

*Motherlugger*

F L O R A Y

*For Francesca*

Written for radio during the UK Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020. Commissioned by ECHO(ES) for *CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG*, and broadcast in Spring 2021 via their website, where it can still be listened to.

*From the muffled confines of a one-bed flat.*

Katrin: *[Old woman's groans interspersed with laboured breathing, followed by a single yelp. Long pause. Groans continue, turn into inaudible muttering. Pause. Weakly.]* Mimi? *[Pause. Louder, strained.]* Mimi. How long? *[Pause.]* How long's it been? *[Pause, followed by more laboured breathing.]* Down here. *[Pause.]* Here, Mimi. Seven out of ten. *[Pause. Startled.]* Oh, my shagpile! Ohh. It's all... such... *[Pause. Weakly.]* Cherry molasses. *[Pause.]* Our head! My. Oh my, belly up. Could've snuffed it. Right here on my old... on your shagpile, Mimi. *[Pause.]* My stain. *[Pause. Muttering.]* Bit of muck and you'll be safe, eh? *[Pause.]* How much muck is enough muck? *[Chuckling.]* You forgot to teach me how to die. *[Long pause. Deep sigh. Calling.]* Ida! *[Silence. Sighing.]* Where's she got to? *[Tries rolling onto side.]* Better go an- Argh! Owwww. *[Pause. Sharp inhalation.]* Ohhhh. Ohh no. What now? Ohh. Not L1 again. Please not. *[Pause.]* Must be... L1 or L2. *[Collapses back onto floor. Long pause. Laboured breathing.]* Ah, Yuri will be here soon. *[Wistful sigh.]* His hands. *[Long pause. Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes.]* Can't wait around all day, can we? *[Staggers to feet, knocking cup and saucer from nearby coffee table, all*

*the while groaning.*] Alright. It's alright. [*Pause.*] Steady on the pins! Where's my stick? [*Hobbles to mantelpiece, catches reflection in mirror.*] Lord have mercy, I was trying not to look. [*Peering more closely.*] That mug! Hardly recognise it these days. Seems to change with the... [*Pause. Melancholy.*] Molasses. [*Pause.*] Just need me a crown of thorns, Mimi! [*Chuckling. Sound of camera shutter from phone.*] Lord have mercy, I wasn't going to look. Must've caught the corner on the way down. [*Muttering under breath.*] Bit of muck and you'll be safe. [*Pause.*] Some days not even mine. Whole other face staring back. Your wisps and nooks... same brow. Same bags. Same blooming violets. [*Pause.*] Very same. [*Pause. Turns, startled.*] Is that daylight? [*Wincing.*] Ohh. Ow. [*Pause.*] Ohh no, what's the damage this time? Let's have a look. [*Groaning as she hobbles to laptop on table by window. Collapses into chair, relieved.*] Ahhh. [*Sound of laptop turning on. Pause. Tapping on keyboard. Long pause.*] Oh. Not lumber. Must be thoracic. [*Rummaging through clothing.*] Let's see... 5... no... What's that one? Wasn't there before. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1. Ah, yes. Lumbar! [*Pause. Sound of tapping on laptop.*] Looks like lumbar. [*West Country accent.*] Lumbering old lumbar. [*Normal voice.*] Got you to thank for that, Mimi. Thanks very much, thank you! [*Sing-song.*] Thank yourself. [*Pause.*] Hmm. Might be one up...

[*Cheery jingle emerges from laptop, followed by American*

*female voice. Sing-song.*] However much this looks — and sounds! — like a senten-

Kattrin: [*Loud tap.*] Oh bog off, I'll show you where to put your grammar. [*Sound of tapping on laptop. Pause.*] Mmm, yes. One up. Over L1. Makes it thoracic. [*Pause.*] Ohh I don't know. Feels in between. Maybe the disc. [*Tuts.*] Always purgatory, eh? Never relief. Not even the balm of a straight answer. [*Pause.*] Yuri will know what to do. We'll just sit tight 'til he comes. [*Pause.*] Don't s'pose I'll make it to the bath tonight, even if he carries me. [*Pause. Suggestive.*] Hmm... [*Chuckles. Firm.*] No. [*Pause.*] No, no. Could use the extra time though. Get fixed up. Bit of TLC. [*Chuckles. Sudden exasperation.*] Yes, I know what YOU think, Mimi. [*Pause.*] Half my age? Hardly! [*Pause.*] Well, nearly. Hardly matters though, does it? Not once you've reached a certain level of... familiarity. He's told me about some of the others. My god. Must be like a holiday coming here. [*Chuckles.*] Oh, he's always in good spirits, is Yuri, always whistling. [*Tries whistling Whistle While You Work.*] Only tune he knows! [*Chuckling.*] Oh yes, he's always in good spirits. And very considerate, you know. Not a word when I'm in the tub. Just tender. Matter-of-fact. Always says *we*. [*West Country accent.*] Just lay these out before we bathe. [*Normal voice.*] Ha! That'll be the day. Makes a difference though, doesn't it? Makes you feel part of something. Even if it is part of the training... all mandatory stuff, he

says. [*West Country accent.*] Got to make 'em feel inclusive. [*Pause. Normal voice.*] Still. Soothes me alright, 'cause I know with Yuri he means it. Mykal was always *you and I* this, *you and I* that. Always had a way of... curdling things when it suited him. [*Pause.*] No, I'm not comparing. Just an observa- [*Sudden anger.*] GET OUT! [*Tuts.*] Thought I'd got rid of you... Already had my nice raspberry mittens, what more do you want? [*Pause. Opens window. Background of street noises and traffic.*] Go on, get out! [*Groaning as she sits back down, sighs.*] I know, I know, it's me who needs to get out. Haven't made it past the second lamppost since March. All holed up in my own... [*Pause.*] Your own... [*Long pause. Drumming fingers on table.*] Mimi, there's something I've been meaning to... something I wanted to, er... [*Pause.*] It's to do with the- [*Startled.*] What's that? [*Silence.*] Ida! Is that you? Stop creeping about. [*Pause.*] I can hear you... Come here. Come on, come here. I've been through the mill, and where were you? Fat load of help, you were. Could've rotted down there. [*Sound of cat-flap.*] There you are! That's it, here. Here. [*Pause. Straining, places Ida in lap.*] He-llooo! Ohh I've missed you, my little clampet. Used to stick around a bit more, didn't you? [*Crooning.*] Ohhh little smooshy face. Little smoosh-moosh! Hmm? Smoosh moosh! Look at you, all muggly-moo. Oh, Ida! [*Singing.*] Oooh Aida... [*Chuckles. Jubilant. Hums tune from Verdi's Aida. Pause. Deep sigh.*] Oh Ida, what's this lump? Don't tell me it's another tick.

Ohh no, I'm not doing that agai- OW. [*Pause. Angry.*] I said OW, Ida. Don't be so grippy. You know you can't leave ticks. Come on, hold still. Just remind myself... [*Pause. Sound of tapping on laptop.*] Hmmm. Ah yes, not too hard, otherwise... Urgh. Alright then, pull and twist. Gentle and firm. Come on now, you don't want that little sucker... [*Pause. Shouting.*] Ida! Stop wriggling, you're hurting my back. Won't take long... just a minute, my darling, and then we'll- [*Pause. Flatly.*] Oh it's a burr. [*New Yorker accent.*] False alarm, everybody! False alarm. [*Chuckles. Normal voice.*] There you are then, got your own way. [*Pause.*] Oh you're off now, are you? [*Pause.*] Just a quick hello is it, check the maggots haven't set in? [*Sound of cat-flap.*] Charming. [*Pause.*] See that, Mimi? Way she flicks her head. Always flouncing off. Funny little thing. Started eating with her paws again, too. Scoops the food like that, brings it up to her mouth. Could've sworn I saw her roll her eyes last week. Ohh but what would I do without her, eh? Sometimes wonder if it isn't her who looks after me. [*Pause. Sirens in distance. Stands to look out of window.*] Oh there she is, over by the Parson's already. Always drawn to their ghastly displays. Last year managed to get herself stuck in Santa's sleigh. Young lad from Junction News had to climb up the Virgin Mary to hoist her out. [*Birdsong.*] Ah... who's that? Is that our little friend, the chiffchaff? [*Pause.*] Chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff! Sounds like they're up under the- [*Leaning out of window. Sprightly.*]



Hello little- [*Pause. Disappointed.*] Oh. It's you. [*Leans back in.*] Starlings again, Mimi. Usual tricks. [*Crowing sounds.*] I'll give you ha ha. Carr carrrr! car! [*Chuckling.*] Carr carrrr! That's it, go and build your nest somewhere else. [*Chuckling.*] Ohhh. Oh, you should hear Yuri's laugh, Mimi. [*Pause.*] Mimi? [*Pause.*] You should hear Yuri. Real boom boom. One of those deep ones, really gets you by the whatsit. [*Long pause.*] Mmm. Lots of crocuses for this time of year, wouldn't you say? Cro-cus-es... Croci? Crocuses... Croc- [*Sudden anger. Shouting.*] Oi! CRETIN! [*Raps on glass.*] Pick that up! Pick- [*Pause.*] Yes, you. Not in my oleaster. Who do you think's gonna- [*Pause.*] Oi! [*Deep sigh. Normal volume.*] Cretin. That's the boy from over the way, isn't it? Real temper on him. Seen his older sister go by... few times. Nasty limp these days. Used to see her at the chemist's all the time. Thick powder all over, trying to cover the bruises. Only drew attention to 'em, really. And that horrible lipstick. I stopped going there in the end. Cheaper at Boots. [*Sound of ringtone drifts past window, followed by indecipherable male voice shouting abuse. Deep sigh.*] Ohhh. [*Slams window shut. Background sounds reduced. Angry.*] No privacy these days. [*Drawing curtains.*] Why I keep these drawn. Oh the chill you used to put in me, Mimi... Man at the window, you'd say. [*Sing-song.*] Man at the window! [*Pause.*] Took years to know what you meant. And that thing you'd say about Yaya looking down on us. Wouldn't go to the bathroom for weeks without throwing your big towel

over me. [*Sound of email arriving.*] Ohhh god, I hope that's not Carol again. I've had it up to here with those blasted e-chain thi- Hmmm... [*Sitting down at laptop.*] Online Pharmacy? [*Pause.*] What breakthrough? Must be trials for the vaccin- Ah! Now this could be an idea, Mimi. Here, they're looking for volunteers to gain... Oh. Six inches. [*Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes.*] Bet you're glad you missed all this, aren't you? Not really one to stay put... [*Chuckles.*] Well, there's a new film out soon with what's-his-name. One with the eyebrows. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Oh you should see the new picture house, Mimi... size of the chairs! Daresay we could both fit in one of them, and still have wriggle room. Lean back... spread out. Not like before. Yuri says they'll even bring drinks to you in some places... right to your seat. Fancy that! Oh, I haven't seen a good movie in years. Don't watch much anymore, can't ever decide which... what to watch... so many things to choose from now, you wouldn't believe. And all in the same place, all at your fingertips... only need to reach for the zapper. Not much to get you off your feet these days... remarkable, isn't it? How much life can be lived lying down... [*Long pause. Tentative.*] Reminds me, Mimi. There's something I- [*Pause. Fingers drumming table.*] Something I've been wanting to... I mean it's not really... but... [*Pause. Sharp inhalation.*] I... had your dream, Mimi. [*Pause.*] Been having. Yes, been having your dream. Few times now. Ever since [*Pause.*]

Well. The only one these days. Can't remember the last time I had one of my own. I know it sounds... er... [Pause.] But I wanted to ask... [Sudden despair.] Oh, ow. Ohhh... [Pause. Strained.] Getting worse. [Sound of pills rattling.] Ahh. [Pause. Sing-song.] Pink for pain. Blue for food. [Opens bottle, pours out a capsule. Swallows one without water, screws lid back on. Hands fumble, drop bottle. It rolls out of sight.] Gonna regret not going after that. [Sighing.] State of this place. All this stuff... Feel like I'm forever stacking, shelving, putting things AWAY... and yet. [Pause. Quieter.] And yet. [Sigh. Long pause. Fingers drumming table. Blurts.] Er... your dream. As I was... [Pause.] Yes. Been... having your dream, Mimi. [Pause. Slow inhalation.] One you told me after Mr. B. died. One where he's up a mountain. Standing... edge of a cliff. [Pause.] Remember how it woke you up... all your toes tingling with vertigo. Never one for heights, were you? [Slow inhalation.] Way you told it Mimi, made me think of that painting. You know. Famous one. Bloke on a rock... sea of fog. [Pause.] Well, that's what I pictured when you told me. So now it's always that. Except, in the painting, you only see him from behind, don't you? His back. Mightn't even have a face. But in your dream you're down in the abyss, right, down in the fog, looking up at him. And you can't really see him 'cause the sky's too bright, wind's too cold. And your eyes... your eyes are streaming. Still remember your face when you told me that bit, Mimi. Cold wind in

the eyes, nothing like it. [*Pause. Fingers drumming.*] But... but even though you can't see, you know it's Mr. B., don't you? You know it's him standing up there on the rock. Your eyes are streaming and the wind's cold and the sky's bright, but somehow you just know. [*Slow inhalation. Fingers drum more quickly.*] Well, I never met Mr. B. [*Pause.*] So... when I dream it, it's not him, it's The Holy Ghost. His silhouette, I mean. I can tell it's him from the outline of his robes. Flapping in the wind up there. Flick-flick-flick... slow and steady like a metronome. [*Pause.*] Remember when he'd come round for Sunday lunch, Mimi, still in his big old robes? Way they took up all the space under the table. And the way he held his knife. [*Pause.*] Always cut the fat off. Spent near-on ten minutes dissecting. Piling it up on the edge of his plate. [*Pause.*] But, well. Your dream. It's always the same. Always the same, just like you told it. Same rocks, same fog, same peaks and troughs. Fog makes that cold pricking feeling, doesn't it? Like termites crawling all over your body, nipping or stinging, whatever they do. But when you look down, it's just bare skin, bare arms. Nothing there. That's the feeling that stays, isn't- SSSHHH. [*Frantic.*] What's that? [*Silence.*] That's a mouse... [*Pause.*] That's a mouse, that is. [*Quick shuffling, sound of chair scraping along floor. Stepping onto chair. Breathing heavily.*] Oh, come off it! Must have seen you squealing from stools a thousand times, Mimi. [*Low rumble as train passes; sounds of*

*crockery, things in boxes. Sing-song.*] Come out, come out, wherever you are... [*Pause. Aggressive.*] Come on! Show your whiskers! [*Long pause.*] Little wretch. I'll call you Carol. [*Gets down from chair, groaning with difficulty. Sits. Breathing heavily.*] So, ah, your dream. [*Pause.*] I never really... [*Pause.*] Well. It was all spread out, covering everything. The fog, I mean. [*Pause.*] Like a fine lace veil. And it was drifting slowly through the air, through each narrow pass in the rock. Only when I looked down did I realise it was me filling the air... me! *Exuding fog.* Every part. Arms, hands, my chest, legs. Bright white curling out like wood smoke. Spiralling up out of your skin, up and up in plumes. Thicker and thicker til I couldn't see a thing. So I tried to... cry out. Cry for help. But all that came out were thin wisps of fog. [*Pause.*] Silence... All silent, except for the steady flick-flick-fli- [*Interrupted by sound of cat-flap. Startled.*] Oh Ida! [*Nervous laugh.*] Clamouring about like that! [*Pause. Exhales loudly.*] Ohh look who's back. Look who's back! Darling girl. [*Long pause. Fingers drumming table.*] Then the fog started to... contract. Coming together in a thick mass. [*Pause.*] And then, quite suddenly, it contracted into a dense milky orb. About this big. And it kept floating there, right in front of me. Glimmering. Almost... pulsating. Couldn't take my eyes off it. The way it moved... as though it was following something. As though it was conscious. Moving in sync with my gaze. Or... or it *was* my gaze. My eyes. No. Not my eyes,

but- Ow! Stop it, Ida. [Pause.] What're you doing, hmm? What do you want? [Pause.] Ah, Yuri will be here soon... need to finish my list. [Long pause. Struggles to kitchen with walking stick, groaning. Nauseous.] Urghhh. Urgh. Phew! Drain egg's back. [Blows air.] Needs a plunger. [Pause.] Right, all the usuals. [Pause. Reading from notepad.] Then double-sided tape, Weetabix, prunes, peppercorns... [Writing.] p-l-u-n-ger. [Pause.] What are those things called... in the sink? Catch stuff. Like a little... sink-sieve. Don't know if they actually *do*- Oh, demerara! [Distractedly, while writing.] I mean, I always assume the sheer weight of everything and the constant flow will force things down, but I'm always surprised when they come bubbling back up agai- [Sudden anger.] OH FOR GOD'S SAKE. [Scribbles, slams pen down.] Brilliant. [Tuts.] Didn't even- [Weakly.] For god's sake. That was my only pen. [Long pause. Hobbles with stick back to laptop, breathing heavily. Pause. Calm, self-soothing.] Alright. It's alright. Alright alright alright alright. [Sits, groans. Sound of tapping keyboard.] Ah, strainer. That's it. Lord, how many kinds? Steel. Copper. Silicone. Rubber... Deep or shallow. Flat or raised. Circle, square, flower. Ohhh, have mercy. Red, green, blue... 2 pack... 3 pack... how long d'they last? Oh it's too much. Too much. We'll make do. It's not that bad, is it? [Pause.] No. We'll make do. [Pause.] Not as bad as what's underneath, Mimi. Thing in the news last week about toxic waste. All these landfills underground that

haven't been dealt with. Industrial sludge, some of them. Sink holes opening up all over the place these days. Quick gulp, swallows a house. Little yawn, another one gone. Does make me wonder about those cracks, keep opening up round the flat. Had Yuri patch them up last year, now they're bigger than before. [Pause.] Never felt anything, have we? [Pause.] No. Not a tremor. Everything sound as a grand still life. *Too* still. Be rotten though, wouldn't it, to find we're the cerise glacée of a smouldering pile. Well, turns out I nearly was. Found the old place on the map, where I lived with Mykal... X marks the spot! Even a vineyard near that one. Daresay I've got a bottle or two left. Won't be cracking one of those open anytime soon... [Chuckles.] Start sprouting antennae! [Long pause. Deep sigh.] Poor Mykal. [Long pause. Fingers drumming table. Slow inhalation.] There were faces... half-faces in the rock. Big crumbling teeth. Crevices mouthing... urging me, warning. Distant moans in the wind. Shadows shifting about. Sand flying, grit in my teeth. Gaping mouths appearing, disappearing... appearing again, further up. [Pause.] I couldn't do what I needed to do. I couldn't, I didn't know what it was. But there was a specific task I had to perform. The faces kept moaning, urging me to act quickly. [Pause.] All I had was a purple root. Held it in my hands. It was rough and gnarly and twisted in on itself- OWWW! Stop it, Ida. [Sharp inhalation. Long pause.] Well, I s'pose the reason- [Pause.] Telling you all

this, I... [Pause.] I was wondering, Mimi. About... [Pause.] When you... [Pause.] I mean. These envelopes. When you put them in the recycling. Are you... are you supposed to pull the little see-through plastic bit off, or is it fine to leave it? I mean, well, it all gets lumped in together most of the time, doesn't it, I suppose, but, well, they do say, don't they, about separating your materials and so on, you know, only it's a bit of a bother isn't it, tearing off the little windows like that, I've a whole stack of them here waiting to be done and I do wonder if any of it ever reaches the- [Furious.] Oh for crying out loud, what is it, Ida? What do you want? No, it's not 4 o'clock yet. Stop it. Stop nagging me. [Long pause. Deep sigh. Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes. Weakly.] Maybe I would've had the courage to do the thing, if I'd known what it was. I couldn't say. [Pause.] I couldn't even think with all the moans urging and urging me. When I ran to them, they'd just crumple in a quick avalanche of sand. I dropped to all fours, beat your head against the hard ground til a thin crack appeared, snaked forward. Hairline fracture, nothing more. I tried to wedge my fingers down inside, prise it open from within, but it was too narrow. And I was getting more and more desperate; digging, prising, scratching. [Pause.] Your fingernails stripped off, lay there in the dirt. [Chuckling.] I was just sitting there, sucking the bleeding nubs of my fingers, rocking back and for- Oh! I was floating. [Pause.] Yes. Floating up to the mountain ledge... my lungs beautiful



silk parachutes. Unfolding from my mouth and opening up, fixed to pink threads running down my gullet. Birds darting about with razor-blade beaks. Still, up and up 'til I'm just about level with The Holy Ghost. [*Pause.*] But when I'm close enough, I see he's made of... he's... [*Pause.*] It's a stone. Hard stone. I want to run my hand over the surface, check it's... but I can't quite... can't get onto the ledge. One foot touches, slips off. And I just hang there. Start laughing and laugh- [*Opening curtains.*] Ohhh... Where's the sun gone? [*Tuts.*] Never lasts long, does it? [*Pause.*] Remember the sun in Yarmouth, Mimi? Ohh remember that, that really was a sight. [*Pause.*] Laughing, yes. Crying and laughing and shaking so hard... [*Pause.*] I'd been looking up the whole time — the *whole* time — orienting my little valley life around this great big lump of rock! And before I know it, he's turning — I mean the rock — turns into straw. A great big bundle of golden straw. I'm laughing so hard at this point, my lungs crumple and lose air, and I start descending. And when I look back, he... it's a piñata, a great pink and white unicorn... and then it's a fountain... then eel pie... and then... just before it slips from view, behind the ledge... just before that... I see... quick flash, nothing more... it's... his eyes. It's him. Knocks the wind out of my lungs so fast they burst, and I- [*Frantic.*] CAROL! [*Sound of scuffling.*] Oh... Ida, quick! Come on, she's a real scurrer, this one. Quick! [*Pause. Sudden anger.*] Pestilential creature! Listen... [*Long*

*pause. Silence. Gasps.*] It's big... Oh it's a rat, must be a rat... [*Pause.*] Go on, Ida, [*Whispering.*] Seek him out. Seek him out. [*Frantic.*] Over there! Near the kettle... [*Pause.*] No, you're too slow. Go on, behind the boxes. [*Long pause.*] And still you sit there, eh? Against all instinct... What is it? Don't you have instinct, Ida? [*Pause.*] I do. [*Sing-song.*] Oh you do, do you? [*Normal voice.*] Yes I do, matter of fact. I'll lay a little flip-trap for that rat. Should be in you, Ida. You know, like... [*Pause. Searching for example.*] Like time is in the clock. Yes! Time is in the clock. [*Pause.*] But the clock is not in time. [*Pause.*] No, the clock is still... [*Long pause. Theatrically.*] Apprenticed to eternity. Oh, that's rather good isn't it? Happy... being... apprenticed to eternity. Who said that? Can't imagine what it'd be happy about. [*Pause.*] Ever hear of a happy Stoic, Ida? No. Course you didn't. Stony-faced lot. But the fact is... [*Pause.*] The fact is, one must imagine the clock happy. [*Chuckles.*] Yes! Nicely put. [*Pause.*] Because we can't keep... HANDS! [*Remembering.*] The hand. [*Pause.*] Down in the sea of cream, er, fog, when it changes colour. Turns to deep blue-black and you're totally submerged Mimi, remember that, you're in this dark sea of blue-black and a long arm reaches down through the fog — must be his, I'm guessing, Mimi — and it's got a grip on you, on my tongue, and it's pulling you to bits; a massive forefinger and thumb pecking at you, pulling and picking and pecking me to bits... [*Pause.*] Ha! Bit creepy

isn't it, Mimi? [*Chuckles. Pause. Tentative.*] Was it the same for... [*Pause.*] Anyway, there was another one, or maybe it was the same one... black eggs. Big black eggs, and an arrow... Oh and the one with the plums! Or were they lychees? Yes. Lychees. Peeling lychees, and... [*Long pause.*] Well, I won't bore you. Goes on and on. But you know that, don't you? [*Pause. Sorrowful.*] You know better than anyone, Mimi. [*Pause. Forced cheer.*] Ohh it's good to talk, isn't it? It's good to talk! Makes me feel... [*Pause.*] Yes, makes me feel. [*Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes.*] Used to love it when you'd tell me things. When you'd pick me up from school, remember, sherbet dip hidden up your sleeve. Oh, we'd chat and chat, wouldn't we? All the way home. Top deck, front of the bus. Just you and me. [*Pause.*] Oh yes, it's good to talk. [*Long pause. Fingers drumming table.*] I was wondering, Mimi, you never... [*Pause.*] You never told me about Mr. B. I mean, you never really... [*Pause.*] Funny thing, isn't it, memory? Funny thing! There are so many things I just... [*Pause.*] But what can be recalled, I wonder, without an image? [*Pause.*] Without a name? [*Pause.*] Some things just, sort of... *nag*, don't they? And, well, there's something... [*Pause. Loud, rhythmic drumming of fingers on table.*] There's this other thing, Mimi. It's... it's about The Holy Ghost. I wasn't going to, er... [*Pause.*] I don't know if... [*Pause. Fingers drum more quickly.*] Remember how he'd come round for Sunday lunch Mimi, still in his robes? [*Pause.*]

Yes, the thing is... [*Long pause.*] I wanted to tell you... [*Long pause.*] I wanted you to know that, well... [*Pause. Softly.*] You can talk. [*Pause.*] To me, I mean. [*Pause.*] If you want. [*Silence. Long pause.*] Well, that's... yes. That's it. [*Pause.*] Wanted you to know. [*Long pause. Frantic.*] THERE! It's over... Ida! [*Pause. Flatly.*] Oh. Could've sworn I... [*Pause.*] What then? Glint of light? [*Pause. Frenzied.*] My own hand! Good grief. [*Chuckling.*] Plonked there, mind of its own. Idle and giddy with rash! [*Imitating TV presenter, whispering.*] Spotted here in its natural habitat. Crawling... along... a surface. Now it halts, seen. [*Chuckling. Normal voice.*] This whole time? Surely not. Ears... questionable, yes. But my eyes...? What can I trust, if not these roving balls? [*Shouting.*] Raving balls! The very coinage of my brain... miraculous! As if conjured out of thin air... [*Startled.*] Jesus Christ! [*Pause. Flatly.*] Oh, it's you. What've you got there? What's that? [*Pause.*] Ohh no. [*Incredulous.*] Ohhh Ida, what've you done? [*Mounting anger.*] What have you DONE? Ohhh you ANIMAL. [*Softly.*] Ohh poor thing. Look at it, look at her, ohhhh. [*Furious.*] Drop it now. DROP HER. [*Softly.*] Ohh it's alive, still alive, poor little thing... ohhh... come here dear little... beautiful thing... silky thing... oh you're not a rat, are you? Not a rat at all. What has she done to you? Ohhh still beating... oh little drum. [*Pause. Furious.*] CRETINOUS RUIN! I'm sick of your tricks. SICK! You'll have to finish him off. Yes. Yes, come on. We can't leave it like this, come- Ohhh don't

go cowering under there, come and finish what you... [Pause.] Don't you look at me like that. Coward. [Pause. *Weakly.*] Now what? What am I s'posed... what can I... [Pause.] I mean no, I can't... [Pause.] Chair leg? No, oh nooo. [Pause.] Rolling pin? Oh no no Ida, no. I can't. I just can't. [Pause. *Shouting.*] Yes, yes, I know what YOU would do, Mimi. No. I'll have to find something else. [Rummaging through boxes.] Cornish vanilla... this'll do it, have to do it, have to do... [Pause. *Despairing.*] Oh I can't stand it, just can't stand it. Blesséd creature... there, there. Make you a nice little... where's the kitchen roll? [Pause. *Sound of kitchen roll being torn.*] Ohh there we go. [Sound of ice cream tub being opened.] There's a soft little... There we go, in there. [Sound of lid being closed.] I'm sorry, so sorry... [Pause. *Sound of drawer opening, tub being placed inside.*] There. [Sound of drawer closing. *Deep sigh. Shaken.*] Look. Look what you've made me do. [Pause. *Stern.*] No wet food for you today. I said no! Silly thing, and you were gonna get your nice wet chickens as well. Why do you have to treat the whole world like it's your playground? Hmm? If you knew the things they say about me because of you... yes, YOU. If you *knew*... you wouldn't... [Pause. *Deep sigh.*] I can't stand this, Ida. Sooner be minding a bagful of fleas. Wait on you hand and foot, don't I. And this is the thanks I get, is it? Ungrateful little remnant. Festering little cretin. Yes. Yes you are. Festering little- [Interrupted by distant sound of knocking. *Terrified.*]

*Whispering.*] Sshhh. Who on earth...? [*Pause. Calling, breezily.*] Who- Who's there? [*More knocking. Long pause as she struggles to the door with walking stick, a bunch of keys jangling as she goes. Sound of door being unlocked, then opened. Voice distant, with forced cheer.*] Hellooooo!?

[*Silence.*] Hello? Cooeey! [*Silence. Tuts, sighs. Closes door slowly. Long pause.*] Ida? Where've you gone? Ida?

[*Repentant.*] Ohhh Ida, come out, come on, I'm sorry my darling, I'm sorr- [*Pause.*] Come on, stop that. Stop quivering. What's wrong with your leg? Oh lord, what is it now? Come here. Come on, my little love... [*Pause.*] Why do you never come when you're called? [*Long pause.*] Mimi? [*Pause.*] Why do you never... [*Long pause.*] I was wondering, Mimi. What... what's this blue pot for, exactly? [*Pause.*] Is it really... I mean, it's so big, and it really gets in the- [*Pause.*] Mimi? [*Long pause.*] Mimi, what did you mean when you said 'impenetrable?'

[*Pause. Sigh. Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes.*] Look, I'm really trying to find... [*Pause.*] To find that chalk thing. That chalk you rub into the... do you know where it... [*Pause.*] Because I can't get these stains out of my... [*Pause.*] *Your* shirt, yes Mimi, *your* shirt. [*Controlled breathing. Tentative.*] You know, I can't keep living in... with... and... within... but without... I mean, to live without... and... and outlive. I can't. I won't... [*Pause.*] I will not ask why you do what you... did what you did do. But do you think you... do you think about... because... I thought... well, I think I thought I

thought... and now I'm... so I don't know if... if you did what you... *did*... or... because of a lack of... maybe... or if you *wanted* to... I mean, we all do things we... but... but some things... more easily reversed, and... and if you don't... if you... if I do not do what I want to do... Mimi... if I do not do what I *want* to do... then do *I* do what I do? It's just... [Pause.] Oh, look at me. Standing here. Loose end, all hugger-mugger. This age! Just to be... [Strained.] Shut up. [Pause.] Shut... up. Shut UP! [Long pause. Weakly.] So tired... [Pause.] And can't get... awake, just keep... [Pause.] Slipping... [Pause.] In and out and never quite... [Pause.] Always... [Long pause. Louder, matter-of-fact.] Really is a mess, you know? Still full of your... all your... [Pause. Incredulous.] Everywhere. Even the bottles. That ancient cassis, how do you even... [Pause.] And those *dolls*, Mimi... they're embarrassing. Quite frankly. Even Yuri's said things. Why do you still... [Pause.] You never even *liked*... [Pause.] And the fish bowl. When are you going to... [Pause.] And those ugly succulents. And the broken chair. And all the photos. I mean, can you really expect me to... [Pause.] People I've never even *met*, Mimi. Never will. And your sodding ashtrays, still full of butts and piles of a- a- AH... OWWW... [Sharp inhalation.] Ohhhh... my... [Muttering under breath.] Ohhh timber-timber-timber-timber-tim- [Loud crash as she falls, followed by silence. Pause long enough to signal the end. A quiet chuckle emerges, gradually turns to raucous laughter.]

Nearly! [*Pause. Weakly.*] Ow, ahh. Ar. Me timbers. Who will hear me? [*Pause.*] And if they don't... then did it... did it even... [*Chuckles.*] Yuri will be here soon. [*Long pause. Sharp inhalation.*] Ohhhh... Oh here they come. My chemicals! Russshhh- Rushing up. Flooding. [*Pause.*] Ohh the rush. Oh ohhh. Mimi! Seven out of ten. [*Long pause. Laboured breathing.*] Seven point five. [*Wearily.*] Ohhh. Cut down. Cut DOWN... [*Pause. More pensive.*] And yet... upright. [*Pause.*] More upright, somehow. Things do look clearer from down here. [*Pause.*] Skirting board needs a good scrub. Who'd've thought it? [*Pause.*] And this... layer... the quintessence of dust, no less. [*Pause. Tentative.*] Mimi? [*Silence. Long pause.*] Everything is so... so quiet down here. [*Pause. Long yawn. Starts clicking tongue against roof of mouth, making the sound of hooves approaching a fast trot, then cantering, gradually slowing to a walk, then stops. Deep breaths, followed by a long content exhalation.*] Arrhhh. [*Pause.*] Ought to spend more time down here, really. Nice spot for a little rest. [*Starts to get up.*] Already feel better for the- ARGH. Ohhh. [*Sharp inhalation.*] Oh, it's... [*Pause.*] Ow. Oh that's not... [*Tries to get up again.*] Oh, no. No no no. [*Pause.*] Well then, I'll just... [*Pause.*] Yuri will be here soon. [*Pause.*] Just sit tight. [*Pause.*] Lie. [*Long pause. Muttering under breath.*] Demerara... prunes... plunger... [*Tuts. Remembering excitedly.*] Oh, Caramelle! [*Singing animatedly, waving hands in the air.*] Voglio la caramella che mi piace tanto e che fa du-du



du-dú, du-du du-dú Dufour! Du-du du-dú Dufoooour!  
[Silence. Long pause. Sigh. Tries whistling Yuri's tune. Pause.] The ceiling... I've never really... [Pause. Emphatically.] The ceiling is an ocean. [Pause.] The ocean swallows a stone... Plop! And the water seals itself. [Chuckles.] Plop! And the water seals itself again. Plop! And the water- Plop! And the- Plop plop plop! [Long exhalation.] How briefly they touch the surface. [Pause.] Touched. [Low rumble as train passes; sounds of crockery, things in boxes.] More casserole than ocean though, isn't it? Life. Infinite looping casserole. Plop! [Pause.] And what then, after the meal? [Mocking.] Not the radiance of eternity! Not the pure brilliant light! [In a child's pleading tone.] But sir! Ain't it a little cold to be steppin' outside? [Chuckling.] Mop it up. Mop it up with a crust. Danish bloomer, whatever you've got. [Noticing crumbs on floor.] Ah... these crumbs. Evidence of what? [Pause.] The Holy Loaf. [Pause.] Then sweep it up! Put it in my little bin. [Slow, melancholy.] Green bin with the brown lid. [Pause.] The non-detachable brown lid. [Pause.] Bit of muck and you'll be- [Pause.] Urgh. [Sighs.] A lumpen mass. Vegetation. Warm and humming. Fruit flies... ascend! Swivel. Dive. In, out. In again. Stone, skin. Browning. Stalk, seed, pip. Congealed, sprouting, fizzing. Fruit flies... next generation. And the others. Crawlers, gorgers. Unseen. Feeding. Breeding. Heaven! [Deep voice, announcing.] Welcome to The Mush Room. [Pause. Normal voice.] And what then, after it's full?

*Motherlugger*

[*Shouting.*] No room at the bin! [*Sing-song.*] Full to the brim, no room at the bin. [*Higher pitch.*] Somebody make a vacancy! Make it full of vacancy! [*Normal voice, chanting and clapping.*] Fuller and fuller, 'til there's no room for her vacancy. [*Long pause. Fingers drumming on the floor. Voice shaking.*] Myk- [*Tuts. Pause. Calling.*] Ida! Ida, darling. [*Whistles. Fingers drumming.*] Room frees up all the time. Every cave. According to The Gospel of Bin. And my bin... my bin is advertising. So bloom in the bin or bloom... [*Pause.*] Where do the binless bloom? At least a crumb... Well. A crumb is always a whole crumb. [*Pause.*] But does a crumb imply a loaf? Know a loaf when it sees one? I mean... In order- [*Pause.*] That is, to properly regard the breadlife... Stale in a room or stale of room? [*Pause.*] The bin squints. [*Pause.*] The bin is a bin in winter and spring. [*Pause.*] My lid. [*Pause.*] Lids close. [*Pause. Excitedly.*] I could stealth! Saw off a corner. Lodge in the hinge! [*Pause.*] How the mind blooms for squatters. [*Pause.*] Here squatter, go and scatter... [*Shouting.*] Her crumbs! [*Sudden anguish.*] Ohh! Ohhhhh. Oww. [*Long pause. Faint groaning. Nervously.*] Yuri? [*Pause. Laboured breathing. Begins humming part of a lullaby. Pause. Voice soft, reverent.*] Lord almighty, heavenly father... [*Pause.*] What is that *stink*? [*Long pause.*] Must be mousey. [*Pause. Voice weakening.*] A mouse named Carol. [*Long pause. Voice barely audible.*] A stench named Carol.