

The Clearing

By Chris Cooper



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March 2022

And from her mother's tears come the rivers, come the birches, come the cuckoos, who still sing these songs of sorrow.
The Kalevala

Youth Woman

The action of the play
Takes place somewhere in Finland in the late spring months
in a clearing in a birch forest
in the not too distant future.

Site

The clearing is in the heart of a birch forest which has lost or shed its greenery. There are some shoots of green here and there, but the overall effect is ashen. The forest floor is littered with leaves that are both dry and grey and there is broken brushwood and branches littering the ground. The tree trunks stand like distressed poles in the earth, leaning, split, wounded. The sky is a blanket of grey, with a sunless sky and it is cold.

Woman is in her late forties. She wears outdoor clothing, the sort used for hiking and cold weather, boots, hat, and gloves. She has a green check plaid or woollen outside shirt that covers her torso and a light waterproof jacket over that. They are well worn but in good repair.

Youth is in his mid-teens. He wears bulky old training shoes, baggy denim jeans and a big coat, which shows heavy wear and tear, over a faded bright coloured prison overall. A new looking brightly coloured baseball cap.

The equipment, such as the windbreak for the fire, cannisters etc are the type you can buy as camping equipment. The coverings are lightweight waterproof groundsheets that blend in the with the forest floor

Note on stage directions

- means the sentence drifts off
 - is an interruption, including self-interruption, by one which stops the other
/ denotes where one speaker overlaps with another
- Moment* is shorter than a *Beat*
Beat is shorter than a *Pause*
which is shorter than a *Silence*

*- The exact wording of the pre-recorded phone message and voice messages left by the daughters need to be created in rehearsal by the company and resonate both the local context and the centre of the production of the play.

One

Day. Clearing in the forest.

To one side of the clearing by the trees is a small bright green one-person lightweight hiking tent. The tent has been partially camouflaged with brushwood and leaves. A branch has been pulled away from the entrance, which is unzipped although we cannot see inside because of the flap hanging down. To the right side of the tent there is what appears to be a low rock.

In the centre of the clearing there are two flat cut tree stumps and a log and a pile of brushwood and twigs by the log. Over to the left of the tree stumps, there is a rock with what appears to be leaves piled up against it. To the side of the brushwood, on the ground, is a handmade wooden spindle.

Sudden movement from inside the tent. A thudding sound from inside the tent. Beat, an unopened tin can with no label, is thrown out into the clearing, followed by another. Another is thrown out. Youth appears backing out on all fours. He pulls a rucksack out behind him. He wrenches it free and sits on the ground with the rucksack cradled between his legs. Still. He listens and looks around.

Silence.

Youth begins to rummage through the rucksack, pulls out a fleece and some other clothing, map, torch, tosses them aside. First aid kit, drops it to the ground. Pulls out a small box, opens it. A soil testing kit perhaps. Disappointment, drops it to the ground. Takes out another testing kit – perhaps for water. Two water bottles, empty. Shakes and throws them both at the ground.

A cuckoo calls. Youth freezes. Another call. Youth gets to his feet. Another call. He moves in the direction of the call. Call, again, fainter. Pause. Listens.

Silence.

Goes over to one of the tin cans picks it up. Goes to the rock by the tent. Bangs the can against it, traps his thumb between the tin and the rock, yelps, drops the tin. Wrings his hand. Jams his thumb into his mouth. Sits, rocks, sucks.

Woman appears behind Youth. In one hand she carries a long-handled spade a shaft fashioned from a birch branch and a flat piece of metal roughly bent into shape attached together with washing line wrapped round it. In the other a collapsible water cannister which is full. Binoculars round her neck. She surveys the clearing. She eyes the contents of the rucksack on the ground. Still. Watches his back.

Youth takes out his thumb. Examines it. Remembers the first aid kit. Gets up, turns, sees the Woman. Beat. Grabs the log and threatens her with it. Pause. Woman stares at him. Puts down the spade and then the cannister. Pause. She takes a step towards him.

Youth: *(Log)* Warnin' you. Don't *(Gestures)* make ...

She takes another step towards him.

Youth: *(Loud)* Back off!

Woman bends down and picks up one of the testing kits which is by her feet. Examines it.

Youth: *(Jabbing the air with the log)* Smash you!

Woman sighs. Puts the kit back in the rucksack. Picks up the torch, the next thing closest to her. She turns to look at Youth. Youth takes a step back, raising the log above his head. Woman stands.

Youth: *(Hissing)* Askin' for it!

Woman stares at Youth. Takes a step forward. Folds her arms. Pause. Youth's arms begin to shake.

Youth: *(Gritted teeth)* Don't ... Bitch!

Woman stares. Youth begins to cry. Swallows it and begins to shake. Shaking spreads to his whole body. A sob. Shaking. Another sob. Woman takes another step forward. Youth throws the log towards her as hard as he can. She steps back. The log falls at her feet. Youth runs past her. Trips, falls, scrambles to his feet, and runs out of the clearing into the trees.

Woman listens without turning to look. Still. She takes the binoculars off. Sudden movement, goes to the clothing, unfolds the fleece revealing a small bag. Opens it – takes out an A5 sized notebook and a mobile phone. Looks over her shoulder briefly. Puts them back inside the bag. Grabs the fleece and wraps the bag up in it once more. Puts it in the bottom of the rucksack. Collects the discarded items and puts them in. Leans the rucksack against the rock by the tent. Picks up the tin cans. Stands them by the rucksack. Stands the cannister and spade up by the rucksack. Tired. She slowly picks up the log and returns it to where it came from. Looks up at the sky. Grimace. Shivers.

She brushes off some of the leaves piled against the 'rock' by the tree stump to reveal a waterproof sheet which she pulls back. There are more unlabelled tins and packets under the waterproof, she adds the tins the Youth had taken from the tent to the pile. Clears some more leaves in the centre of the clearing in front of the stumps and pulls back another waterproof sheet to reveal a fireplace dug down into the ground. There is a three-sided metal windshield with a grill (back facing the audience) to protect the fire. Retrieves some of the dry twigs and sticks, places them inside the windbreak and uses a flint hanging round her neck to light a fire. She watches it ignite. Feeds the fire with more kindling. Sits on the logs. Extends her hands towards it. Feels the warmth. Silence. A crack of a branch amongst the trees. Woman hears but does not look. Pause. Woman takes a tin and picks up the can dented from being hit against the rock.

Woman: *(Examining the dent and turning the can the other way round)* Upside down. It's a ring pull.

She pulls off the lid, takes an instrument from her pocket, extends an arm with a spoon from it, stirs the can, and places it on the grill. Feeds the fire. Watches.

Woman: *(Louder)* Baked beans. *(Pause)* I know you're there.

Youth reappears behind her from the trees. Still. Silence. Woman stares into the fire.

Woman: We can share. *(No response)* You're hungry. Scared. And there's nowhere else to go.

Somewhere in the forest a tree collapses with a crash. Youth steps into the clearing. Pause.

Woman: You get used to it eventually. *(Pause)* Come. Warm yourself.

Youth goes to the fire. Moment. Sits by her side on a stump. Youth glances back over his shoulder at the trees. Turns and stares at the fire. Woman stirs the beans.

Two

Three days later. Afternoon.

The clearing. The rucksack is outside the tent. Youth is sat on the logs by the fire, feeding it kindling. Stops. He rubs his hands, feeds the fire some more. Woman appears carrying a dead rabbit.

Youth: What's that?

Woman: Dinner. *(Inspecting it)* Not much meat on it. Undernourished. *(Lays it on the rock)*
Like us.

Youth: Not eatin' that.

Woman: Fine.

Youth: *(Feeds the fire)* Disgustin'.

Woman: You need to collect more kindling

Youth: If we 'ad a chainsaw -

Woman: We don't. And if we did, we wouldn't use it. *(Youth looks at her)* You take what's
fallen until you can plant replacements.

Youth: Tree hugger.

Woman: Moron.

Youth: Only jokin' you.

Woman: So am I.

Youth: *(Beat)* Saw yer, actually huggin' the trees.

Woman: Make yourself useful.

Youth: *(Indicating)* Doing what?

Woman: *(Beat)* Sweeping up leaves?

Youth: Very funny. *(Pause)* Why do you do that? *(Beat. She stares at him)* The tree hugging.
Weird.

Woman: Listening.

Youth: What?

Woman: You heard. *(Moment)* Makes me feel better.

Youth: Better?

Woman: Yes... Its – Never mind.

Youth: Mad.

Woman: The way we live is mad. Alienates, disconnects, us from what's outside the window,
on our doorstep.

Youth: *(Looks)* Dead trees.

Woman: They're not dead. They're – look if you don't like it here, you can leave.

Youth: Your forest, is it?

Woman: No. The forest belongs to no one.

Youth: Exactly.

Woman walks over to the rucksack. Takes out a piece of equipment. Takes the spade over to one side of the clearing.

Youth: What's that?

Woman: For testing the soil.

Youth: Scientist are you?

Woman: Yes.

Youth: Tree hugging scientist.

She starts to scrape away leaves. Puts spade aside. Crouches on her haunches. Scrapes again at the ground. into the soil.

Youth: S' cold. Silent.....dead silent. Everything's dead. And Silent (*Stands, looks into the trees. Woman picks up a handful of soil*) No birds. Surrounded by trees, and no birds (*Woman is still. Head down*) No sun. Grey. (*Woman lets the soil dribble through her fingers*) S'all gone.

Youth wanders to the other side of the clearing. Woman scoops another handful of dirt. Crouches. Looks at the Youth who is not looking at her. Lets it run through her fingers once more.

Youth: Silent, silent ... (*Shouting*) Silent!

Woman: Pipe down!

Youth: (To Woman) Forest's dead.

Woman: Its wounded. Needs time to heal.

Youth: Dead.

Woman: We've wounded it /and its –

Youth: Gone.

Woman: Its recovering.

Youth: Where is everyone?

Woman: Its early days, /you -

Youth: Is there anyone there? (*Shout*) Is there anyone there?

Woman: Shut up.

Youth: (*Yell*) Is there anybody there? Is there anybody there?

Woman: Shut up! Shut Up!

Youth: Any-bleedin'-one!

Woman hurries over to Youth. Grabs him by the shoulders. He screams. No words. She slaps him. He sits down. Pause.

Woman: (*Standing over him*) Shut up!

Youth: (*Quiet*) No one. (*Beat*) No one here.

Woman: You're here. I'm here. We're alive. Survived this far. We're here.

A cracking of timber. Another tree falls somewhere. Silence. Youth gets to his feet.

Woman: We need to talk. (*Beat*) How did you get here – escape the ...?

Youth: How did *you* get here professor?

Woman: I live here.

Youth: Here?

Woman: A cabin. Four days walk away. Decided to look further afield after the last storm. It took most of my roof off.

Youth: From round here?

Woman: No. The city. Left in DATE. After the COP collapsed.

Youth: Police?

Woman: Climate conference. Realised they weren't serious about the impending ecological catastrophe. *(Beat)* Not sustainable. The way people lived. So, I left, with my ... Everything.

Youth: They're not laughin' now are they.

Youth wanders off.

Woman: I need to – to know what you.... Where - *What* you've seen?

(No response) What's your story? *(No response)* I'm talking to you. *(Youth looks but does not speak)* I'm here! And I'm talking to you.

Youth: You're not me mum.

Woman: Don't be such a child!

Youth: I am. *(Beat)* I'm just a kid. Stupid.

Pause. She starts to go.

Youth: Where /you -

Woman: I need some space.

She leaves. Pause.

Youth: *(Quiet)* Sorry. Sorry.... Sorry ... you stupid bitch.

He begins to pace up and down.

Youth: *(Kicking over the leaves)* Gone. *(Goes to the edge of the clearing)* See? Nothing!

Goes to the rucksack. Opens it. Rummages. Drops things on the ground. Pulls out the fleece. Unwraps it. Opens the bag. Drops the book. Looks at the phone.

Youth: *(Brandishing phone)* Saw you!

Fiddles with it. It powers up. Holds it up. No signal. Pockets phone. Opens the book. Mouths something slowly. Stops. Shuts the book and stuffs it inside his jacket. Repacks and closes the rucksack. Folds his hands under his armpits. Stares at the ground for a moment. Goes into the trees. Pause. He reappears. Sits by the fire. Pause.

Grabs a tin from the pile. He opens it and tips food in his mouth rapidly. Eats quickly. Woman suddenly appears. She goes to the spade. He drops the tin.

Woman: *(Indicating)* Come on.

Wipes his mouth with his hand. Does not move.

Woman: Come on!

She goes. He hesitates. Follows her.

Three

The clearing. Later that afternoon. The spade is resting against the rock. Woman is sat by the fireplace with a different rucksack. She is wearing household rubber gloves as she empties it item by item. Clothing. Tins and packets. Youth watches.

Youth: What you wearing them for?

Woman: We need to be careful. *(She drops another item of clothing onto a pile)* We can burn this stuff.

Youth: Hungry. *(Grabbing the tin she's holding from her hands)* Tins are OK. Not been opened.

Woman: What if it killed him?

Youth: *(Mimes hitting her on the head)* Like this?

Woman: No, like contaminated. *(Snatches it back)* I don't know.

Youth: Didn't look like he was poisoned to me.

Woman: What does poisoned look like?

Youth: Well, you know *(Pulls a face)* Poisoned.

Woman: We're all poisoned. The food chain's poisoned.

Youth: Fuck off we're all poisoned!

Woman: Toxic. Pollution. ... We destroyed the soil. Its dead.

Youth: You're jokin' me. Soil doesn't die.

Woman: It does, then it becomes dirt.

Pause. Youth stands up wanders away. Looks at the earth

Youth: Shit. ... at least we got tins.

Woman: Wont last for ever.

Youth: Its beans innit. Tins of beans is everywhere.

Woman: Seriously?

Youth: *(Beat)* ..Yea.

Woman: Where do you think they come from?

Youth: Shops. There's still some shops.... Probably. Somewhere... There's places you can... The city. Soldiers used to hand 'em out. People fight over them. *(Starts to pace)* Saw a bloke mash up another bloke with a tin. Both wanted it. *(She looks at him)* Smacked him in the face. Bosh. Tomatoes. Juice. Mental. *(Silence)* *(Pause)* Serious. What're you doin' here, man?

Woman: I like it.

Youth: OK. Whatever.

Woman: What about you?

Youth doesn't respond. She finalises the two piles.

Woman: *(Pointing to one pile)* We keep this. *(Indicates rucksack)* And this. *(Indicating other pile)* Burn the rest.

Youth: What do you think killed 'im prof?

Woman: Hard to say. Sad.

Youth: 'Is face was pain, man.

Pause

Woman: Best not to dwell on it. Change the subject.

Silence

Youth: OK. What you doin' in the middle of nowhere? No one lives here. No life.

Woman: There has been life here for millennia.

Youth: Who?

Woman: Millenia. Thousands of years. Millions. Before people. Before mammals. Its Pre-Cambrian. Around four point six billion years old. Human settlements didn't appear until hunter gatherers until about 10,700 years ago, that's 8,700 BC.

Youth: BC?

Woman: Before Christ.

Youth: Jesus!

Woman: *(Looks at him. Beat)* We say BCE now. Before the Common Era. Its more inclusive.

Youth: Big words.

Woman: All I'm saying is life doesn't begin and end with people. If the earth is twenty-four hours old, modern humans have been around for just one second. One massive destructive second.

Youth: I didn't do nothin'.

Off we hear a tree crack, splinter then fall. They both look in the direction of the sound. Pause. Woman puts the stuff they are keeping into the 'new' rucksack.

Woman: *(Indicating)* I'll sanitise them. *(Beat)* He died all alone.

Youth: Yea. *(Pause)* Been alone for years. *(Woman looks at him)* I'm a criminal.

Woman: We all are - look what we've done.

Youth: Honest. *(He looks at her)* You gonna judge me professor? *(Pause. She looks away. Pause)* Stealin'. Food an' stuff.

Woman: When the food shortages started.

Youth: We was short before the shortages. We was poor.

Woman: Your family?

Youth: Whole postcode. Poor. That's not sustainable *(Beat. Youth starts to go through the 'unwanted' pile)* Learn to keep your eye open. Gets to be a habit.

Woman: What did I say?

Youth: *(Holding up a t-shirt)* Armani, man.

Woman: *(Taking it back)* No.

She picks up the pile and puts it by the spade.

Woman: We don't know what killed him.

Youth: Boredom?

Woman: As I said no one's keeping /you here.

Youth: Yea well, I don't intend sticking round much longer.

Woman: *(Moving the tins to the pile of food)*. At least we gave him a burial.

Youth: Yea. Least we did that.

Woman: What's that supposed to mean? *(Youth shrugs)* Come on? *(Shakes his head)* What else was I supposed to do?

Youth: Heard that one before prof.

Youth turns away from her and goes over to the pile of things to be burned. Picks up the t-shirt once more.

Woman: Stop that.

Youth looks at her and laughs. Examines the t-shirt.

Woman: Stop – I – this is my place and / I –

Youth: Yours? Thought it belongs to no one?

They begin to struggle over the t-shirt.

Youth: Get off. /Mad -

Woman: It might be contaminated!

Youth: You're fucking contaminated - in /the head.

Woman: Stupid.

Youth: Don't' call / me –

Woman: /Ungrateful -

Youth: Stupid. *(They struggle)* /Ungrateful!

Woman: You just take. What do you give! Get out!

There is a tearing sound. Youth pushes Woman away. She falls to the ground.

Youth: What the - ! *(Clutching t-shirt)* All you clever people. What have you ever done? *(Woman looks up at the sky)* Nothin'. Fucking nothin'. Told us everythin' would be alright. Nothin' to worry about. Now look at us. Livin' in trees! *(Beat)* Climate change – `Not change its – it's a -a bleedin' ...

Woman: *(Looking at him)* catastrophe. I never told anyone it'd be alright.

Youth: Sure /you didn't –

Woman: That's not – not fair./ I -

Youth: Fair? What you know? Been up 'ere. Didn't see the waves. Smashing /the – or the fires.

Woman: /Look -

Youth: No, you look! *(Beat)* Wind and fire. Falling buildings. Roads with big holes. You said, told us... We'll invent a – suck all the *(Gestures)* ... capture the. .. Too late. Not enough Prof.... Sky like blood. All you clever scientist ... fuckers, with your big words, messin' with my future. *(Woman starts to speak. He presses a finger hard against his lips)*. Shh! *(Still. Pause. Quiet)* My life! Fucked! *(He looks at the t-shirt)* Ripped. Guttled.... Armani. Torn it. *(He slowly examines the t-shirt)*. *Woman starts to move. Youth stills her with a gesture. He puts the t-shirt on over his coat. It is torn at the neck)* Ripped. ... *(Silence)* Didn't affect everyone. Not at first. *(Laughs)* Then there was one fire. In a posh restaurant. Had food

there, even when it was short. *(Laughs)* Fire alarm went off and everyone queued up to pay before leaving. They fucking left it too late didn't they. Died standing in a queue. Burnt to a crisp. That's' how they found 'em. Comedy. *(Chuckles)* They weren't laughin' though. *(Moment)* Chaos. Looting. Soldiers on the streets. Rich people left. Convoys. Took their bottles of fresh water. Their cannisters of fresh air. *(Beat)* Left us to it. Primal Carnage, Extinction. Played that game. This was for real. *(Pause)* Screws legged it too and I walked out. Kept going. Long. Away from the crowds waiting for help in the streets. Away from the big waves. Away ... from it all. Walked and walked *(Pause. He walks towards and past Woman as if she isn't there)* Disaster. *(Pulls the t-shirt away from his torso)* Why?

Woman: Too distracted.

Youth: *(Quiet)* Ripped.

Woman: Too busy having everything we wanted. People don't like change.

Youth: Why?

Woman: We don't see what we don't want to see. Can't bear to miss out? *(Youth slowly turns to look at her)* On our phones. Our Apps. Gaming. Extract, consume, extract, consume, accumulate so we can extract and consume more. *(Walks up to him)* Take, take, take. Rape. *(Beat)* Never giving up anything. *(Gets closer)* Look at you. Armani! *(Silence)* Who's it for?

Youth: Me!

Woman: Zombie.

Woman deliberately takes the t-shirt in both hands at the neck and deepens the tear in the t-shirt with a sharp tug. Youth takes a step back.

Youth: Hey!

Woman steps forward again and deliberately tears a long strip from the t-shirt. She holds the strip up to his face and lets it drop to the ground.

Youth: *(Whisper)* Cruel

Woman: Wake up! I've had enough. Left everything – everything to get away from this ... this *(She pulls the t-shirt off Youth's back)* shit! I don't want to be poisoned. Understand? I don't want it. Go away! *(Youth looks at her. Looks at the shredded t-shirt)* Piss off! *(She picks up the t-shirt and thrusts it into his hands)* They brand sheep. *(She pushes him)*. Go on. Re-join the flock. *(She drags him back)* You can't, they're lost. Or decomposing on the ground! *(Pushes him away)* Baa! *(Pulls him back)* No, take it back, to where we buried him... *(Points and pushes him)* take it, and ... *(She hands him the spade)* and give him it back. *(Drags him back again)* No. On second thoughts you stay, and I'll go. I'll go as far... as far as I can ... from you!

She reels away and starts dividing the tins and packets into two piles. Youth looks at the t-shirt. Looks at Woman. She goes over to the tent. Youth wanders off into the trees. Woman pulls out her rucksack. Gathers tins and water bottles. Youth reappears with the small bag. Stands at the edge of the clearing. She realises the small bag isn't there. Rummages. He opens the

notebook. Woman panics. Rummages more. Youth starts to slowly, deliberately, tear strips out of the book and let them fall to the floor. Woman dives into the tent. Youth walks further into the centre of the clearing slowly tearing and littering the ground with strips. Woman howls from inside the tent. Youth continues to tear. Woman crawls out of the tent. Stares at Youth for a moment. Youth tears.

Woman: Bastard!

Jumps to her feet and screams as she runs at him. He does not look up. Tears.

Woman: *(Knocking the book from his grasp)* Moron! Stupid!

Woman jumps onto the book. Protecting it.

Woman: *(Shouts)* Get out!

Youth turns away and goes to the new rucksack. Begins to fill it with tins and packets. Bottles. Woman stifles a sob. Presses the notebook into her stomach. Rocks for a moment. Youth continues to fill the rucksack with machine like detachment. Woman darts out a hand to grab a strip of paper. She smooths it out. Youth shoulders the rucksack. Woman grabs another piece of paper. And another. She begins to recover every last scrap she can. The Youth turns and goes. Woman continues to collect the pieces. Eventually she gathers a pile. Clears leaves on the ground and puts them down. She begins to try to piece them back together.

Woman: *(To herself)* No....no *(Reading and piecing)* No... *(Reading and piecing)* No... no .. no ..no.

She stops. Still. Rocks. She opens the book and places the pieces back in the book. Closes the book. Still. Off we hear the cuckoo once more. She cries. Calls again. She slides the book into her coat, hugs it. Cuckoo calls.

Four

Seven weeks later.

The clearing. Early morning. The 'fireplace' and food are covered by groundsheets and leaves. The spindle sits on top of the rock. There is no sign of life. The brush is drawn closer to the tent, the entrance is zipped up.

Off we hear a cracking sound and the crashing of a tree somewhere in the distance.

Silence.

Youth appears at the edge of the clearing. He is carrying the rucksack he left with in his arms. The top is open. He enters into the clearing, careful to lift his feet and step-down heel first, slowly, quietly. Looks at the tent. Pause.

Goes to the rock. Gently lowers the rucksack and lays it on its back. Lifts the spindle, looks at it. Puts it down. Lifts the covering over the fireplace enough to look underneath. Stands in the centre of the clearing. Looks at the tent. Looks back at the rucksack. Takes some paper from his pocket. Smooths it out. Two pieces from the notebook. Holds it out towards the tent. Moment. Kneels. Crawls a few steps towards the tent. Shows the pieces of diary to the tent. Pause.

Youth: *(Listens. Quiet)* Before you start. Hear me out. *(Beat)* I'm sorry. Sorry to wake you. Really early I know. Sorry, I left. *(Gestures with the paper)*. I didn't mean... well I did...I... I want to explain. I want you to listen. *(Beat)* Please.

Pause. Shows tent the paper. Woman appears, from the trees. She carries the small bag. It has pieces of wool in it. Youth turns towards her. She freezes.

Thought you were... *(Indicates tent. Pause. Sudden)* Don't know why I took the book... *(Shows the paper)* Lost my shit Wanted to rip you up. Raging. Like I wasn't in my body. Beside myself. Couldn't get back in.

Woman marches forward. Youth remains on his knees as she snatches the pieces back.

Woman: Where's my phone!

Youth: Shhh! *(Quiet)* Please. *(Takes the phone out of a pocket)* There's still some battery left. Signal comes and goes. *(Digs in another pocket. Pulls out a charger)* Found this. Just need somewhere to plug it in. *(Pause)* I didn't read it. Just ripped it up. Why?

Silence

Youth: Why can't we.... Help ourselves?

Silence. She takes the phone and the charger.

Youth: I trusted yer.

Woman: Go away!

Youth slowly stands. He goes to the rucksack and gently pulls out a bundle. It is a baby. He cradles it awkwardly. Shows her. Pause.

Youth: Need your help again. Found her.

Woman: What?

Youth: In an abandoned car. Three days ago. It's difficult. *(Offering)* Here.

Woman: So, you thought you'd come back here.

Youth: Yea. Nowhere - no one/ else to -

Woman: You want me to look after her?

Youth: No. Want you to show me how.

Five

One week later. Evening. Woman is sat on a stump. Baby is sleeping in a cradle made from birch bark. She holds the 'homemade' spindle. There is a large bundle of the sheep's wool attached to it by a woollen thread which has been teased out by spinning.

Woman: Hush... shhh....

She rocks the cradle with her foot and spins the wool on the spindle as she talks to the baby.

Woman: There..... Sleep little one. The only one. You are. *(Sing song)* Aino was the fairest maiden. The fairest maiden, fairest. Old Vainamoinen tried to take her. To possess her to possess her.... 'Not for you nor anyone' Aino said. She did. She did. So Vainamoinen tried to win the maiden. Win the maiden. Win the maiden. A contest with every other man. Nothing good can come from that. *(She stops spinning and looks down at the baby)* Whipped up a storm that swept Aino up, swept her up and drowned her. The things men do. The things men do. Gone was she. None could find her. None could find her. None could find her. *(Resumes spinning)* Then came the mourning, came the mourning and cuckoos sang their song of sorrow. Song of sorrow. *(Spins in silence)* Lost Aino's Mother lay aweeping, lay aweeping, lay.

'...my whole body is blighted
When I hear the spring cuckoo'

Spins in silence drawing out the thread in deep concentration.

(Deep intake of breath) I heard the cuckoo singing its sorrow. ... Followed it through the trees. *(Stops spinning. Suspends the spindle from the thread)* It got weaker and weaker.... Then stopped. I found it hanging dead in the lower branches of a tree. Wings spread in a speckled fan. Beak still open from her last note. *(Still)*What have we done little chick? What have we done? *(She begins to cry)* I'm so sorry....

Youth appears with the binoculars.

Youth: All quiet. *(Puts the binoculars down)* Aino asleep?

Woman nods and looks away.

Youth: No wonder if she was havin' to watch you do that.

Woman: *(Spinning).* You couldn't do it. You can't concentrate.

Youth: Give over.

Woman: Shame. Spinning's where stories come from. Folk spinning, hour after hour, day after day, week after week. They made up stories to pass the time - spin a yarn. Good and bad, angels and devils...Stories about the meaning of life. What stories will you tell her?

Woman looks at him. He shrugs.

Youth: I'll take over.

Woman: *(Handing him the spindle)* Don't drop it.

Youth: No/ I meant -

Woman: Said you couldn't handle it.

Youth: Can.

Woman: Can't. *(Picks up binoculars)* No chance.

Youth takes control of the spindle and sits on the log. Woman walks to the edge of the trees. Pause. He glances at her. She crouches down. Youth looks at the baby. Smiles. Focuses on the spindle. Squints and leans forward towards it. Starts to tease out the fibres from the ball of wool and spin the yarn. Woman goes behind a tree. Watches.

Youth: *(Muttering)* Come on. *(To baby)* Can't concentrate.... *(Glances over his shoulder)*
Fuck yea. *(Hushed)* See!

He begins to grow in confidence. Spinning. Woman pinches her nose.

Youth: *(To Aino)* See *(Spins)* Delicate... got to be real careful *(Silence, spins)*. She's sad.
My story too. ... Tell you how it really was. How we lost it all. Need a new one
now. New once upon a time. Future story. *(Spins)*..... You're the best thing that
ever happened to me. Definite. Won't ever leave yer. Not like my old man.
Won't let yer down. Not like they do. Promise. *(Spins and breaks the thread)*
Shit. Fuck-ing shit! Don't tell her.

Woman stands.

Woman: *(Going over)* I was wrong. Its good. Its good.

Youth: *(Shows the break)* Screwed up.

Woman: No. You haven't. We can fix it. I can show you. Here.

She reconnects the thread form the spindle with the ball of wool.

Woman: It happens to everyone.

Youth: *(Spins)* Thanks.

They sit in silence while Youth spins.

Youth: Relaxin'.

The mobile phone rings. They freeze for a moment. Woman hurries over to the tent. She takes out the mobile phone.

Woman: Hello? *(She listens)* Hello!

*Listens. Still. She puts it on loudspeaker. [We hear a pre-recorded voice selling a product *]. They look at each other. Woman ends the call. Silence.*

Youth: World's a sick joke. May as well throw that away.

Woman: Can't. *(Woman puts the phone on the log between them).* Listen.

She sits on the rock draws her arms around herself. [We hear a voice message]. Woman looks away. When it is finished, she plays another voice [Message*].*

Woman: My girls. There's more. They left a lot more.

Youth: What happened.... I mean..

Woman: I didn't, I ... I didn't pick up,

Youth: Why? Why would you do that?

Silence

Woman: They're out there. Somewhere..... together I hope....

Youth: What were they like?

Woman: Like you, but older. *(Beat)* Just like you.

Silence

Woman: Now I don't know if they're even alive.

Youth goes to the Woman. He gives her an awkward hug. Woman is stiff. He lets her go. Silence.

Woman: The notebook. I kept a diary. About the ... collapse ... About the girls. Me. I told them I didn't need them or their - that we didn't want the same things. Different principles. Then I let them go. *(Pause)* How could I?

Youth: I'm so sorry.

Woman: I'd like you to read the diary. If you don't mind. Maybe you can explain it to me.... And to little Aino. She needs to know.

Woman goes to the tent. Youth bends down and picks up the baby. Rocks her gently. Woman reaches inside and pulls out the notebook. They exchange diary and baby.

Youth: We need to find 'em.

Woman: What?

Youth: Your girls. We need to find ... people. We can't.... just us... It's not...

Woman: Possible.

Youth: No. This. *(Indicates)* It's not sustainable.

Six

The clearing, next morning.

Aino is in the cradle. Woman is packing. Youth appears with the binoculars. She glances up but carries on.

Youth: It was singing!

Woman: What was?

Youth: People. Last night.

Woman: Sounded more like cats.

Youth: *(Binoculars)* Seen it. There's a camp. In the valley. People coming. Together.

She starts folding up the tent up. Youth starts to load up one of the rucksacks with tins and packets and water etc. They talk as they pack.

Woman: What if they're awful? The people.

Youth: Aren't we all? *(Beat)* Come on. We must.

He shoulders the rucksack. Puts a sling carrier around his neck to carry the baby on his front.

Youth: I'll take her.

Woman stops what she is doing and takes Aino.

Woman: *(Putting her in the sling)* There, lovely.

Youth: New story starts here. Hurry up.

Woman: You ready for this?

Youth: Think so. *(Pause)* You?

Woman folds the tent.