



HOME AND COMFORT

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This is a story for all of you.

Krapp is speaking into his tape recorder; he's eating a banana.

You're away from home for the first time. You have weekly phone calls with your parents in a little box at the bottom of a corridor where the phone is. People run past shouting swear words hoping your parents will hear. There's no space to be sentimental.

Or you can't phone home anymore. They're all gone.

You may read this by the side of a canal, on a vaporetto taking longer than you thought it would, while you eat kimchi, or on the bus to the supermarket. You can read it anywhere and anytime you like.

We become estranged from where we're from, but never completely.

In Francis Ford Coppola's 1986 film *Peggy Sue Got Married* there's a scene where Peggy Sue (played by Kathleen Turner), freshly transported from a high school reunion in 1985 to her childhood home in 1960 - answers the phone to her (long deceased in 1985) grandmother. As she cries on the stairs afterwards to her confused mother. She says, "I love her so much and I haven't seen her in so long".

At London's Frieze Art Fair in 2011, an artwork by Laure Prouvost read "ideally your mother will be waiting for you here". Sometimes you wish your whole island - the barley fields



and winding roads, the green, mossy hills and the crashing sea, would be waiting for you here; “will we go home now?”

Pause

If you're lucky, when you're little, there is a time when everything feels like it will always be the same – school, summers, friends, parents, birthday cake, turkey drumsticks from the Maelfa shopping centre. Or maybe your memories are not so happy; maybe you'll move mountains to forget them.

Growing older brings volition – the agency to re-evaluate and move away from the things that tried to break or hold us back. Our relationship to our parents, or lack of parents or familial function changes over time. In Sheila Heti's *Motherhood*, the book so many of us read last year, she (or her character) writes about wanting to take away her mother's pain, even thinking she was the cause of it: “once I am finished writing this book, neither of us will ever cry again”.¹

How do you feel when someone you love is in turmoil?

How do you feel when your child grows up to be an artist, representing their country at the Venice Biennale?

Can you remember a time before all this had happened?

Memory is like a scar; looking at it might remind us of the wound or it might just let us know that *something* has happened. A doctor once said, “the body remembers sadness” – taking to bed once a year, the cough someone described as grief. So what happens to collective pain – the pain endured by a community,

¹ Sheila Heti (2018) *Motherhood*



visible and invisible incisions in the land? How does grief manifest when it has no voice?

Have you ever had an eerie feeling when you entered a place? Do you know what happened there?

An online image search of 'Aberfan' brings up pages of historic images. Turmoil, disaster, clocks stopped in time. The present day images are those of tribute and memorial. A small village belongs still to the tragedy that took place over a few minutes more than 50 years ago.

The scar remains.

And if the land holds such memories, so too do bricks and mortar. But what happens when the bricks and mortar are gone? Years ago, on a train between Glasgow and Edinburgh, a block of flats were being demolished. Like the set of a play held aloft, three walls remained. A teenage bedroom was exposed, the wallpaper laid bare for us all to see. From the window of a locomotive, a trace of life before this place became somewhere people no longer lived and breathed and died.

In Margaret Tait's 1976 film *Tailpiece* she documented the emptying out of her childhood home in Orkney. There are frames of the house, garden, beds, and photographs, and then a fleeting shot of her own reflection in the mirror.

Pause

You remember a weekend morning, having work to do and so much to organise. There was a brief lull, a moment cross-legged on the floor with a cup of tea. As you sit your 5-year old son brings you a little note, written in pencil "I love you".



There is another weekend in the future. You're at the beginning of the biggest year of your life. You thought you'd be doing something else. But instead you are packing up belongings, sorting things into boxes. Everything is slowed down, just as it was speeding up. You think about that face that had once gazed so intently onto yours.