

Equilibrium

Day time - We're in a modest, well-kept kitchen. Daylight shines through a sash window, half propped open. Some subtle outside sounds can be heard, vague utterances of life - children at play, birds, leaves rustling - a peaceful afternoon. Our protagonist is stood at the kitchen counter surrounded by ingredients, weighing scales and a photographed picture of a woman, she's audience-facing, sleeves rolled up, rolling pin in-hand preparing a dough from the ingredients throughout the monologue - rubbing her hands with flour, weighing things on the scales periodically until they are eventually balanced. As she speaks she sometimes does so over her shoulder, to a character not visible on stage. She's in her mid 60's, wearing a white shirt, thick rimmed black glasses & a floral pinnie, hair pushed back off her face. The setting is overtly suggestive purposefully, but ambiguous of era. With a broad but softly spoken Lancashire accent she begins;

Woman: D'you know, I love it here. This house... I feel like, if I could marry some part of this building, I would. Like one of those people who wed fairground rides or cars and dry hump them... Who's anyone to judge anyway? And, who's to say that any one persons definition of insanity's gospel? ... whatever gets you through the night I say... Lest we forget people used to think women were insane if they 'spoke out of turn' or proclaimed to enjoy sex... There are many people who still actually believe this.

I find women so beautiful I can hardly take it sometimes. I have to divert my eyes or else I might just fall in too deep, never to be seen again. The female gaze might just be the most enrapturing implication of the human condition. Though you wouldn't think it to look at me now, people thought I was devastating when I was young... And, that this somehow mitigated me from sadness. As if it were part of some accepted universal truth, that good looks are an antidote to sorrow. But, you know; It's always beauty that kills you in the end.

I heard a man say that on a documentary once. It was about a drug called Sco-polamine, I think. Something like that... Yeah, that was it - they called it 'Devil's breath' because when you blow it onto someones face it turns the poor bastard into a helpless zombie with little recollection of what's happened once they've come round. In Ecuador women were being sent to entice clueless men with money, getting close enough to emit the poison before robbing them blind as they became quickly knocked unconscious. The way he said it seemed romantic somehow - He'd had this terrible experience happen to him yet when he described the lady who perpetrated the crime it was with awe and tenderness, completely spellbound by her beauty...I thought I was the ultimate romantic, til' I heard that.

I've often felt as though I could die on the spot at the mere sight of a beautiful woman. No need for any intoxicating drug. When I was a girl I used my looks against men all the time... to wield a power I didn't think I could possess in any other way, it's what we're taught... Not old enough to be experienced, too small town to be 'intellectual', oh but I have this... body. Oh it has it's uses, mind. But it can be deifying and as soon as you become a deity in someones eyes you're no longer a human being but a glorious acquisition to be possessed and shown off.

How men treat women is sort of like how major celebrities become dehumanised by the public... and we're all too familiar with the casualties that *that* brings about. It was easier to parade under the guise of acceptable, hyper-feminine sexuality, but not easier on the spirit. When my first 'love' dumped me, he took me to one of those over-priced patisseries near Oxford Circus with all that imitation French grandiosity, total tourist trap... I'm guessing the surroundings were an attempt at softening the blow. Either that or to discourage any show of dramatics in front of the parading prim clientele. He was much older than me. Middle-class... eccentric type. Intelligent, but completely overbearing and entitled, nothing at all like me. Oh it was humiliating. When he delivered the news everything in me wanted to flip the table - cream puffs and eclairs like flying grenades, pelting the shocked customers in my wake, ridiculous when I think of it now.

I wanted everybody in the whole world to know I'd been wronged. But instead I just followed him out, speechless and numb - completely powerless. What use are good looks in that situation?... I cried for the entire train journey home. The passenger opposite me didn't check to ask if I was ok, but people generally didn't do that. Teenage girls were often found crying on trains - it was a consequence of coming to terms with that fact that you're second best. And you learn that early on, one way or another. After that ordeal I vowed to never again allow anyone to have such power over me, or, have any say at all in fact on anything I decided to do with my life. I'd run away from home to be with him! Funny isn't it, the first foray into the world of romance. It feels in the moment like the absolute be all and end-all but it never is... It's only the beginning. I couldn't see that then, though. I was barely a woman. He didn't love me, how could he?

[she puts down the rolling pin and takes the photo frame in her hands]

She did, though. I remember when I first saw her and was completely immobilised. I couldn't believe she was looking right back at me. It was the kind of look that supersedes language and is mutually understood upon arrival. That's when my true vulnerability came to the surface, and my instincts. With her I was totally... present and in the moment... Nothing to parade or hide behind that could be convincing anymore. Before then I'd always been sort of, absentminded and performative... Oh we do make a balls-up of it don't we?... Us humans. Misjudging situations. We're very good at it... We get things wrong or at least, that's how we see it. Wrong place, wrong time, wrong... person.

But that's the entire point of everything, isn't it? People. Getting it wrong, trying again. That's what life is. It's all people. Everything we do is because of someone, everything we feel, all the stuff we like, is because someone made it. Every conversation we have, every grievance - it's all about someone, even if its about ourselves. We are someone... And we can't escape that... The trouble is, everyone wants to be right. Why do you think we're fighting all the time?... rhetorical question.

[Her tone changes, the B.G noises we have been hearing diminish to silence, she is having a moment of introspective stillness and reflection]

All our beliefs have been instilled by something another person has told us or put into the world. People are in everything. Humanity is in everything tangible, it's all we know. That's why everyone's so sad and fucked up. The human touch is fading, machines have far surpassed human capability and efficiency. We, are disappearing into abstraction and grieving as it's happening. Searching for meaning when it's usually stood right in front of us while we look over its shoulder as if it were in the way, we miss so much... So we keep messing it up, over and over again for the rest of our lives. Desperately wanting to hold one-another, understand one-another. Not knowing how to or fearing the outcome or the consequences if we do. Thinking we need all these objects and things and achievements and accolades... when all we really need is to just... stop. *[after a moment, she continues kneading]*

I spent so much time wading through cynicism, and it doesn't make you more interesting, you know... It's so easy to feel misunderstood, but we needn't. We're all part and parcel of... all *this* *[gestures to the universe]*. Victims of circumstance and society to varying degrees, all floating around somewhere in the vast space falling somewhere on the scale between unbridled privilege and absolute neglect, trying to figure out what the fuck we're meant to do with any of it, why we're here. We're here for each other. That's it. And it's the only saving grace of this life. So never lose sight of that - d'ya hear me?

[Her daughter emerges from behind a wall section in the kitchen holding a large metal pot. She's been in earshot, just not visible to the audience]

Daughter: Is this what you wanted, mum?

Woman: Yeah, that'll do me, love.