY

Nah. C'mere.

(Whispers)

We'll pretend it's pretend. Put her
off the scent.

ALAN

And do all them things like we
planned?

KENNY

(Wearily)

Sounds good.

DAWSON

C'mon Alan. It's time to go.

ALAN

Not yet. Please.

DAWSON

Kenny's tired.

KENNY

I'm not. Just a few minutes more.

DAWSON

I'm sorry.

ALAN

(Becoming distressed)

I don't want to. You can't make me.

KENNY

(Also upset)

Come here Allie. Closer. I just
want to look at you. It's all right.
Don't cry.

ALAN

I'm not.

Both are sobbing.

KENNY

Don't go!

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

Stannington was a lovely happy place. That's what I remembered. But when I went to the staff and patients' reunion in 2013, more than sixty years later, the thing that struck me, surprised me really, well they told me, the patients, how homesick they were, how sad they were, how frightened they were, how ... how ... abandoned they felt ... and ... and ... well ... it made me cry. I hadn't known.

(Cries)

Oh, I'm terrible, I'm terrible.

SCENE 3: NURSES' LOUNGE. EVENING. THE ANNUAL PHYSICIANS DINNER.

After dinner murmurs. A spoon bangs smartly on a glass.

SISTER

Can I have your attention please.

Murmurs cease.

SISTER (CONT'D)

We have a special treat tonight. Student Nurse Dawson has very kindly agreed to entertain us with a song. Nurse Dawson-

Clapping.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARJORIE

Sometimes we had formal dinners for special occasions- all the tables set out and maid service. Dr Stobbs, Matron and all the nursing staff would be there. I was a singer, I still am- and they used to make me sing after dinner in the lounge where there was a piano. So that was another thing I did. Dr Stobbs used to shout 'Dawson!' And I would have to stand up and sing.

Dr Stobbs was the medical superintendent at Stannington. I think he was very fond of cricket. Or maybe that was one of the other doctors. He might have been Irish. He always made me sing 'Galway Bay.'

(She sings a bit of
'Galway Bay.')

One of the patients I met at the staff and patients' reunion said he was afraid of Dr Stobbs, because he was very harsh when he spoke to him on the ward when he was only a little laddie- I was amazed because I didn't think Dr Stobbs was like that.

SISTER

Nurse Dawson!

DAWSON

(Reluctantly)

Thank you, I ... er ... would like to ... er ... sing 'Roll Out the ...

DR STOBBS

Dawson! Galway Bay.

A piano plays the opening notes of 'Galway Bay.'

Unprepared DAWSON starts to sing nervously, she's off tempo, but catches up and gains confidence.

DAWSON

If you ever go across the sea to
Ireland,
Then maybe at the closing of your
day,
You can sit and watch the moon rise
over Claddagh,
And see the sun go down on Galway
Bay.

Just to hear again the ripple of the
trout stream,
The women in the meadow making hay,
Just to sit beside the turf fire in
a cabin,
And watch the barefoot gosoons as
they play.

Ooooh.....

For the breezes blowing o'er the
sea's from Ireland,
Are perfumed by the heather as they
blow,

And the women in the uplands
digging tatties,
Speak a language that the strangers
do not know.

Yet the strangers came and tried to
teach us their ways,
And they scorned us just for being
what we are,
But they might as well go chasin
after moon beams,
Or light a penny candle from a star.

And if there's gonna be a life here
after,
And faith somehow I'm sure there's
gonna be,
I will ask my God to let me make my
Heaven,
In that dear land across the Irish
sea.
I will ask my God to let me make my
Heaven,
In my dear land across the Irish
sea.

While DAWSON is singing there is a small commotion in the audience. SISTER gets up and leaves the room.

DAWSON finishes the song to loud applause. She sits back down.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

(To the nurse sitting
next to her)

Where's Sister? What's going on?
Why did she suddenly rush off like
that? Where's she gone? Why didn't
she stay?

Episode 4

MARJORIE WILSON'S MONOLOGUE

MARJORIE

One of the oldest boy at
Stannington Sanatorium, where I
was a student nurse in 1950, was 15
or 16, which was almost the same age
as me. He wasn't one of the boys I
fell in love with or anything, but
I remember him. He was lovely. An
angel. I wasn't there when he
actually died, but I was there

while the process was taking place. No, the other children would not have been told. Not even the older boys. Not in those days.

I don't remember anybody discussing their actual condition with the patients at all. We just took it for granted that they knew that they were there because they had to get better- and that getting better would probably take a long time. Or maybe they wouldn't get better.

SCENE 1: KENNY'S ROOM. MORNING.
The door is open, the room empty. DAWSON is washing KENNY'S mattress with disinfectant. ALAN approaches.

ALAN
(Calling uncertainly)
Kenny? Where's Kenny Nurse Dawson?

DAWSON
(Coldly and formally)
Return to your ward Alan. Your brother Kenny's not here.

ALAN
Where's his stuff? Is he moving into the ward with me? Can we have next door beds?

DAWSON
I can't talk to you.

ALAN
You always talk to me. Is that Kenny's mattress? What are you doing with Kenny's mattress?

DAWSON
Don't come in. I said don't come in. Stay right where you are.

ALAN enters.

ALAN
Smells rank in here.

DAWSON
It's the carbolic. I told you to keep out.

ALAN
Kenny won't like it. When he comes back and smells it. Why are you crying?

DAWSON

I'm not crying. It's the carbolic. Don't touch anything. You shouldn't be here. You shouldn't have come yesterday either. It was too much for him. I shouldn't have let you.

ALAN

I brought him some comics. These are his favourites. When's he coming back?

DAWSON

I don't know. I can't talk to you anymore.

ALAN

But I don't understand. Has he gone somewhere? Did he go off home without me? Did Mam come and fetch him off the Discharge List? Or did he bust out? We were meant to go together. He must have seen his chance to get away and-

DAWSON

Go back to your ward Alan.

ALAN

I don't have to do what you say. You shouldn't have kept him cooped up in here, on his own. He had to bust out. Did he? Bust out without me? Just tell me the truth. I can take it. He might be waiting for me somewhere.

DAWSON

I can't Alan. It's against the rules.

ALAN

What rules?

DAWSON

Don't let me catch you in here again.

ALAN

Just say where he's gone and I'll leave. I might be only a lad, but I've a right to know.

(No response)

Please!

DAWSON

I'm sorry. Not this time.

ALAN
I hate you!

DAWSON
I'm just doing my job.

ALAN
I hope you get the sack. I thought you were different- but you're just like them other nurses. You can go to the blazes all of you.

He runs away noisily down the corridor.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE
In those days we were meant to be obedient. We took what we were told and did as we were told. We didn't question things. We just followed the rules. Attitudes were different then- what we thought about, what we paid attention to, what we did and didn't do. Procedure, routine and standards were very important. No one really thought about how the patients felt. I know it sounds harsh today. But we weren't cruel- we just never thought-

SCENE 2: SISTERS OFFICE. DAY.
SISTER is sitting at her desk doing paper work. DAWSON knocks timidly and enters.

DAWSON
You wanted to see me Sister?

SISTER
Close the door. Sit down.

DAWSON
I'll stand.

SISTER
(Kindly)
How are you Dawson?

DAWSON
How do you think? I know I'm getting the sack.

SISTER
What do you mean?

DAWSON

Well I'd sack me if I were you. I don't deserve to be here.

(Choking back a sob)

Here's my cap. I won't be needing it anymore.

SISTER

I don't want your cap.

DAWSON

(Sobs)

I love this cap.

SISTER

What happened was not your fault. Kenneth was a very sick lad. Now he's at peace. It's you I'm concerned about. How are you coping?

DAWSON

Me?

SISTER

The first one's always the hardest. I remember my first. Cried my eyes out. You'll get over it. It gets easier. Not that you ever get used to the loss of a patient, especially a child, but others need you.

(Pause)

Put your cap back on Dawson.

DAWSON

I can't. I'm not fit to be a nurse.

SISTER

What'll you do then? Get married? Work in a factory? Sell boot polish door to door?

DAWSON

You don't understand. I'm to blame. I let Alan visit Kenny yesterday.

SISTER

That's against the rules.

DAWSON

I know. I'm sorry. I thought I was doing a kindness to the lads. But it was too much for Kenny and then ... then ... he (sobs) died.

SISTER

(Pats her on the back awkwardly)

There, there Dawson. Would you like a cup of tea?

DAWSON

I'll leave right away, if that's all right. I don't belong here.

SISTER

Rubbish! It must have been a great comfort to the lad, having the opportunity to say goodbye to his brother. Perhaps he felt he could let go after that. I know it's hard to accept, but his death was a blessing. He could not have recovered.

DAWSON

Poor Kenny. I shouldn't have favourites, but he was special. I feel so awful. I'm not sure I'm cut out for this.

SISTER

Rubbish! You're caring, loyal, passionate, curious. You're not afraid to challenge authority if you think you're right- but you'll learn. On occasion your judgement is poor, I'll grant you that- but good judgement only comes with experience. You haven't been here a minute. When you've been a nurse as long as I have, you'll see. You're alert, keen, dedicated, smart, capable.

DAWSON

Honestly?

SISTER

The profession needs nurses like you. Put your cap back on. That's right. Here, let me straighten it for you. That's perfect. Aren't you scheduled for Night Duty? Well hurry up. You'll be late.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE

You did three months night duty at Stannington, a fortnight on, then three days off, then another fortnight on, then another three days off- and so on. That's how it worked. There was two of us on Night Duty together. Mostly we just did paperwork for sister, or wrote

letters to our friends or parents. Being on night duty was really just being there because the children were asleep. If they woke up, you went to see what the problem was- but mostly they didn't, you know, wake up.

I used to shut and lock all the windows on the ward at night. But every morning, I found one window, in the furthest toilet, open. The double doors at the end of that ward used to fly open through the night too. I thought it was the wind. But it happened even when there was no wind.

There's a loud scraping noise.

One night I said to the other student nurse on duty with me, 'I'm going to put a heavy locker against the door to keep it shut.' Later, we were sitting in the office and we heard this terrific scraping noise, and we rushed out to see what it was- and the locker was on its side in the middle of the floor and the double doors were wide open.

It never occurred to me then, but now I think it was no ordinary ghost. It was a poltergeist, if there are such things, because there are always poltergeists where there are unhappy children.

SCENE 3: THE WARD OFFICE. NIGHT

DAWSON

(Whispers)

Did you hear that? Never mind. I must be imagining things. Will you finish the filing? I've a letter to write.

(Sighs)

April 20, 1950

Stannington Children's Sanatorium
Dear Mother and Father,
I am currently working nights, which means I am watching over an entire ward of forty children with only one other nurse for company. The children are all asleep so I am taking this opportunity to write to you at last.

A door creaks loudly open. DAWSON stops writing. Listens.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
What was that?

Distant footsteps fade to silence.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
I'm hearing things.

She begins writing again.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
I know you had your concerns
Mother, but nursing is definitely
what I want to do. I love
Stannington. I really belong here.
Or so I have been told. Honestly.
You would hardly recognise me
Mother. I am becoming very grown up
and confident. Tell Father.

I give injections and change
dressings. I'm not dropping
things, or being told off any more
by Sister. I do not mean to sound
big-headed but I think that Sister
likes me now. Perhaps I remind her
of herself as a young nurse.

Sister is very dedicated. She works
all hours and is still in her office
catching up on her paperwork while
we're on Night Duty. I want to be
just like her someday, and I
believe I could be, if I work hard,
obey the rules and learn everything
I need to know - which is a lot. I
feel as if I may have a real talent
for nursing. Honestly mother, I
believe I have found my place in the
world. Tell Father.

I must end now as it is time to do
the bed-checks and make sure the
children are all right. Please do
not worry about me.

Your loving daughter,
Marjorie

DAWSON gets up, clicks on her torch on, shakes it, it isn't
working.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
Flipping heck! My torch died. Can
I borrow yours? I'll give it back.
Ta.

DAWSON walks about the ward checking on the children then notices ALAN'S bed is empty.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
(Playfully)
Allie? Where are you Allie?

She pulls the bedclothes off the bed.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
I know you're here. You can come out now.
(She raises her voice angrily)
Allie! Come out! Now!

She looks under the bed.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
This isn't funny.
Out! Now!
(Voice quivers)
Alan? Please!

SCENE 4: SISTER'S OFFICE. NIGHT.
DAWSON bangs loudly at the door.

SISTER
(Wearily)
Come in.

MARJORIE
It's Alan!

SISTER
Shush! You'll wake the dead. What's wrong?

DAWSON
He's gone! Alan Stevens is missing!

SISTER
(Unperturbed)
Is he now? You ought to tell Night Sister.

DAWSON
I was on my way to tell her and I saw your light and ... and ... and ... I did the bed checks on time but maybe I should have checked sooner because when I checked- oh God- the bed was empty and I searched the ward, all the other beds and under the beds and between the beds and the cupboards and the bathrooms and the sluice room and he's not there!

SISTER

There's no need to panic. Nurses do not panic. Ever. We'll find him. He's only a young lad. He can't have gone far.

DAWSON

We need to hurry. He could be anywhere. On a bus.

SISTER

There are no buses at this time of night.

DAWSON

Can we go now?

SISTER

All in good time.

DAWSON

But he's getting away.

SISTER

Away where? Have you brought your torch? Where's your torch?

DAWSON

It's not working.

SISTER

Let me see.

DAWSON

But Alan-

SISTER

It's cracked along the casing.

DAWSON

He's getting away.

SISTER

Hand me your black adhesive Nurse Dawson.

DAWSON

I don't have it.

SISTER

A good night nurse must always carry adhesive, scissors, rolls of lint, a working torch. Never mind, we'll take mine. He's here somewhere, don't you worry.

DAWSON

I'll tell Dr Stobbs and Matron.

SISTER

No need for that. We don't want to rouse them for nothing. He'll be hiding in a cupboard mark my words. Children try to run away all the time. We always find them.

SCENE 5: STANNINGTON NIGHT

SISTER and DAWSON walk up and down the corridors, open doors, shout 'ALAN.'

DAWSON

He's not here.

SISTER

He's here.

DAWSON

I think he's run away.

SISTER

Rubbish!

DAWSON

He and Kenny talked about running away together. I think he thinks Kenny's run away without him. I think he's gone to join Kenny.

SISTER

This is your fault Dawson. Letting those two visit. No good ever comes from breaking the rules.

DAWSON

But you said-

SISTER

I overlooked procedure in order to comfort a struggling probationer. I should have known better.

(Pause)

You might not have hastened Kenneth's death, but your actions encouraged Alan to run away. Once one rule is broken, all the rules are undermined.

DAWSON

Yes but-

SISTER

You opened the floodgates Dawson.

DAWSON

Yes but-

SISTER

And what do we have without floodgates Dawson? We have chaos. The younger generation is especially vulnerable.

DAWSON

Yes but- if I'd been able to talk honestly to Alan in the first place and explain what happened to his brother-

SISTER

Rubbish! He doesn't want to know. We never inform the patients of a death. It unsettles them. Surely even you can see that.

DAWSON

But Alan thought ... he felt ... abandoned, and confused.

SISTER

Perhaps I should have spoken to him myself, hmmm? Sat him down and explained everything? Is that what you're saying?

DAWSON

You should have.

SISTER

I'd never do that! We'd have a ward full of worried children.

DAWSON

They're already worried. Alan trusted me and I lied to him. I should have explained that Kenny died peacefully last night. Instead I said I couldn't speak to him. Now look what's happened. He could be anywhere.

SISTER

Because you broke the rules.

DAWSON

Because I didn't tell him the truth.

SISTER

(More urgently now)

That's enough Dawson. We have to find him. It's gone midnight.

DAWSON

He might be outside, or on the road. They planned to go home.

SISTER
I'll wake the caretaker.

DAWSON
(Becoming hysterical)
It's a cold night. He might not have
a coat. Or shoes. He might only be
wearing his pyjamas. He'll catch
his death. It's dark. He'll get
lost. There's animals. Tramps.
(Cries)
He'll die out there if we don't find
him!

Episode 5

MARJORIE WILSON'S MONOLOGUE

MARJORIE
You won't have seen Stannington
Sanatorium where I was a student
nurse in 1950, because it is not
there now. Which is so sad, I think.
It was closed as a TB hospital in
1953 but continued to function as
a general children's hospital
until 1984. Then it was closed
completely. There's nothing left
now. Bits of the old boiler house
are still standing, but that's all.
And it was lovely, like a stately
home or a mansion.

After streptomycin came in, and
fewer children suffered with
primary, or passive, tuberculosis,
places like Stannington became
surplus to requirements- but they
could have used the buildings for
some other purpose. It was a lovely
place, although it must be that not
everyone thought so.

Buildings can absorb unhappiness-
or so they say.

SCENE 1: THE PINE FOREST SURROUNDING STANNINGTON. NIGHT.
DAWSON, breathless, runs through leaves, brambles and pine
mulch. The wind howls.

DAWSON
(Calls)
Allie?
Allie?

Her voice is carried away by the wind.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
Where are you?

Distant moaning. DAWSON runs towards the sound.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
Allie! It's Nurse Dawson. Are you
all right?

DAWSON bends down and cradles the boy.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
You're so cold. Allie!
(No response)
Wake up. Wake up. Wake up. Don't be
dead. Don't be dead. Don't be dead.

Allie groans.

Straining with the effort DAWSON lifts the boy and carries him back to the ward as fast as she can, murmuring encouragement to him.

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE
Before I worked at Stannington, it
seemed a remote, sinister place
even to me. I can remember people
saying, 'Oh so and so's little girl
has been taken into Stannington.'
And we all shuddered. There was a
stigma about tuberculosis in those
days and an ignorant fear of
contagion.

But no one at Stannington was
contagious! No one had sputum. No
one was spitting. That's why it was
such a marvellous place.

SCENE 2: ALAN'S BED ON THE WARD. LATER. NIGHT.
SISTER is looking after ALAN. DAWSON joins them.

DAWSON
Can I sit with him now Sister? I
won't stay long.

SISTER
See that he drinks plenty of hot tea
Dawson.

SISTER walks briskly away. DAWSON sits.

DAWSON
How are you Allie? Still cold?

ALAN

(Weakly)
All right.

ALAN coughs pitifully.

DAWSON
Is there anything I can do? Would
you like another blanket? More tea?

ALAN
Could you ... ?

DAWSON
What?

ALAN
(Whispers)
Just sing to me.

DAWSON
All right lad. Close your eyes.
That's good. Good lad. Everything
is going to be fine.

DAWSON sings a slow and sweetly melodic version of 'Roll Out
the Barrels.'

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE
Streptomycin came in in 1950
while I was still working at
Stannington. It was a very new
treatment, and very, very
effective, but they were not always
sure of the dosage and too much
Streptomycin upset the children's
balance. It didn't damage them, but
they walked sideways. (Laughs)
Until they got the dosage right. It
was a miracle drug, an absolute
miracle. They got better so
quickly, the children who were on
streptomycin. So many were cured.

I remember this one lad who was
cured. He didn't just go home
because he had his specified bed
rest and his specified fresh air,
and they thought he could manage -
he went home because he was cured
and it was wonderful. They were all
so desperate to go home, even
thought Stannington was a lovely
place, wasn't it?

SCENE 3: NURSES' DINING ROOM TWO WEEKS LATER.

Dawson is toying with her food. SISTER approaches and sits beside her.

SISTER
All right Dawson?

DAWSON
He almost died.

SISTER
It's been two weeks. He's fine now.

DAWSON
He was blue with cold Sister. There were pine needles in his hair.

SISTER
It looked far worse than it was.

DAWSON
He was wringing wet.

SISTER
Alan's made a complete recovery, not only from his little escapade, but from tuberculosis too. Streptomycin is a miracle drug. He's going home.

DAWSON
(Without much
enthusiam)
That's smashing.

SISTER
Someone has to tell him about his brother Kenneth before he leaves.

DAWSON
But I thought-

SISTER
The sooner the better. His mother's coming to take him home today.

DAWSON
Today?

SISTER
Normally I'd let the family deal with it in their own way, but the mother has requested we speak to Alan.

(Pause)
You were close to him.

DAWSON
Me?

SISTER
You know how to talk to children.

DAWSON
Me?

SISTER
I thought you'd be delighted.
You're the one who wanted to tell
him the truth in the first place.

DAWSON
I've only caused problems for the
lad. I don't want to cause more.

SISTER
Rubbish!

DAWSON
As the person in authority, I think
it should come from you, Sister.

SISTER
It's you he wants. He doesn't want
me. I'm too busy in any case. I've
a ward to run.

DAWSON
But .. but ... I'm only seventeen.

SISTER
That's an order Dawson.

DAWSON
I wouldn't know what to say. I've
hardly been here a minute. I'm a
probationer. I don't really know
how to ... to ... talk about ...
(she whispers)
death. At the time I thought I
could, you know, do it. But now-

SISTER
Well I'm not afraid to do it!
(She stands, loudly
scraping back her
chair)
Blunt is best.

DAWSON
But kind. You'll be kind won't you?

SISTER
I'll be straight-forward. No point
mollycoddling the lad.

DAWSON
Poor lad.

SISTER

I best get on with it.

DAWSON

No! You've paperwork and ... well ... other things. I'll do it.

SISTER

Good for you! Take the lad a bowl of tinned peaches. Everything'll be fine. He's going home. He'll be 'over the moon.'

MARJORIE'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MARJORIE

When a child went home - it was lovely. We used to dress them up in their own clothes, or their parents brought new clothes because maybe they had grown out of their old clothes. And we used to stand on the verandah and wave to them. And they would be holding hands with whoever had come to take them away. Sometimes parents. Sometimes friends or relatives. Sometimes Social care.

I remember a letter from 1949 that I once read in a patient's file, from the mother of a two year old child. The mother herself was in a sanatorium with TB and her child was scheduled for release but, 'the people who would take him have changed their mind.' Those were her words exactly. They changed their minds.

SCENE 4: ALAN'S BED ON THE WARD. DAY.

ALAN

Will I get the cane? Or is it just detention?

DAWSON

We don't have detention. Or the cane. This isn't school.

ALAN

What's the punishment for running off then?

DAWSON

Did no one tell you?

ALAN

No one tells me nothing.

DAWSON
You're going home.

ALAN
I'm not getting in trouble?

DAWSON
Your Mam's here.

ALAN
Me Mam's come to fetch *is*?

DAWSON
You're cured.
(Pause)
But there's something I want to
talk to you about before you go.

ALAN
(Wary)
What?

DAWSON
Can I sit on your bed?

ALAN
Sister won't like it.

DAWSON
Sister won't mind.

She sits beside him.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
You haven't mentioned Kenny.

ALAN
So?

DAWSON
Kenny was very ill.

ALAN
I have to go now, like you said. And
you have work to do, cleaning in the
ward and like that.

DAWSON
He wasn't going to ever get better.

ALAN
Me Mam's waiting. She's probably
brought *is* a Lucky Bag and a comic.

DAWSON

Don't you want to know what I have to say?

ALAN
Is it about Kenny?

DAWSON
Yes.

ALAN
Maybe later.

DAWSON
Kenny had a turn.

ALAN
Will you help me pack me things?

DAWSON
In the night.

ALAN
Where's me case?

DAWSON
Do you want to go home without knowing?

ALAN
I'm not bothered.

DAWSON
I think you are.
Alan.
Allie.

ALAN
Please.
No.

DAWSON
Kenny is dead. He died two weeks ago.

ALAN
(Sobs)
Nooo.

DAWSON
I'm so sorry. I wanted to tell you when you came to his room and I was washing the mattress, but the hospital wouldn't let me. Please don't cry. He loved you very much. He didn't run away without you. He couldn't even walk.

ALAN

(Sniffles)
I'm not crying. Was it the tuberculosis?

DAWSON
Yes it was.

ALAN
How did he catch it?

DAWSON
No one knows. He might have had a weakness.

ALAN
Our Kenny weren't weak. He was good at games.

DAWSON
I know.

ALAN
And smart. He was good at birds.

DAWSON
He was a lovely lad.

ALAN
But they couldn't save him. Even Dr Stobbs with his needles and tablets and the nurses with their dressings and plaster.

(Pause)
Did his lungs burst?

DAWSON
It doesn't happen like that. He just faded away.

ALAN
He didn't fall over, did he?

DAWSON
No, he died in his bed.

ALAN
I hope he was propped up so he could look out the window at the trees and birds and stuff. Did he have all the covers pulled up? Was he warm and like that? Warm and quiet and just looking out the window?

DAWSON
I don't know Allie. I wasn't there. I hope so.

ALAN

Does me Mam know?

DAWSON
Yes Sister told her.

ALAN
Is she doing her crying?

DAWSON
She's very unhappy, of course.

ALAN
(Pause)
Is it because of me visiting and
all? Did I make him bad?

DAWSON
No.

ALAN
I think I made him worse.

DAWSON
Rubbish!

Awkward silence.

ALAN
Is Kenny in heaven now? With them
wings. Like a bird.
(Wails)
Why did Kenny have to die?

DAWSON
I don't know. I'm just learning.

ALAN
Am I going to die too, cause I
caught it off him, and he died and
...?

DAWSON
No. You're going home, remember?
You're all better. Cured. And your
Mam really needs you now, so you
have to be a strong lad, for your
Mam. You're a clever lad. You can
get some training. Get a job one
day.

ALAN
I miss him.
(He chokes and sobs)

DAWSON
Don't cry.

ALAN

I'm not.

DAWSON

I have something for you.

She gives him something wrapped in paper. He unwraps it.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

Kenny kept it under his pillow the whole time he was here.

ALAN

It's his best feather. His Red Kite feather. He found it one day when he was off school and feeling low because even when he's at school he needs a note for games, which Auntie Beattie has to write, because he gets breathless. But he's home and the doctor comes and he has to blow into a bottle and the doctor makes a serious face. And I know because he told me.

And after that he's just sitting down having a rest. And he don't know why, but he looks up. And perched on the fence between our house and next door is a massive bird all golden with long wings and yellow claws. He's afraid to move in case it flies away, so he holds his breath and he looks and looks. And everything is clear to Kenny, like he's looking through them binoculars, which he doesn't have and we can't afford. Then, while he's watching, the bird flies away over the back lane into the sky, through the clouds and past the sun.

Later he goes out, even though he's not supposed to go out, and he finds this one feather in the back. A red kite feather. And this is it!

(Pause)

Sorry. No one likes to hear me wittering on.

DAWSON

I like to hear you. But it's time to go now. Your Mother's brought your clothes.

DAWSON hands him a bag. ALAN takes out the clothes.

ALAN

These aren't mine.

DAWSON
Whose are they then?

She looks through them.

DAWSON (CONT'D)
There's a good short jacket and a flannel shirt, and a hand knitted vestie and longies with cuffs.

ALAN
They're Kenny's. I want me own clothes.

DAWSON
But you've grown.

ALAN
But I'm Alan. Not Kenny. Kenny's gone. There isn't even a bed where he used to be, because now it's another lad's bed, or a lass's.

DAWSON
He isn't gone. He's in your heart. And in mine.

ALAN
And Mam's?

DAWSON
Of course. We'll never forget him.

ALAN
And Nan's and Auntie Beattie's and Mister Beattie's, who's never home.

DAWSON
And Sister's and Dr Stobbs's and all the other nurses and doctors who cared for him.
(Pause)
They're smashing clothes. Good as new. Now put them on. Your Mam's waiting. Then I'll walk you to the front door and wave to you from the verandah until you're out of sight. And soon you'll be back home with your friends and your go-carts and your games. You're a lovely lad. I'll always remember you.

(Pause)
Don't forget me.

ALAN
I won't. I'll write. Honest I will.

SCENE 5: ALAN'S BEDROOM. SOME MONTHS LATER. SUMMER. BIRDSONG.
DAY.

ALAN is writing a letter.

ALAN
August 10, 1950
Pine Tree Estate, Walker

Dear Nurse Dawson,
How are you? I am fine. It is smashing to be home. Everyone is happy now. Auntie Beattie has got her false teeth on the NHS so she can chew her food properly and won't be so skinny and tired all the time, and Mam has got her spectacles, so she can read and write letters and all. Nan is mad for the new royal baby and is knitting the little princess socks.

Best of all is that we now have a new council house, me and Mam and Nan. There is a bath and an indoor lavatory. We are over the moon. Most of me old mates moved to the new estate too. It is grand even if some of them lads have got snooty now and we aren't friends like before. But I'm not bothered. I don't give a dicky bird. Mam says don't mind them and I don't. Their Mams say I can't play with their lads because I was away in Stannington and Kenny died. They do not see that I am all better now from what was making me bad. (We do not say the name of the thing I had, and Kenny had, but sometimes I think it inside my head.)

It is the summer holidays and red hot but I don't want to go to the swimming baths because they have a lot of stupid rules about who can swim and who cannot. I would rather swim in the sea like Kenny and I used to do. I am busy anyway reading a new comic called The Eagle with Dan Dare, pilot of the future. I wish Kenny could read it too. He would have loved to be a pilot, if boys like us could be.

Maybe one day I will work with animals, or work in a shop, or a garage- if they will have me. I want to be trained up, like you said. But

Mam is worried that I will not get employment because people do not like working alongside someone like me. Maybe one day I will get a sweetheart, but I doubt it.

I have Kenny's bird notebook and I am getting interested in looking at birds and writing down their names like Kenny did. Sometimes Mam forgets and calls me Kenny which makes me laugh.

Look inside the envelope when you finish reading this letter. I have sent you something. It is a white feather from the wing of a angel. (Really it is from a white pigeon but don't tell no one.) Give my regards to all the other nurses and to Dr Stobbs. He must have been fuming when England lost the Cricket World Cup to the West Indies.

That's all for now.

Best regards,
Alan Stevens, who was your patient
at Stannington.

MARJORIE WILSON'S MONOLOGUE CONTINUED

MAJORIE

I really didn't want to ever leave Stannington, but I had to go because I had passed the exam and there were no vacancies for staff nurses there. It was a lovely place to work. That's what I remember anyway. I suppose I've picked out what to remember, the rest I've forgot. Everyone does that, don't they? It was so long ago.

After I left Stannington, I was hired as a staff nurse at Wooley Sanatorium for adults with active pulmonary TB, which was infectious and not as responsive to Streptomycin.

Wooley was near Slaley in Northumberland. I took my brother up there on holiday a few years ago to show him the place I worked - but it had vanished just like Stannington. We couldn't even find where it had been. Later I heard it

was burnt to the ground to prevent any disease spreading. Tragic.

I did marry one of the air force boys and left nursing to become a wife and mother- and because we moved all over the place, I lost touch with my old Stannington friends, and I would just love to know if any of them are still around. I hope my memories might prompt some of my old colleagues who I've lost touch with so long ago to ... well ... a letter ... if any of them are still alive ... I would love to hear from you. Yes. It would be lovely.

THE END