











My thoughts had wandered back to the last few days as I tried to pinpoint exactly when it was that I could have averted the situation I had caused. Where exactly, I could stop time and rewind, to make everything go back to normal. I had been replaying the scene over and over in my head during the depth of the night when I lay awake with nothing but thoughts of him. I had loved him with all my heart for the last three years, we had spent nearly every moment together since the day he entered my life on a boring autumn day in Cambridge. He had slipped into the room with that silly look on his face, he was a bit funny looking really, all legs and unkempt hair but I couldn't take my eyes off him. He came and sat down beside me, looking at me with such adoration, and all I could do was gaze back at him, I was helpless. I did not believe in love at first sight until that moment but all at once I knew what I had been missing out on. I felt my heart thumping and unconsciously raised my hand to my chest to try and still the beat in case anyone could see the movement through my clothing. He only rested a few moments before getting up and as he left the room, he turned his head back looking me full in the eye, an unspoken signal passing between us. I was left breathless with wanting and longing for him to be part of my life, for the rest of my life and I knew then I had to see him again and soon.



But that one evening, with her wood-polish-fizz and her legs aching from what had happened in the narrow hours before, she stared at his happy largeness and felt herself say shortly, My feelings have changed. It came out like a slop, like her morning porridge slapping into a bowl. But she wasn't that surprised because it felt like it came from her chest, a little kernel of something else deep inside her body but very separate from herself. She stared hard into the murky drink, knowing that he was looking at her, open-mouthed, like a fish. And it was a little repulsive. She wished they would shut the fish's mouths and close their one eye when they lay like that on the ice in the supermarket, bloody and dazed. She would push past with her trolley and try to think of something else.

Your feelings have changed? He asked desperately. She knew that they hadn't, but she felt now that there was no other way to go about it. That thin inner-place in her body had reacted against something that it knew had been tolerated for too long. She nodded lightly and felt her breath come shallowly. And he blew out his cheeks and turned to face the empty, dark window. And he said curtly, You know mine haven't. She felt brittle, rubbed-bald, worn. He added, We had something so perfect. You can't do this to us. His mug rattled. She worried her cold fingertips and counted a long time waiting for him to speak again.

It was him who made the decision, not her decision but a decision he had made for them both. You won't do this, he said. He put the cup down firmly. I won't let you do this. And that was enough; he had laid it to rest. She knew that there was nothing more to be said. Her protest had been courteously overruled and so things must continue as they did before. He turned to face her and she saw him suddenly and clearly as another person, as someone she would examine on the train, his cuffed jeans and scratched jacket, his hard eyes. He looked like someone who was owed a debt. Had he always been like this and she had simply not seen it? And she thought of the long weeks with him pouring out like water, staining the years behind and the years ahead, her whole life unstoppered like a bottle and seeping away like an accident. And she knew that this probably wasn't what you felt when you were [in] love.





Close to where we are, there is this place – and here, there are always people passing by one another, finding one another. There are some times I find myself here as well. I have snatched at glimpses of other people making plans (the little and the life-changing) and, listening, I cannot quite believe how in each and every one of these people, there is a whole life which extends beyond the edges and the moments I have seen – that I have brushed past the most beautiful, the most fragile, thing in the world. I have touched it. And I just can't help but smile at it all: at us all.

Over the last six months, I have watched these two people grow into one another. They are the people, Charlie, who make me feel my happiest, the happiest that I have been in so so long. With them, I do not feel quite so alone anymore. I did not think I would be able to do this – you know, leave you all behind; what I didn't realise, though, is that I would make a whole other family here as well. So

After leaving secondary school and going to sixth form college, I got a holiday job at the big department store in our West Midlands town. I was employed in Despatch, a subterranean area called the Van Way. There were four men unloading incoming goods, uploading outgoing deliveries. There was stress: rows over breakages, porcelain and glassware; curses when we lugged king-size mattresses, or three-seater sofas. I'm small - five foot one and a half; but I'm nimble, and I work with rhythm. But foreman Geoff, a tattooed hard case with a mullet hair cut, liked to press my buttons. My name is Timothy (Timoteo to Mum who's Spanish, J to m adi o's Ir sh Ž Ć

at me and turn her head with an inward smile. And I would be wondering how to ask Rakel to go dancing.