

Stumbling down Clifton Street at 11:30am drunk, Effie is the kind of girl you'd avoid eye contact with, silently passing judgement. We think we know her, but we don't know the half of it.

Effie's life spirals through a mess of drink, drugs and drama every night, and a hangover worse than death the next day – till one night gives her the chance to be something more.

A powerful new adaptation of the enduring Greek myth drives home the high price people pay for society's shortcomings.

'Clever, sly and funny...shows us how to live.'
Guardian on Mrs Reynolds and the Ruffian

Gary Owen is the winner of the George Devine, Meyer Whitworth and Pearson Best Play Awards. His other plays include *Crazy Gary's Mobile Disco*, *The Shadow of a Boy*, *The Drowned World*, *Mrs Reynolds and the Ruffian* and *Love Steals Us From Loneliness*. With Helen Raynor he was writer and creator of the BBC Wales series *Baker Boys*. His most recent theatre work includes *Perfect Match* for Watford Palace Theatre, where he is a creative associate, and *Ring Ring*, a new version of La Ronde for the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. In June 2015 he'll make his Royal Court debut with *Violence and Son*, directed by Hamish Pirie.

Cover Photography: Alex Mills
Cover Design: Burning Red | www.burningred.co.uk

WWW.OBERONBOOKS.COM

ISBN 978-1-78319-891-7

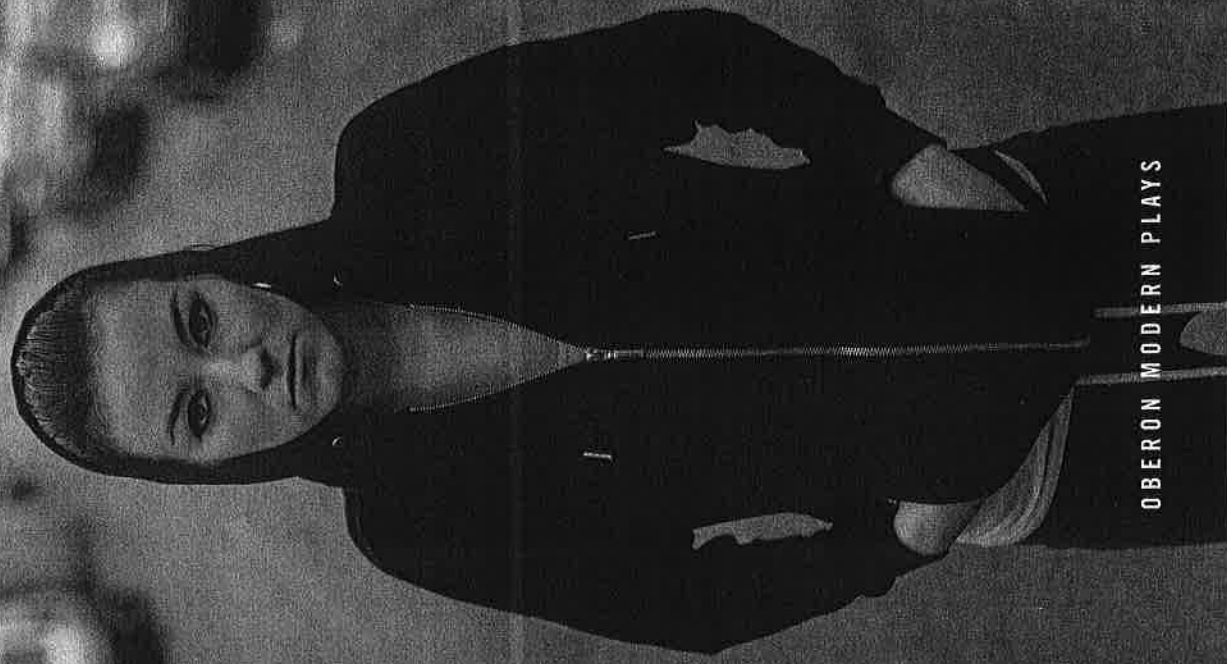


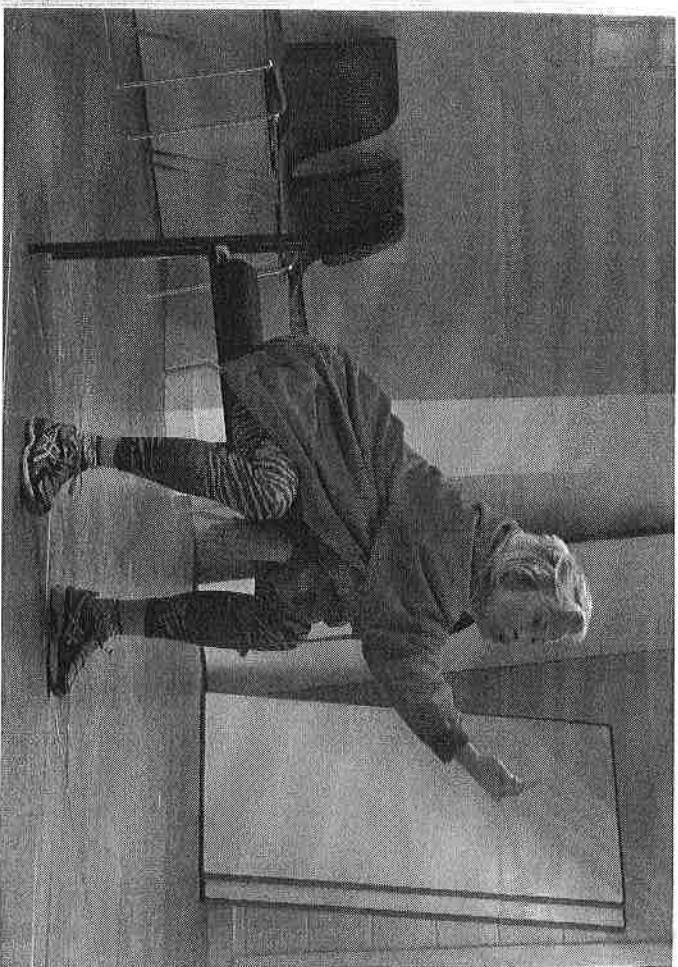
OBERON MODERN PLAYS



OBERON MODERN PLAYS

By Gary Owen





1

You lot.

Sitting back, taking it easy, waiting for me

To – what? Impress you? Amaze you? Show you what I've got?

Well boys and girls, ladies and gents – I'm afraid not.

You have got it back to front, arse about tit, and your up side

Is definitely down. See I know what you think

When you see me pissed first thing wandering around.

You think –

Stupid slag. Nasty skank.

But guess what? Tonight

You all are here to give thanks

To me.

Yeah I know it's a shock.

But you lot, every single one

You're in my debt.

And tonight – boys and girls, ladies and gents –

I've come to collect.

You all know me.

I strut down the street, and your eyes dive for the ground

Face on I'm too much for you to handle

The second I'm past your head snaps up

To catch an eyeful of this firm yet juicy arse –

– and it is, so don't even bitch.

That's my flat, on the corner.



My nan remembers when it used to be a shop – like almost every house on the block,

Oooh, she says, it's not like how it was. I say Nan: wake up love.

Everything changes, everything moves on.

Nan loves to have a moan about the world, the way it's gone,

Course when she moans about how the world has gone,

What she's really moaning about – is me. My life.

Cos I live my life a million miles an hour, do what I like, when I like, and

Oh look, I've got – this¹ – for you, if you can't deal with it

Nan says, this place used to have everything you need

Shops are gone, bingo hall burned, pubs closed, doctors shut,

STAR centre getting pulled down and more flats thrown up.

She says we used to live. You could live here and live well.

Now they're stacking us up, and we're supposed to just exist.

I say Nan you're such a moaning old trout I swear

Nan scowls at me she is up and out

Says – I'll tell you what young miss –

It is eleven thirty-five in the morning and you have taken drink!

Nothing good can come from living like this.

I say to Nan: if you don't like the way I live

Maybe you shouldn't come round no more. How'd you like that?

Nan grumps off,

Slaps down a couple of tens on the table as she waddles by

And I should

I should

Pick them up go after her stuff them down her throat

But

I let the money sit.

I let her shuffle down the stairs

I let the front door slam because

I need those notes.

See the only way I get through the week is a cycle of hangovers.

And I'm not talking, bit of a baddy head here.

I'm talking proper, brain-shredding three day bastards.

I'm talking hangovers that start, you're under a table at Chicken Cottage,

You've already chucked so much you're just heaving big empty sick-flavoured burps, till

Some secret trapdoor springs open in your guts

And this thick green gloop shoots out your gob

This sour liquorice juice, pints and pints of it,

Where the hell was that tucked away? And you wake

In a stranger's bed, or a bathroom floor, or police cell.

But you wake,

Your muscles ache, your throat's sore, teeth fizzing from all that acid

In your puke the night before. You wake and you know

– that's half the week sorted!

Because you'll be day one in bed, crying and wishing you were dead,

¹ Find some cute way to give the audience the finger.

Onto the settee for day two, sweating into your duvet, eating twenty pee noodles, watching whatever shit comes on Dave ja vu.

And on the third day you rise, and put yourself back together; start with a scalding hot bath mid morning to lift the shit from your pores then a ten hour programme of sanding down surfaces, picking, plucking, painting before you're ready to go again.

But last night I didn't get there. Last night, don't know why, don't know what,

I just didn't have the commitment to getting absolutely totally fucked and now

Disaster. It's Monday morning, and I've got a brain functioning on full power.

That is not natural, it is not normal

And it is definitely not safe.

I am going to need those notes from Nan,

So tonight I can put right last night's wrong, get totally fucked

And wipe myself out for the rest of the week.

So I let the woman walk.

I don't stuff those grimy tenners back in her face.

Sometimes you've just got to take it.

But still,

Even if I've got an escape from real life tonight

That leaves me with a day to get through

My body buzzing, all this energy and fuck all to do with it.

This means one thing.

Trouble. In the end for me

But before that, for... losers like you, basically.

I wander down to the pavement, scan the street for targets

Who's gonna volunteer? Who will step up, be victim of my fury?

And -

Yes.

This prick. This prick coming now.

One of these pricks you see snarling on the weighs at the STAR

Gugging down protein shakes, gazing at himself in the mirror.

Session after session pumping up his arms and chest,

But leg day: leg day, the prick pisses off down the pub,

So he's got arms like thighs, but thighs like cheese straws.

He totters down our street every day, little legs barely bearing the weight

Of his steroid-boosted bi's and tri's and pecs

Walking his nasty little dog, some kind of mongrel, maybe not a pug

But fucking pug ugly for sure, and this prick

Lets his nasty little dog shit all over our street. And that really pisses me off

Not just cos I have to walk through it but - *so does he!*

How fucking stupid do you have to be

To let your dog shit on the street *you* walk down

Every single day of the week?

There's so much crap, he has to do this little dance

Just to dodge the turds he's left lying in wait for himself.

I watch him, pirouetting down the pavement like he's having a fit

And sometimes, I wonder

Why exactly I even go out with the prick.

I say -

What did you call me, Kev?

Smile fades, he says

Whassat now?

I say, did you just call me a slag?

He says, I calls you that all the time, you loves it you do.

I go I have had a fuckin gutsful of you -

He goes chill the fuck out I was joking like

You *prick* I shout and I'm off down the street,

He skips after me, snapping at my heels, I'm screaming

You twat, you bastard, you fucking shit

It's like a whole routine we got worked out,

We usually pull it - three in the morning?

Screaming at each other, staggering up and down the street.

You might've heard us. Or you might've been trying to sleep?

So we're raging across the road, and

Some fat mum with a massive buggy full of fat kids says

Would you mind watching your language

Or lowering your volume, please?

I say the fuck you say to me?

One of the fat kids starts to sob.

She goes, your language is upsetting my little girl, alright?

She's belly rolls bulging her leggings from black to sheer grey

I say me fuck a you think you are Dutch?

Christ look at that hair. Rat black then three inches of grey roots.

I mean I can see the bitch is busy popping out sprogs

But five minutes with a pack of Nice n Easy would sort that,

It's so fuckin sad when a woman loses her self-respect.

Kev limps up. Fuck's this 'en?

Bitch fucking started on me, trying to tell me what to do.

Kev's like who the fuck's she think she is? I'm like that's what I said.

Pug ugly dog's snapping around her buggy, bitch backs away

That dog comes near me I'll have the police out -

I step closer, fast, and she's not expecting it, and -

Ewwww, the greasy sludged up pores in that T-zone,

Bitch hasn't deep cleansed since a million years BCC - before CC cream.

I say, you fucking call the police love.

You just try it.

You just try.

And she's gonna say something.

But then I look down at her buggy.

A wriggly red newborn, chubbied up toddler, sobbing,

And a cheeky girl, riding the rail at the back.

And fat mum sees me look. And she thinks.

She thinks about her soft little babies.

Who have to walk this street,

Play on this street,
Live on this street,
With me.

And she thinks better.

I go that's right love, you walk away, you cunt.

I go to Kev, you see that, you see how she was having a go?

He goes what a fucking bitch aye

I go that's got me all riled up that has

He goes yeah no I'm not surprised.

But if you're all riled, maybe I can help you relax?

He brings out this massive bag of weed.

I go where'd you get that?

Blagged my way into some student party Crwys Road

Found it under a mattress next to a foot long dildo?

I mean who needs a foot long of anything?

And I... don't crush his innocence.

We slink back to the flat,

We light up, kick back, haze through the hours

Smoking and shagging, even better for killing time than a hangover

Cos there's none of the shivering, and not so much of the self-hate

And then the sun goes down – and I'm up, off the bed.

Kev's like – whassis now?

I'm – we're off out, I need to get hammered.

He goes, I'll hammer you right here right now love

And even though I've shagged him four times in the last five hours

When he says it like that it makes me wanna fucking kill the prick.

But

For tonight, I let him live.

I work out my anger banging on Leanne's door.

Leanne's my flatmate, I love her, she's a fucking warrior.

She screams, what the fuck? I scream, we are fucking off!

Chuck Dove 72 on the pits, rummage with a baby wipe between the legs, and

Leanne, we are fuckin leaving you behind!

Leanne bursts out of her room, smoothing down a new halter neck

Says, Eff, be honest now – d'you t'is look big in this?

I say – fucking massive love. And we are off.

First bar's Las Iguanas, cos

Leanne's got a voucher. All pitchers two for one.

Which means you pay fifteen quid to get two pitchers of basically ice water

Quelle fucking bargain. But then Leanne whips

A quarter bottle of vodka from her clutch bag

I grab it, cheeky slug, then dump the rest in the pitcher.

Straight off, a git with a badge saying bar manager teleports in next to us,

He goes, guys guys guys hope you're having a great night just need to check – is there vodka in this?

I say, well it's supposed to be a vodka martini

So I would fucking hope so. He goes

You know what I mean, miss. Can I see in your bag please?

I'm breezy, cos the bottle's not in my bag,

Go ahead love, it that's how you get your kicks

He has a little poke around, I tell him

Those would be tampons? Just in case you've never seen them.

He chuckles the bag back to me, defeated but then

As I grab the bag,

I sort of lean forward, and the bottle sort of pops free,

Falls out my skirt, clatters on the floor, between my feet.

Leanne says Effie, love: did you just shit a vodka bottle?

Manager git goes, out, now! – and security's closing in,

I pick up the pitcher

Git says – you throw that at me...

I bring the two pint jug, brim-full, to my lips

I see, in the git's eyes, the thought: you can't.

He has no fucking idea.

I start to drink and people nearby fall quiet

I get halfway down the jug there's clapping and cheers

I hit the bottom – the whole room goes up, people whooping, whistling

Even the git is giving me this grudging smile, like he's in on it?

I shove the empty jug at him, he grabs it, both mits

So he's got nothing left to fend me off when I clamp my hands to his cheeks,

Pull him in like to give him a great big smacker of a kiss and then –

Burp right in his fucking face.

I grab Kev, I get Leanne by the other hand

The Great Western.

I know. It's shite.

From the outside seems empty but once you're in packed four deep to get a drink.

I dive into the crush – buttoned-up undercut at the front is handing Jaeger shots back

Over the heads and shoulders, I grab one – boom, that's gone

I push in further, scuse me, scuse me, I sink in, right to the front

Get my elbows to the bar, prop myself up, cast my gaze round and

There.

Oh God.

There.

At the back.

Little gang of guys.

All of them pretty fit – not gym fit, not primped and preened

Not muscles like boulders, just, you can see

Their arms and legs and bodies are solid.

And not one of them with – that desperation

The eagerness to please, that screams off every guy

Trying his luck on every rainy Cardiff night.

And in the heart of them,

There he is.

Looking at me.

And he's –

Kev finds my side snakes his arm round my waist and
 I'm expecting the guy to look away but
 He doesn't.
 And he's nice looking, yeah, that's a face
 I'd grind myself all over but still:
 Staring straight at me,
 When he can see I'm with another man?
 So fucking arrogant.
 Now if Kev sees that, it's gonna fuckin' kick off
 Course Kev doesn't see that, cos he's a dull twat
 So I say,
 Kev.
 Kev.
 He's angling for the barmaid's eye, jussasac love.
 I say no, Kev
 I've gotta tell you right now.
 He goes 'ssup bitch?
 I say, Kev, look over b'there yeah.
 And I point
 And he looks where I'm pointing I say
 What can you see?
 And he says
 Uhhhh...
 I can see...
 Sign says toilets?
 I go, yeah. That's right. I want you to go down,
 Find the cubicle furthest from the door.
 And wait.

Because I am up for it. Right here right now.
 Fuck yeah! he says. Ladies or gents?
 And I go - well am I a fucking lady or am I fucking not.
 And off the prick trots
 And what?
 You think I should put up with whatever wanders down
 my street
 Dodging the dog shits, and be grateful? Fuck that.
 I turn round, to face this guy
 No shy little look, no flirty glance
 The full on stare,
 Lips parted to show some tooth,
 But a snarl not a smile.
 Nine out of ten guys, can't take it. Will look away.
 This guy - stares me right back.
 And so I walk. Straight at him.
 The crush parts before me - course it fucking does.
 I cut a path right through the dance floor
 And no one touches me. None of them could.
 I close on him like a fucking cruise missile and he's staring
 back
 Trying to hold his nerve but then -
 There it is.
 Just a split second.
 Little flicker of fear in his eyes.
 He packs it away quick as he can, but I've got him now.
 I stop.
 Turn my back and -
 - up till then music has been shit

But the second I start to move to it,
 It becomes fucking sick because I am like
 A multi-million dollar video that distracts from the shittiness
 of the track
 Except I'm in real life.
 I've come half way to this guy, now I'll make him come
 The rest of the way to me. And he'll think he's doing it
 Of his own free will but, not really: I'm drawing him from
 over there
 To over here, where I want him to be.
 I shut my eyes,
 And still the lights pulsing through my lids
 Or maybe it's the blood in the tiny little veins
 And every time I breathe in, I feel like I'm floating up
 Off the floor, I kick off my shoes
 I dance like I don't know how,
 I spin, and I don't know what my body's doing
 I'm just watching it, except
 I'm not me
 I am me
 But I'm someone else as well and then
 And then
 And then
 The song ends.
 And I look
 To where this guy should be -
 Right next to me.
 But next to me there's no one.
 Fucker hasn't moved.

He's propped up, just where he was
 Have I lost my powers? What is going on?
 No man resists me: literally no one.
 And I'm looking at him now,
 Not seductive, or hopeful, just actually
 Actually quite angry at
 Who the fuck this idiot thinks he is
 And that second
 The crowd shifts,
 And the gang he's got surrounding him move
 And I can see the guy
 Head to foot.
 And what I see is -
 - the fucker's on crutches.
 And he sees me see.
 He sees me, laugh.
 At him, and, at me,
 Trying to lure him to the dance floor,
 When the poor fucker can't walk.
 So I walk, for him.
 All the posturing and posing gone.
 I put my arms round his neck.
 I say,
 Hello, you.
 And I smog his fucking face off.

I'm Effie, I say, and he nods like, yeah, he already knew.
 He says, I'm Lee. And I feel like I knew that too.
 I say Lee we might wanna make a swift exit. There's a
 boy,
 Gonna be coming up those stairs any sec not pleased
 To see me with you.
 Worried what he'll do to me, are you? says Lee.
 And I say, no. Other way round, I think.
 We grab a couple of taxis from the road-blocked top of St
 Mary's
 And I realise what it is, Lee and his mates.
 Why they look like a gang. I say, you're soldiers, aren't
 you.
 Lee's chucking his crutches in the boot. He swings round
 the side of the car,
 Leaning on it the whole time, little frown like not pain but
 Really concentrating when his weight's on his right foot.
 He opens the door, holds it open, for me. Says,
 They, are soldiers. I was.
 Till this.
 And he means –
 Whatever hideous event put him on those crutches.
 We're in the car, heading to his mate Tom's. Tom's got a
 flat,
 Far side of Tremorfa. We kiss, me and Lee, I
 Press my hand down his belly, not going *there* yet,
 Sliding past to his thigh,

I say, what?
 He says – wait, alright?
 I can wait. That's fine.
 We get to the flat. New estate creeping out from the
 railway line.
 And you'd think – me on my own, and these five strange
 guys
 You'd think I'd be a bit fist clenched round my keys,
 Ready to kick off, but no. Nothing like.
 They're all polite, without being creepy.
 Funny, without being pricks.
 It feels – never like I'm in danger, more like
 I'm this maid of honour and
 They're my personal body guard.
 We sit in the lounge, few drinks, chat.
 I slip my hand into Lee's. Give it a squeeze.
 And he looks at me...
 And when we head off, there's no
 Fuss and nonsense from the boys, like you'd expect when
 their mate
 Takes the girl he's pulled upstairs.
 They're just all – g'nigh, nice to meet you.
 Like me coming home with Lee is... fate.
 He dawdles a little while following me up,
 I head into a bathroom, quick swipe of Colgate
 Over the teeth, scrape the moss off my tongue, and then –
 He's leaning against a futon, uncured into a bed

Scared of -

And to fight it, I grab his belt, like, fuck it,

Let's get stuck in but

He stops me. Holds me back. Says

I've got something to show you.

He pulls off his top, and - it's nice, lots of muscle but

A little bit of slack around the belly and to be honest

I like that more, there's something weird about boys who are

That obsessive they're not carrying an ounce of fat.

He goes for his belt, says

Okay. Don't freak out.

I say, mate

Anything up to a foot, I can take,

But more than that, and certain positions are gonna be no
go, okay?

And he smiles at me.

A smile that's a bit sad.

And though I just meant to lighten the mood his smile
makes me wish

I hadn't said anything like that.

And he pulls his jeans down. And his legs

Are lovely

But one of them

Stops.

At the knee.

And there's straps and plastic.

He sits back kicks off his jeans and

Pulls the plastic free

And something comes out.

A stump of flesh, that just ends.

The skin folds over

To a red, angry ridge,

Black stitch marks where they stuck

The flaps of skin together.

How'd it happen?

He says, d'you know what an improvised explosive device
is?

I say not really. He says well I do.

He tells me

He's not been able to show,

Himself, to anyone

Since.

So I kiss him. I kiss him and kiss him

And kiss him, and kiss him, and kiss him

And then I'm on him. And he's in me.

And the first time it's so fast. Like almost instantly.

And he's embarrassed, he's sorry, and I'm

It's alright. We've got that over with. And now

We can do it properly.

And I kiss him again. I kiss him and kiss him and kiss him

I slide my lips down his side, down his thigh, he says

Please don't,

But I won't stop, I kiss everywhere, I kiss

Like nothing I've ever kissed,

And I say, there. You see?

He says, it's so fucking ugly.

And I say well actually

I think it's beautiful.

And something goes wrong then.

He turns away from me.

But I can see, from the shivers of his shoulders –

I say –

Look I'm sorry. That was just fucking bullshit. I don't know why I said that. I wanted to say something to make it better. You're right, it's fucking ugly, actually. It's ugly and it's scary and looking at it puts the shits up me cos I think, look at us, we are these little soft creatures and it's so easy to hurt us, anything could happen any time and ruin us. So it's not beautiful. It's as far from beautiful as anything can be. But it's part of you. And if it's part of you, I can take it.

And Lee turns back.

He grabs my face. And he kisses me, and kisses me, and kisses me.

And we make love again and it's hours.

Hours pressing our skin, pushing into each other,

Flipping and rolling over the bed cos the bits of us that aren't touching are jealous of the bits that are: tangling our limbs,

Licking and sucking and breathing each other in,

Getting as much as we can of him into me and me into him, just being, being together and alive.

And after, he tells me.

Both his legs gone, one of his hands.

On the helicopter, medics trying to keep the guy going

Talking him up

But he knew.

And he was sobbing and shaking

But not cos of the pain.

Cos of his kids. All the years they'd have to live

Without a dad.

All the nights they'd cry themselves to sleep

For the want of him.

Knowing he was breaking the hearts

Of the ones he loved most.

And that was his life.

His last seconds

Terror and pain and guilt and defeat

And Lee flips round to me

Sinks his face in my neck, howls like a hurt child.

I wrap my arms around him, squeeze him all I can, and –

– and I take it.

I take it, and –

And that was the end of my life.

Lying there wrapped up in Lee I'm feeling something new.
That something new is – not alone.
I'm not alone.
And it feels like I'm gonna feel not alone, always.
But I want to see.
I want to see if that's how I am now.
So I get up. Lee's mostly sleeping.
I scribble my number, he reaches up, pulls my face down
For a last kiss.
I say, we're not gonna do that, wait three days to call shit,
right?
He says course not.
I say no I know. So I'll speak to you later.
He says what you doing tonight.
I say you, if you've got your strength back.
And he smiles at that.
I pad down the stairs.
His mate Tom says, shall I call you a cab.
I say no and I don't know why.
But I just go with it.
I walk down busy roads that have gone quiet for the night.
Not down Tremorfa. On and out.
Past the big Tesco's, past David Lloyd
To all the massive factories like
Crashed spaceships, the metal mountains,
Train tracks from nowhere, cranes and pipes and chimney stacks

telling me,
Keep going, you'll be fine.
A helicopter swoops low
Like it's gonna scoop me up – or crash.
I follow its path, come off a roundabout
Find a landing pad. I see three figures climb out the
'copter's cabin,
All in black, like stormtroopers of death,
Then they pull off masks and helmets,
And they're just these guys, laughing.
And as the whine of the blades fades,
I hear something else.
Something huge.
Something breathing.
Or something roaring.
I carry on down the road.
Find a hole in a fence.
And there, right in front of me,
Is – the sea.
And a beach.
A beach a mile from where I grew up,
When the fuck did that happen?
It is the worst beach in the world, mind.
Strips of metal, car wheels, half a toilet,
Whole walls crumpled onto the sand,
Concrete slabs cracked, smoothed into soft shapes,
Glass glittering back the moon.

I'm as on my own as I can be.

And...

It's still there!

That feeling

Of being not alone any more. Even though I am, I'm not.

Because I've found what I am for.

I am – for making Lee better.

That's what I'll do.

That's what I'll be.

His better half.

And being his better half I'll be so much better than I've ever been.

That's it now.

That's me.

So next day.

If I was Lee I'd text first thing, but I'm not.

And he doesn't.

Typical fucking bloke playing it cool, but

I've still got that feeling of not alone anymore

And I trust it.

I'm really calm and quiet, and I just

Stay in the flat. Me. In the flat. Sober.

Not exactly waiting but...

Happy and chilled and thinking about

How it'll be when he does call, and where we'll meet and what I'll wear and where we'll go

And how long we'll stay there before we head back home and

Will I move into his or will he move into mine and

What kind of wedding and yes I get it

Those are insane things to be thinking but

This feeling – not alone –

This feeling says, thinking all those insane things

Is fine because

They're not insane, this time.

They're just what's on the way.

So I spend the whole day waiting for him to call and

He doesn't.

Okay.

So

The next day I text, just saying,

Hey, it's me, hope you're alright.
 I get nothing back.
 And I know how it looks.
 It looks like I've been fucked and dumped.
 But looks are deceiving, ask anyone.
 Plus that can't be it,
 Cos I've got this feeling.
 This feeling of not-alone.
 And the feeling makes me not panic, not freak out.
 It makes me think – rationally.
 It makes me think well if I haven't been fucked and
 dumped then
 What else, could it be?
 It could be a million things.
 He might've written my number wrong.
 Or I might've misread his. I *am* basically fucking dyslexic.
 So I look at the receipt where he scribbled his number and
 yeah
 That five might be an eight. Actually so might that three.
 And is that one a seven or what?
 I have just texted some random most likely.
 So I
 Text again.
 Say about... fifty times.
 To all the different variations Lee's number might be.
 I get a few answers: most confused, lots saying hi back to
 me, and
 Three pictures of erect penises.
 But nothing from Lee.

(No, I'd know.)
 And so... I leave it. A while.
 Just playing it cool, like Lee obviously is.
 So I wait.
 Like a week.
 Or two.
 And I know. I know what it looks like.
 But I can't bear it because
 Even though I know
 I don't. Because this feeling, of not-alone
 Is still telling me: this is just some fuck up
 That he's not been in touch.
 He feels same as you do and if you don't find each other
 again
 You will lose the only thing that's gonna to matter in both
 your lives -
 So I walk
 Through Tremorfa, out to Pengam, and
 Inside me still, this feeling, not-alone,
 Saying yes, this is fine, this is *absolutely* a sane way to
 behave.
 I get to the friend's flat, and press the buzzer.
 No one there. Course not, it's the middle of the day.
 I leave a note. With my number. Written in numbers,
 And letters, just in case.
 I'm imagining how it will be a story, me and Lee
 Tell people, how we had this one night together and then
 He lost my number, but thank God instead of stropping off
 I dropped a note round – and we were reunited!

And as I turn to leave I hear something.
 But I'm not sure what.
 I look up, there's – no one, at the window of Tom's flat.
 I get home up the stairs flop down on the settee
 And there
 I cry
 Because I do know
 I know what that thing was I heard,
 Back at Tom's flat. I know now and I knew then.
 It was someone, laughing.
 Not someone. It was Tom.
 Lee's mate. He saw me
 And pretended not to be there.
 He saw me, come to post my meek little note.
 And he laughed.
 Because I have been fucked and dumped.
 I know it. I know.
 And at the same time
 In my heart, this feeling, still –
 Not alone. Not alone.
 And I can't bear that feeling one second more.
 Cos that feeling is the most perfect and certain thing
 I have ever felt before –
 – and it is a lie.
 Into Leanne's room, chest of drawers by her bed,
 Always loads of change. Scrape it together,
 Tip it in a carrier from under the sink, drag it over the
 road,

Pile it up on the counter, and it piles just short
 For a half bottle of vodka. I tell the guy I'll owe him
 And he just wants me gone, says, go on,
 Back up to the flat, can't find a glass
 Why the fuck would I even need one
 Bottle to my open mouth, I breathe in and
 The first fumes of alcohol hit –
 – and my guts explode.
 Before I even take a gulp, I'm chucking right across the
 room,
 Again and again, I drop the bottle, I'm sobbing,
 I'm puking like I've never puked before
 Leanne pokes her head round the door.
 Was you in mine just now when I was sleeping? she goes
 then –
 Seeing me
 What the fuck is this fucksake?
 And I tell her.
 I tell her it all.
 She says you know what this is. Come on...
 But I don't. Or I can't. Or I won't.
 Quick trip up Clifton Street, next thing
 I'm perched over the porcelain, pissing on a stick.
 Well? says Leanne, through the door.
 And I'm watching a little strip of white,
 Watching little spots go dark, join up
 Form themselves into two clear blue lines.
 And I realise.
 I am not alone.

5

The first thing I feel is

Glad.

Cos no way can Lee shrug me off now.

So I just phone – the number I had down, which I knew was right, all along,

I phone I say

Lee. It's Effie. We've got to meet. It's important. Don't ignore me,

Because I won't stop.

I leave that message on the hour every hour morning noon and night for...

Five days? And finally the penny drops

That I really, really will not stop.

Text pings back.

He'll see me, one o'clock, Fat Cat Café Bar.

I spend three hours before we meet making sure I look

Like the only girl a guy would need to fuck for the rest of his life –

And that's not for him. It's for me. So I can be, confident like, at ease –

And waiting there for me at the Fat Cat Café Bar

Is not Lee. It's Tom.

And Tom says

Hey,

Seems like there's been some sort of Misunderstanding?

Lee thought you knew what was going on –

It was only ever gonna be a one night thing.

I mean – you had your tongue down his throat

Before you even knew his name.

And to be fair to you sweetheart,

You put the kid back on track.

Cos he's not been able to – deal, with the physical side of things,

Since the injury. And it's been a real issue,

For him, and his wife.

The fucker's fucking married?

Well, you knew that. You saw the ring.

But I saw no such thing. Cos I never thought to look.

And the whole time Tom's saying this, he doesn't even look at me.

Just plays with his phone. Cos he doesn't give a shit?

Or cos he knows he's being a shit, and there's a tiny bit of him ashamed.

And there is a thought forming in my head. And I get out my phone. Call Lee's number.

Tom's phone lights up in his hand.

And for the first time Tom looks at me, says... Yeah. Sorry.

Lee didn't dare give you his real number in case

You know.

I keep my mouth shut.

Because I do, know. I do.

Tom says look, Effie, you were

Two people had a great night together.

We all like a fuck, let's be frank –

And I see him seeing me.

Yeah, I know. I'm just pissed off cos I thought I was gonna get a fuck

Tonight.

And I look at Tom.

And I do not look away.

And Tom puts down his phone.

Says, shall I get you another glass of pinot grigio?

I say make it a bottle why don't you.

And he basically fucking runs to the bar. I

Pick up his phone.

Swipe through his contacts.

Find 'Lee'. Listed is not the number I've got.

I'm out the door.

I ring - my sister-in-law.

My sister-in-law works at a call centre for a phone company.

She says, Effie, it's more than my job's worth and he probably isn't even with us.

I say,

You fucking do this for me or I'll tell Steve what happened in Bournemouth

And so she says yes.

And I give her Lee's number.

And she gives me his address.

Lee's place is in Ely. Other side of the world but I jump on a number 18, I'm there in ten minutes.

I spend the trip working out what to say, when I meet the wife:

Hi, you don't know me, but your bloke does. Intimately.

Hi, you don't know me, but we are what I like to call, cock sisters.

In the end I settle on -

Hi, you don't know me, but I'm the girl your husband just knocked up.

I hop off on Grand Avenue, though why you need a grand anything

In a shithole like Ely I haven't got a clue.

My phone takes me to his place.

Tiny terrace house. I get there and -

- I don't know what to do.

And it's raining, like always.

The place opposite Lee's is boarded up, like half the houses on the street.

Grass that reaches for my belly in the front yard hides a wrecked car.

I push through the battered back door.

I'm there with the stink and grime who knows how long

And then - a car, losing speed, Lee at the wheel.

I move, back out the back, back round the road,

And I see Lee, swinging his legs to the ground,

Pulling his crutches out the boot, fixing them on the floor,

Hauling himself up -

Just as the front door of his house opens.

And out comes

His wife.

One of these girls

Who's gone thinner than looks good on her.

Too much skull showing through that skin

A face that falls into a frown till she properly pulls it into a smile.

And when she sees Lee she

Doesn't smile.

She just watches.

And then -

A girl - five, six, who knows with kids -

Darts out the door, past her mum.

Pretty little thing, and in her you can see

How pretty her mum must've been, before.

The little girl holds out her arms, to Lee

And Lee

Stops.

Mum's hand goes to her mouth.

Lee lets the crutches, drop.

And he takes a step

On his own.

And you can see it's hard, you can see it hurts

But he keeps on, he limps, skips, staggers,

Half falls, but

Makes it, to his little girl then

Steadied by his wife, lifts the little girl up, flings her in the air

She shouts,

Daddy!

And I remember

I remember shouting like that

And -

And the wife says to me,

Sorry, can I help you?

Because I am standing on their drive.

I have walked right up.

I am no passer-by

I've come with intent

I have come to tell her -

And Lee looks at me.

This soldier.

This man who has killed.

This man who has seen his friends in bits

He looks at me -

- and I am scaring the life out of him.

And he deserves what I am going to do

He deserves it,

And she deserves to know what a liar he is

So I say, to his wife,

Hi, you don't know me, but -

And I see Lee look away, bury his face

In the little girl's neck -

I see her eyes close

I see her lips move and though I don't hear

I know what she's saying

She's saying
Daddy

And I remember

I remember

- sorry, you wanted what? the wife goes.

I say

- *fuck* -

I say

Yeah I'm just trying to find my way back to Grand Avenue?

And she says, aw no you're not far at all.

And I turn.

I walk away.

I spare him what he's got coming.

And every step away from him hurts but

I can take it.

So I do take it.

For that little girl.

7

The doctors.

It's rammed, like always.

Three quarters of an hour in the rain before reception even opens

So by the time we get in we're soaked and sweltering, steaming up the place.

A dozen chairs and three dozen bodies, coughing and sneezing and spitting.

I can feel myself getting ill breathing in what these sickos are breathing out.

The door opens - oh look. It's fat mum

Now with four inches of grey roots,

And her massive buggy, and her massive kids.

The whole room sighs as she unloads, taking up most of the floor,

Everyone having to edge their way round her.

We're all waiting and bored and the doctor's not even here yet.

Fat mum's flabby boy starts to whine, her alien baby howls,

She rocks the buggy, tries to sing

In her drippy little voice, but the baby screams harder,

And every fucker in the room sighs, again.

Sweat beading on fat mum's head,

She asks reception how long's the wait.

Reception says only the one doctor on again today so

We're looking two hours, at least?

Fat mum rocks a bit harder, gives up singing,

And fair play I would too, she can't sing for shit
 She shouts at her little boy, he shouts back and
 She slaps his hand. And then he cries.
 And she kisses his head all guilty like and turns,
 Rolls her whole load out the door.
 The room sighs. Relief this time.
 When I get in to the doc I tell her: I can't have a kid.
 I've got problems with drink and drugs and, I'm mental –
 Ask anyone.
 She makes me an appointment up at the Heath
 But it's a fortnight to wait:
 Two whole weeks.
 And feeling sick all the time and I can't drink.
 It gets so I'm gagging from just the smell, even when
 Leanne
 Has a drop, which obviously is every fucking night.
 And one day Kev's there, not quite sitting on a radiator,
 As I shoot for the bog, hands clamped over my mouth
 I hear Kev say, how the fuck's she hungover? She hasn't
 Been out for weeks.
 Leanne laughs. Oh, Kev love
 You thick twat. She's up the fucking duff.
 I hear the door go,
 Kev's feet bang down the stairs to the street.
 I go lie down, drift off, then, Christ knows when
 Kev is back.
 On his knees by the settee
 He says Eff, I know I'm a prick.

But maybe this is what I need.
 A kid. Make me sort myself out.
 Cos I really think I could do it.
 I really think I could be a dad.
 See look at this –
 – and he gives me a roll of tenners.
 Maybe two hundred quid.
 I been down Cash Converters.
 Sold the Xbox, games, the lot.
 For you. For our family.
 And the thing with Kev is –
 Like, I know he is a person? With feelings?
 But I don't think he is really.
 He's like some big ugly dog that no one wants
 But no one can be arsed to drown.
 And next to him I'm basically a goddess
 And the idea of us getting together properly –
 A goddess – and a dog?
 It just makes me wanna laugh but –
 But what if that's wrong?
 What if it is, him and me.
 Or what if it could be.
 He can see I'm thinking about it.
 I can see him, getting all excited.
 I look at Leanne and she's like
 Once you got a kid, you're sorted you get
 Child allowance, loads of shit.
 Kid's basically a fucking meal ticket.

All I got
For you
And our baby
If you will please just keep it.
And I say
There's one thing.
And Kev says, you name it love.
Because if I'm gonna take him seriously
If I'm gonna take his life
I can't start with a lie.
I say,
You can be this kid's dad.
And live with him, and love him
And do all that.
But you gotta know
You are not the father.
Kev says
Sorrywhathethefuck?
It was some soldier I met, the Great Western, you
remember.
Kev says – hold on hold on hold on
But we shagged that day, when we went out the Great
Western.
So it could be mine, it could be his.
I say it can't. Cos you and me, used a condom.
And I didn't with him.
Kev says but you never. You never let me do it without.

And I tell the truth:
Cos I wanted him so much.
I keep my eyes tight till I hear the door slam.
And when I open them,
In a mess on the floor
Is all Kev's money.

8

Leanne sticks a drink in my hand.

Come on, get that down you. You need it.

I feel my gut start to quiver,

From the cold of the glass

But I take a sip.

The lovely burn on the lips that smooths out

On the tongue, down the throat

And then hits my belly

And something in my belly isn't pleased with me.

You see, says Leanne.

You want a drink.

It's just the fucking baby that doesn't.

And who's in charge?

And Christ, it's not even like you're keeping the thing -

- are you?

Course I'm fucking not.

I take another sip.

The thing in my belly tries to kick the booze back up my throat but

I hold it down.

Good girl, says Leanne.

That's my Effie

And she pours me another.

I put it away in one go

Cos this is my body, and I'm the fucking boss.

Another glass, a proper drink this time

Three, four fingers

I sink it, and the kick back from my belly

Is getting weaker

Let's finish the fucking bottle, shall we? Leanne says

I say - fucking go for it love.

She fills my glass to the top.

And I raise it up.

And out the window I see this

Mangy old tabby cat.

See her all the time, she wanders up and down our street.

And I remember, when we were kids

Some of the boys found a kitten, wild

The trees by the park. Too small to even have her eyes open.

They caught her

Shut her in box.

Starved her.

Till in the end she'd take anything.

They gave her antifeeze.

This tiny thing.

I remember her, staggering about

Mewling and puking everywhere

Sick then spit then nothing

Then blood.

I didn't ask for this. I didn't want it.

I want it gone

But still

A tiny thing.

No.

I'll drink, when it's gone

Alright?

She goes but if you're getting rid what's the point -

I say - I drink, when it's gone,

And that's the way it is.

And if you don't like it you can fuck yourself, bitch.

Leanne goes alright you mardy cow, strops off.

My head's in a mess now

Cos I've not touched anything in weeks so I lie down.

I wake up. And there is music and voices and

Moody boys in tracky bottoms and vests all over the place

I nod round and they nod back.

I stagger into the lounge, Leanne bounces up says

Sorry Eff, got bored, got people round like but look -

I made you flapjacks!

I'm like - you fucking what?

Flapjacks. It's oats, like from porridge,

And syrup. Like from a tin, of syrup.

I have known Leanne all my life, and she has never given any hint

She even knows what an oven is,

So this is massive.

This is like a big sorry for being a bitch about the drink.

I take a bite, and it's

Chevy, sticky, sweet.

Right, steady on, she goes.

And I sit watch the telly a bit,

Show about trucks lost on the ice then

My mouth's dry so I stand to get a drink

- and my head swims.

Leanne looks at me.

She's sort of... giggling.

I say, Leanne,

What have you done to me?

She says,

Effie you are stressed to fuck.

You have got a stressy baby

And it is stressing you right out love.

Are you gonna be like this the whole time

Till they whip it out?

I say, Leanne, what the fuck have you done?

She goes it was just weed, alright?

It relaxes you.

It relaxes the baby.

I say -

- you have given my baby drugs?

She says it's natural you silly cow

It can't do no harm -

Next thing Leanne's flat on the floor

Her lip dripping blood down her chin.

I look round the place.

Fuckin bottles, fuckin cans, fuckin ash trays.

Fuckin boys swilling their drinks, bobbing their heads to the music,

Looking sulky as fuck, and shit, shit,

Anywhere there's space to cram something, there is something: and it's shit.

I can't be here.

I stamp down the stairs.

She's saying Eff you silly bitch, come back -

I let the door slam.

- Eff! -

I hit the street.

- Eff! -

All the windows up and down are dark,

Maybe the flicker of flatscreens.

Just our flat is light and loud.

Effie!

And I walk away from it.

I got no job. No boyfriend. Nowhere to live.

I am all alone. And I am going to have

A baby.

Cos it's called morning sickness, I thought

It was a sickness that happened, in the morning?

Not a sickness that starts in the morning and then just

Carries its merry way on through midday afternoon evening and night.

So that's a thing I learn, early on.

Health visitor says walking or swimming might help, so

Every day I walk to the pool. And the swimming does help.

Until they close the pool down. Then every day I just walk for ages

Through the rain, so I still end up tired and wet

But it's not really the same.

At twenty weeks I learn I'm having a girl!

And she's coming along nicely, so far as the nurse can tell

And then the other thing I learn is

That I'm not alone.

Nan helps me get a place, just a room in a house on Ordell Street?

But mine, and she gets me what she can to make it nice.

She tells me she had a bit saved. But that's a lie.

I go into the Co-op one night there she is,

Back behind the tills like when I was little.

I tell her, you're too old to be working,

She says - call me too old for anything again and I'll tan your hide, girl.

Kev keeps trying to give me the money from his Xbox.

I won't take it so in the end he just buys a buggy,

From the cancer shop. Course it's too big to get in my
 bedroom door,
 And it basically falls apart when you tried to fold it, but still
 The thought's the thing. They say.
 And then
 I'm going through piles of clothes, one of the charity shops
 Clifton Street
 And there is pain, in my belly.
 No big thing there's pain often enough
 With little miss doing her baby boogie on top of my
 internal bits
 But this pain.
 Is not a kick.
 It's a cramp.
 And this is week twenty-nine.
 Too early for all of that.
 I phone just to hear them tell me don't be so daft but
 They say
 Come in, just in case.
 I haul myself down to Habershon Street.
 And then half an hour bumping around the bus, and then
 What seems like even longer to limp
 From the bus stop to maternity, but –
 They say, there's a test.
 If it's negative then we're ninety-nine per cent sure
 It's not early labour 'kay love?
 I say it can't be, she can't come yet
 Nurse says, let's not get worked up now okay let's just do
 the test, yeah?

I piss into a tube, lie back on the bed.
 Out the window I can see, snow. It's snowing.
 The test comes back.
 Comes back negative.
 It's not labour.
 Nurse says, okay so now we know
 You're doing fine, baby's doing fine
 But you won't be meeting her tonight.
 It's just a matter of finding
 The right kind of pain relief, to get you through these
 cramps.
 She moves me off maternity, wheels me, two different lifts
 to a floor
 That looks like it's closed.
 Dark. Quiet. No one about.
 Nurse switches on a light, says
 Doctor'll be round, he'll give you something make you comfy
 And then the nurse – goes.
 Leaves me there.
 On my own.
 And not alone.
 And me and my little girl wait
 For the pain, that comes in waves
 Every half an hour the nurse comes back again says
 Doctor'll be along, just a sec
 And in the end he is.
 He gives me something called pethedine.
 And five minutes later I feel better.
 But five minutes after that the pain comes again.

Lights flickering on around me,
Make it to the lifts, press the button – nothing
Press the button – nothing
Press the button – *fuck*
Down to maternity, buzz at the door.
No one comes.
No one comes.
No one comes.
Through the window. I see a girl. Tiny blonde girl, belly
so big
It looks like someone's glued her to a hot air balloon
She waddles up to the door, lets me through.
Midwife turns up, says what are you doing
Out of your bed, and I
S C R E E M
Midwife says alright let's just do that test again shall we?
Me and little blonde girl waddle back and fore across the
waiting room
Little blonde girl's name is Gemma.
She's got two of them in there. She's bricking it. Says she
is never doing this again.
Ben even comes near me I'll bloody stitch myself up.
Ben her partner, not husband, floppy hair, tidy suit, his hand
swooping down to perch on her shoulder.
The pain comes and Gemma grabs my hand
And I squeeze
And squeeze

Actually it turns out the test is positive now.
I say –
Sorry *what?*
She says the test was negative, it's come back positive now so
Yeah your baby's coming tonight.
I say *what?*
We'll give you a steroid shot now, help baby's lungs get ready
Because
Your baby's coming very early. You understand that,
Don't you Effie?
Gemma grabs my hand,
Says we'll get through this alright?
Now, did you make a birth plan?
And I barely know the girl but her hand clamped on mine
it feels like
We're fucking sisters and then
The midwife comes in says,
Okay. So.
We've not got a bed in special care,
So we're going to have to transfer you.
I say – I don't know what the fuck that means.
Ben swans in says, yeah, special care, it's where they look
after
Babies that are premature? They do fantastic work, so
dedicated.
So, says the midwife, we're going to need you to get ready and
An ambulance will take you to Abergavenny –

I'm like, where the fuck's that?
 She says, just a little drive from here,
 Ben says, more like an hour and a half,
 Midwife says, I think you'll find an ambulance can do it in forty.
 And I'll be in the ambulance with you, all the way,
 To take care of baby –
 And Gemma stops her.
 Gemma says to the midwife – you're going?
 But who's going to look after me?
 Ben says to the midwife can I have a word with you in
 private please?
 And Ben and the midwife go out and
 I can hear Ben not shouting but speaking very loud about
 The risks of twin births and there's a lot of talk about
 Getting some boss doctor on the phone but he's not,
 On the phone,
 And Gemma goes quiet, and
 Lets go my hand and
 Walks out and
 The midwife comes in.
 There's very little chance of you delivering
 In the next hour, so
 You won't be needing a midwife to accompany you
 In any case the paramedics
 Are fully trained, so –
 And I know I should argue.
 I know I should.
 But then the pain. I can't speak.

And there is no one to speak for me, so...
 I'm on a trolley.
 Blankets tucked tight over my arms.
 They wheel me, down and out,
 Flakes of white drift down,
 Touch down on the blanket,
 Sit with me for just a second, so pretty
 Then they're gone, soaking
 The grey of the blanket to black.
 Snow, little girl.
 Snow on the day you are born.
 Paramedic in the back with me, says,
 Careful love, she'll be busting out to have a look
 And we want her staying in there as long as she can.
 The ambulance sets off, sirens and lights
 See baby girl? Clearing the way for us to get to a place
 Where they're gonna take such special care of you –
 And we go speeding down the motorway,
 Paramedic whistling, winking at me
 As we rattle and roll round the back of the ambulance,
 Then we turn off, onto a littler road and
 Swinging round loads of roundabouts and
 There's some chat, between the guy in the back with me
 And the driver. I say what's going on?
 He says nothing, lovely, just
 Snow's a bit heavier
 Cos we're getting up into the mountains
 Just having to go

A bit more carefully, is all -
 - but you can tell
 You can tell
 There's something he's not -
 And we're going slower and slower
 And I say Christ mate I could walk faster than this
 And he smiles says, yeah we might have to
 And then -
 The whole fucking ambulance
 Slides
 Drifts sideways like nothing with wheels should
 And we tip, and totter
 We've come off the fucking road.
 There's chat on the radio and no seriously it's fine cos
 They know we're a priority and they know where we are
 And the hospital is just the other side of the mountain,
 It'll just be a few more minutes and then -
 But you have to stay put little girl.
 Just a little while longer and then -
 But she is *my* daughter, is the thing.
 Does what she wants when she wants and doesn't give a toss.
 And right now,
 She wants to meet her mum.
 She wants to see the snow and the stars.
 So she comes.
 She comes.
 And it hurts.
 It hurts so much.
 Cos as she's trying to get out

I'm trying to hold her in.
 And the driver's back with us too she says
 You're just gonna have to push
 You're just gonna have to let her
 And
 I hear her cry
 I hear my baby girl cry -
 - and then I hear her stop
 And they take her
 The two of them
 Bent over this tiny scrap
 They've got a mask over her face
 They're pounding on her chest
 They're pulling needles out of plastic
 Trying to stick 'em in her
 But she's too small
 She's too small
 They're shouting at each other.
 Shouting numbers and names of drugs
 They're doing Christ knows what, I don't know -
 I do know.
 They're fighting.
 They're fighting with everything they got
 To keep her with me.
 And they fight
 And they fight
 They fight for so long.
 And then
 They stop.

I go to hell.
I don't know how long I go there for but, in the end
Kev comes and rescues me.
This is how he does it.
I wake up, I'm on the floor, my room
In Ordell Street. Taste of sick stale booze in my throat.
Don't know why I'm awake. Why I'm there. Why I'm
breathing. Then
Kev's peering down at me. He pulls me
Up through the floor, says -
You know what we can do?
And I know what we can do.
Nothing.
Kev says:
We can make
The fuckers
Pay.

We get ourselves a lawyer.
He is no win, no fee and he says that
In our case, a win is very likely indeed.
First thing, before court is a sort of meeting,
Up at the Heath. They talk for hours and basically
Tell me what happened to me, but in a way that makes it seem
Nothing was their fault. And when it's finished the lawyer says
Well that went *fantastically*.
And I say, did it? Cos I can't tell.
He says, oh yes,
It won't even get to court.
You press, they'll settle.
There should have been a midwife in the ambulance with
you, you see.
And now they'll have to pay.
How much, I say, are they gonna have to pay?
The lawyer says, the average payout in maternity cases is
Two hundred and seventy-seven thousand pounds.
You should expect to receive rather more.
And I think what all that money would mean.
Get me a house.
Get me a car.
Get me by, for years and years.
And Kev says - we're going to win Effi!
And all these fuckers can fuck themselves!
I wander down through to the shops, buy -

The first thing I see, that I want. A box of juice.
 And I sit, and sip it. And -
 And across the way I see
 The midwife. She's been in the room all morning but kept
 her mouth shut.
 She stares at me a bit then looks away, stares, looks away,
 stares -
 Like she knows she mustn't look at me but she just can't
 stop herself she says
 I just want you to know, I'm so very very sorry for your
 loss.
 But the thing is, Effie,
 I couldn't have saved her, even if I'd been with you
 What your little girl needed was
 To be born in hospital. In a special care unit.
 Where we'd've had the facilities, to look after her.
 You were only in that ambulance cos
 We didn't have a special care bed left.
 We don't have as many special care beds as we used to
 Cos of all these cuts. And what do you think happens,
 If we have to pay you?
 I say, you learn a fucking lesson love.
 She says if we pay you, we'll have to cut more.
 And more old people will die before they should.
 More young people will never get a chance to live.
 And more mums, just like you, will lose -
 I say I don't know what you're crying about, bitch - apart
 from your job.
 Kev says - that is bullshit the hospital will have insurance,
 that's
 Where the money comes from, bound to.

And I know Kev's right
 Or I sort of think he must be -
 But my room is full of clothes
 Sleepsuits and babygrows, that I picked out of piles
 At jumble sales and charity shops;
 Washed in the bath,
 Hung on the radiator to dry,
 Then tucked away snug into drawers.
 And there's a cot. And toys. And a buggy that doesn't fit
 through the door.
 And Nan says - do you think money will even help you?
 I say I know it won't bring her back, I'm not fucking thick
 She says no. No. Listen, for once.
 I said, Effie: the state you are in, will money help you?
 And I know. I know.
 But then what will help? Because I need something, I
 really fuckin do
 And she says, you know.
 You know that too.
 And so.
 And so.
 I drop the case.
 I don't, make anyone pay.
 Because there are years and years ahead of me
 That were gonna be filled with loving her,
 And getting loved back.
 And that broken brick road to the sea
 Not a mile away.

I could walk it any day.
 And what stops me
 What gets me through is knowing
 I took this pain,
 And saved every one of you, from suffering the same.
 Your baby gets sick, she gets well
 Because of me. Your mum gets ill
 She gets healed, because of me and still:
 You see me, pissed first thing wandering home
 And all you think is, stupid slag. Nasty skank.
 When what you should be thinking is,
 Christ Effie, thanks. You took the cut, for all of us.

And I wander home, past
 The pubs that shut, the library they closed,
 The swimming pool got knocked down,
 The bingo hall they burned
 So they could turn it into flats.
 More and more people packed in this little plot of land,
 While they cut everything we need to make a life.
 And we can take it. The hobbled soldier,
 Limping to his little girl. The fat mum,
 Wrestling her buggy out the rain. The pensioner,
 Working night shifts at seventy again.
 We can take it cos we're tough, the lot of us.
 But here's the fucking rub.
 It seems, it's always places like this
 And people like us who have to take it,

When the time for cutting comes.
 And I wonder: just how long
 Are we gonna have to take it for?
 And I wonder -
 What is gonna happen
 When we can't take it any more?

