

BBC RADIO DRAMA

RADIO 4 AFTERNOON DRAMA

A HISTORY OF PAPER

by Oliver Emanuel

Him MARK BONNAR

Her LUCY GASKELL

BBC MAIDA VALE STUDIO 6, LONDON W9 2LG

Tel. 0207-765 2095

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SMS: Tanya Bhoola & Tim Sturgeon
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DIRECTED BY KIRSTY WILLIAMS

you float like a feather

in a beautiful world -

Radiohead.

Characters

HIM, *Scottish, 30s.*

HER, *English, 30s.*

Scene 1.

Present day. Highlands. A bedroom.

1. HIM: Someone once wrote that love is short but forgetting takes a long time. I forget who.

2. In the corner of my bedroom is a box. A big cardboard box with a picture of a van on it. Standard. Inside are pieces of paper. There's a menu from Pizza Express, an origami flower, some used plane-tickets, letters, cards, and half a draft of a terrible novel. I guess to anyone else, it's a load of rubbish, but to me... well... it's the whole story...

He opens the box and rummages through it.

He pulls out a postcard.

3. And it begins with a postcard.

Scene 2.

His Glasgow flat. 1999.

Music plays: Creep by Radiohead.

1. HIM: A postcard. Shoved through my letterbox at approximately quarter past midnight on Tuesday 4th December 1999. It's almost the millennium. I'm 29. My girlfriend left six months ago, taking everything and I've spent every evening since getting drunk and listening to Radiohead at full-volume. (Shrugs) I know, I know. Pathetic. But it's the only album the woman left me and I find it comforting.
2. Then the postcard falls onto the doormat and everything changes.
3. Sometimes a piece of paper can do that.

Scene 3.

4. HER: A History of Paper.

Scene 4.

A book is opened, a page turned.

1. HER: **Introduction. Paper is everywhere.**

It's true. Look around you.

There's tissue paper for blowing your nose. Paper money for buying things. Letters, shopping lists, bus tickets, train tickets, cinema tickets, confetti, passports, postcards, love notes, hate mail, toilet roll, newspapers, bills, more bills, posters, last will and testament, and post-it notes to remind you not to forget that thing you always forget.

Imagine your life without paper for a second.

Can't do it, can you?

Paper is essential to our lives. Our spiritual, educational, legal and sex lives. We write our dreams on paper. We tell our secrets. Paper is an expression of our deepest selves. Paper is us.

1. HER: **And it's everywhere.**

An autumn day. A tree in the wind. Leaves falling.

Scene 5.

1999. He turns the postcard in his hand.
Music continues...

2. HIM: **It's a postcard of a beach. On the back are the words:**

3. HER: Hello Number 4. Please could you shut up?
 Your music is doing my bloody head in.
 Thanks. Number 6.

4. HIM: What the - ?

5. HIM: **Don't know the neighbours. I'm not unfriendly but I've been committed to my own misery these last months and not been paying proper attention.**

He goes to the stereo and switches off the music.

1. HIM: I rip a page from an old Woolworth's notebook. I'm supposed to be writing a novel about a man who lives with an invisible cat, a searing indictment of twentieth century capitalism but mostly I use it for shopping lists.

He rips a page and writes.

2. HIM: (Writing) Dear Number 6. I'm... sorry.

He stops.

3. HIM: Feels somehow inadequate. A bit limp.
Then I have an idea.

He tears the piece of paper and begins to fold.

4. When we were trying to make a go of it, my ex and I went to an origami class. Our relationship counsellor said it would be a good idea to have hobbies. Trouble was she hated it and I loved it. Further evidence, if we needed it, that we were doomed.

5. HIM: There we go.

He holds up the finished article. It's a rose.

Scene 6.

Present day. He's picking through the box of paper.

1. HIM: Know you're in here somewhere. Where are you? (He finds the rose) Ah.

2. HIM: **Flattened and a bit faded, the paper's old. But a rose is a rose is a rose.**

He sniffs it.

3. **That dusty paper smell. Like whisky and rain and skin and everything brilliant. Is there a better smell in the world?**

Scene 7.

1999. The next morning. A knock on his door.

He opens it, yawning.

4. HIM: Hello?

5. HER: Oh. Hey -

1. HIM: **It's her. I don't know it yet but it is.**
2. HIM: Can – can I help you?
3. HIM: **I'm suddenly aware that I'm wearing my mum's old dressing gown and my skin is slick with sweat from last night's whisky.**
4. HER: I'm from next door. Number 6.
5. HIM: **She's wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit. Her hair is bright pink and done up in a tight knot. She has very pale skin and big green eyes.**
6. HIM: Oh.
7. HIM: **And she is stunningly, mind-blowingly, embarrassingly beautiful –**
8. HIM: I – I'm really sorry about the noise. I didn't realise –
9. HIM: **I can't look her in the eye –**
10. HER: No it's cool –
11. HIM: No it's not, it's awful, I'm sorry –

1. HER: I over-reacted. I know that break ups can be tough -

2. HIM: How did you...?

3. HER: Ah well... I'm afraid I held the front door open when she was carrying her boxes down to the van.

4. HIM: Ah.

5. HER: Plus, you know... Radiohead.

6. HIM: It's a giveaway isn't it?

7. HER: A bit, yeah...

She holds up the rose.

8. Did you make this rose?

9. HIM: Erm... aye. I was drunk. I wanted to say sorry and thought it was a good idea at the time.

10. HER: It's beautiful.

11. HIM: Is it?

1. HER: Seriously. Is it origami?
2. HIM: That's right.
3. HER: I've seen it before but didn't know you could make things as lovely as this.
4. HIM: Really?
5. HER: (*Playing with it*) I keep looking at it but I can't figure it out. Sort of magic isn't it?
6. HIM: **That could've been the end of it, eh. Ta very much, close the door. Smile at each other when you meet in the close. But it's not. It's not cos the next thing I know I'm saying these words -**
7. HIM: Would you like to go to dinner with me?
8. HIM: **Dunno where they came from. Didn't think them. They just came out.**
9. HIM: There's a new pizza place around the corner. It's called Pizza Express. I was gonna check it out.

1. HIM: **And there's that moment... like turning a page, when the next thing could be anything, you have no idea, and all you can do is hope -**

2. HIM: Dunno if you have plans tonight or -

3. HER: No, I don't I -

4. HIM: As an apology for the noise -

5. HER: No that's -

6. HIM: I understand if you don't want -

7. HER: Yeah... That sounds great.

8. HIM: **It was the rose. That's what swung it for me, I reckon. A piece of folded paper.**

9. HIM: Great. I'll knock on your door at 7.

10. HER: Great.

11. HIM: Great.

They smile. She walks away. He closes the door.

Scene 8.

Pages are turned.

1. HER: **Chapter 99. The Last Piece of Paper.**

It's the end of the world. Almost.

The librarian breathes through an oxygen mask and walks slowly down a metallic walkway...

2. **The trees are gone. The rivers and oceans are gone. The natural resources of the earth are deep in the red. Those humans that have survived are forced to live in underground bunkers. A solitary librarian, dwelling deep in the Himalayas, is on his final round of the day...**

The librarian opens an airlock...

3. **The librarian knows the stories of the past. A paper-rich past. When the world consumed a million tonnes of paper a day.**

He continues to walk...

1. HER:

It takes forty thousand litres of water to make a tonne of paper so, of course, this gluttony could only last so long. But no-one guessed that the end of paper would be the end of humanity too...

The librarian stops in front of a display case. He sighs.

2.

The librarian finds it hard to imagine that previous existence. He knows only the airless, desert earth. He knows only the single piece of paper that comprises the universe's remaining library.

He switches on the light and the piece of paper is illuminated.

3.

He does this everyday. He switches on the light of the display case and gazes at this unprepossessing fragment. It comforts him. In the small hours of the endless night, the simple marks on this square scrap of paper are a reminder of what went before.

He touches the glass.

1. HER: **He knows the numbers so well, knows them like a prayer, even though their meaning was lost long ago...**

2. HIM: (*Reading through the oxygen mask*) 0-7-7-1-6-3-1-6-7-1.

Scene 9.

1999. Pizza Express. Evening.

They are eating pizzas. He's in mid flow.

Music plays: Creep by Karen Souza.

3. HIM: ...but it's the end of the world, eh.
Don't misunderstand me. I'm not religious or anything. Don't believe in star signs or the rapture. Not superstitious, walk under ladders all the time, I've broken tonnes of mirrors -

4. HER: How?

5. HIM: What?

6. HER: How did you break a tonne of mirrors?

1. HIM: Long story. Worked in a factory once.
It's stupid. The mirrors aren't the point
-
2. HER: What's the point?
3. HIM: Everything's going to stop. Cease. End.
In less than a month.
4. HER: Do you really buy this Y2K thing?
5. HIM: Totally. Don't you?
6. HER: Well...
7. HIM: Think about it. The whole world's run by
computers. Banks, air-traffic control.
Even the little strip on your train
ticket is read by a computer.
8. HER: What's the worst that could happen?
9. HIM: Planes fall out of the sky. Governments
collapse. I miss my train for work.
10. HER: Wouldn't it be kinda peaceful?
11. HIM: Peaceful?

1. HER: Yeah what would we really miss? It'd be like starting again on a fresh, blank page. We could get down to essentials and chuck the rest.

He shakes his head.

2. HIM: Nah it'd be awful. We'd have to work in fields.

She laughs.

3. HER: I like the idea of a simple life.

They eat pizza.

4. HIM: How's your pizza?

5. HER: Good.

6. HIM: It's alright in here, aye? If only they'd stop playing the terrible jazz.

7. HER: I like jazz.

8. HIM: No-one likes jazz.

9. HER: I do.

1. HIM: Weirdo.

They eat pizza.

2. HIM: **When's the moment of love? Is it now? Or was it ten minutes ago? There must be a moment, aye. Feel like if I knew when it was I could understand but now it's like something is pulling at me, like a rock, like gravity, I'm falling and falling and there's nothing I can do.**

Slight pause.

3. HER/HIM: So you were saying about that thing/ What did you say before when I - ?

They stop.

4. HIM: Go ahead.

5. HER: You.

6. HIM: Tell me about yourself. What's it you do?

7. HER: I'm a journalist. Freelance. I cover lifestyle. Travel and food, mostly.

8. HIM: Impressive.

1. HER: Not really. A lot of lonely nights and terrible meals.
2. HIM: Aye and 5 star hotels.
3. HER: It's tough.
4. HIM: (*Mocking*) I'm so so sorry.
5. HER: And it's a disaster for relationships, of course. Never around for more than a couple of weeks, never in the same place, always on the move. Most men don't like that.
6. HIM: Fools.
7. HER: Yeah but it's my fault really. It's who I am. I get bored easily.
8. HIM: Is that why you do that to your hair?
9. HER: (*Touching her hair*) What? Don't you like it?
10. HIM: No I do -
11. HER: Is there something wrong with it?

1. HIM: No no. I didn't mean it like that. Pink suits you.
2. HER: I never thought of it before. I suppose the hair's part of it. I change it every couple of months.
3. HIM: What's next?
4. HER: Not sure. What do you reckon?
5. HIM: Green?
6. HER: You think?
7. HIM: Aye. Match your eyes.
8. HER: (Smiles) Nice. What is it you do?
9. HIM: I work in a bookshop. It's crap. I hate it. We sell twenty times more Jeffrey Archer than Jane Austen.
10. HER: Is there something else you want to do?
11. HIM: I want to write. Novels and that.
12. HER: Why don't you?

1. HIM: I'm trying. Very good at Chapter 1s. I've got Chapter 1s nailed. It's the rest of it I'm missing.

2. HER: Sure you'll finish a book one day.

3. HIM: Aye. Maybe.

4. HER: You will. I know it.

5. HIM: **She's being nice. I know she is. Yet the way she says it, it's got the force of a prediction.**

Slight pause.

6. HER: Will you make something for me now?

7. HIM: Eh?

8. HER: Some origami.

9. HIM: Really?

10. HER: Why not?

11. HIM: O...okay. Give me that paper mat. (*She passes her paper mat*) The paper's got to be square.

1. HER: Why?

2. HIM: That's the rule.

He tears the paper to make a square and begins to fold. All this as he makes the crane...

3. HER: You've got very big hands.

4. HIM: Do I?

5. HER: Yeah.

6. HIM: And what does that signify?

7. HER: Mmmm. Big hands mean good for folding.

8. HIM: (Laughs) Ha. We'll see, won't we?

9. HER: What's it gonna be?

10. HIM: Hmm. For you, I reckon it'll be a crane.

11. HER: A crane?

12. HIM: The bird not the big mechanical thingy.

1. HER: Ah. I get it.
2. HIM: The crane is a holy creature in Japan.
3. HER: Is it?
4. HIM: Aye they say a crane can live for a thousand years.
5. HER: Huh. I didn't know that.
6. HIM: There's a legend that if a person makes a thousand paper cranes they're granted a wish.
7. HER: What kind of wish?
8. HIM: Anything. Good luck. Long life. Dinner with an attractive neighbour.
9. HER: Ahha! It works!
10. HIM: Like you said before, origami is magic.

He folds back the wings.
11. HER: Is it done?

1. HIM: Almost. All we have to do is flip it over and blow its stomach.

2. HER: Shut up.

3. HIM: Seriously. Go on. Blow.

He holds it up and she blows. The crane inflates.

4. There you go. Bob's your mother's brother.

5. HER: Brilliant.

6. HIM: It's nothing.

7. HER: Thank you.

8. HIM: My pleasure.

A beat.

9. HER: But now it's awkward cos I don't have anything to give you -

10. HIM: No no you don't have to -

1. HER: Wait a second. Have you got a pen?

2. HIM: Er. Not on me.

3. HER: I've got one in my bag.

She goes into her handbag and finds a pen.

4. Give me that bit of paper.

He hands it over and she scribbles on it.

5. HIM: What's this?

6. HER: My number.

7. HIM: But... you live next door. Are you moving?

8. HER: I'm going on assignment tomorrow. That's my mobile. Give me a ring and we can do this again sometime. If you want to, that is.

Scene 10.

A few pages are flicked. A train leaves a station.

1. HER: **Chapter 37. Hemingway's suitcase.**

The year is 1922. It's an icy December in Paris. A young woman named Hadley boards a train at the Gare De Lyon to meet her husband in Geneva. Ernest is a journalist covering the peace conference. Hadley has with her a suitcase of Ernest's writing, a draft of a novel and several short stories. Ernest had insisted she bring everything. But when Hadley arrives in Geneva, she meets her expectant husband with tears in her eyes. She's mislaid the suitcase somewhere along the way. Letters are sent, adverts are posted and a reward offered. The suitcase is never found and we can only speculate as to what masterpieces the world might be missing.

Ernest readily forgave Hadley her mistake although some critics have speculated as to whether this was the beginning of the end of their marriage.

1. HER: **If nothing else, the tale of Ernest Hemingway's missing suitcase is proof that it's not always the paper itself that has value but what's written on it.**

The train hoots its horn as it disappears into a tunnel.

SCENE 11.

1999. He's ransacking his Glasgow flat.

2. HIM: WHERE IS IT?

3. HIM: **I was Mr Cool. Seriously.**

4. HIM: I HAD IT. DEFINITELY.

5. HIM: **I came home, put the scrap of paper with her number on it in the special place on the mantelpiece and waited two days. Two whole days. I was a zen master, eh.**

6. HIM: AHHHHH.

1. HIM: **I've always had a thing about important pieces of paper. I lose them. So I'd come up with a system. Then I tidied up.**

2. HIM: Just in case I had a visitor. You know, if she wanted to come in for coffee or whatnot.

3. HIM: **I was being clever.**

4. HIM: Only I wasn't cos now it's disappeared and so has all hope of happiness and love and joy and everything.

He screams.

5. I HATE MY LIFE!

6. HIM: **It's a lesson. Never act against your own instincts. Don't try and outsmart yourself. Never works. The universe will always find you out.**

I think it was Jeffrey Archer who said that.

He collapses onto the sofa.

1. HIM: What do I do now? I'm gonna have to move house or something...

A knock at the door.

He sits up.

Another knock.

2. Wait!

He scrambles to the door and opens it.

It's her.

3. Hello?

4. HER: Oh. Hey -

5. HIM: You're back.

6. HER: Last night.

7. HIM: How are you? How was your trip?

8. HER: Crazy. Berlin. The lights and the market.
They do Christmas like no-one else.

9. HIM: They invented it, aye.

1. HER: Huh?

2. HIM: Christmas. The Germans invented Christmas. I mean, the tree and Santa and that...

Slight pause.

3. HER/HIM: So I was gonna say I/ I don't know if you knew but -

They stop.

4. HIM: Go ahead.

5. HER: You.

6. HIM: No you.

7. HER: I lost my mobile.

8. HIM: Oh.

9. *Oh.*

10. HER: It's a total brick but I'm an idiot and managed to leave it somewhere. I'm always losing things -

1. HIM: Aye me too -

2. HER: And I was sad cos obviously I'll have to buy a new one and they cost a fortune and my boss will shout at me but also cos maybe you'd called and -

3. HIM: Aye -

4. HER: I can't get my messages, you see. I'm so sorry -

5. HIM: No bother.

A beat.

6. HER: So what did it say?

7. HIM: Mmmm?

8. HER: Your message. You said you left a message. What did it say?

9. HIM: Oh well it wasn't -

10. HER: Cos I'm not sure what your schedule is over the next couple of weeks. You're probably busy with the bookshop with the mad shopping rush and family Christmas stuff -

1. HIM: Well aye but -

2. HER: But I was wondering if you have plans for New Year. Hogmanay. The Millennium. If you have plans that's cool, totally fine, but if not I wondered if you fancied coming to the beach.

He blinks.

3. HIM: The beach?

4. HER: Yeah I always go to the beach at New Year. It's cold and quiet and no-one else is about. Plus you'll get a good view of the apocalypse. What do you say? We could see it in together.

Music plays: Creep by I'm Not A Pilot.

Scene 12.

The pages are turned. The music continues.

1. HER

Appendix. The danger of Chinese lanterns.

The UK government has recently set out new legislation concerning paper hot-air balloons, commonly known as Chinese lanterns. These popular toys consist of a wooden frame, tissue paper skin and a fuel cell. The dangers enumerated in the new law include environmental impact, fire hazard, as well as possible interference with air traffic control. Chinese lanterns have been blamed for a dramatic rise in UFO sightings. In addition, a government spokesperson introducing the white paper said they could be dangerously romantic and may lead to feelings of attraction between a man and a woman on a beach at midnight on the last night of the world...

Scene 13.

1999. The beach at New Year's Eve.

She's putting the final touches to the Chinese lantern.

1. HIM: Isn't this dangerous?
2. HER: Nah.
3. HIM: Feels a bit dangerous.
4. HER: How? It's paper and wood and glue.
5. HIM: And a naked flame.
6. HER: It's just a wee candle. What harm could it do?
7. HIM: Did I mention that I'm a total wimp when it comes to these things? I hate breaking rules. I'm not brave or chilled out in any way.
8. HER: That's okay.
9. HIM: Is it?

1. HER: I'm brave enough for both of us.
2. HIM: But what if, I'm saying, *what if* it crashes into a thatched cottage and sets the thatch ablaze and starts a raging fire that razes an entire village and kills a hundred people?
3. HER: A thatched cottage?
4. HIM: They exist.
5. HER: Look around you. We're miles away from anywhere.
6. HIM: Aye but -
7. HER: You made the crane for me. I've made this for you. Do you want it or not?

He thinks.

8. HIM: Aye I do.
9. HER: Good. Now shut up and pass me the lighter. (*She takes the lighter and tries to light the candle*) Dammit. This wind.
10. HIM: How if I stand like this...?

He moves. She tries again. It lights.

1. HER: Ah. There we go!
2. HIM: Now what?
3. HER: We wait for the lantern to fill up with hot air. Hold it steady.

Slight pause.

The sea and the darkness and the night.

4. HIM: Well... this is nice.
5. HER: Isn't it?
6. HIM: Very nice. It's nice.
7. HER: Nice is the word.
8. HIM: Cold and windy -
9. HER: Only a bit windy -
10. HIM: True -
11. HER: And nice. Very nice.

1. HIM: Exactly.
2. HER: A nice way to spend the apocalypse.
3. HIM: The only way, I heard.

Slight pause.

4. HER: Unbelievably dark isn't it? Can't even see the sea.

5. HIM: Must be there somewhere.

6. HER: What if the world has ended already and we've missed it?

7. HIM: Oh no. Didn't think of that...

8. HER: For all we know, the world has ended in a technological holocaust and folk are this minute wandering the streets in their pyjamas unable to get cash out of their banks or change the channels on their TVs.

9. HIM: *Oh the horror! The horror!*

10. HER: Where's that from?

1. HIM: A book by some bloke.
2. HER: Excellent.
3. HIM: This is much better.
4. HER: Two people on a beach on the west coast of Scotland in January, slowly freezing to death.
5. HIM: Are you freezing to death?
6. HER: A bit.
7. HIM: Do you want my scarf?
8. HER: (*Shakes her head*) You're alright. I'll let you know before I finally expire.

Slight pause.

9. HIM: Is this something you do a lot, aye?
10. HER: Not really.
11. HIM: Now she tells me.

1. HER: I went to a lantern festival in China once. It was amazing. Hundreds and hundreds of little lights floating up into the air. You could see for miles in the night sky. Like new stars or a constellation.

2. HIM: Hey - I can feel it tugging -

3. HER: Don't let go yet -

4. HIM: It's not actually gonna fly is it?

5. HER: 'Course it is!

6. HIM: God this is exciting -

7. HER: What's the time?

8. HIM: (*Checking his watch*) Almost midnight.

9. HER: Count us down...

He counts down off his watch.

10. HIM: Fifteen... twelve... TEN!

11. HER: Get ready -

1. HIM: Eight... seven... six...

2. BOTH: FIVE. FOUR. THREE. TWO. ONE -

3. HER: Let go!

They let go. The lantern rises into the darkness. A moment.

4. HIM: Wow. Look at that. It's flying. It's actually flying.

5. HER: Did you ever doubt it?

6. HIM: Well...

7. HER: (*Thumps him*) Bastard.

8. HIM: Ow.

9. HER: Serves you right.

Slight pause.

10. HIM: It's a wonderful gift. Ta very much.

11. HER: You're very welcome.

Slight pause.

1. HIM: Are you dead yet?
2. HER: Almost.
3. HIM: Come here. I'll try and revive you.

She goes to him, he holds her and they kiss.

4. HER: Hello.
5. HIM: Hello.
6. HER: So that was the end of the world was it?
7. HIM: Aye apparently but we're still alive.
8. HER: Yeah.
9. HIM: So what happens now?

Music plays: Creep by Solala.

Scene 14.

Present day. He's sorting through the box.

1. HIM: Why is it we forget the special things but the trivial stuff never leaves us, eh? I want to remember what she wore that night and how it felt when she kissed me for the first time.

Memory's cruel, I'm telling you.

That's why it's important to keep things. Even the most meaningless scrap can say so much.

He pulls things out of the box.

2. A shopping list for the chicken and mash I made that first time she came round.

Ticket stubs for *Being John Malkovich* which I loved and she hated.

The kitchen roll on which she left messages in felt-tip. GONE FOR RUN. LOVE YOUR FACE.

The valentine card with a dragon on it.

1. HIM: **The postcards from when she was away,
from Australia, Thailand and Brazil.**

**A ticket stub from the Great Wall of
China.**

**This is the stuff we're made of, aye. Not
flesh and blood or even twitter
followers. It's the things, the little
things, we leave behind. If that's gone
then what are we?**

**She didn't keep anything. When she moved
in, it took fifteen minutes. Only had two
suitcases and a shelf of DVDs.**

**Glasgow. 2000. He puts down a box,
breathing deeply.**

2. HIM: Is that it?

3. HER: What else do I need?

4. HIM: Are you an international spy? Or planning
a quick getaway?

5. HER: (Smiles) You'll have to wait to find out.

They kiss.

Back to the present day.

1. HIM: Who says that women are more romantic than blokes? It's rubbish. I was the one who remembered our anniversary. It was me that kept the champagne corks, plane tickets and -

He finds something at the bottom of the box.

2. HIM: Hang on -

He pulls out a small jam jar.

3. No way, Jose. I - I don't believe it. How did this get in here...?

Scene 15.

A page is turned. Blossom blows in the wind.

1. HER: **Chapter 25. Confetti.**

It's 1875. The merchant Enrico Mangili has started selling paper confetti in his shop in the centre of Milan. Up until this point confetti in Italy has traditionally been sweets or sugar coated almonds, even bits of fruit. Mangili's moment of genius came whilst wondering through the silk merchants in the city. He noticed the paper off-cuts used for the silk worm's bed resembled petals from a flower yet were far less costly than the real thing. In less than a decade, Mangili's invention becomes the common confetti across Europe and the USA.

Currently, the largest collection of confetti listed in the Guinness Book of Records belongs to Casey Larrain of Chatsworth, California, and amounts to 1447 varieties.

Casey says her favourites are shaped like the characters from *The Wizard of Oz*.

Scene 16.2000. Their wedding day. Midnight.Music plays in the distance: Creep by Richard Cheese.

1. HIM: **November 30th 2000.**

2. HIM: WHERE'S MY WIFE?

3. HIM: **We get married in a castle by Loch Ness.**
Sounds flash, aye? Well... it was only a
wee castle.

4. HER: I'm here.

5. HIM: Where?

6. HIM: **True to form, I cried and she made a**
funny speech about Radiohead. It was a
great day.

7. HER: I'm over here, darling. Straight ahead of you.

8. HIM: **About midnight, as the disco is winding**
down, she vanishes. I find her in the
chapel, on her hands and knees, picking
things off the stone floor.

1. HER: Are you drunk, husband?
2. HIM: Aye it's a possibility, wife.
3. HER: Lovely.
4. HIM: WE GOT MARRIED.
5. HER: Yeah we did.
6. HIM: Why are you on the ground? You'll get your dress dirty.
7. HER: Doesn't matter. Can you pass me that jar?
8. HIM: What jar?
9. HER: By your feet.
10. HIM: Oh aye.

He picks up the jar.

11. Where did you get this?
12. HER: I pinched it from the kitchen.
13. HIM: What?

1. HER: What?

2. HIM: You stole it? I married a thief!

3. HER: Oh get over it.

4. HIM: What's it for?

5. HER: To keep the confetti in. I've got enough now. Give it to me.

She gets to her feet and takes the jar off him and puts the confetti in it.

6. HIM: But - but you never keep anything.

7. HER: Well it's not just any old confetti is it? It's our confetti. I know that it's silly but I wanted to keep some to remember the day.

8. HIM: **Easy to forget we'd only been together a short time. I could still be surprised by things she did. Every day, in fact. I didn't mind. Made me love her more.**

He smiles.

9. HIM: You're so weird.

1. HER: You like weird.

2. HIM: Aye I do.

3. HER: Why don't we go back to the disco? I want to dance with my weirdo-loving husband.

She drags him out of the chapel, both laughing.

Scene 17.

Present day. He turns the jar over in his hands.

4. HIM: Amazing. If you knew her, you'd know how amazing this is.

I'd completely forgotten.

Amazing.

He carefully replaces the jam jar in the box and continues to search through.

5. **Why's it that what's written on paper seems permanent, absolute? Money. Birth certificates. But it's not. It's thin and flimsy and easy to tear.**

He pulls something out, it tears.

1. HIM: Bugger.
2. HIM: **What's the most important piece of paper in your life? The thing you'd save in a fire. Your passport? A note from a dead friend?**

I've thought about it a lot. When it comes down to it, I'd probably grab whatever terrible novel was beside my bed and watch the rest of it burn.

I'm a contradiction.

He stops, sits backs and breathes deeply.

3. **There are so many things missing. I can't find our wedding certificate. Looked but it's gone. Suppose it doesn't matter now...**

And the letter. Aye. The letter.

Remember, this was back in the days when we were still figuring out emails. Folk wrote letters to each other. Skype wasn't even a word.

1. HIM: The letter was the most momentous thing that either of us ever received. When did it arrive? I forgot the day. It was the summer. Morning. She came into the kitchen waving it at me, while I was having my breakfast. I didn't know what it meant -

Scene 18.

2001. Summer. The kitchen.

He's eating cereal. She enters, waving a letter.

2. HER: Look! Look at this!

3. HIM: What?

4. HER: Looky looky look.

5. HIM: You're flapping it around, woman. Can't see -

6. HER: It's the letter. (*She shows him*)

7. HIM: Fantastic.

1. HER: The letter from New York.
2. HIM: Who do we know in New York?
3. HER: You don't know anyone in New York. I do.
It's about the job.
4. HIM: (*blank stare*) ...
5. HER: You remember.
6. HIM: Do I?
7. HER: I told you. My ex-boss moved to the USA five years ago. He said that if ever a permanent staff position came up, he'd let me know.
8. HIM: Is this the ex-boss who's also your ex-boyfriend? What's his name...?
9. HER: Duncan.
10. HIM: Aye is this Duncan?

1. HIM: The significant ex. A charming, good-looking editor of a big New York magazine franchise. They were together for two years. I once asked why they broke up and she said he was too good looking and charming and she constantly felt inadequate. She thought this answer was reassuring. It wasn't.
2. HER: Duncan got in touch and I applied.
3. HIM: Didn't know you still spoke.
4. HER: Only professionally, darling. There's nothing sinister.
5. HIM: And so you got the job?
6. HER: An interview.
7. HIM: (*honestly*) Congratulations!
8. HER: Well we'll see. Never thought I'd get this far. It would be a big step up.
9. HIM: You're totally ready for it.
10. HER: An actual permanent job. Can you imagine? We could actually afford to buy things.

1. HIM: One question. If you get this fantastic job, will you be leaving me to live in New York with your charming and good-looking ex-boyfriend?
2. HER: Absolutely.
3. HIM: Oh.
4. HER: (*smiles*) Shut up, you fool. The job isn't in New York. It's here.
5. HIM: Is it?
6. HER: The interview's in New York, that's all.
7. HIM: Oh cool that's different then.
8. HER: We should book flights soon. The interview is in September. I'll go to the travel agents this afternoon.
9. HIM: We?
10. HER: You're coming too aren't you? I'll be too nervous by myself. And you've never been to New York. You'll totally love it. We can wander around bookshops and pretend to be Woody Allen and Diane Keaton. It'll be brilliant.

Scene 19.

A boat sets sail on the ocean. Seagulls.

1. HER: **Chapter 67. George Wylie and Paper Boat.**

When the Glaswegian sculptor George Wylie's *Paper Boat* floated down the Hudson in New York in 1990, it was greeted by a huge crowd and Duke Ellington's Orchestra. *Paper Boat* was in fact nothing of the sort. The frame was steel, the skin made of gauze and tied with Velcro. George intended it as a lament for the loss of shipbuilding in Scotland but the beauty of the 75 foot long floating sculpture captured the imagination of the world. He said: 'The simplicity of the boat is something poetic, something we should have all enjoyed when we were young. It's kind of like making love. If you ask too many questions about it, it loses something'.

Scene 20.

September 11th 2001. New York. The Tick Tock diner.

1. HIM: I don't have the letter but I do have all the pieces of paper from New York. The yellow Metrocard, the receipt from the Tick Tock diner near Penn Station where we had an early breakfast that morning. If I hold the receipt up to the light the date is faded but just about legible.

(reads) September 11th 2001.
2. HER: Come with me.
3. HIM: What?
4. HIM: Her interview was at 8:30am on the 99th floor of the north tower of the World Trade Centre. We'd been up for hours because of jetlag and her nerves.
5. HER: Come with me.
6. HIM: She's dressed in her dark blue pinstripe suit with her hair in a knot. Like the first time I saw her. Except now her hair is bright green.

1. HER: The view will be amazing.
2. HIM: **She was nervous. Hands twitchy by her side, her big eyes blinking constantly.**
3. HIM: I never told you this before but I'm actually a wee bit scared of heights.
4. HER: You're not.
5. HIM: Legs get all wobbly and my eyes go blurry.
6. HER: You're a plonker.
7. HIM: Can't deny it.
8. HER: Who comes to New York and doesn't go up a skyscraper?
9. HIM: Well I can't come with you anyway. You've got your interview.
10. HER: You could sit in the lobby and look at the view.
11. HIM: Can't think of anything more terrifying.

1. HER: What about killer bees with mouths like sharks?
2. HIM: Why are you doing this to me?
3. HER: I'M SCARED AND I WANT YOU TO COME WITH ME.
4. HIM: **Why didn't I go with her? In my darkest moments, I wish I had. It's a big question. Is it better to feel the pain of remembering or never to have had the memory in the first place?**

Over the next few months, it's this above all else I play over and over in my mind.
5. HIM: (*shaking his head*) Sorry, babe.
6. HER: I hate you.
7. HIM: Fair enough.
8. HER: I don't really. I love you. (*She kisses him on the cheek*).
9. HIM: You'll be brilliant. Amazing. I know it. Just breathe and try not to worry.

1. HER: How do I look?

2. HIM: Flipping gorgeous. Let me take a picture.

3. HIM: **I pull out the disposable camera I bought at JFK. This is the only picture I take that day. It's the one I put on all the posters. Three hours later, I'm begging the owner of a camera shop off Central Park to develop it. I shout and threaten him before he complies. I write a letter a few months later to apologise.**

He holds up the camera.

4. HIM: Smile. Say Wendslydale.

5. HER: Wendslydale.

He takes the picture. A moment.

6. HIM: Lovely.

7. HER: I better go.

8. HIM: Aye you don't want to be late for Duncan.

9. HER: Don't start that again.

1. HIM: What? Me?
2. HER: I forgot to say he asked us to dinner later.
3. HIM: You mean *you*. He asked *you* to dinner later.
4. HER: Both of us. He's married now.
5. HIM: Is he? Why didn't you say before?
6. HER: I enjoy torturing you.
7. HIM: You're a cruel woman. A monster. Knew it the first time I set eyes on you.
8. HER: Will you be here when I'm done? Shouldn't be more than an hour. 10 o'clock at the latest. There's a Starbucks in the basement.
9. HIM: I'll be there.
10. HER: What are you doing now?
11. HIM: Going to wander about the island. Get lost.

1. HER: Don't get too lost.

2. HIM: I won't.

She takes a deep breath.

3. HER: Here I go.

4. HIM: Good luck good luck good luck!

5. HER: See you later, darling.

6. HIM: **And she kisses me on the mouth.**

She kisses him.

7. **And she's running out the door.**

She walks away.

8. **And as she reaches the door, she looks back, smiles and waves.**

She waves.

9. **And that's it.**

The first plane hits the north tower. A massive explosion.

Live news reports from CNN, NBC, BBC cut in and overlap.

1. CNN: This just in. You are looking at - obviously a very disturbing live shot there of the - that is the World Trade Centre and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers -
2. NBC: We have a breaking news story to you about. Apparently a plane has crashed into the World Trade Centre here in New York City. It happened just a few moments ago. We have very little information -
3. BBC: And we're getting reports of a plane crash at the World Trade Centre in New York City. You can see the pictures there. It's one of New York's tallest buildings. That's all the information we know at the moment -

Scene 21.2001. He's walking in Manhattan.

1. HIM: The sidewalks of Manhattan are built for walking. Wide and dirty and the grid system means you can always find your way back.

I'm ten blocks away when the first plane hits the north tower.

Sirens. Running. Panic.

2. Instantly, there's panic and confusion. Sirens and shouting. Police and fire trucks speed along the streets like a scene from a film. I begin to run.

He runs.

3. Later, it's the smoke folk remember. That rolling grey cloud of masonry and iron that keeps coming and coming. But that's not what I remember.

He stops and looks up.

4. It's the paper.

There's paper everywhere.

1. HIM: **It falls from the sky and out across the lower part of the island.**

Paper floating like feathers.

Endlessly.

It's almost beautiful.

Paper falls from the sky. He can hardly breath.

2. **All I remember... all I remember is the paper.**

Silence for as long as possible -

Scene 22.

Present day. He flicks through a scrapbook.

3. HIM: **Made a scrapbook. About that day. Everything I could find. Wanted to understand. I reckoned if I had all the information then I - I could make sense of it all.**

He drops the scrapbook.

1. HIM:

The greatest mystery of that day turned out to be the paper. Why didn't it burn? In the inferno of the collapsing towers, steel and marble and iron were turned to dust. Yet for weeks and weeks after the attacks on the Twin Towers, folk found business letters, diaries and bank statements completely intact all across the island of Manhattan.

How did it happen? How did something so flimsy and combustible like paper survive when all those people died?

Scene 23.

A high rise. Strong wind. A single piece of paper.

1. HER: **Chapter 75. The note.**

Like many others, Denise Scott believed her husband Randy to have been killed instantly that Tuesday morning in September. He worked on the 84th floor. However, almost ten years later Denise was given a note that read: 84th floor. 12 people trapped. The note was covered in blood but the writing was unmistakably that of Randy. It had been discovered by a security guard working at the Federal Reserve and handed in to the Memorial museum. It took a decade to connect the note with Mr Scott.

Despite the terrible light that the note shed on her husband's final moments, Denise said that at least she'd found out the truth.

It was important to know the truth.

A page falls.

Scene 24.

Present day. He's replacing the paper in the box.

1. HIM: **I kept these bits of paper to remember her. But what do they add up to, truly?**
Even if I had all the paper, everything she ever touched, it wouldn't make up for her not being here.

He finds a notebook.

2. HIM: What's this?

3. HIM: **Lost my voice after I came back from America. Couldn't speak a word. My voice just stopped working and I had to write everything in a notebook.**

He flips through the notebook.

4. HIM: (reading) Cappuccino please. No sugar.
 Return to Mallaig. Aye I'm fine.
 Honestly. My wife died and I don't know how to go on. Bottle of Glenlivet please.
 Yes the big one. Thank you. Ta.

1. HIM:

Then one day, a year or so later, found myself singing along to a tune on the radio and I could speak again. Doctor didn't know why.

He replaces the notebook.

Music plays: Creep by Scala & Kolacny Brothers.

2.

There was no body so no funeral. A lot of folk wrote letters. Lovely letters full of love for her, sorrow for me. Couldn't read most of them, obviously.

He puts the letters back.

3.

It was the junk mail that killed me. Her name written on a catalogue or a credit card offer and my heart lurched. It was like she was in the other room. Like I could walk through the door and hand it to her.

Felt sorry for the postman. I was always crying at him.

1. HIM: In the end, the only thing to do was to move house. You reach a point when you need to turn the page and start over, eh?

He closes the box and stands up.

Scene 25.

The book is opened. The first page is turned. A hundred insects buzzing.

2. HER: Chapter 1. Consider the wasp.

It's 105 AD. An officer of the Chinese army is examining a wasps' nest. His name is T'sai Lun. Lun's great skill as a soldier is his ability to stand incredibly still. Especially useful if you're on guard duty at the palace. Or when confronted by a hundred pissed off insects with stings in their tails. Lun had fallen asleep under the mulberry tree and hadn't noticed the buzzing. He was hoping to sneak off without injury when he noticed what the creatures were up to. Lun stands still, his face as close as he dare. The wasps are stripping off the bark, chewing it and spitting it out as a white, brittle skin. An idea flashes at the back of his mind.

CONT.../

1. HER:

The next day T'sai Lun gets to work. He boils the fibre of a new mulberry tree, beats the residue then chuck it into a cauldron full of water. He repeats the process. He then takes the mush and spreads it flat onto a cloth screen. He waits for it to bleach in the sun. Finally, Lun polishes it smooth with a stone before standing back to admire his handiwork.

He doesn't know it yet but T'sai Lun has just created the first piece of paper.

The page is turned.

Scene 26.

Present day. He lifts the box. It's
incredibly heavy.

1. HIM: **Yesterday I sat down at the kitchen table to write a letter. Can't remember the last time I wrote a proper letter. Used a fountain pen and everything.**

He goes out of the bedroom, down the stairs and through the back door into the garden. It's slow and sweaty and difficult. He's not as young as he was.

2. **My darling.**

Been a long time. Almost fifteen years. Crazy. Feels like forever and also no time at all.

I'm the same. A bit fatter. More forgetful. I live in the country now. About an hour north of Glasgow on the coast. It's great. I've got a garden and a big shed where I write. Oh aye. I write now. Well I wrote one book. It's about paper. A sort of history with made up bits. I believe it's sold a grand total of three copies.

CONT.../

1. HIM: Mum is very proud. Anyway you always said I'd do it one day and although it took almost a decade, I finally did.

I put your name on it. Hope you don't mind. It seemed like the right thing to do -

Scene 27.

The last page.

As she reads, her voice is joined by his.

2. HER/HIM: Chapter 100. What's the point of paper?

To speak.

To imagine.

To remember.

Scene 28.

Present day. The letter continues.

1. HIM:

The big news is that I've finally met someone. She lives in the village and works at the local school. She's not as weird as you but she is excellent. You'd like her, I think.

So why am I writing? That's a very good question.

He's in the garden. He drops the box onto the grass.

2.

I've put everything in the box, all the bits of paper, and made a bonfire in the garden.

He takes out a lighter. He's breathing rapidly.

3.

I read somewhere that writing allows us to be present even when we're not. It's true. In writing, you come back to me.

And she comes back.

She walks down the garden path and stands next to him, looking down at the box of paper.

1. HER: What the hell are you doing here?

2. HIM: Well, I -

3. HER: Hey. Wait a second. Is that all my stuff?

4. HIM: Some of it, aye.

5. HER: All of it.

6. HIM: Well... the box is mine.

She grins at him.

7. HER: What are you waiting for then?

8. HIM: Eh?

9. HER: Get on with it. Not got all day.

10. HIM: No I -

11. HER: No point in hanging about, darling.
You've got the lighter. Do it.

1. HIM: Not made up my mind yet.
2. HER: Really?
3. HIM: Still thinking about it.
4. HER: Come on. You've dragged this heap of rubbish around with you for years and years. It's time.
5. HIM: It's not rubbish!
6. HER: Bits of old newspaper and receipts from Pizza Express?
7. HIM: There's other things too.
8. HER: A couple of nice postcards perhaps.

9. HIM: *He shakes his head.*
It's all I've got. All I've got left.
Once it's gone, there will be nothing left of you.
10. HER: Not true.
11. HIM: Isn't it?

1. HER: I'm not a piece of paper, darling.

2. HIM: Aye I know, I know that but -

I forget. Every day. I forget how you look and what you said and how you dressed and how you looked when you were angry or sleeping and what you smelled like. I - I hate forgetting.

He is weeping.

3. This is all your fault.

4. HER: I know.

5. HIM: If you hadn't gone then I wouldn't be here.

6. HER: Yeah.

7. HIM: Pretty pissed off about it actually.

8. HER: Me too.

9. HIM: Try to tell myself that it's not the end of the world. Feel grateful for the time we had, not the time we didn't.

1. HER: Nice.

2. HIM: But it wasn't enough was it?

3. HER: No.

4. HIM: Not nearly enough. I can't even -

Then I think maybe if you'd lived,
you'd've got bored of me anyway. Changed
me like you changed your hair.

5. HER: (smiles) Anything is possible.

6. HIM: But - but whatever it is, I don't want to
feel like this anymore. Can't.

He wipes his eyes. Slight pause.

7. Will you forgive me?

8. HER: There's nothing to forgive, darling.

A beat.

9. Take a deep breath and do it.

10. HIM: Sure?

11. HER: What else can you do?

He takes a deep breath.

1. HIM: Aye right. Okay. This is it.

2. HER: Here we go.

3. HIM: Here we go.

*He flicks the lighter, the paper catches
and the fire burns.*

They holds hands.

*Music plays: Creep by Scott Bradlee's
Postmodern Jukebox. It plays for as long
as possible as the fire burns.*

END OF PLAY