

SWALLOW

Written by

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INT. A DREARY LIVERPOOL HOSPICE ROOM. THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING. THERE IS AN ELDERLEY LADY (MARGARET) ASLEEP ON THE HOSPITAL BED, MARGARET IS HOOKED UP TO VARIOUS MEDICAL MACHINES AND THERE IS AN UNDERLYING AMBIENT SOUNTRACK OF MEDICAL BLEEPS AND OXYGEN HISSES. SITTING NEXT TO MARGARET, HOLDING HER HAND IS PAULA, HER DAUGHTER. PAULA HAS BEEN IN THIS ROOM FOR THE PAST THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS.

PAULA

My mother's hospice is in the very centre of Liverpool. Life swells and curls around the whispering and dying.

Three a.m and an opioid sleep holds her - but outside - outside it's all life.

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS PAULA'S GAZE THROUGH THE HOSPICE WINDOW TO THE OUTSIDE AND WE IN A SWEEPING SHOT AS IT FLIES THROUGH THE NIGHT OVER THE CITY OF LIVERPOOL, AS THOUGH IT IS A BIRD'S EYE VIEW. BRIEFLY PAUSING SO WE GLIMPSE SOME OF EVENTS IN THE FOLLOWING MONOLOGUE

PAULA (V.O.)

A cacophony of birds: Scouse birds, Liverbirds, feathered and sequinned birds, Hens on the pull, birds who peck and birds who Ikea their nests, birds who preen, birds who wear Preen. Strutting and plucking and clucking and Beehives teeter-tottering, bleached strands entwining, perched above Scouse brows, Black boughs, Operatic rows ringin' from the Phil.

And waddling, God, yes ,waddling under the Pie in the Sky, our very own Concrete nest. Brassic and counting cash at the Lobster Pot. Chipshop Steve, '96 inked in Kori Sumi black, from elbow to wrist. Pouring vinegar on salty wounds.

(MORE)

PAULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Hands reaching into pickled egg
 jars choosing gelatinous Dead men's
 eyes.
 An eye for an eye -

INT. SLAM - WE ARE BACK IN THE HOSPICE ROOM WITH PAULA, IT IS
 BRUTUALLY BLEAK IN THAT ROOM.

PAULA (CONT'D)

 Mum has to have Botox injected
 into her sockets so the nurses can
 pull her eyelids down, then
 artificial teardrops every twenty
 minutes or the surface of her
 eyeball starts splitting and
 cracking.

I googled it - imagine paper cuts
 here on your eyeball , that's what
 it feels like.

EXT. WHOOSH - WE ARE BACK OUTSIDE WITH THE BIRD LIKE CAMERA
 SWEEPING AND FLYING OVER LIVERPOOL TO SHOW US THESE SCENES

PAULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

 Students in sash windows;
 Studying,
 Sitting,
 Describing,
 Searching,
 Flirting,
 Watching as they tumble into the
 Adelphi Hotel,
 The fourth Grace...disgraced.
 And
 Sleeping,
 Sleeping,
 Sleeping,
 Rolling down to the Mersey,
 Rolling sounds of the Mersey,
 Rolling across the Mersey, wind
 biting, no mercy.

Saxa salt mingling with brine laden
 mist, a Pier Head miasma.

(MORE)

PAULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 All under those copper, Watching,
 Eyes, Unblinking.

INT. WE ARE BACK WITH PAULA IN THE HOSPICE ROOM. IT FEELS
 EVEN MORE CLAUSTROPHOBIC AND DINGY AFTER THE FREEDOM OF
 FLYING OVER LIVERPOOL

PAULA (CONT'D)

The liver birds and mum both
 blindly staring into the sky.

She'd have laughed at that - rolled
 those watery orbs.

It had all seemed so doable to
 begin with.

Can't walk -get a wheel chair.
 Can't speak get an adaptive speech
 board.
 Can't blink -botox.
 Can't wee - catheter.
 Can't breath- oxygen line and nasal
 specs.
 Can't swallow - cut a hole and put
 a peg tube into her stomach - feed
 her through the night -a bird bolus
 dripping. Can't stand the bloody
 awfulness ... put a syringe driver
 in.

It starts to puncture you.

BLEEP'S FROM THE MACHINES THAT MARGARET IS ATTACHED TO SEEM
 TO GET LOUDER AND LOUDER

PAULA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

At first you hardly notice it

(BLEEP)

But it doesn't stop

(BLEEP)

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

Little bits of you
 (BLEEP)
 Start leaking out
 (BLEEP)
 Patience first and then compassion
 (BLEEP)
 With each washing and bleaching
 (BLEEP)
 Refilling and emptying
 (BLEEP)
 Disinfecting and swilling
 (BLEEP)
 And check the catheter
 (BLEEP)
 Check the peg tube
 (BLEEP)
 Oxygen line
 (BLEEP)
 Pressure mattress

THE BLEEPS ARE VERY LOUD NOW

Christ she's chocking
 (BLEEP)
 Start suction machine?
 (BLEEP)
 Is that mucus or blood?

 (BLEEP)
 Is it the cannula?
 (Bleep)
 It's not stopping-

(BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP)

you'd. kill. to .make. it. stop.

THE BLEEPS RETURN TO THEIR LOWER VOLUME

PAULA(CONT'D)

So here I am, in new joggers,
 "All the gear and no idea" said
 Tilly this
 morning. Well, that was after she
 said she wanted fifty quid to go to
 the cinema.
 "Fifty quid Tills! That's steep"
 "Well" she said "everyone goes for
 sushi first. That's what all the
 girls eat at St Benedict's Oratory
 Mum, there's no carbs in a soft
 shelled crab "

(MORE)

PAULA (CONT'D)

I'm relieved she has some friends
even if they are
pretentious fuckers.

I don't want Tilly to feel
embarrassed you
know - at school.

Mum, do you remember taking me to
school in your orange mini?
Terry Wogan soundtracking our
morning the heater blowing cold not
hot and you'd wrap me in a tartan
blanket, when I sobbed about Kieron
Mcilvaney having a slowie with Katy
Stannish at the ST VINCENT DE PAUL
disco.
"Stop your greetin' darlin'. No
one's worth that"

But you'd hold me- really hold me
until every tear stopped and then
we'd drink milky tea and have a
Tunnocks Tea Cake.

A peat fires and dog hairs
childhood, with holidays in North
Wales.

There's this wonderful waterfall -
called...Shit ...come on...I
remember you taking me there it's
called...

The Swallow falls
The Swallow, Falls.
The SWALLOW falls.

It's in Betws-y-coed but you'd call
it BETSY Co-Ed.

Wet summers spent on slippery rocks
just you and me.

The one person who has loved me
with an unrelenting
Fierceness and has.....
never ever stopped loving
Me.

PAULA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Snowdonia where every tea shop has
Tunnocks tea cakes Mum.

Where machines don't constantly
bleep Mum.

Where swallows fall.

Think of them soaring Mum as
they're taking flight. They're
flying to join the Liver Birds
Mum.
They're coming to Liverpool.

Listen can you hear?

Can you hear them coming Mum?

Let me turn this off.

PAULA starts to unplug the machines attached to Margaret as
she does so both the soundtrack of bleeps and the neon glow
from the machines fades.

PAULA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

And this ...

And this ...

And this ...

There is TOTAL BLACKOUT and in the darkness we hear
Margaret's shallow breathing

PAULA (CONT'D)

Mum let me hold you tight so
tight..... ssssssssdhhhhhhh

THE AMBIENT NOISE SOUNDTRACK of bleeps STOPS SUDDENLY.

PAULA (CONT'D)

SSSSSHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.
...and then you will hear them
swooping.

THE CAMERA MOVES FROM PAULA HOLDING MARGARET BACK THROUGH THE
WINDOW , DAWN IS BREAKING AS THE CAMERA SHOT SOARS UPWARDS
INTO THE SKY, WHERE IT JOINS A CIRCLING GROUP OF SWALLOWS.

SLOW FADE