

Out of the Frying Pan

A play written and performed by Sarah Barfoot

CHARACTERS:

SARAH

MUM

SAM (SISTER)

DAD

WOMAN

BOY

DAUGHTER

FD (FUNERAL DIRECTOR)

MAN

SARAH Is on stage for the duration of the play. V/O indicated for other characters.

RUNNING TIME approx. 45-60 minutes.

Out of the Frying Pan

(Avril 14th Piano music plays as audience arrive and Sarah sets up small props. Two clothes rails, trolley & table already in place? A chair and a stool. The handmade horses and button tin, Cardboard Puppet Box closed that will be opened later).

Q1 *(Sound of machine gun fire, Police & Fire Brigade sirens, air raid sirens, cars dropping from a height, falling debris, car horn (Flashing lights/smoke machine/ strobe lighting sfx 15 seconds)*

(Sarah is on stage, sitting perfectly still, partially visible)

Blackout

Lights up. Spotlight

(Sarah is dressed in an apron and sitting perfectly still in chair)

SARAH: I had a dream last night
It was the end of the world.
The sun was turning black,
The obsidian rolling clouds
Were moving in on themselves,
Folding up the sky
To pack it away.

I was in London
People were machine gunning on the street,
Cars were being thrown out of multi storey car parks,
The road was disappearing as I ran along it.
I tried to hide in my flat,
But it was cold and dark,
And I didn't recognise it.
The carpet was an unfamiliar print and
I kept forgetting how to get into my bedroom.

Q2 *(Sound of key unlocking)*

I heard the signal that I had to leave.

Q3 *Air raid siren*

As I neared the station
I realised
I'd left my cat
In his box

On the balcony.
I looked back
But I was no longer able to see him.
Just falling debris.

I rode on the train,
Towards Clapham Junction.
Someone called out,
I was surprised.

I didn't realise anyone else was here.
(Engage with audience. Beat. Breath)

Then it all went black. *(Blackout)*

A broken heart can do as much damage as a heart attack.

Q4 *(V.O/ Projections: Avocado, six tomatoes, red onion, coriander, chicken breasts. List 1).*

(Shopping trolley?)

(Spotlight on Sarah)

SARAH: It was a phone call. *(Sound positive)*
Just one phone call.
But it changed my life.

(Distinctive background sound every time 'MUM' speaks, air?)

Q5 MUM: Hi Sair, it's mum

I've found a lump

Well actually

It's two lumps.

In my neck.

Just small.

Very small.

Probably nothing to worry about.

SARAH: I was in the supermarket at the time
And I felt my legs go.
Even though
It was probably nothing to worry about
(It was there from the beginning)

*Sometimes I think you can tell so much about a person,
By standing next to them in the supermarket.
Sometimes a dodgy shop
Can be a deciding factor
In how I look at a person.*

SARAH: Yes mum, I'm still here.
I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. *(listening)*
Okay.
Let me know if I can do anything
Okay.
I'll come and see you when I get back.
I love you.
Byeee.

Q6 - *Music Box - remains beneath. (Piano music whilst I speak, children?)
(1st Gothic fairy tale: I will open the puppet box to reveal two puppets
suspended in the box. I will add something each time. It's as if this new world
appears.. Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall
behind).*

***There was a garden thick with foliage
Where nasturtiums and deadly nightshade grew.
There was a chestnut tree called Stickle Bud
And a shed full of bones.***

***Two children play in the dirt
They're making mud pies and drums
Out of thimbles covered with mouse skin.***

***They bury things just to dig them up
And see how the flesh has rotted from the carcass,
They have a three-legged frog in the pond
And talk to a sheep called Clementine.***

***One day one of them falls from a bike,
Her face is covered in scabs
Unrecognisable for weeks.***

They walk their rabbits on a lead

And leave letters in the fairy tree.

*Their father tells them if they dig in the dirt
They may end up in China or Australia.
So, they dig for hours.*

*One of them puts excrement on the roses
As they have seen mother do with manure.*

*And tips white paint on the black dog
After father's sarcastic remark,
'Go on then, tip it all over her. '*

*Mother reads a bedtime story,
It is about a rabbit in a snare.*

(echo)

*But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid.
Crying on the midnight air
Making everything afraid (echo)*

(Lights up, normal house state, spotlight on Sarah)

Two days later I'm away and I get a call.

Q7 - VO MUM

MUM: It's probably not important Sair
But I just thought I'd let you know,
I've got a biopsy scheduled.
On my neck.
I'm sure it'll be fine
The doctor even said so

SARAH: A biopsy. Oh. Don't worry. I'm sure it'll be fine, I love you.

Bookended at either side of my mother's diagnosis were two events.
The first.

EVENT 1 (*visually scaffolded on projector*)

My daughter had a party. (Do is say this over the noise?)

Q8 (*Blackout into Strobe. Sound of grime music, swearing, glasses chinking. Spitting, cycling, a dog barking, police sirens. Sarah moves in front of audience walks to the front as lights up into spotlight, as if returning home. Asking audience.*)

SARAH: (*walking about, looking at things, speaking over sound*)

What the fuck?!

Who's been in....

Is that sick?

Are they rizla?

Who did this?

Was it you?

Did you see anyone?

Who's been out the back?

Where the fuck is my bike?

Sarah: I arrive home to a bomb site.

A party has occurred in my absence.

Two people over to watch football.

Turned into twenty

Who bought booze

And then refused to leave

They swore so much

Out the back

My neighbours called the police.

They ransacked the cupboards

And hid under my bed.

They were thrown

Out the front

So, they climbed

Over the back gate

They took my new bike for a spin

And busted its wheels.

They stole my daughter's speaker

And her trainers.

(Hand sanitiser on table?)

Teenagers.

(Takes a seat in chair)

The next morning the **phone rings**. It's my sister. *She's always loud on the phone. Apparently we sound the same....*

Q9 V/O SAM: It's me. Have you spoken to mum? It's cancer. Advanced cancer. Stage 4. She didn't want to ring until you were back. *(shouty)*

SARAH: What?

Oh god!

Cancer?

Stage 4?

What does that even mean?

I spend the morning in a daze. Nothing feels real. I ring mum and she reassures me and then...

Apologises for the bad news.

(Important moment. Woman apologising for the inconvenience of dying on her family).

(Moving around)

They had done a needle biopsy on her neck.

They needed to do a surgical one

Under general anaesthetic.

But mum has a heart arrhythmia

This means they didn't want to put her under

Even so she's booked in

She gets as far as the anaesthetist

When they halt the procedure.

They're not happy

To take the risk

In case

She doesn't wake up.

Shit.

We enter a No Man's Land. **(Trauma Sound, War zone snippet)**

Q10 - possible *(This is a world, shown in lighting state and sound)*

The world of people who have cancer
Of Unknown Primary.

It becomes this shadowy creature
That is always following us
It hangs over everything in
Our day-to-day lives

We have no specific nurse assigned to mum.
She has started off in ENT,
But they now know
It's come from somewhere else.
But where?

We have to wait for the CT scan
It feels like an eternity.
Mum insists on going alone.
(With dad).

Q11 *FRYING PAN - remains, fades*

(Spotlight on Sarah. Sit in chair. Possible V/O. Could this be recorded, and I sit silently as it plays out)

I waited for her phone call.
All afternoon.
I knew I mustn't be in the house.
I knew
I had to be
Outside
By the sea
I couldn't drive
I caught the bus
Into town
And rang her

SARAH: Hello mum.
It's me. How did it go.

Q12 (Sampler C1) *V/O MUM: It's everywhere, Sair. In my lungs, my back, my stomach.*

(People walk past me, but I don't see a thing.)

I can't remember everything,
But I remember her saying quite simply.

**Q13 (sampler C#1) V/O MUM: I'm sorry.
I just wish it was better news.**

That's when the food starts.
As if every meal.
Will be our last supper.

(Movement, change in lighting state, white wash supermarket lighting, sound effects, cutlery, trolley full of food?).

Q14 (V/O projection, List 2)

Two camembert's

Four fillet steaks

Giant garlic

Black pepper

Spinach

Ice cream

Olives

Leeks

Biscuits

Metastatic carcinoma of unknown origin (speak these)

Widespread pulmonary metastatic disease

Subcutaneous tissue deposits in peri umbilical area

Intramuscular lesion in the left 8th rib

(Spotlight on Sarah)

One of the worst things
About hospital letters
Is that they are written
In another language.

I hide in the bathroom
And frantically google
Everything I don't
Quite understand.
Which is a lot.

In some ways it saves mum
And dad
From knowing how bad it is
Too early on.

Q15 (V/O projection, supermarket lights, List 3)

Eclairs

Gu Pots

Rice Puddings

(Spotlight)

Mum wants to eat cakes
And little pots of rice pudding
And chocolate
And eclairs
She washes them down
With cups of tea

The bastard thing about cancer
Is it makes you crave sugar
Yet it's the very thing you should avoid

We stay in this limbo state for a while
Nothing can really be certain
Until she has another biopsy
But they don't want to biopsy her neck
Without a general anaesthetic

So, we wait. And wait.

Q16 - sfx Sound of clock ticking (Trauma War zone snippet)

It's decided that she must see the cardiologist
(Pacey, walking?)
But the appointment is months away
A nagging voice keeps saying
We don't have time

(Again, it's there from the beginning.)

I scare myself by reading
Everything I can find online.
I calculate we might have six months
Without treatment
(Possible blackboard)
That might be extended to eight
If we're lucky

I find myself leaving messages on people's answerphones saying

Q17 (V/O)

SARAH:

***My mum has advanced cancer
You've offered her an appointment in four months' time,
I'm scared she's going to die before the appointment.***

I have to beg people to shift things
By this time lumps have appeared on her stomach
Finally, we get a date for the cardiologist
And they schedule a biopsy
On the same day.

We don't want to cancel either
I ask the advice of her GP
We decide to try
For both

Except on the morning of her appointment
It becomes clear
She can't
So, she opts for the stomach biopsy.

The lump they remove has a tail
Seems to go right through her
All the way to her **Pancreas**
Mum is stoic
And brave.

Q18 - Music box

^{2nd} Gothic fairy tale- It's as if this new world appears. Piano music whilst I speak, we may hear a hint of the breakdown song that will follow later).

(Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind).

*One is dressed for a party
Wearing her favourite black velvet dress
With a white collar.
Just before the doorbell rings,
She runs through the lounge,
And trips skinning both her knees*

*Her sister experiments
With kissing a lightbulb,
She is left with huge
Callouses where her lips
Should be.*

*She remembers when mother
Nearly amputates her finger
In the car door,
Outside the fruit shop
In the village.
A lady runs out with an apple.*

*That same day she loses her bear, Jesus Christ
In the back of the car and screams
For his return
At the top of her voice.
'I've lost Jesus Christ.'
Till all the street goes quiet.*

Q19 (V/O projection, CHEMOTHERAPY list 4, Supermarket lighting)

Aveeno hand cream
Dry mouth saliva pastilles
Gloves
Warm scarf
Thick socks
Pillow or blanket

Anti-sickness drops

Painkillers

Bottled Water

Rubbish magazine

Snacks

(Spotlight)

I never realised there would be a shopping list for chemotherapy.

(Have these things? Aveeno hand cream offered to audience)

That Aveeno hand cream

Is the only one that works.

That patients' mouths can become so dry

That they want to suck saliva pastilles.

That their hands and feet

Can get so cold (rubbing hands)

That they want to wear thick socks

And gloves.

In bed.

Mum's first chemo session is on my birthday.

Q20 (V/O projection)

Yoghurt

It is hard watching someone

Who loved food,

Lose their appetite.

This is when we decide to introduce cannabis oil,

With the oncologist's approval

We do our research

From the Medical Cannabis book

Source the highest-grade oil we can find

And have it made.

Mum, who has never been stoned before

Dreams of being chased down the street by **Chipolata Sausages** *(some sort of imagery?!)*

And of devouring **Sardine Sandwiches**

One day she levitates above her chair

So, she says.

And she sleeps

Q21 (V/O projection, List 5, supermarket lighting)

White bread

Sardines

Ketchup

Butter

Chipolatas

Yoghurt

(Spotlight)

I stay with mum.

We watch Escape to the Country,

And some gardening programme

With Charlie Dimmock.

It's the first-time dad doesn't joke about her nipples

I start accompanying mum

On her weekly shops

To the supermarket.

Just like I had done as a child

These trips were the highlight

Of my early youth

We would have breakfast

In the café

Fried egg and chips

I loved the way they turned the eggs

Q22 SFX Frying sound REMAINS

And tipped them,

So perfectly,

Out of the Frying Pan

I tried countless times at home

But it never worked

We would shop for that evening's dinner

Something simple

A favourite was to have

Tomato soup

Fresh baguette

And a selection of different cheeses

Or a seafood supper
Prawns and seafood sticks
Cockles and mussels
Pickled herrings
And Homemade
Rose Marie Sauce

Q22 fade out

I would hide make up in the trolley
When it was found at checkout
I would offer to pay for it
With my pocket money
Which I'd do for two weeks
Until she'd let me off.

On our last trip
Mum has a coughing fit just before the till
The woman looks at her and says,

Q23 V/O Woman: Thank goodness
For a minute I thought you were dying. (*Awful voice/ accent/ cackle*)

Mum doesn't go back

*It's strange because even though I knew she was dying.
Part of me never believed she would actually die.
I played these games in my mind*

*If I don't step on that crack in the pavement,
If I cross the road then,
If I overtake that car,
If I am kinder,
She will live*

Q24(*3rd Gothic fairy tale. It's as if this new world appears. Piano music whilst I speak, we may hear a hint of the breakdown song that will follow later).*

(Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind).

*There were childhood haircuts in Cheryl's
Now a Centre for Ayahuasca.*

*She remembers them building big traps
To catch people
With the neighbourhood boys.
Trenches covered with twigs and leaves
In the heart of the big woods.*

*Here there was also a quarry
Where they would slide down,
Bums on sacks screaming & hollering
Into the trees.*

*Their father hides money in the stream as they walk
With the dog
For years,
They are convinced
That you can find money anywhere.*

*And we can see the mother,
And we know that something's not quite right.
Or is it?*

Projection: Pre Christmas

Q25 (V/O / Projection/ Supermarket lighting)

3 x Vax BLADE 2 MAX

(Spotlight)

SARAH: Mum wants to order everyone hoovers in time for Christmas
Something we'll use every day

By this time, she is having trouble sounding out a whole sentence
Due to breathlessness
So, I pretend to be her on the phone
Under her direction

Afterwards I notice she is watching me intently.
(Seated in chair)

She asks me,

Q26 how is everyone, Sair?
I mean are they coping, okay?
Are they sad?

(Pause)

I reply

They are okay.

Everyone is sad.

I'm really sad.

My heart is breaking.

(Facing empty chair, maybe to audience? Lights on both chairs)

But you

You are being amazing.

And how you are being

Is making things

Just a little more bearable.

You are so strong

And so brave

And I just want to say

Thank you,

Thank you

For everything.

I love you

So much.

Love you

So much

(V/O repeat)

Love you so much

(Light down on me, spotlight on empty chair)

(Some kind of background sound, frying?).

Then she says,

Q27 (V/O Mum:)
I have a horrible feeling, Sair

That history
Is repeating itself.
When my own mum,
Your granny, was dying
I was your age now
And she was mine

She was in hospital in Surrey
It was autumn time
I was travelling up there in the day
Then rushing back to pick you up
From school
You'd only just started then
You were five
And Sam was nine
It was very stressful

I had to walk through child oncology
To get to her ward
And I was surrounded
By all these lovely kids
Who were dying of cancer.
They hadn't even had
A chance at life
Some of them
Had been in hospital
For most of their lives,
Had lots of operations
And treatments
I always remember that

You know it's not so bad
I've had a good life
I'm nearly seventy
You know
I've been lucky.
I always think
It is what is
You know
It is what it is.
(Light up)

(V.O)

(EVENT 2) Projector

Weeks later I'm back at my home
I'm chatting to mum on the phone
She's just been put on a higher dose of morphine
We've been speaking for about 10 minutes.

When I say, what are you having for dinner mum?

MUM: Oh, nothing Sair, I don't think, your father says he's had a stroke

SARAH: What? Can you put him on the phone?

Q28 VO DAD: *(voice over)* zzzzzzzzmmmmmzzzzhhh

SARAH: Dad I've got to go.
I'll call you straight back.

It's as if the next few moments happen in slow motion. I ring my sister. Who rings an ambulance. I ring my parent's neighbours and my best friend's parents. They all go and wait at the house. I call mum back. Dad who is slurring and staggering unrecognisably is also, by this time, refusing to go in the ambulance. He is put onto a stretcher by the paramedics and he's rushed into hospital.

(Use sound to indicate the walls cave in).

(Lights low, smoke machine

Q29 Cyndi Lauper – Time After Time distorted piano)

(Sarah is hovering in time to the music either on a rug on stage or around the audience.)

(Lights up, spotlight)

Sarah: Dad stays in hospital for a week.

He is left with a slight slur.
It turns out this is his third stroke
The worst yet.
But he's been lucky.
He moans every single day
About not being able to smoke his pipe.

Q30 - V/O: Ensure drinks. Supermarket lighting, list 8

Nothing
(Spotlight)

The day mum goes into the hospice
The dog is allowed upstairs

It takes about an hour to get her downstairs.
It's hard to move her on the stretcher.
She's in pain
Or she wants to fall asleep.
And she's out of breath.

We talk about roast potatoes
In the ambulance
How mine have never been
As good as hers
How I will spend
A lifetime
Trying to match them
I notice the paramedic
Is looking at me
In the rear-view mirror
She's crying.

They tell us mum has
Stabilised in the hospice
They tell us she might be able to come
Home for Christmas

The thing I find the hardest
Is, I always thought
There would be

One more conversation
The one in which
I'd say everything.

Everything
That was left

Instead,
I say very little
Because something profound
Beyond words,
Connects the two of us
Makes us transparent to each other
And when it happens
The distinction between us vanishes
This treasure box of love and death.

I'm fine,
I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine.

Q31 - MUSIC BOX

(3rd Gothic fairy tale. It's as if this new world appears. Piano music whilst I speak, we may hear a hint of the breakdown song that will follow later).

(Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind).

***There is a birthday party
After the huge hurricane.***

***There is no electricity
So mother cooks on the open fire***

***Charcoal sausages,
Baked potatoes,
Warm bread rolls
And Aubergine dip.***

***There are indoor fireworks
Snakes alive
That spread like rampant worms
Across the table***

*Coiling and twisting
From grey pellets
In some twisted fornication*

*Her sister scares an anxious child
Clasping a black wig in her hand
Clutching it like a giant spider
She chases her through the garden*

*Mother tells them about the pig farm catching fire
They are standing in the honeysuckle
Smelling its sweet, heady scent*

*And then mother stumbles
Or is she dancing?*

*The echoes of cries,
Haunt her dreams.*

(Spotlight)

(Bright light, whitewash).

Q32 V/O projection: Nothing

SARAH: One morning you wake up and everything changes.

I remember that morning so clearly (train noise)

I'm teaching a workshop.

I arrive at the venue
Ten minutes early,
So I lay down.
A boy rushes in,
He says,

Q33 V/O BOY: Hey!!! Something crazy happened to me after your last workshop!

I left and I was so open,

I bumped straight into this girl
On the street
And I spoke to her
And since then, we've been going out!
I wonder what will happen today!!!

SARAH: At lunch I have a sense of calm
I'm eating my sandwich
When I find a beautiful poem on my phone
The Desiderata.

The workshop finishes
We say our goodbyes
I'm in the nearest shop
At the till
When my phone rings
It's the hospice.

SARAH: I see the girl at the till's face change
As she registers mine
I grab my things,
And I run
As fast as I can
To the station
There are suddenly so many obstacles in my way. 01

Q34 (*Lights down, strobe, lights remain low, nearly blackout for the duration of wailing approx. 2 mins **Sound of WARZONE followed by The breakdown, polyphonic singing into wailing***)

SARAH: It feels as if the sky is falling
The sun is turning black
The obsidian rolling clouds
Are moving in on themselves
Folding up the sky
To pack it away
(I'm in London)

People are machine gunning on the street (*twisting, rushing, running, seated*)
Cars are being thrown
Out of Multi-story car parks

The road is disappearing as I run along it.
I ride on the train to Clapham Junction. 25 SECS

(Blackout) WAILING REMAINS-into screams, then single note, then breath

(Lights up, white wash)

(Silence. Absolute silence)

SARAH:

(The detail we remember in shock)

I look around and it is as if I am watching everything
From under the water
To the right of me there is a middle-aged woman
With dark shoulder length hair
And her son
He must be about seven or eight years old
They have bags from Hamleys
One from John Lewis

A group of girls are sitting opposite me
They have bags from H&M
One of them has grey jeans on
She has the same earrings as my daughter

Q35 (Sfx train noise)

Suddenly the sensory overload of the train is too much.

I smell fast food. *(gagging)*
Macdonalds or KFC
I gag.

I am surrounded by Christmas Shoppers.
And I am going to see my mother.
To say good-bye.

I kiss my mother's head
And hold her hand.
And even though

I know
It's too late
Every part of me is screaming
Don't die, for god's sake, don't die
Silently wailing
Willing My life force
Into her
Sending my energy
Through my fingertips
Holding her hands
Till they became warm,
And I can
Kid myself
That she is
Still alive.

I imagine
I can
See her eyes open.
See her smile.
Feel her breath
Upon my face.
Hear her voice
One last time.

I have never seen a body
In such close proximity before
The expression on her face
Seems to register
The exact moment her
Spirit has gone
Out of her
As if it had been
Sucked back
By the universe
Leaving just her shell
Her outer layer.

Q36 (*HOME, spotlight, warm lighting, night bird sound+cicadas*)

Later,

We gather at
Mum and dad's house,
Which I guess
Is just
Dad's house
Now.

Dad is faffing around in the garden and moaning about the cat mewing as he's already fed her.

I go downstairs and realise there is a large cat.
Sitting on the balcony
Crying.

That's not your cat.
Look there's two of them.
Where did that one come from?

This cat sleeps on dad's bed
For the next two weeks.
Takes itself up to bed at 9pm.
Miaow's until he comes up.

We call her Pat the cat.
Comfort ourselves with the silly notion
That mum has come back
In cat form
To look after dad.

Until two weeks later when dad takes her to the vet,
And she turns out to be a boy called Hector, from Heathfield,
Who's been missing for a fortnight.
(Levity, lightness, pull audience back)

Q37 (V.O Long walks, sunrise, sunsets, birdsong)
(Spotlight)

SARAH: I

I start to take long walks in nature
And whilst walking I make up lists in my mind
Such as the weird things I did in childhood:

Q38 (V.0) Eat dry pot noodles
Insist on eating fish and chips cold
(Left overnight and covered in vinegar)
Drink vinegar
Stick fresh mint up my nose
Throw up on every school trip
Wear earmuffs to school
Read all night

Or the things that I know mum really loved:

Q39 (V.O LIST 10) Birdsong
All animals
Especially horses
Smelly cheese
Watching The Supervet
The Power of Love by Jennifer Rush
The Open Road by E.V. Lucas
Beer (until she wasn't allowed it anymore)
Love Joy
Hugh Grant

I notice that I am seeing the clouds in a way
I had never done
Before

For always
it will be
Before and after.

I start a ritual of watching the moon
Like a storyteller
Looking up at the night sky
Wondering where my story began
And how it will end

In no version of my story,

That I had mapped out
Did I see myself
Becoming motherless
In my thirties.

I always thought there would be enough time.
To become who I should

I start to fantasise about rewinding my life
It becomes a bit of an obsession
If I could just grab the fabric of my existence
And pull it back
Step behind the curtain.
It is cold and strange
In this new place
And I find it hard
To let anyone in.

I take comfort in
The fact that a cup of water
Left in my back garden
Will try to grow
New things

That my house plants,
Even when I have nearly killed them,
Will sprout
New shoots.

I am shell shocked that someone
Who wanted so much
To live,
Can die.

As human beings
We are first and foremost
Observers of this world.
Vestigial outlines on a cave wall,
Creators of portraiture,
Makers of the photograph

Yet I remind myself

I am also
An integral part
Of this world
I perceive
I am within it

Made up of the same light signals

The same atoms
That are exchanged
Between pine trees
In the mountains
And stars
In the galaxies.

My human energy vibrates
To the energy
Of the environment

Sometimes I imagined
I was independent of nature
That what happened
In the physical world
Had no bearing on me.

But when I consider
What it is to be human
I am reminded

That air, water, fire and earth
Are constantly moving
And like a drop of water
Falling back into the ocean
I am part of that movement.

Q40 (*Lights Up, trolley. Supermarket lighting, background noise of children whining.*)

Sarah: It's Christmas.
We carry on for the kids.

(Awful Christmas music, whining children)

Q44 MUSIC BOX

(4th Gothic fairy tale. Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind. Music box)

*Her tooth is wobbly
Her sister ties
String to it
Attaches it to a wooden door*

*Slams it over and over
Till there is fresh blood.*

*She breaks her clavicle
Falling down the stairs
And learns to ride her bike
With one hand.*

*They make a cat poo bomb
With a gang of boys
Burn down
Half the orchard.*

*She cuts the breasts off her Cindy dolls
Refuses to sleep*

Recites things to no avail

*A group of owls is called a parliament,
A group of emus is called a mob,
A group of larks is called an exaltation
A group of doves is called a piteousness,*

Picks her ears till they are red raw.

*A group of ravens is called an unkindness,
A group of flamingos is called a flamboyance,
A group of peafowl is called an ostentation,*

***A group of parrots is called a pandemonium,
A group of woodpeckers is called a descent.***

***One day,
Dressed as a Queen's Guard,
She pulls the wings off a fly
The one and only time.
Mother strikes her.***

(Spotlight)

SARAH: Like in the new (*jump on blocks*)
Flush of love
I want to go out in the street
And shout
My mother is dead!!!
Scream it from the rooftops
Make the world listen.

I am amazed that people can't
See it in my face,
That they don't instantly know.

I want to go back to normal,
But I can't
Because normal no longer exists
There is this new place,
Where everything looks the same
On the surface,
But underneath
Things have profoundly
Shifted.
There is no going back.

Sometimes when I get in
All I can do
Is lie on the floor
And howl.
I visit mum in the funeral directors
I want to take a copy of the Desiderata
To read it to her and

To place in her coffin.
I want to cut a lock of her hair
One each
For all of us to keep.
I'm at dad's
And all I can find
Are the pinking shears.

(Scissors shadow)

I have memories of us cutting up fabric
With these giant zig zag blades as kids
And sewing things with mum.

I'm in the foyer of the funeral home
with a dog under one arm
and a huge pair of scissors
under the other
I must look like a mad woman.

I notice they are staring at me for a few minutes
Before it dawns on them
To ask,

Q45 V/O FD: Can we help you madam?

SARAH: Oh yes, please. Would it be ok to cut a lock of mum's hair?

Q46 V/O FD: Of course, but we can do that for you. You don't need to worry.

They do,
And box it up with ribbons.
I didn't know.
I've never done this before.
Mum is wearing make up
And has her hair styled
It doesn't look like my mum.
I wonder where she is.

I start to become fascinated
By the idea of presence.
What it is

How it sits
In our consensual
Concept of time.

Interpretation alone
Cannot do justice
To its dimension

I watch a documentary about Quantum theory
And time travel principles.

48 V/O & Animation:

A corollary to the time travel principles
Is the idea that you can access
Alternate or parallel realities.

Time can be envisaged as a hologram
And the past is configured
By the way
In which you remember events.
But according to quantum theory
At every possible moment
There are multiple
Possible outcomes

Mathematics in its highest forms
Is an abstract language
That pays homage
More to the realm
Of the artist
Or the dreamer.

Super string theory
A unifying theory
Contends that our universe
At its most basic component
Is composed of vibrating loops
In order for the maths of string theory
To make sense
It is postulated
That our universe

Must have
At least eight
To twelve dimensions.

Sarah: When you begin
To change the certainty
About how past events
Are put together
You help re-establish
A flexibility of consciousness
In which the patterns
That hold things
Together
As a remembered
Construct
Can be loosened
Enough
To allow for your mind,
To enact and reencode
The sequence of those events.

I don't tell anyone
But I imagine a place
Where mum still exists
A place where I am with her
I am stroking her hair
I rest my head on her stomach
I play this time and again,
Again, and again,
On a loop
Inside my mind.

(music - PIANO)

The night before the funeral I have a dream.
Mum is dressed in her favourite maroon sweatshirt.
She is younger and looks well.
She is rotating as though she's on a cake stand.
Turning around and round.
She's smiling at me.

Q49 MUSICBOX (5th Gothic fairy tale. Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind).

The mother dreams she is in the old house and the daughters can't see it, but they know it exists because once upon a time they lived there.

She is shaking,

Or is she dancing?

The light is low and it flickers

Sometimes it is hard to tell.

She is surrounded by her daughters

And sometimes the lines blur,

So, they became one creature,

One big giant creature

That is either shaking or dancing,

Or fitting and crying

But is she really fitting?

Or is she laughing?

And no one is certain

Until the end

When the scream rings out...

She is going into room by room

and calling out things as she sees them and so in a sense, they are there too,

except they are not. They are in the living room of the new house with a

bucket and a commode and a mother who has transformed overnight into a

tiny frail bird. A blackbird.

Lights up:

(Put on sweatshirt)

The day of the funeral is beautiful

We have a private family cremation

We have painstakingly picked out the music

Blackbird by the Beatles

And the flowers

Purple and white
And typed a tribute.
Such a surreal thing to do
On Christmas eve.

We are all locked in hands and sorrow,
tears about to fall
When the first strains
of the music begin.

Q50 "Yesterday all my troubles seemed so far away"

Slowly
I realise
Something
Is not quite right

Q51 "Why she had to go I don't know they did not say"

(Gasp)
My sister half mouths, half whispers, "What the fuck?"
Oh my god
They have mixed up the music.
A slight ripple of realisation passes through us
And where the tears
Were about to cascade
There's a slight glimmer
Of a wry smile
A stifled giggle
And the sense
That mum
Somewhere
Somehow
Would be laughing
At this massive cock up.

(Hold the toy horse mum made and take it to the puppet box)

Q52 PANIS ANGELICUS piano

Later,
In the church
Mum's best friend
Tells us the story
Of how they rode to Cornwall
On horseback
Aged eighteen.

They covered five hundred miles.
In twenty-eight days.
Rode up by Chanctonbury Ring
Across Stone Henge
Before there were any restrictions.
Their bums were so saddle sore
They had to crawl into bed at night.
How a girl,
In pink fluffy slippers,
Jumped out of her bedroom window
And joined them on her carthorse
For several miles.

Afterwards she gives us some photos of the trip
That we've never seen before.
In one mum is laughing,
Head thrown back,
Holding on to her horse's tail.
Leaning,
So, it takes her weight.
Carefree.

Q53 (V.O) BUCKET LIST
Do something that scares you.

SARAH:

Three months after mum's death
I abseil off the I360 for Martlets.
I'm terrified, but it's the most exhilarating thing.
And straight away, I want to do it again.

I take part in a death café,
An online group for the grieving
I am struck
by an image,
Shared anecdotally.
In Muslim ritual
People in robes
Will visit the house in mourning.

A taut white sheet is spread out in front of them
And upon it,
Tamarin seeds are placed
The visitors,
Clad in white robes,
Will sit and count out these black seeds
Each one a prayer for the dead.
A blessing in helping them pass on
To the other side.
No exchange of words is necessary
Just this gentle ritual
Of repetitive action
Which can last for days.
Afterwards the seeds are returned
Having passed through hundreds of hands of mourners.

More than anything
I miss the feeling of
Sitting next to mum
Wordlessly recalibrating.
Breathing each other in and out.

I decide to take a scatter pod
Of mum's ashes
To India.
We are blessed by the Ganges
In Varanasi.
Then I travel north with them,
To cross the border into Nepal.
At four in the morning,
I release mum's ashes,
At the Himalayan viewpoint
In Pokhara.

The sky is ablaze.
I have never seen such a place
Where land meets sky.
Then I understand.
The world is on fire.
And every creature does what it can

To survive.

I think
Of mum.
How she is present
In every older woman
That I see.

I think of the many
Strong,
Wise women
I know.
I think of how we
exhaust ourselves
In many roles,
Trying to keep pretty,
To stay sexy,
To be a caring mother,
To keep peace
And not risk exile
Or violence

I see my daughter
At her most beautiful
And yet so afraid.

I mourn the fact that
I will never again
Sit between my mother,
And my daughter,
And I realise how lucky I am
That I ever did.

Most of us
Are scared
Of being seen
Of really being seen
Because we are judged
So harshly.

It dawns on me that without ritual,
Humans live in nostalgia.

I make a promise to myself.
To live the best life, I can.

Then I think about time,
How it's changing as I get older.
I think about jellyfish, that are immortal
And mayfly, that only live for one day.

Here I am (*Bellowing into mountain*)
At this point in the middle,
Somewhere between teenage
And old age

If I live to average life expectancy
I have lived almost exactly
Half my life.

If I live to the age my mother was
I have
twenty-seven
years left
Left. (*Bellowing into mountain*)

I wonder how long
I have,
Till I become
Invisible.

Q 54 MUSICBOX 01(6th Gothic fairy tale Puppet Box lit with up light, to create large shadows on the wall behind. Music Box music).

***Her hands have taken on the shape of feet,
And they can no longer pick things up.
Her feet dip into the gentle pillow
Of her imaginary feathers
Which stop her from standing.
When she sings, it is a delicate cry,
And all the while she is trembling.***

*The delirium tremens-leave her body
With a violence
Not one of them is accustomed to.*

*Then they are in the car,
The daughters,
And no one can speak
As they follow the ambulance.
The mother's skin has gone black,
The air in the car can be cut with a knife.
Suddenly an army
Of Hells Angels appear
Out of nowhere
Q55 (SFX motorbikes, revving engines)
Riding their bikes
Either side of the car
Like chivalrous convoy.*

(Move to middle)

*It's a sign. She will live.
We were so grateful,
The daughters,
To be given a second chance,
After her recovery from alcohol addiction.
It was incredible,
To watch mum come back.
Fall in love with her garden,
Fall back in love with
With her life.*

(Lights up, whitewash)

SARAH: On the morning of Mother's Day
I wake to the sound of loud birdsong

Q56 sfx BIRDSONG

I take it as some sort of sign.
I decide to visit the Friend's Meeting house.
Many of mum's ancestors
Were Quakers.
I want to sit in silence,
To feel close to her.

(Move to chair)

I am sitting quite still
There is a beautiful sense of peace
When a slight shaft of sunlight
Slips in,
Seeps through the window in front of me
Refracting the light,
Illuminating grains of dust like glitter,
Magnifies,
I look up.

(Raises hands to face)

And I suddenly have the strongest sense
That I have my mother's mouth
That my face is her face
My jawline is hers
I lift my fingers to my lips
And gently touch my skin.
She is here
She is in me
I think.
How have I
Not noticed this before
She was here all along.

It gives me an incredible
Sense of safety
Something I realise
I haven't felt
For a long time.

I recall something

I have read Online.
All the eggs
A woman will ever carry
Form in her ovaries
While she is a
Four-month-old foetus
In the womb
Of her mother.

This means
Our cellular life
As an egg
Begins in the womb
Of our grandmother.

We vibrate
To the rhythms
Of our mother's blood
Before she herself
Is born.

And this pulse
Is the thread
Of blood
That runs
All the way back
Through the grandmothers,
To the first mother.

And then, a man stands up and says:

Q58 MAN: I have lived and worked
In 36 countries all over the world
And what it has taught me
Is that women
Hold things together.
In every community,
Even in some
Where they are judged
Or shunned,
Or forced to live

On the outskirts
Of life,
They are there
Showing up,
Looking after the children.
Keeping things going
As best they can.
Whether this is at the heart
Of the community
Or as an outsider
It is their strength and love
That keeps things
Ticking over.
For that reason
And that reason alone
I believe every day should be
Women's day,
Not Mother's Day.
It's not just
Once a year
But
Every. Single. Day.
And without them,
We would be lost.
The world would be lost.

Sarah: I look at my friend
We are both crying
I think I might
Stand up
Recite the poem
I have read at the funeral
(*Desiderata*)

Except I don't
Because
I can't hold it together.
Enough to speak.
Instead, I stand up.
I am looking around
Feeling

Something,
Something
I can only describe

As the opposite
Of loneliness

When something vibrates,
The electrons of the universe
Resonate with it
Everything is connected
The greatest tragedy
Of human existence
Is the illusion
Of separateness

I am not here alone,

When starlings fly together,
In a murmuration,
Each bird is aware of seven others,
Surrounding them
Like a star.
That's how they find their formation
And keep moving.

We are not alone.

In my mind I am dancing with mum,
We are twirling each other round.
(White umbrella)

Suddenly
I remember
Being a toddler
Walking in Dunorlan Park,
Looking up at the sky and seeing the Canada Geese,
Calling out
'Look mum!'
'Another Country Swan'.
I remember her saying how clever that was,
For a child.

To know it was a similar bird,
But also, that it belonged somewhere else.

Then I am six years old
Lying in the backseat of the car
With my head in her lap
As she strokes my hair
Watching the sunlight
As it flickers through the trees

I remember the last time
In the hospital
When the wheelchair was sticking
And would only go back wards
Unless you pushed really hard
So, I ran
Putting my back into it
And we sped up the corridor
Mum and I
Both of us laughing
As we flew out
Through the revolving doors
Into the night air.

Maybe tomorrow,
I will go for a sea swim
Look up at the clouds
Feel the sun
On my skin
Share a picnic
With friends
Reach out for the stars
And aim
Just once
To touch them

What a thing it is,
This life,
To love.
And here we are

All just doing
The best we can.

I always think.
It is, what it is.
You know.
It is, what it is.

Blackout.

(The Power of Love- Jennifer Rush, just the intro. Then an original song by Suzi Hicks, Lost Cats in the Weald, either sung live or recorded).

