

Supernatural Violence

Note.

Performers may alter the voiceovers for any of their own choice.

An old-fashioned wireless crackles into life:

DAVID CAMERON (*V/O*). The Conservative Party is the party of working people in our country. We've got more people who work in our country than ever before in our history. The claimant count – that has gone down to the lowest level since 1975. We are living through a jobs miracle, brought to you by a Conservative government. A plan to deliver for people who want to work hard, and get on in life. I really believe we're on the cusp of something special in our country. That's why we've got to keep on saying it: we've come this far, let us see it through to the even brighter days ahead . . .

A ghostly-looking GIRL enters. Harrowed.

GIRL. When it came, it came un-cadenced, like a fat drain-rat, downing in the gully by the bins, where the arch-light coughs up shadows – a half-dead description of foot-paws and handprints, and trilled beads of meat, dripping, raw, back to people's homes.

Oh, that was common here, east of town, where the lower portion of the Snowden Road reached Gideon Court – a concrete boondock of scavengers and survivors. Grey civic gardens. Raw-heeled harriers.

But we didn't know that this was horror, yet – for when the horror comes, they said, it comes in hurricanes –

– just ask Fitch – old Fitch knows best – he was at the coking plant in eighty-four, penned between the Sheffield to Worksop line on one

side, and eight thousand men, horses, dogs on the other – full-canter snatch squads, bodies, flying, Fitch, hit, square, baton, bite, run –

– oh yes, *that* was horror, he said. That was a *blizzard*. Fitch still walked with a limp where the state had beat him – like a medieval saint, a relic and reminder of the second English civil war, where violence came as acts of God.

Where violence came as plagues you could paint.

Where violence came as blackouts and bodies unburied. Where violence came in queues, three-million strong. Where violence came in riots and repossessions, and waste on the streets. Where violence came in factories that fell like draught horse nags.

Oh yes, said Fitch: at least when the old girl wanted you dead, she held a pageant and told you to your face.

But this was different.

The wireless crackles into life again:

IAIN DUNCAN SMITH (V/O). Disposable income, for example, at the moment, is at its highest level it's been for a long time. And for the poorest ten per cent in society, they're now spending less than they did before on food. You know, the reality is, welfare is about improving and stabilising people, but most of all making sure that households can achieve what they need through work . . .

GIRL. I disappeared almost five years after the first voices came. A late May sunset. I remember because it was the day that Passmore disappeared – the old widow from the bottom floor. Probably drowned or murdered, Fitch had said. And as I searched for something to hide the crackle of cordons, and sniffer dogs, and someone with a pitchfork . . . I heard it . . .

They asked me, years later, how did I know they weren't in my mind? That maybe it was voices from the stairwell – or a police radio – or a solar flare disrupting the atmosphere –

But I know what I heard. Concave – pinched – tonic: like speaking in tongues. Day by day. Night by night. Like electric ghosts they came.

Passmore was just the first.

Pause.

I only half noticed when the streetlights went black – every third one to begin with – just enough jaundice to make the streets look living.

And only those who had children truly knew the year when all the shoes went missing.

Then the soft blood-course to people's doors became a flow when Dolan vanished – six generations out of Galway, the Dolans, four as butchers, three of them here, on the Snowden Road: now, boarded-up – with a just a bone saw left to rust.

Food all round was scarce by the fourth year – like the ghosts of Dolan's past had left their famine here for us. It was now that the disappearing was piecemeal; it was now that death crept. Dry eyes, mottled teeth, grey skin: muscle by muscle, we became ossified – we were living while we were dead – a barely breathing archaeology.

I thought, surely, someone from London. Surely someone *knows*? There must be a committee. There must be a *tsar*. Why can't they *see* us? Or do *they* hear the voices too?

But this was how it was. The more they came, the more we faded.

The wireless crackles into life again:

MICHAEL GOVE (V/O). The number of new jobs created in the course of the last five years has been truly astonishing. These jobs are predominantly high quality. And these jobs are predominantly full time. And these jobs are helping thousands escape poverty and dependence. These statistics are impressive. But behind these numbers lies something more important than proof of economic success: individual fulfilment . . . human flourishing . . .

GIRL. I raced through what was left of Gideon Court, its brutalist route decks, banging on the door for Fitch. I looked around at the exodus: this *must* have been the hurricane. It *must* have been here. But how did we *miss* it? Surely Fitch would know? I banged on the door. But nobody who still existed went outside any more.

Eventually, a tiny window, frosted, with bumps, and a woman's shadow, cracked open: Fitch's leg had gone. Been disappearing for months, she said, ever since a form had come, salmon pink, signed by a sort of doctor sent by the state. First the toes, then the foot, then the ankle – now the entire leg. *Gone*. I wanted to ask – but she said she couldn't – she used to get 15 minutes for each patient of hers – but now – the time had gone – like everything else – and then, she disappeared too.

It was almost nine now, the coma of a late May sunset lunging through the earth: almost five years since Passmore went. Five years since the voices came. The sky was sacramental: a miscommunication with the dark, unpeopled souls below, re-written and revised: the idle butcher; the feckless cripple; a semantic haunting that made vapours out of rage.

The streets were silent.

Beat.

And when it came, it came un-cadenced.

No batons or dogs.

No hurricane.

Just a sort of supernatural violence. Like drowning inside out.

A ghost, that grows inside your bones.

And then, you're gone.

But somewhere, still: somewhere, still, there must be a priest.
Somewhere, still, there must be a saviour. Who can exorcise these
wounds, and give life back to the dead . . .

The wireless crackles into life a final time:

NICOLA STURGEON (V/O). I think it's time not for a pretend
alternative to austerity, it's time for a real alternative to austerity –
that's what I'm offering. And if Labour won't be bold enough on its
own, I think people should vote for parties that will hold Labour to
account, and make them bolder.

The End.

Note.

*A subsequent performance of Supernatural Violence was given on 9 May
2015, two days following the Conservative victory in the General Election. For
this, we replaced NICOLA STURGEON's speech with the following:*

DAVID CAMERON (V/O). I've just been to see Her Majesty the Queen,
and I will now form a majority Conservative government. Together,
we can make Great Britain greater still. Thank you . . .