

THE STROMA SESSIONS

Written by

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Script as broadcast

A note. Extended, brittle, low. Over it, an authoritative but approachable voice, documentary style:

NARRATOR

We present these recordings in good faith, and with all due respect for their provenance.

A woman's voice amidst gentle wind, quiet, disconcerting:

HILDE

(Sings)

No stars to speak of, no hand to hold...

The recording cuts, the note continues.

NARRATOR

The Blackletter Quartet, a new music ensemble, had an idea: to write and record an album on Stroma, an abandoned island off the north coast of Scotland.

The note splits into a worrisome chord; another voice, shouting above the sea, frantic -

RILEY

HERE WE'RE HERE PLEASE WE'RE HERE!

Sea and voice cut, the chord continues.

NARRATOR

They sought inspiration in the ruined houses and unforgiving weather. They wanted to make music in a ghost town.

As the chord migrates into even stranger voicing, a snatch of something on a close-up microphone, a female voice, hushed:

SAM

Hilde, if we play it I'm finished -

HILDE

(Soft)

One, two, three, f-

NARRATOR

The evidence suggests: they found what they were looking for.

A digital rip tears the chord into silence.

INT. VAN

The rattle of a VW camper van in full throttle up a motorway. Faster cars zipping past at regular intervals. Riley is mid-flow, Mancunian, sparky, dry -

RILEY

- number three right, I've stopped worrying about not gettin' any sleep. Cos the way Hilde runs a session I'll be dog tired end of every day and you know, probably able to fall asleep inside Nico's bass drum -

Nico is Scottish, impish, closer to the mic -

NICO

- while I'm playin' it -

RILEY

- while he's playin' it. Number four I've stopped worrying about the weather, cos it's just gonna be two hundred different words for fucking wet.

NARRATOR

You're hearing a short film taken in the back of a Volkswagen Type 2 camper van.

RILEY

Number five, I've stopped worrying about running out of ideas cos guess what, I never really have any decent ones in the first place.

NARRATOR

It shows Katherine Lillian Riley, violin and electronics player, slumped in a pile of coats and bags at the rear of the vehicle. The film is from a smartphone owned by Nico Paolozzi, viola, percussion and electronics, and his is the next voice you'll hear.

NICO

Well there you go, sorted -- what's left to worry about?

RILEY
Well in your case mate, extreme
menstrual synchronisation.

(Laughter from the rest of
the van)
Seriously, think about it. Four
weeks, three women. One man.

NICO
We all gotta make sacrifices.

RILEY
He loves it. Masochist. Sam, when
you due to come on?

Sam's voice is young, posh, raised above the engine.

SAM
MAINTAINS DIGNIFIED SILENCE.

NARRATOR
The woman at the wheel is Samantha
Havilland, cello and voice. Her
shock of red hair whizzes past
before the phone settles on someone
in the passenger seat.

RILEY
Hilde? How about you? When do you
release the hounds?

NARRATOR
As the figure turns to look at
Riley, the setting sun passes
behind her. The camera tries to
adjust but Hilde Miles' face
remains in shadow. If she makes any
reply, it is inaudible.

A pause. Riley sighs.

RILEY
Are we there yet?

The sound of the van snaps off. Tiny pause, then:

EXT. STROMA SEAFRONT

A huge amount of wind.

RILEY
MY NAME IS KATHERINE LILLIAN
RILEY AND I AM C-O-L-D, BLOCK
CAPITALS.

The wind, howling, the faint sound of crashing waves beyond.

NARRATOR

The Blackletter Quartet employed a method of composition that responded to, and sometimes incorporated, field recordings. Their cadences and melodies echoed the sounds of birdsong and weather.

RILEY

THIS IS THE SOUND OF MY ARSE FREEZING OFF AN' DROPPIN' INTO THE SEA.

NARRATOR

It was Riley's job to capture these recordings, which she did frequently; sometimes to a fault.

A series of different locations and perspectives:

RILEY

Day one. This is us firing up the generator, I hope.

The chuckle and roar of a diesel generator coming to life, and three voices (Sam, Riley, Nico) cheering, which then cut -

RILEY

(CONT'D)

This is tarpaulin goin' over the old school roof -

The scree and flap of exactly that, which also cuts -

Then the sound of a huge number of gulls in the distance, a polyphonic mess of screaming and cawing.

RILEY (CONT'D)

21st October 23:0...4.

(Pause)

Infestation of gulls. They're going at something in the dark -- over the other side of the island I think.

(Pause)

I mean listen to that.

(Pause)

Question. Do you think of seagulls as like, the rats of the ocean? Or do you think of them as noisy little dinosaurs?

NICO
 (Fast)
 Rats.

SAM
 (Just as fast)
 Little dinosaurs.

A jump cut to -

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

RILEY
 Stroma sessions, session two. This
 is Nico hitting a crash cymbal, hit
 it Nico -

The thump of a floor tom. Laughter, which cuts -

A couple of stringed instruments tuning up.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 The Stroma Sessions, session four,
 take two. Me, Riley, on... uh...
 violin, Nico on viola, Sam on
 cello, Hilde on geeetar.

HILDE
 (Quiet)
 One, two, three, four -

A burst of absolutely beautiful, languorous music...

... which almost as quickly, stops.

RILEY
 What?
 (Beat)
 What we're stopping already are we?

Sound cuts briefly and then the return of room noise.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 Stroma sessions, session eight.
 Yeah in honour of Hilde who has, it
 must be said, been doing a lot of
 staring out to sea, especially the
 not-Scotland side... Here's Sam's
 interpretation of what Hilde's
 brain currently sounds like.

*A series of scary tones on a cello. Laughter again, cutting
 back into:*

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLFFTOP

The wind, huge, buffeting the microphone.

RILEY
HILDE. HILDE?

NARRATOR
But by day five of their stay on the island, we hear more and more of this: Riley walking the cliffs, trying to find the multi-instrumentalist founder of the Blackletter Quartet.

RILEY
(Closer to mic,
breathless)
Flippin nora Hilde, I know you're gonna pick this up and listen to it in the middle of the night, an' I know I'll never work it up to say this to your face so here y'are: you are the weirdest you've ever been right now. Never known you weirdier, and that's sayin' summat.
(Yelling)
HILDE.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

Some scrapes on a cello.

SAM
Can you take an output from this looper pedal? I think I'll try to nobble today what I attempted yesterday.

NICO
Yup I'll find a spare XLR. So... did you sleep well, the princess and the pea?

Throughout the following the sound of them moving between a range of microphones, different inputs and room noises.

SAM
Slept like a big log. I am loving this. I am literally having a whale.

NICO
How comes you feel so at home?

SAM
Who knows. Old building, fields all around.

NICO

Big moat.

SAM

Funny, funny boy. I was going to say the only difference is a profound lack of peacocks, but -- here you are.

Some quiet tones on the cello.

NARRATOR

This is in fact Stroma's school, abandoned when the last families left the island in the early 1960s. It seems to have been chosen as an impromptu recording studio and living space thanks to its relative integrity. The quartet used a collection of microphones routed to different rooms for different purposes. In this case you can hear Nico walking into what used to be a kitchen.

NICO

HEY - FEAST YER EYES ON THIS.

NARRATOR

The following conversation suggests this had become a room dedicated to guitar amplifiers.

The sound of feet traipsing from one set of mics to another.

NICO

So, cos, if you wondered where Hilde had been sleeping -- look where she's put her mat.

SAM

Well sure it's strange. But I'd venture no stranger than normal.

NICO

Yeah but I think, OK, see here -- I think she turns both amps up to eleven and then she put her head at this end so she sleeps in between the hiss.

Sam splutters like a horse.

NICO (CONT'D)

It's funny cause it's true.

SAM

Come on. What planet are you from?

NICO

It's not my planet! It's her planet, it's planet of the let's all go to an island where no-one can contact us for four weeks until a boat comes to pick you up unless everyone's killed each other. It's the planet of THAT, don't blame this guy. I'm from whatever planet you want.

SAM

I'm going to practise some scales.

NICO

... really, I'm completely from whatever planet you'd like me to be from.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP

The distant sea, the slowing wind, Riley's footfall on grass, at a smart pace.

NARRATOR

The Stroma Sessions files available to us seem to be from three different sources. First and most common, the sounds from Riley's portable equipment.

RILEY

24th October, 11.24. Grey skies, probably gonna rain on me soon enough.

The sound of a cello playing scales.

NARRATOR

Secondly, multitrack recordings from the school studio. As both these and Riley's files are time-stamped, we're able to mix them together into a simultaneous account of events.

RILEY

This is sort of my life right now people, greyness, cold, wind, salt, salty wind, strong cold salty wind, slightly less strong cold salty w -
 (sharp
 halt)
 Whhhhoooooah -

Footsteps stop.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 Look at you... look at you ya
 big puffed-up bird. Seriously.
 Never seen a red seagull
 before.

Cello stops playing scales, segues into long harmonic notes.

The caw of a seagull, quite close.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 Don't give me that look. Did I
 spill yer pint or what?

Pause. *A viola joins the cello, a pleasant melody.* A sharp intake of breath from Riley.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 An' is that... flesh...? In yer
 beak? Ughhh you are -- that red,
 your wings -- actually, you are
 actually covered in blood aren't
 you? Completely covered in the
 blood of... something. Eeeerk.
 OK.

The gull keeps cawing, begins to ululate aggressively.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 OK, movin' on. Walk away from
 the bird that doesn't appear to
 be scared of you, Riley. Bad
 sign.

And her footsteps resume, even brisker. *Cello stops playing, the viola continues.* The wind dips.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

SAM
 That's nice.

The viola stops.

NICO
 Me, nice?

SAM
 No not you. What you were just
 playing then was nice. Keep
 playing it's nice.

The cello resumes.

NICO
I'm responding to you, really. You
let yourself out when you play.
Could listen to it for hours mate.
You know. To you. Bowing.

SAM
(Laughs)
Mate I didn't come all the way
here to get sexually harassed so
just play the bloody tuuuune.

NICO
Alright, yer alright -

Nico joins in again as Sam's cello loops, growing more complex, their melodies intertwining. The wind returns.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP / THE GLOUP

RILEY
So this part of the island's
called Nethertown which is, you
know, about right. Uh. Lighthouse
in the distance, automatic job,
empty.
Whole island, nothing, no-one.
Not even any sheep in fact,
despite what I was led to believe
that there was gonna be fields of
friendly shee-pppaAARG-

Riley's footsteps halt suddenly, the sound of dirt falling,
scrabbling for a foothold...

RILEY (CONT'D)
(Shocked)
That was close that was too close.
Sharp. Almost went over.

A few rocks plooping into water, far below.

RILEY (CONT'D)
OK so this must be the Gloup...
mmm hmmm... it's a hole in the
middle of the island... must be 30
foot deep an' just the sea at the
bottom of it.

The sound of seagulls, massing, swooping and cawing over
something -

RILEY (CONT'D)
Summat's really got these seagulls
all worked up.

An enclosed sound as Riley lowers the recorder over the edge of the precipice. The lapping of water.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Dark down there, even in the middle of the day.

(Beat)
Actually there's something in the water bobbin' about, that's what the birds are goin' at -

Scrabbling sounds. Rocks falling away, splashing into water. Riley's breath fast and sharp -

RILEY (CONT'D)
I, uh - Jesus. Almost went over again.

(Exhales)
I mean -- no... thing in the water looks like a... hard to see cos of the birds but I think it's, it's -

(Beat)
Oh...
Fuck.
No. No no no. Please no.
Fuck. Fuck.
No, oh God...

EXT. THE GLOUP

HILDE
What?

Hilde's voice is deadpan but commanding, bidding its time. Another sharp intake of breath from Riley, whipping round.

HILDE (CONT'D)
I love how you record everything Riley. Is it because you're scared of missing something good?

RILEY
(Catching breath)
CRHIST Hilde how long you -- scared the living sh-

HILDE
You think that's a body down there?

RILEY
Had a moment where I thought it might be you, as it happens.

HILDE
I'm up here for the time being.

RILEY

Sure you are. Thanks.

HILDE

It could be a seal. Stroma has seals. Could be a dead seal. Look at these birds! -- some of them are soaked in blood.

RILEY

Ummh hmm. Where you been?

HILDE

I went to the church to see if I could get inside. But something more interesting happened.

RILEY

Surprise me.

HILDE

You know there's supposed to be no-one else on the island?

RILEY

Yeh.

HILDE

I've just seen someone else on the island.

The sound of the recording cuts, *the music continues.*

NARRATOR

Five years after the Blackletter Quartet's disappearance, The Stroma Sessions were discovered in a substratum of the internet. There is no single accepted theory as to how or why they found their way online. Metadata allows us to order and mix some of the material with confidence. What follows next is a case in point.

EXT. CHURCH

Blustery but not overpowering wind. Dialogue and sound of boots on grass cuts in and out, as if on a noise gate.

RILEY
By looks of those overalls he's
phone company... tryin' to fix the
phone, yeah see that, he's got the
exchange open -

HILDE
I was told there was going to be no-
one else here. It's quite annoying.

RILEY
(Calls out)
ALRIGHT MATE?

The sound of someone grunting in frustration as metal tools clatter around.

HILDE
I don't think he can hear you.

RILEY
(Louder)
ALRIGHT?

The footsteps stop. The dialogue settles into a constant recording. The occasional beep of a line tester.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Hey mate how ya doin'? Thought we
were the only ones here.

Pause. Another beep.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Is it workin'?

Pause. The Telephone man has a Polish accent.

TELEPHONE MAN
I will not talk to you.

Hilde laughs.

RILEY

Sorry?

TELEPHONE MAN

You are not there, I will not talk to you. No-one is there.

Pause.

HILDE

That's interesting.

RILEY

Uh. Did we offend you in some way?

(Pause)

Can I um -- is the phone alright?

A tool box being packed, closed up, and lifted away. Footsteps departing. *The music curls into a dark, rumbling chord.*

RILEY (CONT'D)

Now is it me or did he just bugger off without so much as a by your leave?

HILDE

Yes.

RILEY

Rude.

(Calls out)

HEY MATE, COME ON, COME BACK. I reckon it's you he didn't like the look of. I mean best of times you seem like you'd happily drink someone's blood.

The rattle of a telephone handset coming off the cradle -

HILDE (CONT'D)

Phone's completely dead.

A low, vocal noise in the background -- quiet at first.

RILEY

Hang on a sec.

Footfalls. The sound gets louder. A tonal murmur.

HILDE

What is it?

(Laughs)

Where are you going?

RILEY

I think it's from the church. Here.

Put the headphones on.

(Rustles, thumps)

Can you hear that?

Pause. The murmur is louder.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Is that interference? Radio?

HILDE

I'm going to turn it up.

The mic attenuation increases and as everything (wind, breathing, rustle of clothes) amplifies around it, the background sound is identifiable.

A mass of voices in song: a hymn.

HILDE (CONT'D)

Whatever it is, I like it.

RILEY

Let's have 'em back.

(Rustling)

Yeah that's... human voices innit -

The signal comes and goes rapidly as if the mic's being whirled around -

RILEY (CONT'D)

Definitely coming from inside th-

(Gasp)

Hey, WAIT, what're y-

Corrugated iron being kicked, the squeal of rusty metal being wrenched outward.

RILEY (CONT'D)

HILDE, you can't do tha-

HILDE
 (Distance)
 Come on let's see.

RILEY
 Awww maaan...
 (Very close to mic)
 I'm breaking into a church, people.
 This is it, I'm breaking and
 entering god's house.

Riley squeezing through a gap in the metal.

INT. CHURCH

Wind drops, rotting wood underfoot, the sound of the choir rises again. *The music begins to seethe, tumble...*

NARRATOR
 There have, over the years, been several churches constructed on Stroma. Visitors have described the remaining example, a small Presbyterian chapel near the south-east coast, as surprisingly well-preserved. Animals have at certain times made their way inside, rot has set into the overturned pews, and the broken windows have been boarded up. The altar and the cross have not survived intact. But the interior is sound.

The two women's voices drop to a whisper -

HILDE
 Can you still hear the voices?

The ghostly choir more present. A squishing, muffled sound -

RILEY
 Yeah. These are... prayer books all over the floor, right?

HILDE
 I think you must have radio interference. Come closer down here.

A tone -- a long, high, pitch, building throughout:

RILEY
 Closer to the altar?

HILDE
Closer to the cross. See if you get
more of it.

RILEY
What you thinkin'?

HILDE
Maybe we can record in here.

RILEY
Ah man, no way. Noooo way. Step too
far. I'm not going all black mass
for you, luv, not on these wages --
besides, what about this mystery
noise?

HILDE
Maybe the noise is what we need.

RILEY
There's something else. Hilde...

HILDE
Come on, clooooser -

RILEY
Ah man it's gettin' louder -

HILDE
See if you can hear more down here -

RILEY
Hilde, it -
(deep breath)
It sounds like a scream...

It is a woman's scream. Stretched into a horrible extended
tone, rattling in the throat -

All the sound *including the music* cuts.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

A clunk as a mic is activated.

RILEY
This is session... uh, nine.

Jump cut. *Notes on an electric guitar - sparse, tentative.*

HILDE
Play it again.

Over the top of the guitar, suddenly: the last recording made in the church. A mixture of the ghostly congregation and the scream.

HILDE (CONT'D)

Stop it there.

The recording stops *the guitar continues.*

HILDE (CONT'D)

Put on some of Sam's cello from yesterday.

RILEY

Hang on, findin' it -

A click, and a *cello motif is added to the guitar, looping.*

HILDE

Bring the church recording back in.

The choir and scream return -

HILDE (CONT'D)

Lower.

The music continues for a moment.

NICO

I think that's interference.

RILEY

Yeah?

NICO

Radio from the Orkneys or the Faroes or whatever. Gotta be.

SAM

But there's half an hour of the same hymn and it basically doesn't stop.

RILEY

Sam... you alright?

SAM

Me?

RILEY

Yeah.

SAM

Why?

RILEY
Uhhh... just think it sounds like
you that's all. That high -

SAM
What, the, high...

A pause. *The music continues.*

*For quite a while... Cello winding around guitar... church
choir low in background, high-pitched, constant scream over
the top -*

RILEY
Sounds a bit like screamin'.

SAM
I don't think I could hold a note
that long.

HILDE
It's not right. Hit stop.

All the music cuts.

RILEY
It's weird I grant you but there's
something quite....

SAM
... Yes, I'm with you, something
that speaks of where we are.

NICO
Yeah, I'm hearin' that.

HILDE
No. It's too much, too soon.

A guitar being laid against an amp and the feedback cut off.
Then footsteps. Hilde's voice now in the same space as the
others.

HILDE (CONT'D)
We need to play better.

NICO
I thought it was sounding quite
good...

HILDE
It wasn't. Riley stop the whole
thing.

Hilde's footsteps going back.

NICO
What's up with her?

RILEY
God I dunno -- you know how she is.
Maybe the planets aren't in
alignment, maybe Cthulu has stopped
responding to her voicemails.

HILDE
I've put the headphones back on and
I can hear you.

Pause.

RILEY
Yeah, but you ARE a nightmare, luv.
You've had a massive cob on for at
least two hours.

SAM
Why don't I go through there?

RILEY
Careful.

SAM
Hilde I'm going to come through
there and ask how you're feeling
okay? And I want you not to kill
me.

HILDE
Be my guest.

Footsteps.

RILEY
Maybe we can release her into one
of the other houses and she can
smash stuff up for a bit.

NICO
Yup.

RILEY
Don't think anyone will call the
police.

NICO
Nope.

Sam has reached the other room -

SAM
How are you feeling?

HILDE
Hm.

Pause.

SAM
What's the book? Can I see?

HILDE
I'm reading it.

SAM
What is it?

Pause. No reply.

SAM (CONT'D)
Is it interesting?

HILDE
It's about Stroma. About what
Stroma feels like. About the
inevitability of how it was
abandoned. In the end. And what was
left behind.

SAM
What was left behind?

HILDE
Difficult to say.

Pause.

SAM
Well -- sure, I suppose you won't
have got to the end yet.

HILDE
No, I've read it before.

SAM
Oh I see.

HILDE
I've read it quite often.

Pause.

SAM

Hilde are you going to continue
being a complete mare tonight, or
shall w-

HILDE

No. Yes. Maybe we should wait until
tomorrow before we play any more.

A clunk and rustling as some mics are powered down -

RILEY

Brilliant. You hear that?

NICO

Yup.

RILEY

Let's get drunk.

NICO

Yup.

A glitch and we're left with nothing.

NARRATOR

This is the final recording on
October 24th. In the early hours of
October 25th, at dead of night,
comes the following.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP

The sea very close, the wind brisk. Sound of feet stomping
over grass.

RILEY

MATE YOU OK?

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Soz you what?

Pause. The footsteps stop.

RILEY (CONT'D)

How long you been here for?

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
I'm here. I'm here -- step away
from there will ya?

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Been here since yesterday? Come on.
Must be cold.

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Problem with yer boat?

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
I can help.

A noise, an intake of breath -

RILEY (CONT'D)
- NO NO NO NOO DON'T -

Coming closer: someone running at speed in a squeaky anorak -

NICO
RILEY! RILEY GET AWAY FROM THE EDGE-

The mic hitting the ground, a quick scuffle, two bodies
hitting grass.

The sound cuts and we're back to silence.

NARRATOR
In general it appears that
Katherine Lillian Riley was the
most accident-prone of the
Blackletter Quartet. But in
recordings time-stamped the
following afternoon she claims -

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

Winds howl around the building, muted by the bricks.

RILEY
I haven't sleepwalked since I was
sixteen. I don't get it.

SAM
Stress.

*Someone is drumming idly in the background, using beaters,
producing gentle washes of cymbal.*

NICO (BACKGROUND)
Well you can't sleepwalk on a small
island. Clue's in the question.

SAM
(Eating something)
Where was she?

NICO (BACKGROUND)
You know that wee slice of rock
they reckon used to have a castle
on it?

SAM
Mm hhm.

An electric guitar adds a dark shimmer to the drums.

NICO (BACKGROUND)
She was out by that, in her joggy
bottoms, waving her arms, shoutin'
a loada rubbish at something that
wasna there. Kinda reminded me of
Sauchiehall Street actually.

RILEY
Shouldn't have had that whisky -

NICO (BACKGROUND)
Hey! And! She was recording
herself!

SAM
Were you -?

RILEY
Yeeeeahhh... maybe...

NICO (BACKGROUND)
It's official, she presses the red
button in her sleep.

RILEY
Rude.

SAM
Do you remember anything at all?

RILEY

All I remember from last night is a dream I had about the boat.

The drums stop. A drum stool creaks. Footsteps. Nico is closer now:

NICO

Say that again.

RILEY

The boat we came over on. I had a well odd dream about that. Why're you all lookin'-

NICO

I dreamed about the boat too.

The guitar stops.

HILDE

Was your dream one in which the boatman was at the wheel, but it was a huge ship's wheel, even though the boat was small?

RILEY

Uh. Yeeeeeah...?

HILDE

Was the sea like a mirror on one side of the boat and wild on the other side? Huge waves that never broke over us?

NICO

Oooh got goosebumps...

HILDE

Samantha did you also have the dream last night?

Pause.

SAM

I had something similar.

HILDE

So in your dream, was the boatman at a huge wheel on a small boat with the sea like a mirror on one side and wild on the other, and did he have a particular lack of a face? Was it a grey space with no features? And Sam were you screaming, and Riley was counting, and was Nico face down in the bilge water sloshing around the bottom of the boat?

NICO

Holy crap.

HILDE

And was I inside the cabin, playing guitar like this?

A wash of see-sawing notes. Weird, woozy, autumnal. Long pause as the music continues, constant like the sea.

NICO

At this point I'd kinda like to go home now please.

The guitar cuts.

HILDE

I think we can use this. This is what we use.

NICO

Nah I can't be dealing with this -

HILDE

Why not?

NICO

Because it's horrible. It's, I mean I don't wanna go back to it, you know -

HILDE

It's a good dream though. The music from the dream is especially good.

NICO

I'm dead on that boat -- I'm alive but dead and I'm looking at myself dead. Seriously Hilde, Hilde LISTEN I'm NOT -

The guitar is unplugged. The amp buzzes and crackles.

HILDE

- that was unnecessary -

NICO (CONT'D)

- You've been weird enough but this is too much you're just ordering us around now.

SAM

Nico...

Pause

HILDE
 I think you're probably scared,
 which is fine and mHILDE
 I think you're probably just
 scared, which is fine and might
 even help. But we've only so many
 days left out here. And your
 contributions haven't been all
 that inspiring, Nico.

NICO
 Okaaay.

An anorak being pulled on. A squeaky door opening.

SAM
 Nico... it's freezing out there.

NICO
 It's freezing in here an' all.

The door slams shut.

RILEY (to Sam)
 Go after him.

SAM
 Let's play some music. I really
 want to distract myself.

HILDE
 - That's not how it works -

The sound glitches and cuts.

NARRATOR
 "That's not how it works."

A burst of room noise under:

RILEY
 Stroma sessions, session 10.

*Then music, languorous, rolling, instruments in concert,
 building on the motifs from the dream of the boat.*

NARRATOR
 With a system of composition that
 relied upon recording, re-recording
 and plenty of discussion in
 between, arguments among the
 musicians were commonplace. And
 Nico Paolozzi had only been playing
 with the Blackletter Quartet for
 eleven months.

EXT. OUTSIDE SCHOOL / INLAND

Winds light to variable. *The music continues.*

RILEY

(shivering)

This is too long for him to just be off sulking, right? We should be worried now, right?

SAM

Let's head to Nethertown first.

RILEY

Coolio. Yer torch workin'?

Two torches clicking on, followed by footsteps on grass...

NARRATOR

Certainly in the nine hours following Nico's departure a huge amount of new material is recorded. While Riley and Sam began their search for the still-absent Nico, Hilde Miles remained at the schoolhouse, adjusting and adding to the day's work.

SAM

Do you think Hilde's going to listen to this eventually?

RILEY

Yeah. Every night I've been wakin' up around 4 and there she is in the dark, headphones on, scrollin' through everything I've done. Or readin' that book of hers.

(Beat)

Why? You want me to stop recordin'?

SAM

No no maybe it's best if she hears it. FYI I'm sort of currently debating whether to start feeling, ummm, freaked out. Or not. Just the man you met when... you met him and he refused to talk to you...

RILEY

Yuh huh.

SAM

I mean sometimes people are just outright rude I know. But it got me thinking, just, something else -- Can I ask you a question? The boat, the one that brought us over?

RILEY
 (uh oh)
 Yeeehhh...

SAM
 Well, OK, here's my question -

RILEY
 - given I'd had plenty whisky cos I
 don't take to water at all well -

SAM
 Actually, here's the thing. Can you
 answer any of the following
 questions...

(deep breath)
 What did the boat's owner look
 like? How did he speak? How did we
 speak to him? What was the weather
 like, actually? Who got on first?
 How long did it take to put all
 our gear on board? How long did it
 take to get over here? When did
 the boat leave? Did we watch it go?

*Pause, and the music changes gear, begins to slip into
 dissonance now and then.*

RILEY
 We did get ... really drunk that
 night.

SAM
 It's going to get dark soon isn't
 it?

Something picked up.

SAM (CONT'D)
 ... those are Nico's gloves,
 aren't they? Oh god why would he
 take them off? He'll get frostbite,
 literally.

RILEY
 Yeah yer right, don't freak out
 just yet. I think if you could hold
 back on the freaking out that might
 be useful. Look, uh -- you take
 Nethertown and the Lighthouse, I'll
 head up this way and check all the
 clifftops around to the castle
 rock. OK?

SAM
 (Heading off)
 Hurry won't you?

Heavy footfalls as Riley moves away. *The music continues, jittering a little, occasionally sparse and uncertain.*

NARRATOR

Narrow Geo, Hill Row, Hammer, White Healy. Bay of Sluggs. Riff of Hebrigg, Fullie Geo.

Sound of the furious sea.

It's possible to cross Stroma north to south in a little under thirty minutes, east to west in a mere fifteen. The terrain is elevated toward the centre and has no trees. And so the North Sea is ever-present, visible from almost every part of the island. Every scrap of evidence available to us suggests that at this point, Hilde Miles was alone in the schoolroom.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

HILDE

(Very close mic)

Nico can you play that quieter.

A part of the arrangement falls away, becomes more subtle.

HILDE (CONT'D)

Better. Keep it there.

NARRATOR

It is of course entirely possible that Hilde was using multitrack recordings from previous days, mixing them, and talking to herself.

HILDE

Sam... try modulating up a third maybe. Play around. Try some kind of descant.

And the cello does exactly that.

NARRATOR

Unfortunately for this theory, some of the material is music we've never heard up until this point. Did Hilde Miles record it herself? If so, why the need to give regular instruction?

HILDE

Section b at the end of this bar with all dissonance.

And the music shifts gear into something properly dark.

NARRATOR

Because as far as we know Nico was still absent, with Sam seeking him out in Nethertown -- and as darkness fell, Riley, on her own reconnaissance, had reached that jagged outcrop of rock upon which was once situated a Norse castle.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP

The music continues, the dissonance growing throughout:

RILEY

Oh thank god for that there he is.
Panic over everyone.

(Calls out)

NIC-O.

Pause. Riley's footfalls speed up.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Quite close to the edge. Come on mate don't take it all that serious.

(Beat)

'Ang about. Those overalls. Aaaah.
No, no no not him. I think it's the telephone bloke.

The sea very close, the wind brisk. Sound of feet stomping over grass.

RILEY (CONT'D)

MATE YOU OK?

The man's voice is shaking, cracking -

TELEPHONE MAN

I won't speak to you.

RILEY

Soz you what?

The footsteps stop and now the man is frantic.

TELEPHONE MAN

I won't speak to you you're not there. I won't speak to you.

RILEY

How long you been here for?

TELEPHONE MAN
NO-ONE IS HERE.

RILEY
I'm here. I'm here -- step away
from there will ya?

TELEPHONE MAN
I CAN'T LEAVE.

The music begins to screech and twist.

RILEY
Been here since yesterday? Come on.
Must be cold.

TELEPHONE MAN
I CAN'T LEAVE THE ISLAND.

RILEY
Problem with yer boat?

TELEPHONE MAN
I GET ON THE BOAT, I AM ON THE
WATER, I AM BACK HERE. EVERY TIME.
I CANNOT GO.

RILEY
I can help.

TELEPHONE MAN
NO. YOU'RE NOT THERE.

A noise, an intake of breath -

RILEY
- NO NO NO NOO DON'T -

Rocks and turf falling away. The Telephone man screams, his
voice falling away. The mic hitting the ground, the recording
cuts.

The music twists into a horrible resolution and stops.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

A door bursting open, almost falling off the hinges -

RILEY
You've brought us to an island of
suicides -

HILDE
Sssh. Recording.

RILEY
- haven't you?

A low tone on violin which fades out like a breath.

HILDE
Don't know what you mean.

RILEY
The body in the Gloup the other
day, down in the cave. DEFINITELY a
body. An' now I've just watched a
man throw himself from the cliffs.

Another low tone on violin.

RILEY (CONT'D)
I saw him bounce off the rocks,
break his neck and sink.

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
What you noddin' for? Stop it with
the bambi eyes. Jesus.

Clattering about.

HILDE
What are you looking for?

RILEY
My phone. I need to try and connect
if I make an emergency call it
might-

HILDE
I think you left it over by the
hob. Don't worry, there's no
signal. I checked.

RILEY
Whadya mean you CHECKED?

A higher tone on the violin.

HILDE

It's important we're not disturbed
so I keep checking the phones. Hang
on while I get this repeating.

The violin notes begin to ring out in a loop. They're familiar -- they respond to the chords from the dream of the boat. Every now and then Hilde adds some more scant phrases.

RILEY

Are Sam and Nico back?

HILDE

Yes they're h-
(Beat)

Sorry no, they're not here yet.

RILEY

Hilde can you STOP being WEIRD
ASAP, PLEEEASE a man's just DIED.

HILDE

Not sure about that. Because if you
think about it. Wait a moment -

The music shifts down a gear, slowed into something different.

HILDE (CONT'D)

Yes that's better. Because if you
think about it: what if a set of
circumstances made a place a closed
system?

Pause.

RILEY

I don't know what you even think
you're sayin' -

HILDE

Sea. The sea all around the island.
Currents turning, grooves in the
water like a vinyl record. Every
now and then the sea gets jumpy,
and the record skips. Or, or --
(Delighted at the thought)
Maybe it's the salt in the air
here. You use salt in holy water. I
believe you use salt in an
exorcism. Maybe the salt in the
wind... preserves the sounds.

RILEY

We need to contact the mainland somehow and get off here.

HILDE

True though. Your recording from the church. That recording could be from anytime in the last three hundred years. The guy fixing the telephone -- sometime in the last decade, but who knows when precisely...

RILEY

You've gone crackers love -

A clattering and rustling as Sam and Nico enter -

RILEY

Nico!. What the HELL happened to you?

SAM

He's seen someone.

NICO

She's right. I've seen it. I've got to tell ya, it's real, it's all real -

The music and sound cut.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

RILEY

This is Stroma Sessions, twelve. Hilde I want you to promise that after we've done this, we'll do everything we can to contact someone off the island. You promise? That's my condition.

HILDE

If you play well... sure.

RILEY

Nico you OK through there?

NICO

(Through headphones)
I'm fine. Give us a bit more level in these.

NARRATOR

To isolate his vocal from the other players, Nico Paolozzi had been placed in another room further down the corridor. The severe weather can be heard through the thin, decaying roof above him.

RILEY

Stroma Sessions, session what, twelve was it? Yes twelve. Nico is going to tell us what happened and the rest of us are going to play to it. An' I want everyone to know this was Hilde's idea.

HILDE

Can we start with th-

RILEY

- in fact I think all of this was Hilde's idea from start to finish, right?

HILDE

Maybe we can all just focus. Sam. Let's start with you doubling the drone.

SAM

Here goes. But Hilde...

A cello joins the drone.

HILDE

No more talking. Apart from Nico. Ready when you are.

Nico's voice is hushed.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL "STUDIO"

NICO

Uh yeah this is gonna be me talking about the last few hours. Gonna say it out loud and see if it sounds right. You, uh -

(Pause)

When we first arrived here you know what I thought? I thought oh this is gonna be fiiiiiiiine. Quite peaceful, that's what I thought. I thought, four weeks, we can knock out a good bit of music and have some drinks to keep warm.

(Pause)

So yeah I'm sorry if I didn't really live up to the first bit of that.

A violin joins the ensemble, very gently, fluttering. Throughout Nico's story the music will be beautiful, spiralling, increasingly complex without being portentous.

But towards the end it develops undertones of dissonance and doubt.

NICO (CONT'D)

Cos earlier when I stormed out, I was just, in seconds: she's right, Hilde's right, I'm not really doing much good. So for a bit I just walked the cliffs to cool off you know. Watched the red birds down by the Gloup, there's even more of them today, whirling and diving. Sea looked quite calm even though the wind was like, mega strong. And well you know how the mainland just kinda sits there like a grey sausage a mile away, an' I just kinda got the idea, maybe I'll give it a wave. Sort of, here I am. An' I notice when my hand goes up that I hear a tone, it's a different tone, in the wind. The wind slips to a different note. Maybe one of you guys, do that? Maybe you play a different note. So I'm raising my hand now -

A high note comes into the music -

NICO (CONT'D)

An' I bring my hand back down like this an' the wind goes back to what it was -

The high note fades.

NICO (CONT'D)

Yeah sorta like that. So I do this a few more times to check I'm not goin' completely lala, you know. But no... I'm playin' the actual wind. It's responding. I take my gloves off, tense my fingers and I can give the wind a kinda vibrato. I can move my hand this way, it makes one kind of harmonic, I move it the other way, does another. I raise my hand -

A high note.

NICO (CONT'D)

I lower my hand... when I twist my hand, note shifts then as well...

The note ripples, a tremolo, then fades.

NICO (CONT'D)

... quite happily doin' this without askin' why, I mean there are plenty of ways for yer ears to play tricks I believe. But here we go people -- cos after three minutes maybe less, I look down and: there's this kid stood next to me. Pretty little bairn with golden hair an' a gentle kinda face. What she's wearin' -- I dunno it's maybe old-style clothes but their kinda dirty an' it's hard to tell. Maybe they're not old school maybe they're just a bit muddy. She's got a bunch of weeds and flowers in her hands and she's twistin' 'em round. Long kinda fingers, fidgety hands.

Pause

What do I do? What would you do? I do the obvious, I say to her: so are you a ghost wee lassie? She pulls a face like she's not sure she ought to say anything -- then she looks up and speaks to me. I can't hear a word. It's not that the wind is too strong cos I kneel down next to her and I hold my ear closer, her lips are moving an' no sound is coming out. It's like watching TV with the sound down, except the wind's everywhere. "Where's yer mammy?" No sound. "Is yer mammy here with you?" Lips move, words formed, no sound.

The first note of doubt.

NICO (CONT'D)

So being down to her level that's how I get to see her eyes real close. They're a greeny-grey, like the sea and the grass. Then she's -- maybe she's annoyed I can't hear her but she gives me a little slap on the arm and turns around and runs away.

That first note of doubt fades.

NICO (CONT'D)

I feel her hit my arm. She's no ghost, I feel it. An' I call out hey -- she just skips away. But, ah... funny thing though... bear with me here. When she's running she's not getting further away, I don't think. It's like the perspective's all wrong, like a trick corridor or... hall of mirrors. Then I realise that what's happening is she's growing. She's growing upward and also, you know, literally, she's growing up, as she runs off. Hair gets longer, legs more gangly, body gets taller. OK definitely a dream I think, OK Nico, you have fallen off a cliff and you're dying and you're dreaming some sorta Alice In Wonderland thing. She turns round and looks at me and there's still the same eyes. Greeny-grey sharp eyes. But the wind is lower, right? And now something that hasn't happened the whole time we've been here -

(Laughs)

Sun breaks through the clouds. I mean. Ridiculous, yeah?

The music responds with something pastoral and lovely.

NICO (CONT'D)

The sun is feeling sombre for some reason, the sun's really serious, it's not happy run-about sun. And I sorta figure I've got to follow her. And the girl looks slightly pissed off with me and I don't wanna leave it at that. So as I follow her I walk through this deep wide line of serious warm that's fallen over the island. I reckon she's about fifteen now or something. We're walking down to Nethertown, her always just about thirty paces in front of me, just dawdlin' you know, I haven't felt so peaceful since we got here. But then -- well cos you know how Nethertown is just the occasional falling down house, bricks with nothin' inside? Right. Not any more it ain't.

Pause. Return of a note of doubt.

NICO (CONT'D)

(Hushed)

Nethertown is full of proper houses now. They've all got roofs, they've all got doors. There's woodsmoke comin' from the chimneys. There's one with serious smoke billowing out and a soft glow from inside, and that's the house she walks into. I'm going with it now, I'm going after her. Even though I'm thinking this is too much to be a dream, my dreams aren't normally like this -- my dreams are normally like, moving colours for ten minutes and a song I can't remember.

Pause. *The note of doubt resolves.*

NICO (CONT'D)

Inside the house everything's in order. Riley, remember when we went into one of those houses the other day and it was dirt on the floor, just dirt and red feathers and a rusty bedstead? This is a house with people living there now. I can smell herbs, I can smell cooking, there's pictures on the walls, old type furniture, but it's not broken it's complete. There's a tin bath. It's all got that temperature a family house has got, the runaround of smells you can't control. I mean this is a living house. She's in the kitchen. The serious sun is right across the room, it's across her face, shadows from the window, they put lines over her face, but there she is: same tangly hair. Same grey-green eyes. I think she's my age by now. Sippin' a beaker of something that steams. Those long fingers of hers tappin' on it. And she's just looking at me. I can sit at the table. I can do that just fine. Wooden chair underneath me -- is there? Is it really? Stroke the splintery table. She looks at me. It's like I'm allowed there now. I'm permitted. It's as if we've just had a fight and we've just made up, she's got a half-smile going on.

NICO (CONT'D)

She's talking over the kitchen noises and I still can't hear her
I still can't hear her speak.

(Pause)

Sun's going down outside by now.
Feels like it's doing it deliberately to mess with my mind.
Magic hour my arse, I can't hear her talk.

From now until the conclusion of Nico's story, the music becomes gradually but increasingly dissonant and disconcerting.

And part of it becomes, recognisably, the music from the dream of the boat...

And throughout the wind through the roof above, growing, intensifying...

NICO (CONT'D)

So what do I say? Sorry, can't hear your words. Sorry, this is a dream darling, don't waste yer breath. Sitting opposite her it's a hundred late-night arguments with girlfriends, you know? Feels so familiar. She's disappointed in me. Those grey-greeney eyes cloud over, and when the sun goes down I can't see her face so well, she's in shadow. She's not angry at me no more... but she knows what I represent, sittin' there over the table, our noses inches from each other but no words between us cos she can't hear me an' I can't hear her. I ask her where she's from, then I stop myself: I ask her when she's from. She stands, and there's a set of stairs at the back of the kitchen, and she's up them. I can hear her moving around on the top floor. And yeah I go up. Course I go up. Takes me twenty seconds to get upstairs, right, but I reach the top and it's night time, it is night time, there's all this flickering from gas lights and moths and one room on that top floor is aglow.

(Beat)

NICO (CONT'D)

I've -- I've had to apologise a million times for stupid things I've said. Looking at her now, looking at this woman I saw being five years old maybe twenty minutes ago, right now at the top of them stairs I feel I should say sorry for being alive.

(Pause)

She's sat on the edge of the bed, lookin' out her bedroom window at the sea. One candle at the bedside. Bugs lindyhoppin' round it. She is, I dunno, she is sixty years old I think. Those grey-greens now got laughter lines and serious baggage, I mean, but they're still the same...

(Pause)

I can sit next to her, right? I can just sit here for a bit and we can listen to the sea over in the dark. I hold her hand and it's the same long thin fingers she had as a kid. We just hold hands a wee while.

(Pause)

Finally she turns to me. Says three words. I think I hear them. I really think I do this time. Cos I remember her voice -- cracked and raspy, but those eyes, still a kid's eyes I swear. She says: "Don't give yourself."

(Deep breath)

Next thing I know she's gone. Like the candle gutters for a second and she's not there. Can still feel her hand in mine but she isn't next to me. I'm on my feet like a shot, I'm looking around. Think I see her through the window in the moonlight outside, walkin' with a limp, headin' out to the cliffs, that's where she's going -- and I'm, this is NOT how it finishes, this is NOT the way it works tonight, I don't care HOW many times it's happened this way, I do NOT give my permission, you know? I'm up on my feet in a split second I am down those stairs, and as I leave the house -- I mean, Jesus, I swear. I really mean it.

NICO (CONT'D)

It's pitch black with the moon peeping in and out of cloud, and easy enough to see things, but I swear: faces in the windows of every house down the street. Watching me. Candles flickering. Doing nothing, just in the windows, eyes on me. In every house as I run past. I'm out of Nethertown fast as I can, I'm up to the edge before it drops to the water, I'm refusing to let her go, "Don't give yourself"? I'll give what I like. But maybe it's a few paces from the edge, god I don't know, it's only steps from where the land drops away, I tread on something and god help me it crunches like eggshell under my foot. I look down and that's when I know I'm not ever going home, this is what happens here, start to finish every day, cos I'm looking at a skull, rolled away from a sad set of grey bones lying in the mud, there's a ring of weeds and flowers around it and I know it's her, truly, can't be anyone else, there she is, dead on the edge of the land at the foot of the sky.

The wind stops. *The music stops.* Pause.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

SAM

Nico, you alright?

Pause.

HILDE

Did you find him where he said?

SAM

Yeah. He was just slumped on the grass staring at the clouds.

RILEY

OK we've done recording him now.

SAM

I'll go and make sure he's alright.

Sam puts down her cello and exits.

RILEY
Gonna check we got all that, cos
Hilde -

HILDE
Hmm?

RILEY
That's the last thing we're
recording out here.

HILDE
Hm.

SAM (OTHER ROOM)
(Top of lungs)
RILEY!

Clattering as Riley scrambles to her feet. Running into
another room, picked up by another mic -

RILEY
Where is he?

SAM
He's gone.

RILEY
He couldn't have. There's no way
out. We'd have seen him -- he can't
have just vanished.

SAM
No. He's just gone.

INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

Slow fade up of the distant sound of the sea. Embers in a
fireplace, crackling.

Then the wheeze of a radio, tuning in and out of shortwave.
No voices, just the radiophonic burble of stray signals.

RILEY
Useless.

The clunk of switches. Then the hiss of FM, swooshing into:

ANNOUNCER
... Lundy, Fastnet, Irish sea.

RILEY
OH! OH MY GOD! HUMAN CONTACT!

ANNOUNCER
Northeast 4 or 5. Occasional rain.
Moderate or poor.

RILEY
Oh my god I love you and I have
missed you so so much.

ANNOUNCER
Shannon, northeast 5. Heavy rain.
Poor, becoming moderate.

RILEY
Poor, becoming moderate.

ANNOUNCER
Rockall, Malin, Hebrides.

The signal begins to crackle and fade.

RILEY
No no no...

Frantic pushing of buttons -

ANNOUNCER
Fair Isle...

RILEY
Don't leave me -

The radio sputters and completely stops.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Brilliant. OK. Whatever. Still got
the essentials

A swig of liquid from a bottle. A jump cut in the
recording.

INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

RILEY (CONT'D)
My name is Katherine Lillian Riley
and I'm, uh -

A jump cut in the recording -

RILEY (CONT'D)
I'm gonna put this on a memory
card and whack it in a bottle,
(Clink)
- then I'm gonna throw it in the
sea and maybe someone'll fish it
out eventually. If they haven't
fished me out first.

NARRATOR

For a few moments Riley simply records the embers of a dying fire. From what we can tell she has set up camp in one of the Nethertown houses. This is the first recording since session twelve, and is time-stamped over 24 hours after Nico Paolozzi's disappearance.

RILEY

Yeah what would you like to know about Stroma? Accommodation -- well I've had worse. I found the one house on the island that has a proper front door, which I can lock. Facilities? Hmm -- I got a pair of nail scissors which will probs do me if anyone tries to get in. Overall I guess I'd give it four stars. One star deducted cos the whole island is like, massively haunted. True though, listen to this, recorded this through the door last night:

Violent wind. Manic laughter. Recording stops.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Hang around by yourself for long enough you hear more and more stuff like that. Something walks past at a distance. Someone's in the room next door. Or there's someone who keeps turning up even though they're dead. I think that's probably the official international standard for haunting, right?

Pause.

RILEY

Yeah I've been, I've, uh -- what do y'wanna know?

(Swig at bottle)

So I left Sam there with Hilde. In my defence, she didn't really sound like she wanted to go. Sam -- said something weird straight after Nico had gone. Here it is:

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL / THE BOOK HOUSE

SAM

I think this is it.

RILEY

(Panicked)

There's nowhere for him to get out,
it doesn't make sense! -- It's a
solid brick wall right

(Slapping the wall)

here, just, just impossible -

SAM

I think we're already gone.

The recording cuts -

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)

I mean fair enough you know. Let me
count the ways: none of us can
remember the boat trip over to the
island. There's noises from
centuries ago all over the place,
can't move for 'em. Nico's seen
people in the houses who obviously
can't be there. Hardly surprising
Sam ends up being the first to say
it.

And as Riley plays the files back the ambiences jump in and
out of and overlap each other -

SAM

(Quietly)

I think we're dead, Riley.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)

She sounds convinced, doesn't she?
I mean kinda resigned slash
convinced. She's not even being
dramatic about it. Not afraid to
admit I played this back quite a
few times last night when sleep
just wasn't happenin'.

SAM

(Quietly)

I think we're dead, Riley. I think
we died on the boat. Maybe we
drowned.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)
 If you're gonna think all night yer
 might as well have something
 massive to think over. But come on,
 can you blame me for not being sold
 on it straight off?

Intercutting with the schoolhouse recordings once more -

RILEY (ABANDONED SCHOOL)
 I'm out to flash a torch at the
 mainland see if I can get some
 attention. What's Morse code for
 for fuck's sake help us?

A coat being pulled on.

HILDE
 Sam, do you fancy doing some vocal
 work over what we just laid down?

RILEY
 I mean -- WHAT? You promised!

SAM
 Um. Yes, sure, no problem.

RILEY
 ... Sam?

A 'cello being picked up. A few bowed notes.

SAM
 (Extremely quiet)
 Riley, I don't really see the
 point. I might as well make music.
 Seeing as that's what we came here
 to do. Maybe that's all there's
 left to do. I don't think I've got
 it right yet.

RILEY
 What about Nico?

HILDE
 I really liked his story.

RILEY
 Jesus I did -- shut UP, I did NOT
 ask you. Sam: what about Nico?

SAM
 It's funny but can you remember his
 face? His face, it was sweet wasn't
 it? Funny and... just a lovely
 face, but I can't...

(Pause)

SAM (CONT'D)
 His mouth, it was... his nose, was
 it long? I liked his smile. What
 was his smile like?

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)
 And there's me looking between Sam,
 who looks like she's been on a
 thousand year bender, just you
 know, broken... and Hilde, whose
 eyes have gone supernova by this
 point, looking' straight at me,
 daring me to argue.

HILDE
 Come on, Riley.

RILEY
 Nico's gone. There are bodies
 everywhere. Forget it.

HILDE
 We could get it right.

RILEY
 Forget it mate.

A door slamming

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 Then this is the harbour.

EXT. THE PIER / INT. THE BOOK HOUSE / INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

Waves lapping against the harbour walls, and a strong wind.
 The clicking of a torch.

RILEY
 Dot dot dot dash dash dash dot dot
 dot. Dot dot dot dash dash dash
 (Continues under)

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 The wind by the pier. With me
 flashin' at the A389 over the water
 like no-one's business. And back in
 the school, at the same time I'm
 out out freezin' me unmentionables,
 this is The Stroma Sessions,
 session thirteen.

HILDE
 One, two, three, four -

A single vocal note, a viola weaving around it gorgeously.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)
 Obviously had I known, had I
 understood at that point, I'd have
 been right in there and draggin'
 Sam out by her hair if need be.
 Gaffer taped up her mouth. Listen
 to this, it's -

The music is turned up. A long, high, breath.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 That is gorgeous innit? That's them
 really getting somewhere and if I'd
 have clocked what was going on...

Riley's morse code fades out. *The viola stops, the cello continues.*

HILDE
 Sam keep singing. I'm going to read
 you something. Keep going.

A book being opened, pages turned.

NARRATOR
 This is, presumably, the book that
 Hilde Miles has been reading prior
 to and throughout their stay.
 Researchers have identified it as
 "Line And Reason Of Stroma", an
 obscure psychogeographical tract by
 the musician Leven Andreas.

HILDE
 Page 84. I bring a delay unit with
 me to the island, which records any
 signal to a loop of tape and
 repeats it, however many times one
 wishes. When on maximum setting,
 the result is endless. I find it
 almost spiritually satisfying.
 Noise sounds as if across an
 infinite valley, or down a
 subterranean tunnel that runs to
 the end of time. One evening on
 Stroma I decide to disconnect any
 input from my delay unit. There is
 no microphone attached, no
 instrument. I set it to maximum
 feedback and leave it for the
 night.

(MORE)

HILDE (CONT'D)

The following morning I connect its output and listen to the still-turning loop of tape. There is a mass of barely discernible sibilants, chants, vocal notes, laughter and shouting, seething away beneath the hiss of my blank tape in complex cross-rhythms and clashing harmonics. It is of course impossible. But I feel like a scientist who has left a spotting of bacteria in a petri dish, and woken to find a gloriously blooming culture. It is entirely as I suspected. Stroma has a glorious infection. Its feedback is not stoppab-

A glitch. The schoolroom recording cuts out completely.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)

Meanwhile I've had an idea. Darkness coming down, yeah. Still on the pier and no sign of anything responding to my torch. But guess what there's a ferry. Goes past a couple of times a day on its way up north. So I wait, and -

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP / INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

The wind and the sea and the sudden sound of a ship's horn...

RILEY

Here it comes -

Frantic clicking of a torch -

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)

Low red and white car ferry, and I follow it all the way down the coast into Nethertown, signalling all the time -

Jump cut.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Come on. COME ONNNNNN.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 Except I've been at it half the day
 haven't I and the batteries are
 going -

RILEY (CONT'D)
 AM I HERE OR WHAT? COME ON PEOPLE.
 PLEASE!

Jump cut.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 Somewhere close to the Gloup,
 pretty much all the way to the
 northernmost tip, the torch gives
 out -

RILEY (CONT'D)
 YOU BLIND? CLEAR AS DAY OVER HERE!
 COME ONNNNN!!!

The sound of massing seagulls in the background -

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 But all that's left there is me and
 those bloody birds. Those bloody
 birds. Literally. They're still
 wheelin' and divin' into the Gloup,
 coming up with red with scraps in
 their beaks, still picking at
 whatever it is in the water like
 it's a never-ending feast somehow,
 day in day out, like it never
 stops...

*The return of the schoolroom music and Sam's voice, the long,
 high note -*

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL / INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

Sam's voice drops away. -

HILDE
 Why have you stopped?

SAM
 Tired.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)
 Listen to what happens next, like
 a falcon hoverin' overhead.

HILDE

Hmm. You still sleep, don't you?
Can't remember the last time I
slept. Before we landed here
certainly.

SAM

You haven't slept once?

HILDE

I tried the first few nights. I
turned up the guitar amps to see
if I could tune out the music the
wind was making, that kept filling
my head with new melodies. But to
no effect. Air here is so full of
sound, you just deal with it.

SAM

Why didn't you say?

HILDE

Plenty to do in the middle of the
night. I watched Riley walking
around in her sleep. I read my
book.

SAM

Hilde. Do you think we're still
alive?

HILDE

I'm not sure what purpose it would
serve to make that distinction.

Pause. The sound of digital scrubbing as Hilde lines some
music up -

HILDE (CONT'D)

Sam. Listen. See what you think.

Nico's viola, isolated, gorgeous, languid...

HILDE (CONT'D)

Nico's viola, that's the
foundation, the brickwork,
weatherbeaten, unadorned but solid.

Mixed with a fluttering violin...

HILDE (CONT'D)

Riley's violin, not quite right yet
but we'll get round to that.

(MORE)

HILDE (CONT'D)
 The violin is the wind, the way the
 wind hits the cliffs and rolls over
 the island, the string in the
 air...

A guitar is added, washes of familiar chords...

HILDE (CONT'D)
 The dream of the boat, the see-saw
 of the waves, the four of us in
 concert. And...

*A drone, a loop of massed voices and the high-pitched tone
 above it...*

HILDE (CONT'D)
 The church... the delay, ringing
 out until the end of time...

SAM
 It's all coming together, isn't it?
 Yes I suppose so.

HILDE
 This is the best orchestra you'll
 ever be part of. Could you sing
 that note? The high note, could you
 ride the note that high? We just
 need you to give it everything Sam.
 We just need you to feel it, like
 it's forever. It needs to be
 delivered with that conviction,
 that force, that permanence. You
 can do that. I'm sure. We're very
 close now. I'm convinced. I really
 am.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP/ INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

The wind, huge again. Massed gulls faint in the background.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 And while all that's going on at
 the school, I'm watchin' the ferry
 glide away. Just imagining the
 people on board. All that life
 going on inside.

(MORE)

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 Maybe a third of a mile away or
 summat. And because - well, what
 else have I got to lose? - I raise
 my hand and wave.

A change in the sound of the wind.

RILEY (CLIFFTOP) (CONT'D)
 What! Seriously?!

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 I lower my hand.

Another change in the sound of the wind.

RILEY (CLIFFTOP) ((CONT'D)
 No!

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 Hadn't believed it up till now.

Changing tones in the wind, shifting frequencies.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 But here I was, moving my hand
 around, and playin' the wind like
 an instrument. Listen, you can hear
 it: hand goes up, hand goes along,
 hand goes down, north, south...

Notes and textures in the air.

RILEY (CLIFFTOP) (CONT'D)
 Ohhhhh we are so fucked.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 And that's when I see him standing
 next to me.

RILEY (CLIFFTOP) (CONT'D)
 Jesus.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)
 No doubt. Seriously. Same
 overalls, same hangdog face,
 definitely the same guy who went
 over the edge of the cliff two
 days ago. Flesh and blood.

RILEY (CLIFFTOP) (CONT'D)
 I'm recording this. I'm recording
 you, right? This is an audio
 recorder. Say something.

NARRATOR
 Those who believe the Stroma
 Sessions to be an intricate fake
 often reserve their greatest
 scepticism for the following
 exchange. What seems at first to
 be a one-way conversation, with
 only Riley's voice perceptible,
 is revealed as something very
 different once the audio has been
 amplified through various
 filters.

EXT. NETHERTOWN CLIFFTOP

As the conversation is played back, the Telephone Man's
 voice is so muted and difficult to hear, the narrator
 repeats every phrase:

RILEY
 Say SOMETHING.

TELEPHONE MAN
 I will not talk to you.

NARRATOR
 I will not talk to you, a
 second voice seems to say.

RILEY
 Stop it! I'm here, look, look at me-

The sound of Riley slapping herself.

TELEPHONE MAN
 There is no-one there I will not
 talk to you.

NARRATOR
 There is no-one there, I will not
 talk to you.

RILEY
I saw you DIE, I saw you throw
yourself into the SEA.

Pause. *Is that a vocal note in the background? High,
sustained, growing?*

TELEPHONE MAN
Which time? I have tried so many.

NARRATOR
Which time? I have tried so many.

Pause.

TELEPHONE MAN
Are you alive?

NARRATOR
Are you alive?

RILEY
Don't you start of course I'm alive-

TELEPHONE MAN
I am not so sure. It is always hard
to know.

NARRATOR
I am not so sure, it is always hard
to know.

RILEY
Why are you here?

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

NARRATOR
Sometimes I think.

TELEPHONE MAN
Sometimes, I think...

NARRATOR
If I fix the phone -

TELEPHONE MAN
If I fix the phone...

NARRATOR
Maybe, I can leave.

TELEPHONE MAN
... maybe I can leave.

NARRATOR

I try very hard, but I never fix
the phone.

TELEPHONE MAN

I try very hard. But I never fix
the phone.

The wind stops. *The vocal note too.* As long a silence as we
can get away with.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)

And that's not a fault on the
recording. That's the wind
stopping. It just stops dead. And
the telephone guy has gone. And
there's just perfectly still air
and god help me straight away I
know what that means -

RILEY (CLIFFTOP)

Oh god! Sam! -

Scrabbling, feet running at full pelt on grass, over dust
paths, the recording jumping, glitching, bumps on the
microphone, Riley's heavy breath -

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE) (CONT'D)

And I'm across the island fast as
my tiny legs can take me, all the
way back to the schoolhouse -

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

The door bursting open -

RILEY

Where is she?

Beautiful music is playing from a speaker.

HILDE

Listen to this, it's really coming
together.

RILEY

Where's SAM?

HILDE

Here she is.

*The volume of the music comes up. Sam's vocal over the top:
sustained, prominent.*

HILDE (CONT'D)

(Almost trance-like)

It was beautiful Riley. It was really lovely. Very peaceful. Only needed three takes. Maybe four. We used the delay unit. And in the end I could just sit back, I didn't even have to work the mixing desk. Sam handled it all. Her voice got stronger and stronger. As that happened I guess she just started to fade. Like she was fading into the note. That's what it looked like to me.

The note might be turning into a scream. Hard to tell.

HILDE (CONT'D)

The wind around got louder. Her hands went first. Gradually transparent. Fingers still flexing, it was funny. She'd closed her eyes. Then her eyes went. Then her face, her body. Headphones left in mid-air once she'd gone. Then you can hear it, right at the end of the piece, the vocal stops and -

A clatter.

HILDE (CONT'D)

That's the headphones falling to the ground.

(Little laugh)

So appropriate. So like Sam. So lovely.

The schoolroom sound cuts.

NARRATOR

We present these recordings in good faith, and with all due respect for their provenance.

INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

The embers in the grate, still. The occasional snuffle or abrupt laugh in the background. Jump cuts and odd sounds.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Here, with Riley playing back and commenting upon the previous day's events, we have left the files undisturbed. As the night progresses, her recording behaviour becomes increasingly erratic, and she often activates her equipment for split seconds at a time, only to switch it off again immediately. Entire hours pass this way. Perhaps Riley was beginning to construct what she imagined to be the diary of a shipwreck. Only one thing seems indisputable: by the early hours of the morning, Riley had drunk a substantial amount of whisky.

Riley is drunk. The following is scattered with repetitions and jump-cuts as she switches the recorder on and off.

Another greedy gulp.

RILEY (CONT'D)

It's not a human noise.

A sudden burst of *Sam's vocal*, her voice *impossibly stretched*, turning into a long scream. Then it stops.

RILEY (CONT'D)

It's not, is it? That's not a sound a human... being... can be.

Sam's voice again, cutting just as abruptly.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Hilde knew. Hilde brought us all here to die. So hey guys how about an island? How about maroonin' yerselves and makin' a record? Yeah sure Hilde. So tell us about this island.

The pages of a book being turned over.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Here's the book she was readin' all week. Line and Reason of Stroma by Levvvven Andreas. Never told us this. Page page page -- page two one one. Robert Hamilton, Bishop Of Caithneths, 1638. "

(MORE)

RILEY (CONT'D)

The people of Stroma profane their kirk with songs of love, most bawdy, also idolatry of sea demons, clouds, and formations of the stars. Most terrible to God they hold a song sung well the most pure of any kind, sense imm, immaterial, piety notwithstanding, also they prostrate, no, PROSTRATE themselves before the song. To sing on Stroma is to slide into hell. No tithe is offered, they do not ssshive, their bodies do not decay. Spectres... sing with the flesh. They are salty, godless and beyond compassion, their kirk rotten, ever ruins, unto their very founding." Oh HE knew the SCORE. Good old BISSSSSHOP Robert HAMILTON. Hilde knew, Hilde has it all worked out, I know I've listened to every last bit of her, of it, this is her, you want proof? This, this is her earlier -

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL

A microphone being moved around.

HILDE

Stroma Sessions, session thirteen. Sam's vocal. Take three.

SAM

I'm really not sure any more.

HILDE

- no it's fine. Let's keep going.

SAM

Hilde I feel weird. Can't we edit from what I've already done?

HILDE

No, that wouldn't be quite right.
(Clicks fingers into mic)
That's better. Sam, why did we come here?

Pause.

SAM

Not sure why you're asking me.

HILDE

What was the idea?

SAM

To get away?

HILDE

To get far away. Why did you say yes to coming?

SAM

Because it didn't...

HILDE

Go on.

SAM

Because it didn't sound comfortable or sensible, which is what I've been most of my life. And it scared me and I thought that might be good.

HILDE

So use that. Put all that into your voice and give me one more take. Trust me. We'll play it one more time.

SAM

But I don't know what this feeling is.

HILDE

Describe it.

SAM

I feel like I'm short of oxygen. Or I've fallen asleep at the wrong time and just woken up suddenly. My whole head is buzzy.

Movement, and Hilde's voice closer to Sam's mic -

HILDE
Pain makes your instincts strong.
Times like this, you can sing
without pattern, without thought.
You're not a selfish person
anyway, Sam. But right now it's
almost impossible for you to be
anything other than true.

SAM
Oh OK. OK. Yes OK.

HILDE
Shall I play it back?

SAM
Where did Riley go, again?

HILDE
She has her own problems and she
just needs a little time. It's
fine.

SAM
Where did Nico go?

HILDE
He got annoyed with me but he'll be
back.

SAM
Annoyed? Did that just happen now?

HILDE
I'm sure he's close by.

Pause. Sam's voice is hushed.

SAM
OK. But -- Hilde, if we play it I'm
finished. Yeah? One more time then
I'm done.

HILDE
Sure.
(Pause)
One, two, three, four -

*The music from Nico's story, with more recent additions.
Sam's voice doesn't quite join yet.*

INT. THE BOOK HOUSE

Suddenly a microphone is grabbed and the book house volume ramps up, Riley's voice up close, frantic, any remaining composure gone.

RILEY (BOOK HOUSE)
 Listen to me listen to me, please if you get this, anybody anyone who gets this, get this -- do not sing a song on Stroma. Do not raise your voice. Do not play a note, do not hold your hand to the air. The sky is a harp. The ground is a, is a drum. The woman Nico saw -- she, she was right. She said it. You just end up givin' yerself. Don't give yerself.

Sam's voice joins the music.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 You just end up servin' something you don't understand I mean, I know I'm a musician, I know that's part of the deal but it shouldn't, this isn't -- this isn't FAIR is it? It isn't is it? It's not FAIR to be roped into a, a song that never stops without so much as a by your leave -

There's a knock on a wooden door. The music is switched off with a click. Wind rattles the house.

Another knock on the door. Insistent.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 (Manic whisper)
 So right I know why she's here I know why she's looking for me. I took the files I took all of them. Just ripped the hard drive off the laptop and walked away. NOT safely ejected. Took her, her, her book as well. She wants them back cos she's useless without the, without the others, without the rest of us, without our -

Pause.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 (Voice suddenly raised)
 AREN'T YA HILDE? USELESS.

INT/EXT. THE BOOK HOUSE/OUTSIDE BOOKHOUSE

HILDE (THROUGH DOOR)
 Sure. Riley can I have the recordings
 back now please?

Fearful breaths from Riley, close up.

HILDE (THROUGH DOOR) (CONT'D)
 I could probably just push this
 door slightly and it would fall
 right in.

RILEY
 You're a GHOUL. I've got NAIL
 SCISSORS. Know THAT.

HILDE (THROUGH DOOR)
 Riley... you'll understand soon
 enough. Tell you what. I'll be by out
 the Gloup. Once you sober up.

RILEY
 I'm not going THERE it's COVERED in
 SEAGULLS.

HILDE (THROUGH DOOR)
 (Departing)
 Not any more it isn't.

NARRATOR
 The following is the final Stroma
 Sessions file from the original
 source. It begins with Riley
 deciding to meet Hilde Miles at the
 Gloup, the hole in the island with a
 sheer drop down to the sea cave
 below.

Slamming, as loud as possible, into:

EXT. THE GLOUP

Very heavy wind buffeting the mic. Footsteps on grass.

*The music continues and builds throughout, familiar elements
 drifting in: the chords from the dream of the boat, the
 dissonances from Nico's story, and so on...*

RILEY
 (Out of breath)
 Can't see a bloody thing except
 her. It's like she's swallowing
 the moonlight.
 (Calling out)
 YOU STEP AWAY FROM THERE I'M NOT
 COMING THAT CLOSE TO THE EDGE.

HILDE

I love how you record everything,
Riley. Is it because you're afraid of
missing something good? Look at that
sky. Oh, it's like an oil spill.

(Sings)

No stars to speak of, no hand to
hold...

RILEY

Tell me you knew. Say it into the
microphone. Tell me you knew we'd
die out here. From the moment we
saw the body down there in the
water, the whole thing was comin'
together wasn't it? You were like
oh yeah, this is exactly what I
wanted!

HILDE

No body down there anymore. Which is
about right. I'm up here for the time
being.

RILEY

... what do you m-

Riley lets out a huge scream of frustration.

RILEY (CONT'D)

I SAW IT. I SAW A BODY I SAW THE
SEAGULLS EAT IT. I SAW ONE BIRD
COVERED IN BLOOD WITH FLESH IN ITS
BEAK. I SAW A MAN FALL TO HIS DEATH I
SAW MY FRIENDS EATEN UP BY THIS
PLACE, NICO SAW FACES, I SAW, I SAW
IN YOUR BOOK, YOU KNEW! YOU KNEW!
AND YOU'RE GOING TO TELL ME YOU KNEW
-- YOU'RE GOING TO SAY IT!

Pause. Their voices closer together now.

RILEY (CONT'D)

What did we do to deserve this?

(Hilde's response is almost as if she's been asked why the
victims deserved such honours.)

HILDE

I mean you're really good musicians,
you know. You talk a lot in between
playing of course but one can't have
everything. Sam has a kind of
fluidity to her playing that comes
from being a pliable but intelligent
person.

(MORE)

HILDE (CONT'D)

Nico's desperate to connect which makes him a good listener. And despite what you think, Riley, your mistakes are the making of you. You'll need to remember that.

RILEY

Shut up. Say into -- say it into the microphone: what gives you the right?

HILDE

The right? Are we talking about rights now?

(Laughs)

You're the one who kills me in a minute.

RILEY

What?

HILDE

In a moment you push me all the way down there. I hit the rocks on the way, and I die. Then a cloud of red seagulls comes down. Huge flock of them. And they pick my corpse clean. They do it in seconds.

RILEY

STOP MESSING WITH ME.

HILDE

Shh. Hey. Bring the mic a bit closer. Riley.

(Closer to mic, urgently)

How many years have we played together? Hundreds of concerts. And how many people heard us, live? Thousands? But this is different. Stroma's different. Something happened here. Something that keeps happening forever. This whole island is a needle in a circular groove. It's a, it's a tape loop that never stops. It's in concert with itself. Isn't that exciting?

RILEY

You've graduated, you're a monster. Finally. 100 per cent. Congratulations.

HILDE

(Delighted laugh)
 Congrat-YOU-lations! This is the best gig we'll ever play, Riley. Right here. And you need to listen because you'll be on your own soon. Stroma is the most perfect medium. It's worth the sacrifice. It's worth giving yourself, completely, without regret -

RILEY

You're a psychopath.

HILDE

You've got to listen Riley, any moment now it's the water and the birds and the blood. You'll need to finish the sessions alone, ok? So I think Nico's part could, overall, be lower and Sam's 'cello is the key. Keep her foregrounded. Yes?

A scrabbling in a coat pocket -

RILEY

Well here's your handiwork mate. Everything we've done every note every take on this eeny weeny drive. And guess what Hilde, it's going straight in the sea -

The music morphs into a see-sawing dissonance.

HILDE

- it won't matter. When you open up the laptop tomorrow, everything will still be there, all of it -

RILEY

- straight in the salt water. So much for your everlasting scheme mate, so much for yer orchestration-

HILDE

- you're not listening -

Rocks falling away, sudden movements. The cawing of seagulls.

RILEY

- YOU'RE NOT LISTENING - YOU, YOU
 KILLED US ALL -

HILDE
 You got on the boat of your own
 accord. Deep down you want this as
 much as I do. Play music, Riley.
 Get it right.

RILEY
 Get back, get BACK -

HILDE
 RILEY, RILEY, LET'S FACE IT WHAT
 ELSE CAN YOU DO? COME ON. WHAT
 ARE YOU WORTH?

A slap. A muffled punch.

RILEY
 DON'T COME NEAR ME -

HILDE
 RILEY.

A thump. Scuffles. Riley gasps as Hilde slips on the edge
 of the Gloop.

RILEY
 Nooo -

HILDE
 (Quiet)
 - told you.

Falling rocks. A terrified, full-throat scream from Riley
 as Riley falls:

RILEY
HILDE!

Hilde's body hitting a surface hard, then hitting
 water.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 OH GOD NOOO -- HILDE -

And a sudden, IMMENSE flapping of wings, a massive cawing and
 screeching of gulls, frenzied, horrific, distorting the
 recording, engulfing and distorting Riley's screams -

RILEY (CONT'D)
 DON'T NO NOT AGAIN NOT AGAIN -

The recording jitters, stumbles, roars, stops.

INT. ABANDONED SCHOOL - NIGHT

Heavy rain and wind through the walls. The music will re-build toward a terrible crescendo throughout the following.

RILEY

First thing I noticed is that there's always diesel for the jenny. Always think I'm running out but I get up every mornin' and there it is. Fresh gas, man. I mean seriously.

A digital stutter, a rip -

RILEY (CONT'D)

I am -

(Beat)

I... was -

(Glitch)

Sod it. Seriously. My name is Katherine Lillian Riley and I am alone on the island of Stroma in the North Sea. I've lit some fires...

(Jump cut)

Cold. Today I decided I couldn't take it any more and the laptop got switched back on. I listened to session thirteen and it's -

(Falters)

Yeah it's pretty good.

(Jump cut)

Hilde's body has totally gone today. Some bones were there for a bit, floatin' in the gloop but so what, she ain't any more. Bye bye. Bye bye bye.

(A glitch)

Four weeks gone. Boat didn't come yesterday, like it were supposed to.

(Jump cut)

My name is Katherine Lillian Riley and I am trapped on the island of Stroma and I figure I need to get it right. Right? Right. I've plugged in the mics again. Tuned up my violin. Meantime I wave at the mainland, I flash the lightbulbs in the school, no-one's seein' me. You sometimes hear the singin' from the church but don't see anyone. You sometimes see the telephone man but always in the distance.

(MORE)

RILEY (CONT'D)
 You, sometimes, get to sleep, but
 not often I've found. So I don't
 have much choice in the matter,
 that's what I th-

A rip. *The drone from the church recording.*

RILEY (CONT'D)
 My name is Katherine Lillian Riley
 and I am contained on Stroma
 sometime at the end of me life. No-
 one comes. I've listened to
 sessions one through thirteen
 again. And yeah, I'm the weak link,
 that much is obvious. I'm actually
 playing a bit out of tune in some
 places. But beyond that I'm
 bugged if I know how to make it
 any better. Really.

(Jump cut)

Don't have much space on the disc
 so what I'll do is... uh... I'll
 record, and I mean, if it doesn't
 work, I'll delete. How long can it
 take?

(Blip)

OK. These are the Stroma sessions,
 session fourteen.

A rip. *The underlying music starts to grind, tear, claw...*

RILEY (CONT'D)
 No, that were no good. Stroma
 sessions, session fifteen.
 (Rip)
 These are the Stroma sessions,
 session sixteen.
 (Rip)
 Stroma sessions, session seventeen -
 (Rip)
 Stroma sessions, session eighteen,
 this is the one folks -
 (Rip)

The dream of the boat chords.

RILEY (CONT'D)
 Yesterday when I was playing -- no.
 (Rip)
 Sometimes when I'm playing -- uh.
 (Glitch)
 Sometimes when I'm playing Nico and
 Sam play too.
 (Glitch)
 (MORE)

The wind. *Sam's vocal note, barely perceptible at first.*

RILEY (CONT'D)

Stroma sessions, session twenty,
doubling the viola this time which
could work I g-

(Rip)

Stroma sessions, session forty nine

(Rip)

Cold. Just so cold I can't think.
Hilde keeps looking at me funny.

(Rip)

Stroma sessions session one hundred
and forty four -

(Rip)

(Strange accent)

Jussss waaanted to plaaaaay the
muuuuusssssick

(Rip)

This is the Stroma sessions session
one hundred and ninety three,
Nico's going to be on drums for
this one and... I think... Sam, are
you... no point asking you never
ever speak to me do you?

(Rip)

Stroma session two hundred, vocal f-

(Rip)

Stroma sessions se-

(Rip)

(A scream of frustration)

Stroma sessions five hundred

(Rip)

Stroma sessions five hundred twenty
two, they just sit there, the three
of them just quietly walk in, sit
there. Always playing the same
thing though. Don't speak to me.
Sometimes talk to each other, I
can't hear it. Lips move. No words.
Ain't fair. Really really is not
fair people. Sing song. Sing song.
Sing song.

*Sam's vocal note louder, elements of the awful full-throated
scream mixing into the tone...*

RILEY (CONT'D)

(Rip)

Stroma sessions seven hund-

(MORE)

RILEY (CONT'D)

Stroma sessions uh session session
session session session

(Guttural, awful scream)

Stroma sessions one thousand four
hundred and eighty eight

(Rip)

Seventeen thousand nine hundred
ninety two

(Rip)

Four hundred thousand thr-

(Rip)

Stroma sessions one mil-

And at its most horrific, *the music cuts.*

Everything stops.

END