

WITHOUT TRACE

PROLOGUE

BETH

Escape. Velocity: the speed needed by a projected body to escape from the gravitational field around the earth. When I was young, I had this fascination for setting off fireworks. Watching them shoot off away from where I planted them in the ground, and explode in the dark. But I always secretly wanted them to carry on, to have enough of a momentum to go on out past gravity's pull. And just carry on. And never come back.

TRACK GIRLAGAIN

BETH

last night
last night I became a girl again
last night I lay screaming between these sheets
drenched as if the world was pouring from me
as if my whole world was being bled from me
and all that was left was my curiosity and awe

and look at me

last night I ripped open
and gave birth to a strange likeness of mine
a lightness
which shed me like skin
and peeled me away like an unwanted gift
and with a shrug
I lay here discarded and open on the floor

and I'm spinning
I'm sad and I'm awkward
unsettled and exposed
blushing naked in the road

last night I stripped myself
all to see for all to see

all new again

and look at me

SCENARIO JIM

there's a silence that comes to those who wait
last night
last night it washed over me
and I could touch it
thick like treacle
like black treacle
like wading through absence
heavy
pulling me under
drowning out everything

3 days 3 nights
where's she now?
what did she say?
what did she say?
2 o'clock
2 o'clock
back at 2 o'clock
back
I'll be back
back home
two
I'll be back home at two
it's not that difficult
I'll be back at two
I'll be back home at two
(INSERT PART 2)

TRACK Worst scenario 2nd half

JAMES

I glance at the sofa. It's empty.

I'm missing

I'm absent

I'm lost

I'm in the dark

I'm on the rack

I'm raw

I'm stripped

whipped

I'm bled

broken

I'm haunted

betrayed

neither here nor there

muttering stuttering

buried

I'm deeper

I'm dead

I'm silent

I'm dreaming

I'm screaming

I'm drenched

awake

aching

tight

I'm bitter

I'm drunk

punchy

I'm sinking

I'm drowning

I'm a wreck

I'm total

I'm lost

I sit in the empty space on the sofa.

God, this silence.

TRACK PICK UP

GLEN How far are you going?

BETH Don't know yet.

G Which way, then?

B That way?

G Oh. Sure you not going that way?

B Is that an option?

G How about that way?

B What's that way like?

G Good. But you're definitely not heading back that way, then?

B No. Are you going to give me a lift?

(Sound of car door closing)

G This is nice.

B It's not mine.

G I didn't mean the car.

B Oh. Yes it is.

B My name's Beth

G Do you like playing games?

B All the time.

G Really?

B I'm very good at playing games.

G How's that, then?

B We went away a lot when I was young.

G You still are young.

B I'm 30 next month.
G I'm Glen
B Pleased to meet you, Glen.
G Pleased to meet you, 30-next-month.
B You smile a lot, don't you?
G There's a lot to smile at.
B Whose lot?
G Can we start again?
B Sure.
(Repeat. Faster)
G Let's play a game.
B S.
(GLEN plays)

G Sky. R. Road. H. Horizon. F. Field. C. Cattle. No, cows. T. Trees. In the distance. H. Horizon. Closer. R. Road. S. Sky. F. Field. G. Green.

BETH I can't believe I did that. I'd never.. I never let myself go like that. But I was so hungry. Hungry for this stranger. Or strangeness. It was like I couldn't get enough. Like I wanted to have it all. Like I hadn't eaten for days. I don't really know how.. it just didn't seem to be me. I was the one watching instead.

And now

In these surroundings, in these clothes. with uncombed hair tied loosely back, is this me? In this car, with this man, driving fast driving slow, keeping a pace I haven't known since - I can't remember. I catch my breath. Something tells me that's enough. Something is saying get out.

G R. Road. There's nothing else really, is there?
B I think I'll get out here. Thanks. For the lift.

SPEECHLESS

JIM when I saw her on the train today
 and I told her how well she looked
 and how she made me jump
 that she still has that effect
 and I blurted out that I hadn't meant it when I said I
 needed some space
 and went upstairs but came straight back down again
 and she went upstairs instead
 just like today
 walking down to the next carriage

ANNA Jim.

JIM and then when I caught up with her in the market
 I'd recognize that walk anywhere
 and I said coffee
 and we sat and watched the street
 and couldn't help think about that holiday

ANNA Jim, stop it.

JIM and when you came to the reception
 and explained everything
 and I took a half day

ANNA Look at me, Jim. Look at me.

JIM when I rested my eyes
 on the green during lunch hour
 and you went all quiet

ANNA Stop it.

JIM and sitting here opposite you

ANNA Stop it. Look, come here. Let's talk.

JIM There's nothing..

ANNA But it might help..

JIM No, there's nothing.

BETH ON BEACH (PASSING) edit

BETH

Two weeks

There's friends you care about so much you couldn't imagine being separated. You really believe you like... you love them so much you could never ever be apart.

And then you meet up every other weekend, and nothing's changed.

And then you meet up every other month, and nothing's changed.

And then you meet up every other year and nothing's everything's changed.

And you still phone every christmas.

And then you forget next time round and so do they.

And then one day. You're talking to someone on the phone or at a wedding and you hear they were in.. an accident or something.

And it doesn't mean that much anymore. It's like some fictional characters have been written out of a novel your reading. Or dropped from a soap.

Well, I killed myself off last week. Me and the others.

I washed away my footsteps, and I can start afresh.

No one holding me back. I'm running again.

SPIRAL

JIM I've only myself to blame
I know
I'm a bloody careless sod at times
Only myself to blame

ANNA She's my friend, too, you know.

JIM Bloody careless
Bloody careless

ANNA You're not the only one..

JIM Only myself to blame.

ANNA You're not the only one suffering here.

JIM Only myself
Only me

ANNA What about me? Look at me.

JIM Bloody careless.

ANNA I'm sick to death.

JIM Only myself.

ANNA Look at me! I'm sick.

JIM There's only me to blame.

ANNA I'm sick.

ANNA'S NIGHTMARE

VOICE1 She's dropped you in it this time.
She's dropped you up to your neck

VOICE2 No, you're just in at the deep end
She's not like that
She doesn't even know

1 And you're drowning
She knew exactly what my plans were
Had to spoil them, didn't she? She had to..

2 It's her way of joining you
Yes, that's what it is

1 She's kicking sand in your eyes

2 It might not be her fault
Perhaps she's in trouble. Jim might be right

1 Why did she use to borrow the flat
Why did I never ask her
What was she up to?
Why the flat?

2 She's your friend. We shared everything.

1 But she was always in control
That's what this is.

2 Oh, I'm just being stupid. What am I talking about?

1 She's getting her own back. I didn't invite her along. That's what this is.

2 How was I supposed to know? Did she really want to come?

1 Jealous

1 Unhappy?

BOTH Oh shut up! Shut up!

1 What was she thinking?

2 She must be in trouble.

1 Why?!

2 Why? Perhaps she's in India. Waiting for me to..

1 No, that's absurd.

2 I just don't know. I just..

1 She never really cared, did she?

2 She did.

1 It was all just a game.

2 She did. She did!

1 She's playing with you.

2 No

1 She's toying..

2 Perhaps Jim knows something I don't
He's not telling me something

1 You're both in it together
Drowning

2 Unhappy

1 Jealous

2 In trouble

1 She's trouble.

2 Your best friend

1 Just a game!

BOTH Oh stop it! Stop it!

EUPHORIA

JIM

Can you believe it?
I still can't believe it
it was all a mistake
of course
you told me
and the note you left
thank you I'm so stupid
thrown out with the newspapers
and the ansaphone messages
I'm a bloody careless sod at times aren't I?
I've only myself to blame
I know
thanks for not fussing
 for being here
 for being you
 here
so just sit there and don't move
you've made me realize
I realize now
you
I mean you and me
I can't say it
just be next to me
just while I get over the shock
your eyelashes
they send shivers down me
even more now
and your touch
the warmth of it
it means the world to me
 (pause)
don't take that away from me
I'm spinning
put your hands here
and your head
look up at me the way you used to

I'll always remember this
open some wine
I'm shaking too much
let's talk
or walk
let's go out
no let's stay in
there's so much we
let's go to bed and stay there for days
a weekend a week a fucking year
let's both of us go missing

spend all our money
head to the beach and blow it on fireworks
let's be reckless like that
we'll get in the car and drive to the beach
like fireworks
kaboom

SHALL I? SHAN'T I?

1 The flat
He has to be told
he has to know
and it has to be me

2 What options have I got?
He finds out or he doesn't
If he doesn't then.. then what?
Is that so wrong?

1 He deserves to know I suppose
I can't hold it from him

2 But I could just as well
So he's left in the dark
Is that so bad?
Is it so bad if he's left in the dark?

1 She might be alright though
If she's alright he has to be told
So it has to be me

BOTH Me,

2 to crush him like this
I that really what I want?

BOTH Do I really?

1 Should I really?

BOTH No. Yes. No.

1 So she borrowed the flat
So I lent her my flat
So she might have been seeing someone

2 But I don't know that

1 That's not good enough

2 I don't know anything

1 That's still doesn't mean..

2 It means nothing!

1 Well, he has to be told.
He has to know

2 So it has to be me

1 What are my options
He finds out or he doesn't
If he doesn't then..
Is that so wrong?

2 He deserves to know
I can't hold it from him

1 But I could just as well
So he's left in the dark

BOTH Is that so bad?
Is it? Is it?
Perhaps

1 It is

PICK UP No 3

GLEN Which way you heading. *Pause* Sure you're not heading that way? *Pause* How about that way?

GLEN Where do you disappear to? Beth.

BETH Pardon?

G When you look away like that?

B Why?

G I'm curious.

B I'm just wandering.

G What are you getting out of all this?

B What's with all the questions?

G Are you afraid to tell me?

B What?

G What you're looking for.

B Oh for Christ sake, it's not about looking for something. Or being after anything. It's not about finding anyone. Or about my lost childhood. Or my father or being bored with my lot. Or depression or moodswings or needing some space. It's not about you. It's definitely not about me and someone else. Money, security, the job, the flat, the boyfriend, the best friend, the frigging family history. It's.. *(pause)* Oh.

G What?

B My age, or some crisis I'm going through, or my clock ticking. It's not about feeling wasted or wanted or wanting something I can't have or wanting something to happen, or..

G But what is it? Go on.

B Do you really want to know?

G Yes.

B Okay. I'll tell you.

BAD NEWS

Doorbell. Anna sits.

VOICES 1 AND 2

There's been an accident
it's Beth

Music

There's been an accident
it's Beth- she's dead

Music. James on

Film

She's dead. I'd better sit down then.

Music

It's Beth. She's dead.

There's been an accident

Music

There's been an accident

It's Beth

You'd better sit down

Music

Film

There's been an accident

She's dead

Music

Beth's dead

Music

There's been an accident

Music

Beth's dead

there's been

there's

there's been

oh God

don't let it be

there's been

there's

been an

been an
been an
oh God don't let have to be me
have to be me
have to be
have to be me
no
no don't let it be
let it be
let it be me
not her
let it be
no
let it not be so
so
so
so simple
it can't be that simple
can't be
oh God
has to be me
has to be wrong
they can't
can't can't can't can't won't
oh God please

don't

there's
been
an
accident

SIX MONTHS

JIM There's a quiet that comes after a storm. It's wet. Sweet. A fresh start. It feels brisk and clean. *(Breathes in)* It's all new again. A new start. And look at me. I can relax at last. It's okay. It's okay and I'm fine. I'm doing really well. Six months is a long time.

POSTCARD *(GLEN arrives with postcard. JIM and GLEN circle each other)*

MALE VOICE

you're not as I imagined you
I thought you'd be older
I saw you differently
expected you to be fatter for some reason

I tried to picture what you'd be like
by imagining you with her
and you always looked
unkempt
is that the word?
like you cared less for your appearance
and that that would be something Beth quite liked about you

I'd imagined you bigger
no
smaller
or perhaps I was thinking in relation to me

your clothes
I'd never have pictured Beth with someone like that
she's always so
I can't think of the word
but it's the opposite to what you're wearing

you're really not her type
surely
no

there's something about Beth. Something defined, sharp.
defined against a dark background.
she stands out
I expected you to be like her I suppose

maybe you are
perhaps I just can't see it
maybe you're like me
what I was like before..

did you expect this to be different
I thought this would be different

HOW DID YOU HOLD HER?

JIM After the accident.. what did she hold?

GLEN

JIM Okay, did she have her arms to herself
or were they
were her hands holding onto anything

GLEN

JIM You perhaps
was she lying on her own
away
or were you close enough to her?
was she alone?

GLEN

JIM okay
what was she looking at?
were you holding her head?
let's say you were holding her head
were you cradling her?
was she alive in your lap?
yes
I can picture it
it was like this, wasn't it?
her eyes looking up at you
like this
where were your arms
what did you notice about her
what was she looking at
at you? at the car?
did she..?
was she at all..?
did you..?

GLEN I really don't remember.

RETRACE JIM

JIM

Everything was so easy. She was comfortable.. when we were together, the tiniest movements caused us to sink in. We just sank into one another. Lock stock. In tiny movements, we got ourselves rooted to the spot. And all the while the sands were shifting around us. All the while you could see the tide coming in. But we stood strong. She was comfortable there. We both were. It was easy.

RETRACE ANNA AT BEACH

ANNA

When I was a girl, I'd play that game where you'd run patterns through the sand and try to retrace your steps one by one, until they'd all been washed away by the surf. And then you'd start all over again. A different pattern. And again. And again. She enjoyed playing games, didn't she? Me and her both. This was just another one. Or was it? There's no 'yes' or 'no' written here. Any trace of an answer's been washed away now.

RETRACE GLEN DRIFTWOOD

GLEN

It's not the travelling that creates distance between people. You can go to the ends of the earth and beyond and be closer to someone than sitting side by side on the sofa in front of the telly. It wasn't in her personality to stay put. I know that. She was like me, uncomfortable being rooted to the spot. She had to drift. She needed to get herself washed up now and then. On a different beach.

EPILOGUE

BETH

I sometimes feel the earth moving under my feet. Pulling me in this direction or that.

There's times I get myself into such a spin, that I dream I have enough momentum to shoot off anywhere at random.

But instead of coming back when I've got there, I just keep on going.

I'm like a firework, but one that doesn't stop, shooting beyond gravity's pull

and off into space.

and all people can see is a thin trail

getting thinner until it disappears

it's just a thought

nothing more