

Silent Key

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Silence. Then footsteps on frosted grass.

EXT. FARMLAND - DAWN

RECORDED SAMANTHA (V.O.)
Morning Ian.

RECORDED IAN (V.O.)
Morning to you to, Sam. Very
formal of you.

IAN, 38 and wearing rough clothes covered by a thick jacket, ambles toward a letterbox, reaching in. Finding nothing he props himself up and waits. A gated fence dividing him from the surrounding wilderness. The world deathly silent.

RECORDED SAMANTHA (V.O.)
Well we do this everyday, no
harm in mixing it up.
You know they're sending someone
back to live, actually live, on
the ISS.

Distantly talking to himself, Ian walks back up the hill towards a small hut sitting near the farmhouse.

RECORDED IAN (V.O.)
Because it's a blast up there.

RECORDED SAMANTHA (V.O.)
Oh absolutely. That's what we're
gonna talk about on our show
today-

INT. STUDIO - MORNING

RECORDED SAMANTHA (V.O.)
-What would it be like, if you
were up there. Alone.

The studio walls are lined with racks of broadcast equipment, steel cases covered with knobs, dials and gauges. All connected by a swarm of cabling and every one terminating inside a mutant HAM radio.

Ian sits hunched in front of the mic, fiddling with the gear, running through a sound check.

IAN
Test, COUGH! Iannnnn,
Iiiaannnn, Iiaaaaaaaannnnnn.

At the top of the broadcast, Ian's sharp gestures punctuate the show.

IAN (CONT'D)

Welcome back! And remember I'll be here twice a day. Same times, same place. Probably the same content as well. But!

(Beat)

If you would like to say hi. Please. You can come to the gate at the start and end of each show.

Ian's grungy intro track is cut into by faint INTERFERENCE. He scratches at a weeks stubble.

IAN (CONT'D)

It's a hard life out here! The earth hates me!

(Beat)

Well maybe it's not **just** me. But I can't seem to grow anything edible anymore. I've got the black thumb, everything I touch-

He snaps his fingers

IAN (CONT'D)

-Dies! Not one thing I've buried in the dirt seems to get anything out of it. I stick it in, and something about me makes it act like a child!

(Patronising, childish voice)

That little potato seed looks up at me from a hole in the ground!

The interference returns. Loud, intrusive. He hesitates.

IAN (CONT'D)

And says "You know what, I'm not doing this today."

Interference. Sounding like static but it fluctuates more wildly, populated with hisses, clicks and pops. Bordering on... speech?

Ian stops, confused. Staring as the levels fluctuate.

EXT. STUDIO - LATER

Ian switches off a petrol generator surrounded by barrels. The vast majority toppled, and empty.

EXT. FARMLAND GATE - NOON

We watch Ian amble towards the gate again. He checks the letterbox and waits, glancing around.

Silence.

Wandering away, Ian carves his own meandering path towards the farmhouse. Practising for the show.

IAN

"Welcome back, I'm Ian. And it's quiet out here."

He stops. Reciting the same introduction as he approaches the house.

IAN (CONT'D)

Welcome back, I'm Ian and I'll be here twice a day, you can-

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - NOON (CONTINUOUS)

Ian absentmindedly kicks open the screen door at the farmhouses rear.

IAN

-find me here, in the kitchen.

He grabs a can of food from a corner cupboard stocked with its twins. Plopping it's contents into a pan sitting atop a portable gas burner. He returns to practise.

IAN (CONT'D)

Oh it appears we have a caller.

IAN (CONT'D)

(Fake voice)

Hi Ian, howcome you haven't done a show with Sam for so long?

IAN (CONT'D)

Well personally I've been enjoying the solo show. Haven't you?

(Beat)

What's your name caller?

IAN (CONT'D)

(Fake voice)

Lena.

He eats from the pan, sitting quietly in the under-used kitchen. Staring into the distance.

IAN (CONT'D)
 Thank you for calling Lena.
 (Beat)
 Just insulting, right?

He laughs, buzzing interference scratches at his ear.

INT. FARMHOUSE HALLWAY - NOON

Running sheets neatly line an entire wall.

Mind maps dot the spaces between them, laying out each and every broadcasts content. Accompanied by childish and crude representative sketches. This mornings sheet with little plants just barely poking their heads above ground, and a cartoon Ian shouting at them.

He pins a new sheet to the wall, sketching alongside the afternoon shows content. Whistling as he does.

EXT. STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Ian yanks the generator into life.

INT. STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Ian in front of the mic, position constant.

IAN
 I'm Ian. Here. Twice a day at
 the same time. Same place. Wait
 at the gate if you want to say
 hi.

Intro music. Screeching interference. Ian watches the levels fluctuate crazily.

Silence.

IAN (CONT'D)
 I(eye)...It's quiet out here.
 And I wonder if the plants hate
 that, like they know there's
 supposed to be cows moo'ing and
 a rooster crowing, somewhere a
 kangaroo pounding along.
 (Bouncing his hand
 along)
 But there isn't, it's just...
 Nothing... No one.
 (Pause)
 I'm the only one trying to liven
 things up! You know, they used
 to say you could feel radio
 waves in your teeth.

Grinding interference.

IAN (CONT'D)

Quite sincerely I hope someone's
receiving this with their
mercury fillings, and just
fucking loving-

Interference, like garbled speech.

INTERFERENCE

Crrrrzzzzz-**Hello**-oogggg-ggkkkkkk-

Ian grinds to a halt, ripping off his headphones.

Silence.

He replaces them. Listening. Interference cascades
through, filling Ian's headphones. He stares at the mixer,
levels swelling.

Slowly his arm extends to his left, fingers grasp a dial.

He violently wrenches it to the left, switching
frequencies.

The static floods the studio.

EXT. STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Clenching his fists Ian slams down on a button, killing
the rumbling generator.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

A gas lamp lights the studio floor. Ian squats, hovering
over the open hearts of cart systems, mixer and amp
innards surrounding him.

The same recording from earlier plays in the background.

RECORDED SAMANTHA (V.O.)

So all of this odd stuff happens
to people spending time in
space. They come back, having
effectively been isolated from
everything we see as **life**.
Nothing lives in the vacuum of
space.

Ian flicks through manuals and hand drawn diagrams.
Tugging at pages and then at the wires they designate.

LATER

He sings quietly to the music playing during a break in
the recording. Murmuring as he drums along on rack
casings.

Crackling static goes unnoticed.

LATER

The little studio is cluttered with parts and casings, laid out in circular order. Ready to be recompiled and restored.

RECORDED IAN (V.O.)
 Right now it's trained people
 going up. But what happens when
 you send someone like me to
 space.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)
 No tv and no beer make homer
 go?...

Ian smiles. He removes a few complex and strange connectors.

RECORDED IAN (V.O.)
 Well what happens if you get
 stuck up there with nothing to
 do but wait?

He clicks a cable back into place, killing the recording. Listening.

Nothing.

Then.

At the very edge of hearing-

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - MORNING

Crackling.

Ian dumps another duplicate can of food onto the portable stove. Staring at a mess of goop. Crackling.

Crackling.

He scratches his ear.

And slams the flimsy stove down onto the counter. Hard. And repeatedly.

INT. STUDIO - LATER THAT MORNING

Ian, interference cascading through his headphones.

IAN
 A lot of stuff has this really
 infuriating edge to it. Like
 hipsters! Remember hipsters,
 they were supposed to be
 genuinely excited about all the
 (MORE)

IAN (CONT'D)

old, cool shit in the world. But somehow that just rubbed society the wrong way.

Interference. He's ranting.

IAN (CONT'D)

How are most people coping with this shit... Because this is the only way I can.

(Beat)

I mean, whoever's listening out there I hope this is cathartic for you.

Screeching interference. Ian's caught up in his rambling.

IAN (CONT'D)

Because otherwise you're just stabbing yourself in the ears over and over.

Screaming interference.

IAN (CONT'D)

(Angrier)

And if so, you know what! Fuck you!

EXT. FARMLAND GATE - MORNING (CONTINUOUS)

Ian stands next to the box, waiting. Buzzing, scratching interference still in his ears.

The box shudders. A dent sprouting in the side.

EXT. FARMLAND - MORNING

Ian seizes the pole of his miniature radio tower, hauling himself upward. A shred of paper between his teeth.

At the peak, he tugs at wiring inside an open panel. Constantly referring to the slip of paper in one hand, a distorted series of diagrams and patterns. Broken by Ian's own handwriting and sketches.

Socketing clicks into place, he refers to the paper again.

Reaching out, he emits a satisfied grunt as something snaps away from the tower. Ian follows it with a bomb drop whistle.

The paper slips away. Ian grabs for it, falling.

He slams into the ground palm first, his wrist shatters.

He writhes, screaming wordlessly. Lunging toward-

INT. STUDIO - MORNING (CONTINUOUS)

He yanks a rag from a hook, using it to bind his wrist.

The studio's speakers blare nothing but interference. Loud and constant. Pulsing cutting the air, each wave ripping the fabric of reality.

Ian tears random gear from it's racks, lining the floor with splintered casings and shattered glass.

Interference.

Like toppling dominoes, zip tied cabling yanks yet more radio gear from it's place.

Interference.

Ian seizes the desk mixer, bending and cracking it as he slams it onto the desks lip.

Interference.

He tears apart his bastardized radio receiver. Stripping every inch of mutant parts, brutally returning it to it's untouched construction.

Interference.

Ian stands in the ruins momentarily, before sitting back down at the desk dragging the crushed mixer with him.

Hooking the headset back into place, Ian slowly pieces it back together. Cables are slotted back into their homes.

Static.

Clearing as he scans through bandwidths, edging closer and closer to speech.

Silence. No interference, no static. Just silence.

Ian pauses, he draws the microphone towards him. Gently slotting it's connection into place.

FEMALE VOICE

Hello?

Ian chokes, voice cracking.

IAN

Is someone actually there?