



I wonder what people care about in a war zone. I wonder in what ways their problems change. Yes you're fighting for your life but what about your bills?

Two people whose lives are an orchestra of alarm clocks, traffic lights, advertising, emails, credit cards, meal deals, phone calls, breaking news, loyalty cards, WiFi, meetings, meetings, meetings . . .

What happens when the modern world begins to erode your mind; when you start to blur the food you eat with the numbers you crunch? How far would you go to get the things you want? Would you sacrifice your place in the queue? What would happen if you just said no?

Even Stillness Breathes Softly Against A Brick Wall received its world premiere at the Sono Theatre Upstairs on 28 May 2013, directed by Nadia Latif and produced by Tabula Rasa Theatre and Lindsay Fraser Ltd.

A rift on the idea of life being a series of reassuringly familiar, yet despairingly empty actions . . . Birch's play is a fluid poem, meandering through repetitive days, rolling through thoughts and speeches with a nicely judged turn of phrase 'Time Out

'A play of strong poetic feeling . . . the play has a strong sense of claustrophobia and the idea that consumer society results in a living death, with all of us sleepwalking towards the grave, runs through the events like a slash of red lipstick . . . There is a subversive joy in its gestures of anger, and some of its stage images linger to haunt the imagination — just like its title 'Arts Desk

SONO
THEATRE

DRAMA & PERFORMANCE STUDIES

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BRAD BIRCH **EVEN STILLNESS BREATHES SOFTLY AGAINST A BRICK WALL**



Brad Birch

methuen | drama

B L O O M S B U R Y

Characters

Him
Her

Design

Spaces within a small flat.

Fractions of furniture and props to indicate where in the flat we are, for example, a bath indicates the bathroom, and so on.

Sound

Cold, electronic, minimalist.

During Act Three, a constant low hum at just under 20 Hz (no lower than 17 Hz) – just below threshold of human audibility – to create a state of disorientation and unease in the audience.

Act One

One

They appear:

Him Wake up.

Her Wake up.

Him Every morning I wake before her.

But I don't get up till she does.

Her I have to make the tea

otherwise he'd be in bed all day.

The kitchen floor is cold on my feet.

No matter how close to the bed I leave my slippers

I always step over and forget them in the morning.

Him As I get up I trip over her slippers.

Her Maybe I should sleep with them in my arms.

Then I won't forget.

But would the hard plastic soles

prove more uncomfortable in the night

than the cold kitchen floor in the morning?

Him As soon as I'm up I'm bursting for a piss.

Her While the kettle boils and the sound of him pissing

echoes through the hall

I wake myself up.

Him How I haven't pissed myself in the night

is a marvel and testament to the proficiency

of the human body.

Her I rattle through a plan for the day in my head.

Even though I don't want to, I can't help it.

Him I catch sight of myself in the mirror.
My legs and arms **██████████** and chest
underwhelm me.

Her I take the tea to the bedroom
and he's already in the shower
and halfway through the first verse
of 'Want You Back'.

Him (*sings*) 'But someone picked you from the bunch
One glance was all it took
Now it's much too late for me
To take a second look.
Oh baby give me one more chance . . . '

Her I iron whatever bits I'd planned to do last night
but didn't bother with.

Him I pride myself on only ever having to take
ten minutes in the shower.

Her After twenty minutes he gets out.
The bathroom is wet and warm like breath.

Him I sip the tea she made me and get dressed.

Her The first words we say to each other
are often just slight variations
on the theme of how late we are.

Him We get to the bus stop and have a bit of a fuff
about whether or not she's remembered
half her handbag.

Her The heaving bus lurches towards us.
Busy with the commuting and the mad
bunched together.

Him A shipment to the city.
Bussed in and bussed out
stopping everywhere that doesn't matter
where the don't care and don't mind get off.
We sneer at everyone else's stops.

Her I touch up my eye-liner.
And try not to catch the eye of the old man
sat behind me
in my compact mirror.

Him I get off after her and head to the office.
I won't be late but
for the sake of being a worrying fucker
I panic as if I will be.

Her As I get to my desk
I see I've already got three voicemail messages.
It is not yet nine o'clock and I feel a martyr
for doing anything before the day officially starts.

Him I see Mr Cohen and speculate on whether
he ever actually leaves the office.
Spending his nights upstairs laying more eggs
mothering them into hatching.
A fresh new batch of worker drones.

Her I go to take the messages but I find them to be
just cold calls automated.
Empty and echoey. Tin and dead.
Recorded from another space and time.
The computers that programmed these messages
have no idea what their purpose is.

They don't know their pulses
are meant for human ears.
But if they did I wonder what they'd rather say.

Him I'm as bland as my tie and as straight
as the crease down the front of my trousers.
My degree in Business Studies did not prepare me
for being this inconsequential.
I dress to look a cheap deal for my boss.
But it's what you do.
It's what you are.
In this economy it's the way you have to be.

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Act One 13

Her I have a shirt that blends
with every coat of paint in the building.

Him I walk past reception and imagine the girls there
talking about me.

I'm friends with neither of them on Facebook
but I have three mutual friends with one
and five mutual friends with the other.

Her The morning passes and I do nothing
but take calls and forward them on.
I type up the odd letter and open the post.

Him I am a still-life portrait waiting to be painted.
My work is dull but I'm not complaining.
Don't think that I'm fucking complaining.

Her My day is defined by my breaks
and the only true measure of progress I have
is how many times I wash up my cup.

Him One of the interns makes me a cup of tea
and I say thank you.
I sympathise with the interns
and the shit they wade through.

Her There's no moment in the day
not one symbolic or literal event
that assures me my work here is worthwhile.
But it is a safe job.
And safety outweighs satisfaction
and my government agrees.

Him But when I was an intern
I fucking hated the people in my position.
I stop myself from sipping the tea he made me.

Her The men in the office start talking about football.
And as I don't want to sound like a vinegar tits
I disguise my hatred of their banter.

Him I'd have spat in my tea if I was him.
~~_____~~

Her I'm only ever brought into the conversation
when they want to ironically or otherwise
compare themselves to a girl.
~~_____~~

Her Course I'd never imagine saying anything.
I'm a woman of childbearing age.
Am I hell going to cause a fuss.
Don't think that I'm fucking complaining.

Him Should I invite them to five-a-side?
Should I make them my mates?

Her You get on with it and you manage yourself.
I conduct myself in a way
my mother doesn't have to.

Him I wonder what Dave would say
about me bringing all these fuckers to football.

Her You work the woman out of you.

Him They'd bump up the numbers I suppose.
And maybe one of them
would have a decent left foot.

Her You are all potential boys.

Him I spend the rest of the day
anticipating all the interns calling me a cunt
under their breath
by calling them 'mate',
as soon as we make eye contact.

Her You will get along.
You will be easy to work with.

Him I wonder if Mr Cohen worries
~~_____~~

Probably not.
He probably thrives on it.
I need to thrive on it.

Her The afternoon drags like the morning
except outside starts to shift to a slow fade.
And people are now yawning
because they've been up too long
rather than yawning
because they've not slept enough.

Him I chew my way through the afternoon.

Her I make it through another day
by not being too much
and by being just enough.

Him Home time.

Her We cling to our burdens with white knuckles.
I cannot be relieved of this position..
I am worth my wages and my cost to the company.

Him I pick her up from her work
and we drift through the usual small talk
of office politics and minor news stories
that have littered our days.

Her A cat watches us get off the bus back at home.
Her eyes are the colour of amber traffic lights.
And I know it's a she because all cats are girls.

Him We rely on the idea that we're both fighting.
We go through it because we must.
And because we must we pretend to care.

Her The bus is just a box that
sends us from one place to another.

Him I care about her but I don't care about her work.
In the same way one veteran won't care
about another veteran's war.
Too close. Too raw.

Her We have no choice in the direction of the box
and I wonder if it can take us to any place
we don't already go.

Him We get home and in some ways that's enough.

Her That's enough.

End of One.

Two

He appears and turns on the lights, the television, his laptop, his iPod
in his dock, the kettle, and starts playing with his phone before he takes
off his jacket and tie.

The house-phone rings. He picks it up.

His mobile rings. He picks it up.

An email comes through to his laptop.

He exits and returns with a supermarket pre-packaged sandwich. **He**
opens the box, lays it out on the table and, to the theme of his orchestra
of electronic goods, starts to eat his sandwich.

She appears having come home from work. **She** takes off her coat and
puts her bag down and exits.

She returns with her own sandwich and sits next to him. **He** finishes
his sandwich and exits as **She** starts eating hers.

End of Two.

Three

He appears.

Him The air conditioner in the office won't work
and while it is neither warm nor my job
I am asked to have a look at it.

She *continues eating her sandwich.*

Him I see nothing but a broken machine.
I'm no mechanic but things don't half work.
They're either working or they're not.
I waste my time.

I spend a good ten minutes with it.
I tell them that it doesn't appear
to be able to switch on.
They ask if I know how to fix it and I say no.
They sigh and tell me they're going to have to call
someone proper out.

And they linger on the word 'proper'
as if it was my idea to have a look at it.
Like I give a shit.
Like I give half a fucking shit.
Am I not proper to you?

He *watches Her for a moment.*

Him I get back to my desk and I've missed a call.
I check the number and it's my parents.
I wonder why my mum would be calling.

I don't ring her back as I have a whole afternoon
planned for doing much more important things
like looking at Winona Ryder's Wikipedia page.
I find celebrities enormously attractive.

He *disappears.*

Her The cardboard packaging on my Tesco sandwich
is not too dissimilar from the bread.
I know it's not the healthiest thing in the world
but it's the easiest thing in the world.
I am not a woodland creature.
I will not eat seeds and berries.
Heat magazine does not fuel me.
The lifestyle section of the *Guardian*
does not feed me.

These grey processed foods may be empty
but they are predictable and satisfying.
The plastic highs of MSG
and echoing carbohydrates.
You know where you are with a pre-packed meal.
A thousand will taste the same
and there's security in that.
Snack packs. Bio fuels. Meal for one.

End of Three.

Four

He *appears.*

Him I get a text from my dad saying he called the office
and did I get his message.

I ring him
and ask what he's doing home on a Monday.
He tells me he has nowhere else to be.

There's a point in your life when you realise
that your parents are just people too.
That they're not betters or elders
they're just equals.
And sometimes not even that.

They made him redundant on Friday
and it was only on Monday morning
when he got up with the alarm
that it hit him.

He is not required to be up on a Monday morning.
He's not required to be up on any morning.

Weighed up and evaluated
my dad found himself not cost effective.
A piece of paper. A calculator.
His livelihood.
That's the fucking economy.

I ask him how mum took the news
and he tells me he'll let me know
once he's found a way of telling her.

End of Four

Five

They appear.

Him Wake up.

Her Wake up.

Him I had a dream that we were on the bus
and on the way to work.

The traffic was moving so fast and
the bus wouldn't slow down
because there were so many other cars behind it.

But then something happened
and all the cars started crashing.

But as they crashed the cars didn't stop moving
and the cars were getting more and more mangled.

Like a wave of destroyed cars.

I woke up as the bus folded in on us.

Her Are you getting up yet?

Him We get ready and leave.

Her The cat didn't watch us leave
and I'm disappointed.

But it will be there tonight.

Him The same colours of windowed tins
on bitumen skin.

The heat of other cars cooks through our seats.

Her Irrationally think the cat only comes out
to watch us.

And that it comes to show us

that we're not just people,
we're not just someone else.
We're us and in some ways
our us is greater than other people's.

Him We all pour into the city like water down a sink.

Fucking plughole city.

I used to think my dad knew
how the world worked.

I see my office and I see the type
that would be first against the wall.

And the idea of my dad as one of them
is a bit fucking embarrassing.

Her There's something burning inside of him.

Him I don't work because I want to.

I don't make myself essential to the company
because I fucking want to.

Her I know I'll worry about him all day.

He might not have said anything
but the quiet types never do

and his eyes scream stress

and I know how much he can cope with.

Him The rest of the world thinks my dad is pointless.

If my parents can't cope then what chance
have I got?

Her I get an email calling me upstairs.

Maybe they figured they could sack me
and not miss me.

I will not miss the company either.

Him I go to make a cup of tea to get away from my desk.

As I walk to the lift I'm aware of Chris and Tom
and Peter and Harry at their desks.

I am not a flirt but I feel them watch me.

~~_____~~

Him

You don't have to do too much in this world.
You just have to work and earn your way.

Her

I don't turn back to them when I'm in the lift.
I don't acknowledge the stares
and I let the feeling pass.
I am not a flirt.

Him

The old bastard Frank creeps behind me
and makes me jump in the kitchen.
I drop a cup and it smashes on the floor.
The sound and the look of it
cracking and bouncing and bursting
makes me feel strangely good.
Frank just smiles and takes some biscuits
from the cupboard and leaves.
I have to stop myself from dropping another cup.

Her

In my boss's eyes I see
he thinks of himself as my Christ.
I cross my legs and hold my stomach.
I expect him to fire me.
I can feel him swallowing gulps of powerful air.

Him

He offers me a promotion.
I ask doing what and he tells me
it's exactly the same job but on a different floor.
I am being asked to ignore
the corpses of the redundant.
I will be sat among their ghosts.
I don't refuse because I can't refuse.
I hear something on the news
on how the forces in some fucking-istan
are storming their government buildings.
I imagine taking a bayonet upstairs
and performing a mild act of genocide
on Cohen and his cronies.

Her

We are doing what we can
for ourselves and for each other.

I say thank you and he kisses me on the lips.

Him

I see an interview with a local man
caught up in the fighting.
I wonder what people care about in a war zone.
I wonder in what ways their problems change.
Yes you're fighting for your life
but what about your bills?
How do you feel about your relationship?

Her

I ascend into another level of commitment
to a job I only took
because there was nothing else out there.

Him

I pick her up from work and that's the day.

Her

That's the day.

End of Five

Six

He appears.

He is watching the television as it yawns out decibels of colour.

He switches it off and goes to leave the room.

As **He** leaves, the television switches itself back on again.

He goes to the television, switches it off, goes to leave and again it
switches itself back on.

He turns it off but as quickly as **He** does it turns back on.

Again.

This time **He** doesn't turn it off. **He** just sits back down on the sofa.

She appears and sits down next to him and they watch together.

End of Six.

Seven

They appear.

The television is on between them, spewing out white noise and a blizzard of 'snow'

Her

Chloe texts me
telling me she's looking forward to New Year.
I presume she means the party
and not the empty promise of change
heralded by a new calendar year.
I text back saying so am I.

Him

Most evenings are in front of the television.
There is not the pressure
to have your own opinions.
You are presented other people's dreams wholesale.

Her

I feel him radiating a stress
he doesn't normally carry.

Him

We watch the small Middle Eastern state
getting spanked by missiles.
The ruins look like a map from *Call of Duty*.

Her

I haven't told him about the promotion.
My money doesn't change
and therefore the significance of my work
does not change.

Him

This could never happen to us.
We do things properly here.
We have a world that can't be bombed or battered.
We've finished with that.
We're dead to change.

Her

It's not that I want to keep it away from him.
I just can't see him being that bothered.

Him

There's a man on the television
holding the corpse of his son
and in the background there is music.

Her

And maybe there's a part of me
that doesn't care what he thinks about it either.

Him

The most exciting thing I can do in that office
is break the odd cup here and there.

Her

I hate myself for thinking that.

Him

There's a security in knowing
a bomb will never fly out of the sky.
We don't have to look up any more.

Her

We call these things progress.
But progress to what?
And to where?
Where are we actually fucking going?

Him

We can just look forward and that's a good thing.
And life might be hard but fuck.
Tell these kids that are being bombed
that life is fucking hard.

Her

He just sits watching the fighting
and nothing else.

End of Seven.

Eight

She appears.

Her

Sometimes I wonder whether or not
this is a relationship or just a default setting.

And we're working

we're working fucking hard

for this imaginary goal of being happy together
and in a kind of peace.

But what is that kind of peace?

What does it look like?

Perhaps some things we're not meant to know.
And the whys and the because of whats come later.
I have faith in him and that's all I need.
I hope that it's all I need.

End of Eight.

Nine

They appear.

He *is in front of the television. It oozes at him.*

Her Dead to the world he watches the news.

Him Between pieces on the conflict
they show a dog who acts like a person
and its owners treat it like a little boy.
And as ground troops are deployed
we vote for our favourite adverts.

Her I spoke to your mum.

Him She didn't tell me she was going to ring.

Her I don't tell him it was me who called her.

Him What did she say?

Her She was surprised to hear
you didn't tell me about your dad.

Him He didn't want people to know.

Her It's nothing to be ashamed of.

Him Imagine if I weren't working.

Her We'd cope.

Him I've had to lend them money.

Her It's what we're there for.

Her It's what you do.

Him She asks me why I kept it from her.

Her We can manage.
I don't have to be involved
if you don't want me to be.

Him I ask her how she can say that.
I couldn't do it without you.

Her He breaks my heart without trying.
It is the softest tissue because I love him.

Him Every decision I make is with you
at its fucking heart.

Her I wonder at what point
do we include time for ourselves.

Him I tell her I only want to do what's best.

Her I don't think what we are doing is what's best.

Him I tell her I know.
I need you.

Her And I know he does.
And maybe I haven't been there enough.
Maybe I've been letting him down too.

Him I love you.

Her And that is it.
Whatever challenges or problems we have
we love each other.
There's nothing else in the world except us.

Him We watch the news.

The bombing has reached the rural provinces
and civil war has broken out.

End of Act One.

Act Two

One

He appears.

He slowly gets dressed from one suit to another identical suit as the rear blares at him from a television screen.

He takes time, he makes himself up slowly.

He is ready for work.

End of One.

Two

They appear.

Her Wake up.

Him Wake up.

Her Kettle on.
TV on.

Everything on.

The day is alive with electric hum.

Him Morning news blaring.

The slow tense of every muscle begins again.

Her People are already on Twitter.

Hashtag breakfast.

Him Gulped my tea down without really noticing.

The cup still hot to touch.

Her I shower.

The warm water runs down my hair
my body and my face.

Him

I wonder why someone so good
and so fucking beautiful has to work.

Her

I choose carefully what to wear.
Which grey to put with which black.

Him

The dread builds about another day
pushing my mind to keep going.
Why am I doing this?

Are we not here to expand as a species?

Her

We know the world will not change for us.
But if we deal with it together
and in tune with each other
then we will be stronger than that.

I put on my make-up.

Him

We leave.

Her

I take the backed-up post out of the little grey slot.
If it wasn't for me he would let them pile up.

Him

She tuts but that's all it is.
A tut.

There's more to life than remembering the post.

Her

The cat watches us still and
I'm now certain she's watching us
out of sadness rather than fascination.

I read too much into these things.

Him

Traffic.
Car cholesterol.
The same every day.

Her

I don't like to think that the cat watches us
because it knows something terrible.
I'd rather it watched everyone if that's the case.

Him

A young girl on a bike screams
at the bus as it cuts her up.

'Watch where you're fucking going,'
and through the window she looks at me.

Her I realise I don't have any cash for lunch.
I don't mind paying on my card
but you feel a bit of twat
paying on a card with the meal deal.

Him And I think, well, it's not my fucking fault.
Why did she look at me
when I was just fucking sat there?
Look at your fucking self.

Her But then I think fuck it.
Money is money and they'll take it
however fucking way I give it to them.

Him When I get to work I read an article online
about how tomorrow's global war will be nuclear
and last just minutes.
The thought haunts me all day.

Her I peel the stamps off envelopes and save them.

Him Thanks to the television
the radio and the internet by ten a.m.
I have encountered international misery
and actual human suffering
more times than I have encountered
any kind of personal satisfaction.

Her I never use the stamps I save.
I let them build up in my drawer.
I never think to question my routine.

Him My computer crashes
and takes all my progress and work with it.
I feel myself breathing in particles
of disconnected wi-fi.

Her That's a lie.
I question what I do
every single moment of the day.

Him The computer splutters back to life
and a backlog of emails flood through.
One hour ago. Two hours ago. Three hours ago.
Urgent. Priority. Urgent.

Her I type up a letter.

Him I panic. My fingers shake as I reply.
Apologise. Explain. Rinse. Repeat.
See email from Cohen. Fuck.
Don't even want to open it.

Her I answer the twenty-fourth call of the day.

Him I have a cup of coffee for lunch.

Her The man on the other end doesn't want to talk
he wants to shout.

Her I do not know who he is
I hang up and tell my boss about the abuse.
Though he is more concerned
that I hung up the phone.
It is company policy to never hang up the phone.

Him The computer crashes again
just as I'm preparing for another meeting.

Her The phone rings and I dread picking it up.

Him I receive nothing but jeers from my colleagues.
Half sniffing an opportunity to take advantage
of my misfortune
half not understanding
how to honestly convey empathy.

Her After a few moments
of weighing up whether or not

not answering the phone now would manifest itself
in not answering the phone ever again
I bite the bullet and prepare myself
to be called a cunt for the second time.
I pick up the phone and it is the same man.

Him I rush notes for the meeting and do the best I can.

Her I hate him.

And as I accept his apology
I snap a pen in my hand.

Him She just looked at me.

It's not like I was even driving the fucking bus.

Her But before I can really process it

the phone is ringing again
and I don't have time to establish what I think.

Him I don't mean what I said.

I didn't even say it.

I don't mean what I thought.

Her My mind wanders

because it has nothing to cling on to.

Him Just because I think it

it doesn't mean I mean it.

Her I stand in front of the mirror in the toilet.

I wonder how I'm seen by other people.
I am not fat but I trick myself that I am.

Him My dad texts and asks for money

to pay for Mum's Christmas present.
I can't say no.

I tell Frank that I'll go for a pint.

Her I realise I forgot to open the bills in my bag.

Fuck it.

Him The day doesn't come to a neat finish

it just ends because it has to.

Her And I wish my boss a Merry Christmas.

End of Two

Three

He appears in a pub

Him

The pub is busy but Frank doesn't notice.
He doesn't take in his environment
like the rest of us.

There is nothing that touches him
because nothing is real.

We talk about the football.

About the cricket.

Everyone's shit.

They're all playing shit.

Frank's great.

It's all gone wrong for him.

And yet he sits in the office and says nothing.

Just keeps to himself.

But with that he sees everything.

Working with a man so apathetic

is both exciting and dangerous.

I tell him that me and her are stronger than ever.

I tell him that I've only just realised
how important it is to be together
in times like these.

And how close we were

to making the biggest mistake of our lives.

He tells me he thinks he's ill.

There's nothing wrong with him yet
but he knows it's there.

There's nothing physically wrong
with the milk in your fridge

but you know it'll go off.

There's nothing physically wrong
with that loaf of bread in your cupboard
but that'll get mouldy.

Sometimes you can just feel it.
It's already within us, our deaths.

Fucking hell, Frank. I say.
That's a bit heavy.

You start wondering about tomorrow.
You start wondering about how much hope
you can put on it.

I can't be doing with this, he says.
I'm trapped here.

It's a bloody prison.
There's no better word for it.
Prison.

I ask him what he means.
The pub?

The office?
No, he says.
Here.

And he taps the side of his head.
Here.

We realise it's easier on both of us
if nothing is said.
And so we just sit there and finish our drinks.
Merry Christmas, Frank.
Cheers.

End of Three

Four

She appears, decorating a Christmas tree with pristine ornaments. **She**
strings fairy lights around the branches.

He appears.

Her Do you know what I believe in?

Him What do you believe in?

Her I believe in this.
I believe in here.

Me and you.

She continues to decorate the tree.

Him We have a good Christmas.

We spend it alone.
We spend it together.

Her I tell my mother we're just having a quiet one.

You know how busy he's been
and what with the year we've had
He just wants to . . . I just need to relax.

Him We greet morning gently
with the natural waking of our bodies.

We make it through the day
and the world doesn't collapse.
The telephone doesn't ring
and the television is ignored.
And in this space two humans can exist
and be themselves.

She is on the phone.

Her It was great.

It was like going away.
Which is weird because we were just at home.

Home.
I've never called this place home before.

Him I buy her a necklace of white gold.

She holds the necklace.

Her I love it.

Can you help me?

He *helps put it on Her.*

Her Do you like yours?

Him She bought me a watch
that tells the time on every continent.

I tell her I love it.
Though I am cold to it.
It's just a necklace.
It's just a watch.

Her It stresses me.

We are not cheap people and
we will start the New Year with new debts.

Him But it's Christmas.
Fucking Christmas.

And we're taking time out for ourselves.

Her It was then when we realised
how content we could be
if we could just be left alone.

End of Four.

Five

They appear.

Him At New Year we are required to join our friends
Nick and Chloe for a night out
that has been planned for months.

Her We don't have to if you don't want to.

Him I lie and tell her I am looking forward to it.
Truth is Christmas alone was bliss.
Us against the world.
Outside and tomorrow come too soon.
But you can't stay indoors forever.

Her They take us to the adult crèches
ostensibly called Revolution
Panache and Utopia.

Him She suggests a pill to make it easy on ourselves.
To have a good time.
The chemical wash fooling us
that this is somewhere close to happy.

I am twenty-nine years old.
I am popular.
I am handsome.
I have a loving girlfriend and I am set for life.

Her I am twenty-seven.
I would cross a burning bridge for him.
My mother is proud of me.
I can abide my job and I trust my friends.
I am set for life.

Him She dances like a dreamer.
The number of times we have almost given up
is the number of near fatal mistakes
I have made in my life.
Do you want a drink?

Her I see the looks he gets.
Chloe reminds me that he is a keeper.

Him Though I don't think that I am ugly
I believe myself to be dull and boring and plain.
Elbows as sharp as maths digging into the side.
As the barman chooses who to serve
the gripping and groaning herd rub across each other.

I hate this.
This is not me.

Her I don't enjoy going out.
I do it for him.

I believe this is what he wants.
But I watch him.
And just for a moment
for a split second
I see it in his face
that he is not happy here either.

I tell him.
I don't know why
but it feels right to be honest
and to let him know
that I don't think our friends understand us.
And that I'd like to go home.

Him Are you OK? I ask.

Her Yes, I say.

Him I want to go home too.

End of Five.

Six

They are sitting on the pavement outside their flat.

They are lit by a clock of light which is close to midnight.

Him And we left.

Dodging the queues and crowds
spilt drinks, broken glass and street fighters.

Her I love you.

You are warmer than you'll ever know.

Him Midnight.

Her A new year.

Him Brought in with mugs of white wine.
Watching other people's fireworks.

Her And we are alone.

Him Together.

Her We find ourselves a space.

Him The idea of being here and nothing else.
Able to take what we want as what we are.

Her I miss myself terribly.

I've got nothing to say to myself any more.

Him And I tell to her that Christmas
meant more to me than . . .

Her And I've never been happier than . . .

Him And I can't stop thinking about when . . .

Her And why should we be ashamed
of wanting to spend time alone.
I fucking love you.

Him All we can do in this life
is make a little room for ourselves.
That's our own little space.
We can make clocks that never tick.

Her If the moment calls we can tell it to wait.

Him And we sat there at midnight
and watched the New Year roll in.
New stars and ideas.
We sat with each other
both agreeing that there's nothing purer
than fresh rain
after being stuck out in the rotten air.

The clock strikes midnight.

End of Six.

Seven

They appear.

Her Wake up.

Him Wake up.

Her I make a cup of tea.

And as the kettle boils I stare out of the window and think of nothing.

I literally think of nothing.

Him I'm being battered by the pattern.

Her At work each phone call is abuse.

Each email is a threat.

Or at least that's how it feels.

But if it feels like that then surely that's how it is.

Him I watch hardcore pornography rather than edit a report.

Her I go to the bathroom and check my hair.

I look at myself in the same way other people look at the television.

Not watching.

Letting it rinse over my eyes.

Him I accidentally download another virus.

It freezes my computer.

Her I make cups of tea.

And pour them in the sink.

Him Work dulls me to a nub

so that I only walk to the door where in the past I used to run.

Her My mum worries that we're struggling for money.

His dad is still out of work and the rain outside never stops.

She asks me how I feel and I'm sure

she's anticipating me to be sad or depressed but I'm happy because I've got him.

Him

Frank hasn't made it into work. I ask around if anyone knows why

but by the looks on their faces

they barely know who the fuck I'm on about.

Her

I get another call for the phone bill. I accidentally answer it and hang up straight away.

Fuck.

Steven from accounts comes over

and tells me he likes my hair today.

Him

I think about the old man. I didn't realise how much I need him here.

~~I've never been here.~~

~~Nothing to do here.~~

~~Nothing to do here.~~

~~Nothing to do here.~~

Him

Perhaps I see him as an older me. Or what I could see myself being if I'm not careful.

~~The violence in their language confuses me.~~

~~I'm not sure I can handle this.~~

Him

I look through his desk and drawers to see what kind of shit I'll horde when I'm his age and sat here.

Her

I'm a bit embarrassed.

A bit coy.

A bit fucking angry.

Him

And I see that he has nothing in his desk. His cupboards are empty.

I can't believe it and I admire the old bastard.

Her I think about my legs.
I think about my eyes.

Him He sits here all day and he doesn't let it touch him.
His empty desk nothing but a vessel
of the all the fucks he gives.

Her I think about myself in parts.

Him I look around the office
and Frank may be old and sad
but at least he doesn't believe in this.

Her Somebody in the office tells a joke.
I check myself as I smile.

Him For some people normal isn't enough.
For some people this isn't enough.

Her And I ask myself
What are you smiling at?
What are you actually smiling at?

Him I'm not happy and I'm not sad.
I'm just fucking there.

Her I'm asked to take minutes for a meeting upstairs
and they're taking the piss.

Him I'm not becoming the man I thought I'd become.

Her If they had balls
then they'd tell me to take the minutes.
Who the fuck are you asking me to take minutes?

Him I get a text from my dad telling me the money
I tried to transfer didn't go through.
I check my account online and I haven't enough.

Her Fuck you asking.
Tell me.
Tell me to take your fucking minutes.

Him He's bled me dry.

Her I sit there in silence.

Him I see the cars outside my window.
Wishing for a crash.
Something to happen.
Something like breaking glass.

Her I stop listening.

Him Just for a moment.

Her It is silent.

Him Go home.

Her Go home.

Him Today I have realised . . .

Her Today I have realised . . .

Him It is possible for Frank to exist
yet not be in work.

Her I've never sat comfortably at my desk.

Him It is possible to just say no.

Her That maybe I should start saying no.

End of Seven.

Eight

They are sitting at a table. They have been eating.

Him There are children getting caught in the war.
Little starving bombed children
that will die after barely being born.
That child will die pure.
And his little legs and his little arms
his little face and his little arse
are being blown to bits by adults.

Her Did you have a good day?

Him Yeah.

You?

Her Yeah.

She goes to clear the table. He stops Her, as to say not to bother.

Pause.

He goes to hold Her hand but as He reaches over the table He knocks a glass.

The moment He struggled to create is broken. He is resigned to let

Her stack the plates, the cutlery and the glasses.

She takes them to the sink.

Moment.

The television, in another space, switches on. It is white noise and 'snow'.

Him I tried to transfer money to my dad and there wasn't enough.

Her How much more does he want?

Him A bit.

Her A bit . . .

Him Just a bit more. They have to live.

Her We can hardly manage.

Him We should be fine.

Her Well, we're not.

Him Both of us are working.

Her Council tax has gone up. Rent has gone up.

Fucking draining money to your parents.

Him I can't help that.

Her Yeah, well we can't help having the heating on either.

I start to open the letters at work.

One after another asking for more and asking more often.

No let up.

No consideration.

No more warnings.

Your phone is going to default.

I can't do it because it's in your name.

Him Right.

Her You need to tell them we can't pay it yet.

Him Yet . . .

Her Well, what the fuck do you want me to do?

Take your watch back?

Him Yeah.

Her Fuck you.

Him I don't understand how we can't afford . . .

We're on good wages.

Her Not good enough.

End of Eight.

Nine

They are faced with a mountain of bills.

They start burying mounds and mounds of letters in any crevice they can find in their flat.

The place is fit to bursting

End of Nine.

Ten

He appears.

Him

First I thought she'd fucked up.
I mean I know I leave it to her
but we work and that should be enough.
If you work then you should be able to afford to . . .
I mean yeah, I've had to lend my parents a few quid
but you can afford that.
You should be able to afford that.

My dad calls with good news.
He's got a job.
I ask him what doing.
It's picking litter in a park.

You can just imagine him there.
These little shits.
Little bastards dropping rubbish everywhere.
And there's my dad behind
picking up after them.
If they shat on the pavement
would he have to pick that up too?

The war today spread
to the neighbouring provinces.
The civil outbreak has caused
the international community
to condemn the people for fighting for their lives.
They've never seen fire in Geneva.

I read an article online
about a Spaniard who shot himself and his family.
They say he was deranged.
Say he had issues.

Though the reasons he shot himself they report
were mounting debts, the loss of his job
and pressures at home.

Now that to me doesn't sound like derangement.
To me that sounds like
the whole fucking world falling in on him.

She appears.

Her

And you think shooting yourself and your family
is the right way of dealing with those problems?

Him

I didn't say that.
But let's not make it something it wasn't.
He was failed.
Then he failed his family.
In that order.

Frank has still not turned up for work.
I have taken to drinking out of his mug.

Her

The walls in the flat.
They weren't painted that long ago.
The landlord talks about painting them again.
But with every layer of paint he coats the walls
the smaller it makes the room.
Each layer is another crust.
I can feel the room closing in.
At what point do you say something?
At what point do you refuse?
I dream about Steven from accounts
and Adam from accounts
taking it in turns to smash me
while my boyfriend watches.

Can you ring O??
Can you do something about these fucking bills?

Him

Yeah.

Her

I can't deal with it on my own.

Him

I know.
You don't have to.

End of Ten.

Eleven

He *appears.*

Him I wake up.

She *appears.*

Her He rings me at work.

Him I phone her.

Her How are you feeling?

Him I lie.

Her Well, I hope you feel better, darling.

Are you going to try and make it into work?

Him I lie again.

Her OK, see you later.

She *disappears.*

Him I sit in my dressing gown

eating cold soup out of a can.

I wasn't ill though this makes me feel sick.

The only actual work I do all day
is writing on internet forums.

I say controversial things to provoke a response.

I incite anger using racism, sexism, homophobia.

I blame the Jews for the markets crashing.

I blame the Muslims for pretty much
everything else.

I masterfully litter my tirades
with spelling mistakes

and factual inaccuracies, circular logic
and ignorance.

Though I do not believe anything that I am saying

I find this much more exciting and rewarding
than work ever was.

There's a cooking programme on the television
and some of the men there are crying.

I phone Frank.

A young man answers.

It's his son or something.

Frank's been taken ill.

He's in hospital.

I say thank you and hang up the phone.

I didn't really listen.

I said thank you

before I hung up the phone.

End of Eleven.

Twelve

She *is in the mirror.*

She *is putting make-up on.*

She *finishes and looks at herself. She is pretty.*

She *wipes her hand across her face, taking the lipstick with it.*

She *wipes her eyes, her cheeks.*

She *scruffs her hair.*

She *looks ridiculous.*

He *appears on the phone.*

Him I ring the company like she asked me to.

I'm phoning with regards to . . .

They know why I'm phoning.

I have a problem with the . . .

They know what my problem is.

Can you help?

They can't help.

The barking echoes of terms and conditions.
The policies and the packages.
The contracts and the clauses.
They cannot help.

Frank is dying
I tell them.
And I said thank you.
'Who's Frank?' they ask me.

Her
At work I am stared at.
I am asked if I am OK.
Yes, I say.
Yes I am thank you, how are you?

Him
I'm Frank, I say.
I know I'm Frank because I hate it too.
Because I can't pretend to give a shit.
And if I'm not Frank yet then I will be.
'Would you like us to call you back
at a more convenient time?'

Her
I hear Adarn from accounts
talking to Steven from accounts.
Asking what have I done with myself.
[REDACTED]

Him
I tell him that we're not paying.
He tells me I am contracted.
I tell him that I'll cancel my direct debit.
He tells me they'll cut me off.
I tell him I'll sell the phone.
He tells me I can't do that.
I tell him that I think he overestimates his position.

Her
I'm asked to see the boss.
He asks me what's wrong.
I tell him nothing.
He says that he considers me a hard worker.

Him
He tells me I have to continue paying the bill.
He tells me they are providing a service.
That this is how the world works.

I ask him if he's ever allowed himself to be alive.
I ask him if he's ever said no
to anything he's ever been told.
Imagine saying no as a concept.
Yes is passive.
No is refusal.
Yes is acceptance.
No is an action.
Yes is dire.
No is a new idea.

Her
I take the afternoon off on recommendation.
I'm asked to consider how I dress for work
and the importance of good presentation.
I will not present myself to you, I think.
But I smile.
And I shake his hand.

Him
I tell him to fuck off.
Not the company.
Him.
Personally.
You.
Fuck off.

Her
I just want to be home.
End of Tzeitel.

Thirteen

He appears at Frank's bedside.

Him

Frank sat amongst tubes.
And he's happy to see me.

We talk about the football.

About the cricket.

Everyone's shit.

They're all playing shit.

He tells me he has days.

But it has taken years to get to this point.

He asks me if I'm happy.

I tell him that I haven't thought about it.

He tells me I don't ask enough questions.

I tell him I do, just not out loud.

He tells me that something comes over you
when you're near the end.

Memories seem to have much more relevance
because they're all you have.

And you put everything in its own little box
And then you realise that some boxes

those labelled disappointment and regret
are full to the brim

And those labelled love and happiness
are almost empty in comparison.

He's angry.

He's fucking furious.

He's wasted his entire life.

And what he's dying of isn't cancer
but other people.

Start asking questions.

End of Thirteen.

Fourteen

They appear.

Him

Are you happy?

Her

What?

Him

You need to answer me the question
Are you happy

Without any thought or pause

Are you happy

And if you have to think

Then it means you're not

Answer the question

Are you happy

Quick

Go.

Her

I . . .

Him

No.

Neither am I.

Her

What's brought this on?

Him

Something Frank said.

Her

How is he?

Him

Dead.

End of Act Two.

*Act Three***One****He appears.****Him**

There are moments in the day
where I believe that I am all.

Where the light breathes from me.
And the cold cools only me.

There are moments in the day
where time ticks just for me
and I watch the past
and present dance, dissolve in duet.

Where strangers weep and I see them
and I believe their tears are shed for me.

I close my eyes
and I can still make out the world
as if my eyes were open.

I sit in spaces left alone.

Here are your playgrounds
your parks and your peace.
Watch the rain pour on to them
and settle on the surface
unable to soak into the ground.

There are moments in the day
where I believe that I am all.

They are getting fewer.
And I know I cannot last.

*End of One.***Two****He is in a space.****She appears.**

He takes a sandwich out of his box, takes it apart and only eats the
meat within it.

She takes a sandwich out of his box, takes it apart but can find nothing
within it that she wants to eat.

*End of Two.***Three***They appear.***Her** Wake up.**Him** Wake up.**Her** Kettle on.**Him** Turn over.**Her** Forgot my fucking slippers.**Him** Back asleep.**Her** Get up.**Him** No.

Her Even with the TV off
the brash bang and flash of war dominate the flat.
I do nothing as the clock passes nine.

Him Good morning.**Her** We're running late.**Him** My phone alarm.

It didn't go off.

Her Didn't set it.
Him Yeah.
Her So . . .
 What shall we do?
Him We fuck.
Her His mobile rings.
Him Mid-coitus.
Her Answer it.
Him No.
Her Could be important.
Him It isn't.
Her Could be.
Him I answer it.
Her It's O2.
Him I hang up.
Her What was it?
Him Don't care.
Her And then he . . .
Him Then I just . . .
Her He threw his phone.
Him Smash.
Her Against the wall.
Him Fuck it all.
Her Broke.
Him Yeah.
Her But . . .

Him Don't need it.
Her Yeah.
~~Her~~
Her Get to work three hours late.
 I pretend to have a cold.
Him I wander in without showering
 and not wearing a tie.
 I get looks at reception.
 I know they will be talking about me.
~~Her~~
~~Her~~
~~Her~~
Him Sinks of bleach.
 The cleaners have been in.
 My desk could do with a deeper scrub.
 Erode it like a coast.
Her I do one thing an hour.
 No one notices if I don't kill myself working.
 A revelation.
Him I am not asked about my lateness
 or my appearance.
Her I overhear Adam from accounts
 and Steven from accounts talking.
 The new girl Hannah is being rated.
Him There is an argument
 about Frank's job description.
 They are putting an ad in an agency.
 Turns out no one really knew what he did.
Her Thanks to her chest and arse she is welcome.
Him I haven't brushed my teeth.

Her She's a cute girl.
I unplug my phone.

Him I read opinion pieces on the war.
Nobody understands it.
They're all talking politics.
But out there.
On the front line.
It's reality.
This isn't it.
This isn't real.
We won't die here.
Nothing's on the line.
It's a fucking office.

Her I feel sorry for the girl but I am glad she is here
to soak up the attention.

Him I start browsing hardcore porn sites
while I look for news on the war.
A common theme.
Life.

Her She might enjoy it now.
But she's new.
She'll get over it.
She'll resent it.

Him I confuse myself and feel sick.

Her And she'll resent herself for enjoying it.

Him I smoke a cigarette in the car park.
Fuck it.
The day's too long for me.

Her The slut.

Him I spend the afternoon asleep in the toilet.
I wake to pick her up and we go home.

Her Gets what she deserves.
Him And like breathing in without chest bones
we are relieved.

Her I smile as I leave the office.
You all get what you deserve.

Him Today I have realised . . .

Her Today I have realised . . .

Him I make no effort with my life.

Her I could disappear.

And no one would notice.

Him I hate almost everyone.
Other than her.

Her I've worried about my job for so long.

And maybe myself.

Her But I've been shown it doesn't matter.

Him Maybe.

Her And neither do I.

End of Three

Four

They appear

Him Wake up.

Her Wake up.

Long silence

End of Four

Five

They appear.

Her Wake up.

Him [REDACTED] and get into work for the afternoon.

Her I get to the office eventually but no one cares. I sit there and don't know what point I'm making.

Him Fuck it.

Him [REDACTED] I break my desk cupboard.

Her I have no respect.

Him On my lunch I go to the market.

Her I spit a little bit in the kettle.

Him I take a box of rancid fruit that has been left out in the bins.

Her I am asked to photocopy a contract.

Him I hide fetid bananas soft apples and bad oranges in the office.

Her I copy the front page and the back page.

Him Within hours the place stinks like a drain.

Her And fill it with blank pages.

Him The flies will be here tomorrow.

Her I hand the contract back to my boss. I hold eye contact with him

so that when he looks back he will know it was intentional.

Him I will deny any knowledge of where the smell comes from.

Her But he doesn't notice.

Him I suggest wryly that's it Frank haunting us. But it's me. It's me haunting them.

Her And that is testament to my worth.

Him I ask the office what the fuck they're doing. Frank practically died here. I'm not going to let it get me. This is not my life's work.

[REDACTED]

They walk off.

End of Five.

Six

He appears.

Him I ring my dad. He tells me he's on his break. I ask him how much shit he's picked up today. How many used condoms. Tampons. Knives. Needles. Nappies.

Dog shit.

Horse shit.

Rat shit.

Dead rats.

Dead dogs.

Dead horses.

He tells me I'm putting him off his biscuits.

I tell him he's putting me off the future.

I ask him what the fuck he's doing.

And he hangs up the phone.

I dial his number again

and this time he doesn't even say hello

he just picks up

and I tell him

he can keep the fucking money he owes me

because I don't fucking need it.

I shit money.

I ooze money.

This time I hang up

and I go to the kitchen to smash a cup.

He walks out.

~~I dial his number again
and this time he doesn't even say hello
he just picks up
and I tell him
he can keep the fucking money he owes me
because I don't fucking need it.
I shit money.
I ooze money.
This time I hang up
and I go to the kitchen to smash a cup.~~

~~He tells me I'm putting him off his biscuits.
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and I tell him
he can keep the fucking money he owes me
because I don't fucking need it.
I shit money.
I ooze money.
This time I hang up
and I go to the kitchen to smash a cup.~~

He rushes on, grabs Her and they run off stage laughing and wrestling
End of Six.

Seven

They are at a table.

Him How was your day?

Her Good.

Him What made it good?

The telephone rings.

They try to ignore it.

It gets louder and louder.

He picks it up.

Him O2 call the landline

they tell me that for days

they have been trying to get hold of me.

The bill is still outstanding.

And I tell them I'll show you something

fucking outstanding

but they don't get that I mean my cock

and they don't get that it's a joke.

I tell them that the phone is broken.

How is it broken?

I broke it.

Your warrantly won't cover that.

Are you happy with your life?

I ask him.

Stunned.

Emotion down the telephone.

A soft touch right to the centre of his heart.

He takes a pair of scissors.

He playfully snips the air with them. She is nervous.

I tell him that everything I care about in my life

is transient and temporary.

The love I have for her

cannot be measured or sold.
It cannot be touched or sullied
and it exists only if I say it does.

I love her
and what she represents.

He cuts the line. She is relieved.

They kiss.

End of Seven.

Eight

They appear.

Him Liberated by the cut phone
I suggest we flood the kitchen.

Her I tell him to calm down
and maybe we should look in the catalogue
for a new telephone.

Him Who do you need to ring?

Her What?

Him Who do you need to phone?

Her No one.
I don't know.
At some point.

Him Well, we'll worry about it then.
Didn't it feel good?
Didn't it feel a relief?

Her I suppose it was.
And it was.

I felt three stone lighter the moment he cut it.

Him I broke a cup at work
and it felt just like this
and I thought
at the time
it was the cup
but it was me and how I felt
and I feel the same now
do you get what I mean.
It isn't about the stuff
It's about . . .

He takes a plate and drops it on the floor. It smashes everywhere.

Her Careful!
What are you doing?

He smashes another one.

Him Don't you see what I mean?
It's just stuff.

He passes her a plate.

She thinks about it.

She drops it on the floor.

She stifles an embarrassed laugh.

End of Eight.

Nine

They appear.

They lay out tools from carrier bags.

They destroy and dismantle everything in their flat.

**She sits on the floor and cuts up photographs while He breaks the table
into pieces.**

He rips down the centre of the sofa.

She destroys her necklace with a hammer. **He** watches.

He takes his watch off and stamps on it. **She** watches.

The television is still blaring the war. **He** takes the hammer to it.

End of Nine.

Ten

Lights rise on the mess.

End of Ten.

Eleven

They are in a bath.

They are fully clothed.

She reads from a book. **She** rips pages out of it.

Him Dream in shatters.

Dream in frost.

Dream of people watching.

He touches **Her** face, **Her** cheek.

You are enormously significant
to my existence.

I could count on my hand
all the things I live for.
There's nothing else after the forefinger.
You are the thumb.

She bites **His** thumb.

They kiss.

End of Eleven.

Twelve

Lights up on them fucking.

They ignore the scene that they're meant to be doing.

She comes.

End of Twelve.

Thirteen

They appear.

Him Wake up.

Her Wake up.

He corpses and **She** starts laughing too.

The scene breaks down.

End of Thirteen.

Fourteen

They appear.

Him Wake up.

Her Wake up.

Him How did you sleep?

Her Deep.

Him I watch her get up.

Her shorts.

Her There are no mugs for tea.

There is no toaster for toast.

I don't know what to do about breakfast.

Him We go back to sleep.

End of Fourteen.

Fifteen

They appear.

Her Wake up.

Him Yeah.

Her I regret the decision to smash all the lightbulbs out of their sockets.

Him The further into the dark she goes the harder it is to hear her.

Her The curtains are drawn and the glow of the street lights the room in a deep blue and orange.

Him I call for her.

Her I notice something.
His watch no longer ticks.
Hands suspended.
Stuck at quarter past four.

Him I'm not totally convinced I'm awake.

Her The time we decided.

Him I don't know.

Her The time we snapped.

Him What are you doing?

Her Nothing.

Him I'm hungry.

I'm going to find something.

Her Watch your feet.

Him Nothing stands out as edible.

Her And so I sit here in the dark and maybe that's what he means by escape.

Him Through the blind I see the moon.
I don't see its point.

Her The space daunts me.

Him I don't know what else we need.

Her And so I do nothing.

Him There is nothing else we need.

Her It is easy to get lost here.

Him I don't believe in outside any more.

Her The hallways are daunting.
The shadows deepen.

Him In and out is not sustainable.

Her I'm losing time.

Him Honing my life down into the flat.
Into the room
into the chair
into the head and the eye.

Her I understand what freedom means.

Him I am focused.

Her And what it costs.

End of Fifteen.

Sixteen

She appears.

He appears. He is pissing.

She tries to find a space where She can piss. She can't.

He finishes and walks away.

She goes to where He pissed and pisses there herself.

End of Sixteen.

Seventeen

He appears.

Him I dream of a child hurt
and I can't remember
if I saw him on the news
or I just made him up.
I swear he's hiding in the living room.

I haven't followed the war for a day or so.
Lag of understanding.
But I feel I know which way
the violence drifts.

She appears.

Her The flat starts to smell.
A fetid and warm-smelling bin.
Crawling through the hall.

Him The longest day of the year
and you can't even
stand the sight yourself
on the shortest days.

Her The clock is irrelevant.

~~She says, "I'm fucking tired."~~

~~She says, "I'm fucking tired."~~

~~She says, "I'm fucking tired."~~

~~She says, "I'm fucking tired."~~

Her We will get hungry
or we'll get thirsty
and get tired of drinking from the tap.
But we don't think of that now.
We don't think of that.
We don't think
We don't think.
Don't.

Him Grenades for your dinner.
Fuck your diet.

End of Seventeen.

Eighteen

She appears, sifting through a broken cabinet.

He appears.

Him What you doing?

Her Headache.

Him Oh.

Her Need something.

Him Yeah?

Her Yeah.

Him Don't we have —

Her Just sleep.

Him Can't sleep.

Her That's why I'm fucking looking.

Him Alright.

She gives up.

Her I'll have to go to the shop.

Him What?

Her I can't fucking . . .
I need to go.

Him No.
Look.
Be fine.

Her In pain.

Him Nothing out there.

Her Please.

Him Nothing for us.
Not any more.
They'll spit in your tea.
Cohen cunts.

Her All the food in the tins is rotten.
Muggy rooms.
There's a heat in the bathroom,
I can't find where it's coming from.

Him I want to blacken the walls and grow trees.
I can't grow them alone.
Will you help?

Her I couldn't make any sense
out of what he was saying.

Him He was holding him like this.
And he was . . . you know.
But he was holding him like this
and they were in front of trees.

Her And I realised he meant the war.
He wanted to recreate the war at home.

End of Eighteen.

Nineteen

They appear.

Her Wake up.

Cannot sleep.
Cannot dream.

Sit and stare into light purple
early morning.

Bore a hole in the wall.

I saved my mobile when we started breaking stuff.

Call my mum

because I had to talk to someone.

The muffled plastic-smelling tone
of the telephone

is better than nothing.

She told me she was worried.

I told her I was fine.

She told me her and the cat miss me.

And I told her I miss them too.

She asked when I would be home.

She told me she had made my bed.

She had made me cheese on toast
and a cup of tea.

She asked again when I would be home.

At least I've spoken out loud today.

He tells me he cannot think.

He sits and vegetates.

I have noticed his eyes
go from a blue to a grey.

I feel him drifting further.

A broken buoy at sea.

Him Wake up.

Her Open a can of beans.

Him Feel her gone.

Her Sit and stare at the smashed television.

Him Walk through to living room.

Her The silence soothing.

Him Are you alright?

Her Yeah.

Him You're up.

Her I check my face in the cracked mirror.

Him Come back to bed.

Her I can't sleep.

Him I can't wake up.

Her Go back to bed.

Him Are you alright?

Her I watch the sun rise.

Him Asleep in seconds.

Her I feel alone in this house.

Him All my energy is facing upward.

Her I didn't realise things would be so fucking intense.

Him I hear her crying.

Her And I wonder if we're going in the same direction or if I'm just following him.

End of Nineteen.

Twenty

He is lit by holding a lamp that's still working

He drops it on the floor and the light goes out.

End of Twenty.

Twenty-One

They appear.

Her What are you eating?

Him I made us food.

Her What is it?

Him I made it in the kitchen.

Her I don't know.

Him I made it for us.

Her But I don't know if I can eat it.

Her I don't know if I should.

Him We've eaten worse.

Her It smells.

Her It's not right.

Him All we can do in this life is make a little room for ourselves. That's our own little space. We can make clocks that never tick. Take what we want as . . .

Her And is this what we want?

Him Yes.

Her I thought this was about us.

Him Everything's about us.

Her I don't think we can cope with that.

End of Twenty-One.

Twenty-Two

She is picking through mountains of old sandwich boxes, looking for food within them.

She is struggling and gets frustrated.

He appears with a can of beans but they can't open it.

He starts to eat bits of the cardboard from the sandwich boxes.

She is reluctant to join him.

End of Twenty-Two.

Twenty-Three

They appear.

Him Do you think that's what they say?

Do you think that's what they're saying to each other right fucking now?

Her Who?

Him Them.

Her You don't turn to me any more.

Him No.

Her You think what you have is growing.

Him It is.

Her I've stopped dreaming.

Him I'm not enough for you.

Her I rang my mum.

Him Right.

Her I think I need to go away.

Him I want us to have a baby.

In here.

Will you let me fuck you?

Her No.

Him I think you're being unreasonable.

End of Twenty-Three.

Twenty-Four

She is putting lipstick on.

After She has finished She takes a bite from the stick and eats it.

End of Twenty-Four.

Twenty-Five

She is sitting on the floor, a blanket wrapped around her.

He is standing.

Him We're at war.

Me and you.

Her Fuck.

Him I suggest we blind ourselves.

In a moment of inspired idiocy I ask her to gouge out my eyes with a knife.

There's only so far you can go for someone. Tears pouring down her face.

Her I'm scared of you.

She gets up.

She goes to **Him**.

I'm sorry.

I didn't mean it.

Her But I did.

I don't know why I'm here.

He is four miles away from me.

I think it's just relief.

I was at my lowest.

Maybe I still am.

But that's not to say

I'm going to stay this low for ever.

We're losing each other.

How can this happen?

What do we do?

What the fuck do we do?

Him Nothing.

Her My mum has asked me to go home.

Him I know.

Her How do you know?

Him I can see in your eyes.

You've already gone.

End of Twenty-Five.

Twenty-Six

She has bags.

Her You could come with me.

Do you want to come with me?

Him I spent the night looking through old cut up photos

of you as a child

and they are happy.

That's all you are really.

Her If you're lost then you need to say

because if I come to find you

I might not know the way back.

Him That's OK.

Her What do you think you are achieving?

Him Nothing.

Her I do not tell him that as soon as I leave

I will phone the police

and an ambulance.

Him We both know where I'm going doesn't exist.

But let's talk as if it does.

Her I love you.

She disappears.

Him You're amazing

even when you're not here.

He notices Her gone.

There are moments in the day

where I believe that I am all.

There is a soft edge to the world

and there is an understanding between who I am

and what is expected of me.

His light fades.

The bath is lit.

He takes his shirt off.

There are moments in the day

where I believe that I am all.

There are moments in the day

where I am nothing.

He throws it in the bath.

78 Even Stillness Breathes Softly Against a Brick Wall

He lights a match.

The block of light fades, leaving the scene lit only by the match in his hand.

He throws the match into the bath.

The shirt burns.