

**Excerpt from *Home Hindrance*, May 2007**

*Home Hindrance* was a site-specific performance in David's home. An audience of six were led from room to room, where a different actor was waiting in each room.

**Scene four – bathroom**

The audience are led into the dark bathroom, where they all have to stand, very close together. The door is closed behind them and they are left in darkness. After a few moments the light comes on. They see that the performer is already with them, perched on the edge of the bath. She is wearing heavy make-up and a sexy dress.

NATASHA [*charming, slightly defiant*] I don't know about you, but I think terminal illnesses can be quite soothing... Rory wasn't the first person I knew that died. I work in a hospice and people take such a long time to go. It is horrible to see people suffer, but it does let you down gently. You know it's going to happen and when it does, it's usually a relief. For everyone. The person you fell in love with disappeared a long time ago, so you had got used to living without them.

On the other hand, I think about my best friend. His partner died suddenly in a car crash. The hospital were frantically trying to call my friend's mobile, but it was turned off because he was with me, at the cinema. Shrek, feel-good movie. I felt idiotic because my friend and his partner were both HIV and it never occurred to me that he might die from something else. So, my friend never got the chance to get used to it and never had the chance to say goodbye. That's why I prefer these long illnesses. You can be prepared. Like a scout.

We were best mates from my clubbing days. I was always out, always dressed to kill, always up for it. I can proudly say that there is not a drug available that I haven't tried once. At least once. See, that's what the anti-drug campaigns don't talk about. It is fucking great. But the problem with going out, getting dressed up, is it's too easy to start playing the part. [*thinks about this, decides to remove make-up in the mirror*]

That's when I met Rory, out clubbing. We did a ton of coke and fucked like maniacs under the Kingston bridge. It went on from there. We couldn't keep our hands off each other. Fucking incredible. Incredible fucking, [*a la Basil Brush*] boom boom! [*gets in shower and turns water on, shouts through shower curtain*] I do believe that I've been fucked on top of every piece of furniture in this flat. Wait, not the oven... but, oh, the washing machine! I even lived in this flat for a while, when I lost my job. It didn't matter, though. Rory had a couple of grand saved for a mortgage deposit, so I lived off that for a while. We were like twins, me and Rory. We were a perfect match. [*slightly defiant*] Everyone said so. Everyone.

*Turns off shower and starts to towel dry herself.*

But all good things come to an end, eh? Suddenly, Rory loses his job too. Some big blow up with his boss about nothing, you know what coke's like. Anyway, disciplinary hearing, gets the boot, little fucker blames me. Thinks I've fucking lead him astray. I wasn't having that. It's not like I forced him to take too much fucking coke. Bastard. I was better off without him. I told him so... My Nana had this Russian saying - 'Once they've chopped off your head, there's no use crying about your hair.'

I didn't stay in touch with Rory. Then he got together with Leah. I knew Leah anyway, we'd all been around the same clubs, the same gigs. [*slightly sad*] I've always liked her, I suppose. [*smiling*] She would look right at you, make you feel like you were really interesting and special, like nobody else mattered to her. It was the strongest connection I've ever felt, but it wasn't sexual.

[*by now she is sitting on the edge of the bath in her towel*] It was around then that Nana popped her clogs and left me the big house in Newton Mearns. I wasn't sure what to do with it. Then one day, I got a phone call. Rory. Wants to meet me for a drink, catch up. Turns out that he's having a pretty rough time. Leah's had a miscarriage... at five months. Neither of them have got any idea how to deal with it and he says I'm the only person he really trusts, just wants to talk things through. He loves Leah, wants to stay with Leah, but she's changed. And then he starts crying. Not crying, but weeping. I didn't know what to do, so I did what I'm best at. I touched him, I kissed him, I took him home and fucked him rigid.

He regretted it afterwards, of course, and I suppose I regretted it too. But he blamed me. I thought, you fucker, we're right back in the same fucking situation all over again. Me being blamed for something that is just not my fault, absolutely not my fault. I fumed about it for weeks. And then... [*unsure whether to continue*] I waited and timed it just right, seven weeks later. I told him I'd missed my period. I told him I was going to keep the baby, I wanted to come round and discuss it with him and with Leah, talk it all over like adults... [*bemused, guilty*] He put his arms round me and hugged me for ages and ages and didn't let go.

And you know what happened then? I really did miss my fucking period. I was pregnant. I had never been pregnant before. I liked the feeling, knowing it was there inside. Remember my best friend - the car crash widow, he used to call himself? He said 'how could you ever look that child in the eye, Natasha?' I've come to realise, that kind of bluntness is one of the privileges of the terminally ill. I'd never let anyone else talk to me like that. But he was right... I went to Rory's sister. Lied to her too. Told her that Rory didn't know and that I wanted to get rid of it so as not to ruin Rory and Leah's marriage. His sister offered to pay for it... I let her pay for it... Well... no use crying over your hair... no use crying.

My friend the car crash widow was pretty sick by then. [*smiling*] He had nobody and I had nobody. We'd sit for hours eating garibaldi biscuits and watching his cat lick its fanny. He'd say [*matter of fact*] 'I won't get a second chance, your baby won't get a second chance, but you will, Natasha. What are you going to do?' [*thinks for a moment, changes subject*] His medication was really complicated. Different pills at different times, some with food, some without, injections Tuesdays and Thursdays. I

moved him and the pusscat out of that manky council flat and we all lived in Nana's old house in Newton Mearns. So, I looked after him until it was time for him to go. His hospice gave me special training.

[*as if making an excuse*] I had to stop clubbing because I needed to have my mind clear to remember all the medication. His family were no fucking use. Before the funeral, my friend's mother told me she 'didn't really want a load of AIDS people turning up at the crematorium.' [*mischievous*] Of course, I made sure they turned up in their droves, the boys from the hospice, leather queens from his S&M days, three drag queens in black lace mantillas. At the wake, one of our lot got a bit too friendly with the sherry bottle and started telling everyone about this time in the eighties when the deceased got prosecuted for importing pornography from Amsterdam - photos of amputees penetrating each other's rectums with their leg stumps. We were all howling with laughter, but then I noticed his niece sitting near us, looking out of the window at the rain, staring. [*pause, thoughtfully*] We just wanted to commemorate our friend in the way that he would have liked best.

His ashes were scattered in the garden at the AIDS hospice, so I used to go back there quite often. I was hanging around so much I just started helping out. They had trained me after all. I even sold Nana's house and gave them the money. [*as if caught out in a lie*] Well, some of the money... a little money. But what was the point? All that effort to be a better person, and for what? The writer wrote all this in advance and that's when I started to disappear. I'm not someone he just made up, you know. He should have asked me first. You and I won't ever really meet. They'll get some actress in and make me look different. I hope she's pretty. I've always thought it would be nice to be a brunette... [*smiling, realising the irony*] Still, no use crying over your hair, eh? [*more serious*] No use crying.

[*upbeat*] Anyway, after the difficulty at the widow's funeral, we worked out our own little ritual at the AIDS hospice, to say goodbye to people in our own way. The night they die we gather round their bed and... [*can't think of a better word*] celebrate. It's strange, when you imagine corpses they seem quite creepy, but when it's someone you know, it's different. You know they're gone, but you can't quite let go. We light nightlights round the bed to shine bright and steadfast, protect our sleeping babe. We look at old photos, tell stories about them, play their favourite records, even cracked open some bubbly one time. It gives us time to say goodbye properly. You might want to lay down with them, one last time. One more kiss. Just another hug, the last one this time, really. Just one *more* kiss. And before you know it, you've been lying there all night. The sun is coming up and you've still got your arms around them, but at least you've had your chance to say goodbye.

[*taking a deep breath*] Okay... You'd better come with me.

*She leads them in to the bedroom*

[ ... ]

**Scene 6 - Epilogue, Bedroom:**

LEAH: I think back to the last night before all this started. I think about all of them, Joanna, Eammon, Natasha, all of them. But most of all, I think about the night Rory bought me flowers. I even dream about it sometimes, that last night before everything changed.

I light nightlights to protect him, to shine bright and steadfast. I used to hold up a glass of water for him to drink. That's too hard now, so I just pour some water into his mouth and he turns his head to let it run out again. That way he doesn't get too dry. His dry lips leave a white mark on the rim. I think I can still feel his breathing, but I'm not sure. I feel for the pulse [*puts two fingers on pillow*], but my fingers are shaking and I press too hard... [*withdraws fingers and holds them tightly in other hand – long pause*] Nothing. No more space station. Nothing... I know what to do. We planned it all a long time ago. [*she lays down as if he is next to her*] Tonight, I won't sleep on the sofa-bed, I'll get into bed with him and lay close to his back, the way I always used to. Hook my leg up over his hip, the way I always used to. I won't leave him alone. One more kiss, just another hug, the last one this time, really. One *more* kiss... I won't leave you alone. [*she closes her eyes*]

*LONG PAUSE. As she is laying quietly on the bed, we hear the sound of the front door open and close, then the sound of something being loudly kicked over and clattering to the floor.*

RORY [*voice from hall, a bit drunk*]: Aw, fuck off. [*coming into bedroom*] I've woken you. I'm sorry, darling, I'm really sorry. I stayed out longer than I'd meant to. I must reek of booze.

LEAH: [*coming to, slightly annoyed*]: What's the time?

RORY: About half one. Sorry sorry.

*He turns on the bedside lamp and starts blowing out the candles*

LEAH: [*mildly, sleepily*] For fuck sake, Rory. I was asleep. Jesus

RORY: I've got flowers for you. [*he holds them out*]

LEAH [*hiding her surprise and confusion*]: Thank you. Thanks. That's. Lovely.

RORY: I'll put them in the sink for now, put them in a vase in the morning.

*As he goes to the bathroom she gets up and starts to get undressed. When he comes back in he does the same.*

LEAH: Where were you?

RORY: The horseshoe bar, fucking arse end of the world. Eammon insists, even though we tell him it's a fucking dump. Still, it sells beer, eh?

LEAH: Are you up early in the morning?

RORY: I am, I am. We'd better get straight to sleep.

*They get under the covers and snuggle up. He turns off the light, leaving everyone in absolute darkness.*

LEAH [*in the dark, suddenly remembering*]: Oh, how did you get on at the doctors?

RORY: Well, he said he'd refer me. That's what they always say these days, I think. He didn't seem concerned, though. I'm sure it'll be fine. We'd best get to sleep. Night night.

LEAH [*very quiet*]: Sorry I snapped, I love you.

RORY: [*even quieter*]: Yeah, love you.

*Audience are left in the dark for a few moments before Calum enters. He quietly thanks them and leads them back to the living room. There are drinks and snacks laid out on the table for them to help themselves.*

END

**Excerpts from Susurrus, July 2006**

*A sonic art piece, Susurrus was written for the Bard in the Botanics festival. Audiences listened to these different narratives as they followed a map around the Botanic gardens in Glasgow*

1.

*ROBIN. Male, Educated Glasgow accent.*

I admired my father greatly and certainly there was nobody who had more of an influence on me. My mother is like a dim figure in my childhood. And my sister. Which is strange, because I don't feel distant from them now. It's just that when I think of my childhood, I mean before he left us, which was when I was about sixteen, I don't think of Mum and Helena at all. Just Dad. The memories at the top of the pile, the front of the drawer, the tip of my tongue, they are all about him. There are things my father taught me, whether he meant to or not, things I still do today. My wife says I'm the kindest man she ever met, which is a beautiful thing to be told, and I learnt that from him. All the time we spent alone together, that was always the way that he treated me. Always.

My happiest memories are the trips to the forest in the highlands. Mum and my sister Helena were never allowed to come, it was just me and Dad. We'd go for a long weekend, but it was never long enough. Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, four nights will quickly dream away the time.

We usually arrived late in the evening, Dad pitched the tent and we went straight to sleep. My favourite bit was waking up on the first morning, next to him in that small tent. My eyes would be sticky from sleep, like someone had come in the night and put something in them. I would wake up early and watch him in the morning light, his profile in half-light, half-darkness. Sleeping sound on the dank and dirty ground. Half-sleep, half-waking. Watch his chest rise and fall. He had a huge barrel chest, 'opera singer lungs' he would say. He'd sigh and gasp while he slept. Almost inaudible, unless you were really close, almost uncomfortably close. But I was never uncomfortable. [MUSIC HAS FADED AWAY] I would watch his profile, the rise and fall of his chest. Listen to the birds crackle and click in the undergrowth. Rise and fall. Almost inaudible. Sigh and Gasp. Really close. Crackle and click... Almost uncomfortably close.

When I was a teenager my friend Rosalind used to come round after clarinet and we'd get out the LPs. She used to stare at the photos of my father while we listened. One time she said [ABSENTLY] 'God, thighs like a rugby player. They look hard as granite.' I said 'yeah they still are'. She said 'how do you know what your Dad's thighs feel like?' [PAUSE] A moment of silence hung between us. [MUSIC ENDS] The music ended. She knew. We could hear crackle and click, crackle and click of the needle at the end of the record. She knew. We sat, not looking at each other, repeating the same phrase in our heads. Yeah they still are. Yeah they still are. crackle and click, crackle and click, crackle and click.

I'd decided that I'd never tell anyone. It made me a very good liar. Women told me I was a good listener. If you listen, you don't have to talk. I learnt what women wanted and I gave it to them, but I never felt it. I never *felt* close. I had no flair for flaming desire. There was this particular subject that was off-limits, and they never knew about it. So, they never asked. I was sensitive, always let them cum first. Always held them in my arms afterwards. Made them feel special and secure, like the only one in the world and so in need of a stampede of love. Sometimes my ears would pop. I would feel so distant, so cut off, that my hearing seemed to shut down. I would always think about it then. Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms. It was then that I remembered every detail. Because, those are all things that I learnt from him. I remember it all, even now. Remember, recall, reminisce, recollect. I was the one who came first, I was the one being held in his arms feeling special, secure, like the only one in the world and so in need of a stampede of love. Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.

I love that sound, the sound of the wind in the trees. When I was a child, I thought that trees could breathe, that they were sighing. Trees do breathe, in a way. So maybe they *are* sighing after all. Sigh and gasp. Maybe. Sometimes.

The psychiatrist asked me to keep a diary, but I didn't have time to write, so he gave me a dictaphone. Each week, on the way to my appointment at Gartnavel, I would stop off in the Botanics with a coffee and listen to my own voice, talking shit about my own problems. All these different snippets, recorded at different times. They seem unrelated, but after a while you start to see the links between them. You start to see patterns, circles, spirals. I'd walk round in circles in that secret garden behind the glasshouses. Particular words and phrases that you use again and again. Particular *ideas* that return again and again, time after time. *Fixations* that come back again and again, time after time, night after night. Like the roots of different plants that grow together under the soil, interconnecting in circles and spirals. A cactus and an orchid, planted in the same spot.

I would watch all of the people in the Botanics and I would wonder, what is your story? Everyone's had someone leave them or let them down. Everyone's been let down. Over and over again. I'd watch them and feel like they were my friends. My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye. Each week I felt closer to those people in the Botanics than I ever did with my girlfriend. My girlfriend who later became my wife. My wife who sleeps as I wind her in my arms, making her feel special and secure, like the only one in the world. [ALMOST A WHISPER] But I'm not even there. I'm floating outside the window, watching an Indian-looking Scottish man in bed with a woman. She's asleep on his shoulder and he is staring at the ceiling, eyes wide open... Staring. He is miles away, leagues away, in a forest seven leagues from Athens.

[SLOW, THOUGHTFUL] I *never* hated *him*. It was the others, the psychiatrists and the concerned friends. They took it away from me. He gave me those fantastic trips to the Highlands. He gave me sighs of love that costs the fresh blood dear. But they took it all away and replaced it with something I didn't want. That nobody wants. It seems strange, that's all. I felt loved and cared for with him. Isn't that what everyone wants?

Now, when I look back on it. It is as if I had two childhoods. But the bad version never really seems like my own. It's like a play, a tragedy in one act that I played alternate nights with a romantic comedy. I'm dejected and I'm depressed, yet resurrected and sailing the crest. Such conflicting questions rise around in my brain. Should I order cyanide or order champagne? One night we all left feeling upbeat and light. The next night we left feeling bleak. Really fucking bleak. One psychiatrist said that it would make no difference. One said that it had changed everything and I was in denial, I would always secretly want to find security in the arms of a man. I was pretty sure that that was a load of shit. Maybe. Sometimes. But there was the problem of the ears popping, the having no flair for flaming desire, the staring at the ceiling.

I did it with a colleague and I planned it all meticulously. I knew he was gay and he knew I was straight. So, I engineered getting both of us drunk, except I played it a lot, lot more drunk than I really was. And it all went from there. Text book. He leaned in, I didn't pull back. Text book. He was sensitive, let me cum first and then held me in his arms, with my head against his chest. Made me feel special, secure, like the only one in the world. And I hated it and hated it, but would not stop.

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They took us into a room in the basement to see him. We were in a separate room with a big glass window and we could see him on the other side, just laying there. Death-counterfeiting sleep, sleep-counterfeiting death. I remember there was a smear on the glass. The shape of a forehead, a nose, ten fingertips. The person who had last been there, the person who had just done what I was doing now. The same height as me. Another boy.

2.

HELENA. Female. Educated Glasgow accent.

[SIGH – PAUSE] I don't even know where to begin... ... The beginning? ... Where's that?. Is the beginning my beginning, or is the beginning his beginning? Or is the beginning really my parents' beginning? Maybe. Sometimes. I couldn't tell you how my parents met. It was just so long ago, the beginning... I don't know.

Whenever Dad came home from a tour, we'd have a special slap up meal, just the four of us. My mother was a very good cook, when she put her mind to it. He would tell us funny stories about the other opera singers and we'd all hang on his every word.

So, I can't start at their beginning, but I can start at mine. I was born on 26th of June. The same birthday as Shakespeare my Dad always told me, which was apt because his name is Robin Goodfellow! My brother's name is *also* Robin Goodfellow, except we never called him Robin. *Moth* was our family nickname, I think because robins and moths both fly about. My mother tried calling me Mustardseed for a while. Even as at seven I could tell was just stupid. I ignored her and she soon

stopped. Anyway, Robin senior, our father, left us when I was about eleven. ... I met an academic recently who told me that actually nobody *knows* Shakespeare's birthdate. I laughed about it. [PAUSE, VERY RUEFUL] Really laughed.

[FAST] I should be bitter about it, but I'm not. I never was. My Dad always liked Moth more than me. Most daughters would be horrified, but it really wasn't a problem for me. Dad and Moth would go away camping for the weekend. I was always told it was too rough for girls. I did tell them I was in the swimming team and the cross-country running, even rock-climbing for a while. My brother, meanwhile, was the most fragile little boy, what people used to call 'sensitive' or even worse 'a sickly child.' Moth would have number-eleven snot that stretched right down to his lower lip and would vibrate like a violin string when he spoke. I suppose all that manly stuff was to toughen him up. As I say, though, it never really bothered me. Not really.

[FAST, SLIGHTLY HARD] Moth could rely on Dad. He could feed on Dad. I had to learn to be self-sufficient, to live on what was available. I learnt to grow naturally on rocks, or at least in very rocky soil. I could derive my nutrients from very little – the atmosphere, rain water. I even learnt to survive on my own dead tissue. So, my brother was what they used to call a 'sickly child' and my mum was what they used to call 'highly strung. Nice expression for a family of musicians, isn't it? Highly strung. Add another string to your bow. String someone along. How long is a piece of string? Like a puppet on a string, ham string, ham strung, ham hock, ham shank. String 'em up. [PAUSE, THOUGHTFUL] String 'em up. Maybe. Sometimes.

Yes, we always knew we were adopted. Mum and Dad look so Scottish, red hair, peely-wally skin, the lot. I definitely look Greek and my brother's Indian, very brown. So, they could never have kept it secret even if they *had* wanted to. It was very right-on at the time, but it's a bit of a cliché now. Our family photos look like a Benetton advert.

We used to come to the Botanics every Sunday for a walk, listen to the wind rustling in the trees. Sometimes my father would sing while he walked. Not loud or embarrassing, just absentminded, really. He always said 'I will walk up and down here and I will sing, that they shall hear, I am not afraid,' which was a quote. I think. We'd walk through the bit with the trees, the Kelvin walkway that leads down to the river and he would sing, just for us. Dad and Moth would walk ahead. I wouldn't be able to see him, but I could hear his voice mixed with the rustling of the trees. One time we were walking through the trees and he was singing up ahead. I think it was Benjamin Britten's opera of *Midsummer Nights Dream*, which is funny, because he never usually sang that. Mum and I were lagging behind watching the squirrels and these two women came across the bridge, really excited. [POSH WEST END WOMAN] 'Can you hear that singing up ahead? It's Robin Goodfellow!' I can't believe it, Jean and I can't believe it, can you believe it? Robin Goodfellow in the Botanics. [DELIBERATELY QUOTING] 'Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath.' My son is at the RSAMD. He'll not believe it, will he Jean?' Mum didn't miss a beat and said 'That's nothing, Maria Callas was busking doon the Barras last week!' and we left them standing there.

My brother got sick on one of those camping trips and had to go to hospital as soon as they got back. I got dragged along because there was nobody else to look after me. I didn't understand about having your stomach pumped. I thought they were pushing his tummy up and down like pumping up the airbed. I didn't know they put a tube down your throat. I could hear him 'Please don't. Please. I promise I'll be a good boy. *Please*'. He was begging them. I think that was the only time I've ever heard another person beg. I mean really beg. [PAUSE, RUEFULLY] I laughed so hard I hit my head on the wall. A doctor told me off and I laughed all the more. [PAUSE] I laughed and I laughed and I could not stop.

He used to get fan letters from Greece, India, everywhere. It was usually Moth and I who opened them, because Dad didn't find them as funny as we did. There was a particular woman in Japan who wrote a letter every month or so and her English was really terrible. We used to read them out to friends when they came round. She had met him briefly at the stage door at Covent Garden, but said her dream was to come and see him sing at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh, which she spelt E D I M B U L L A.

And a man in Texas who wanted to have the tights Dad wore in Marriage of Figaro to auction them for charity. It had to be the tights. There was a PS: 'Please don't wash them.' The Japanese woman, Kaako, always signed off by saying 'Goodbye, Robin... I'll be thinking of you.' [SLIGHTLY MOCKING] She didn't *know* him. She'd only met him one time, briefly, years ago, but she obviously imagined him, imagined conversations with him. [THOUGHTFUL, MULLING IT OVER] 'Goodbye, I'll be thinking of you.'

I suppose, looking back on it, that Dad was mentally ill. That's what we'd call it now, but in old money it was called going bananas. Non compos mentis, like a tooth being drilled and never being filled by a dentist. We didn't have stress in those days, let alone depression. But even if it was happening now, he still wouldn't really be able to talk to a doctor about it. Surely they'd report him to the police? Does confidentiality go that far? I don't know. I've never needed to know.

My brother made me go and see a production of it, one of these god-awful things where you have to follow the actors around the Botanic gardens. It was a freezing night and I had no jacket. And there's a road nearby so the actors all had to bellow to be heard above the hum of the traffic. Pretentious rubbish. Shakespeare was a dirty buggler anyway. All that talk about getting the love juice in your eye. I could hardly keep a straight face.

The only opera person that I remember meeting was Janet Baker – Dame Janet as she is now. She and my father had sung Dido and Aeneas together. Moth and I used to call it Dildo and Anus. But I remember Janet Baker came to stay once and she was really lovely. Really kind. Asked me all about swimming, said how envious she was because she wasn't very sporty. She told me all about the life of an opera singer, all the things she had to do to look after her voice. When she stayed in a hotel, she kept the bath filled to stop the air-conditioning from drying out her vocal chords. She couldn't eat onions or garlic before the performance because she wanted to "utter sweet breath", I think that was

a quote, Shakespeare, maybe. Dad never told me things like that. I used to listen to Janet Baker's recordings and think how kind she had been. I still do, when I'm feeling sorry for myself. I listen to her and it comforts me.

The letters arrived by the sackload after it happened. Lots of flowers, but also strange things. Chocolates, books and even some jewellery. The thing I remember most clearly, though, is Kaako, the Japanese woman with the terrible English. She sent a bouquet and the message read 'Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound. But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?'

It's ironic, to look back on it. To look back on how harsh my mother was. Pull yourself together. Acting like a madman. In retrospect, I'm sure she thinks that's why he killed himself. He couldn't take it any more, this constant pressure from her. It's funny, of course, because she's losing it now. She's going bananas too. She's old, so it's not such a shock. But I do often think about that. Pull yourself together. Get a grip. Acting like a madwoman. I'd never dare say it to her. It would be too cruel to remind her, but it *is* tempting.

[QUIETER, MORE OPEN AND WOUNDED] They never even told me. Maybe they thought I was too young to be told outright, so they never did. They told me that he had been found unconscious in the woods at the botanic gardens and had been taken to the Western Infirmary. So, it wasn't a lie. He *had* been found unconscious in the Botanic and he *had* been taken to the hospital. They just didn't tell me which part of the hospital. They never told me that he was taken straight downstairs.

I wasn't allowed to go and see him. When I asked how he was they would look at each other for too long and then said 'no change, Helena'... 'no change.' I wasn't that young. I was eleven. I worked out that something was very wrong, but they were so uncomfortable when I asked that I stopped asking. We never mentioned him, never said a word.

I thought Dad couldn't be that ill because they were doing flippant things like going shopping, both of them came back with smart new outfits. My brother had never had a suit before... I *suspected* all along. Sometimes I imagined that he had been killed by a lion. It was the very first thing I thought when they told me he'd been found unconscious in the woods. I don't know why.

And then one day, I opened one of those fan letters. It was the Japanese woman. 'Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound. But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?' So it was Kaako who told me, not my mother, not my brother. I had never even met her. I hid that card and kept it for years. But I was mugged last year. There was £150 in my purse and all I cared about losing was that little card.

I worked out the dates years later. From a book. The biographer had interviewed my mother... She told a complete stranger, but not me. Anyone can read about it in this book, *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Robin Goodfellow*. I only know the same details as you, which isn't much, really.

[QUIET, ALMOST A WHISPER] The only thing that book did say was that Janet Baker sang at the funeral.... I would have liked to have seen her again. I wonder if she asked after me. I like to think that she stood up for me, said 'where on earth is Helena? She should be here.' ...

[PAUSE] It's strange. I didn't *know* her. I'd only met her one time, briefly, years ago, but I find myself imagining her, imagining conversations with her.

[PAUSE] The biography said that she sang Dido's final aria, which is my favourite. Remember me. Remember me, but forget my fate.

[PAUSE] I like to imagine what it would have been like. She would have comforted me in a way that the others wouldn't, or couldn't. Given my hand a squeeze while the coffin slid away. Bent down to my height as she left and whispered in my ear.

[PAUSE] Goodbye Helena. I'll be thinking of you.

[PAUSE] I'll be thinking of you.

[SLIGHTLY CYNICAL] I'm not sure why we got the bench, but I know it was the right thing to do. Lots of people have said. How wonderful, I will go there myself. To clear my head.... To think things through. To read a book... To hear the trees. To watch the kids... To feel the sun. To remember, recall, reminisce, recollect. [SLIGHTLY CYNICAL] All that - just in park bench! I never knew that people loved those benches so much. [BECOMING PROGRESSIVELY MORE OPEN] Come to think of it, though, I have never ever sat in one without reading the plaque. The memorial plaque on a memorial bench. I chose one in the herb garden and put his name and the dates and then 'Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound. But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?' So, I don't need Kaako's card anymore. I've got this bench. To remember, recall, reminisce, recollect.

END

**Excerpts from *Reekie*, August 2006**

*Reekie was commissioned by Escalator East to Edinburgh as a sonic art walking tour for Edinburgh Fringe. Audiences listened to the piece on MP3 players and headphones as they followed a map around the meadows, towards the 'pubic triangle' and back to the meadows. The piece was intercut between the following text, and sections of music (composed by Pippa Murphy).*

WOMAN: I watched you all this time. I watched you. But you never noticed. Everything tinged with blue and rippled with time but I could see you none the less. I could see it all.

DOROTHY: I go out for a walk every lunchtime. About an hour. Through the meadows. Past jawbone walk, a jawbone held in tension, tight. Past the American tourists in their plastic ponchos, hearing snatchsnippets of conversation when I pass. A tiny life that opens and closes.

WOMAN: Up Chalmers Street with the shattered windows, ghosts of houses, stained with soot from a woman-wispish ghost of a girl. Past the old fire station, a *museum* of fire now, a trial by fire for the pure of heart and body. To the junction with all the strip joints. People call it the pubic triangle. Girls working from nightfall to daybreak. Daybreak to nightfall. Fall. Break.

DOROTHY: Past the tattooist, lines on the skin in circles and spirals, figures of eight. And eventually, I'm stretching back across the middle of the meadows. A huge mass of rock in the distance, waiting for something, maybe for me.

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WOMAN: There are so many things that I meant to do and never did. He stopped me. He held me tight and never let me go.

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DOROTHY: Dougie is a good man. Really. I've been happy. Really. I mean, I *am* happy. You could do a lot worse. Really. Good job, doesn't snore, doesn't smell. Really. There's many a woman would be pleased to be with the likes of Dougie. Really. *Really* really.

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DOROTHY: [SLIGHTLY DEFIANT] People think just because they've got kids that you want them too. I remember when the doctors told me. I was quite young and I remember thinking 'okay then'. That's the price I paid. The eating, the not eating, they call it a disorder these days. [BREEZY] So, that's the price. My insides are knotted up like rope and there's no space left to grow a baby. Just the

way it is. Not the be all and end all... Really. If I *had* kids I would never have got this amazing opportunity. Work in India, six months, A S A P. I work for a knitwear company and we have Indian factories. Nice ones, not sweatshops. Middle-aged wifeys sitting round on the floor knitting everything by hand in a lake of red wool. I said YES! Dougie was shocked, but didn't mind really. ... Really.

WOMAN: I always wanted to be effortlessly stylish. A woman who threw on a pair of slacks and a figure-hugging red sweater like Katherine Hepburn. I always meant to... but I never did.

DOROTHY: My sister had a red jumper that I *loved*. Ruby's red jumper. I coveted that jumper. We always borrowed each other's clothes, but she took that one with her when she left. I was by myself after that - just me, Mum and Dad. I preferred it that way. I wanted to miss her... but I never did.

WOMAN: I wanted to be a woman who wrote impassioned pleas for Amnesty International. One day I'd get a Christmas card from Peru telling me I'd been a candle in the dark. From nightfall to daybreak. I always wanted to... but I never did.

DOROTHY: I love airports.

Such a flight,  
Such a buzz, such a thrill, such a kick,  
Such a whoosh, such away, such an up up up ,  
A shine and a shimmer, a sparkle and a sprinkle,  
Such a splutter, such a stammer, such split, splat, stop.  
Such a stop.  
Such a... [FAST SIGH, AS IF REMEMBERING] Shit

[DISBELIEF] I had *forgotten*. I had packed my guidebook and my notebook, my traveller's clock, my traveller's purse, travel shampoo and travel champagne. But I had forgotten. [AS IF EXPLAINING TO A CHILD] There's an extra baggage allowance... for the thing attached to the baggage... Me. Inadvertently, I had come along too. And that was the one thing that I *really* needed a break from. Obviously, I knew that it *wouldn't* be like being on holiday. But I did think a little bit of that holiday feeling would rub off. Just a little. ...

DOROTHY: A lake in a forest. Frozen and hard. There's something held tight beneath the ice. A swollen, woolly jumper beneath the blue. It was the last time I saw that jumper, stretched along her spine, bobbing and bumping against the underside of the ice. The long black hair is swaying in the slow breezy water and she is turning a joyous cartwheel under the ice. She sweeps and leaps, a figure of eight, a figure of nine. Nine years growing, glowing red beneath the blue. [PAUSE, EXPLAINING] Ruby went under the ice and never came up. So, she never outgrew that jumper. Nine years growing, nine years going, nine years gone.

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WOMAN: I wanted to be the kind of woman who loved the arts, saw all the best shows at Edinburgh festival, even before the reviewers. I always meant to... but I never did.

DOROTHY [BRIGHT]: The company arranged everything. A flight, a flat and even [BEMUSED] a servant. Rohini. She lived in a room downstairs. She'd left her husband and kids behind. More importantly, she had left behind her husband's *mother*. Rohini, I'm thirsty. Rohini, you forgot to buy flour. Rohini, this floor is *still* dirty. First thing I did was double her wages, but it was still a fraction of what I paid my cleaning lady in Edinburgh. She said the only one she did miss, was her sister-in-law. The sister she never had.

WOMAN: Did I ever tell you about the time I turned into a cat. Did I? Did I ever tell you about the time a rope wrapped itself around my body and wrapped tighter, tauter, choking me and I *wanted* it. Without a doubt, Without a shadow of a doubt, a shadow of a woman, a woman-wispish ghost of a girl, a silhouette.

I wanted to be a woman who recycled, bought organic, bought fairtrade, travelled to work on the bus instead of in the car. Travelled to work on the bus. I always meant to... but I never did.

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DOROTHY: When I was younger, at university, I thought I was so right-on. [DISGUSTED] "That man said I had great legs, wanted to take me out for dinner. He *obviously* thinks women are just sex objects" [THINKING] I never knew I was throwing away something I'd want later on. I don't know what I would give for a man to compliment my legs these days, offer me dinner. Not even that, just to give me that look. Not predatory, not even sexual, really. A man in the street, in a park, on a bus. Waiting. For something, maybe for me. That *look*. Waiting. For something, maybe for me.

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WOMAN: The candles from the night before had left a mark on the wall. The soot looks like a slender woman, leaping in the air. A woman-wispish ghost of a girl on the white wall who lives for a moment, but only from the right angle. Then I am gone, another stain to be wiped away in the morning.

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DOROTHY: [FASCINATED] Nobody knew who I was, or how I was, or when I was me and how I was not. A slate blackboard I could write and wipe clean. A palimpsest. Write it and wipe it. I introduced myself under new names at parties, trying on a new me. Nobody knew who me or how me, the why or the when me. Nobody knew.

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WOMAN: I wanted to be the kind of woman who wore no underwear. The wind would catch my billowing skirt on a blustery day. A businessman would stare and blush as I blithely strode by. Or a blushing businesswoman. I always mean to... but I never did.

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DOROTHY: I don't know how to treat servants. So, I treated Rohini like a flatmate, like a friend. A sister. A firm friend in infirm times. There were no rules, so we made them up. She would bring me my chai in the morning and then get into bed with me. We'd sit, drinking tea and chatting. Old spinster sisters, watching dots of dust turn a figure of eight in a slanting slash of sun. I would never have done that with a girlfriend at home, not at my age. But there was something... something unspoken. We were both away from home. There were no rules, so we made them up. We talked about sex. She told me that she didn't like it. It didn't hurt, it was just ...annoying. I told her I missed it. She laughed so hard she snorted tea through her nose. Of course, this was before. Before Suresh. Suresh... changed it all.

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WOMAN: I wanted to be an alluring call girl, getting paid for something I'd do for free. A latex cat costume underneath a trench coat, stiletto-clacking my way across the marble lobby of the Hilton. How did she get through? We have a policy. [AS IF EXPLAINING] I transformed myself into cat, sneaked past the soldiers and through the city ramparts. With the tiniest flicker at the edge of my lips, I nod to the doorman, and breeze out into an eight-wheeled chariot that flies away, high above the city. I always meant to... but I never did.

DOROTHY It wasn't my fault. I've been told so many times. We were young. Nine years old, eight minutes apart. Ruby first, Dorothy second, a figure of eight, eight minutes later. It wasn't my fault. My mother, my father, everyone said. [SLIGHTLY THREATENING] But I was there, not them. I scanned the ice and saw a blood red mass glowing beneath the blue. Not them.

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DOROTHY: The Indians treated me like a visiting dignitary, invited me to ambassador's parties, to drink margaritas, eat sushi and complain about the heat. They'd lay on traditional singers or shadow puppetry, a bit of 'regional flavour'. My honours dissertation at university was in classical Indian literature, so I knew the lie of the land. At one party there was [SLIGHT DISBELIEF] a kathakali troupe. Kathakali is supposed to be shown in *temples*, from nightfall to daybreak. But here they were next to a swimming pool, truncated to an hour. Like cutting up the Mona Lisa to wallpaper your bathroom. Amputated. Rama's limbs cut down to bloody stumps for an audience who drank margaritas, ate sushi and complained about the heat.

The dance told an ancient story from the Ramayana, the travels of Rama. I recognised it. Rama's wife Sita is kidnapped by the evil demon Ravana. Sugriva, the monkey king sends out his monkey soldiers in search of the eight-wheeled chariot that kidnapped her. Hanuman turns himself into a cat to slip past the soldiers, through the city ramparts. When she returns, Rama despises Sita for being impure. She chooses suicide by fire, builds her own funeral pyre. But the fire-god rises up and carries her *out* of the fire to prove she is pure of heart and pure of body. Surpanahka, on the other hand, has her nose and ears cut from her face for her wilful lasciviousness.

I was mesmerised. I was mesmerised by their *bodies*. The muscles under such thin skin, like rope under silk pulled tight and then let slack. Stretched, taut, tense. Held in tension, tight.... I had stopped breathing.

After the show, I broke the rules and went to meet the dancers. They were embarrassed, ashamed of these swimming pool farces. They were stoned. Good Kerala grass, they told me, and I longed for it, to go outside, to sit under a tree, where the Margarita Ambassadors wouldn't see. I wanted to know more about the dances. I wanted that ropesilk arm to pass me a spliff, to give me that *look*, just for a moment. Waiting. For something, maybe for me. His arm held out in ropesilk tension. Stretched, taut, tense. Held in tension, tight.... I had stopped breathing.

His name was... his name was Suresh.

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DOROTHY: It turns out I wasn't the only one glad to be away from home. Rohini was free from annoying-sex husband, but also was free from his mother. Vicious-Malicious. She said 'I'd rather be a paid servant for you than an unpaid slave for her.'

Vicious Malicious mother-in-law suspected her other daughter-in-law of having an affair, of wilful lasciviousness. The only person in the family that Rohini *liked*. The sister-in-law who was the sister she never had. [DISBELIEF] Vicious Malicious wanted to *burn* the girl. A trial by fire to prove she was impure. She wanted Rohini's *help*. Rohini was sly as a cat. Why waste your own money on firewood, mother-in-law? A brothel would pay good money for a sixteen year old like her. Your son will be free of her and you'll have made a good profit. So the sister she never had ... was sold.

WOMAN: I did my research so I would know what Dorothy was banging on about. These Kathakali men train for eight years, *nine* years to control every facial muscles, even their eyeballs. Nine years. Even the Kathakali make-up takes four hours to apply and two hours to remove. Once the performer is wearing his make-up, he is no longer himself and it's forbidden to use his real name.

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DOROTHY: [LIGHT] I know I should have felt ashamed... but I never did. Surpanahka's ears and nose were cut from her face for wilful lasciviousness. But not mine. All this time I had been waiting. Waiting for a ropesilk arm to reach around me from behind, to twine itself across my belly and down between my legs.

All the things I wanted to hide were things he wanted to see, to breath, to leave on the window sill. To dry in the sun. All the shameful parts I had kept hidden and secret, musty and moist. My red hair I'd always highlighted, the belly I'd hidden under flattering suits, the hair I'd waxed off. Obsessively. Suresh wanted it all. I wanted to give it to him. All this time I had been waiting to surrender myself to a ropesilk dancer, a figure-eight skater. Surrender. From nightfall to daybreak. Surrender, Dorothy. The flicker-flash of a moon-sun oil lamp. Surrender.

WOMAN: The dancer never speaks, communicates only with the face and with the hands. The hands can be held in nearly 500 different positions, each with a different meaning, a different impact, a different emotion.

DOROTHY: The candles from the night before had left a mark on the wall. The soot looked like a slender woman, leaping in the air. A woman-wispish ghost of a girl on the white wall. She lives for a moment, but only from the right angle. Then she is gone, another stain to be wiped away in the morning.

WOMAN: Kathakali performances are lit by flickering oil lamps. A large group at the front to represent the sun, a small group at the back for the moon. The oil lamps flicker and flash, glow and grow. As the dancers jump and spiral, sweep and leap, dots of dust rise from the matting and catch in the light, floating and falling, a swirling figure-eight imitation of the dances.

DOROTHY: The thing that took pride of place in the slash of sun on the window sill, was my craving. My desperation. I had been so embarrassed by it for so long, lied through my teeth, kept it secret and hidden, musty and moist. Rotting. The more I craved, the more I wanted, the more he fed me, filling me up. [WITH RELISH] Giving me my fill. A ropesilk fountain that always flowed. I always wanted more and he always wanted me to want more and wanted to give. To give and give. More and more. Further and longer and wetter and deeper. Hold me tight, and never let me go.

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WOMAN: I watched you all this time. I watched you. But you never noticed. Everything tinged with blue and rippled with time but I could see you none the less. I could see it all. You never knew the who me or the how me, the why or the when me. *Nobody* knew.

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DOROTHY: In the Ramayana, Sugriva the monkey king sent his monkey soldiers in search of the kidnapped Sita. Flying Monkey soldiers like the ones in the Wizard of Oz when I was little. The wicked witch flies up and writes in the sky Surrender Dorothy. Ruby leaned across in the dark and said 'That's your name... Dorothy'. [THOUGHTFUL] Surrender Dorothy. Surrender.

DOROTHY: A lake in a forest, frozen and hard. There are lines on the surface where a skater has come. Not just any skater. An *artist*, skating on a frozen swimming pool farce. Circles and spirals, figures of eight that he's traced on the ice, on her skin. My skin used to come up in red lines where he stroked me with his finger nails. His hands could stroke me in nearly 500 different ways, each with a different meaning, a different emotion, a different marking. He could have written his name on my skin. Suresh, ropesilk dancer, figure-eight skater... branded me, owned me... but he never did.

Spinning and turning, shaving a layer of ice with each turn and each spin. The shavings melt and become water. With each spin and circle, a deeper line in the ice, shaving off shards and melting.

But when the skater is gone, the melted shards just freeze once more. A fresh layer of snow falls and the circles-spirals are covered. The snowflakes fill in the eight figures and you'd never know he'd been there at all. You'd never even know. The who him or the how him, the why or the when him. *Nobody* knew.

The temperature drops and a swan's head is trapped beneath the ice, squeezing precious last air-bubbles out of its beak. The slender neck turns circles and spirals, frantic figures of eight. A bug stuck down that willowy gullet, choking him. Stretched, taut, tense. Held in tension, tight. Stupid animal. Couldn't he see the weather was turning, temperature dropping?... It's finished.

I sat at my desk in the office. [HARSH] Come to your senses woman. I need to be hard-headed, hard-nosed. Icy. I know it's the right thing to do. It's finished.

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WOMAN: I've been waiting for so long, but for what? I'm like communion wine that's soured and dried, a purple dot at the bottom of a glass. The ghost of some wine, that's what the inside of my body looks like. [CHEERFUL] There's nothing you can say to hurt me. I'd have to be *listening*, and I'm not. I'd have to *be here*, and I'm not. Smoke disperses in the air. Crying and curling for a second, but soon enough I am gone. A lingering smell of soot, but after that ... [WHISPER] nothing.

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DOROTHY: After her sister-in-law had been dragged away to service men in a brothel, Rohini would sneak and visit her. She got a brusque brushoff at the brothel threshold – she's busy, she's sleeping, she's working. But Rohini kept trying. She wanted to be the fire-god, lifting Rama's wife out of the flames and carrying her to safety. Rohini wanted to know that she had done the right thing. She

saved the sister she never had from the fire, but was the frying pan any better? One day the brusque brush off changed. She's left. She's moved. ... She's gone.

Rohini didn't understand it, but I did. I've read about it before, in the paper. The sister-in-law had been sold again. Women are bought and sold to brothels in Europe, in Britain, in Scotland, in Edinburgh. Slaves in the oldest, truest sense. Time after time. Man after man. Nightfall to daybreak, daybreak to nightfall. Break. Fall. Night after night after night. I read in The Scotsman that there are a thousand of them working in brothels in Scotland. In Edinburgh. I walk past those places on my lunchtime stroll. I think about the women inside. I wonder about the sister Rohini never had, and then had, and then lost. I wonder if she is there. I could be walking past her window every day. Every daybreak. Break. Fall.

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DOROTHY: Of course I wanted more. Of course I wanted to stay. Of course. But where could it go? Really. Could I stay? Really? Could he *leave*? Really. I can't turn into a cat and slip through the city ramparts... Such a splutter, such a stammer, such a split, splat, stop. [PAUSE] Such a stop. [SIGHS, DEFEATED & COLD] I handed my notice, booked my flight, and left without saying goodbye.

DOROTHY [BLEAK] I love airports. Such a flight. Such a whoosh, such away, such an up up up. As the plane landed in Edinburgh, I thought about half the people on the plane being excited to discover a new, exhilarating city and half the people disappointed to return to an old, empty life. I love coming out of the arrivals gate and seeing all the faces, placards that read 'Mr Zontiros' or 'Mr Van Der Basch.' Expectant hairdos waiting for someone, something, somehow. I'm surprised how many are worried, wary. Maybe she'll look different, behave different, be different. Maybe I've lost her for good this time. I should never have let her go. Should have held her tight and never let her go... [SUDDENLY COLD] I told Dougie not to meet me at the airport. I called a cab.

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WOMAN: There are *so many* things that I meant to do and never did. He held me tight and never let me go. When we first met, he said to me 'I've been waiting so long. You're the one that I need to warm me.' He wanted to be close, spend time only with me. A sudden creak, a crack and I plunged beneath the sheet and the depth. A ruby red glow beneath *him*. Frantic footsteps above as they tried to drag me out. But he was having none of it. He was *having* me... to have and to hold... *in* sickness... *until* death... [PAUSE] I had stopped breathing.

DOROTHY: Rohini sends me letters in her bald, simple English. She sees Suresh in the street. His eyes are red and swollen from too much of that kerala grass. His body thinner. He looks at Rohini for a moment too long, then looks away. [COLD, ANNOYED] I wish she wouldn't tell me. I never reply to the letters, but still they come. It's in the past. Past tense, intense, held in tension, tight... [THOUGHTFUL] I had stopped breathing.

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WOMAN: 'Who are you?' he asked me, a stern frown. I told him my name. He said 'I've been waiting, for something, maybe for you. I've always wanted a woman, to hold her tight and never let her go.' I'm not a woman, I'm only nine. Don't worry, you've time to grow. But the ice lied. Nine years old, nine years cold. A ruby red mass glowing beneath the blue. I never did billow my skirt, or see the best shows, or stiletto-clack across a marble lobby. And believe me, [WHISPER] I tried. But he *did* take my warmth, he *did* hold me tight, and he *never* let me go.

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DOROTHY: When the skater is gone you'd never know he'd been there. Except he left something. A blood red mass glowing beneath the blue. New. Growing, against all odds, against the underside of the ice. Nine *months* of growing, this time. Nine months to go, nine months to grow.

[PAUSE] Ropesilk dancer, figure-eight skater. He's completed the figure eight, replaced what was lost and made a new Ruby beneath the ice.

[PAUSE] You can scan the surface of the ice. The scan says the blood red mass is a girl.

[PAUSE] Maybe I'll *call* her Ruby. I'll buy her a red jumper

[PAUSE] And when she's nine years old I'll hold her tight. Hold her tight and never let her go.

SOUND slowly fades away

**END**