



BURNT TOAST (2025) - transcript

Is that you, Timmy?

Phil hides in this house every day. No one even knows he is here. Just some ghost from the past. But the great thing about ghosts is that they make for great stories. So his story, doomed delusions and disastrous sorcery. Phil's life is an endless series of delusions. An act that has long since lost its charm. A magic trick that has gone terribly, terribly wrong. It was 1984. Everyone kept laughing along thinking it was part of the funny act. Even his glamorous assistant, wearing the sparkly dress, had no idea. Aired on live television. Dead. Just like that.

Oh, I've got a splitting headache.

Ever since, Phil has been haunted by the spectres of the past, troubled by the reality of everyday life. It's as if he is cursed. When Phil walks into crowded rooms, he doesn't light it up. He falls over. His shoelaces always seem to come undone. He puts his clothes on inside-out. He looks the wrong way when he walks over the road. He tells strangers about his fear of bathtubs, convinced they are all out to drown him. His life is one big failed trick.

Can you hear the sound of their washing machine again? Radiators, gurgling. Water pipes, struggling. Tap, doing a bloody tap dance. I've never even seen him. It's like a phantom. I just know the sound of feet. Like an aural fingerprint. Distinct patterns of behaviour. And do you know? He normally sits down around here. I once heard him sobbing. Poor bastard. He was drowned out by canned laughter. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Oh, the reason I called is... I can't pay this month. I can try and get it to you by the end of the next. But something is tormenting and oppressing me here. I swear I can feel the foundations of this house sinking into the earth. Everything's lopsided. It makes me walk funny. And the fridge also stinks. It's at room temperature. Nothing keeps cool. Sir, I don't drink milk nor would. As my father used to say, never cry over spilt milk. It could have been whiskey. It smells like death. And it contaminates the whole space entering into the body like a ghost of sorts. A sour phantom.

He's going to call the landlord. It makes him feel like his voice is heard, but the landlord never does anything. He's just using up the poor man's phone credit.

Everyone's voices nowadays just sounds like a distant hum, a bit like the dodgy pipes or the absent neighbours. And everyone's a bit like a landlord. No one really listens nor cares.

Yes. Yes, I know. It's very early on a Monday. And yes, I'm... I'm fully aware that I'm unemployed. Yes, and it gives me an awful lot of time to think. In fact, I've decided to start looking after myself, eh. And do you know, and do you know where that starts? It starts with... self-love.

So I'm going to start loving myself, and I'm going to set a few boundaries. Now, can you hear me? My first boundary.. it starts with you. So... Can you hear? So... so...

I'd like you to fix the broken window, the rusty leaks, the rusty pipes and the dirty leaks and the hole in the ceiling, the wiring, the wiring, wiring. It's having a physical effect on me. I can feel it. I feel like I'm living in a broken cupboard, not a room. All right, all right. Calm down, calm down. I'll get the money to you, by...

In a couple of days. So, so, I want you... Are you still there?

Drops of water falling one by one onto a stone will gradually create a hollow. This method was applied to the body and named the 'Water - Torture - Method'. It's to do with anticipation and irregularity of the next drip. Victims end up experiencing delusions and hallucinations. They slowly lose touch with reality because they can't control or predict their surroundings.

They're at it again. Can't you see I'm trying to make magic here? Whose f'ing dog is that now?

Everything in this house reverberates. It's like one unconscious collective body. But Tommy's never seen his neighbours, he only hears them from afar. If they're not arguing they are blasting music or a TV or the radio. There's always some kind of transmission. It feeds his day with background noise.

Here's a little trick made famous by the magician, Dante. All the great magicians are dead. Houdini's dead, Harbin's dead, and Dante's dead. They're all dead.

In fact, I don't feel so good, myself. That's better. I'm on a whiskey diet. I've lost three days already. Ha-ha ha-ha.

Rehearsed and meticulously timed, each movement and distraction is made to create the illusion of chaos.

Just like that. Ha! Ha!

The number you have dialled has not been recognised. Please check and try again.

Not again, Sheila. Are you ghosting me? Am I just a number to you?

Don't you recognise these beautiful baby blue eyes, papa?

Why was the skeleton so lonely? Because he had no body.

Who's stealing my drink? F off, you phantom. Where are you? You don't scare me. Knock knock. Who's there?

They say I'm a baby, as I'm always scared. It's true. I sleep like one.

I wake up screaming every morning, around 3:00 AM.

My father used to play the saxophone. He also drank so heavily that when he blew on the birthday cake, he lit all the candles.

'Smoke and mirrors' was an illusion designed to make an entity magically appear and disappear, merging the visible and invisible to conjure up forgotten spirits.

There's a man having a barbecue in the front garden., so he's turning the spit like that and the flames are getting higher and higher. Higher and higher. And he's singing. O sole mio. I slept like a log last night. O sole mio... I woke up in the fireplace... the flames are getting higher and higher... it's the beginning of the week... yes, I feel like it's been....

Hello? Hello?

They say your life flashes before your eyes just before you die. And if you've performed your entire life, would it not look just like a fiction film sped up, compressed and layered with flashes and glitches and bad haircuts? Would it even look like your life or an imitation of a life? And through whose eyes?

Do you think that on Earth, everyone has a double?

I had a double just before the show.

No, no, no, I don't mean that. I mean, do you mean that we all have somebody who looks exactly like us?

[SONG]

Time and time again but we don't learn
Up and down that same old street
Looking back in history
A page can be turned
All it ever does is repeat

Woah,
Round and around we go
Nothing much more to show
For all we know there is no reason
Got the moon at night
And I got the sun for light
Everything's changing right
Season to season

Hey...

When a flower dies another grows
Starting from a single seed
How it all happens, no-one knows
Is there really any need?

Round and around we go
Nothing much more to show
For all we know there is no reason
Got the moon at night
And I got the sun for light
Everything's changing right
Season to season

Round and around we go
Nothing much more to show
For all we know there is no reason
Got the moon at night
And I got the sun for light
Everything's changing right
Season to season to season to season to season to season to season...

Helen Anna Flanagan, *Burnt Toast* (2025). Commissioned by FACT Liverpool and Mondriaan Fonds with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.