

But more to the point, if Luka had known what was going to happen, he wouldn't have asked me in the first place.

I know these Fidelis people are saying they won't transfer the account over to you and Hector, but I'd be grateful if you'd contact them again. I really shouldn't be in this position, Maria. It's not fair on anyone.

>

I mean I know it's meaningless to talk about what's fair or not in this situation. It's obviously not fair on you that he's gone.

I just... He'd made the decision to live his life away from me. That was the reality. So I can't see that it's right for it to revert to me like this, just because of some oversight that doesn't really add up to anything more than, he didn't know he was going to die.

I mean obviously he did. Know. Because that's what appointing an executor obviously means. That you know you're going to die some day.

But we all know that and at the same time we all don't. And we all don't know it in such different ways. And we're all wrong in different ways. And I don't know how to make any decisions on that basis.

How can I be the one who, who, who makes this decision when I'm as wrong as anyone because I don't know either. I don't...

I know I'm just sort of babbling now and I won't keep you. I just wanted to say, again, how sorry I am. I'm sorry he's gone and I'm sorry there's an aftermath to that but he left me and that's as clear a signal as anybody could have that if there's anyone who shouldn't be picking up the pieces of this right now, it's me. There are seven and a half billion people on the planet who he didn't fucking walk out on and any one of them is better placed to make decisions about his online legacy than I fucking am.

<

Between the > < marks, the sound of TERRY leaving the voicemail fades down and we hear TERRY's thoughts, live, over the top.

God I'm not even listening to myself any more, as I leave this stupid self-justifying message for Luka's mum. I'm not even hearing my own voice.

My mind is racing. As if this thing were urgent, though it couldn't be less so.

I'm trying to remember the last thing we said to each other.

It must have been angry. They would have been angry words. No?

I didn't want to be angry, I wanted to be cool and to somehow rise above... But he'd make some cruel remark, or be petty or thoughtless, or he'd smile, or he'd be too kind for the moment. And I'd be angry.

Mostly of course he was just... gone. Just not there. Not even a silence, like the kind of silence you can dig down into and grow something there. Just a backdrop of ambient nothing-in-particular. So the anger, to be honest, it was almost a relief.

And I'm still angry.

And maybe now he's dead there'll never be a resolution, I'll never be not angry.

And that's the thought that starts to flip it all. Even as I'm saying no to Maria, no I'm not going to be the one to make this decision about what of him remains online, I'm realising: if I can hold this space, if I can be closer to him in this weird virtual afterlife, then maybe there'll be a way of... forgiving him. Or acknowledging or accepting or...

This could be a gift.

TERRY's voicemail message fades back up.

I'm sorry for swearing. I'm sorry for using up your voicemail space.

I'm just really sorry, Maria.

That's all I wanted to say.

And, look, if I can ever –

A beep, and then an automated voice:

This Mailbox is full.

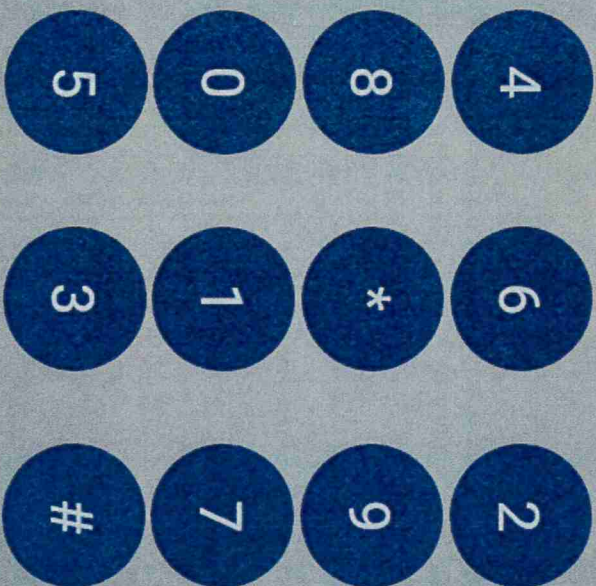
To listen back to your message, please press 1.

To leave your message, press 2.

To re-record your message, press 3.

To hear these options again –

We hear TERRY push a button. We just don't know which one. The numbers scramble on the phones and we hear a long beep.



SCENE 5

The sound feed takes us back to the 'reality' of the cafe.

TERRY walks to the café counter and asks the barista what cookies and cakes they have. The barista replies. He chooses a cookie and holds it in his hand.

TERRY:

The horrifying thing, of course, is that it seems as though everything is just going to carry on regardless.

Margaret sits in the corner and takes an hour and a half to eat a piece of lemon drizzle cake crumb by crumb.

Giancarlo puts his feet up on the chair next to him and reads his second-hand Calvino.

Dennis and Barbara exchange small lonely syllables about their neighbour's daughter's lesbian wedding, like they're sharing a bag of unpleasant cough sweets.

And I have my peppermint tea and my water and my cookie and nothing about me seems changed, and maybe nothing is.

Except one morning I'm working on this thing I'm writing and out of the corner of my eye I catch the slightest glimpse, this slender half-second glimpse, of a lioness. Coming in through the door of the cafe.

The sound of a lioness roaring moves around the audience.

An unhurried, unmistakable lioness.

Nobody else sees her, she's so sleek, so covert.

She moves herself through gaps in the layout. In and out of my line of sight.

Casting her imperious gaze over the almond biscotti and the cheese straws.

Without him seeing, she stops near Giancarlo and sniffs his aura. She's not impressed. There's not much meat on him.

Nothing about her makes me nervous.

We're friends.

The worst thing that can happen has already happened, and now we're both here. Me and a lioness.

The great gift of a lioness. Giving a form to the feeling. Me and a glimpse of a lioness. Already out of sight. Around the next corner.

Here's a strange idea. Someone told me that the whole internet, all the electrons that are in motion at any time that between them constitute the entire internet, together weigh about as much as a strawberry.

Either that fact's really captured my imagination, or I'm hungry. I'm not sure which.

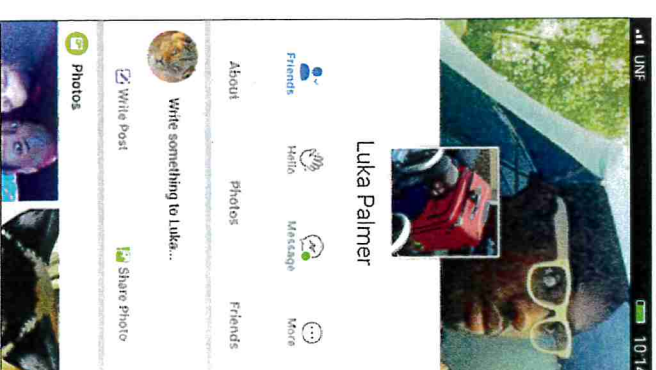
I've been making a start.

I promised Maria.

She said, "Just make a start, dear. See how you get on."

So I've been looking through Luka's Facebook.

The phones all light up on the home screen. The Fidelis app is selected. All of LUKA's bundles appear. The Facebook folder is selected and appears.



There was a period of my life where this is something I'd do almost obsessively. That point where we were turning from friends into... the other thing.

I dare say I'd have got a bit stalkery about it again after he left me, only he was sensible enough to block me. I was actually grateful, even at the time. I thought, that's actually the nicest thing you've done in ages.

So it's all new. Everything from the last seven months is new to me.

And I'm reading it all and scrolling down and breathing in and out and it's fine. It's fine. This isn't going to be as hard as I thought.

And then there's just this one picture.



One picture. He's holding a balloon.

He's smiling like a kid on the first day of the holidays and he's wearing that Snoopy vs. The Red Baron t-shirt that he told me he'd stopped wearing because it didn't quite fit him any more (which, actually, it doesn't) and he has a touch of red-eye from the flash but mostly he's holding a balloon.

The balloon picture takes over the whole screen. Over the rest of the scene it very, very slowly starts to get smaller and smaller, finally disappearing into the black of the screen.

He's flanked by three people and they're all doing poses that say what fun we're having in this popular night-spot, what incredible fun, there are tongues out and arms all over the shop and it's such fun and Luka is holding a balloon.

I never saw him hold a balloon.

I realise what I'm feeling is indignant because this photo is essentially an accusation. What did I do, what was it that I actively did, that made him feel unable to hold a balloon around me? To express his true balloon-holding self. Is that why he left me? So he could feel that string in his hand.

And then there he is again with the same people, having chips at the end of the night. No balloon by this point. He's obviously let go of the balloon. Or it's burst. See, this is why I don't do balloons. You're setting yourself up for a terrible loss.

I don't know any of these other people. They're young and sort of avid looking. They look like they just that minute came off stage from representing Latvia at Eurovision.

Luka has the same look in his eyes that he used to get when he'd scarf a whole bag of Tangfastics in under twenty minutes.

Whatever it was that made his eyes go like that on this night out, I'll bet all the money in my pockets it wasn't Haribo.

Of course he fucking left me. With my complicated tuneless indie bands and my two glasses of wine and my podcasts and my Saturday night devotion to BBC4.

And then there's a photo of him doing a half marathon. At least I knew about that. The cheeky sod asked me to sponsor him. I said I wouldn't and then I did. Here he is crossing the line at the end of the race.

And here he is by a fountain which doesn't look English. The caption says 'Make a wish!' which I don't get, I'm sorry.

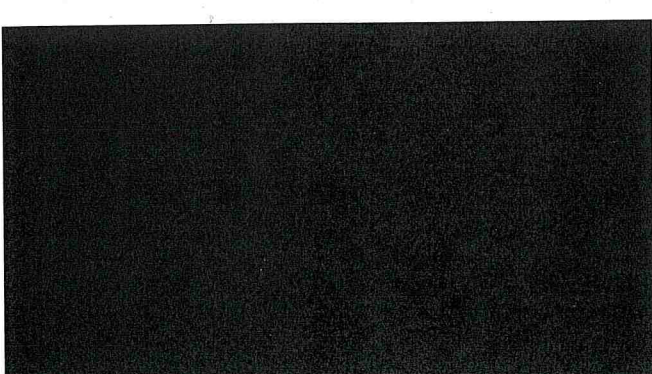
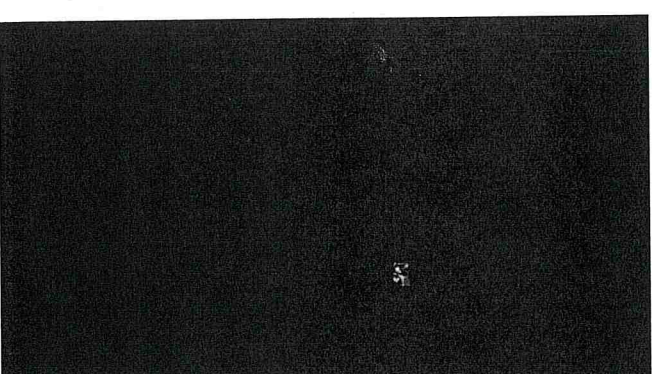
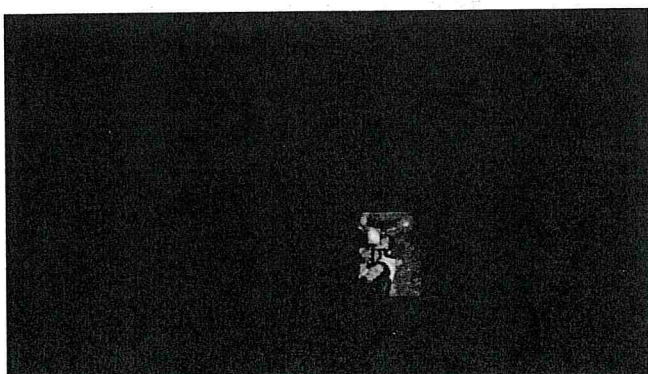
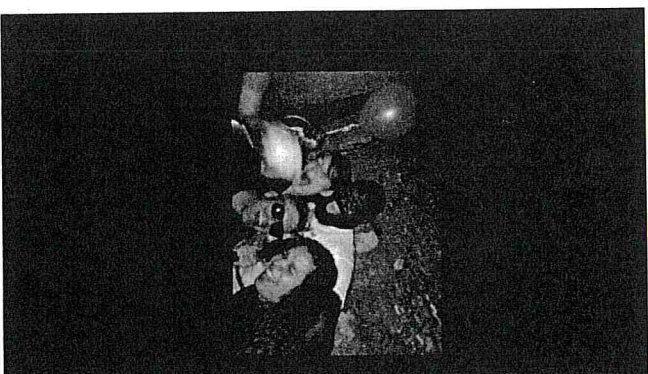
And here he is outside Bikram yoga with a boy he's tagged as Peachfuzz. And here he is asleep in a departure lounge with drool on his chin and this photo has been liked more times than 'Candle in the Wind' and here he is in Hyde Park with a frisbee between his teeth, and here he is and here and here at some club and there's a bubble machine or table football and here he is dancing with his top off and here and here and I'm: what's wrong with this picture?, oh his chest hair, he no longer has chest hair, and here he is with another four or seven random Latvians, and here he is and here and here and here and here and here he is holding a fucking orange balloon.

And he looks so happy.

TERRY crushes the cookie that was in his hand.

And here he is and here and here and here he is: but the point is: he isn't. There is no is. There is no he. There is no here.

Luka left me, and then he left everyone else, and there's no here any more, and he's no more present than a balloon you just let go of and watch it disappear into a complicated sky.



SCENE 6

TERRY:

Listen, what would you do?

I don't mean in my position, I don't mean what would you do if someone asked you to be their digital executor. I mean what would you do with all your online stuff after you die?

Your emails and your Facebook and your Twitter and your Instagram. And the curious remnants of your MySpace that still show up when you Google yourself, which you still do from time to time, though you know as well as I do, that way madness lies.

Imagine. At the moment of your death, you can push a button. A big red button next to your bed. Yeah it's a bed death. An orderly bed death. Lucky you.

You can push a button on the wall and in that moment, every online trace of you, every virtual fragment, every tremor of your human frailty that went out into the world expressed as a cloudburst of ones and zeros... is gone.

It can all disappear with your final breath.

Or it can outlive you. It can remain, to say who you were.

If that's who you were.

So that as long as the digital cosmos survives, you survive, and you'll never be forgiven.

— Forgotten. Did I say forgiven? I mean forgotten. Forgotten.

So. Do you? Reach out and push the button?

Do not go gentle, says Dylan Thomas.

Horseshit, say I.

I've done enough raging to last me a lifetime. I'll take gentle at the end. That much I know.

What I can't figure out is, what's the gentler thing? The less rageful thing?

To push the button? Or to not push it?

You see I keep getting lost in this spiral.

I have to remind myself that no such button actually exists.

And then, I have to remind myself that it does. Kind of.

That's the button Lukka's daring me to press. Or not.

Not for me, but for him.

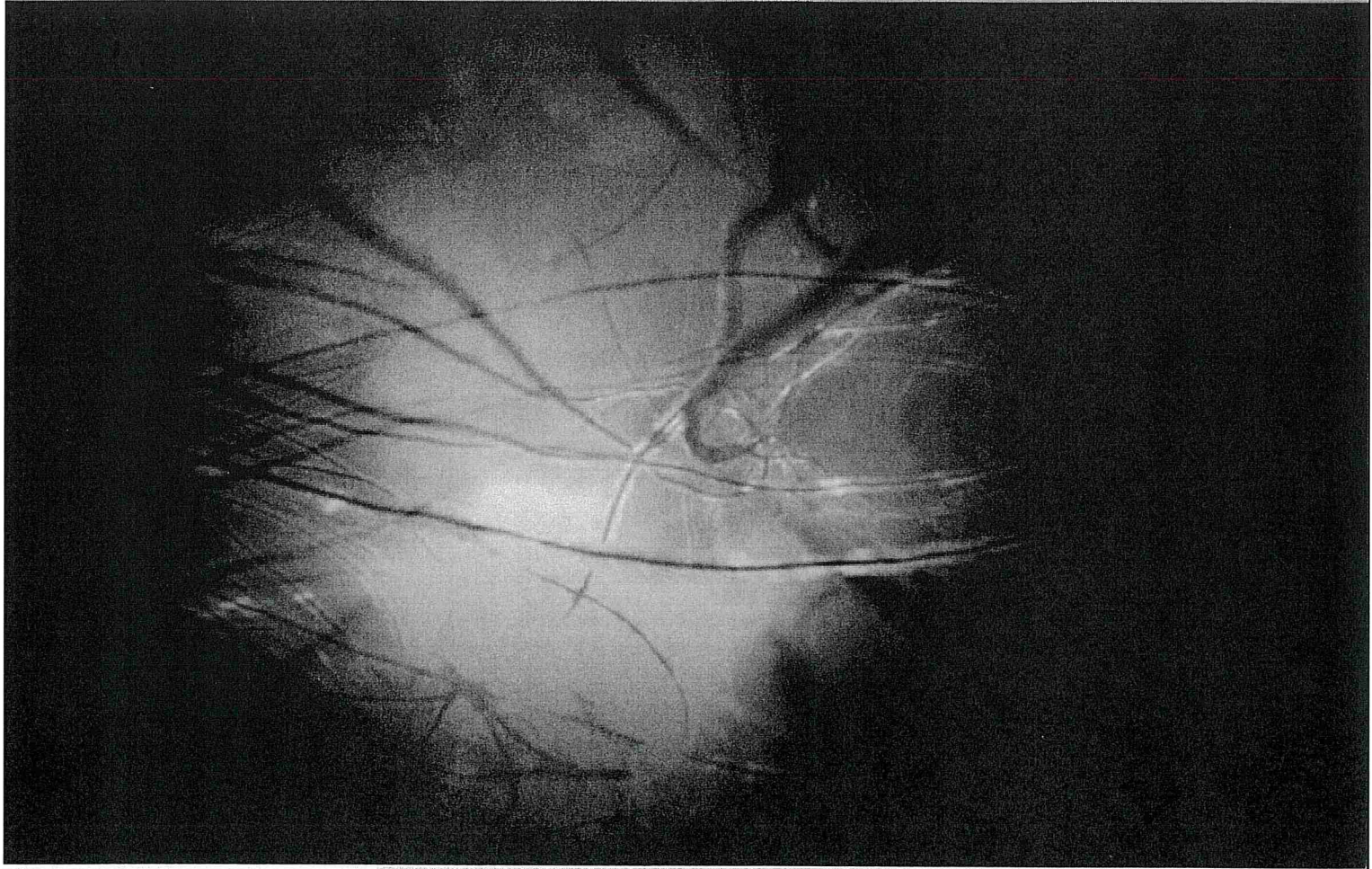
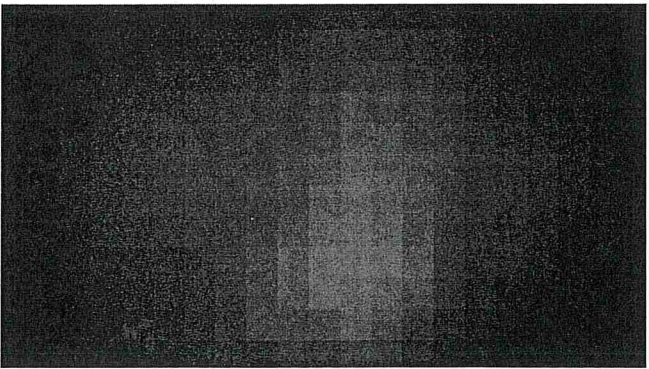
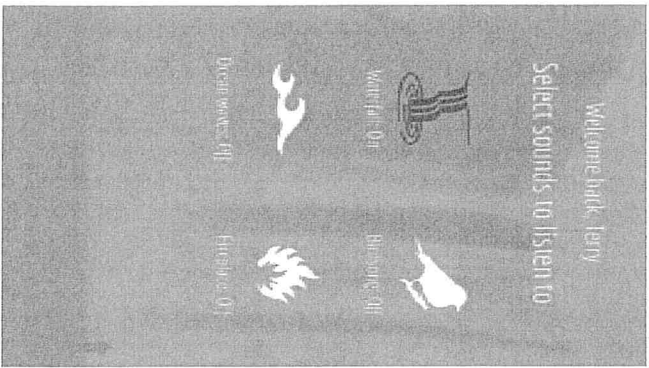
I just don't get it. Why would he give me that...?

I was going to say 'power'. Why would he give me that power?

But it doesn't feel like power. It feels like a peculiarly sharp sort of weakness.

Why would he give me that weakness?

TERRY turns the waterfall app on and pushes the volume up and up and up. A shift, somehow. Time passing. His recorded voice plays as the waterfall app pixelates and becomes water – a dark, underwater abyss.



The days feel longer than they probably are.

When the waterfall app is loud enough in my ears to drown everything out, it has this strangely soporific effect.

And the scrolling. Man, the endless scrolling through so many images and so many words, and time feels very liquid, like this slow liquid...

TERRY slides underneath the table and through people's chairs and tables, floating through the café. TERRY's voice gets muffled as if he is underwater.

I feel like I'm on a precipice somehow

the edge of something

the edge of Luka maybe

the edge of myself

the edge of knowing something / or forgetting something

right at the edge like I could just in a drowsy moment topple forwards

headfirst / into too much information

I turn on the artificial birds, in the hope that a little more detail will

keep me alert

something to say hello to

hello birds

you're very convincing

as algorithms go

and then I'm falling / not falling

forward / diving / plummeting

still in my chair at my table and nobody knows I'm in motion at all

You can't tell by looking

Margaret doesn't know

Margaret doesn't even know my name

Privately she's named me Algernon

Bit random, Margaret

from four feet away you'd hardly know I was breathing

and actually I'm not

I'm holding my breath

for the moment of impact

when my falling body meets the surface

of

the

image

and like some hauntingly complex Mensa puzzle

I'm outside myself on the inside

I'm watching myself hit the infinity pool

I count the ripples outwards

the circles going out and out and out

uncontainable

my body suddenly slower still

time slowing to a standstill

the calling birds

too far away to count

this body of water

depthless

not really water

but data

and I'm swimming and sinking at the same time

I'm resisting and I'm letting it take me

I'm falling through light and liquid crystal

flailing in slow motion

through endless edgeless code

letting myself be drowned in this

there's no feeling of peril

just a reassuring quiet

all the sounds far away in impossible distance

and I know exactly where I am
in a perfectly rendered underwater city
of bioluminescent creatures

I'm the least impressive stranger here

TERRY arrives back at his table.

or maybe this is a new kind of sleep
that hasn't been done before
and there are no instructions yet
for waking up

The phones go back to the screensaver a week later.

SCENE 7

TERRY:

OK I'm back in the room.

And today instead of my usual fare I have a chai latte and a lemon
and poppyseed muffin because I'm not the one who died. All right?
And asserting that fact in the universe is sometimes more important
than the fact that I don't really actually want a chai latte and this
muffin is disgusting. It's disgusting. It's like someone put deodorant on
a bandage. It's *so* disgusting.

You know it's none of my business but I think Barbara's been crying.

I'm keeping my head down. There's lots to do.

My increasingly persistent friend Simon Lewis-Jones of Fidelis Bloody
Grief Monetisation Inc. has written to remind me that I need to go
through Lukka's Twitter.

When I die – any second now, if that muffin's as lethal as it tastes –
whatever poor bastard it falls to to manage my digital legacy will have
all of five tweets to trawl through. The first of which, one rainy Sunday
in October 2013, said 'testing testing'; and the second said 'Well, here
I am' – except it didn't: the *third* said 'Well, here I am', the *second* said
'Well, her I am'.

The fourth said 'Thanks @lukapalooza for showing me how to delete,
but I'm going to preserve my mistake for posterity'.

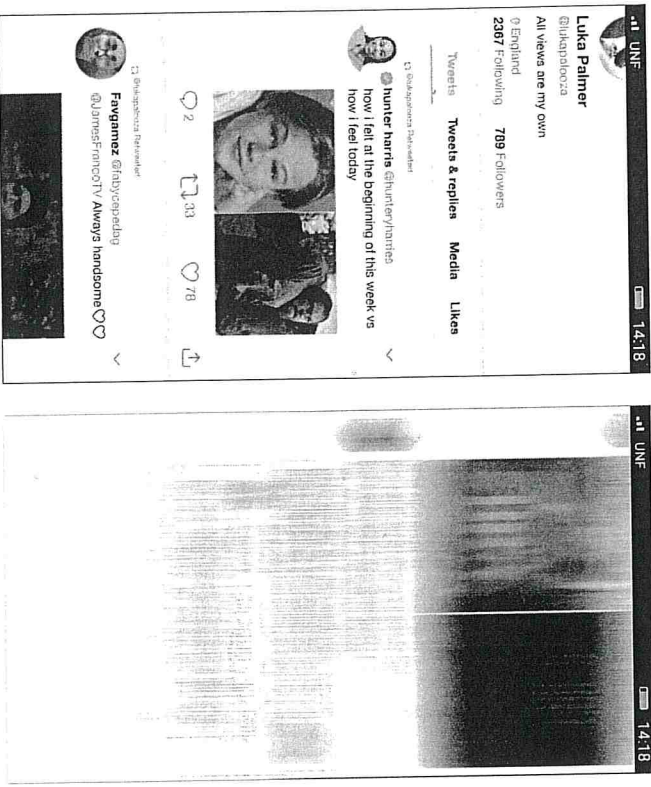
And the fifth one said 'I've never been so happy in my life I swear. It's
all downhill from here.'

Luka, on the other hand, managed to leave the world just shy of 33,000 tweets. I worked it out: at an average of eleven words per tweet, Luka's Twitter output is roughly the length of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

And so I do the tediously inevitable. I take literally hours to scroll all the way down to the beginning. Because Luka was the first person I ever knew who was on Twitter. Always the early adopter. He'd been on it like a month when we first slept together. He showed me it on his swanky new MacBook Air. I assured him there was no way Twitter was going to catch on.

"Who's going to want to broadcast endless drivel about their personal lives? Who would want to know anything about my life? Or yours?" But now of course I want to know. I want to know how our first night together shows up in his timeline.

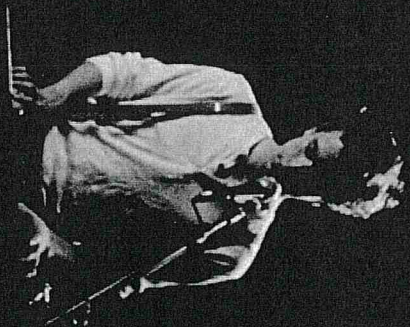
So I'm scrolling and scrolling and it doesn't take long to find the date. Not the date of the shag, the date of the morning after.



There's a link to a video by a twinky French pop star he liked who I'd never heard of: Laurent Mercier. This utterly middle-of-the-road piano ballad guy. It always mystified me, his fascination with this kid.



All right, it didn't mystify me. Not after I saw the kid.
TERRY presses play on the music video. The whole song plays out for the rest of the scene.



New World (Nouveau Monde) by Laurent Mercier

LAURENT MERCIER (song)

I never thought I could feel so alive
I never thought that my life would be turning around
I didn't know you were going to arrive
And lift me up so my feet are right off of the ground

All at once – *cet amour profond*
Tout à coup – dans un nouveau monde

TERRY:

But this music. Like chewing-gum that half the world has chewed
all the taste out of before it gets as far as your mouth.

I won't lie to you, I was proper crestfallen for a moment there.

And then I realise I copied the link without reading the tweet.

The tweet says: "Good morning! Waking up into a new world." Wink.

And I think:

Oh, love.

And then I think:

Wait, is that even about me?

I look at the timestamp. Yeah I'm pretty sure he tweeted this while
I was in the shower.

That was real. That was a real thing that happened.

LAURENT MERCIER (song)

I wake up with you *dans un nouveau monde*
(Ohhh)
Shiny and new *dans un nouveau monde*

TERRY:

I'm scrolling up and up, wondering how the story gets told, the story
of our lives slowly gradually entwining.

I'm thinking about the landmarks by which I measure out that time
when we were just starting to share our lives. The Thai meal when
he told me his middle name and I laughed so hard I did an entire
broccoli out of my nose. The ill-advised daytrip to Southend when
everything was shut.

But none of it's there.

Not none of it. There's a picture of his tom yum soup, captioned
"Yes yum!"

None of the rest.

Here's a video of Laurent Mercier saying he doesn't care about labels like gay and straight.

I'm looking for the time we bought hanging baskets and I thought that afternoon he was the most handsome man I'd ever seen.

But here's an unfunny Garfield cartoon and four different tweets about Jeremy Paxman's hair:

I'm looking for when we hired bicycles and went for a long ride for no reason other than being together.

But here's a photo of Luka holding up a vuuzela and pointing at it.

And here a gif of Laurent Mercier laughing next to a camel.

And here's Laurent Mercier singing a piano ballad that sounds like a dog pissing on some cardboard.

And here's fuck-all about my dad's funeral.

And here's James Franco being a cockhole about anything.

And here's Laurent Mercier singing his piano ballad that sounds like punching a plastic robot in the face with a fist made out of candyfloss.

And on it goes, this ballad

Music swells.

LAURENT MERCIER (song)

A new star shines above

To remind me of your love

The night can't come too fast

Give me your hand and we will make it last

I wake up with you *dans un nouveau monde*

(Ohhh)

Shiny and new *dans un nouveau nouveau monde*

(Ohhh)

Tout est vrai dans le nouveau nouveau monde

(Ohhh)

This is a new world baby

TERRY:

— on and on

and here's Luka in his stupid Poundshop mirror-shades

laughing at nothing

and on and on goes this ballad

and he's so incredibly untouchably alive

and I realise I'm crying

I'm crying my eyes out here

because suddenly Laurent Mercier

is singing his song to me

and it's about me

The sound of the café gets quieter as if people have left. The Norrah Jones music stops playing. The café is empty and about to shut. TERRY gets up to leave.



SCENE 8

TERRY:

I buy wine. I buy four bottles of wine. It feels like panic buying. Which is sort of exactly what it is.

I get home and I open the first bottle and I pour myself a glass and it's good, it's very good, it's fine, it's cheap, OK, it's good enough.

And I make grilled cheese. A little light salad on the side which I know I won't eat.

This is all about the cheese and the wine. Not all four bottles, but... One and a half. And a bit. And then bed.

I badly need a dream sequence.

It's one of those nights when for some reason I really notice how unnecessarily big the bed is. I lie myself diagonally across. Like a road sign that says: no loneliness.

I turn off my phone for once. How do I expect to sleep if my phone's still awake?

All the screens go to sleep.

Shutting down...

Shutting down...

I'm drunk and I'm queasy and I'm incredibly tired but also my brain's still churning so I start to count backwards from 300. That's always been my trick, since I was a kid.

Every time you lose track, you have to go back to the start.

300. 299. 298. 297.

The sound of rain coming from all the phones.

I've left the window open and I can hear the rain getting heavier as I count. For a moment, around about 255, I start to get confused, I start to think it's the counting down that's making the rain go harder. I stop counting and listen to the rain.

I want to put the radio on but my arms won't do it.

My brain makes up a radio interview with my dad. Just for a moment. He's smiling, even on the radio, and he's saying, never forget, old son, you can only walk half way into the woods. After that, you're walking out again.

Shit. 300. 299. 298. 297.

I can hear excited ducks in the distance. Like really far away. Like in France.

I hope Barbara's all right. I hope she doesn't get wet in the rain. I hope she isn't wearing a paper hat.

You know like a Christmas cracker hat. A party hat.

211. 212. 213. Hang on, I'm going in the wrong direction. 212. No.

Do it properly.

300.

And at that moment, Norah Jones appears in the doorway, glowing.



It doesn't look like Norah Jones, because I don't think I know what Norah Jones looks like, so she looks like Sheryl Crow, but I know she's Norah Jones.

There's no escaping you, I say.

How do you think I feel, she says, and smiles, and I know we're going to be great friends. I feel very calm with Norah Jones watching over me.

So are you going to press the button? she says.

I say. How can I? How can I be expected to decide what survives?

It's what he asked of you, she says.

Yeah but we'd been apart six months, I say, and it was horrible between us.

Six months, says Norah Jones. So he had a lot of time to change his mind in. Just because someone can't be with you any more, it doesn't mean you don't still know them better than anyone. Better than themselves, even.

But listen, I say: if I knew him as well as all that, I'd know what he wanted me to do. I haven't got a clue.

Well but maybe, she says, running her long fingers through Sheryl Crow's hair, maybe he didn't have a clue either. Maybe he knew he could trust you with this task because you'd understand the complexity of it.

I say: I'm not sure I do, Norah. I mean I get that it's complex. That's not the same thing as understanding the complexity.

The ducks far away make a collective noise that sounds like they get what I'm saying.

Well, I feel for you, she says. This responsibility you've been given, it's like my 2015 collaboration with Keith Richards. It's an honour to be asked to do it, but actually getting it done is a pain in the chuff.

The rain starts to sound like applause from a small sad audience.

I think I might go to sleep now, I say. I'm a wee bit drunk and I think I'm ready for my dream.

Norah smiles. Good night, she says, God bless: and she turns to go. But she hesitates.

Before you sleep, she says, I just wanted to say...

And she holds out her arm towards me, and opens out her fingers, and there in the palm of her hand is a fat, wet snail.

Lean in, says Norah Jones.



And in a low, careful voice, the snail says:

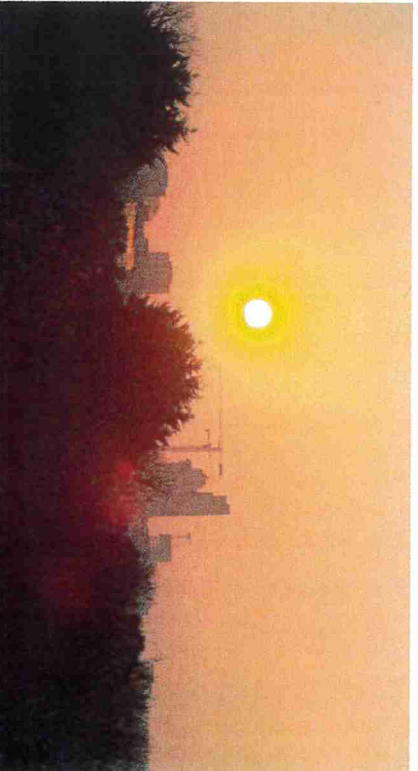
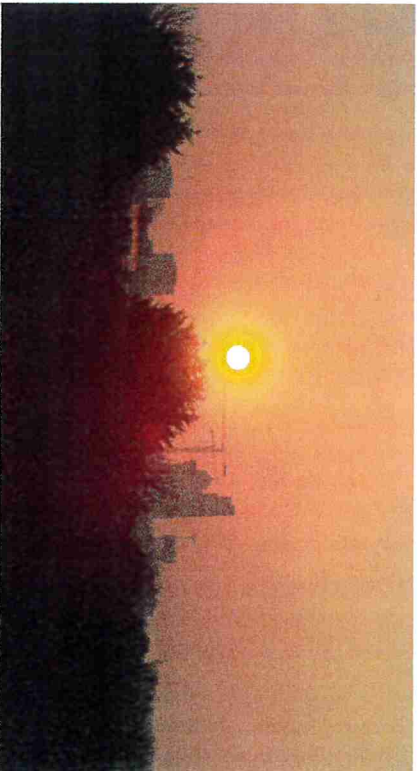
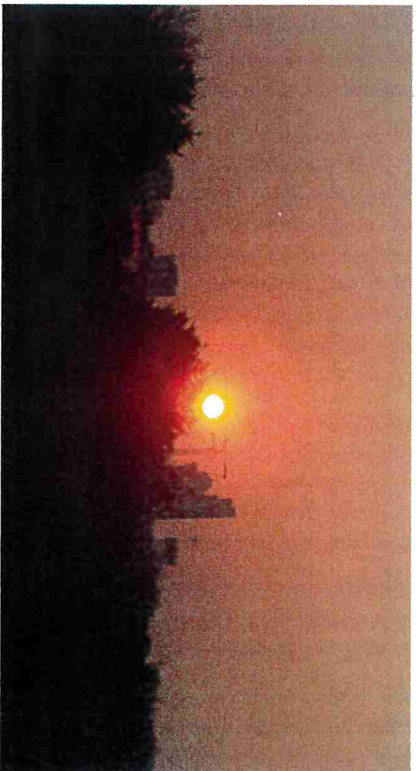
"Death is a story told by the living."

I look at the snail. The snail looks at me. The snail shrugs. Don't ask me how.

The sunrise appears on the screens.



Switching on in hope, in despair. In the nick of time. Switching on as immigrants, as hospital orderlies, as sex workers and teaching assistants. Switching on as cat lovers and unpaid carers and tarnished saints and sadomasochists. Switching on the radio so quietly I can't hear it, to hear a man say about the weather today, or the death yesterday and tributes have been paid. Switching on in love, in fear, in defiance. In forgetting to not switch on. Switching on to make breakfast for the kids. Switching on to pray. To masturbate. To beat a crying dog. To go for a piss and then back to bed.



Far away people switching on lights.

Here we are. That's all. That's what we do. Day after day.

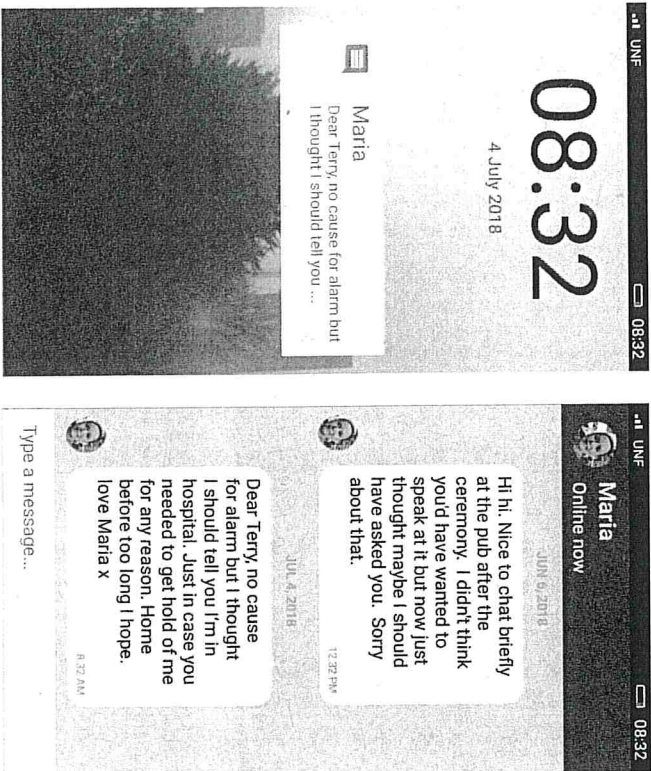
Planning our perfect suicides by the perfect light of our unshockable phones. The suicides we'll never commit.

Time to face my own day.

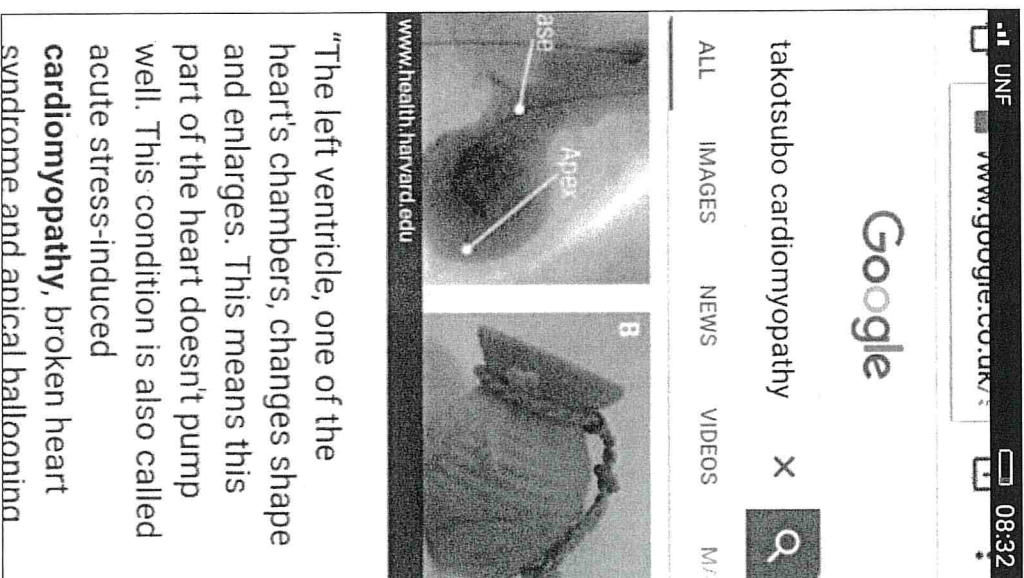
I don't take my phone out of my pocket. I just switch it on, and it vibrates to tell me it's woken up.

And then after a minute or so, it vibrates again. I have a message.

It's from Maria.



TERRY googles 'Takotsubo Syndrome'. He scrolls through the results and taps on a video.



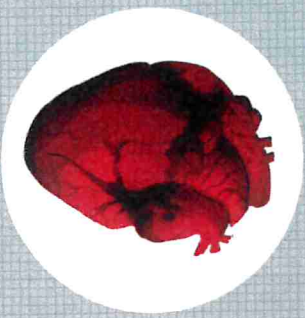
V/O:
Takotsubo syndrome is an acute reversible heart failure syndrome that is increasingly recognised in modern cardiology practice for patients with acute 'cardiac' chest pain.

V/O:
The name Takotsubo reflects the resemblance of the left ventricle at end-systole to the octopus pots of Japanese fishermen in the Hiroshima fish markets.

V/O:
The heart suddenly becomes weak.
The left ventricle changes shape, it stretches and balloons out.
From the inside, you think that you're having a heart attack.
You have chest pain, shortness of breath.

V/O:
Many alternative names have been used, including stress or stress-induced cardiomyopathy, apical ballooning syndrome and 'Broken Heart Syndrome' in the context of bereavement.

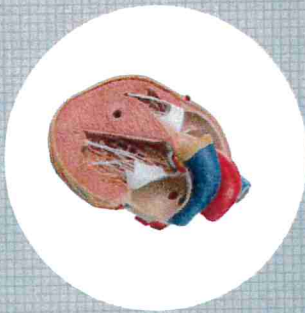
TAKOTSUBO SYNDROME



THE HEART

heart failure syndrome
'cardiac' chest pain.

LEFT VENTRICLE



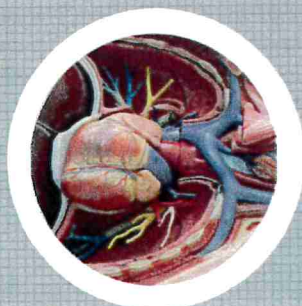
Gender and age:
90% female. Majority
50 years and
post-menopausal.

THE HEART



Cardiac symptoms:
Chest pain, breathlessness,
palpitations

THE HEART



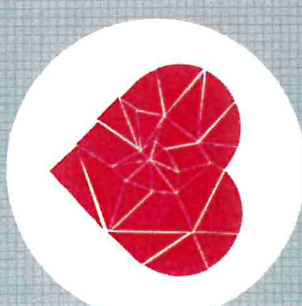
Cardiac symptoms:
Chest pain, breathlessness,
palpitations

APICAL BALLOONING SYNDROME



Preceding events:
Stressor trigger
identifiable in 70% of
cases, such as
bereavement.

BROKEN HEART SYNDROME



Preceding events:
Stressor trigger
identifiable in 70% of
cases, such as
bereavement.

TERRY:

Broken heart syndrome. Serious doctors call it that.

When I get there, Maria's sleeping, with her mouth a little open. The kid in me one hundred per cent wants to pop Maltesers in that little gap.

She's had an angiogram and an MRI. And she's not going to die. At least not today. At least not of this.

There are many machines. I don't like them but I'm glad they're there. She should have all the machines. One of them, I don't know which one, is going ping with the exact same ping my emails used to make on my old laptop. She's just lying there sleeping and I'm hearing: You've got mail. You've got mail. You've got mail.

An elderly woman starts to wail in the ward across the corridor and it's just enough to wake Maria up. Her eyes open and she's looking directly at me but it takes a while for her to see me. I'm worried to begin with that she can't move or speak or something. But she's just processing. She's just waking up in an unfamiliar bed. Tell me about it.

After a while she says: Oh.

I say: Hello Maria.

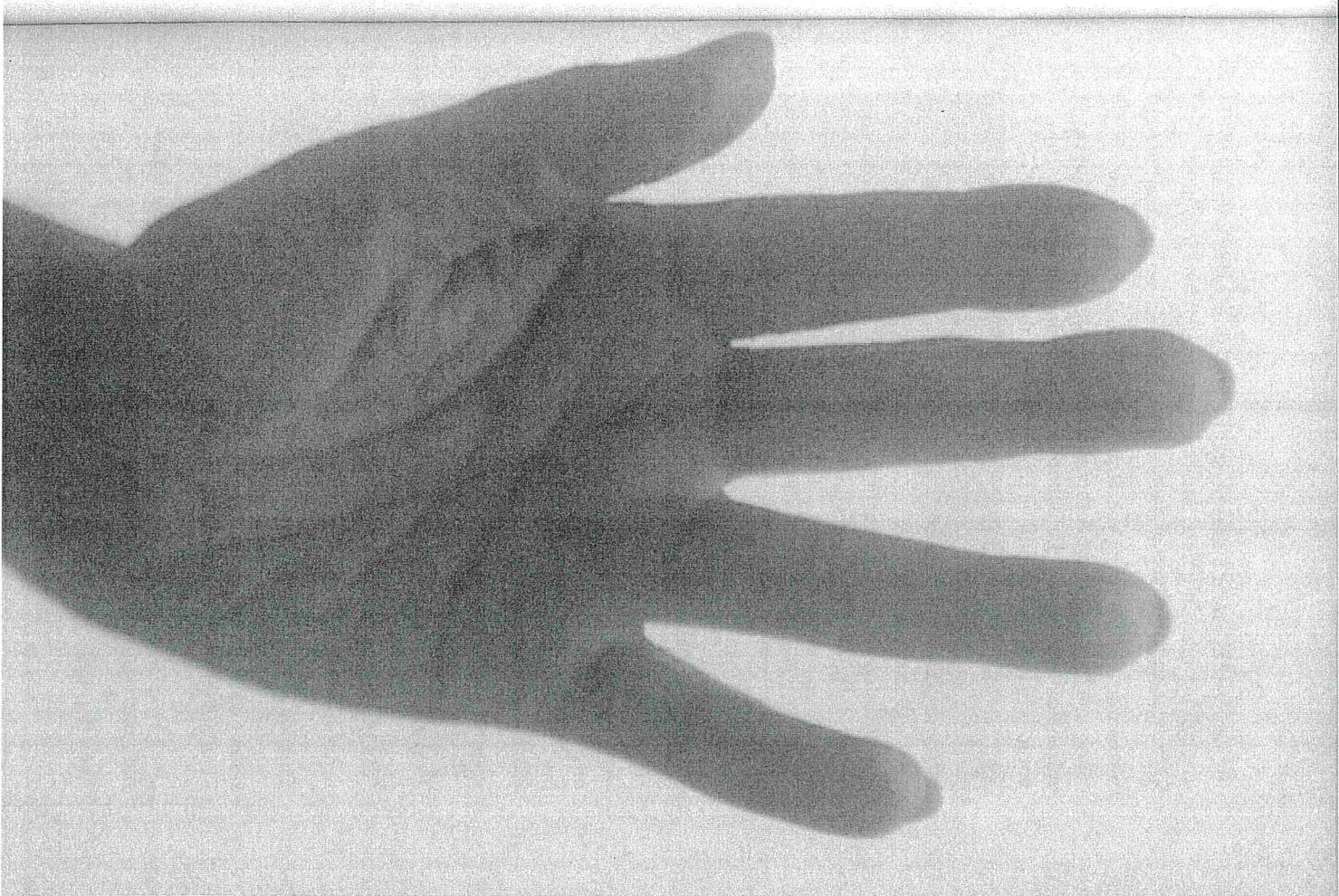
Hello, she says. And then she says: Oh.

I'm so sorry you've been in the wars, I say.

Dear you, she says.

And she reaches out her hand towards me, the one that's not attached to the machines. She can't reach very far. But far enough.

I reach out too and my fingers touch her fingers. Mine underneath hers.



It's very gentle, and it makes no sound. But information is rushing through my body into hers, and coursing through hers into mine. Gigabytes and gigabytes of data.

Instructions for not dying yet. How to do patience. Equanimity. Piano music by Schubert. A thousand images of barbery macaques. Adrenalin. Mid-ventricular ballooning. The Shipping Forecast. How not to scream in the middle of the night when there's no intruder. The proper names of British birds. Songs about birds. Proverbs about birds. How to just actually look at birds.

Our fingers. The lightest of touch.

We talk a little about the Fidelis thing. I'm getting on OK, I say, though I wonder if she hears the catch in my voice.

For some stupid reason I tell her about Southend. It just comes into my head. Everything was shut, I say.

He told me all about it, she says. He didn't mind. He was so proud just to have you on his arm.

He always felt safe with you, she says. And some idiotic part of me wants to take it as an insult. Because wasn't that what he walked out on? To be with the young beautiful Latvians, doing shots of this and lines of that and ironic 80s pop? Wasn't it feeling safe that he couldn't stand another minute?

He was so lost without you, she says.

Yeah I know, I say.

God I wish he was still alive so I could strangle him.

A nurse is starting to fuss round us and it feels like time to go.

Time to go, I say.

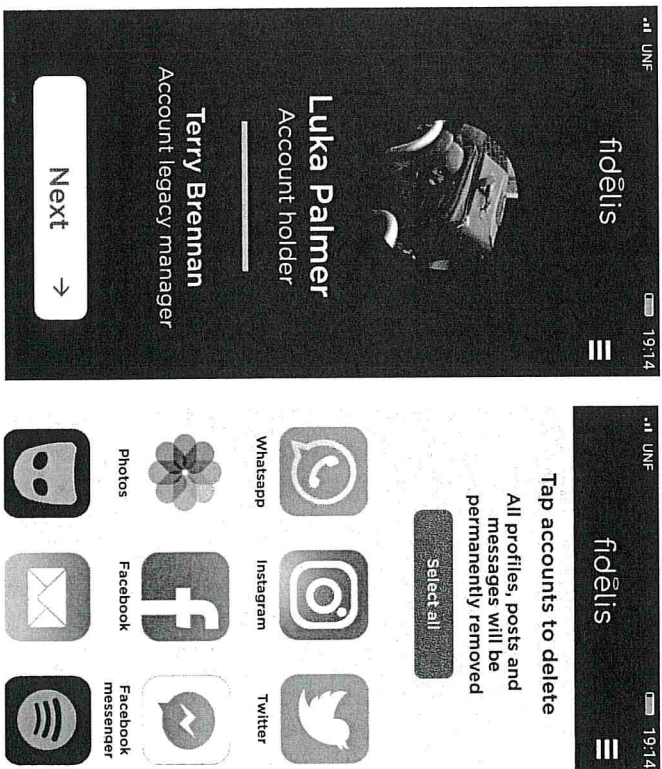
I don't want to let go of her fingers. But they're hardly touching at all. I can't even really tell at what point I let go.

Dear Terry, she says as I'm leaving. The way she says it sounds like she's starting to dictate a postcard to her secretary.

Keep him safe, she says.

I'm at home, in the end. I always imagined somehow that I'd be in the cafe. But I'm sitting on the bed. The laptop's taking its time booting up. I got home from the hospital, made a cup of tea. But I'm not hanging about.

I log into my Fidelis account.

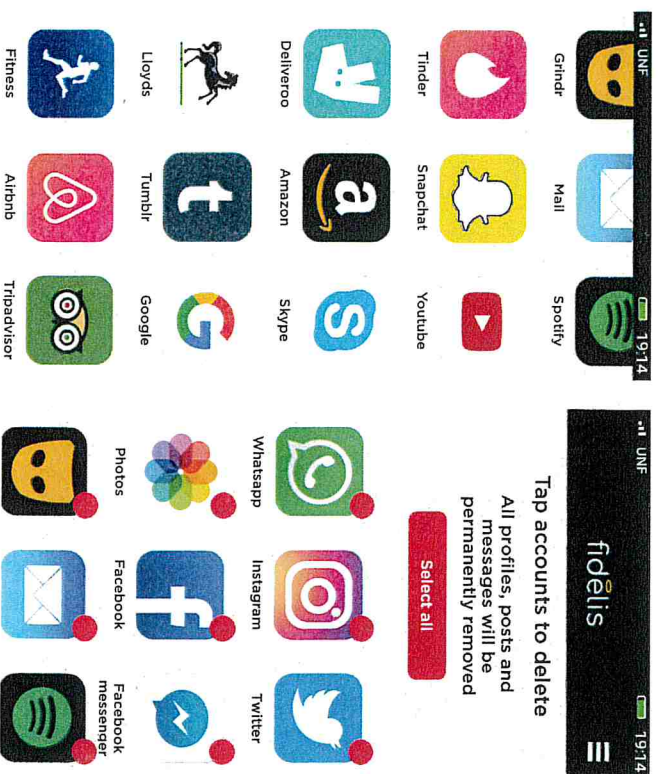


There are all Luka's digital assets, itemised, categorised.

I read through the whole list. 34 different bundles of information. Years and years of Luka finding different ways of processing the world. Placing himself within it. Reaching out. Making friends. Being the beautiful man he was. Before me, with me, after me.

TERRY selects all.

Tick boxes appear in all the little checkboxes.



Yeah I'm sure.

Thank you for asking.










UNF 19:14

fidelis

Tap accounts to delete

All profiles, posts and messages will be permanently removed

Select all

		
Whatsapp	Instagram	Twitter
		
Photos	Facebook	Facebook messenger
		

UNF

19:14

fidelis

No items

Done

SCENE 9

TERRY:
I wonder, shall we just...
Can we just talk?
Do you want to take these off?

TERRY leads everyone in taking off their headphones.

Hi. It's only me.
I don't know what to say, really. I just wanted to say it to you. I wanted the words to travel through the air.
I'm sorry I hogged the limelight.
There's any number of people who'll tell you that's me all over.
Oh he pretends to be a Margaret, sitting out of the way, trying not to be seen. But really, deep down, he's a Giancarlo.
I don't know.

Giancarlo doesn't come in here any more. I miss him. I miss his arms. Is that a strange thing to say? I miss something about his bare arms. Barbara comes on her own, sometimes. She has a tea. No flapjack. Margaret's going to outlive us all.
Or Maria will.

She's home, she's convalescing.

I think she hates me.

I want to sit down with her and say: Death is a story told by the living. And something else that I think I know. That a little snail didn't tell me.

It's not what you keep that defines who you are. It's the things you let go.

So listen: you don't have to do this. This is just, I don't know, just an invitation.

If you're sitting close enough to someone else that you can do this, would you just maybe put your fingers on their fingers.

Just gently. Just your fingers touching.

You don't have to. But if you'd like to make the offer to someone near you.

Just touch.

Digits, right.

Just let that be what we do for a moment.

I'm going to go now.

I'll let you decide.

When you're ready to stop touching, you can stop.

And when you stop, that'll be the end of the story.

Take as long as you like.

Thanks for being here.

Safe home.

TERRY leaves.

The cafe remains, for as long as anyone can use it.