

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Part V

Karel Reisz , Dir. (1960)

It's morning in the industrial city of Nottingham, England. A long freight train chugs along, crossing the industrial landscape. Through the haze, we see a sprawl of factory buildings, with a power station in the background. Wagons filled with coal sit in the foreground, waiting to be delivered.

And now we see Arthur's neighborhood, the backs of the houses, fences, clotheslines, the long chain of outhouses. There are just a few sounds of children playing. Everything looks remarkably neat and tidy in the peace of these early hours.

As for Arthur, he's in his rumpled bed, looking miserable. He just lies there, hands crossed over his chest, slowly turning his aching head. We listen to his thoughts in voiceover: "They'd bested me, right enough. Still: I had my bit of fun. It's not the first time I've been in a losing fight." He raises his hand to his forehead. "And it won't be the last time, I don't suppose."

He pulls off the blanket and sits up on the side of the bed. "How long have I been lying here, though? A week? I can't think."

He gets up, walks over the bureau and looks at himself in the mirror, his arms crossed, his fists clenched. He raises his hand and gently touches his bruised cheek. "Mum called me barmy when I told her I fell off a gasometer for a bet. But I'm not barmy. I'm a fighting pit prop that wants a pint of beer.* That's me. But if any annoying bastard *says* that's me, I'll tell him I'm a dynamite dealer, waiting to blow the factory to kingdom come. I'm me and nobody else. Whatever people say I am, that's what I'm not. Because they don't know a bloody thing about me."

**Pit prop: a piece of wood used to prop up the roof of a mine tunnel.*

And, in a rare moment of self-reflection, he puts his hand over his mouth, admitting that even he doesn't know what he is.

He walks slowly to the window and pulls open the curtains. As the sun hits his face, he squints down into the backyard.

It's a beautiful day and the neighborhood is humming. The camera pans over children as they run and toss a ball in the air, shouting happily; Mrs. Bull and a friend chatting over a fence, beside a clothesline; a man comes down the alley toward them on his bicycle. Looking out to the street, we see a group of women talking beside a pram. People walk, a car drives by, life goes on.

And best of all: here comes Doreen. Her bright white coat and handbag match the laundry hanging on the clothesline she passes. Against the sooty background, she looks practically incandescent. Arthur's face lights up at the sight. He closes the curtains. His life will go on, too.

He gets back in bed and lies still. But, when there's a knock at the door, he quickly fixes his hair.

"Come in!" he calls.

Doreen enters and he sits up, with a broad smile. "Oh, come on in, duck! This is a surprise!"

"I came to see how you were."

"Not bad. I'll be as right as rain in a day or two." These are the same words he said to Brenda about her recovery from the abortion. "Take your coat off and sit down."

“This is a nice room,” she observes, “Are all those clothes yours?”

“Ah, just a few rags.”

“They must have cost you a pretty penny.”

“I get good wages,” he says proudly.

“I’ve been worried about you all week. You were in a state when we brought you home. What happened?”

“Oh, I got knocked down by a horse and cart. I didn’t see it until it was right on top of me. I thought I was a goner,” he says casually.

“You even told your own mum you fell off a gasworks for a bet. You won’t tell anybody anything, will you?”

“Why should I? It pays to keep your trap shut. Now come and sit down.”

“No, it doesn’t.”

“I’ve just told you, haven’t I? I told you I got run over with a horse and cart.”

As he talks, Doreen walks across the room gazing at him. Finally she stops and says, shaking her head, “You are a liar.”

As she stands over the bed, looking at him, he lies back down. “You won’t like it if I tell you.”

“I won’t mind,” she assures him.

“I got beat up by two soldiers.”

“What for?”

Surprising us, he tells the truth: “Well, I’ve been knocking around with a married woman and her husband set them onto me. Two against one, so they beat me. I’d have flattened them if they had been one at a time.”

“I suppose that’s why you left us at the fair.”

But now it’s back to his lies again: “No, it wasn’t. I saw a mate of mine on the dodgems* that owed me money and I went to collect it.”

**Dodgems: bumper cars.*

“I didn’t see you after that. What happened to you?” he demands, as if it was she who had done something wrong.

“You talk to me like I was a bit of muck.”

“Oh, duck, don’t get like that. I’m sorry.”

“You *do* look sorry,” she says, surprised.

Arthur closes his eyes, exhausted.

He pats the bed next to him. “Come here.”

She doesn’t move, just gazes into his eyes, almost frightened.

“Come on, come here,” he says softly, patting the bed again. She sits and he goes on, “I’m glad you came to see me. I would have stayed down in the dumps for good if you hadn’t.”

As she sits next to him, she replies, “I wondered how you were. Oh, I brought you some fags.”

“Oh, thanks,” he says, tucking them under his pillow. “What’s it like outside?”

“It’s a bit cold.”

“Not in this bed. It’s warm underneath all these blankets. Come and try,” he says, taking her hand.

“What do you take me for?” she asks, offended.

“We’re courting, aren’t we?”

“You might call it courting.”

“You’re a nice girl, Doreen, and I like you a lot. I reckon you ought to stay with me for good, so I don’t get knocked down by any more horses. The trouble with me is I’m always bumping into things. It’s not much of a paying game.”

“You’ll have to watch where you’re going then, won’t you?”

“I’ve never seen anybody look as nice as you do,” he says. We see that she’s dressed carefully for this meeting: a pale blouse, a necklace and lipstick and her hair is nicely pulled back.

Doreen doesn’t respond. She just gazes at him with a serious look on her face. He breaks the silence, “I’ll buy you a ring next week if you’re nice.”

She smiles, and seems to give a quiet sigh of relief or satisfaction.

With a big smile, he says, “Come on, give us a kiss, then.” Suddenly, Doreen looks elated. She bends down to kiss him.

Downstairs, Bert arrives.

Arthur’s father, rolling a cigarette at the table, asks him, “How’s things in the pit?”

“Black,” he chuckles. “But I can’t grumble. Where’s the lad?”

“Still in bed,” his Aunt Vera tells him. “Take his clean shirt up, while you’re about it.”

“Right-o,” he answers and grabs the shirt, walking briskly toward the door.

“It’s time he got up,” says his uncle.

At the door, Bert pauses long enough to look back and ask, “What’s up, the telly broken?”

Up in Arthur’s room, Doreen is bent over him in a tight embrace.

Without knocking, Bert bursts in, announcing, “Here comes the laundry man!”

The couple separates. Arthur sits up, wiping the lipstick off his mouth and Bert says, “Oh, sorry, Doreen. I didn’t know you were here.” He tosses the shirt on the bed.

Arthur admits that it’s time he was getting up.

Doreen stands and straightens her top and her hair. She says that she’ll be going; her mum is expecting her.

Doreen goes to the door and Arthur says, “So long, love. I’ll see you at your house.” Doreen, holding her white coat, turns back to face Arthur. She looks radiant.

Doreen leaves. The moment the door closes, Bert whispers his appraisal to Arthur: “Smashing nurse.”

Arthur leans over and gives him a playful slap.

Bert invites Arthur fishing that afternoon, but Arthur can’t.

As he puts on his shirt – still sitting in bed – he explains, “I’ve got a date.”

“With who?”

“With Doreen!” he says happily. For a moment, he looks like a carefree little boy.

Dinner is over: the dessert plates are stacked neatly. A big teapot sits on the table, with a scattering of delicate cups and saucers. The clock chimes the hour: 11:00. Doreen’s mother is sitting in a chair, her back turned to the table, reading the newspaper.

Arthur is bored, maybe angry, at least annoyed. He flicks crumbs on the table with his forefinger. At first, Doreen seems sad. But then she makes a barrier for the crumbs with her hand and they both smile. She’s made a game of it. They glance over at her mother and continue playing.

“Your mum takes all night to read the paper,” Arthur says quietly to Doreen. “Does she read slowly or is she looking at the adverts?”

“She reads every word. She loves her newspaper more than a book.”

The kettle in the kitchen starts to whistle and they look over again at the woman, who continues reading, her newspaper held high. She seems unaware of the sound, until Doreen alerts her.

"All right. I heard it." She gets up and goes out.

When she's out of the room, Arthur leans over and takes Doreen's hand. "I thought she was never going to get out of that chair," he says in a low voice.

"She won't be a minute. She's just filling a hot-water bottle."

As her mother comes back into the room, hugging the hot-water bottle, Arthur lets go of Doreen's hand. "Well, I'm off to bed," she says. "Don't be long yourself, Doreen."

Doreen stands up. "I won't be. Arthur's just going in a minute. He's got ever such a long walk home."

"I have," he affirms. "I'll get cracking in a bit."

"Well, don't be late," her mother admonishes and then leaves the room to go to sleep. Doreen calls after her, "I'll wash the cups up before I come, mum."

Alone at last, Arthur and Doreen stand facing each other, motionless. Finally Doreen starts to clear the table, saying, "I'll take these cups –"

"No," Arthur puts his hand on her arm, stopping her. He holds both her arms and gazes straight into her face. She gazes back at him. He reaches up slowly to touch her face, but she stops him. "Let's make as if you're going first."

She goes to the front door. Arthur follows her. She turns the latch, opens the door, leans out slightly and says loudly, "Good night then, Arthur."

"Good night," he answers.

A barking dog joins in the charade.

Then Doreen points out, "We'll have to do it a bit louder. You know that she's deaf." They smile with delight at the trick they're playing.

Even louder than before, she calls, "Good night then, Arthur!"

"Good night, duck! See you soon!" he hollers back.

She slams the door and the co-conspirators share a silent laugh at their ruse.

Arthur leads the way back to the front room.

Arthur sits. Doreen walks slowly over to the window and closes the curtains. When she turns to look at him, their eyes meet. She comes to stand behind his chair. As he reaches out his hand, she takes it and looks at him, serious.

He pulls her down into the chair next to him and grasps her arms as he stares intently into her eyes. Meeting his gaze, she leans forward and kisses him. He pulls her toward him and reaches over to unfasten her top. She pulls back. They look at each other and then begin to kiss again, more passionately now.

They slide onto the floor and continue kissing, in a close embrace. They pause and Arthur stares into Doreen's eyes for a long time before beginning to kiss her again.

A dissolve brings us back to the factory. Arthur has cut himself and he goes to the first aid cabinet.

The camera moves outside: Jack is just about to enter the building where Arthur is tending to his wound.

He enters and the light from the open door catches Arthur full in the face.

The two men are face to face. They pause for a few seconds, neither moving. At last, Jack moves past Arthur, trying to avoid him, but without success.

“What are you doing round this way, then?” demands Arthur.

“I’m just going to the press shop,” replies Jack, mildly. “I’m on days now.” Then he starts to walk on. Again, he fails to end the conversation.

“I thought you might have been coming to see me,” replies Arthur.

“There’s no need of that, is there?”

“Isn’t there? Hadn’t you thought them swaddies* had killed me?”

Jack hesitates, looking downward. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says and again starts to step away.

“I didn’t think you would. That’s the sort of bloke you are, isn’t it? Till you get bashed in the face, then you squeal like a stuck pig.”

He’s finally provoked Jack, who turns and angrily accuses Arthur: “You caused a lot of trouble between me and Brenda. You can’t deny it. It wasn’t right.”

“You don’t have to tell me what’s right and what isn’t. How is Brenda anyway?”

Jack softens. “She’s okay. She’ll be alright with me. I’ll look after her.” Then he warns, “Keep that between me and you, though. If you ever try to see her again, you’ll get more trouble from swaddies.”

**Swaddies (or ‘squaddies’): slang for soldiers.*

“They won’t find it so easy next time, whether I’m on my own or not.”

“You’re too much of a troublemaker, Arthur,” Jack scolds, then, more gently, advises, “You should take things as they come and enjoy life.”

“I do enjoy life. Just because I’m not like you, don’t think I don’t.”

“Well, I’ll see you sometime,” Jack says, returning to his mild-mannered ways, and leaves.

Arthur walks through the cluttered, hectic factory to his workbench. From there a dissolve takes us to a lake, its still surface reflecting the branches of bare trees.

Arthur and Bert are fishing, framed by the silhouettes of the bare trees. Their bikes are in the back; we hear the soft song of birds. But an electrical tower lets us know that this is only a brief escape. Still, the men’s reflection in the water gives us a sense that, for once, Arthur is at peace.

Arthur, who is not one to exert himself unnecessarily is arranging his fishing rod so that he won’t have to sit and hold it. Bert hums the “Wedding March” and Arthur playfully tosses dirt at him so that he’ll stop.

The gorgeous composition of this shot – the interplay of diagonals and verticals drawing the eye between the two men – exemplifies the spectacular cinematography of Freddie Francis, who flawlessly and unassumingly shows the intrusion of industry in this natural setting. As they fish, the cousins talk about life and love.

“Thought you were the one who wasn’t going to get married until you were good and ready.”

“I hadn’t met Doreen then.”

“What’s the score with Brenda then?”

Leaning pensively on a tree, Arthur replies, “Finished. She’s a good sort, though. I’ve given her a lot to put up with.”

Up to now they’ve been talking without facing each other, but now Bert turns to Arthur with his next question:

“What’s her husband like?”

“A bit of a dope. But he’s not a bad bloke.”

“I told you to lay off weeks ago. Not that you took any notice.”

“Well, you’ve got to enjoy yourself.”

“You’ve got to keep your feet on the ground as well.”

Arthur’s contemplative moment abruptly ends. He tears a bit of wood off the tree and answers, “I can’t see that much use in that. You see people settle down and, before they know where they are, they’ve kicked the bucket.”

“It’s not altogether like that. There are easier ways of getting things than lashing out all the time.”

“Do you think so? I’ve still got some fight left in me, not like most people.”

“But where does all this fighting get you?”

“Ever see where *not* fighting gets you, eh, like my mum and dad?”

“What do you mean? They’ve got all they want.”

“Ah, they’ve got a television set and packet of fags, but they’re both dead from the neck up. I’m not saying it’s their fault, mind you. But they’ve accepted their lot so that all the bloody gaffers* can push them around like a load of sheep.” Arthur throws the wood down angrily.

“You’re in a funny mood, Arthur. I’ve never seen you like this before.”

**Gaffers: supervisors, low-level bosses*

“There’s a lot more in life than my mum and dad have got,” he says, as Bert looks over at him, concerned.

Suddenly Arthur cries, “Hey, I’ve got one!” He picks up his fishing rod and happily reels in his little fish as Bert looks on, smiling. Arthur is bitter, but he’s not going to let his bitterness prevent him from enjoying life.

Our story closes on a field overlooking the city. The city is expanding and here on the outskirts the houses are larger and further apart, not at all like the row houses in the city. At least for now, they’re within walking distance of grass and open air. A couple – but not our couple – are walking, arm in arm, on the undeveloped land.

Arthur and Doreen are offscreen, but we hear them talking.

“It’s good to be out,” he says.

“It’s nice out here,” she agrees.

“It’s peaceful, for a change.”

The camera zooms over to them. Arthur is sitting up, looking toward the city. Doreen faces the other way, propped up on her elbows. She turns her head to tell Arthur, “I asked mum if we could live at home. She said it’d be alright.”

“Till we get a new house... I wouldn’t mind living in an old one myself.”

“I would. I want a new one, with a bathroom and everything.” At that, Arthur turns his head to look at her.

He gets to his feet. “Me and Bert used to roam all over these hills when we were kids. Blackberrying. There won’t be blackberries or a blade of grass here much longer.” Abruptly, he throws a stone at the sign advertising the new housing. It hits with a clang.

“What did you do that for?” protests Doreen.

“I don’t know. Just felt like it, I suppose.”

“Maybe one of those houses will be for us,” she says, nodding in the direction of the new houses in the distance.

“I know,” he acknowledges.

“You shouldn’t throw things like that.”

He looks down at her. “It won’t be the last one I’ll throw,” he informs her – as if she didn’t know.

She stares at him sternly and doesn’t respond. The two seem to have a sort of understanding. Arthur knows that he will have responsibilities. But he still isn’t going to conform to what others expect.

They continue staring at each other for a moment, then he grins and stretches out his hand, “Come on, duck. Let’s go down.”

He helps her to her feet and they start walking, apart at first. But Arthur gives a little skip, like a little boy and, when he reaches out his hand, she grabs it.

As they walk towards the new houses, the screen fades to black.