

## The Sound of the Birds.

Actor:

The only thing I can hear is the sound of the birds. Their soft chirps and whistles punctuating the otherwise stark and encompassing silence.

There is a great pain in my chest, that sits there like a knot. I reach for you, but find only empty space - an empty space where, only some hours ago, we held our breath and lay together, finding solace in each other's embrace.

It's funny to think - you know - when you actually stop and think about how our brains edit out certain kinds of sounds. The kinds of sounds, I mean, that we are used to hearing day-to-day. The sounds that can easily fade into the background, as we get used to them - as we become accustomed to them. Birds - well yes, the sound of birds is one example, but there are actually many - many - many others, depending on where we are at any given time. Cars - and I say cars because I did used to live right by a very busy motorway - but it could also be trains, aeroplanes - the hum of a generator, the screech of a car alarm outside your building. Or - or the distant rattle of gunfire, the wail of emergency service vehicles, explosions, the screams of a young child covered from head to toe in bright - no dark crimson blood. Screaming - screaming for her mother.

Am I making sense? Please, do let me know if I'm confusing you.

At a time like this, all I can think to do is check the news - of course I check the news. Wouldn't you? It's only natural in a time of crisis. I find no answers in the headline and it takes at least four flicks of my thumb to find a relevant article - 'Humanitarian situation worsens in the city: more should be done to alleviate suffering says Minister'. It was posted over twelve hours ago. I feel dizzy and my throat is dry. All social media is down - either down or blocked - but I see that I have recently received an email from my energy provider, telling me that I am now able to view my latest bill. Other than that, my inbox is completely empty and I am gripped by immeasurable panic. The knot in my chest tightens again and I know I can't stay here. I have to search for you.

What would happen if one day, all the children in the world woke up and found that their parents had vanished? Just vanished - I mean - without a trace. I used to think about that scenario a lot as a child. But then again, you already knew that didn't you?

Anyway, I start my search for you - in the street outside of my - our - apartment. I check by the bins, the contents of which by now has started to rot - there's a rancid clear liquid pooling underneath the discarded bags. I search between the rows of parked cars, which are covered with fallen leaves and bird shit - and in the boot of my car. All I find is a broken pair of sunglasses - one of the lenses is missing - and tie-dye T-shirt with a large hole in the chest. I can't remember where this came from and once again, I feel the knot rise and twist in my chest.

I turn off my road - the road I - we have lived on for a number of years now, and I make my way down the Main Street into town. An artery - that's how I imagine it - an artery that connects all the smaller streets to the heart of the city. Do you like that imagine? But this street is as empty - no, somehow even emptier than the last. All of the shops - supermarkets, the pharmacies, the news agents, the tanning salons and hairdressers, the restaurants and the cafés are all closed and boarded up. I think you understand what I'm getting at. I continue like this for sometime, until I reach the park - the park on top of the hill, that seems to be located directly in the middle of the city. The park with the benches, the duck pond and the big oak tree - and right at the top, overlooking the whole city, the children's play area. Do you know where I mean? I know you do - I know that you must do because

it's where we drank that bottle of vodka together. You remember - we drank the whole bottle and mixed it with orange juice - and I threw up - yes - over there, by the swings.

Except - and I can't be sure, but in this moment it seems as if everything is backwards or inverted. Like I'm seeing it through a pair of those blue and red 3D glasses. It's like - have you ever watched an old video recording of yourself as a child? A video, perhaps, of you playing in the garden - playing in a Wendy house that your dad made - or maybe even in an upstairs bedroom, with the sun beaming through at just the right angle - just the right angle to illuminate thousands of dust particles and draw long shadows across the room. And then - just at that moment in the video, with the dust and the shadows and so on, you see yourself - yourself as a child, turn to face the camera.

"What are we doing up here then"

chirps a voice from behind the camera. The corners of your mouth begin to twitch and curl upwards - but before you can see yourself smile, the tape goes dead and cuts to grey static. This is what it's like. I hope this is making sense. I'm trying to be as clear as possible.

Once again, the knot appears again in my chest, but this time, the pain is overwhelming. As I double-over in agony, I feel it growing tighter and tighter and tighter until - like a - like a cord of elastic, it releases suddenly and violently, into a blast of iridescent light, that bursts from my chest and spans out over the park and across the city - wiping out trees, cars and buildings, which disintegrate on impact into chunks of concrete, shards of metal, splinters and clouds of dust.

I lie in the middle of a crater, where the play park used to be, a mushroom cloud billowing from my chest and rising into the sky. It is silent - almost completely silent. The only thing I can hear is the sound of the birds.