

Richard Monks – Writer

Introduction to Early Warning for The Wire BBC Radio 3

Some ideas begin with a character – some with a story, or a theme. Early Warning began with a photograph; a black and white image of a concrete dish, a massive monolith, some 15 – 20 ft. in diameter – it was like a giant satellite dish stood isolated on a shingle beach beneath an enormous sky.

And I remember wondering what on earth this thing was – I was intrigued – this strange, brutalist piece of architecture. Some time later, talking to a friend who lived on the coast, I discovered that it was, in fact, an ‘acoustic mirror’ – built before the First World War as part of an early warning system in order to detect incoming enemy aircraft. They were known locally as ‘Listening Ears’.

Even though I was convinced that these ‘sound sculptures’ offered tremendous potential for a radio play, it took me a while to work out exactly how to incorporate them into some kind of narrative. I needed a way in – a human story.

As tends to happen, if you think long and hard enough, characters do begin to emerge. And as they’re brought into focus you begin to hear their voices, once indistinct they become real. So that by the time I started to write the script I found that I’d discovered my protagonist; a profoundly deaf fourteen-year-old girl called Ella – an outsider, recently moved to the coast – someone for whom the ‘Listening Ear’ plays a critical role.

During my research to discover what it was like to inhabit Ella’s world I met with an audiologist and a group of deaf teenagers who gave me an invaluable insight into their lives. From the hours spent talking to them, certain themes began to emerge – isolation – frustration – alienation – themes which sparked new thoughts, new characters, new storylines – all of which felt to me as if they were bouncing around in the centre of this huge concrete dish – ricocheting off each other like particles of sound – colliding – creating conflict. My job then, was to listen – to try and make sense of it all – just as Ella must do in this play.

EARLY WARNING By Richard Monks

for BBC Radio 3 The Wire

We hear the International Speech Test Signal (ISTS) - a number of European languages mixed together to simulate normal speech patterns. Sounds begin to build, layer on layer - a murmuration of starlings sweeps about overhead – the rush of air – the beating of wings. In amongst the sounds of the landscape we hear someone running – a chase is underway – the hunter and the hunted - stumbling over shingle – falling – picking himself up again – splashing through water. Finally the hunters catch up with their quarry and deliver a series of deadly blows – bludgeoning their victim to the ground. Amongst it all a guttural scream – primal – distinctly human as the victim is beaten about the skull. A final blow reverberates around the concrete sound mirror from which emerges a single tone.

The AUDIOLOGIST'S voice is heard – somehow disconnected – close up.

AUDIOLOGIST

Ella? Ella?

INT. HOUSE DAY

A door slams. ELLA (14) storms upstairs. Her parents, ALASTAIR and CLARE follow after her. ELLA is profoundly deaf.

ELLA

You think I'm lying? That I'm just making it up.

ALASTAIR

You're being ridiculous now.

CLARE

It doesn't matter what we think.

ELLA

It's what the police think though.

ELLA locks herself in the bathroom. CLARE tries the handle.

CLARE

Come on. Open the door.

ALASTAIR

There's a chance your hearing may have deteriorated, that's all.

CLARE
Ella. Come on, love. This is silly.

ELLA
I'm telling the truth.

ALASTAIR
Look at it from their point of view.

CLARE
The area was searched – all around the gravel pits – the area close to 'the mirrors' where you think you heard, whatever it was you heard, but there was no sign of a body.

ALASTAIR
No one's even been reported missing.

ELLA
Doesn't mean it didn't happen.

CLARE
Look – unlock the door and let's talk about this properly.

ELLA
It's just 'cos I'm deaf. You're just like everyone else.

CLARE
No.

ELLA
Why then? Why will no one believe me?

We hear the rush of air again as starlings swoop low – the primal, distinctly human cry as someone is beaten about the skull. From the final blow emerges a single ton

INT. AUDIOLOGY CLINIC DAY

The AUDIOLOGIST sits with ELLA conducting a hearing test. Her voice treated as if heard from ELLA'S perspective as she listens through a pair of headphones.

AUDIOLOGIST
Ella?

ELLA
Yes.

ELLA removes her headphones. The AUDIOLOGIST'S voice immediately becomes slightly less muffled.

AUDIOLOGIST
What did you hear?

ELLA
I'm sorry.

AUDIOLOGIST
It's OK. Let's start again. So I'm going to play you a series of sounds – same as before and I want you to press the button if you can hear them. OK?

ELLA
OK.

AUDIOLOGIST
Starting with your right ear.

We hear a short burst of tone.

AUDIOLOGIST
Good.

A second burst is heard at a different frequency.

ELLA V/O
They call me 'bomb-ears' at school – tick...tick...boom! – because of my hearing aids. They think I'm stupid. Pull faces. Dad tells me to ignore them – says eventually they'll get bored and leave me alone – but it's not as easy as that - sometimes it gets to me and I can't help it - I just explode.

A high-pitched tone explodes into a wall of distorted sound.
EXT. PLAYGROUND DAY

ELLA'S hearing aid squeals loudly. Children chant loudly as two girls fight. A TEACHER intervenes.

KIDS
Fight! Fight! Fight!...

TEACHER

Right that's enough. Ella! What do you think you're doing?

ELLA

She started it.

GIRL

It was her!

ELLA V/O

Break times are the worst when the teachers are not there. And if you say anything – to anyone then they'll only get you afterwards. So you learn to keep quiet.

LEANNE appears as the kids disperse.

LEANNE

Ella? Are you OK?

ELLA

No thanks to you. I thought you were meant to be looking after me?

LEANNE

What happened?

ELLA V/O

I've smashed them up before now. You get so frustrated that you just want to get rid of them – bury them in the garden, or flush them down the toilet. Because they'll pick on anything that's different, or out of the ordinary. It's human nature.

Another tone. We hear the AUDIOLOGIST'S voice again.

AUDIOLOGIST

Good. Well done.

We hear several more of varying pitch until finally one mixes through to the sound of a reversing lorry.

EXT. PORT NIGHT

Lorries drive off the ferry as customs officers check container wagons in the inspection area. Suddenly one of the customs officers, ELLA'S father, ALASTAIR, calls out.

ALASTAIR

I think I've got something! Just put the probe in and it's gone right up – 420...430...Let's get the curtain off and have a look inside.

ELLA V/O

Dad says its ignorance - that people are frightened of what they don't understand. It's alright for him though - he doesn't have to put up with it – he's hearing.

The back doors of the container are unbolted and ALASTAIR peers in. He calls down to others.

ALASTAIR

There's a gap down the side. I can see one – maybe two, hiding right at the back.

As ALASTAIR climbs in amongst the crates we hear the faint sound of the ISTS signal as he shouts to the immigrants.

ALASTAIR (CONT.)

Stay where you are! Stay there! Where are you from? What country?

ELLA V/O

So when they start picking on you – calling you names – you just want to get out of there – run as fast as you can. I never wanted to move here – it feels like the end of the world – - like a nuclear explosion's wiped out everything for miles – everything except for a line of bungalows washed up by the tide. That's ours on the end – with the chain-link fence – to stop me from running away.

EXT. MARSH DAY

A murmuration of starlings sweeps overhead – the rush of air – the beating of wings. In amongst the sounds of the landscape we hear ELLA running across the shingle peninsula. She is distraught. Random words float on the wind.

RECORDED VOICE
Thud. Witch. Wrap. Jail. Keys. Vice...

A distorted mobile phone conversation.

CLARE
Alastair.

ALASTAIR
Listen. I can't talk right now...

CLARE
It's Ella.

ALASTAIR
What about her?

CLARE
School just phoned. She's disappeared again.

RECORDED VOICE
Shape. Wreath. Hide.

INT. BUNKER EVENING

ELLA sits in the bunker listening to the sounds of the marsh reflected in the vast sound mirror – starlings swoop about in the sky. We hear the wind and the vibration of raindrops on the concrete dish above as it begins to rain – an eerie alien soundscape.

ELLA V/O
If I take off my hearing aids you'd think there'd be nothing – no sound – just emptiness.
Space.

We hear the handling sound of the microphone as ELLA removes her hearing aids. The landscape sounds immediately disappear – replaced by internal sounds from her imagination – her heart – blood rushing through veins...

ELLA V/O (CONT.)
But it's not like that - somehow the brain fills the silence – I've no idea what with, maybe it's the sound of my heart pumping – blood rushing through veins breathing – maybe it's all these things put together – filling the void.

ELLA suddenly screams. Reality comes crashing back into focus as she puts her hearing aids back on.

BIRD MAN

What are you doing?

ELLA screams.

BIRD MAN (CONT.)

Get out!

ELLA

You scared me.

BIRD MAN

Go on! Get out of here!

ELLA

Why? I'm not hurting anyone.

BIRD MAN

It's dangerous. You should be in school.

ELLA

I had a headache. They said I could go home.

BIRD MAN

Then go.

ELLA

Doesn't look dangerous.

BIRD MAN

Concrete's crumbling.

ELLA

How come you're allowed down here then?

BIRD MAN

Enough questions. Do as you're told.

ELLA

One more. Then I'll go. Promise.
What is this thing?

BIRD MAN

A sound mirror.

ELLA

I thought it was a satellite dish at first.

BIRD MAN

Looks like it.

ELLA

Looks old.

BIRD MAN

Over a hundred years.

ELLA

What was it for?

BIRD MAN

Surveillance. Before the First World War.

ELLA

Like CCTV?

BIRD MAN

Sort of. Part of an early warning system.

ELLA

Against what?

BIRD MAN

Enemy aircraft. There used to be a whole line of them dotted along the coast – huge great things – hundreds of feet tall.

ELLIE

What's happened to them all?

BIRD MAN

Eroded by time. The salt air.

ELLA

How did they work?

BIRD MAN

Someone sat down here listening over headphones to a microphone positioned up there on the end of a pole. Scanning the horizon.

ELLA

Like a periscope?

The BIRD MAN smiles.

BIRD MAN

Yes. Just like a periscope.

ELLA

Listening for sounds.

BIRD MAN

Round here we call it the 'Listening Ear'.

ELLA

Maybe they've all sunk into the concrete.

BIRD MAN

Maybe. I imagine it'd have heard all sorts –
the odd motor car back then, voices - even
the birds.

ELLA

What do they sound like?

BIRD MAN

What?

ELLA

Birds.

BIRD MAN

You don't know?

ELLA

No. These things are rubbish outside – all
you get's the wind.

BIRD MAN

Like music.

ELLA

What sort of music?

BIRD MAN

Probably not the sort you listen to. It's hard to
describe - they're all different. Gulls.
Gillemots. Oystercatchers...

ELLA looks out through the gap in the concrete.

ELLA

What about those – out there?

BIRD MAN

Starlings. Ah now they're amazing creatures – beautiful too, with green and purple feathers. They can take in sounds from their surroundings – their environment.

ELLA

What do you mean?

BIRD MAN

Anything from car alarms to the human voice and incorporate it in their song. The same rhythm. Pitch.

ELLA

How?

BIRD MAN

No one really knows. It's like you learning another language – Spanish, or French.

ELLA

I can't speak French. I can't hear the words properly.

BIRD MAN

That's a shame. Well we get all sorts landing up here - from all over the world. Africa. Scandinavia. Even had an albatross once - all the way from the Southern Oceans. Huge great thing.

ELLA

What was it doing here?

BIRD MAN

Lost. Blown off course. We get others too - 'vagrants.' Pallas' Warbler - little Auks.

The starlings suddenly swoop low over the sound mirror.

ELLA

Wow! Look at them! They're like a swarm of bees.

BIRD MAN

A 'murmuration'. That's what it's called when they swoop about like that.

ELLA

Why do they do it?

BIRD MAN

Looking for somewhere to roost.

INT. HOUSE NIGHT

ELLA comes in through the back door. ALASTAIR is unpacking boxes in the kitchen.

ALASTAIR

Where the hell have you been? (shouts)
Clare!

ELLA

Just walking.

ALASTAIR

Everyone's been out looking for you.

CLARE enters the room.

CLARE

Who was that?

ELLA

Who?

CLARE

That man you were with.

ELLA

I don't know.

ALASTAIR

What do you mean you don't know?

RECORDED VOICE

Thug.

CLARE

You were talking to him.

RECORDED VOICE

Chose.

ELLA

I didn't ask his name.

RECORDED VOICE

Ride.

ALASTAIR

How many times have we told you about
talking to strangers?

ELLA

He wasn't strange.

CLARE

He looked like a tramp.

RECORDED VOICE

Shoot.

ALASTAIR

He could've been an axe-murderer for all you
know.

ELLA switches off her hearing aids – the sound becomes muffled.

ALASTAIR (CONT.)

Switch those back on. Ella! I'm talking to
you.

ELLA

What?

ALASTAIR

Now!

ELLA V/O

Mum always says I was different from other
babies – eyes darting everywhere –

desperately trying to work out what people were saying - grabbing her face all the time, pulling it round so that I could lip read. And if I couldn't make myself understood, or get what I wanted, I'd get proper angry.

ELLA switches her hearing aid back on – a noisy kitchen – everything amplified to the same level. She empties her school bag onto the table, getting her books out. Amongst her things is a broken radio mic.

ALASTAIR

And how's this got broken again?

ELLA

Dunno. Must've got banged in my bag.

ALASTAIR

I haven't got time to keep running up to the hospital every five minutes. Why can't you look after your radio aids?

CLARE

What happened today? Tell me.

ELLA

Same as always.

ALASTAIR

What have I said before? Sticks and stones...

CLARE

There must be some nice girls in your class.

ALASTAIR

She's never there long enough to find out.

ELLA

I can't understand what they're saying. They talk too quickly.

CLARE

Well then ask them to repeat themselves. Explain.

ELLA

They just say 'it doesn't matter', or 'I'll tell you later'.

CLARE

This isn't like you, love.

ELLA

I want to go home.

CLARE

This is home now.

ELLA

Yeah well you never asked me.

ELLA leaves.

ALASTAIR

Where are you going?

ELLA

(CALLS BACK)

To have a bath.

ALASTAIR

I haven't finished yet.

CLARE

Leave her.

ALASTAIR

I swear she smashes them deliberately.

CLARE

You don't know that.

ALASTAIR

Two in as many weeks! She's not that clumsy.

INT. BATHROOM NIGHT

The copper pipes vibrate loudly as ELLA turns on the bath taps. We hear the water from her perspective – a deep groaning sound.

ELLA V/O

The first time I heard water I thought it was a monster – this loud groaning – I was terrified – imagining some creature hiding somewhere – waiting to grab me. Mum had to sleep in my room to stop me getting nightmares – same as when she found out about Dad. At first she said it was because he had a cold – but I knew she was lying. They thought I didn't know what was going on but I could hear them arguing – feel the vibrations through the floorboards whenever she smashed something.

ELLA sinks below the water and we hear ALASTAIR and CLARE arguing in the kitchen below – their voices muffled.

CLARE

It doesn't help you flying off the handle every five minutes.

ALASTAIR

She needs boundaries.

CLARE

It's inevitable she's going to find it hard. They all knew her at the last place, been with her since Primary – start her off in middle of year nine and what do you expect?

ALASTAIR

She could at least make the effort.

CLARE

You can see her point though. She was fine before.

ALASTAIR

Oh so I'm to blame?

CLARE

Well it wasn't me who played away.

ALASTAIR

Takes two to break up a marriage, Clare.

CLARE

Obviously – you and the Tupperware Queen.

ALASTAIR

That's not fair – it was silicone utensils – and she only sold them part time.

CLARE

As if I care.

ALASTAIR

Anyway I thought we were supposed to be moving on?

CLARE

You started it.

ELLA appears in the kitchen doorway wrapped in a towel and carrying her clothes.

ELLA

(LOUDLY)

Where's the hair dryer?

ALASTAIR

You're shouting.

CLARE

Try one of the boxes in the spare room. Are those dirty?

ELLA

What?

ALASTAIR

(LOUDLY)

You're shouting.

ELLA

So are you.

ALASTAIR

Don't be cheeky.

CLARE

If you give me that lot I'll do a wash.

ELLA hands CLARE her dirty clothes. She checks the pockets.

CLARE (CONT.)

What have you got in these pockets?

ELLA
Feathers.

ALASTAIR
Where did you find all these?

ELLA
Just around.

CLARE
That one's pretty - the blue.

ELLA
Starling.

ALASTAIR
Now go and get yourself dry - and put your
hearing aids on.

INT. CLINIC DAY

A final beep as the hearing test continues.

AUDIOLOGIST
Good. OK we're going to try the left ear now.
Same again.

ELLA
Is there any water?

AUDIOLOGIST
Yes of course.

She fills up a cup from a water dispenser.

AUDIOLOGIST (CONT.)
There you go. How are things going at
school?

ELLA
Fine.

AUDIOLOGIST
Good. Ready?

We hear another burst of tone.

ELLA V/O

It's like they can't be bothered, some of the teachers – just talk to the board – or stand with their backs to the window and when you keep putting your hand up, because you can't see their lips, they ignore you – so you give up and just sit there getting bored.

A low-pitched tone mixes through to the next scene.

INT. SCHOOL HALL NIGHT

Chairs scrape across a wooden floor. A parent/teacher meeting in a noisy school hall. Sound bounces off the walls and wooden floor. ALASTAIR and CLARE sit with ELLA'S Head of Year, MR. CLOUGH.

ALASTAIR

The point is at her last school she had teaching support and a Teacher of the Deaf – so why can't she have the same here?

CLOUGH

As I say, it not something we can provide - unless she has a statement.

ALASTAIR

Which she doesn't.

CLARE

She's too bright. She's her own worst enemy.

ALASTAIR

Besides we've been down that road before. It's a bloody nightmare to prove.

CLARE

As far as they're concerned there's no educational need.

ALASTAIR

Our worry is, though, that if she carries on like this, she's going to fall behind. She's frustrated that's root of it. And these ceilings don't help. Given the right support...This whole building's a bloody nightmare as far as she's concerned.

CLOUGH

I understand what you're saying and I'm sorry
I can't do more.

ALASTAIR

What and that's it?

CLOUGH

It's the same for every deaf child in the area.

ALASTAIR

A post-code lottery.

CLOUGH

We're very proud of the provision we make for our students with special needs. In fact some of our staff recently attended an inset where they learned to sign their own name.

ALASTAIR

Oh well that's terrific – they can teach Ella then – because none of the deaf children we know use sign language.

EXT. PLAYGROUND NIGHT.

LEANNE strikes a match and lights a cigarette. She shelters from the rain in the bike sheds with ELLA.

LEANNE

Want one?

ELLA

Don't smoke. Are your parents in there too?

LEANNE

Mum. Don't see my dad anymore. He's moved away. Don't blame him either - it's a shit-hole. Soon as I'm 16 I'm off.

ELLA

Where to?

LEANNE

Africa.

ELLA

Yeah right.

LEANNE
Why not? Could if I wanted.

ELLA
Sure.

LEANNE
Can you keep a secret?

ELLA
What sort of secret?

LEANNE
If I tell you, you must promise not to tell anyone.

ELLA
What?

LEANNE
Promise.

ELLA receives a text on her mobile and answers it.

ELLA
Hang on.

LEANNE
What's the point in having that?

ELLA
What do you mean?

LEANNE
If you can't hear it properly.

ELLA
Texts. (*Reads a text*) Shit. I've got to go.
What were you going to say?

LEANNE
I'll tell you later.

EXT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

ELLA meets her parents in the corridor.

CLARE

Ella! Ella!

ELLA

What did he say?

ALASTAIR

Suggested we try Room Twelve.

ELLA

The disability room?

CLARE

Learning Support.

ELLA

No way. I'm not going in there.

ALASTAIR

Why not?

ELLA

They smile at you like you're some sort of retard.

CLARE

Ella!

ELLA

It's true. I might be deaf but I'm not an idiot.

CLARE

They can help sort out your batteries – all sorts.

ELLA

I don't care. I'm not going.

ALASTAIR

O.K. Fine. Who have we got next then?

Checks his list.

CLARE

Geography. Five minutes.

ELLA

I wouldn't bother.

CLARE

Why?

ELLA

He's got a beard.

ALASTAIR

So what?

CLARE

You got something against beards now?

ELLA

Can't read his lips, can I

INT. CAR DAY

ALASTAIR, CLARE and ELLA drive home back along the coast road with ELLA sat in the back.

ALASTAIR

No wonder you're behind. He was saying you don't bother with your radio aid half the time.

CLARE turns to ELLA in the back.

CLARE

Is that true?

ELLA

What?

CLARE

Mr. Clough. He said you don't bother giving them your radio aid.

ELLA

Everyone looks at you like you're some sort of freak.

CLARE

Can't you do it before anyone comes in and collect it after?

ELLA

Then they walk off with it. And you hear them in the toilet.

ALASTAIR

Ignore them – who cares if they think it's uncool? I tell you what's uncool - failing your exams – ending up on social.

ELLA

I can't hear what you're saying.

CLARE

Doesn't matter.

ALASTAIR

It bloody well does. She can't afford to screw up.
Life's hard enough.

CLARE

It's along here somewhere.

ALASTAIR

What is?

CLARE

The farm. There. Organic veg.

ALASTAIR

It'll be shut now.

CLARE

I know. I'm just saying they do a box scheme. Do our bit for the local economy.

ALASTAIR

Apparently they supply some of supermarkets as well.

CLARE

How do you know?

ALASTAIR

Lad at work's related to them somehow - a cousin, I think.

CLARE

Who isn't round here? Looks like quite a set up they've got anyway.

ELLA

Leanne works there.

ALASTAIR

Who's Leanne?

CLARE

The girl who's been looking after her.

ALASTAIR

Or not.

ELLA
In the sorting sheds.

CLARE
Is she nice?

ELLA
Don't see her much. She's always off with her boyfriend.

The car pulls up outside the house. Engines rev in the car park opposite as youths leave the pub.

ALASTAIR
Looks like chucking out time.

CLARE
Bit early, isn't it?

CLARE spots someone in their front garden.

CLARE (CONT.)
What's he doing?

ALASTAIR
Who?

CLARE
In the front garden.

ALASTAIR jumps out of the car.

ALASTAIR
Oi! Get out of it! You filthy bugger!

They laugh as ALASTAIR chases a drunk from the drive. Tyres screech as the sopped up cars tear up and down the coast road.

ALASTAIR
Bloody cheek. I bet that's why the Mahonia's had it.

LEANNE calls from one of the cars.

LEANNE

Hey! Ella!

ALASTAIR

Come on. You've got school tomorrow.

CLARE

Do you know her?

ELLA

It's Leanne.

ALASTAIR

Bloody hell. No wonder.

CLARE

That's odd.

ALASTAIR

What?

CLARE

A bundle of feathers on the doorstep.

ALASTAIR

Kids probably. Give them here I'll bin them.

ELLA

No! Don't.

INT. HOUSE NIGHT

ELLA stands at the window watching locals tip out the pub opposite whilst CLARE serves up tea.

CLARE

How many fish fingers do you want?

ALASTAIR

Ella! Come away from the window.

ELLA

I'm not hungry.

CLARE

He was on the bus again this morning. Got off near the farm.

ALASTAIR

Who?

CLARE

That bloke. Gives me the creeps.

ELLA

His father was drowned.

CLARE

How do you know?

ELLA

He told me. At the beginning of the war.
They thought they were all spies.

ALASTAIR

Who were?

ELLA

The Italians.

ALASTAIR

'Foreign aliens'. Elbows off the table.

CLARE

I thought you said you didn't know his name.

ELLA

I don't.

CLARE

Well you seem to know everything else about
him.

ELLA

They rounded them all up one night and
shipped them off to Canada.

ALASTAIR

I'm sure they had their reasons.

ELLA

It was the last time he saw him. His boat was
torpedoed.

CLARE

Well I don't think he can have washed in
days.

A car races past the house rattling the windows.

ALASTAIR

Someone's going to get killed out there if
they're not careful.

Another car passes at speed - the sound of its souped-up engine mixing
through to a single tone.

INT. CLINIC DAY

ELLA sits in a room as the AUDIOLOGIST finishes off the first test.

AUDIOLOGIST

Well done. You can take the headphones off
now. OK?

ELLA

Fine.

AUDIOLOGIST

Good. So what I'd like you to do now is listen
to some words from the word list and then
repeat them back to me. Alright? Just do the
best you can.

ELLA

Ok.

RECORDED VOICE

Man.

ELLA

Man.

AUDIOLOGIST

Excellent.

RECORDED VOICE

Hip.

ELLA

Hit.

AUDIOLOGIST

Nearly.

RECORDED VOICE

Thug.

ELLA

Thug.

RECORDED VOICE

Ride.

EXT. COAST ROAD NIGHT

A car tears past with its alarm blaring loudly – joyriders screaming - music thumping.

INT. CAR NIGHT

LEANNE shouts above the noise.

LEANNE

You got my text then?

ELLA

What?

LEANNE

I didn't think you'd come.

CRAIG

Thought you'd be too scared.

ELLA

No. Why would I be?

CRAIG laughs.

CRAIG

Good girl. That's we like. Want some?

ELLA

What is it?

CRAIG

It's the proper stuff. Blows your head off.

LEANNE

Go on.

ELLA takes a swig of vodka.

ELLA

Whose car's this?

LEANNE

Who cares?

CRAIG

You want to keep away from him you know.

ELLA

Who?

CRAIG

Bird Man.

ELLA

Why?

CRAIG

He's a nutter.

ELLA

What do you mean?

CRAIG

His mother was killed, murdered.

LEANNE

Years ago.

CRAIG

They reckon he did it. Hit her over the head with a hammer. Somewhere out on the Marsh.

ELLA

How do you know?

CRAIG

He's schizo. Smashed her skull into pieces.

ELLA

What?

CRAIG

It's common knowledge.

LEANNE

When they found him he was covered in blood.

CRAIG

Wandering round like a Zombie. He'd dragged her body for miles.

ELLA
I can't hear what you're saying.

CRAIG leans in close.

CRAIG
Why? Are you deaf, or something?

CRAIG laughs.

OTHERS
What! What! What!

CRAIG
What's it sound like that thing?

ELLA
Get off! It won't work on you.

We hear the hearing aid squeal in the fray.

ELLA
Get off it!

The sound becomes muffled as GRAIG takes one of ELLA'S hearing aids and puts it on.

CRAIG
I can't hear you. I'm a deafo. Divi deafo!

He starts singing loudly to the music on the car stereo.

ELLA
Give it back!

CRAIG
Can't hear you. You'll have to speak up.

LEANNE
Give it to her.

CRAIG
I bet she'd like that!

LEANNE
Go on.

CRAIG
Hey how about we have some fun?

HE turns off the road onto a bumpy track.

LEANNE
Where we going?

CRAIG
Farm.

LEANNE
What are we going there for? It's late.

CRAIG
Sod it. It'll be a laugh.

The car tears into the farmyard – doing handbrake turns – tyres screeching.
Music pumping.

LEANNE
You'll wake them all up.

CRAIG
That's the idea. (shouts) Come on – up you
get you lazy bastards!

LEANNE
Craig. Please.

CRAIG
Shut it.

He stops the car and gets out.

LEANNE
What are you doing?

RECORDED VOICE
Match.

CRAIG
Teaching them a lesson.

RECORDED VOICE
Whip.

EXT. FARMYARD NIGHT.

CRAIG starts banging on the side of a caravan parked in the yard.

RECORDED VOICE

Hell.

Sounds break up – it is a nightmare of distorted voices and frequencies of varying pitch - the confusion builds to a crescendo as CRAIG picks up a rock and throws it through the window –shattered glass falls to the ground.
Silence.

CRAIG

Keep away from her, you filthy bastard!

He then gets back into the car.

INT. CAR NIGHT

CRAIG turns to ELLA and LEANNE.

CRAIG

What's wrong, babe?

LEANNE

What did you do that for?

CRAIG

He's scum. Shouldn't be here – should he?

LEANNE

Let's just get out of here.

They tear off again.

ELLA

I feel sick. I think I'm going to be sick.

LEANNE

Open the window.

ELLA promptly throws up all over CRAIG.

CRAIG

Ah! For God's sake!

EXT. MARSH NIGHT

The car skids to a halt. CRAIG gets out, opens the back door and drags ELLA out onto the road. LEANNE shouts from inside the car.

CRAIG

Get out! Get out!

LEANNE

Get off her! What you doing?

CRAIG

It stinks.

ELLA is sick again – she's in a bad way.

LEANNE

You can't just leave her here.

CRAIG

You shut your mouth – or I'll chuck you out as well.

LEANNE gets out the car.

LEANNE

Its miles out.

CRAIG

Get back in. I'm warning you. Get back in the car.

LEANNE

Not without her I'm not.

CRAIG

You do as you're told.

LEANNE

No.

CRAIG

Get in. Now!

LEANNE

No.

CRAIG

Get in! You stupid slag.

CRAIG hits LEANNE across the face.

LEANNE

Ahh...

CRAIG pushes LEANNE back inside the car whilst ELLA throws up again. He slams the door shut.

CRAIG
(TO LEANNE)

Now stay there.

He gets in behind the wheel and tears off leaving ELLA alone.

ELLA

Wait! Stop!

A confusion of muffled abstract sounds – ELLA'S breathing. The sounds of the marsh – wind and rain interfering with her one remaining hearing aid. She starts to stumble across the shingle.

INT. SOUND MIRROR - BUNKER NIGHT

We hear the sounds of the landscape – the wind – the reeds. The rain beats against the sound mirror – the sound amplified – distorted. Layers of sound gradually build - wind blows through the grass.

ELLA V/O

They just told me one day, that they were moving. I never wanted to leave. So when the removal vans came I hid. There was a cupboard in my room – low, beneath the eaves. I could hear them packing the boxes, rolling up the rugs, taking down curtains. Hooks snapping. I heard their voices too, shouting - searching everywhere – but they never found me. I sat there for hours in the dark - imagining everything.

We hear random words from the recording – swirling around inside ELLA's head.

RECORDING

Thud. Man. Hide. Ship. Guess. Fib.
Catch. Shoot. Kill.

A murmuration of starlings circles overhead – the rush of air – the beating of wings. In amongst the sounds of the landscape we hear someone running – a chase is underway – the hunter and the hunted - stumbling over shingle – falling – picking himself up again – splashing through water. Finally the hunters catch up with their quarry and deliver a series of deadly blows – bludgeoning their victim to the ground. Amongst it all a guttural scream – primal – distinctly human as the victim is beaten. With one final blow the cries cease. The low rumbling frequency continues.

We hear muffled voices as a search party approaches.

ALASTAIR

She's in here!

CLARE

Ella! Ella! Wake up.

ALASTAIR

She's out cold.

We hear the squawk of radios as paramedics arrive on the scene.

MEDIC ONE

Can you hear me? Ella!

CLARE

She's deaf.

ALASTAIR

She's lost both her hearing aids.

MEDIC TWO

I can smell alcohol.

MEDIC ONE

OK. Check her temp and BM. I'll stick the cabin heat on full - get her warmed up.

MEDIC TWO

Temps... thirty-four eight.

MEDIC ONE

Right let's get her in the van. One, two three and up.

ELLA retches as they lift her into the back of the ambulance.

MEDIC TWO

You get us going, I'll start a line.

MEDIC ONE

(CALLS CONTROL)

Red base priority.

CONTROL

Go ahead Juliet five oh one.

MEDIC ONE
Show us blue to All Saints hospital we have
an unresponsive teenage girl with
hypothermia, GCS 7, temperature thirty four
point eight, pulse sixty-two, BP 95 over 60
E.T.A twenty minutes.

The other sounds gradually fade to leave just the words from the audiology test

RECORDED VOICE
Kiss. Buzz. Hash. Thieve. Gate. Wife. Pole.
...Wretch.

INT. CLINIC DAY

ELLA repeats the words.

ELLA
Wretch.

AUDIOLOGY
Good.

RECORDED VOICE
Dodge.

ELLA
Dog.

RECORDED VOICE
Moon.

INT. HOSPITAL DAY: WPC interrogates ELLA as she lies in a hospital bed.

WPC
You see our problem, Ella?

ELLA
No.

WPC
The problem we have is that, at this stage, no
one's even been reported missing. We have
no body. Therefore...

ELLA
I must be lying.

WPC

Mistaken.

ELLA

Your problem is you're not listening. None of you.

WPC

Alright. Then tell me again.

ELLA

Everything was spinning.

WPC

When you got out the car.

ELLA

I thought they'd come back.

WPC

But they didn't.

ELLA

No. So I started walking.

WPC

And it was still raining.

ELLA

I'd no idea where I was going. Stumbling through reeds, up banks of pebbles then sliding down the other side – my feet sinking into the shingle. Then suddenly I tripped – hit something hard.

WPC

The old railway line.

ELLA

My knee started bleeding. I carried on, following the track until it came to an end in the middle of nowhere. My clothes were soaking. Freezing. I looked around. I could just about make out the shape of the sound mirror – I thought that at least if I could get inside the bunker it'd be dry. I climbed down and lay on the stone slab at the foot of the dish. Closed my eyes- so tired. I could hear the rain outside.

WPC

And then?

ELLA

Someone crying.

WPC

A person.

ELLA

Yes.

WPC

Definitely female?

ELLA

It was hard to tell.

WPC

Could you describe the noise for me?

ELLA

Like she was being beaten. In pain.

WPC

You're sure it wasn't an animal? A fox, or dog perhaps? Wounded?

ELLA

Certain.

WPC

And yet you'd lost both of your hearing aids.

(Checking notes) 'One in the car and one somewhere on the Marsh.' It's a strange place - the wind can play tricks.

ELLA

This wasn't the wind.

WPC

Could it have been a dream then?

ELLA

I've told you it was real.

WPC

You were suffering from hypothermia.

ELLA

I felt it.

WPC

It's not uncommon to experience
hallucinations.

ELLA

I didn't imagine it!

INT. HOSPITAL DAY

Lift doors open. The BIRD MAN steps out of the lift into a busy hospital corridor where he stops a passing nurse for directions.

BIRD MAN

Excuse me. Excuse me. I'm looking for ward
nine.

NURSE

Second on the right.

BIRD MAN

Thank you.

As he continues down the corridor he comes across ALASTAIR who is waiting for CLARE.

ALASTAIR

Can I help you?

BIRD MAN

I've come to see Ella. I heard what
happened.

ALASTAIR

She's asleep.

BIRD MAN

Well I don't mind waiting.

ALASTAIR

She's very tired.

BIRD MAN

Then perhaps I could call another time.

ALASTAIR

I don't think so.

BIRD MAN

I see.

ALASTAIR

Look I don't know who you are, or what you want, but I don't want you seeing my daughter again. Is that clear?

BIRD MAN

Perfectly.

CLARE approaches from the other direction as the BIRD MAN leaves.

CLARE

Alright? What did he want?

ALASTAIR

Nothing.

CLARE

Well come on then – are we going in, or not?

INT. HOSPITAL WARD NIGHT

Monitors beep. ELLA lies in bed half asleep.

ALASTAIR

Hello love.

CLARE

How are you feeling?

ALASTAIR

We bought you some more grapes.

CLARE

And I thought you might want some magazines as well. I'm afraid it was all that they had in the shop.

ALASTAIR

I saw Leanne earlier – she was asking after you.

CLARE

If it weren't for her we'd never have found you.

ELLA

What do you mean?

CLARE

She told us about the sound mirrors.

CLARE

Guessed you'd be there.

ALASTAIR

We'd have been looking all night otherwise.

CLARE

What were you doing out there?

ALASTAIR

They reckon you were out cold for up to an hour.

ELLA

I didn't imagine it. I heard someone.

CLARE

Just steady. Take it easy.

ELLA

Why's no one believe me?

ALASTAIR

Half a bottle of vodka might have something to do with it.

ELLA

If I didn't wear this damn thing...

CLARE

Ella.

ELLA

You'd listen then though, wouldn't you?

CLARE

Now you're being silly.

ELLA
'She's deaf. Ignore her.'

CLARE
You know that's not true.

NURSE
I think she should rest now.

ELLA
She! She is a person. She has a name.

INT. CAR NIGHT

ALASTAIR and CLARE drive home.

ALASTAIR
There's no way she could have heard
anything without her aids.

CLARE
She seems so convinced.

ALASTAIR
Well the police have got her statement.
They'll be in touch if they find anything.

CLARE
I don't know what to think.

ALASTAIR
It's obvious what this is.

CLARE
What?

ALASTAIR
Her way of getting attention.

CLARE
Bit extreme, don't you think?

ALASTAIR
Let's face it we've hardly had much time for
her the time these past few months.

CLARE
And whose fault's that?

ALASTAIR

Don't start.

They pull up outside the house.

CLARE

The whole point of moving here was to have more time as a family.

ALASTAIR

I've got to put in the hours. Besides I've not noticed you giving her much time - you're always decorating.

CLARE

Well someone's got to. I'm not living in the 1930's.

They get out of the car and start to unload shopping from the boot.

CLARE (CONT.)

What are you going to say to his father?

ALASTAIR

Who's?

CLARE

Craig's. You are going to speak to him presumably.

ALASTAIR

Well...

CLARE

He dumped our daughter in the middle of nowhere.

ALASTAIR

What difference is it going to make? He's not going to listen to me.

CLARE

Anything could've happened. Did happen. If you don't say something I bloody well will.

Mobile rings. ALASTAIR answers it.

ALASTAIR

Jacko. Alright? How many? When? Sure.

ALASTAIR hangs up.

ALASTAIR

I've got to go.

CLARE

I don't believe this.

ALASTAIR

They've got six sailings due in and they're a man down.

CLARE

So. Why can't they find someone else?

ALASTAIR

I'll be as quick as I can.

CLARE

Well you can at least help me carry this lot in first.

They approach the house.

ALASTAIR

That's weird.

CLARE

What?

ALASTAIR

More feathers.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

A bell rings. Noisy students tip out of a classroom into a corridor – amongst them is ELLA. LEANNE catches up with her.

LEANNE

Ella! Ella! Wait! I didn't think you'd be back so soon.

ELLA

Got bored.

LEANNE

What did they say?

ELLA

What?

LEANNE

The police.

ELLA

Same as everyone else. 'Forget about it.'

LEANNE

They're right. You should.

ELLA

What's happened to your face?

LEANNE

Nothing.

ELLA

I don't know why you go out with him. He's mental.

LEANNE

Yeah well I'm not – not any more.

ELLA

How come?

LEANNE

I told him we were finished.

ELLA

What did he say?

LEANNE

Just laughed. Thought I was joking. I tried getting him to turn back you know.

ELLA

Sure.

LEANNE

I swear. Told him he was being a prat. To stop the car.

ELLA

He didn't though, did he?

LEANNE

I've never seen him like that before. It was like he was on something. Pumped up. Then just as we get into town he slams on the breaks and tells me to get out.

ELLA

Did you?

LEANNE

Too right. He was going ballistic. Calling me a slut, tart...God's knows what else. I ended up walking home.

ELLA

You're better off without him.

LEANNE

Anyway if it weren't for me you'd still be out there.

ELLA

What do you want, a medal or something?

LEANNE

(BELLIGERENTLY)

No.

ELLA

I went back, you know.

LEANNE

What?

ELLA

To the Marsh - to see if I could find anything – proof. I thought maybe the shingle might've been disturbed where they'd been a struggle, or there'd be a torn piece of clothing or something. A shoe.

LEANNE

And was there?

ELLA

No. Nothing. Either the tide had washed it all away, or they were right and I had imagined the whole thing. I even sat in the bunker listening, thinking I might hear something – a trace – a whisper. (Pause) You know all that stuff he said about the Bird Man?

LEANNE

What about it?

ELLA

Is it true?

LEANNE

So they reckon.

ELLA

Well what if that's what I heard?

LEANNE

How do you mean?

ELLA

I don't know – but if she was murdered out there – then maybe...

LEANNE

What? You heard his mother's ghost?

ELLA

Possibly.

LEANNE

Now who's mental?

ELLA

All I know is I'm not making it up. I mean what if somehow...what if the sound got... like trapped.

LEANNE

Where?

ELLA

Inside the mirror – the vibrations...

LEANNE

Vibrations!

ELLA

Well I don't know – what else could it be?

LEANNE

How about your imagination for a start? You hear all this stuff and your mind goes into overdrive. Conjuring up all sorts.

ELLA

I didn't imagine it.

LEANNE

It's impossible. Sound doesn't just float around for years. Even I know that.

ELLA

But what if it did? What if was like...like fossils say – that fall into the sand – then layers of dust settles over of them and they lie there undisturbed for years – until this shape forms, a space – a memory of what was once heard. Locked away. Then eventually, over time, they re-emerge – like an ammonite....

LEANNE

...perfectly preserved. Then how come no one's ever heard these sounds before?

ELLA

Because no one ever listens. Not properly.

LEANNE

And you do?

INT. CLINIC DAY

ELLA repeats the recorded words.

AUDIOLOGIST

Try again.

RECORDED VOICE

Badge.

ELLA

Bad.

AUDIOLOGIST

Not quite.

RECORDED VOICE

Kill.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY DAY

The sound of a microfiche spinning through a scanner. It flaps as it comes off the spool at the end.

ELLA

If it's true then it'll be in here somewhere - in the archives. What's that one say?

LEANNE picks up a metal canister from the pile.

LEANNE

1940.

ELLA

Pass us the can.

ELLA takes a microfiche out of the can and laces it through the machine. She then spins through the archives.

ELLA (CONT.)

April. May. June...

LEANNE

What's that?

ELLA

Where?

LEANNE

Go back a bit.

She rewinds the microfiche.

LEANNE (CONT.)

More. Keep going. There.

ELLA

'17th June 1941. Woman found dead on marsh.' It must be her.

LEANNE

'The battered body of Maria Rossi was discovered yesterday morning on the eastern shore of the peninsula.'

ELLA

'Two local men, Thomas Benson and Derek Thorpe, are being questioned in connection with her murder.' I told you – didn't I?

LEANNE
Still doesn't mean that's what you heard.

ELLA spools on further.

ELLA
'Murder suspects released without charge.
Thomas Benson (22) of no fixed abode.
Derek Thorpe (18). 'Police appeal for
witnesses.' But why would they let them go?

LEANNE
Not enough evidence, presumably.

LEANNE gets up to go.

ELLA
Where are you going?

LEANNE
Just gotta check on someone.

INT. CLINIC DAY.

The test continues.

RECORDED VOICE
Wave.

ELLA
Wave.

AUDIOLOGIST
Good.

RECORDED VOICE
Reap.

ELLA
Weep.

RECORDED VOICE
Goose.

Pause.

AUDIOLOGIST
Ella? Are you alright?

EXT. HOUSE DAY

ELLA hammers on BIRD MAN'S door.

BIRD MAN
Alright. Alright. I'm coming. Coming.

He opens the door.

BIRD MAN (CONT.)
It's you.

ELLA
There's a bird – caught in a net. I think it's
hurt.

BIRD MAN
You shouldn't be here.

ELLA
I didn't know who else to tell. I thought it was
a bag at first, flapping in the wind.

BIRD MAN
Where is it?

ELLA
On the Marsh.

BIRD MAN
Alright. Wait there.

EXT. MARSH DAY

They hurry across the marsh together.

BIRD MAN
What were you doing out here anyway?

ELLA
Looking for you.

They approach the stricken bird.

BIRD MAN

OK. OK. Easy does it.

ELLA

What is it?

BIRD MAN

Brent Goose. From Alaska.

ELLA

How bad is it?

BIRD MAN

I'm not sure. Looks like its skin been rubbed raw.

ELLA

You're not going to kill it!

BIRD MAN

Heavens no. (In Italian) OK. OK. Easy does it. There.

Once free from the net the goose flies off.

ELLA

Will it be alright?

BIRD MAN

It will now. It'll spend the rest of the winter here before flying home in the spring.

ELLA

I came to thank you for the feathers – they're beautiful.

BIRD MAN

They wouldn't let me up to the ward.

ELLA

They didn't tell me.

BIRD MAN

Somehow I didn't think they would.

ELLA

I heard something though. Out here.

BIRD MAN

So I gather.

ELLA

A woman crying - like she was being attacked.

BIRD MAN

And you reported it.

ELLA

Yes. The thing is...the thing is I know what happened - about your mother.

BIRD MAN

Is that so?

ELLA

Yes.

BIRD MAN

And who told you? Your new friends?

ELLA

Yes.

BIRD MAN

Well you shouldn't believe everything you hear.

The BIRD MAN makes to go.

ELLA

No wait. Please.

BIRD MAN

I have to go.

ELLA

I didn't mean to upset you.

ELLA chases after the BIRD MAN.

ELLA

They think I'm making it up - that I imagined it. I just need to know...

BIRD MAN

Please. Leave me alone!

ELLA

What if that's who I heard?

BIRD MAN

Impossible.

ELLA

But what about the starlings?

BIRD MAN

What about them?

ELLA

You said it yourself - they can take in sound from all around – what if the mirrors are the same. Soaking it all in - buried deep. And somehow the sounds come out now.

BIRD MAN

Resurfaced?

ELLA

Exactly. I'd be a witness. I could help.

BIRD MAN

Even if it were possible – which it's not, it'd make no difference.

ELLA

Why?

BIRD MAN

Because I already know who killed her.

ELLA

You do?

BIRD MAN

Yes. Now go home.

The BIRD MAN hurries off leaving ELLA standing on the coast road. A car screeches to a halt beside ELLA on – music thumping. CRAIG winds down the window.

CRAIG

Where is she?

ELLA

Who?

CRAIG
Don't piss about. Tell me.

ELLA
I don't know.

The car screeches off.

INT. HOUSE DAY

ELLA opens the front door. She hears voices coming from the sitting room. She hangs up her coat and goes through.

ALASTAIR
Oh he's sound, is Jacko. If there's
clandestines he'll sniff them out – guaranteed.
Never bothers with the probe – just opens up
the container doors and smells for smoke.

WPC
Smoke?

ALASTAIR
Bonfires - from the camps. Gets into their
clothes.

ELLA enters the room.

CLARE
Ella.

WPC
Hello.

ELLA
What are you doing here?

ALASTAIR
They just want to ask you some more
questions.

WPC
You look like you've been running.

CLARE
(TO THE WPC)
Can I get you another tea?

WPC

No thank you. That night – before you were left out on the marsh – can you tell us where you went, in the car.

ELLA

Up to the farm.

WPC

Who's idea was that?

ELLA

Craig's. He thought it'd be a laugh.

WPC

And once you got there, what happened?

ELLA

We drove round the back – past the greenhouses and packing sheds. There were some caravans. We stopped and he got out.

WPC

Just Craig?

ELLA

Yes. He started banging on the sides of the caravans. Shouting. Howling.

WPC

And where were you while this was going on?

ELLA

Still in the car.

WPC

With Leanne?

ELLA

Yes. Why?

WPC

What was her reaction? How did she react when she saw what he was doing?

ELLA

She tried to stop him.

WPC

How?

ELLA

She shouted. She wound down the window
and shouted for him to leave them!

WPC

Them?

ELLA

He called them 'scum'.

WPC

Did you see anyone?

ELLA

No.

WPC

So no one came out?

ELLA

No.

WPC

Didn't you think that odd? That they didn't
retaliate in any way.

ELLA

I don't know. I suppose so. I didn't think.

WPC

What happened next?

ELLA

He undid his trousers and peed against the
caravan.

ALASTAIR

You never told us any of this.

WPC

Please. Let her finish.

ELLA

Then he got back in the car and we sped off.
It was like he was trying to frighten her or
something – like a warning.

WPC
When was the last time you saw Leanne?

ELLA
This afternoon.

WPC
Have you any idea where she is now?

ELLA
No.

INT. CLINIC DAY

The AUDIOLOGIST sits with ELLA.

AUDIOLOGIST
O.K. So now I'm going to put some noise
behind the words so it sounds more like your
normal classroom. Let's see how you do this
time.

The AUDIOLOGIST presses a few keys on her computer – we hear a recording of a noisy school corridor – children shouting.
A distorted phone conversation between ELLA and LEANNE cuts in. Their voices fading in and out as the signal breaks up.

RECORDED VOICE
Rage.

LEANNE is desperate.

LEANNE
He's gone mad.

RECORDED VOICE

Noose.

ELLA

I can't hear you. Leanne. You're breaking up.

LEANNE

You've got to help me.

ELLA

Where are you? I can't understand what you're saying.

LEANNE

He's going to kill me.

RECORDED VOICE

Hell.

Tyres screech as a car races along the coast road. Starlings swoop about, mimicking the sound of a car alarm – their wings beating – air rushing.

INT. BUNGALOW NIGHT

A plate smashes on the floor as ALASTAIR dries up at the sink.

ALASTAIR

Shit. (Calling upstairs) Ella! Come and lay the table! (To Clare) Where's the dustpan?

CLARE

Under the sink. What time are you on until tonight?

ALASTAIR

Late.

CLARE

Stupid question.

ALASTAIR clears up the broken plate and puts the pieces in the bin.

ALASTAIR

Everyone's running round like headless chickens at the moment.

CLARE

Why?

ALASTAIR

Someone's been caught taking bungs.

CLARE

What for?

ALASTAIR

Turning a blind eye. Lad got through
yesterday clinging to the rear axle of a wagon
– just inches from the road. Iraqi.

CLARE

And no one noticed?

ALASTAIR

Not until he was out the port. Jacko reckons
it's been going on for months. (Calls again)
Ella!

CLARE

I'll get her. She'll be on her iPod.

CLARE goes upstairs to fetch ELLA whilst ALASTAIR continues the conversation.

ALASTAIR

They had a whole family of Afghans a while
back too – parents and a baby – found
suffocated in a container. Driver claimed he
never heard a thing.

CLARE returns in a panic.

CLARE

She's gone.

ALASTAIR

What?

CLARE

Her window's wide open.

INT. CLINIC DAY

The ISTS signal is heard – a mix of foreign voices.

AUDIOLOGIST

So this is simply to fine-tune your hearing aid.
You don't have to do anything. Just listen.

The ISTS signal continues as we mix through to the noise of the packing shed.

INT. PACKING SHED/COLD STORE NIGHT

We hear the clatter of machinery as workers sit at a noisy production line sorting fruit. ELLA walks along the line desperately searching for LEANNE.

ELLA

I'm looking for Leanne. Have you seen
Leanne?

ROMANIAN

No.

ELLA

She works here sometimes. Have you seen
her? Leanne?

LITHUANIAN

Sorry. No.

ELLA

Does anyone here speak English? I'm
looking for Leanne.

ELLA goes through to the cold room. As she closes the door behind her so the noise of the ISTS signal dies – replaced by the hum of refrigerators. Cowering in the corner is LEANNE.

ELLA

Leanne! What are you doing hiding in here?
What's going on?

LEANNE

You were right.

ELLA

What?

LEANNE

They killed him.

ELLA

Who? What are you talking about?

LEANNE

Nadir.

ELLA

Who's Nadir?

LEANNE

He worked here – sorting.

ELLA

I don't understand. Slow down.

LEANNE

It was nothing at first – we just wanted to practice his English. I knew if Craig found out he'd go ballistic.

ELLA

You were seeing each other?

LEANNE

Someone must've seen us together – I don't know how. We were careful.

ELLA

So it was him in the caravan?

LEANNE

Yes. He must've found out that night – that's why he was being so weird. After I told him it was over – that I didn't want to go out with him – he came back here to find Nadir – to teach him a lesson.

ELLA

How do you know?

LEANNE

He told me.

ELLA

Craig?

LEANNE

Bragging. How he made him beg. You heard what he did to him.

ELLA

We've got to tell the police.

LEANNE

If he finds out I've told anyone he'll kill me.

A car screeches to a halt in the yard outside.

LEANNE (CONT.)

That's him.

CRAIG shouts from outside the shed.

CRAIG

Leanne!

LEANNE

Help me. Please.

CRAIG

Leanne! Get out here! Now! I know you're in there. I know you can hear me.

ELLA

Come on. Follow me.

LEANNE

Where are we going?

INT. BUNGALOW NIGHT

ALASTAIR enters ELLA'S room where he finds CLARE frantically searching through her things.

ALASTAIR

I've phoned everyone I can think of - no sign of her.
(Pause) What are you doing?

CLARE

What's it look like?

ALASTAIR

What if she comes back?

CLARE

Then she can damn well explain where she's been?

ALASTAIR

She had a fit when I just read her diary – she'll go mad if she finds you rifling through her things.

CLARE

She's taken her phone. There's nothing on her

computer either.

ALASTAIR

All that stuff about the farm.

CLARE

What about it?

ALASTAIR

Well it just goes to show, we don't know
the half of it, do we?

CLARE gets down on the floor.

CLARE

She's a teenager, what do you expect?

ALASTAIR

Still. I thought we could trust her.

CLARE

Pass us that torch.

ALASTAIR

What?

CLARE

There's something under the bed.

ALASTAIR

What if she's with them again?

CLARE

Who?

ALASTAIR

Craig and his mates.

CLARE

Give her some credit.

ALASTAIR

A boyfriend then. What if they've run away?
I mean let's face it – she's not exactly been
happy.

CLARE
You have a go. I can't reach.

ALASTAIR lies on the carpet and reaches under the bed.

ALASTAIR
If she walks in now this was your idea,
OK? It's just a shoe box.

She takes it from ALASTAIR, opens the lid and looks inside.

CLARE (CONT.)
Feathers.

ALASTAIR
Eh?

CLARE
It's full of feathers.

ALASTAIR looks inside the box.

ALASTAIR
I'll bloody kill him.

CLARE
Where are you going? Alastair!

EXT. BIRD MAN'S HOUSE NIGHT

ALASTAIR hammers on the front door.

BIRD MAN
Alright. Alright.

He opens the door.

ALASTAIR
Where is she?

BIRD MAN
Who?

ALASTAIR

Don't play games.

BIRD MAN

I don't know what you're talking about.

ALASTAIR

Ella. If you've touched her...

BIRD MAN

I swear. I'd never hurt her.

ALASTAIR

Ella! Ella! Where the hell is she?

EXT. MARSH DAY

Starlings circles overhead – the rush of air – the beating of wings. In amongst the sounds of the landscape we hear ELLA and LEANNE stumbling over shingle.

ELLA

Keep going. It's not far now.

Random words from the audiologist's recording continue to reverberate around the sound mirror.

RECORDED VOICE

Fib. Catch. Noose. Kill...

ELLA

Quickly. Down into the bunker.

EXT. COAST ROAD NIGHT

ALASTAIR follows the BIRD MAN along the road.

ALASTAIR

How do you know she'll be there?

BIRD MAN

I don't. I'm guessing.

The BIRD MAN peels off across the MARSH. ALASTAIR calls after him.

ALASTAIR
Where are you going?

BIRD MAN
It's a short cut – across the peninsula.

INT. SOUND MIRROR BUNKER NIGHT

ELLA and LEANNE take refuge in the bunker.

LEANNE
What if he finds us?

ELLA
He won't.

LEANNE

I'd no idea Craig would react like this. If I'd known I never would have talked to him. It were my fault. All Nadir wanted was a better life, a new start and I ended it for him.
I'm scared.

EXT. SOUND MIRROR NIGHT

Distorted sounds echo about the mirror as CRAIG is met by ALASTAIR and the BIRD MAN outside on the marsh.

CRAIG
Leanne! Get out here! Now!

ALASTAIR calls out.

ALASTAIR
You keep away from her!

CRAIG
This is none of your business.

ALASTAIR
I'm warning you – if lay so much as a finger on either of them.

CRAIG
You keep out of it. Both of you. (yells)
Leanne!

ALASTAIR
Ella! Are you in there?

ALASTAIR goes off towards the sound mirror whilst the BIRD MAN confronts CRAIG.

BIRD MAN
You heard him. Get out here.

The BIRD MAN picks up a piece of driftwood.

CRAIG
What are you going to do with that? Hit me?

CRAIG laughs.

CRAIG (CONT.)
Come on then. Let's see if it's true, what they say.

The BIRD MAN swings the club at CRAIG.

BIRD MAN
Go home.

CRAIG
Is this where you killed her then? Out here – all alone. You're trembling.

BIRD MAN
I'm not frightened of you.

CRAIG
No? What happened? She beg you, did she? On her knees.

BIRD MAN
I'm warning you.

CRAIG
Didn't listen though, did you? How many times did you hit her? Once – twice. Bang! She falls to the ground. Bang! Again. Back of the head. Blood everywhere.

BIRD MAN

Get out of here. Now!

CRAIG

Get some sort of kick out of it, did you?

The BIRD MAN finally loses control and lashes out, knocking CRAIG to the ground. We hear CRAIG'S agonizing cry reverberating around the sound mirror as the BIRD MAN stands over him with the piece of wood on the verge of beating him to a pulp. ALASTAIR appears from inside the bunker. He shouts across.

ALASTAIR

No! Stop! For God's sake!

ALASTAIR runs over to where the BIRD MAN stands shaking with rage.

ALASTAIR (CONT.)

It's alright. It's alright. The police are on their way.

INT. MORTUARY DAY

A steel mortuary drawer is pulled out on rollers. A sheet lifted to reveal the corpse.

LEANNE

Yes.

WPC

You're sure?

LEANNE

Positive.

ELLA

Do you believe me now?

ALASTAIR

Where was he from?

LEANNE

Somalia.

WPC

Although he had no papers, of course.

ELLA

I told you, didn't I? But you wouldn't listen.

WPC

There was no record of him. We couldn't have known.

ELLA

What about Craig? What'll happen to him?

WPC

He's been denied bail. We have your statement, as well as Leanne's. The evidence is strong. We have a good case. In the early hours of this morning Border Agency officers raided the farm. They found a number of illegal immigrants being held against their will. A local gang have been arrested and charged with offences related to human trafficking and forced labour.

INT. CLINIC DAY

ELLA completes her hearing test – repeating the random words.

RECORDED VOICE

Thud.

ELLA

Thud.

AUDIOLOGIST

Excellent.

RECORDED VOICE

Witch.

ELLA

Witch.

AUDIOLOGIST

Yep.

RECORDED VOICE

Wrap.

ELLA
Wrap.

AUDIOLOGIST
Well done.

RECORDED VOICE
Jail.

ELLA
Jail.

AUDIOLOGIST
Very good. Now I'm going to take you outside
and I want you to tell me what you can hear.

EXT. MARSH DAY

The sound of migrating birds fills the marsh as ELLA sits alone at the base of the sound mirror. After a while she hears someone approaching across the shingle.

BIRD MAN
I thought I might find you out here. I came to
apologise.

ELLA
What for?

BIRD MAN
The other day. You were just trying to help, I
know.

ELLA
It's me who should be apologizing.

BIRD MAN
No. It's understandable. He was worried for
you, that's all.

ELLA
You were right though – it was none of my
business.

Pause.

BIRD MAN

After they took my father we were put under curfew. All the women and children. He lived nearby – at the police house.

ELLA

Who?

BIRD MAN

Derek Thorpe. Everyone knew his father of course. He was the local superintendent. Mother felt sorry for him.

ELLA

Derek?

BIRD MAN

He wasn't right. He'd been starved of oxygen at birth. He'd run errands for us before the war for sweets. Then when the fighting started he'd bring us fruit from the farm. Apples. Pears, sometimes. He'd call round after dark to see if we were alright - if we needed anything; his father could get most things on the black market. One time he was in the kitchen – I'd come down for a glass of water and I saw him touching her – stroking her leg.

ELLA

Your mother?

BIRD MAN

Yes. She didn't like it.

ELLA

What did she do?

BIRD MAN

She slapped him across the face. And he left straight away. Only an hour, or so later he came back – with another man.

ELLA

Benson?

BIRD MAN

They forced her outside.

ELLA

You saw them?

BIRD MAN

They took out across the Marsh.

ELLA

Why didn't you say anything?

BIRD MAN

I was too frightened. After they'd gone I ran – just ran and ran, not knowing where I was going - until eventually I ended up here.

ELLA

The Listening Ear?

BIRD MAN

I hid in the bunker - in case they came looking for me. Stayed there all night – crouched whispering in the dark.

ELLA

Why?

BIRD MAN

I was convinced he'd be able to hear me.

ELLA

Who?

BIRD MAN

My father. That the words would be reflected off the mirror, and that wherever he was they'd find him – that he'd help us somehow.

(Pause)

The next morning I found her body on the beach. I tried to pull her up out of the water but she was too heavy – the waves kept dragging her back in again. So eventually I gave up and went for the police.

ELLA

You told them what you'd seen?

BIRD MAN

Of course.

ELLA

And?

BIRD MAN
What do you think?

ELLA
They didn't believe you.

BIRD MAN
A seven-year-old immigrant boy – it was my word against theirs.

ELLA sits beneath the Listening Ear listening to the sounds of the marsh. The birds – distant waves. The wind in the reeds.

ELLA V/O
Sometimes, when I've had enough – if my head hurts from too much noise – I'll take off my hearing aids – and just sit there, listening to a world no one else can hear.

We hear the handling sound of the microphone as ELLA removes her hearing aids. As she does so the background sounds disappear – layer by layer, until all that remains is the sound of migrating geese beginning their journey home - eventually they too disappear. Silence.

END CREDITS