

My Working Week

By Thomas Bolger

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

W.H Auden

Characters

Young Man/Arthur/James – Late 20's. Tall. Polite. Eloquent. Curious. Fragile.

Paul – Mid 40's. Broad. Encouraging. Reserved. Caring. Tired.

The play takes place in one room and there is only one exit. The speech should be performed naturalistically and in instances of stuttering it is not always the staccato repetition of the first letter (r-r-r), but a struggle to form the word inside the mouth and out the lips. Although based on real life events, the characters presented are entirely fictional.

Scene 1

Two men are sitting at a table in a bedroom, with pale sunlight hitting it at an acute angle. Paul is sitting comfortably, smiling. The younger man is wary and nervous, looking around the room. We meet them half-way through a conversation.

Paul – I told you it would look better when you unpacked. It's nice isn't it?

Young Man - P-perfect.

Paul - Perfect?

Young Man - Well m-m-maybe not perfect.

Paul - But it's nice?

Young Man - Yeah it's really nice.

Pause

Paul - The sun came out for you today.

Young Man - I know.

Pause

Paul - You'll like it here.

Pause

Young Man - The air's different.

Pause

Paul - You're only half an hour away from the sea.

Young Man - I asked to be by the sea.

Paul - You can go swimming.

Young Man - I can't sw-w, I can't swim.

Beat

Paul – What’s wrong son?

Young Man - I don’t know.

Paul - Well then smile.

Young Man – I’m just. I d-don’t know what to do with my hands.

Paul - Your hands are free to do whatever they want.

Young Man - I d-don’t know where to look.

Paul - Look at anything you want.

Young Man - There’s so much, to, to take in.

Paul - It’s a lot to take in all at once in I know.

Shaking his head

Young Man - It’s too m-m-much Paul. My chest hurts.

Paul - Hey, look at me, relax, it’s just you and me here.

Pause

Young Man - But everyone’s outside.

Paul – I don’t understand. What’s changed?

Young Man – I-I, I can go outside. I can be with them if I want to.

Pause

Young Man - The thought of that door being five steps away makes it difficult to breathe.

Paul - No more locks?

Young Man - N-no more locks. There’s just, endless space, windows and glass. I don’t know this.

Paul – You will soon enough.

Pause

Young man – I don't know this.

Paul - You want to go back?

Young Man - N-No! Don't say that. Don't say that to me.

Paul – Sorry, I'm sorry.

Pause

Young Man - I'm trying.

Paul - I know.

Silence

Young Man - Arthur.

Paul - What?

Arthur -That's what my name is.

Pause

Paul - Arthur. I like it.

Arthur -Yeah. I was stuck between Frank and Arthur.

Paul – Frank's nice too.

Arthur -Yeah, but Arthurs better.

Paul - Nice to meet you Arthur.

Arthur laughs quietly, they shake hands

Arthur -Nice to m-meet you...?

Paul – Paul.

Arthur – N-Nice to meet you Paul.

Paul - We should get better acquainted. What's your favourite colour?

Arthur –Blue.

Paul - Where do you work?

Arthur -I'm looking for w-work at the moment.

Paul - Where do you live?

Arthur -Felt- - 24 Charlotte street, Ch-Chichester, PO20 3EX

Paul - Do you live with anyone?

Arthur -I'm living with a friend of a friend, C-Cathy, she seems nice. She looks after old people.

Paul - Seen any good films lately?

Arthur -I don't get out that much.

Pause

Paul – See how easy that was. You're going to be fine.

Arthur –I just can't believe I'm sitting here, there's so much room. It's, um, str-stran-st-str...

Paul - Strange?

Arthur -Yeah. None of this feels real.

Paul - It will soon enough. The more you talk about yourself, talk to people, the more real it will become. I got you something.

Arthur -What?

Brings out a small wrapped package, Arthur is stunned

C-can, can I open it?

Paul -Of course you can.

Opens it slowly, Arthur puts his hand to his mouth like a little boy

Arthur -I don't know what to s-s-say.

Paul – You don't have to say anything.

Pause

Arthur - Thank you.

Paul – It's a pocket watch, so you can keep track of all the time you have now. It's precious. Time, I mean. Although the watch is an antique too.

Arthur – Thank you Paul.

Paul – As a matter of fact, what time is it?

Arthur – Um, quarter past eight.

Paul – How time flies. I better be on my way, I've shown you where everything is in the house right?

Arthur – Yeah.

Paul - And what time are we meeting tomorrow?

Arthur – 9 o'clock sharp.

Paul – Sharp-ish. We'll go to the bank, look at some places for work and if you're lucky get some fish and chips.

Arthur – That sounds like a lot.

Paul – We'll take it slow.

Arthur – You'll give me lessons on how to talk to people? B-Because I'd like that.

Paul – Of course. Right, call me if you need anything. You have that phone I gave you.

Arthur – Y-Yeah.

Paul – Cathy comes back from work late, so you'll be alone for most of tonight, ok?

Arthur – I don't... What if something goes wrong?

Paul – Nothings going to go wrong.

Arthur – But what if?

Paul – You have my number and the police protection number saved on your phone, call me if anything happens. Which it won't.

Pause

Arthur – Ok.

Pause

Paul – There's also... There's some people in a car outside who'll watch the house tonight.

Arthur – W-Why?

Paul – For your safety.

Arthur – I am safe here?

Paul – I promise. Don't be afraid to call me.

Short Pause

Goodbye Arthur.

They shake hands

Arthur – Goodbye Paul, I'll see you tomorrow.

Paul – 9 o'clock sharp?

Arthur – Sharp-ish. Have a s-safe journey home.

Paul – I will. Take care.

Paul leaves and Arthur is left alone. He walks over to a mantelpiece and runs his hands over it to take the dust away, then he sits on the bed to test its spring. Suddenly he looks up at the sound of people shouting outside. He walks over to the window and closes the curtains. In the semi-darkness he starts to play with the watch, spinning it over and over.

Scene 2

3 weeks have passed, we enter the conversation halfway through, Arthur is lying on his bed, Paul is sitting at the desk occasionally writing down things of interest.

Paul - And you're coming up to?

Arthur - Two and a half weeks now.

Paul - Nice?

Arthur - Alright I s-suppose. It's work. People are friendly to me. I'm always on time and I hit the um, er, quotas.

Paul - That's good.

Arthur - You have to make a certain amount of successful calls to hit your quota. But most of the time people hang up b-before you can say anything. But it's ordered, you know, I have the words all laid out for me.

Paul - Like a script?

Arthur - Yeah, I like that, I always know what I have to say. I don't like it when people shout at me though.

Paul - Does that happen a lot?

Arthur - Most days.

Beat. Laughs to himself quietly.

Every day.

Some people are lonely and some people are angry. They don't know who I am and I don't know who they are, but, I've got to convince them they're not happy with their home insurance or their current gas company in the space of 1 minute. It's hard. I preferred my job at Feltham, listing the library books alphabetically, that was simple. I would read all day every day, anything really, maps, poetry, children's books, anything I could get my hands on. Reading would, would take me away.

I rehearse and practise so that even I believe it, just like you told me. But on the phone I've got all this distance to the person, yet, yet I can hear them breathing. They could see me in the street but wouldn't recognise me, they couldn't. I stick to the script. But the people at work, the real people, I still have trouble t-talking to.

Paul - You can talk to me fine.

Arthur - That's because you're my friend.

Pause

When this girl at work asked me where I was from I couldn't speak. Her names Rebecca and she's left handed like me.

Paul -Is she nice?

Arthur – Perfect.

Paul - Really?

Arthur - I just froze, mumbled something about moving lots, but every time I try to say something to her I – I – I stutter.

Paul - I hope you've been careful not to say anything that would put you in, you know...

Arthur - Of course not. But it's hard tricking yourself.

Paul - It's not tricking or lying to yourself or anything like that.

Arthur – But it is. I have lie to myself every day.

Pause

Paul - Most people do.

Arthur - But this lie is bigger than me, it's, it's shared. C-cathy had the news on last week when I came back from work and they were talking about me, saying I'd been released, what I'd look like.

Paul - I saw it too, it's nothing to worry about. Just digging up old stories.

Arthur - They mentioned Tom.

Pause

Paul – It's important to forget certain things Arthur.

Pause

Arthur - It's important to remember certain things Paul.

My mum had brown eyes and my step dad used to t-tie my shoe-laces too roughly.

Paul – It's important to hold on to the good things that you collect on the way. If, if you look back on your life, most of it is...impressions, shapes and sounds right? But there are moments that stand out; there are imprints sharp in focus. Golden ones. A certain place, maybe a -

Arthur -A place? I know which one I'd choose.

Paul – Yeah?

Arthur - Before it happened...now this was months before, me and Tom went to the woods for the first time. Our woods. It was only about twenty minutes from the estate, but they were like different w-worlds. After school we walked there together, me keeping up with him. It would have been around November, so it was quite cold. I think there was a bit of frost. We walked along the footpath, over the bridge and down a little lane that led to the woods. It was so quiet you could hear...everything. No cars, no people, n-nothing.

Pause

Um. We followed some half-trampled footprints alongside a stream, jumping from one rock to the next – careful not to slip. Because it was, you know, i-icy. The water split two ways and there was a little clearing where we stopped to catch our breath – it came out like smoke. So anyway, we came to this bit of the woods and we saw something that l-looked like brown paper crumpled up, so we got closer and it was a bird lying on the ground. It had broken its wing. I think it was a sparrow, or like a starling or s-something. It kept trying to get up to fly to its nest, which was half way up a tree but just, couldn't. We didn't say anything. Tom looked at me. Must be in pain he said. Then he stepped on the birds head with his school shoes and its skull snapped softly like an apple core. I didn't feel sad when I looked at it. Tom said it was the right thing to do. Then he climbed up the tree and found some eggs in the nest. We decided to throw them into the stream because otherwise when they hatched they'd

not have a mum and they'd be alone. Surely they'd prefer to be dead. They were small but heavy and made a little splash.

Beat

Then Tom held my hand for a bit because he said his were cold. I said ok. We belonged next to that stream, next to the trees and the sky. But we felt quite alone in those woods yet, I dunno, closer. I can't explain it very well. That was the first time we went to the woods. And that was where we would go every day, just the two of us. It was ours.

Long pause

I've never told anyone that story before. And I can't tell it to anyone, because it's the truth.

Paul - You just have to be careful with your words.

Short pause, Arthur nods slowly

Arthur – I want her to notice me.

Paul - Who?

Arthur - Rebecca.

Paul - Ask her out for a drink.

Arthur – N-N--No, I couldn't.

Paul - Why not?

Arthur - She'd say no.

Paul - You don't know that.

Arthur - *You* don't know that.

Pause

Paul - Look, pretend I'm her.

Arthur - Rebecca? You don't look anything like her.

Paul - I should hope not. Look, just act like you would around her.

Arthur - Pretend?

Paul – Yes.

Arthur - Is this going to help?

Paul – Yes.

Pause

Ok. Hello Arthur.

Arthur - Wait, I'm not ready.

Pause

Ok.

Paul - Hello Arthur.

Arthur - H-h, h-hi Rebec-ca.

Paul - Nice day today.

Arthur - Yes it is, d-do you like drinking?

Paul - No wait, too soon, start again. Hello Arthur.

Arthur - H-hi Paul. No, sorry, hi Rebecca.

Paul - Nice day today.

Arthur - Yes, how was your weekend?

Paul - Um, fine, didn't do much.

Arthur - That's nice. I like your eyes.

Paul - Thank you.

Arthur - You're left handed.

Paul - I am?

Arthur - Yes, I am too. Would you like to go f-for, a um, for a drink, if you're not, you know, busy.

Paul - I'd like that very much, is Thursday ok?

Arthur - But Thursday is when I see you, I mean, could we do Wednesday?

Paul - Yes.

Arthur - Thank you.

Paul - Don't thank me.

Arthur - Sorry.

Paul - Don't apologise.

Arthur - S-sorry.

Pause

Paul - Did that help at all?

Arthur - Not really, you don't look anything like her.

Paul - The important thing is to relax like I've said and be yourself, but...

Arthur - Not be myself.

Paul - Right. Talk to her like you would talk to me.

Arthur - How *was* your weekend?

Paul - Fine, I didn't do much.

Arthur - No, I mean you Paul.

Beat

Paul - Oh, well, fine. Quiet.

Arthur - I like it when it's quiet.

Pause

If you're not busy at the weekend we could go to Selsey and throw stones into the sea or go to the amusements or something.

Paul - Well Arthur, outside of the regulated times I have with you, I can only...

Arthur - No-no. That's, that's what I'll ask Rebecca.

Paul - Oh I see. That's a good idea. She'd like that.

Arthur - Yeah. I think she will.

Pause

You can stay for dinner if you like, C-Cathy's making Lasagne.

Paul - Thank you but I have dinner waiting for me at home.

Arthur - C-Cathy is a great cook. Is your wife a good cook?

Short pause

Paul - She was a good, is, um, she is a good cook, yes.

Pause

Arthur - I never asked but I assumed you know, that y-you were, are... You still wear your ring.

Paul - It's fine.

Arthur - I'm sorry Paul.

Paul - It's fine.

Beat

Arthur - Do you have dinner waiting for you?

Paul - I've got to go now Arthur.

Arthur - I'm s-sorry Paul, I d-didn't mean to.

Paul - Goodbye Arthur.

Arthur - Paul we can't talk to each other can't we?

Paul - These sessions are for you, not me.

Arthur - But we can talk properly?

Paul - I'll see you Thursday.

Arthur – Paul.

Paul - Tell me how things go with Rebecca.

Arthur – Paul.

Paul - Enjoy your meal.

Pause as Paul leaves

Arthur - Have a safe journey home.

Paul leaves and Arthur is left alone. Silence. He starts to say 'Hello Rebecca' to himself in different ways. He gains more confidence with each try.

Scene 3

2 weeks later, halfway through the conversation. Arthur is excited and Paul takes pleasure in this.

Arthur - And after I messed up the last time I saw her, I didn't think she'd say yes again.

Paul - She clearly likes you.

Arthur - She says I'm funny, but I never make any jokes. She laughs because she says I look lost all the time.

Pause

She didn't say much on the bus up there, just smiled a lot and looked out the window which was fine by me, my, my hands shook every time I looked at her. Paul you should have been there when we went to Selsey! It was so s-sunny that when you saw the sea it looked like it was winking at you, like it was alive. She asked if I wanted to go down to the water and I didn't want her to know I couldn't swim so I said yes. We p-pulled our trousers up and dipped our feet in. The sea would chase us when the, um, the er, ti, the ti-

Paul – Tide.

Arthur - Tide came in. Then we played who could throw the furthest and I threw a pebble so far it must have been like, 50 metres or 60 or something!

Paul – Wow.

Arthur - Yeah, and what was best was we didn't talk much. There was this comfortable stillness. We would use our hands or eyes to talk. When we were walking back though, she stepped on a broken shell and cut her foot. Only a little bit, but enough for it to hurt. I started to panic b-because I don't like blood, I thought everything was ruined. Then without saying anything she put her arm round my shoulder to steady herself. We limped along the pier and I could feel her weight shift with every step. She was very light. We eventually got to a pub and she got it bandaged up. I bought her some ice cream and everything was sunny again.

Pause

It was a perfect day. You should have been there.

Paul - It sounds wonderful, are you seeing her again?

Arthur - Well I see her every day. But we play this game at work where we pretend we don't know each other. Then if you catch the other person smiling at you, you lose. She's coming over to watch a film tomorrow.

Paul - I told you she wouldn't say no.

Arthur - You didn't know that.

Paul - *You* didn't know that.

Short Pause

Arthur - Thanks again for helping me Paul, I haven't had much experience, with, you know...

Paul - Girls?

Arthur - Yeah. I never understood them. But I'm starting to now. After mum died I didn't get taught, how to, how to act around girls. My step dad never, never talked to me about anything like that.

Paul - Mine didn't either.

Arthur - I didn't know you had a step dad.

Paul - I don't, I mean my dad didn't talk to me either.

Arthur - Oh.

Paul - Had to learn through trial and error.

Pause

He wasn't around much.

Beat

Arthur - My step dad was. He wasn't a very nice man.

Pause

Paul - I know.

Arthur - How do you know?

Paul - Well, I mean I've read all the papers regarding your case, so I know, well, I know what he was like.

Arthur - Those are just words on a page. You didn't know him.

Awkward pause

Paul - You're right I didn't, sorry.

Pause

I didn't mean to assume anything Arthur. I just meant, we both had to look after ourselves.

Arthur - I didn't have much of a choice.

Silence

Paul – I'm –

Arthur- The -

Paul - Go on.

Arthur -The newspapers are still talking about me and Tom.

Paul – You shouldn't pay any attention to them, they'll stop eventually.

Arthur - It's hard to ignore them.

Beat

I mean, do they not think half of my life is enough? For a child's mistake?

Paul – But they don't know you, the person they're talking about is gone, dead. Who you were, what you did, is gone, buried. They're not talking about you – Arthur – the person sitting in front of me, they're talking about someone else.

Arthur - Are they?

Paul - Yes. Trust me. The person sitting in front of me is called Arthur. The person sitting in front of me, has time on his hands.

Pause as Arthur mulls this over. Goes to the mantelpiece and picks something up

Arthur - I've been meaning to say, you know that watch you gave me?

Paul – Yes.

Arthur – Did you know it has a catch that opens it up? It has words inside it.

Paul - An engraving?

Arthur – Yeah. I don't understand them though.

Paul - Let me have a look.

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.'

Arthur - It's a poem, but it doesn't make any sense. Apart from the last line.

Short pause

Paul - What it means, I think, is that, well, even in little things there is the capacity for, for big things. That time is, well it's up to us to decide what time means.

Arthur - I don't understand. You can't decide what the time is.

Paul - You can decide what to do with it.

Arthur - Other people decide.

Paul - Well, sometimes.

Arthur - I get the last bit. Eternity in an hour. That feeling where time moves but you don't. When you measure the day by when its night. When you lay in bed and it just goes on and on. One of the boys at Feltham used to say you have to kill time or it kills you.

Paul - Re-read it and think about it. It's much better to measure time by the people around you instead of an, an emptiness.

Pause

Arthur - How *do* you measure a man?

Pause

Paul - By the time he's served.

Arthur – What does that make me?

Paul – I mean the time he spends with himself, understanding himself.

Arthur - What about his past?

Paul - Well, I believe where you stand now is most important.

Arthur - But every mistake I've ever made has led me to this moment, sitting here, with you.

Paul – Mistake or choice?

Arthur - I didn't choose this.

Paul - I chose you. I could choose who I mentored on release, and I chose you.

Pause

Arthur - Why?

Paul - Because a child should not be punished for an adult crime. Because everyone deserves another chance.

Arthur - Tom didn't get another chance.

Paul - Which gives you all the more reason to take it.

Pause

Arthur - Thanks for picking me.

Paul - No need to thank me.

Arthur – Sorry.

Paul - Don't apologise.

Pause, they share a smile.

Do you fancy a drink?

Arthur - But our hours nearly up.

Paul - It'll kill some time.

Arthur - Are you sure?

Paul - I haven't got to be anywhere else. And it will do you some good to get out of this room.

Arthur - Ok, let me grab my coat. I'll buy the first round.

Paul - You don't need to do that.

Arthur - I want to. I get all this money from work and I don't know what to do with it.

Paul - Not many people have that problem Arthur.

Arthur - I'm thinking of buying Rebecca something nice.

Paul – Yeah, like what...

They leave during these last two lines, continuing the conversation out of the door, into the outside world.

Scene 4

2 weeks have passed, we meet them half-way through a conversation. Arthur is pacing, Paul is sitting on the bed.

Arthur - Then she sat where you are now, right there, and called me over. She was wearing make-up, she normally doesn't, I think she looks fine without it but that night she looked different – like someone else. I-I-I was so nervous, my heart started to hurt, there was this tight fist in my chest, my tongue was thick from thoughts of her and me. I sat next to her and the bed sank low. Beds are normally built for one person. She started saying how sweet I was, taking everything slow, being a gentleman, and laughed when I said I didn't know what she was talking about. She had been drinking red wine so her lips were extra red. She started to kiss me here, then here, then on my lips. But something was wrong. She laid down like she was about to sleep and started to take her dress off. She pulled me closer and touched me, I began to feel sick, I was too hot and the room was moving, shadows on the wall. I couldn't breathe when she took my shirt off, retching when she put her hands on my neck, hot and cold, warm, bitter sweet. I-I was wrong, it was wrong. I ran out and threw up in the bathroom. Then caught myself in the mirror, empty and shivering, like an animal.

The lights were off when I came back, in the darkness my eyes adjusted and there was a small shape in my bed, crying. I never wanted to upset her, so I climbed in, laid down beside her and put my arms round her stomach. I said I was sorry, she said ok. My hand could feel her rise and fall and we fell asleep like that. That horrible hot feeling had disappeared and instead there was this, this – golden weariness.

I just want her to know who I am. I think the reason I felt sick is because, she doesn't know who I am. I need to tell her, otherwise I'm just pretending, lying.

Paul - We've been through this Arthur, if you do, we'd have to start all over again. You wouldn't be safe and neither would she.

Arthur - She would understand.

Paul - She won't. Not right now, not this soon.

Arthur - When?

Paul - Maybe never.

Arthur - I can't hold on to this, not for that long. She asks me where I'm from and I lie, where my parents live, who my friends are, where I went to school, I lie, what I want to do with my life, what tv shows did I watch as a child, I lie. I, I can't keep doing it.

Paul - With time Arthur, with time maybe you can tell her. But not now, you're doing too well. Some things can be left unsaid, finished. It's been nearly 3 months and you've made such progress, what with the job and Rebecca, you know, don't jeopardise that. With the newspapers and everything else going on at the moment, it's not a good idea. When I see you now, I see someone different from the boy I saw through closed doors and glass a long time ago. You hardly stutter anymore. You look people in the eye. Please be careful. It's my job as your carer to guide you to the right decisions.

Arthur - What about as a friend?

Pause

Paul - Trust me.

Arthur - On the morning after we held hands to work and had lunch together. She trusts me.

Pause

Have you been watching the news?

Paul - Yes.

Arthur - They had special one on us the other day.

Paul - I saw. You need to stop watch -

Arthur - Did it make you feel angry?

Paul - Yes it did.

Arthur - Sick?

Pause

No one deserves to have their grave dug up. No one. The headstone was smashed, the earth turned over. They interviewed members of the public and they said they were glad. Tom didn't ask for this, he made his payment years ago, to say sorry.

Short pause

I wanted to join him for a long time. It seemed the right thing to do.

Paul - Well I'm glad you didn't.

Arthur - Sometimes I'm not so sure.

Pause

He was just a boy, he was always just a boy. The first thing he ever said to me was – I'll race you to that tree and ran off. We weren't well liked at school. I was too quiet, he was too loud. Maybe that's why we became friends.

Paul - Do you miss him?

Arthur - Yes. Is that wrong?

Paul - No. It's natural to miss someone you, you...

Arthur – Liked.

Paul – Yes.

Arthur - School wasn't for us. They didn't understand us. We learnt more in the woods. Our woods, that we shared with the birds and the trees and everything else in it. It was shut off from the rest of the world, had its own rules and colours. Nobody else was allowed in. That was Toms rule.

Pause

You're kind of like Tom.

Paul - In what way?

Arthur - We could talk to each other and still enjoy silence. And his dad was never in. And you both have blue eyes.

Short pause

I listened to what you said. I, I re-read the poem. And I think I get it.

We used to see heavens in wild flowers, I just didn't remember at the time. My only rule in the woods was don't look at a watch. I wanted to forget about where we were and how long we had it. We had a lot of time back then, as children. Eternity in an hour.

I still had to go home at the end of the day though. So did Tom.

Paul - Have you told her about him?

Arthur - Tom? Yes. I've just said he's an old friend. And I changed his name to, to...Paul. Just to be on the safe side. Is that ok?

Paul - Er, yes. Just be careful with your words.

Arthur - I will. I miss him even though I shouldn't.

Pause, Arthur clears his throat and goes over to the window, closing the curtains

I'm not kicking you out but, she's um, she's coming over in a bit, I should probably start cooking.

Paul - Sure, ok. But please bear in mind what we talked about today, it's important.

Arthur - I know

Paul - Promise me you won't tell her.

Look at me.

Promise.

Pause

Arthur - I don't know Paul, if...

Paul - Promise.

Arthur - Ok. I promise.

Paul - Yes?

Arthur – Cross my heart, hope to die.

Paul - Don't say that.

Arthur - I promise.

Pause

Paul - I'll see you in a week. After that, we only have another 8 of these sessions.

Arthur - Really?

Paul - How time flies.

Pause

Arthur - But I can still see you afterwards? There's no rules that say...

Paul - Of course. I'm not going anywhere. Just means I'll stop pestering you so much.

Have a nice night Arthur.

They shake hands

Arthur - I will. You know, you always shake with two hands. Why do you do that?

Paul - Do I?

Arthur – Yeah.

Paul - I've never noticed before, I don't know, must be a habit.

Arthur – A habit?

Paul - Yes, something ingrained in a person. Like a repetitive action they don't notice.

Arthur - Like stuttering?

Paul - Well no, you know when you're stuttering.

Arthur - I forget sometimes.

Well, have a safe journey home.

Paul - I will.

Paul exits and Arthur tidies the room briefly, then sinks low into the bed.

Scene 5

2 weeks have passed, we meet them halfway, Arthur is not in a good way.

Paul - When?

Arthur - It w-was last week, Friday I think. I was making m-my calls at work, I ring up and this little girl answers the phone. I'm about to go through the m-motions you know, hello sir/madam can I take a moment of your time when she says, my n-names Alice, what's your name? She sounds like an angel, chirruping down the phone. It takes me about 10 seconds to answer her, for some reason my mind goes blank, b-blood rushes to my ears and I feel like I'm underwater, drowning. Arthur, my names Ar-Arthur. They both begin with A. I ask if mummy or daddy are home and she says they're out. S-She was on her own Paul, she couldn't have been older than about six or seven and she was on her own, talking with me on the phone. Why did you ring she says, because It's my job, what, to talk to people? I say yes, I make sure they're happy. She says she'll be happier when her m-mummy gets back. She asks if I make people happy and I say n-n-not really, it's hard when you don't know them.

Pause

Then she says, don't worry Arthur, and starts to sing sunshine, you are my sunshine and gets half the words wrong in. Then sh-sh-she laughed. I cradled the phone as if it were her and started to cry. People at work noticed and my manager sent me home. I don't know why, but I felt so alone. I couldn't explain it to R-Rebecca either. Now everybody looks at me funny, I can feel their eyes on me. Everybody's started to look at me funny Paul, people on the bus, neighbours, in the shops, they look through me when they stare. How do they know?

Paul - They don't know anything, you haven't said anything.

Arthur - No - I haven't said anything.

Pause

Her voice was so sweet and lonely. I wanted t-t-to reach out and touch her, tell her I know what it's like. But I couldn't.

I haven't been sleeping well, I keep having nightmares about... 'it'.

Paul - I thought they had stopped.

Arthur - They had, they've only just come b-back. I sleep with the light on now.

Paul - Arthur that's not good, how long have they been happening?

Arthur - Since the phone call at work. I keep seeing things. I can feel something behind me whenever my backs turned.

Paul -What do you see?

Pause

Arthur - Them. The t-two of them holding hands.

Paul - Arthur this is what happens when you look back. You need to mo-

Arthur - Move on? That's what you keep saying. Just m-m-move on like nothing happened.

Paul - Well, no, but-

Arthur - Because every time I try, I end up where I started. Always looping back in a s-s-cir-
s-s

Paul – Circle?

Arthur – Stop helping me Paul.

Like a circle, over and over. Every-single-f-fucking-time.

Paul - Arthur calm down.

Arthur - Why should I, don't I d-deserve this? How can I possibly move on?

Paul – By, by taking stock of, by, looking at and understanding what happened that day.

Arthur - Understand? *Understand?* You know what I did right, you r-read it in your little report so you understand, you can place me on a spectrum, in a b-box for your files.

What happened that day, even I don't understand. How can anyone understand that, g-g-give my actions meaning? It meant nothing. And yet, yet here I am, unable to move, it is a p-part of me, cut into my body and it means everything to me. Everything I do is an extension of it,

an afterthought. My life ended when I was twelve years old. You can't even begin to understand Paul.

Paul - I can try.

Arthur - Well you have done an admirable job b-b-babysitting me, thank you.

Paul - Arthur that isn't fair, you're lashing out because you're tired.

Arthur - Fair? Do you know what's fair – locking up a child for over a decade. That sounds fair to me. Telling him he may re-enter the world once he's turned out his soul, w-washed it and forgotten. Push it down, deeper, to your core. Move on-forget-m-move on-forget. Move on to what? What progress have I made in your notes? How have you measured my time spent? Have I been a g-good boy?

Paul - You have Rebecca.

Arthur - A woman I'm a stranger to. Yeah, at least I have that. A p-person I love but can't have. That's fair. The only person I want to talk to but can't. If you really wanted me to move on, you would let me tell her.

Paul - No Arthur, we've been through this.

Arthur – Y-Y-You haven't been through anything, Paul. This may be your job, but this is my life. Y-You haven't had anyone touch you, hold you down. Y-You haven't been locked up. You haven't got any cross to bear. You're, you're not holding on to anything, you haven't got anyone to hold on to.

Paul - That's enough Arthur, let's talk about this calmly.

Arthur – T-Talk? That's all we do and I'm not getting anywhere. Talk, but keep your mouth closed, talk but make sure nothing that comes out is you. I can tell you my nightmares, but you will never understand them. You may be a good listener, but you've got f-fuck all to say - maybe that's why your wife left you.

Atmosphere plunges, Arthur has gone too far

Paul - How dare you.

After all that I've done for you, you talk to me like that, you assume. When you have no idea. You think I can't know you, just because you fucked up some people's lives. Because I have made mistakes. You are not special, you are not unique, and your mistake has been made before by plenty of people. You are not alone in your loneliness. I have tried very hard to help you, but you throw it back because you assume I don't understand. I know how heavy guilt is. Every day I take a look at myself and fucking hate the person staring back. I hate him for what he's done.

Short Pause

My wife left me because I ended someone's life.

Pause

Someone we didn't know. Someone I'd never met before. A little boy, playing football in the road. My wife was in the car at the time. When it happened, it was like someone had woken me up and said look what you've done. Hit me hard in the face and showed me the little boy whose head was twisted, legs pointing in different directions. Look at what you've done, this is you, an extension of you.

My wife looked at me like a stranger, in that moment, everything we'd been through, time spent together, was erased. How can you love a stranger? How can you begin to understand what I've lost? I had to stand in court and apologise to his parents, knowing my words wouldn't change the fact I'd paralysed him from the neck down. My words wouldn't help feed him, clothe him and put him to bed every night. No matter how much I meant them. I have been within four walls with no way out.

Pause

It was a mistake, but it was my mistake. It grew. Me and my wife would eat in silence, sleep in different rooms – even though she loved me. I know she did. Eventually though, she gave up trying. If you tell Rebecca what you did, all those years ago, she won't even look at you like a stranger. You'll be beneath that. Bury your secret. That's the only way this is going to work. I've tried to look after you Arthur, tried to understand. I'm here.

I spend my days talking to you, and sitting in an empty house with the lights off.

Shakes his head

There's no shame holding on to grief, as long as you make room for other things.

Silence

Arthur - I had no idea.

Paul - These sessions are for you not me.

Arthur - I'm so sorry.

Paul - Don't apologise.

Arthur - I'm s-s-sorry Paul.

Paul - I've got to go now Arthur.

On this note Paul leaves, Arthur is left alone hitting himself, saying 'I'm sorry' over and over. Then exits to try and say sorry in person.

Scene 6

Two days have passed. Arthur bursts through the door, locking it, closing all the curtains.

Visibly shaken he picks up the phone and fumbles the number in.

Arthur - P-paul? Promise me you won't be cross – promise? You need to s-say it. You've got to promise first. Ok?...I-I-I messed up. Really b-badly. I'm sorry, everything's wrong and I d-d-don't know what to do. You told me not to and I s-s-s-s-should have listened. I, well, I-I c-c-ccan't-breathe....y-yeah ok,

Arthur breathes deeply

Paul...I-I- told her. I know, I'm s-sorry... You promised. If you shout at me I'll hang up. I'm s-sorry, I told her and everything went wrong... Yeah. Just now. I went over to her house and and despite everything you said I had to, I had to. I had to f-fuck everything up didn't I? It's in my b-blood. It was a mistake, I told her what my name was, my real n-name... Stop calling me that! My, my - Arthur is a lie, not real, my-my name is James... Yes. That's who I am. J-James M-Martyn. You might have heard of me, I get a lot of attention, I don't w-want it but that's not the point. James, I'm James, I've always been J-James... I told her who I was and she didn't recognise me. Or r-rather, she did. I don't know. I told her and she just s-stared, I tried to explain to her the past couple of years, how I'm different . How everything's different now that I know her. Yes. D-Different. But still the same.

I tried to explain to her about the woods but I kept getting it wr-wrong, it wasn't coming out right. I didn't – I didn't think it would go like, like how... I know you said – listen to me. I told her what happened. Me and T-Tom. Those two girls... Yes. I mean n-no. I said, I shouldn't of but, I, she wouldn't let me finish. I said me and Tom were in the woods and were together, well, we were holding hands and, t-touching, you know, we were kissing, but as f-friends. She didn't understand, nobody understands. They had to ruin it, those two girls from s-school, they came into our woods, and and saw. They saw us. S-Screamed and laughed, said they'd tell everyone, it was ours, our place, they had no right to disturb what we had. I, we, me and Tom chased them and c-caught them, we dragged them back, next to the water, the stones were sharp, water c-cold, we did. He did, I watched, I helped, but, but, it all came out wrong, Rebecca, Rebec-ca, she she she didn't give me a chance. She started screaming and hit me, I, she ran down the s-stairs and I panicked, pulled her back, by accident, you

know, I just wanted to, to t-talk, to hold her, tell her I'm not like that. That was then. Like you said, I've m-moved on, I have time. I have you.

But, but when I pulled her back she slipped and fell down the s-stairs. She hit her head, and, I'm so f-fucking stupid, but she wasn't moving...I don't know...I don't know Paul. I think she's ok, she wasn't m-moving, I tried to pick her up, stroke her hair, but there was b-blood and I panicked...

I'm at the house. I just want it to go away, I-I don't want to be here anymore, to, to do this, I'm not capable, I-I-I...No, nononono, if me or you ring an ambulance they'll know. I'll go b-back, I'll never be allowed out. It's too much. It's what I deserve but I can't...No Paul, p-please, don't tell them, she's fine. Please we're friends, p-p-p-please...I know b-but, I thought, I thought she would have understood. I don't know why, but I thought she would have accepted me...

Because I l-loved her. In a different way to Tom but just as much. Paul, I can't go back, not forever, I can't handle that. You un-understand? Yes. I know you do, you're the only person I can t-talk to. I know that now. I realise what you've been doing and I-I-I can't put into words how much I owe to you. I can't. I won't. Paul. Thank you, for everything.

I'm s-sorry, I can't stay, this is bigger than me. You're the only person who knows me but you can't f-fix this, you can't fix me. I'm done, done with this act, Arthur, that's not me. I've got to make payment for what James has done...Whatever you s-say doesn't change what I've done. It's written down...It's too m-much Paul. You don't deserve this but I do.

Pause as he listens

No, Paul, no, it's not that easy. I can't stay here if you do that. I'm s-sorry...I should have taken you to Selsey, you would have liked it...Some sunny day. I know...Well, I'm going there now to see R-Rebecca because she's fine, she knows I'm going to be there because we don't need words, she knows and forgives me. Everything is going to be ok, yes, I'm going for a swim, the sun came out for me today, it'd be a shame to waste it...

The watch broke yesterday, just s-stopped. I'm sorry. You can have it if you want Paul, get it fixed, it's yours. I-I don't need it. I'm all out of, I can't. I'm sorry. You tried Paul, you tried really hard, but it doesn't change the fact my, my name is James Martyn. That weighs heavy, you know. That's part of me, cut into my body, burnt in my blood.

A friend told me there's no shame holding on to grief, as long as you make room for other things. You should listen to him, he knows what he's talking about. I'm sorry Paul, it's just all too much. I d-don't know who I am. There's more to a man than his name, but... We'll meet again.

Goodbye.

James hangs up, opens the curtains, places the watch on his mantelpiece and exits. 'We'll meet again' by Johnny Cash starts to play.

Curtain.