

# do this in [x] of me

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## Characters

Siobhan, octogenarian.

Aoife, adolescent.

*These characters are Irish American, which doesn't necessitate that they're white.*

## Setting

A kitchen

filled with wires

a table with red tiles, a little chipped

prayer books everywhere

“don't touch” “turn off the stove!!!” “EMERGENCY NUMBERS”

The largest feature in the kitchen is an AN/FSQ-7 along the back wall: a large, installed computer from the mid-1950s.

## On [brackets]

[x] is used throughout the script: a redaction, a forgetting, an insistent ringing or beeping.

Sometimes words are featured in brackets: [God], [remember], etc. These should be spoken by the performer, with insistent ringing or beeping interfering if possible. As if the words are not quite forgotten or redacted.

## Pronunciation Guide

Siobhan -- /ʃi'vɔ:n/ shiv-AWN

Aoife -- ee-fuh

Mhamó -- mah **moh** [Eng: grandmother]

Aos sidhe -- ees shee [Eng: the faeries, good people]

mé féin -- /me: 'fe:n/ [Eng: myself]

**For Joan Carey Garvin**, who was/is/always will be the smartest, most loving, most faith-full person I know. With all my love.

**introductory rites**

In darkness:

EXTERNAL VOICE

What did you do today? How have you been feeling?

Then:

Siobhan and Aoife sit at the kitchen table. Red tiles,  
a little chipped.

In front of them, large cards laid out in rows.

They turn over the cards one at a time.

They look at the other side, then put them back in  
place.

SIOBHAN

We need to give them an answer

AOIFE

Let's just keep playing, they're bothering us

SIOBHAN

They asked and we have to be polite

AOIFE

Just tell them anything, they don't really care

SIOBHAN

[shouting]

NOT MUCH! DOING GOOD!

Siobhan picks two up and shows them to Aoife.  
They have the same design on each: two hearts.

AOIFE

You've found two of a kind!

SIOBHAN

It's easily done. Just two matching cards.

AOIFE

They're in different shades.

SIOBHAN

But both hearts. Your turn.

Aoife pulls two and shows the cards: a sword and a computer, mismatched.

SIOBHAN

You aren't to show me your hand, Aoife

AOIFE

Oh

SIOBHAN

Don't worry, it's all right

But now I know where that one goes

And I think I remember its twin

Siobhan pulls two matching sword cards out.

AOIFE

Bravo, you, again

SIOBHAN

You'll beat me one of these days

Now where did I put my glasses

AOIFE

Your what?

SIOBHAN

My glasses, they were here just a minute ago

AOIFE

They're the easiest things to lose

SIOBHAN

They're not on your side of the table?

AOIFE

I don't see them

Come to think of it, where are my glasses?

SIOBHAN

Well aren't we a pretty pair

AOIFE

It runs in the family

They continue pulling cards.

EXTERNAL VOICE

Are you hungry?

The sound of a cliff sliding into the ocean

AOIFE

What was that?

SIOBHAN

This is why we go on ignoring everything

AOIFE

Sounded big

SIOBHAN

Things are always going wrong these days

AOIFE

They say the O'Leary farm went into the sea last week

SIOBHAN

Not another one

AOIFE

Farm after farm

They built that up for years

Sheep, mostly sheep, some crops

Lambs dotting their lands

SIOBHAN

May they recover what's lost, Lord willing

AOIFE

Amen

The church bells ring.

SIOBHAN

On your head

AOIFE

Is something wrong with my hair?

SIOBHAN

On your head

Aoife pulls glasses off her head.

AOIFE

Oh! I've been looking for these.

She puts them on.

AOIFE

Funny, these make it worse.

The church bells ring again.

SIOBHAN

The bells are calling

We need more room

AOIFE

I thought we were waiting for something

EXTERNAL VOICE

Are you hungry?

SIOBHAN

NOT YET! LET ME CLEAR SOME SPACE!

AOIFE

I thought you were in charge here

Siobhan thumbs through a prayer book

SIOBHAN

Let me consult the manual

We'll go through all the steps, cleaning each bit of the RAM until we reboot

AOIFE

And it'll help?

SIOBHAN

They don't call it a mystery of faith for nothing

Hymn number 108 to start, I think.

Aoife and Siobhan flip through their hymnals.

**entrance song**

Aoife and Siobhan weave through the space,  
hymnals in one hand, gathering supplies with the  
other, until they reach the FSQ-7 by the end of the  
song.

SIOBHAN

*If e'er my heart in riper years  
Shall beat with anguish, grief, or fears,  
My Jesus He will hear each moan,  
And gently say, "Thou'rt not alone."*

AOIFE

*Though fled were every earthly friend  
On whom I might or could [depend]  
Though left by all, to all unknown,  
He still will say, "Thou'rt not alone."*

SIOBHAN

*Though cherish'd ones around me die,  
And sever'd be each earthly tie;  
I still may [seek] my Saviour's throne,  
And hear Him [say,] "Thou'rt not alone."*

AOIFE AND SIOBHAN

*So too, when all my years are past,  
And life her race hath run at last,  
My [God,] Thou wilt not me [disown,]  
To whom Thou [saidst,] "Thou'rt not alone."<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> By Sister Mary Joseph Croke of the Convent of Mercy; Charleville, Ireland 1853



**greeting / opening prayer**

Siobhan and Aoife huddle by the FSQ-7.

SIOBHAN

Back when I was first in the field we didn't have semiconductor memory.  
The Williams tube must've come around a few - five years ago  
We were still using those cathode ray tubes, the electrical charges.  
Those Brits were really trying it: William, Kilburn.  
They thought they were onto something with secondary emissions.  
And of course they were.  
But just a bit. 2000 bits, max.  
Time base generators. Function generators.  
The flip flop between horizontal and vertical.  
The oscillation of waveforms.  
It'll all come back to me, and it'll all be useless. CRTs have fallen by the wayside. You spend a few years away, you raise half a dozen kids, you return and suddenly there's MOSFET, there's Fairchild, it's a whole different ball game.  
So that's

AOIFE

I don't understand any of it

SIOBHAN

That's because there are different types of software here  
Like I was saying, the CRTS, they don't really use em anymore  
Out there  
But they're here  
The magnetic core memory, the SIMMs, the DIMMs

AOIFE

Ummmm okayyy

SIOBHAN

Look, look: a place for the old CRTs

AOIFE

I thought those didn't really work

SIOBHAN

They're pretty volatile

But they're what we've got here, so we might as well use them

Here's the spot for magnetic core, for SIMMs, and finally for DIMMs

We've got it all, but it's all

It's all mixed up

Needs cleaning

AOIFE

So it can run better?

So there will be fewer disasters?

SIOBHAN

Fewer fires to put out

AOIFE

So that we can reach Out There?

SIOBHAN

We'll start with the CRTs, the older models

AOIFE

...combined routing tools!

SIOBHAN

We've been over all this

AOIFE

It's like another language

SIOBHAN

Cathode ray tubes

AOIFE

Oh you were just talking about these! The Brits?

SIOBHAN

Williams and Kilburn, yes

AOIFE

So how do we make these ones run better

To um optimize storage? Is that what we're doing?

SIOBHAN

That's the problem

I don't know that we can

The technology never advanced enough; it was basically just replaced with magnetic core

AOIFE

Mm hm

Siobhan pulls a Williams tube out of a slot on the  
FSQ7 back wall.

SIOBHAN

You know why this all was developed?

AOIFE

To further our human capacity for connection and communication

SIOBHAN

Something like that

The AN/FSQ-7: or, the Army Navy Fixed Special eEquipment

AOIFE

But where's the q?

SIOBHAN

eEquipment, eEquipment

AOIFE

That's a stretch

So it was the military, then

These are instruments of war

SIOBHAN

Especially in the Cold War, you know, in the days I was coming up in the labs

IBM was just their partner and that's how it went

AOIFE

The Cold War?

SIOBHAN

You youngsters know nothing of history

AOIFE

Well ex-squeeze me for living, I'm trying to keep up as best I can

But I care, you know I care. And there's so much going on, too much to track. I wrote about it in the Sodalian

SIOBHAN

I'm sure you did

AOIFE [reciting]

"During a war or a crisis, the Catholic Churches are overcrowded, evening services are mobbed, daily Mass and Holy Communion are common; but as soon as the immediate danger passes we become lax."

SIOBHAN

That's true enough

AOIFE

"We wait till the Maine is sunk or Pearl Harbor is attacked to call it a crisis.

The true fact is that every day is a crisis."

SIOBHAN

So for now today's crisis is this: we need to clean out this RAM, to try to get a little more capacity, to make things run more smoothly.

AOIFE

And why? To see if we can be Out There?

SIOBHAN

For now we're starting with the Williams tubes.

Just take it out, wipe it off, and put it back in the Q7.

And then we'll move on to magnetic core, then SIMMs, then DIMMs.

Got it?

AOIFE

I have close to no clue what you're saying

SIOBHAN

Here, take my hand

That's better, right?

And close your eyes.

In the name of the [father], the [son], and the [holy ghost]

May You guide our hands, may we find a way to avert crisis

May we respond to everything in our path,

And may we find grace

AOIFE

Amen

SIOBHAN

There, now maybe with a little blessing we'll get it all done

Take this cloth, and pull out the tube, and clean off what you can

AOIFE

Roger that, mhamo!

SIOBHAN

Don't call me that

AOIFE

Do you [remember] that house in Boston? The living room, the green carpet?

SIOBHAN

My mother hated that carpet

Had it pulled up as soon as ever she could

AOIFE

I haven't thought about that house in so long

I don't know what called it to mind

A drop falls from the ceiling

SIOBHAN

Oh no, do we need to patch it again?

AOIFE

It's always leaky like this

SIOBHAN

Terrible for the electronics

You must concentrate more

AOIFE

It isn't my fault

SIOBHAN

If you're not concentrating at all times, awful accidents can happen

Crises, you might call them

I'll get out the buckets

AOIFE

I can do it, don't trouble yourself.

Aoife places buckets around the room.

SIOBHAN

Make sure to cover the corners, they're vulnerable

AOIFE

Very little is under my control. Things spin out from under my fingertips, cumulus, nimbus, cirrhus

SIOBHAN

You ought to be more careful

AOIFE

Can you pull them back in for me? Can you fix it?

SIOBHAN

We'll just have to sit through the rain

AOIFE

But it was such a nice day!!

SIOBHAN

Settle in, I'll get us a brew

AOIFE

The CRTs will be ruined

SIOBHAN

They're susceptible, what can I say

They don't hold many bits anyhow

AOIFE

But you said we had to make use of what we have

SIOBHAN

And we do, I'll get out the tarp.

Siobhan goes to cover the FSQ-7

AOIFE

Sometimes the clouds have a mind of their own.

SIOBHAN

You have to focus on them at all times or they'll run

At every second, your brain is facilitating your breath, the movement of your toes, the curvature of the spine

AOIFE

I really put my mind to it, I do

SIOBHAN

The neurons fire at two hundred miles per hour when they're working well

AOIFE

I think I'm doing alright

SIOBHAN

I'll get out more buckets

AOIFE

Her long winding hair

The plink of rain in the pail

SIOBHAN

Whose hair

AOIFE

I always thought I'd grow to be taller

My mother is tall, so tall, with the biggest feet you'd ever seen

She buys shoes made for men, big and clunky and ugly

Hulking leather loafers

Thick boots with a sole that would resist a nail

The clouds are about to spit something out again, help me, help me

SIOBHAN

Control it, rein it in

Breathe deeply

Your brain is telling your heart to pump blood through each of your capillaries as you listen to me speak, as you learn what a capillary is

AOIFE

A worm!

SIOBHAN

Breathe deeply

Imagine the clouds growing lighter, dispersing

Imagine the sky clearing, the brave peep of a sun through their skirts

See the way the wind is picking up, will it to blow faster

AOIFE

I'm breathing

SIOBHAN

You're doing very well

AOIFE



My capillaries are wiggling

SIOBHAN

That's not their job

AOIFE

And I'm willing the clouds away

I'll save the afternoon

I'll save the tubes

I'm saving them now

They're already saved, dry and safe in the barn

SIOBHAN

The main frame?

AOIFE

Not a drop of rain in sight, not a speck of precipitation

A lightening.

SIOBHAN

Good work, it's clearing! It's clearing!

AOIFE

I am accomplished, I am inventive, I approach genius

SIOBHAN

Keep it up!

AOIFE

I have everything I need

I draw close to me what I value most

A lightning.

A photo frame falls to the ground

SIOBHAN

Mhathair!

AOIFE

That's not your mother, that's your daughter

SIOBHAN

She fell from the wall!

AOIFE

She'll be fine

SIOBHAN

The wind is knocking about so

The howling, the spattering

AOIFE

I didn't [mean] for this to happen

SIOBHAN

It's only a wee storm

AOIFE

I didn't [want] to call the clouds in

SIOBHAN

And yet here they are.

It rains.

**penitential act**

The whole room, especially the FSQ-7, is sizzling  
and wet

SIOBHAN  
Rain's stopped  
We can see what's working

AOIFE  
It seems a little bleak

SIOBHAN  
Well, we recover what we can  
As usual  
What was it that set you off this time?

AOIFE  
I can't [recall]  
I can't seem to –

SIOBHAN  
The green carpet?  
The house in Boston?

AOIFE  
Fenway Park  
A great wall of vines

SIOBHAN  
Mother's portrait falling off the wall

AOIFE  
Well, anyway  
Maybe it's best not to name these things

SIOBHAN  
Right you are  
Don't want to field any aftershocks

AOIFE

I'll get started

What we need is a fresh beginning

Aoife grabs a cloth, wipes what she can.

SIOBHAN

Don't know if that'll do anything

AOIFE

I saw the Union Jack in the storm

Down the hill by the shore?

It was flying today

SIOBHAN

It always is, somewhere

AOIFE

I wish we were armed

SIOBHAN

We are

We've got the military's mightiest tool

AOIFE

A tool is different than a weapon

SIOBHAN

They'd mow you down

AOIFE

Then I'd make some kind of difference

SIOBHAN

Good luck with that

AOIFE

It's almost dry

SIOBHAN

It's steaming

AOIFE

We can see if there's internal damage

SIOBHAN

Open it up?

AOIFE

Expose the innards

SIOBHAN

You needn't be so graphic

AOIFE

What would you have me say

SIOBHAN

They're just wires

AOIFE

Are they now

Hand me the screwdriver

Siobhan hands Aoife a knife

Aoife slices the FSQ-7 open near the cathode tubes.

Inside: guts, intestines, tripe

Various origins

AOIFE

Hand me the wires

SIOBHAN

We'll sew it, we'll patch it

AOIFE

It's salvageable

SIOBHAN

We need only the time and tools

AOIFE

I recognize that you're right, you know

SIOBHAN

Always

About what this time?

AOIFE

I'm at fault here

I started it

SIOBHAN

I know

AOIFE

Then I shall [ask] for forgiveness

SIOBHAN

You're welcome to, but I [make] no promises. I'm no priest

AOIFE

Mea culpa, mea culpa,  
mea maxima culpa.

SIOBHAN

Do you know what that means?

AOIFE

I messed up big time. Like big big time

SIOBHAN

Even the tops of the mountains were buried in water  
Over twenty feet deep

AOIFE

It could have been deeper

SIOBHAN

You could have been more conscientious

AOIFE

I didn't think it would actually [x]!

I thought I would [x] and maybe it would [x] but not [x], not like this

I thought

I thought

SIOBHAN

That was your first mistake

A confession needn't include an explanation

AOIFE

I'm not very good at that yet

SIOBHAN

It takes a lifetime

AOIFE

I don't have that long!

SIOBHAN

Who knows how long any of us have, really

You could go tomorrow or yesterday or years from now

And they wouldn't care, they'll still be there to block our way

I'll show you how to do it:

I'm sorry

AOIFE

Sorry

SIOBHAN

Say it again

AOIFE

I'm sorry

SIOBHAN

For what

With Feeling

AOIFE

I'm sorry for

I'm sorry for everything

All the little ways I've gotten things right and wrong

Sorry for all the things I've done and left undone, all the things seen and unseen

I'm not sure which is which sorry

SIOBHAN

Sorry can you pass me that screwdriver?

AOIFE

Sorry one second

SIOBHAN

Sorry I meant the other one

AOIFE

Sorry I responded kinda harshly

SIOBHAN

Sorry I bumped you

AOIFE

Sorry I'm kind of hard to get in touch with

SIOBHAN

Sorry I said that

AOIFE

Sorry I didn't show up

SIOBHAN

I just wanted to say –



AOIFE

I feel really really really bad and –

SIOBHAN

If it wouldn't be too much trouble –

AOIFE

Is there any possible way I could –

SIOBHAN

Is there any shot in hell you would –

AOIFE

Forgive me

SIOBHAN

Forgive me

AOIFE

Sorry I'm not worthy

SIOBHAN

Sorry I'm too worthy

AOIFE

Forgive us our trespasses

SIOBHAN

Give us this day our daily bread

AOIFE

Sorry I'll get the recipe

Everything seems so futile in their path

SIOBHAN

That is why you must confess, to get the past off your chest

Reconcile with what is so we can look to the future

AOIFE

I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.  
All the springs of the great deep shall burst forth  
the floodgates of the heavens shall be opened  
And the earth will be clean again  
I have seen the way things are and we need a new start  
A clean slate  
There's an abscess of filth, a piling up, a  
What is the word ?  
The walls are closing in and the skies are opening up  
They'll wash me  
They'll reset what is wrong  
I didn't want to do it, I didn't think it would actually happen  
Turns out my will is more powerful than I thought  
I imagine [rains] and it [pours]  
Every living thing that moved on the earth shall [cease]--birds, livestock, wild animals, all the  
creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind.  
Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils shall [x]  
I [imagine] forty days should be enough.

SIOBHAN

Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do  
Please turn to Hymn 237

**gloria**

SIOBHAN

*Glory to [x] in the highest  
And peace to all people on earth*

AOIFE

*For all our earth is holy  
And all our tech is blessed  
We are so thankful, humbly  
But we also mess up all the time so please take away our sins  
And also our guilt, it'd be nice to not feel guilty all the time anymore  
Even when I gave confession regularly I felt guilty all the time*

SIOBHAN

*Glory to [x] in the highest  
And peace to all people on earth*

EXTERNAL VOICE

You may be seated

AOIFE

Yes, let's go back to playing cards

SIOBHAN

IN A MINUTE!

Siobhan consults the prayer book

SIOBHAN

It's time to take the next step.

AOIFE

Ugh

SIOBHAN

Our exercises, our recitations, our [remembrances]

**liturgy of the word: first reading**

A loud beep, the crash of waves

SIOBHAN

Our people come from Lough Derg, near Donegal  
Some of them, anyway  
They say Saint Patrick spent forty days and forty nights out on the island there  
Praying for a miracle  
And on the fortieth night [God] revealed to him an entrance to purgatory  
The pilgrims still journey there every year for the past millennium  
Every summer they circle the island, fasting  
Some say a man named Conan let loose and then slayed a sea serpent in the waters of Lough  
Derg  
Some say it was Saint Patrick who did it  
The truth is not particularly clear, and you know there are ethics around these things  
Journalistic integrity, all that  
My uncle Bud was a sports journalist.  
Boston, the forties. Fenway Park, he'd take me to games.  
I'd sit outside the writers' room – girls couldn't go in. My boy cousins could, but I sat outside,  
patient, impatient.  
Counting the minutes tick by, the innings, the hours.

AOIFE

There's no reason why your cousins should be in there and not you.

SIOBHAN

I'm smarter than they are anyway.

AOIFE

I'm a better reader.

SIOBHAN

I have a more extensive vocabulary

AOIFE

I'm more polite.

SIOBHAN

I'm more humble.

AOIFE

If you can believe it.

SIOBHAN

I always thank my teachers.

So thank you, Uncle Bud

Maybe one day you'll be as great a writer as I am.

AOIFE

If you're lucky.

SIOBHAN

The players were always so gracious.

Ted Williams came to my mother's house for lunch, he knew the family.

And on that day, all the boys in my class wanted to talk to me.

I was the most popular girl in school.

AOIFE

Nothing ever happens.

SIOBHAN

I'm sure that's not true.

AOIFE

Nothing happens and we wait and wait and wait for something to —  
for life to —

but we're still stuck here and we don't know why.

SIOBHAN

It's the RAM running out of space out of room out of space.

We've got to clear it clean it - make sure it's dry and ready to go

We can move on to the newer devices now. The magnetic core

More bits more bytes more bits

AOIFE

Won't do any good. Can't update an old drive

SIOBHAN

I told you it's the RAM

AOIFE

Same difference

SIOBHAN

One's permanent and one's temporary

AOIFE

But which is which?

SIOBHAN

I thought I explained all this

AOIFE

It's a little hard to understand

SIOBHAN

It's been so long since I had to –

It's not like it's something I –

I'll consult the manual again but I know the next step is the core

AOIFE

I know something's wrong

Something's very wrong

We're all mixed up, we're –

SIOBHAN

Peel me an apple and have some yourself.

Your blood sugar's low. Got to save energy for the clearing.

AOIFE

The fiber's good for you. It'll help you [x]

SIOBHAN

Someone used to say that about potatoes.

Would mash them with the skins on, say it was good for your guts.

Maybe it was my uncle, maybe my father.

The Gilooly men always did like to talk about their bums.

AOIFE

Here

SIOBHAN

Cut it for me. These teeth of mine, these ever-loving teeth.  
And have some, have some, have some yourself. Blood sugar.  
The cleaning of the space, the clearing of the piping.

AOIFE

With the skin on.

SIOBHAN

I agree, nothing ever happens.  
I have had nothing good to eat today.

AOIFE

This apple.

SIOBHAN

What apple.

A flash of light and:  
Siobhan sits at a spinning wheel, transforming  
wool into yarn. Aoife sits at her feet, carding the  
wool, brushing out impurities.  
As Siobhan spins, she loops the finished yarn out  
on the branches of a white thorn bush.

SIOBHAN

She fought and fought, but the aos sidhe took her away despite it all  
her nails clawing at the faeries until she had a bite to eat  
and then it was over, as well you know, for faery food changes us mortals  
the aos sidhe, the good people are tricksters  
they will stop at nothing to steal us away, to keep us for their entertainment, making us  
into a shadow of what we once were  
a century can go by in the blink of an eye, and it has, and it will  
Careful with your carding. Careful they don't snatch you.

AOIFE

Aye, Mhamó

How do you know the sidhe took her

SIOBHAN

It's well known

It's a fact

AOIFE

But how do you know

SIOBHAN

Ask anyone in town, ask your mother

AOIFE

She doesn't believe

SIOBHAN

She's a fool and she'll be proven wrong

AOIFE

What if I don't believe

SIOBHAN

Not so loud

AOIFE

What if I don't believe

SIOBHAN

A fool you are to repeat it, too, and you'll be proven wrong

You ever hear of the lass and her boots

The a story from out in Donegal, from an old uncle of mine

AOIFE

Which uncle

SIOBHAN



The lass who did not believe stayed a night in a haunted house  
She slid off her boots and lay down to sleep  
But sleep she did not, for one of her boots got up of its own accord  
And took a wee turn about the room  
And then the second boot took the same turn, as if being walked by its owner  
who laid still in her corner, unbelieving  
So the boots joined together, walked themselves right up the stairs  
Walked themselves round and round the room above the lass' head  
The dust falling lightly around her ears  
She could hear the thud of the boots as they approached again,  
Descending the stairs, crossing the room, and giving her a nudge

AOIFE  
A nudge?

SIOBHAN  
A kick.  
They kicked harder and harder, until the lass stood  
You've more wool for me? Bless you

AOIFE  
And what happened next  
The boots were knocking around your uncle's shins

SIOBHAN  
My uncle?

AOIFE  
From Donegal?

SIOBHAN  
It was only his story, it was the lass' shins, with the boots  
We weren't always here, were we – there was another life, another time

AOIFE  
Mhamó?

SIOBHAN  
I don't think I'm your grandmother, truly

Siobhan reaches out to the white thorn tree.

A flash of light, an insistent beeping:

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

AOIFE

Deadline's today, Gillooly.

SIOBHAN

Hm?

AOIFE

And the place is a mess.

SIOBHAN

I hit the filing requirement, sir.

AOIFE

Seems rather disorganized.

You were working with the gang-punch group?

SIOBHAN

I assure you –

AOIFE

Because you're not to punch the cards yourself

SIOBHAN

Well I

AOIFE

You can bring them yourself, though, if you're tired of waiting for the courier

SIOBHAN

I get paid by the card.

AOIFE

Then you might have more productivity to your work, huh?

SIOBHAN

I thought 8 bytes was the limit

AOIFE

That's why we have programmers

SIOBHAN

I Am the programmer.

AOIFE

You ever see *His Girl Friday*?

SIOBHAN

Rosalind Russell, Cary Grant? Dialogue at a mile a minute.

AOIFE

I need you to program as fast as they talk in that film.

SIOBHAN

I can give it a shot.

AOIFE

Do more than that, will ya? The company depends on it.

SIOBHAN

I thought you wanted my work to be stringent and considered

AOIFE

I want a nice club sandwich.

SIOBHAN

Sir?

AOIFE

A nice triple decker on rye. Good juicy tomato. Run down to the deli and get one for me, that's a good girl.

SIOBHAN

But I – the programming you wanted me to do?

AOIFE

You'll figure it out. There's lots of hours in a day.

SIOBHAN

Whatever you say, Mr. Smith.

AOIFE

Call me Bruce.

Turkey and bacon. Mayo and mustard. Lettuce and tomato.

SIOBHAN

On rye.

AOIFE

On rye. Don't let them skimp on the pickle spears. I love pickle spears.

SIOBHAN

Got it.

AOIFE

And try to program a thousand bytes while you're down there.

SIOBHAN

A thousand?

AOIFE

Make it two.

SIOBHAN

But I

AOIFE

The only butt I wanna hear is yours walking away

SIOBHAN

Sir

AOIFE

I take it back, I take it back, a bridge too far

SIOBHAN

The RAM only has room for –

AOIFE

Be ambitious, we'll cut it down

SIOBHAN

I'm the one who'll have to –

AOIFE

Juicy tomatoes, crisp lettuce, three full slices of rye.

I'll pay you back tomorrow.

**psalm**

Aoife and Siobhan methodically clean the  
magnetic core memory.

SIOBHAN

*Blessed be [x] my strength which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:*

AOIFE

*My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer*

SIOBHAN

*Woman is like to vanity: her days are as a shadow that passeth away.*

AOIFE

*Bow thy heavens, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.*

*Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them.*

SIOBHAN

*Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;  
Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

SIOBHAN AND AOIFE

*I will sing a new song unto thee*

*I will sing praises unto thee.*

**liturgy of the word: second reading**

Aoife and Siobhan have moved on to the SIMMs.  
They unplug each from the motherboard, wipe it,  
and replace it.

SIOBHAN

1952 is a good year  
My roommate throws a party, champagne and sparklers  
I buy funny glasses for everyone to wear and in the morning they're strewn around the living  
room, reminders of the year gone by  
It's a leap year ahead, a hop skip and a jump  
We joke about the men she's invited – are they eligible? Are they worth our time?  
For the most part, we're unconvinced  
We play Kay Starr records and emulate her lipstick  
In early February a queen takes the throne, a young woman like us, and we cut our hair short  
like hers  
My mother's words echo in my ears, admonishing me during the last war  
We're Irish, she says, the monarchy is not a thing to be admired  
And yet I admire the new ruler anyway, her tiaras, her marriage, her far-reaching dominion  
One day, perhaps, I shall be in charge too  
It's simple, really  
Receptor and signals, like a relay

AOIFE

I'm not very fast

SIOBHAN

You don't have to be  
And the machine doesn't either

AOIFE

What happens next  
After 1952, what happens next  
I get the order all mixed up

SIOBHAN

Mixer again.

Aoife hands Siobhan back the pliers.

AOIFE

After 1952? I can't keep it straight.

SIOBHAN

And I'll repeat it ad nauseam

AOIFE

Don't tell me you're cross

SIOBHAN

Never, never, I can tell the story as many times as you need

Let's see, where was I?

AOIFE

1952

SIOBHAN

Ah, 1952

We move across the country

My friend Peggy, I don't know if you [x] her, she helps me a lot

She can't believe that I didn't know anything about how they did things there

I come to California and the girls, they all have makeup

But in Pennsylvania you weren't allowed to go to school with it

You would be sent home

So in California Peggy takes care of me

My mother doesn't care, she used makeup too

It was a big jump, from Pennsylvania to California,

Like coming from kindergarten to college.

An insistent beeping, or ringing: [x]

AOIFE

Are you gonna get that?

SIOBHAN

I'm sure they'll leave a message



AOIFE

Nobody leaves messages

SIOBHAN

That's today's modern America

AOIFE

Did you get the picture I sent you

SIOBHAN

In the mail?

AOIFE

On the phone.

SIOBHAN

I'm not sure

I don't think so

I've been known to be wrong

Siobhan goes to work on the wires, welding them together.

The overwhelming sound of an electric mixer

[x]

AOIFE

The picture I [x] from that year

The childhood home [x] with the big tree in the front yard

All the kids lined up on the sidewalk outside the porch

SIOBHAN

I know that one, I know that one

AOIFE

[xx] here

The picture looms large above them, fuzzy

SIOBHAN

Ah, there's Joseph and John and Patrick and [x]  
The whole gang before Mass  
Still in Latin in those days  
Kyrie Eleison

AOIFE  
Christe Eleison  
The [x] of sitting through devotionals in a foreign tongue

SIOBHAN  
The Latin was tough. The Latin was hard.

AOIFE  
They could be saying anything

SIOBHAN  
They [sang] allelujah out of season

AOIFE  
Not until the Lord is risen

SIOBHAN  
It's been too long since I've given confession.  
I remember seeing my husband's eyes for the first time  
Paul Newman blue  
The sins my parents divulged circle the twenties, prohibition  
Climbing up in the tree because they had some, I guess, liquor in the car at Holy Cross  
In the twenties my mother didn't go to college but she was working, at the newspaper  
Her father was the sports editor and his father was the sports editor  
And her brother became a sports editor and her brother in law became a sports editor  
She was a typist, she was a typist.  
That was a big deal then  
And that's how my father got close to the family because her brother was at the high school and  
my father played hockey and was at the house all the time.  
They started in high school, my mother and father.

AOIFE  
Good for them  
Keep going

SIOBHAN

Well my uncle Bud

I mean he was just my favorite

He took Eddie and I, my cousin Eddie and I would go to ball games. We could get anything we wanted, it didn't costcha any thing. Anytime the guys came around with something, we'd just get it. He'd be up in the sports thing, and Eddie could go up there but no woman or girl could go up there. I mean they couldn't even go in to say hi.

Oh no, I could sit at the outside the sports thing

And I used to be so annoyed

I used to have big fights

Because he's not gonna let them -- you know a little girl, 10, 12, 14 years old

In the middle of a big ballpark

So Eddie had to come with me which he loved

And we would sit down where the sports writers could see us

And when we went up like break time or between innings or something and I could sit outside on the bench;

Eddie could go in

Everyone said that's never gonna change

And I said, oh yes it is

And I'm gonna change it

I think it's time

Electronic whirring dies down.

AOIFE

Is it a sin if you don't recognize it as sin while you're committing it?

Aoife hands Siobhan various tools and wires.

Siobhan puts things together

The overwhelming sound of an electric mixer

[xxxxxxx]

SIOBHAN

What sin did you have in mind

AOIFE

Hm?

SIOBHAN  
From before

AOIFE  
We may be done here

They step back from the work they've been doing on  
the FSQ-7

AOIFE  
It's a beautiful instrument

SIOBHAN  
I started making that one chocolate cake in 1967  
Betty Crocker recipe  
This one's better though

AOIFE  
The picture I [x] was from that year  
The childhood home [x] with the big tree in the front yard  
All the kids lined up on the sidewalk outside the porch

SIOBHAN  
I know that one, I know that one

AOIFE  
[xxx] here

The picture looms on the screen they're putting  
together

SIOBHAN  
Who is that

The world stutters, flashes of light and dark, back  
to the field with the white thorn bush. Aoife behind  
the wheel spinning the wool, Siobhan carding. The  
field is no longer verdant but greying, cracking

almost. The finished yarn adorning the white thorn  
tree is longer, exponentially so.

SIOBHAN

Tell me again, tell me again

AOIFE

She slid off her boots and lay down to sleep  
But sleep she did not, for one of her boots got up of its own accord  
And took a wee turn about the room

SIOBHAN

It cannot be

AOIFE

But it was, and it will be, and is  
the second boot takes the same turn, as if being walked by its owner  
who lays still in her corner, unbelieving

SIOBHAN

I believe!

AOIFE

So the boots join together, walk themselves right up the stairs  
Tramp themselves round and round the room above her head  
The dust falling lightly around her ears  
She can hear the thud of the boots as they approach again

SIOBHAN

Not again!

AOIFE

This story is too much for you

SIOBHAN

I can hear it, I swear

AOIFE

You children aren't used to listening this way

There was a time, at nights, we'd sit around  
and they'd all tell what had happened with the fae  
but you aren't used to it

SIOBHAN

My mother won't let us

AOIFE

I as good as [remember] it now, sitting around the stove, or sitting around the fire  
Sitting around the warmth  
And someone'd spin a yarn, they would -- it's as if I'm there now  
    tell us about the villager who got taken, we say  
    tell us again a tale of the sidhe, tell us everything you know  
    and we sit and we listen to our elders, our aunts, our uncles and their wealth of  
knowledge  
    their yarns about the good people and the white thorn bushes

SIOBHAN

Your uncle from Donegal?  
The two boots approached him?

AOIFE

The boots  
The boots  
The boots  
Descending the stairs, crossing the room, giving her a nudge, a kick.  
They kicked harder and harder, until the lass stood  
she stood and the boots followed,  
Kicking at her shins, stomping at her toes  
The boots followed --  
They took me once. Maybe they took me many times. Maybe I am there now

SIOBHAN

The boots?

AOIFE

Maybe I am there now  
underneath the white thorn bush  
Our lady the Virgin is powerful, and she will protect us

SIOBHAN

Who took you?

**cards**

In darkness:

EXTERNAL VOICE

What did you do today? How have you been feeling?

Then:

Siobhan and Aoife sit at the same kitchen table,  
now in the midst of the dry field. The grass grows  
unruly around the large computer in the back.

In front of them are large cards laid out in rows.

They turn over the cards one at a time.

They look at the other side, then put them back in  
place.

SIOBHAN

This won't last forever, you know  
The clouds could come at any moment

AOIFE

I won't let them  
I'm breathing, see?

SIOBHAN

But we're just waiting, it seems

AOIFE

Aren't we always  
Nothing can ever manage to be on time

SIOBHAN

On a fine day you can look down all the way to the ocean  
Down past the rolling hills there, you know?  
All the way to the ocean.

AOIFE



Oh, it's lovely  
Worth the wait, whatever it's for

SIOBHAN  
The breeze in your hair, not yet enough to be a hindrance  
Not yet enough to blow the cards away

AOIFE  
There was that day when they all scattered, all over the lawn, and we had to retrieve them one at a time? You dropped your sandwich?

SIOBHAN  
I don't think we've ever done this before

AOIFE  
Oh, maybe so  
I'm sure you're right – you're always right, mhamó

Siobhan picks two cards up and shows them to Aoife.  
They have the same design on each: two hearts, a match.

AOIFE  
Bravo, you

SIOBHAN  
It's easily done.

AOIFE  
They don't look the same.

SIOBHAN  
Sure they do. Same shape.  
I packed food

SIOBHAN  
Turkey?

AOIFE  
Club

SIOBHAN  
A club sandwich with a view of the ocean

Aoife's turn. She shows the cards: a sword and a computer, mismatched.

SIOBHAN  
You aren't to show me your cards, Aoife

AOIFE  
Oh

SIOBHAN  
Don't worry, it's all right  
But now I know where that one goes  
And I think I [remember] its match

Siobhan pulls two matching sword cards out.

AOIFE  
Bravo, you, again

SIOBHAN  
You'll beat me one of these days

They continue pulling cards.

AOIFE  
Cool breeze

SIOBHAN  
Crisp bacon

AOIFE  
Tangy mayo

SIOBHAN  
County Mayo

AOIFE  
The decadence of three – Three! – slices of bread

SIOBHAN  
Ideally one rye

AOIFE  
Oh, it's a must

SIOBHAN  
And mustard, thinly spread

AOIFE  
Crisp lettuce

SIOBHAN  
Juicy tomato

AOIFE  
Maybe that's it, Siobhan, maybe that's all it is  
A thick club sandwich with a view of the ocean

SIOBHAN  
Hm?

AOIFE  
Maybe that's what we've been waiting for

SIOBHAN  
It sure is lovely

AOIFE  
And a cool breeze

SIOBHAN

Not strong enough to be a nuisance

AOIFE

I don't think I ever have been, no

SIOBHAN

The tide's coming in

AOIFE

It always does

SIOBHAN

It comes in waves

AOIFE

Naturally

SIOBHAN

And we can watch it safe from here, safe from our perch, with our thick! Club sandwiches!

AOIFE

Is that all?

SIOBHAN

You said so, didn't you, you said we were waiting for something just like this

AOIFE

That's right, I did. I do, I say it over and over. We were waiting for something just like this

SIOBHAN

It's only a break, you know, from – from –

AOIFE

Earlier the bombs were falling and the coastline was eroding and the ice caps were melting and the RAM was fading but now – now we have a sandwich

SIOBHAN

A hearty sandwich!

This is what we've been waiting for

AOIFE

This is the end of the road

SIOBHAN

Did you leave the pot on the stove? The burner on?

AOIFE

Never, never, I'm responsible

SIOBHAN

I know you are, dear

It's wonderful to spend time with you

Just the two of us

Quiet, like

AOIFE

*"Thou'rt not alone."*

A huge gust of wind!

SIOBHAN

Not the club sandwich!

AOIFE

The cards, the cards!

They scramble to pick everything up.

SIOBHAN

I guess our game is up

No sense putting it back together

AOIFE

Another loss for the books

SIOBHAN

You'll win one day, I swear you will

AOIFE

That crisp bacon, that crisp lettuce

SIOBHAN

It's birdfeed now

The gulls will eat anything

AOIFE

How I hate them.

SIOBHAN

There, there, you can have some of mine

AOIFE

That's very kind of you.

I think I'll wait till supper.

Sometimes it's nice to feel a bit ravenous

Makes one feel penitent

The church bells ring.

SIOBHAN

Well then

AOIFE

Welll then

Shall we head down the hill?

Here, I'll hold your sandwich

SIOBHAN

Oh no you don't!!!!!!

Siobhan crams the remnants in her mouth.

AOIFE

I would have helped you

SIOBHAN [mouth full]

You would have dropped it

AOIFE

It's possible

Come, I'll help you down the hill, at least.

SIOBHAN

I have my good shoes on.

AOIFE

I'm sure you do.

SIOBHAN

My good, sturdy walking shoes.

I can go for miles

I can go for miles on the train tracks behind the house

We'll fix whatever's not working, I promise

AOIFE

And what's that?

The church bells ring again.

Aoife slips a little.

SIOBHAN

See? It's you who need hold my arm

AOIFE

We'll hold each other up then

**gospel**

The field is ablaze: bombs, debris  
The kitchen table untouched amid it all

SIOBHAN

To the fore! Hit them before it's too late!

AOIFE

Aye, Mhamo!

Aoife fires a rifle into the distance

SIOBHAN

Again!

AOIFE

Aye, Mhamo!

A hand grenade

The boom

SIOBHAN

That ought to hold them for a few minutes

AOIFE

I wasn't cut out for this work

SIOBHAN

We are soldiers for the Lord

We don't get to choose, we are chosen

AOIFE

I feel like I was chosen wrong.

SIOBHAN

No such thing, my dear

On your left!



AOIFE

Where?

SIOBHAN

Your left! Now!

Aoife ducks just in time.

Explosion.

AOIFE

Oh [x]

SIOBHAN

Are you hit?

AOIFE

Just nicked a little

SIOBHAN

Bleeding?

AOIFE

Not too bad.

SIOBHAN

Here, tie it up.

AOIFE

I don't know if I can reach

SIOBHAN

Hold still, I'll do it for you.

It'll heal in time.

Siobhan bandages Aoife's wound

AOIFE

Back to your post

SIOBHAN

You don't have to tell me twice

AOIFE

On your right!

Siobhan fires to her right.

A computer keyboard flies onto the stage, detritus.

SIOBHAN

Direct hit!

AOIFE

You're a good shot

SIOBHAN

Have to be, my dear

AOIFE

Shall I pick up the pieces?

SIOBHAN

After the battle, after the battle.

Your four o'clock!

Aoife fires.

AOIFE

Just a little ... bit... further...

Aoife fires again.

SIOBHAN

Attagirl. Attagirl.

You might save us yet.

AOIFE

Everything I learned, you got it from me

SIOBHAN

And you'll only improve with time.

Most of us do.

AOIFE

Do you think we're meant to be martyrs?

SIOBHAN

It's sacrilege to give up that easily

There. There in the distance.

They both fire.

AOIFE

But martyrdom?

SIOBHAN

I only think about the kingdom ahead.

We can't possibly know what's coming, and yet someday – someday –

They both fire.

AOIFE

The kingdom ahead

SIOBHAN

We only do one sacrament most weeks, but some weeks

Siobhan fires

SIOBHAN

Some weeks, they're special

And of course no one person can do all the sacraments

There are rules, you know

AOIFE

A ship is approaching the harbor

SIOBHAN

Well that's odd

What's its flag

AOIFE

I can't tell yet

SIOBHAN

An unknown vessel approaches

AOIFE

Make me a vessel of your peace

SIOBHAN

It will get closer and closer, but we may have to go down to the shore to see what it is.

AOIFE

I can wait

SIOBHAN

Patience is a virtue

An explosion, larger than the ones before.

Smoke fills the space.

When it clears, Siobhan is alone

SIOBHAN

For forty days and forty nights they have blockaded us

For an eternity we have resisted in return

Finding little ways to slip through the cracks, to reinforce the cracks, to buttress and rebut

The imperial forces are stronger than ours, of course

We are the Little Guy out here

And they return with cannon fire, with torrents of curses, with plagues dropping from the sky

When will this war end, when will our battles cease?

Our men have been gone for what feels like decades, our soldiers have been at the front since  
ever I can [recall]

And while my mother plants in her garden my father plants mines in another field

One day they'll bloom across limbs and torsos while she cooks, unawares

The tomato soup in my bowl will curdle

And while we fight empire we build our own

[xx]

Aoife enters as Boss

AOIFE

Did you clear the hard drive?

SIOBHAN

I didn't know I had to.

AOIFE

Never clear the hard drive

SIOBHAN

But I didn't, I –

AOIFE

The RAM is full

SIOBHAN

I thought that was temporary

AOIFE

The RAM is full and it's overloaded.

SIOBHAN

Oh no.

Something is very wrong.

Something is wrong.

AOIFE

You got that right, bubba.

A roast beef sandwich.

Sourdough bread.

No vegetables, absolutely no vegetables.

SIOBHAN

But something is – something is – something is terribly wrong.

AOIFE

Mustard but no mayo. If I see a speck of mayo I'll explode.

SIOBHAN

I don't want you to explode.

AOIFE

Hurry now, hurry to get it! The RAM is full and we mustn't have any explosions, not today. It would absolutely wreck us.

SIOBHAN

One dry sandwich coming up.

AOIFE

Chicken on wheat.

SIOBHAN

I thought you said –

AOIFE

Tuna on white.

Make sure they don't skimp on the vegetables.

SIOBHAN

I might have to write this down.

AOIFE

Don't forget the cathode tubes!

SIOBHAN

The bombs have been dropped

AOIFE

Not near here, surely?

SIOBHAN

Off the coast. You can see it if you –

AOIFE

That's far enough away

If you stand at the top of a hill and you look down –

SIOBHAN

It's all sunk into the sea

AOIFE

They say those are rising

SIOBHAN

Hems?

AOIFE

The ocean

SIOBHAN

Nothing to do about it, then

AOIFE

Nothing to do? Nothing to do?

SIOBHAN

Nothing to be done.

Bombs raising the sea level! I never!

AOIFE

It's not just the bombs

SIOBHAN

Something is very wrong

AOIFE

It's been wrong since the beginning, we're stuck, we're waiting, it's all come to this

SIOBHAN

I think I just saw one.

Explosion.

AOIFE

I'll say you did

SIOBHAN

A big one

The splash!

You could feel it from here!

AOIFE

They'll stop at nothing till they destroy us

SIOBHAN

Then let them

AOIFE

We must defend our homeland

We're fighters, you and I

SIOBHAN

I'll find the spears

AOIFE

We can make real weapons, you know.

SIOBHAN

A knife on a stick's a great weapon

AOIFE

We don't need to get into the fray. We can stay up on this hill, from afar

They won't go down easily

SIOBHAN

Nothing ever does.



The world stutters, flashes of light and dark, and  
Siobhan is spinning the wool, Aoife carding once  
again. The finished yarn on the white thorn bush  
has vanished, gone.

AOIFE

Something keeps happening  
Something keeps happening over and over again

SIOBHAN

What'd you say, dear one?

AOIFE

My past rises up before me, as if I'm young again

SIOBHAN

They're tricky that way  
Maybe you're being taken  
Maybe they took me away once

AOIFE

And what happened

SIOBHAN

I ended up here, didn't I? I ended up here  
So all must be well, mustn't it. All must be well.

AOIFE

You were saying, about the boots.

SIOBHAN

I hardly know.

AOIFE

The boots in the haunted house, for the one who didn't believe  
Your uncle in Donegal? The lass?

SIOBHAN

The boots the boots the boots

AOIFE

Descending the stairs, crossing the room, giving her a nudge, a kick.  
They kicked harder and harder, until the lass stood

SIOBHAN

Ah! The lass stands in the corner she's been hiding in  
She stands and the boots follow

The sounds of boots walking on hardwood

AOIFE

What was that

SIOBHAN

The boots follow, glancing at her shins, stomping at her toes  
The boots follow, persecuting her, landing blows where they can

The sounds grow louder: hard boots on soft skin.

AOIFE

I can't stand it

SIOBHAN

The boots kick and kick and kick until the lass leaves the haunted house  
Running out the door, wheeling down the boreen away from it  
And that is how, after getting kicked out by her own boots, the lass comes to believe

AOIFE

If you believe in Christ how can you believe in the sidhe

SIOBHAN

I believe in everything that's greater than myself, and both are that  
I believe in the soul of this white thorn bush

The spun yarn re-emerges from the white thorn  
bush, wrapping itself around branches, like vines

AOIFE

It's been here forever, for centuries

SIOBHAN

And it will continue on so as long as we have been here

AOIFE

And we might be here forever: me, mé féin, and I

SIOBHAN

What did you call me?

AOIFE

I hardly know

SIOBHAN

When I'm a child the sidhe roam the field, The Now, and they take me underneath the white thorn bush, and there I stay, and there I stay

The lowing of a sheep

AOIFE

It will be time to shear again soon

SIOBHAN

We sheared yesterday

AOIFE

And we shear today and we'll shear again tomorrow

SIOBHAN

She's a fool and she'll be proven wrong

AOIFE

I believe, I told you I believe

SIOBHAN

If you believed we'd be gone by now, we'd be liberated, we'd be free  
The wool would be spun and the sheeps shorn

AOIFE

It's done now, at the end of the day

SIOBHAN

And tomorrow the sun rises, the dawn breaks, and the sheep's wool is long and curly as it  
springs from its hide

The yarn grows out of the white thorn bush still,  
profuse and thick

AOIFE

I'm young again, every day, split

And in one moment I live my youth and relive my youth and see myself reliving my youth

SIOBHAN

and the next moment I live my twilight and relive my twilight and see myself reliving my  
twilight

AOIFE

They took me, they take me,

SIOBHAN

they will take me tomorrow and yesterday

Heavy boots on hard wood.

AOIFE

I believe, I believe, I believe

The yarn climbs up Aoife and Siobhan's limbs,  
capturing them.

The world stutters, flashes of light and dark: Aoife  
spinning; Siobhan carding.

AOIFE

She fought and fought, but the good folk took her away despite it all  
her nails clawing at them until she had a bite to eat

and then it was over, as well you know

SIOBHAN

the aos sidhe are tricksters

AOIFE

Careful with your carding

SIOBHAN

I am, I was, I always will be

Siobhan and Aoife look at the FSQ-7

All the RAM components have been cleaned and returned to their places.

## homily and credo

The sound of a cliff falling into the sea

SIOBHAN

In this part of the manual we try to make sense of all we've seen thus far  
We try to synthesize some kind of message from the liturgy of the word  
And then we move into the liturgy of the eucharist  
And that gives us the chance to reboot  
To take stock of what is working for us now.  
The officiant might tell a personal story in order to connect with the readings  
So, to that effect:

My mother was a smoker  
And her mother before her  
She'd light up in the kitchen, stirring a soup  
At parties, ash falling into her glass  
The only place that remained unclouded was church  
Except the incense, of course  
And then on the steps of the parish she'd pull out her cigarette case  
And light up again  
I always thought it was so chic, so mature, so admirable as a child  
The pinnacle of adulthood, waiting for a man – my father, usually – to light her cigarette  
And as I grew older we moved from the East Coast to California  
Smoking was common both places, of course  
But in the Golden State her habits morphed in my eyes to compulsion  
Never without a smoke, never without something in her hand fixated on her mouth  
So when I finally had the chance I turned it down, once, twice, three times  
Like Peter denying Jesus, I denied my birthright to a hanging blue cloud around my head  
My mother never understood this, kept buying packs by the carton  
We weren't close  
I wish we were, but we rarely saw her until her final years  
In the hospital, coughing, the cancer spreading  
It was a terrible loss that we all saw coming  
But what could we have done differently?

AOIFE AND SIOBHAN

What could we have done differently?

SIOBHAN

And now we consult the manual day in and day out  
Waiting and responding  
The cliffs falling into the sea  
The charting of a new coastline: some gain, mostly loss  
We [rebuild] what we can, [leave] the rest, playing catch up with the wiring  
The sound of the cliffs  
There goes the O'Leary's farm  
The built that up for years  
Sheep, mostly sheep, some crops  
Lambs dotting their lands

The yearning, the moody skies, the fields  
In my family, the highest compliment?  
Good Irishman.

We go to Ireland with our sisters, our daughters  
We meet family we never knew we had  
We find them on the computer – the last names, the small towns  
It wasn't that long ago that we [x] – that I – [x]

Some days, the RAM works like a charm. The searches of my mind secure.

It's simple, so simple, anyone could do it  
We're running a relay here, nothing complicated  
A relay of information from point to point,  
two unique properties that define any true mechanical brain  
it can transfer information automatically from any one of its "registers" to any other  
and it can perform reasoning operations of indefinite length

Someone is at home waiting for me  
My house is full of people waiting for me  
They don't have food, they're waiting for me  
I have to cook for them, I have to make their meals.  
They want club on rye beef on sourdough chicken on wheat tuna on white  
They want apples peeled and unpeeled, piles of potatoes, just like my mother used to make  
Ash in the broth, ash lingering on the counter  
The cafeteria at IBM always hung heavy with smoke like she did, men in their suits bending over  
their paltry lunches

Someone is at home waiting for me to cook them lunch, to feed them, to nourish and I  
And I'm not quite sure how to get home but I know they're there I know they're waiting on me I  
know they need me to help them  
All of them sitting around the table, eyes large, stomachs gaping  
I know somewhere something is very –  
I'll find a way to them, I must make my way to help them eat to get them food to make sure  
they're  
No, no no  
You wouldn't know them  
They're all coming over to my house  
You wouldn't know them  
They stick me with needles, and I am awake  
They stick me with needles and put me under  
When they scan my brain they will find everything and nothing, a universe unexplored, one I  
can hardly explain, one I've never seen mapped  
Hills and valleys, gorges and peaks  
The sun rises in the evening and sets in the morning and all the while I wonder:  
Is it lunch time yet?  
Will the Sox win the pennant?  
Will the troops win the war?  
Those who know talk in whispers and those who don't talk in shouts  
No I know they're all coming, they will be hungry, they will need a spread  
They will need buttermilk in glasses  
They will need to curb their rumbling guts  
They will need fruit washed and cut and stew simmering on the stove in the bowls my friend  
made and they will need  
You wouldn't know them

I [x] about the tenses:  
Past present future  
All colliding, bouncing off each other  
I will am have gone to the store  
I will have made dinner  
It would have been inedible: guts, wires, all that can twist  
I will do anything I could  
My mother was a smoker

AOIFE  
My mother is a smoker



Blue cloud  
Church  
My father  
Lighter  
My birthright  
Once – twice – three times  
Like Peter

SIOBHAN

Was / Denied

AOIFE

Deny my dignity, no one

SIOBHAN

I don't know what I expected at the end of my life  
But I never imagined this:  
The constant maintenance, wiring and rewiring  
The eternal reach to connect Out There

AOIFE AND SIOBHAN

The splintering of the self

SIOBHAN

Sometimes she shows up for me and we're back  
California, Pennsylvania, Florida  
A card table, a green carpet  
Sometimes it's just me, facing the Out There  
I [x] about tense

EXTERNAL VOICE

What did you do today? How have you been feeling?

AOIFE

Our life yawns out ahead, tender

SIOBHAN

Somewhere in the break I know I should respond  
But the words jumble in a bag and I can't pick them out fast enough

I, who am genius

Am                                      was                                      will be

So we return to the manual

Time and time again

What are the next steps – how do we move – and which way is forward –

Is                                      was                                      will be

AOIFE

I believe in the almighty

The maker of heaven and earth

SIOBHAN

Of all that is seen and unseen

AOIFE

I believe in the Mother, the creator

The unfurling of a fern leaf

SIOBHAN

I believe in the underbelly of a lamb

AOIFE

I believe in the soft dew of the mornings

SIOBHAN

The hard rain of the evenings

AOIFE

I believe in the tricksters, in transportation and transplantation

SIOBHAN

The snow's soft crunch along the bushes

The brightness of a berry

The shine of a trout

I believe in my mother's cooking, in canned goods, factory gloss

AOIFE

The ridges of a red jelly

SIOBHAN

The softness of a boiled potato

AOIFE

The fluff of a meatloaf, heavy with breadcrumbs

SIOBHAN

Ketchup on rice

AOIFE

Jell-O in salad

SIOBHAN

The puff of a yorkshire pudding

The slide of the butter across its surface

AOIFE

In Boston we called them popovers

The melt in the mouth

[x] from [x], light from light

SIOBHAN

Mama said there'd be days like this

AOIFE

The melt in the mouth

SIOBHAN

There'd be days like this, Mama said

AOIFE

Credo in whiskeys and ales

Credo in undiagnosed illness

Credo in unum Deum

I believe they ought to give out better lollipops at the office

I believe they ought to give out caramels and Turkish delight

But instead I receive a measly Dum Dum and must content myself with its hard meaningless existence, whittling away at its impenetrable orb until I've gotten over my fear

They stick me with needles, and I am awake

They stick me with needles and put me under  
When they scan my brain they will find everything and nothing, a universe unexplored, one I  
can hardly explain, one I've never seen mapped  
Hills and valleys, gorges and peaks  
The sun rises in the evening and sets in the morning and all the while I wonder:  
Is it lunch time yet?  
Will the Sox win the pennant?  
Will the troops win the war?  
Those who know talk in whispers and those who don't talk in shouts  
And I know, somewhere I know  
That all we've done with the wiring  
All the cleaning of the RAM  
All the constant maintenance  
Something is deeply, deeply  
[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

**cards**

Back at the kitchen table with Aoife and Siobhan,  
everything singed around them.

EXTERNAL VOICE

Are you hungry?

Aoife picks two cards up and shows them to  
Siobhan.

They have the same design on each: two hearts.

SIOBHAN

Bravo, a match!

AOIFE

It's easily done.

SIOBHAN

I'm all mixed up

AOIFE

You're grand, you'll get it this time

Siobhan's turn. She shows the cards: a sword and a  
computer, mismatched.

AOIFE

You aren't to show me your cards

SIOBHAN

Oh

AOIFE

Don't worry, it's all right

But now I know where that one goes

And I think I remember its twin

Aoife pulls two matching sword cards out.

SIOBHAN

Bravo, you, again

AOIFE

You'll beat me one of these days

They continue pulling cards.

The sound of a cliff falling into the ocean

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

The church bells ring.

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

The church bells ring again.

**liturgy of the eucharist: procession, consecration, anamnesis, communion**

Aoife and Siobhan wind through the audience,  
carrying a computer on a pedestal garlanded with  
grapes.

AOIFE  
Holy, holy, holy  
The power of the word and number

SIOBHAN  
Charge ahead!

AOIFE AND SIOBHAN  
Let us signify

They press a button on the FSQ-7. A spigot  
emerges. Wine (blood?) pours out.

They catch the liquid in chalices.

AOIFE  
I didn't know this was gonna happen

SIOBHAN  
It's in your manual.  
It happens every time.  
Next we consecrate the wine, we bless it, we drink it  
We consecrate the vessel from which it came, the main frame  
And then we test it  
We restart and reboot  
We see if we're running a little more smoothly  
We see if we can reach Out There again

AOIFE  
Mysterium Fidei

SIOBHAN  
The mystery of faith

AOIFE

What if I don't want that?

SIOBHAN

It's a gift, Aoife

AOIFE

What if I like things how they are

I like spending time with us, just the two of us

Quiet, like

SIOBHAN

It doesn't matter, love

There's a version of the truth Out There that they all agree on

They all agree it's real

That a second is part of a minute and a year passes in hundreds of days

And when our seconds take years and vice versa –

That's not going to fly Out There

That doesn't match what everyone else believes

AOIFE

But that's – it's just a belief

SIOBHAN

Everyone agrees

Everyone has the same version of time

AOIFE

So ours is wrong?

SIOBHAN

You can't keep interfering

Bringing things up

It's all I can talk about

Whatever liturgies we're reciting

AOIFE

You said to follow the manual!



That's what We believe to be true  
That's what we know to be true

SIOBHAN

We're losing it  
Seeing things the way other people do

AOIFE

It's not such a bad thing  
We're happy, aren't we  
Aren't we happy here?  
The cliffs keep falling into the ocean  
And we can't really see anyone else  
But [x] is alive and [x] is alive and our mother [x] alive  
We'll go Out There when we can manage it  
I'll help you, alright  
We'll do the liturgies and the wiring but we'll just  
We'll take it easy  
Ease and comfort  
We may not have seen this coming in its entirety  
But we imagined ease and comfort  
If we over extend  
If we over extend we could run the risk of losing it all

SIOBHAN

I don't want nothingness, I fear nothingness  
I don't think there's nothingness

AOIFE

I want flowers bursting from the hillside, and here if I imagine them hard enough maybe they will  
Maybe the roots will extend down and the stems will extend up and the blooms will bud then open then proliferate, seed carried on the wind and in the beaks of birds and pollen on the backs of bees  
I can will it to happen  
I'll crack the world open with the courage of my conviction  
And everything I need will pour forth  
And nothing will be in the right order  
And everything will be as it should be

Dusting off the cobwebs between the lines,  
thinking about what I want to leave behind  
If all the meals cooked are consumed and all the wires programmed are outdated  
If the rug gets torn out, the couch goes to her and the dishes donated  
It's a battlefield of words left in the wake, strewn across the places I would've cleaned

SIOBHAN

Bud, sports.

Mom in a cloud of ash.

Volleyball on the west coast. Lipstick in a tube. The fighting Irish lose again.

Altoona Pennsylvania, the clash of cymbals going uphill both ways in a snowstorm

Florida buses sticky with sweat

Boston winters, donut frosting, California piers battered by surf

AOIFE

See, isn't it nice?

The invocation of the past

The anamnesis

We [remember] it all

SIOBHAN

And we'll bless it all, devour it all

The next steps in the manual

We've got to try, Aoife, we've got to try

AOIFE

Sorry I shouldn't have questioned you

Sorry I'll get the recipe

The smell of roast beef.

AOIFE

Two eggs

One cup milk

One cup flour

One teaspoon salt

One cup beef drippings

You'll want to have cooked your roast just now, the smell of it hanging thick in the air

SIOBHAN

Careful not to get milk on the wires

AOIFE

I'm reckless

SIOBHAN

Beef drippings

AOIFE

From the roast

Preheat the oven to four fifty

SIOBHAN

Check

AOIFE

A boat off the shore of Kildare, Prince Edward Island

We named the place after back home

SIOBHAN

Tipperary, Connacht, Roscommon

AOIFE

Take the road away from Lough Derg, past Coolaholiga, a right at Nenagh

A tablespoon of drippings in each cup of the muffin tin

Siobhan does so

SIOBHAN

From Kildare to Kildare, across the sea

AOIFE

Whisk the eggs

Beat in the dry ingredients

Fill the muffin cups halfway

SIOBHAN

Oil so hot the batter spits in the pan

AOIFE

Into the oven, into the oven

SIOBHAN

Four fifty

AOIFE

Fifteen minutes

SIOBHAN

Three fifty

AOIFE

Fifteen minutes

SIOBHAN

And out they come –

AOIFE

Butter the Depths of Lough Derg –

SIOBHAN

– perfect little beauties –

AOIFE

golden – brown – puffs

SIOBHAN

– mine is the most – beautiful! – faith you’ve ever seen –

AOIFE

shimmering with oil

SIOBHAN

I’ve never been to Yorkshire

AOIFE

England’s no good for visiting

SIOBHAN

Decent pudding though  
Consecration then communion

They hold up pudding and chalices of wine

SIOBHAN

For forty days and forty nights St. Patrick prayed for a miracle  
And on the fortieth night [God] revealed to him an entrance to purgatory  
So let it be for us, we pray:  
May the fruits of our labor ripen  
Through remembering, may we join in communion

They eat the pudding and sip the wine

SIOBHAN

[whispered]  
We just ate God

AOIFE

[whispered]  
Uh huh

Heads down, kneeling, absolute contrition  
At times they sing along softly.

EXTERNAL VOICE [singing]

*Though cherish'd ones around me die,  
And sever'd be each earthly tie;  
I still may [seek] my Saviour's throne,  
And hear Him [say,] "Thou'rt not alone."*

*So too, when all my years are past,  
And life her race hath run at last,  
My [God,] Thou wilt not me [disown,]  
To whom Thou [saidst,] "Thou'rt not alone."*

Siobhan and Aoife look up.

The main frame will reboot in three

...

[illegible]

**cards**

Aoife and Siobhan in the kitchen. Everything as it was.

In front of large cards are laid out in rows.

They turn over the cards one at a time.  
They look at the other side, then put them back in place.

Siobhan picks two up and shows them to Aoife.  
They have the same design on each: two hearts.

AOIFE  
You've found two of a kind!

SIOBHAN  
It's easily done. Just two matching cards.

AOIFE  
They're in different shades.

SIOBHAN  
But both hearts. Your turn.

AOIFE  
We haven't built anything

SIOBAN  
Isn't that the way

AOIFE  
Feels futile  
Feels worthless

SIOBHAN  
Maybe we weren't meant to build anything of worth  
Maybe that only scars the earth

Aoife's turn. She shows the cards: a sword and a computer, mismatched.

SIOBHAN

You aren't to show me your hand, Aoife

AOIFE

Oh

SIOBHAN

Don't worry, it's all right

But now I know where that one goes

And I think I remember its twin

AOIFE

Is this all there is?

Day after day, in and out?

Is this all there is?

SIOBHAN

And the glory to come

We'll keep trying

Just like we have been

Siobhan pulls two matching sword cards out.

AOIFE

I can't imagine it

SIOBHAN

That's what faith is for

So believe in something and throw your whole weight behind it.

Not just anything. Make it good.

Paul Newman blue eyes

Beef drippings spitting in the pan

A club sandwich with a water view and a cool breeze

The miracle of a new day, no matter what came before, no matter what's ahead

Believe in something



Do this in [x] of me

They continue pulling cards.

The church bells ring.

The crash of waves, tide rising.

Aoife and Siobhan close their eyes.

They listen:

The waves abate.

The coasts cease their erosion.

The cliffs no longer slide into the sea.

The ice caps re-freeze.

EXTERNAL VOICE

What did you do today? How have you been feeling?

The church bells ring again.

end.