MIKE

BARTLETT

PLAYS: 1
NOT TALKING
MY CHILD
ARTEFACTS
CONTRACTIONS
COCK

Introduced by Sacha Wares

BLOOMSBURY
Mike Bartlett

Plays: 1

Not Talking, My Child, Artefacts, Contractions, Cock

Not Talking: ‘This is a thoughtful play with contemporary relevance enhanced by historical perspective. Constant juxtaposition of contrasting themes – music and military, loyalty and betrayal, bullying and defence of values, killing and suicide, male and female emotional responses, desire for children and abuse of youth – mirror the alternate voices telling parallel stories making it much more than another anti-Iraq war rant.’ Judges of the 2007 Imison Award, on presenting the prize to Not Talking

My Child: ‘Bartlett, in his first play, pins down with horrific accuracy the way children become the victims of warring parents. But he never lets you settle into easy moral judgments.’ Guardian. ‘Brutal, thrilling … unmissable.’ Evening Standard

Artefacts: ‘“Embarrassment of riches” doesn’t begin to cover it. I cannot recall when last I saw so much, on both narrative and thematic levels, crammed into a one-act 80-minute play without the whole thing bursting messily under the strain … A play that thoroughly engages on whatever level(s) you choose to approach it.’ Financial Times

Contractions: ‘An intensely disturbing experience … We are careering towards a society, Bartlett implies, that sees all and understands nothing … It’s grotesquely funny – and it chills to the bone.’ The Times

Cock: ‘Brilliant and blackly hilarious … Cock is also a heady example of the way that concentration on theatre’s unique aesthetic capacities can help a dramatist to go the extra mile morally. I await Bartlett’s next piece in a mock-sweat of unseemly anticipation.’ Independent

Mike Bartlett’s plays include My Child (Royal Court Theatre, 2007); Artefacts (Bush Theatre/Nabokov/59E59, 2008) which won the Old Vic New Voices Award; Contractions (Royal Court Theatre, 2008); Cock (Royal Court Theatre, 2009); Earthquakes in London (National Theatre, 2010); Love, Love, Love (Paines Plough/Theatre Royal Plymouth, 2010). Work for radio includes Love Contract, The Family Man (both BBC Radio 4, 2007); Not Talking (BBC Radio 3, 2006), which won the Writers’ Guild Tinniswood Award and Society of Author’s Imison Award; The Steps, Liam (both BBC Radio 4, 2009). He directed D.C. Moore’s monologue Honest in its first production by the Royal & Derngate Theatre, Northampton, in 2010. He is currently Writer-in-Residence at the National Theatre and Associate Playwright at Paines Plough.
by the same author

Artefacts
Cock
Contractions
Earthquakes in London
Love, Love, Love
My Child

Stuff I Buried in a Small Town
(part of the anthology Six Ensemble Plays for Young Actors)
Plays: 1

Not Talking
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with an introduction by Sacha Wares
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Chronology

2006  
*Not Talking* (BBC Radio 3)

2007  
Appointed the Pearson Playwright in Residence at the Royal Court Theatre

*Not Talking* is awarded both the Writers’ Guild Tinniswood Award for best original radio drama script broadcast during 2006 and the Society of Authors’ Imison Award for best first radio play

*My Child* (Royal Court Theatre)

*The Family Man* (BBC Radio 4)

*Love Contract* (BBC Radio 4)

2008  
*Artefacts* (Bush Theatre/Nabokov/59E59): winner of the Old Vic New Voices Award

*Contractions* (Royal Court Theatre), an adaptation of *Love Contract*

2009  
*The Steps* (BBC Radio 4)

*Liam* (BBC Radio 4)

*Cock* (Royal Court Theatre)

2010  
Appointed Writer-in-Residence at the National Theatre and Associate Playwright at Paines Plough

Directs *Honest* by D.C. Moore at the Royal Derngate Theatre, Northampton

*Cock* wins an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre

*Earthquakes in London* (National Theatre)


2011  
*13* (National Theatre)
Introduction

I remember clearly the first time I read a Mike Bartlett play. I was travelling to the Royal Court reading through a pile of scripts that had come through the theatre’s Young Writers’ Programme. Late, and reading on the tube in a hurry for the script meeting, I found that within a few lines of the first page of *My Child* I was totally and utterly *in* the world of the play. As I read on, I became increasingly excited by the speed with which the drama unfolded and was blown away by the sheer confidence of the writing. I also recall feeling a very particular thrill at just how spiteful and unsparing the dialogue was, an awareness of how close the frenetic rhythm of the play was to the world around me, and an astonishment at the thought that this searching attack on contemporary values had been written by someone under twenty-six years old.

Rereading *My Child* along with the other plays in this collection, I get exactly the same thrill now from the words on the page. To me, these are not plays that sit happily in a book (or a pile), asking politely to be produced. They are much more impatient than that, containing a pure theatrical energy that comes from the fact that they are already on stage in Mike’s mind as he writes, and sprung by an incredibly lively philosophy of what makes good theatre.

‘What’s the game?’, ‘How is it scored?’ and, crucially, ‘How do you win?’ – these are questions I’ve heard Mike ask many times when talking about his plays and the world in general. For him, good theatre is a high-stakes game where private actions are played out under public scrutiny. Rehearsals for *My Child* took off for all involved when we moved from discussion of ideas and themes and focused instead on the point-scoring tactics of the characters, their pleasure in hurting one another, and the obsession with winning. From nine-year-old child to wheelchair-bound grandmother, every character is engaged in a vicious competition through the play, fighting hard to avoid being the loser in an encounter. In rehearsals, Mike constantly drew parallels between the ‘game’ of the play and professional wrestling. Like a spectator sport, with its crowd-pleasing violence, the play is unapologetic in its desire to entertain. The insults hurled are violent but fun, and there is a showman’s playfulness to the writing, a delight in speed and surprise. But more seriously, the idea of the wrestling match as rigged public spectacle, with predecided winner and loser, illuminates something central to the play and the world view it explores. For all the effort and invention the characters employ to get the better of one another, there is, with the climactic arrival of alpha male Karl, a sense of inevitability that the true father – with his philosophy degree and poor income – will be forced to submit to the rich, success-story of a stepdad. Witnessing his son be collected as a trophy, the Man considers where he went wrong:

**Man**

 Why did you tell me all this?

**Mother**

 All what?

That it is better to be polite. To put others first. Not to be violent. To turn the other cheek. Not to treat people as rivals but as friends. To try to be moral and good, and not selfish.

**Man**

 To love.
Because it’s right.

No. It’s not.

Look at me.

It’s not how the world is.

Losing the battle, submitting to a stronger opponent, discovering oneself to be the victim of rigged outcomes and stacked odds – these are ideas that recur throughout the plays, as characters who thought they were engaged in the act of living discover themselves to be unwitting participants in a competition they didn’t choose to enter and for which they don’t understand the rules.

The opening scene of *Artefacts* captures precisely the range of conflicting feelings that come with not knowing the rules. Built around an extraordinarily theatrical monologue that careers from arrogance to vulnerability, the scene traces teenage Kelly’s train of thoughts as she struggles to catch up with the fact that she has a father and heritage she knew nothing of. Anxiously anticipating some version of a reunion, Kelly has quickly to adjust her expectations on meeting her father. She finds herself thrown without warning into a trading game, forced to bargain against the clock for an outcome to satisfy her emotional need. The scene carries a huge theatrical charge. No one who saw the Bush production could forget the haggling that takes the place of the hoped-for exchange of precious memories and lost moments. Reckless, and driven by deeply conflicting needs, the scene sets off a chain of deal-making and breaking that runs through the play.

While *Artefacts* looks at the games, negotiations and divisions between two worlds, in *Contractions* the focus is on a game of corporate poker that treats human emotions as probability calculations. A brilliant employee with outstanding figures, Emma at first assumes she has a genuine chance of winning and we, as audience, are able to enjoy the subtle shifts in confidence as hands are played and trump cards flourished. The dialogue, as in all of Mike’s work, is incredibly precise, with every word, punctuation mark and scripted pause carrying a carefully chosen meaning and weight in the game. But this is not a fair game – the all seeing Manager knows more than she ought, and Emma loses much more than she could have predicted. Like the Man in *My Child*, she loses her partner, her child, her idea of her future. As each is taken from her, like him she is less and less able to control her feelings. They spill into the room and across the table in a mess of grief, anger, revulsion, mud, blood and vomit, none of which succeeds in forcing a show of humanity from her opponent, who steadfastly keeps her cool. Only when Emma is finally ready to fold is there a faint clue that the Manager may also secretly grieve the life she has sacrificed to her job and the pursuit of maximum profits. With an almost unnoticeable change in her quality of breathing, we become aware of an effort made to hold down a rebellious rising emotion.

The tension between feelings and rules, desires and roles is also at the heart of the play *Cock*. Explicitly referencing the idea of a cock fight, the play is structurally like one in that it is a series of quick bouts; spatially, in that the characters find themselves trapped in the confined area of the apartment; and rhythmically – beginning with the frenetic peck-peck-pecking of fellow creatures set against one another, and slowing to an exhausted yet unrelenting conclusion. However, when ‘hen’ and ‘referee’ both unexpectedly find their way into the arena of John and M’s relationship, the rules are subverted and everyone’s roles and identities thrown into question. With two distinctly different futures laid out before him, John explains, ‘I’m trying to work out how to handle this who to be.’
The line could be spoken by almost any of the characters in this collection since they all have a decision to make about what kind of person they want to be, and by extension the kind of world they want to live in. The Man in *My Child* must decide what kind of father to be, and whether to act to build a relationship with his son not based on material objects; Ibrahim in *Artefacts* must decide what kind of citizen to be, and whether to sacrifice his daughter as an act of protest against the buying and selling of his country’s youth; Emma must decide whether to cut her losses and leave the financial security of a job that demands loyalty to profits above all else. However, they all face such stacked odds that whatever decisions or actions they take tend quickly to be transformed from positive attempts at change into futile gestures of protest.

The first play in the collection, *Not Talking*, has the idea of the protest gesture at its core and as such offers a clue as to how we might read the plays that follow. Mark’s decision to abide by his superiors and say nothing about what he has witnessed is contrasted with a gallery of protest acts across different generations, including James’s conscientious objection, Lucy’s piano protest and Amanda’s accusatory silence. Ineffective as the acts of protest may be, they stand in contrast to the blind, rule-abiding young soldier Mark, who does nothing in response to the crime he has witnessed. To be present is to be implicated, the play suggests; to abide by the rules is to be complicit; to protest (however ineffectively) is an obligation owed to the future. The Christian overtones are explicit and, as with all the plays in the volume, *Not Talking* carries within it the shadow of a lost child, a symbol across Mike’s work of a neglected responsibility to future generations, an abused legacy.

To be there is to be part of it, and to be part of it means you leave a trace behind. The audience is by no means exempt from this. In each of the plays our relationship to the acts we witness, is under as close scrutiny as Mark’s. *My Child* begins with the very specific set of instructions:

*The audience and actors come into the space together. It is not clear who the actors are at first.*

*Actors can go anywhere in the space.*

*No actor should enter or leave the theatre during the performance.*

These are unusually precise directions about audience and space, highlighting the extent to which Mike is concerned with the role of the bystander. This is not a play where we are encouraged to sit back and watch anonymously from the dark. We are written in, as present within and vital to the play as the son and his father. When the Man turns to strike up conversations with people in the crowd (the woman in the bar, the people on the tube, the girl selling DVDs in the street), we are that crowd, and for a split second unsure whether the person answering is a performer or just an onlooker like ourselves. It is our world the play is critiquing – and we are asked to consider our complicity with its values.

In *Cock*, the spatial relationship is different:

*The audience is raked down towards the actors.*

*There is no scenery, no props, no furniture, and no mime.*

*Instead the focus is entirely on the drama of the scene.*

We are not among the actors, but above them, at a vantage point, with more space to watch, take sides and judge. However, with the arrival of the Father, the right to judge or lecture comes under
scrutiny (‘You kept looking at my breasts as you were talking there there you’re doing it now’).

The audience is not referred to explicitly in Contractions, yet our presence fills out the world of the play, our eyes and ears becoming part of the all-knowing corporate culture; the very act of spectating contributing to the sense of eroded privacy.

In Artefacts, the spectator is cast as confidant to the central character, Kelly, and encouraged to see events firmly through her eyes. As the story unfolds, however, Kelly is given less and less opportunity to speak directly to the audience and, as other characters claim the right to tell their version of events, the shifting form of the play prompts the spectator to look afresh at Kelly’s preoccupations from other points of view and perspectives.

Only in performance does the power of the plays’ spatial dimension really register and the very particular focus placed on the audience become apparent. Talking in an interview about his work, Mike mentions as a favourite moment ‘Teenagers laughing at the Man in My Child being beaten up, and the older audience members disapproving. An audience in dialogue with itself.’ It is this profound enthusiasm for debate and disagreement, this pleasure in theatre where people takes sides (yet may find their allegiances shifting), along with a deep respect for the spectator’s contribution to the meaning of the theatrical event, that, for me, makes the plays in this collection especially remarkable. Much can be understood by reading them, but it is the subtle game set up between play and audience, language and space, event and bystander that stirs up in the moment a live, rich, complex debate about who we are as a society and what we may be leaving as our legacy.

Sacha Wares
July 2011
Not Talking

For Samuel
Thanks to: Paul Ashton, Josie Bamford, Rosie Kelly, Kate Rowland, Pam Marshall, Kat Nugent, Amy Sackville, Dan Snelgrove, and especially Steven Canny and Claire Grove.
Not Talking was originally broadcast on BBC Radio 3, on 3 March 2006, and featured the following cast:

**James**  
Richard Briers

**Lucy**  
June Whitfield

**Mark**  
Carl Prekopp

**Amanda**  
Lyndsey Marshal

*Produced by* Claire Grove  
*Directed by* Steven Canny
Characters

James
Lucy
Mark
Amanda
Part One

FX: piano music – confidently played by Lucy.

James

I remember as a boy, I used to speak to everyone and anyone, incessantly. I found talking easy and I remember looking with curiosity at those other kind of people who were shy, or tongue-tied, and wondering what that must be like. To find speaking difficult.

I’m James.
I’m eighty-two.
I live with my wife Lucy in a small cottage in Sussex.
Very settled really.

Lucy

I try not to remember the day when it happened. When we sat, stunned and still, his hand on mine, both of us crying. Not speaking.

James

I met Lucy just before the war at a friend’s dinner party. She was nineteen.

Beautiful.

Lucy

But every morning at half past eight when I wake up I still scratch my stomach. I scratch. How uncouth. Scratch scratch. A distraction.

James

Once married, we had a wonderful summer. Walking, punting, drinking, laughing.

Lucy

I will try to smile.

James

One day, on a hill, I developed a glint in my eye, so I asked her what she thought of my idea. She smiled and said ‘Of course!’ So we began to try after that.

Lucy

If you force yourself to smile when you’re sad, you feel better.

Beat.

There. It actually works. Just think of the good times. Lemonade.

James

Only three weeks later, she went for a test, and she was, so she came home and we celebrated with lemonade I think and going to bed and making love, but carefully because we didn’t want anything to go wrong.

Lucy

Remember good times only. Drifting up the Thames on a punt. A summer’s evening.

James

Sunlight trembling through trees. Wireless playing. We lost the pole in the river and didn’t care. Drifting with nothing to do.

Lucy

Did I listen to her womb to see if I could hear her inside? Yes.

FX: quiet crackling old recording of ‘Me and My Girl’.

James

I sung to her. Could she hear me singing?
He sings out of time to the music.

FX: the record suddenly stops.

Lucy We switched it off as we wanted to hear the birds and the water. And I’m sure people were being disturbed by the noise.

One day the midwife asked us if we would prefer a son or a daughter. And of course we replied that it didn’t matter to us, but she continued that in her opinion, judging from the sudden aggressive kicks Lucy was feeling, it was probably a girl. Probably. So almost without thinking we named her Mary.

Then two days later it happened.

Lucy I remember a walk in the country when we saw that hill. It was a lovely day, so hand in hand we began to climb. To the top. It seemed to be getting closer all the time but still so far away.

James She called my name from the toilet.

Lucy And we finally got there!

James Through tears. I could hear her crying.

We rushed to the hospital as fast as we could, but it was too late, and we both knew it.

Lucy We rushed to the view and looked and it was magnificent. He took my hand and put his arm round me.

James Not touching. Just looking away together.

Lucy Before I knew it we were hugging. And looking out at the view.

James Not being able to speak.

Lucy Not talking. Just looking into the distance.

James Looking away. Close, but with a distance between us. A gap.

Lucy Looking into the distance. And at that moment, he turned to me, with a glint in his eye, and said ‘I have conceived of an idea’ And I knew what he meant. A child. I hugged him and kissed him and said ‘Of course!’ And of course very soon after that. Mary. Began.

James Just staring into the distance. I imagined she would turn her head slowly and look me in the eyes. Then move towards me, and we would embrace. I imagined we could just be together, knowing we loved each other and that even though Mary was gone, we would try again. We could be closer now than we were before.

Lucy Mary had begun. My baby. I named her Mary in my head. I imagined her life out for her … there and then … just imagined as it turned out.
James  I imagined after Mary was gone that the emptiness would lessen, and with that the space between Lucy and I would close. But it never has. So we never tried again.
Part Two

FX: a SA80 drops on the table.

Mark Crack crack crack. Or should I say t t t t t t t t. Cos this is a standard SA80 Rifle with two settings … single shot and semiautomatic. Beautiful weapon.

Beat.

Wicked.

At first we only got to use handguns … but, what it is, is that … with handguns you’ve got to be skilled. You have to aim. No. No point mate. Just shoot everywhere. See what you hit.

He laughs.

For my seventeenth birthday, I remember my mum made me a sponge cake in the shape of a machine gun to celebrate me signing up. When Dad came round he said it was tasteless. He didn’t even have a bit.

Amanda I remember …

Mark But yeah … Amanda … yeah … She was a hotty.

Amanda I remember he had this way with words.

Mark Sugar honey.

Amanda When he swore, it sounded wrong, which was …

Mark Just sweet.

Amanda … sweet.

Mark All the lads thought she was. I did too.

Amanda He held his head at this funny angle. Which was …

Mark They all wanted to do her.

Amanda What’s the word … like … innocent?

Mark She was fit.

Amanda No. Endearing.

Mark Nice tits, Gary said.

Amanda Endearing.
Sensitive.

He just seemed different.

There was this like little party thing in the NAAFI and we all thought it would be crap cos drinks weren’t allowed. But Kate brought the vodka and we got hammered. Me and the girls pissed up and dancing.

Her lot were new and the party was the Sergeant’s idea to … um … bond as a unit. Gary said he’d like to bond with her as a unit.

I didn’t really know what he meant.

The boys shuffled in, then just stood around, like boys do. We’d all only been at the barracks … um … three weeks? So I didn’t know everyone. All us girls were chatting and laughing at the boys. And then, I see him looking at me. He was really shy. Like he wanted to come and talk to me but didn’t know how …

By nine o’clock, I was with her. Arms round her. Dancing. I was shit, right, but I was dancing. And I was giving it the smile and yeah, she wanted me. We’d been talking and y’know flirting all night and I made her laugh. Not laugh at me. Laugh in a good way. You know.

He looked like he didn’t really know what a girl was. I watched him. Kept on trying to catch his eye. He kept looking at the floor. Really like … shy.

So I was dancing with her, but I wanted to make a move, so I had this idea and I said stay there. And I went over to Sergeant Bunder, who was like the DJ, and I said ‘Can I make a request?’ And Sarge says ‘Want some Kylie, gay boy?’ I said ‘No sir, there’s a girl I’m trying to pull and I want you to play a song so that she’ll let me get off with her … sir.’ ‘A girl, eh, gay boy?’ said the Sergeant. ‘Yeah,’ I said. ‘Yeah.’ ‘A girl’.

‘What girl?’ He asked. I said Amanda, over there. Sarge laughed at me. Then he said, ‘Got just the right one gay boy, go and get your tongue ready.’

I was pretty sure he liked me. So I went across. I stood close. I asked him if he danced. He said no cos he was shit at it.

And I went back over. And we danced some more … slowly … to this song Sarge played. And she seemed to like it. We was about to get off when the lads came over and started shouting and slapping me and stuff. Gary said ‘What’s gay boy doing with a girl?’ And then they said to her … Amanda … they said … they said to her that I wasn’t worth it because I didn’t have a cock.

I said anyone can dance.
I do have a cock.

Amanda  He told me his name was Mark.

Mark  They’d got some drink and did I want some?

Amanda  Mine’s Amanda. He was so nervous!

She laughs.

… Gary then went up to Amanda and put his hand on her. Said she could do him if she wanted. She pushed him and told him to go and shag his mum. Then she walked off.

Mark  Gary said she was a minger anyway and that he’d find some other girl to do but there were only about nine girls there, and fifty-seven lads. We left him, and went outside and got pissed on this vodka we had.

Amanda  So eventually we ended up dancing. He was a bit shit. But it was … endearing.

She laughs.

Mark  After an hour or two, someone says we have to see this, and four of us run over to this building. It’s dark. Not used much.

Amanda  There was something good about him.

Mark  There are whispers to shut up and then we hear this noise coming from behind the building. So, really quiet, we look round the corner. Four of us.

Amanda  After a while he shouted that he had this idea and he ran over to Sergeant who was playing the music. Then he comes back over and says it’s a surprise. And this song starts playing. It’s a slow dance.

FX: Westlife’s cover of ‘Mandy’ by Barry Manilow – in an echoey hall.

Mark  We can see Gary’s on this girl. They’re shagging!

Amanda  So me and Mark, we move closer. And I put my arms round him. He’s really tense, but he tries to look cool by keeping a straight face like he doesn’t care … but when I stand close I can feel …

She laughs.

… there’s something between us! If you know what I mean …

Something I can feel between us …

She giggles.

Which gives it away.
And two of the sergeants are watching. They’re pissed and whispering stuff a bit. They’re laughing, and Gary’s really going for it! It was hard to tell cos it was dark, I couldn’t see that well, but I remember the girl had something in her mouth.

Then I noticed. The song’s ‘Mandy’ … it’s my name. That’s really sweet. Then I asked if he chose it … for me. He says … ‘Sort of.’ I said thanks.

This girl wasn’t liking it. We just watched. Then suddenly, the Sergeant … he looks round and sees us. We don’t move.

He just looks at us all for ages. Points at us and then taps his head.

To show us he would remember our faces.

We’re shit scared. And run off.

And then the others turn up and they’re wankers. And he goes off with them somewhere.

Go to bed. But I couldn’t get to sleep. I wanted to see Amanda again.

Susie comes over and says … what’s he like? I tell her that it’s not true what they say.

But now I feel guilty as well. Watching.

Mark has got a cock.

FX: piano music – confidently played by Lucy.
Part Three

FX: piano music fades out.

Mark A couple of days later I was eighteen. In the post, Mum sent me a birthday card in the shape of a bazooka.

In 1939 … an announcement on the radio dictated that under the new National Service Armed Forces Act … we were all to register at the employment exchange for army training. I felt … like there was a weight. Falling through me.

Mark When you’re eighteen, you’re a real soldier. If there’s a war, you fight properly. Like part of a unit. You can, at last, do your duty. To Queen and country. But sod the Queen.

James Sinking.

Mark And sod her country.

James Because I didn’t want to do that.

Mark We fight so that Mum back home says well done.

He laughs.

James I’m a Christian. The example of Christ is non-violent. I won’t kill.

You don’t question, you just do. Don’t question, just do. You don’t question you just do.

Mark Do you understand? You don’t question you just do. You … You don’t think, you act. Sarge always said. Your privates don’t think! Privates are trained not to think!

James People say, what about the Holocaust, the genocide, the torture.

Mark (shouting) Think-how-you-feel-when-your-privates-won’t-stand-to-attention!

James The brutality. Horror. It’s evil. It’s wrong. What did you do about it?

Mark (shouting and laughing) You’re not paid to think.

James And although I often reflect on it, I have never regretted the decision.

Mark You are paid to do whatever I tell you!

Pause.

James When I told Lucy what I was going to do, she made it quite clear she didn’t want to talk about it.

Mark I was ready to go.

(Shouting.) Iraq!
James: She just asked if I wanted a cup of tea.

Mark: (shouting) Iraq!

James: I said do you still love me?

Mark: (shouting) Iraq! We’re back! For freedom!

James: Her eyes flickered for a moment.

Mark: We leave in less than a month now.

James: And she said ‘Of course I do’.

Mark: We shafted Saddam. Easy.

James: ‘Nothing’s changed darling’.


James: But there was no passion.

Beat.

On the same day they told us we would be going out there, I was cleaning my shoes in the corridor and she walks past. That … Amanda … I hadn’t seen her since the party, a couple of days before. I thought she was fit, even in uniform. I said hello. Did she remember me? She smiled a bit and said yeah, of course. She sat down. With me. She asked what I did after we danced. I said I … just got drunk and went to bed … Why? She said it didn’t matter. Then she said she thought that I was … different from the others. I said I wasn’t. She said she meant different in a good way. Interesting. I said alright then.

She was being all weird. Quiet. But nice. But weird. Did I want to meet up again?

I didn’t know whether she meant like … to talk … or to shag. But I said yes just in case it was to shag …

When I got to the Exchange to register there were two desks next to each other. One for the army and the other for the conscientious objectors. In the queue for the army there were about twenty people, at least four of them old friends from the town. So as I approached the wrong desk and filled out the form, I felt them staring. I felt their anger. I wasn’t a hero, not a pride of the nation or a brave young man doing his duty. I was a coward.

So we met again the next day, and then whenever we could. As it turned out, just to talk. No shagging it seemed. But it was good. I ended up telling her stuff I didn’t tell anyone else. About … how I got scared sometimes, and lonely. She said she’d write to me when I go to war. If I’d write back.

Once outside, by myself, I thought about going home and seeing Lucy, hearing her talk about the weather, but it didn’t appeal somehow. Then, from behind me, a woman’s
James voice says ‘Excuse me?’ I turned and saw a woman, about my age, early twenties. She wore white gloves. I thought she was going to give me a feather or something. But she said she’d seen me register. ‘You must feel a bit shaken up. It wasn’t very nice in there. Would you like to go for tea?’ ‘Oh … actually … yes,’ I replied. ‘Thank you.’

Mark She was wrong.

James Then the tribunal three weeks later.

Mark She was wrong. I am not different. I don’t think more than the others …

James The chairman of the tribunal was a county court judge. Ignorant man. I told him I would not fight because I believe in Christ and his example of non-violence. He replied: (Judge’s voice.) ‘You don’t look religious. Name Jesus’ disciples.’

Mark I’m not … you know … I don’t want to kill. But some of them …

James ‘Simon, Andrew, James, John …’

Mark Some of them would enjoy it.

James ‘ … Phillip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas.’

Mark Bit psycho some of them. Loony pissheads.

James ‘Alright?’

Mark I s’pose every army needs loony pissheads. They’re vicious bastards in a fight.

James (Judge’s voice) ‘If a Nazi was raping your sister in front of you, would you just let it happen?’

Mark And if they go a bit crazy sometimes, maybe that’s a price worth paying.

‘A Nazi raping my sister?’

James ‘I don’t have a sister.’

(Judge’s voice.) ‘That’s not the point. Just answer the hypothetical question.’

Mark But still … Sometimes … you just worry.

‘We are faced with an evil reality and pacifism is my response. I won’t fight. In any war.’

They told me off but eventually granted me exemption.

James When I came out, she was waiting for me again. The girl. We had arranged to meet. We hugged and she said she was proud of me. That I was doing a good, Christian, thing. That caught me by surprise because I was thinking about her breasts.

‘Shall we have tea?’ she asked.
‘That would be nice,’ I replied.

I’d been seeing Amanda three weeks, when Sergeant Grainer called me over by myself to talk to me. He’s this big square guy. Must be like twenty-two. He said he’d seen me with Amanda since the party. Talking. I said yes sir. Had I told her that I saw it? Er … ‘Saw what sir?’ I didn’t understand.

Then he said:

(In the voice of the Sergeant.) ‘Have you told your girlfriend what you saw that night?’

I was shit scared. ‘No sir. I haven’t told anyone. She doesn’t know anything about it.’

Then he laughed at me. Says:

(In the voice of the Sergeant.) ‘Yes she does. Hasn’t she told you?’

‘Told me what … sir?’

(In the voice of the Sergeant.) ‘Didn’t you recognise her, you little tosser? Didn’t you wonder why she’s dragging herself around with a face like a slapped arse?’

‘No sir.’

‘You don’t talk about what you saw, alright?’

‘Yes sir.’

I’m about to go. Then he says:

(In the voice of the Sergeant.) ‘And whatever happens, you leave it to us. You don’t do anything.’

‘Yes sir.’

Yes sir.

FX: slow, cautious piano music – played by Lucy.
Part Four

Amanda  I didn’t want to tell anyone. Enough problems with the war.

FX: the piano slowly stops.

I didn’t know what to say when he told me. He is a man of principle. He needed me to
tell him that I was proud of him. That I loved him for doing the right thing. But I
couldn’t … I felt …

Lucy  Well, I never mentioned it. When the ladies in the tea room disapproved in my general
direction, I just held the Telegraph slightly higher. I tried to be strong … but inside me
there was …

Amanda  You shut yourself off to everyone. You lock yourself up. You have … shame.

Lucy  Shame.

Shame you can’t let out.

Amanda  A stinging pain for a long time. And then I was numb.

If I don’t want to tell anyone, it’s up to me, right?

I just kept to my daily routine. I’d get up, breakfast, iron, help James get ready for
work, straighten his tie (making sure it wasn’t too tight or worse, too loose), put on the
Third Programme, clean, sit down for elevenses, do the washing, have lunch, and then
in the afternoon go into town, shop, and be back to the house before six o’clock, when
James would get in. In the evening we would read, or perhaps play a game of cards.
Nothing needed to be said.

Lucy  One Saturday, we went and saw his mum. She lived in a small flat with her kids. She
hugged me tight. Said I was just what he needed. Mark went red and told her to shut
up.

She showed me pictures of Mark when he was young. Apparently, when he was four
he wanted to be an astronaut. Then at seven, a fireman and eight … a doctor.

Amanda  But by sixteen, he was about to leave school with two GSCEs but no money or
anything, when the army came round and told them all about becoming a soldier. Good
pay, accommodation, make your parents proud. Get respect. Get away. When he
signed up a few months later his mum was scared, but also proud, and he was a good
boy who sent money back home for her rent. Besides, she said, he was never a
brainbox, was he? I mean, he doesn’t say much, but it’s always hard to know if that’s
because he’s thinking all the time … or if it’s because … well, because he isn’t.

She said I was quiet too.

He had always told me that he was hopeless with women. But every day now his tie
seemed tighter when he came home, as if it had always been taken off.
And he was arriving home later. Half past seven. Meetings for the ambulance unit, apparently.

Then Florence, in the tea room, asked me with eyebrows lowered who that girl was that she had seen James with. The other day? Around six o’clock? I replied that I didn’t know, and Florence’s eyebrows rose.

Beat.

I didn’t mention it to him. I wasn’t angry at first … just … sad … I …

Amanda

I said I thought Mark was very clever. She smiled and said that I probably knew better than her.

Lucy

Scratched.

Amanda

You’re not pregnant are you? she said suddenly.

No. Why? Do I look fat? I replied. No, no, but she thought that might be why Mark and me had come to see her. Suddenly Mark says, ‘We haven’t even done it, Mum, alright?’ She laughed and said he was a proper gentleman.

One day I looked at the clock and it was seven. As usual, no sign of James yet. So I had a thought. I sat down at the piano. And I found some music, and started to play it. Chopin. Closed my eyes while I played …

FX: piano played quietly by Lucy.

And I smiled, or cried … or laughed.

Amanda

Mark told her I played the piano, and she found some old music.

Lucy

Funny, wasn’t I? But I felt things playing those songs I never did before …

But I wanted her to take me aside from Mark and ask really why was I so quiet. Why hadn’t we done it? Yes, why? Why don’t you want to? You can tell me. I won’t tell anyone. It’s alright. Come here. Tell me all about it. What happened?

Amanda

Who did?

When?

Lucy

Why?

But she didn’t. She couldn’t, so I just played instead. And when I left she gave me the music. Since I liked it so much I could keep it, and she doesn’t play the piano. Didn’t know why she still had it.

Lucy

Feelings. I was jealous, beautiful, angry, secrets, falling, crying.

Amanda

I still hadn’t told anyone.

Lucy

Sinking.
Amanda: So …
Lucy: Down.
Amanda: So.
Lucy: Strange.
Amanda: …
Lucy: Breathing.
Amanda: Hmm.

I made sure that every day, when he came home at seven o’clock, I was playing. And because I never used to play before, and because I did it every day now, he became aware that I knew exactly what he was up to, he knew what it meant.

So … I.

I was having a nice time that night. I had just met Mark. We’d danced … and then his mates came over. Gary Franks. They said something rude to me and I told him to go and shag his mother. Then I left. I went over to Susie and the others and they said I was brilliant, that he looked really pissed off and someone needed to say it because he was a wanker.

Beat.

Much later, I was … walking, past the education block. I was on my own. I can’t remember why. I’m sorry I was drunk. I can’t remember.

Pause.

But someone suddenly put their arm around my head and pulled me to the ground and I hit it hard. My nose was bleeding. I was struggling but there must have been at least two of them. One held me down and the other blindfolded me, I could feel the hair on their arms …

Pause.

… Smell beer … They put a rag that smelt of petrol in my mouth. There was sniggering. And loud whispering. I was shaking. They picked me up and told me to stop trying to scream or they’d hit me. Then they did hit me in the stomach. They carried me. I was thrown … on the floor … There was soil, then … sweat and men.

They
They
They.

Lying there for a long time, and I could just hear them whispering…
I choked.

I choked.

FX: the piano stops.

Then one of them got on top of me and held my shoulders down with his arm. With his other arm he pushed my skirt up and got my knickers off.

I

He was there for a long time. There was counting. There was, there was counting.

I tried to think of something else. Something good.

I just thought

But

I

A shout and they turned me over and it went on but … but …

It went on for

For …

And then it stopped.

Someone spat in my ear and said. He said ‘You’re not going to talk about this … Who are you going to tell? … You going to tell an officer? … I’m a officer. So who are you going to tell? Be brave. Shut up.’

Then I was carried outside again. Left. Hands untied and they took the rag out. Then they ran off. I took the blindfold off. It was dark and cold.

I wanted a shower. But it’s not allowed at night so I just went and lay in bed.

I didn’t cry. The others would hear.

I

Did … didn’t tell anyone.

I’m not a victim.

One day as I sat down at six o’clock to play, he came in through the door. He said quietly that there weren’t going to be any more meetings. I replied that surely they still have things to discuss. Peace isn’t that easy. Then he kissed me and said ‘It is for me’. I knew I wouldn’t need to play any more. She could have taken him away. But I had won. Without saying a word.

**Lucy**

FX: piano music confidently played by **Lucy**.
Part Five

FX: the music stops suddenly.

He left for Finland a couple of months later, to drive ambulances. After he had gone, I was sorting his things out in his study and a photograph dropped onto the floor. A picture of a young woman with white gloves. Her address was on the back, and her name. Susan. I knew who this must be. But it was over. I knew I had to ignore it. File it away.

Lucy

A month ago, in one of my files I found a photograph of a beautiful girl wearing white gloves. Susan.

James

But I couldn’t just leave it. A week later, I was outside her front door. Susan’s front door. I needed to tell her what she made me feel.

Lucy

She came to the door. I recognised her from the photograph. I said I believe she knew my husband. He’s in Finland. James. She said she did. Yes. I must be Lucy. She knew my name.

When I found the photo, so many years later, I remembered meeting Susan in the rain. I had felt alone, and there she was, telling me I was brave, with … her smile. For two months following, we met nearly every day and went to her flat. I told Lucy I had meetings.

James

Did I want to come in? I don’t think so. She said she was sorry. She didn’t mean to upset me.

I said was she still in contact with him? Did he write to her from Finland?

Lucy

Yes, he did.

Did she reply? Yes.

I told her to stop. Leave us alone.

She said it was complicated.

Lucy knew I was up to something. She would be playing piano when I returned. This was her sign. To make me feel guilty.

James

It worked. Eventually I couldn’t bear it. So I told Susan we had to stop seeing each other. I went back to Lucy and we carried on as before. Then after two months I left for Finland. Once there I wrote to both Susan and Lucy.

Why was it difficult to stop writing to my husband? I asked

Because she was pregnant.

James didn’t know, yet.

Lucy

I slapped her.

I slapped her. She was pregnant and I hit her. How dare she? How dare she do that? She
just stood there and took it.

Lucy always wrote back at length, telling me how things were going in the house and the town. Susan . . . rationed her replies. And then abruptly stopped altogether. I wondered why, why stop now? . . . It didn’t matter . . . she had ended it.

She said she would leave us alone if that was what I wanted. I said yes. Please do. Never contact either of us again.

I thought I would get back in contact when I returned, but once home . . . Lucy seemed so content. Comfortable . . . it was easier just to forget.

I want to give you this, I said. And I gave her the music. The music I had played. This is what you made me feel. She looked at me, took it and shut the door.

I went home and cried.

There would be a child. Somewhere.

I hoped maybe it could just be forgotten.

Sixty years later, finding the photograph of Susan in my study, I wanted to see her again. So I went downstairs. Lucy was standing looking out the window at next door. She said a new family had moved in and they looked noisy.

I took a moment, and finally told Lucy the truth. That I had an affair before I went to Finland.

She said that she knew that. Susan, wasn’t it? She had found the photograph years ago.

I told Lucy that I had lost contact. She said she knew that too. And she knew why. She said she had visited Susan’s house to tell her to stop writing to me.

Well, I was going to go and find her. Now.

And then, all of a sudden, Lucy was crying and Lucy never cries. She had something else to say. Susan was . . .

She was pregnant.

‘So,’ I told him, ‘maybe you do have a child after all.’

Pause.

I’m sorry, James.

I’m sorry. I should have told you.

I should have. I’m so sorry.

It was just easier . . .

Please. I love you. That was why . . .

Beat.

James. Please.
James  I walked out of the room. Got in the car. Drove.

Pause.

I went to Susan’s old house … and I found out from the neighbours that …

Beat.

… Susan died in 1994. But she did have … we had a daughter … called Beatrice. Beatrice grew up and married and moved, and, I discovered … Beatrice died in 1996, two years after her mother. But she also had a daughter, Sarah. And my granddaughter, Sarah, had children of her own, and lived in a flat, in the town.

So I went to see her. And as I spoke to her about her life, her children, about what had happened … I noticed the mug I was drinking tea from. It had belonged to Susan. I was drinking from the same mug sixty years later.

And I met my two youngest great grandchildren. Lily and Steven. They were wonderful.

I asked about the eldest, Mark.

He was eighteen.

A soldier.

At the barracks nearby. I could go and see him. Sarah said he’d like to meet me. He’s a good boy. Thinks a lot. Sarah said she saw now where he got it from.

Pause.

Lucy  James.

Please.
Part Six

FX: the distant sound of the barracks. Marching, shouting, birds, etc.

About three weeks ago, I got a present sent through. A jelly in the shape of a landmine. From Mum. At least, I thought it was from Mum, but it turned out it was the lads … taking the piss.

Very funny. Training’s tough. They keep on saying … we fight fire with fire. But I thought about it. No one fights fire with fire. It wouldn’t work. Actually fighting fires with fire. But orders is orders. If you go out on a limb, you’ll lose the limb. I was taking orders. Training hard.

Mark

But I always thought about her. Amanda. Distracted. I wanted to do something … but … I couldn’t …

When we got back from visiting Mum on that Saturday in the evening, Sergeant Bunder took Amanda off to talk to her. I don’t know what he said, but when she came back she had just shut up completely. Didn’t even talk to the officers.

The next day, when she didn’t shout back ‘Yes sir,’ they gave her a beasting.

Amanda

I started playing piano again. I found an old piano in a hallway in the barracks, and played.

FX: sounds of outside fade away.

I saw her the morning after, and she had a bruise on her face. On the side. Not sure how. Normally in a beasting they make you run the same twenty metres again and again. Till you’re sick. They said she had fallen over. When she was on her own, I hugged her. I thought she might cry, but she didn’t.

Mark

As I hugged her, I had thoughts over her shoulder. Thinking I wasn’t helping her. Not now, and not that night, on the ground. When everyone was watching. Enjoying it. Maybe I did too. Pissed lads and some girl. He was holding her down. I remember. It’s getting clearer. I just watched what they did to her like it was a film. And I can’t stop feeling shit.

Amanda

I had orders not to talk. So I wasn’t talking. To anyone. I just played piano.

Mark

Everyone said she was a stupid bitch. The whole platoon was being punished cos she wouldn’t speak. Someone said it was my fault.

So I had a beasting. Then restriction of privileges. Then another beasting. This time done by Sergeant Grainer. I fell over. He whispered stuff in my ear. He said that for every soldier at the training barracks, things happen to them which are hard. (Starting to put on the voice of the Sergeant.) ‘The purpose of the barracks and the training is to make soldiers tough. You can’t have soldiers who complain. You want soldiers who can forget the past and move on. Soldiers who stay in line and take orders. Who are professional.’ He said.
She looked worse every day.

*(in the voice of the Sergeant)* ‘Some young men and women can’t take it. Young men and women who came here but found it difficult to stay in line and take what came. And in war, what happens to soldiers who don’t stay in line?’

I didn’t answer. He carried on. Spitting at me again.

‘They get shot. We’ve had deaths here. Suicides. Cos some soldiers can’t take it. You never know.’ He said ‘Sometimes there doesn’t seem a reason. But they were suicides. You know how we know that? The military police have investigated.’

They tried to get her to talk to people. The religious guy, the women’s officer. But she doesn’t trust them. Right not to probably.

*(in the voice of the Sergeant)* ‘Unfortunately suicides can happen at any time.’

‘To anyone.’

‘Soldiers have problems we don’t want to know about.’

‘Stop making such a fucking thing out of it.’

‘Just fall in line.’

‘Now get up.’

I could’ve told someone. I watched it all happen too. I was proof. But I had orders. Not to speak about it.

FX: piano music – *Amanda* playing.
Part Seven

FX: Amanda is still playing. James speaks over the last part of the piece.

I arrived at the barracks unexpectedly. Explained who I was. Said I wanted to see Mark.

Apparently that wouldn’t be possible. But I had come all this way. I was family. They would see if he was off duty.

Then as I was being escorted through corridors to a meeting room, I stumbled on a coincidence.

I heard a piano. Playing Chopin. The music Lucy used to play.

A young girl soldier sat playing on an old piano in the hallway.

She looked so serious.

I stopped and listened. The soldier escorting me wasn’t sure what to do I think.

FX: the piano stops.

It’s not a protest.

I just didn’t speak.

To anyone. Played piano instead.

This music Mark’s mum gave me.

Amanda It’s … bitter, gloomy, beautiful sometimes.

Heartbreaking.

So

I stopped feeling so numb for a few minutes.

No one understood. And that made it even better.

She noticed me watching. Stopped playing. Turned towards me.

I said, ‘Do excuse me but that was beautiful. Sad.’

James She just looked at me. Didn’t say a word.

‘I’m a visitor here. I’m here to visit my great-grandson Mark.’

Do you know him?

Amanda And then this old man comes in who says he’s Mark’s granddad or something and says it was beautiful. Like he understood what I was doing.

James She said nothing.

Sorry. Had I interrupted her?
Amanda: He was kind I think. But weird.

James: Well … sorry, but it was wonderful. Please keep going … I had better go and find Mark.

Amanda: I liked him.

James: I smiled. Then I noticed the message scrawled on the front of the music in pen.

Amanda: But he was so weird.

James: It was Lucy’s handwriting.

Amanda: He picked up the music.

James: It was Lucy’s music. She’d written something on the front.

Amanda: And he looked at what it said on the front. ‘This is what you made me feel, Susan.’

Pause.

Then he gave it back to me and was escorted wherever he was going.

Old man. Sweet.

FX: piano music played by Amanda.
Part Eight

FX: a door shuts, suddenly cutting off the music.

James  He stood up when I came in, like I was some kind of officer.
Mark   Just an old man with a cross round his neck.
James  But he didn’t smile. I thought he might be interested to meet me, but he was cold.
Mark   A Christian.
James  We shook hands. Then we were left alone. Half an hour.
Mark   He would be a Christian.
James  I asked how he was, and we sat down.
Mark   He was smug, like he owned me.
James  He was upset about something. But he said he was fine.
Mark   So I told him that Mum had called me and told me stuff. I knew that he didn’t fight in the war.
James  I said I just met a girl playing the piano. He said it was Amanda. His girlfriend apparently. Sort of.
Mark   What about that then? His great-grandson being a soldier. Is that ... Ironic?
James  Before I knew it we were arguing.
Mark   Oh right.
James  I said, ‘I don’t mind you being a soldier. You make your own decisions. It’s up to you. Your mother’s very proud of you.’
Mark   He was having a go ...
James  Well, I’m pleased you’re doing what you want to do.
Mark   Trying to stay nice but ...
James  No, I don’t agree with it. But that’s up to me.
Mark   I know what I think.
James  He said he would kill people if he had to.
Mark   ... I ... you ...
James  He was trying to provoke me.
Mark  You shoot to kill.
James  I knew that …
Mark  But that’s what you do in the army.
James  That’s part of it, isn’t it?
Mark  Don’t shoot to injure. Doesn’t work.
James  Following orders.
Mark  Just following orders.
James  Well, how do you feel, I asked him.

Beat.

Mark  I … I … I … don’t mind … but …

James  He kept on saying it was part of the job.

Mark  You just spoke to her. You tell me.

James  We began to talk about Amanda.

Mark  He said that she didn’t say anything when he met her. Course she didn’t.

James  I asked him why she played the piano. And why she wouldn’t talk to me. Where the music came from.

Mark  I said I didn’t know.

James  Didn’t know.

Mark  Haven’t I asked her?

James  She’s upset.

Mark  No.

James  Maybe you should talk to her.

Mark  No.

James  Maybe. I said.

Mark  I think she just hates the army now.

James  Maybe, I said, she wants to talk to someone she trusts.

I think … I can’t talk to her about it. I know what it is. I can’t talk to her. We don’t speak
Mark any more.

*Pause.*

And he just sat there. This lonely old man, who thought he’d go and try and find some more family now that all his own had died. And he’s asking me about *my* girlfriend! But I …

I wanted to tell him.

*Beat.*

**James** We don’t have to argue. Do you love her?

**Mark** Yes. Just tell him.

**James** Do I love her? He asked.

**Mark** He had just stopped.

**James** If I tell him. If …

**James** Well …

**Mark** If he told anyone what I’d said, I’d just say it wasn’t true, and he was mad. A mental ... OAP.

**James** I wanted to make him realise that there is nothing worse than not talking. That by not talking you lose someone. You drift.

**Mark** I …

**James** But I didn’t say that.

**Mark** Listen.

**James** Instead. ‘What do you mean, you know what it is?’

**Mark** Listen.

**James** ‘Sorry. I don’t know.’

**Mark** Shut up.

**James** He started to cry.

**Mark** Shut up. I said ‘I want to tell you something, but if I do, you can’t tell anyone else. A secret. And if you do tell anyone, then I’ll just say you’re mad.’

**James** Mark.

**Mark** She was raped.

**James** ‘You can say anything, Mark.’
‘She was raped by someone I know. And a Sergeant was watching, and holding her down.’

He wished …

I just know. Everyone does. These things get around.

He wished he could have done something.

‘But that’s why she won’t talk to anyone. Not me. She hates everyone here now, but she can’t leave because you can’t … not easily. And she can’t tell a Sergeant because they all know already and … and she’ll be in shit. So she just shuts up. She can’t tell anyone. And …’

He wished he could have done something.

She’s been threatened, beasted, spoken to, and told to stop acting weird, being silent. But she hasn’t. She still won’t say anything. I think they’re worried that she’s making a big thing out of it and … so … I don’t know.

… There’s been a couple of … suicides or whatever … both at night … on roaming patrol … in the dark …

I don’t know if …

What do you wish you had done when you saw them raping her?

Beat them, shot them in the head, stopped them doing it to her. I could have, if I’d … if I’d. I’d kill them. I’d kill them to stop them.

I wondered why he was telling me.

‘So that’s why you’re wrong,’ I said to him. ‘You wouldn’t have done anything.’

If that had been you watching her, you wouldn’t fight them. You wouldn’t even want to. Sometimes you have to do something. I didn’t. And I got it wrong. But you’ve been that wrong all your life.

I …

The world is shit.

He was so upset.

He didn’t say anything.

Nothing to say.

It was difficult to know what to say. I asked him what Amanda thought.
Mark  Who knows? She’s been raped, mate.
James  He wouldn’t tell me. I asked him again.
Mark  I bet she … she wants to kill the people who did it. She hates everyone here.
James  Just sit down I said. He hadn’t told anyone before. He was crying.
Mark  Fight fire with fire.
James  Was that what he said? I can’t remember.
Mark  He said violence leads to violence.
James  How many times can we turn the other …?
Mark  If you live by a sword you …
James  I can’t remember. But anyway eventually …
Mark  I don’t know what he said. I was crying by then.

FX: distant sound of piano played by Amanda.

James  We just sat next to each other. Not saying anything.
Mark  When we both shut up. We could hear her playing in the distance.
James  So we listened. And we heard her. Playing.

Beat.
   Perhaps he should just go and sit with her. Hug her. Love her for a while.

Beat.
Mark  He thought I should go. But …

Beat.

FX: the music stops.

Mark  It was too late anyway.
James  Just after the music stopped we both saw her through the window. Walking across the square in uniform with her gun. Away from the main block.
Mark  It was dark but we could see her in the floodlight.
James  We watched her go across the square. She disappeared behind a building. I turned to Mark.
   I remember realising that maybe he was right. All I needed to do was to sit with her. Just
be a friend for a bit.

James  I asked him. ‘Where’s she going? Why has she got a gun? Is that usual?’

Mark  But it was too late.

James  Is she … on roaming patrol … that one you spoke about, Mark? I asked him. He nodded.

Mark  Too late.

James  And I asked if she had ever done it before, and he said no. She hadn’t.

Mark  He worked out she was on a roaming patrol …

James  I said to him that he had to stop her … if …

Mark  She knows.

He had orders not to interfere he said.

James  I didn’t have time to ask him what he meant as Amanda was walking into the distance, so I suddenly got up and went after her …
He had been gone for two days. I had pottered around. Done the things I would usually do. Made a cake, dusted the surfaces, arranged some flowers for the church. But without him, it was quiet. I wanted to talk about the unusual weather or the new couple next door, which I know are not really important, but I suppose … somehow …

One day, in the morning, I was scratching my stomach and there was a knock on the window. It was a little girl. She had been watching me. Now she was waving. I held up my hand to shoo her away, but instead, I waved back. Then I found myself opening the door and saying hello. She asked how old I was. I lied. Said I was nineteen. She said ‘No way, you’re a hundred at least.’ I said she was a very clever little girl. Mum was behind her in the garden and apologised. Dad was fixing the front door. We introduced ourselves. They were newlyweds but Lisa was four. Mum … Nicola … asked if I lived by myself.

Yes, I replied. I do.

Nicola looked sad.

My husband left me, I continued. Yesterday.

She was surprised. Once couples reach our age, they tend to stay together.

So I told her the story.

While Lisa ran up and down the path, pretending to be an ambulance.
Part Ten

FX: sound of the barracks outside at night.

James It was dark by this point.

Amanda On roaming patrol you go round the base at night.

James I got outside.

Amanda Armed. Round and round.

James It was dark. I knew the direction she went in.

Amanda On your own.

James I walked that way.

Amanda There’s always someone else on patrol at the same time. But you’re supposed to spread out so you never see them.

James I walked quickly. To warn her. Too quickly.

Amanda A two-hour patrol, from ten o’clock to midnight. It was cold.

James Very cold.

Amanda Bloody freezing mate.

James Then. I tripped over a piece of metal in the ground and fell.

Amanda Wear thermals mate.

James It was so dark.

Amanda Freezing my bollocks off mate.

James Idiot. No torch. I couldn’t see anything.

Amanda I was scared.

Beat.

Yeah. I was.

James Idiot.

Amanda I knew about roaming patrol. So I was jumpy.

James I stood up and tried to see.
Amanda: And I heard something. I looked behind me.
James: I staggered towards some light.
Amanda: In the distance I saw the other soldier on night patrol.
James: Must have looked pretty helpless.
Amanda: Gary Franks.
James: When I got to the light, there were some trees.
Amanda: He looked towards me. Put out the cigarette.
James: I looked around …
Amanda: Shit. I walked away quietly.
James: No idea.
Amanda: Round the base. Away.
James: Which way?
Amanda: Looked over my shoulder. Couldn’t see him any more.
James: I gave up and rested. Thought about shouting.
Amanda: Checked my gun.
James: And what about Amanda?
Amanda: And then …
James: I felt a bit like crying to be honest.
Amanda: Then I saw this man. The old man from before. Mark’s great-great-great-grandfather. He was standing by the trees out of breath.
James: I heard.
Amanda: And he looked towards me and smiled.
James: And she appeared. We spoke. She spoke to me.
Amanda: Hello he said. I got a bit lost. He said.
James: Hugged her.
Amanda: I spoke. I asked him what he was doing out here. Where Mark was.

*Beat.*

He said he was looking for me.
Then he said I sounded scared. And he took my hand.

I …

I don’t know …

I don’t know what it was …

I started to cry. Really. Just happened …

And he hugged me.

I cried. Dropped my gun and cried.

I …

We hugged. Then over her shoulder, I saw a soldier, a young boy really, holding a machine gun. He walked towards us.

Amanda

I relaxed.

James

Then he saw me.

Amanda

I just cried. For the first time.

Amanda didn’t notice him. Facing the wrong way.

The boy was confused. He must have been thinking about something.

Working it out. Who was this old man? Maybe he would shoot her. Shut her up.

James

But if he did, the bullet would hit us both.

Linking us.

He looked round, unsure.

Then he walked off.

Amanda

I thanked him.

Amanda smiled, apologised and thanked me.

James

I said no need to.

Amanda

He was so kind. I said. Sorry.

James

I said I’d buy her tea. We stood looking at each other for a moment. She was a child.

She said the canteen was shut …

Amanda

I hadn’t finished the shift. But …

James

Then come and get tea somewhere else. Maybe we could leave the barracks. Maybe you can tell me what’s the matter. Mark said you might want to talk.

Amanda

Thank you. But I can’t leave. It’s not allowed.

James

I drove in here. You don’t have to stay. It might be better if you just left. Maybe you
James could hide in the back of the car.

Beat.

Amanda I don’t know why I trusted him. But we started to walk towards his car.
At the court case, we were ordered to tell them anything and everything we knew. So I did. And she hated me. All I did was to follow orders, do as I’m told. That’s my job.

I just wanted Amanda to smile at me. Understand. But when I told them I’d seen it, seen them do it, and done nothing, she cried. She was shocked. Disgusted.

They accused me of being part of the gang that did it. My great-grandad told them that wasn’t true. I didn’t trust him much though. Not sure why he was so involved anyway.

Look, I just do as I’m told. Like soldiers have to.

Sometimes if they’re having an argument next door, Nicola sends Lisa to visit me, and we make up funny stories together. And it’s probably better for them to let off steam than …

I knew James wouldn’t come back to me. And I didn’t want him to. It wouldn’t make us happy. Staying together. We had changed. Both of us. I didn’t think that could happen at my age.

I might book to go away for a while. And start playing the piano again. Just for myself.

FX: piano music played quietly by Lucy.

The judge remarked that I had been a conscientious objector during the Second World War. Did I have a grudge to bear, against the armed forces? I told the judge that if a country pays its children to train as killers, it must expect a little trouble. Maybe you would call it collateral damage?

The night he got me out of the barracks, we drove for two hours before we stopped, just to be careful. We then had tea in a motorway service station, and after a while, I told him everything. It was suddenly easy to speak. In return, he told me all about his wife, and Susan, and the war. By the end of that night, when the police arrived, it was like we’d known each other for ages. We drank tea. We listened to his music in the car.

FX: the piano music fades to silent.

We talked.
My Child

For my family
Thanks to Dominic Cooke, Jessica Cooper, Amy Sackville, Dan Snelgrove, Simon Stephens, Jeremy Taylor, John Terry, Lyndsey Turner, Graham Whybrow, Simon Vinnicombe, Duncan Macmillan, Rachael Wagstaff, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, Nick Gill, the YWP, all at the Royal Court Theatre, and especially to Miriam Buether and Sacha Wares.
*My Child* was first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, London, on 3 May 2007. The cast was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Richard Albrecht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Adam Arnold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Jan Chappell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>Adam James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Woman</td>
<td>Sara Kestelman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Man</td>
<td>James Livingstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Ben Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Woman</td>
<td>Antoinette Tagoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Woman</td>
<td>Jodie Taibi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Woman</td>
<td>Romy Tennant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lia Williams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Director* Sacha Wares  
*Designer* Miriam Buether  
*Lighting Designer* Johanna Town  
*Sound Designer* Ian Dickinson  
*Choreographer* Juha Marsalo
Characters

Man
Mother
Older Woman
Woman
Child
Other Woman
Young Woman
Another Woman
Another Man
Father
Karl

The audience and actors come into the space together.
It is not clear who the actors are at first.

Actors can go anywhere in the space.

No actors should enter or leave the theatre during the performance.

There should be no doubling.

The play should have the feeling of being inappropriately public.

Note

/ means the next speech begins at that point.
– means the next line interrupts.
… at the end of a speech means it trails off. On its own, it indicates a pressure, expectation or desire to speak.

A speech with no written dialogue indicates a character deliberately remaining silent.

A blank space between speeches in the dialogue indicates a silence equal to the length of the space.

Darkness.

Man Mum?

Mother Shh.
Older Woman

Woman Love?

Woman Shh.

Man What do I do?

Mother Darling.

Child Mum.

Man Shhh.

Child Mummy.

Shush.

Man Excuse me.

Sorry.

Lights up.

Child My arm hurts.

Man Shut up.

Child My arm hurts bad.

Man Look, I’m really trying here. I’m trying to do my best.

Woman He looks ill to me.

Man We had a nice time.

Woman Did you?

Man Yes.

Woman He says / his arm hurts.

Man I know what he says. He just wants attention, I think. It’s–

Woman He didn’t fall or anything then?

Man He’s just tired.

Woman Did he fall over?

Man I would tell you –

Woman So he didn’t?

Man I would tell you if he fell or anything. He didn’t. Go to bed.
Child: But –
Man: Go to bed.
Child: You’re rubbish. Simon’s dad takes him to Hamleys when they go out. Says he can have anything he wants. Says he can choose anything. He’s got a PS3.
Man: What’s that?
Child: You don’t know?
Man: Sorry. No.
Child: God.
Man: …
Woman: Go upstairs now.
Child: My arm hurts. Mum.
Man: You spoil him.
Child: You don’t love me, Mum.

Woman: I do not spoil him. He enjoys himself with me. What did you do? Take him to the job centre? He looks bored. He hates it with you.
Man: You shouldn’t swear in front of him.
Woman: What have you done to his arm?
Man: What have I done?
Woman: Well, something’s happened.
Man: I broke it.
Woman: What?
Man: He was mucking about, so I took his little arm, and snapped it across my knee.
Woman: What? What?
Man: Like a dry twig.
Woman: …
Man: I DON’T KNOW WHAT’S WRONG WITH HIS ARM. Perhaps he trapped it in
Man something. He’s just moaning again. He’s spoilt.

Woman Why did you say that?

Man You spoilt him.

Woman That you broke his arm. Like a … twig. Why did you say that? You’re so weird. You’re like a like a fucking …

Man Maybe it’s the coke we take together.

Woman Like a fucking retard.

Man Or the violent films I show him …

Woman I’ll tell social services. They’ll stop you seeing him.

Man You won’t stop me seeing my son.

Woman You said you broke his arm.

Man I was joking, you / thick bitch.

Woman You said you take coke …

Man Coca-Cola. I was taking the piss out of you.

Woman I love him. I don’t want you near him. You don’t know –

Man I would do anything for him.

Woman You won’t even take him to a toy shop.


Woman Maybe he isn’t even yours.

Man What?

Woman Around the time he was conceived, I was having an affair. Maybe he’s not yours.

Man We never stopped fucking till I left.

Woman Yes, I was fucking someone else. And you. Both. He was bigger.

Man Was it Karl?

Woman No. Someone else.

Man Fucking slapper.

*The Woman hits the Man.*
Woman again. I’m calling our solicitor. You better do the same, if you can afford it.

*She faces the Child.*

**Woman** I do love you and so does Dad.

*The Child thinks about this.*

**Child** But Dad’s a wanker, isn’t he?

**Yes.**

**Woman** I’m afraid he is.

*But …*

**Child** What?

**Man** Hi.

**Other Woman** I’m sorry.

**Man** Hi.

**Other Woman** Do I know you?

*No. But … can I buy you …?*

**Man** Can I buy you …?

*Can I buy you a drink?*

**Other Woman** …

**Man** …

**Older Woman** Love …

**Other Woman** If you want.

**Man** Thanks.

**Older Woman** Love –

**Woman** No.

**Older Woman** Love …
Woman: Love ...

Woman: No.
I haven’t got the time.

Child: What?

Woman: Your dad. The person you call Dad. It might be that he isn’t really. That Dad is actually someone else.

Child: Really?

Woman: Maybe. We’ll have to do some tests. But would you like that? If he wasn’t your dad any more?

Child: Yeah. It would be much better. Would my new real dad take me to Hamleys on Saturdays?

Woman: He might.

Child: Would he love you?

Woman: I’m with Karl.

Child: Does Karl love you?

Woman: Yes. Of course.

Child: He gets angry with you sometimes.

Woman: Sometimes we get angry with people we love, but –

Child: You get angry with me.

Woman: I’m sorry about that. I shouldn’t. How’s your arm?

Child: It’s got a bruise on it now. Can we go to Starbucks? I want a muffin.

Older Woman: Love …

Woman: That means it’s getting better. Starbucks? Not now, Mum.

Man: There.

Other Woman: Thanks.

Man: So, what do you do?

Other Woman: I’ve got a boyfriend.
Man  I …

Other Woman  You were trying to chat me up, right?

Man  I suppose so.

Other Woman  I’ve got a boyfriend. So don’t bother. Thanks for the drink.

*She laughs.*

Other Woman  Love …

Child  Mum.

Woman  What?

Child  Granny.

Woman  I know. I know. What?

*The Older Woman has urinated on herself.*

Woman  Oh. Mum. You’re a fucking pain.

*The Woman starts to mop up the urine.*

Other Woman  Love … Sorry.

Woman  Why didn’t you call someone?

Other Woman  I did.

Child  Can we go to Starbucks?

Woman  I should hire someone.

Other Woman  I hate all this.

Woman  Maybe a home then.

Other Woman  Don’t be like that.

Child  Mum.
Woman: I’m coming. God, Mum, there’s enough of it, isn’t there?

Older Woman: You’re horrible to me.

Woman: I’m joking.

Older Woman: You think this is funny?

Woman: The only way I can get through it. It’s this, or not coming at all. Sorry.

Older Woman: Can’t you show me the tiniest bit of love?

Woman: Not when I’m wiping you up, no. It fucking mings.

Older Woman: Don’t use language like that.

Woman: Just shut up for a minute, will you?

Older Woman: Don’t tell me to / shut up.

Woman: Calm down, or you’ll shit yourself.

*The Older Woman reaches out and hits the Woman. The Woman hits her back, but not as hard.*

Young Woman: Hello.

Man: Sorry. Excuse me.

Young Woman: DVD?

Man: What?

Young Woman: Cheap DVDs. New films.

Man: New?

Child: Mum.

Young Woman: Not available in the shops. Very cheap.

Child: I want to go to Starbucks.
Woman: I’ve got to go.

Older Woman: I’m sorry. Do come back. Sorry, love. Sorry.

Woman: I find it difficult.

Older Woman: I know. I’m a pain. You don’t have to come.

Woman: Yeah, but I do, don’t I?

Older Woman: I suppose you do, yes. I appreciate it though.

Where do you have to go?

Woman: I promised I’d take him to Starbucks. He likes the muffins.

Older Woman: That’s nice. Does he want to come and visit me?

Woman: He doesn’t like the smell.

Older Woman: Does he talk about me?

Woman: When he was younger, he used to talk about you all the time.

Older Woman: And now?

Woman: I think he’s forgotten.

Older Woman: You should bring him to visit.

Woman: I’ll try …

Older Woman: Good.

Woman: But we’re busy. Wait till Christmas, maybe.

Man: Do you want to watch a film?

Child: I’m tired.

Man: I bought you a film. It’s new.

I’m tired.
Child: I’m tired.

Man: *American Pie: The Wedding.*

Child: That’s not new.

Man: Have you seen it?

Child: Is it a fifteen?

Man: Um. Yeah.

Child: I’ll watch it later.

Man: No. Wait. It’s an eighteen.

Child: Let me see it.

Man: All right. I’ll put it on now.

*The video comes on.*

Child: This is shit. It’s just a video camera in a cinema. It’s a bootleg.

Man: Wait. It’ll get better.

Child: No. No. This is shit.

I want to go home now.

Man: How’s your arm?

Child: Like you care. You’re not my dad, anyway.

Man: What?

Child: Mum told me. You’re not my dad. I won’t have to come and see you any more soon.

Man: Mum’s wrong. I am your dad.

Child: No you’re not. You’re a wanker.

Man: Don’t swear like that.

Child: You can’t tell me what to do.

Man: Mum’s lying to you. She wants you to hate me.

Child: Can I go home now?

Man: No. It’s not four o’clock. We’ve still got a couple of hours.
Child I want to go home.

Man No.

Child Let me go, you wanker.

*The Child starts attacking the Man. The Man doesn’t respond. The Child stops and takes a step back.*

Man I’ll get the car.

Another Woman Excuse me.

Man Yes.

Another Woman Does this train go to Victoria?

Man Um …

Another Woman Is it a Circle Line train?

Man Um … Yes … I think so.

Another Woman Right.

Another Man Yes, it is.

Another Woman Thank you.

Man I …

Another Woman …

Man I …

Another Woman I’m sorry?

Man Do you …?

Another Woman Are you all right?

Man No.
Another Man Jesus.

Another Woman ...

Man I want you to tell me something.
Woman What?
Man Did you really have an affair?
Woman Of course. Why do you think I wanted the test done?
Man Because you might have slept with someone. That doesn’t mean you had an affair.
Woman This was nine years ago.
Man But it turns out you are his father. It doesn’t matter.
Woman This isn’t about him now. I just want to know the truth.
Man Why?
Woman It matters to me.
Man Why?
Woman Whether, even though you fucked someone else, I was still the man you were emotionally faithful to.
Man Emotionally faithful?
Woman ...
Man Emotionally faithful?
Woman Okay –
Man Are you with anyone at the moment?
Woman No.
Man Is this why you want to know? Because deep down you hope that underneath all this shit, and you letting me down, and me kicking you out, and my new husband, and our son who hates you, you hope that somewhere underneath all that I secretly still harbour a love for you that will never die.
Woman Yes. Exactly that.
Man And you hope that because right now you feel alone and unwanted by anyone, including your own son.
Man  Yes.
Woman It was a fully operational affair. Sexually, emotionally and utterly unfaithful to you.
I had finally realised that you were not the person I hoped you were. That you were, in fact, something less.
Man  But we still made love. You carried on with me through that.
Woman I was desperate that we might find something to hold on to, but there wasn’t. Not even a child could keep us together.
Man  No.
Woman Even now, I still shudder at the thought that one day my son might remind me of you.
Man  Has he?
Woman Not yet. Thank God.
Man  Why do you do this to me when you know I’m a good person?
Woman That’s not enough. You lack confidence. You are innocent. Stunted. You refuse to understand money, or responsibility. You are still a boy. You may be good or whatever but I want someone who knows when to buy me flowers, who pays bills for me, who isn’t afraid of a spliff or outdoor sex, and I want someone who has a very clean car.
Man  I don’t think you’re happy.
Woman I am. I just wish that you didn’t exist.
Man  You want me dead.
Woman I just wish that you were … erased.
Man  Erased.
Woman That our son never needed you.
Man  Do you think he will?
Woman Not if I can help it. We’re starting fresh proceedings against you. That’s what I wanted to say.
Man  On what grounds?
Woman Abuse and neglect. His arm is still bruised. Either you did it, or you failed to stop it happening. Whatever, it doesn’t look good for you.
Man  I can’t afford a new solicitor.
Woman: I know.

Man: Of course you do.

Woman: Is it worth it? Give him up. We don’t need your money.

Man: He’s my son.

Woman: No. He’s nothing like you. He’s another man’s son now. You are just an unreliable irritant.

Man: Oh, fuck off.

Woman: Make sure you open your post.

Man: Yeah.

Mum? 

Mother: Yes.

Man: Why did you and Dad die?

Mother: It happens.

Man: Do you miss me?

Father: Of course. We always miss you.

Mother: We watch what you do.

And? What do you think?

Mum? 

Man: What should I …

Have you ever seen a calf being taken away from the cow, so that the cow will give milk?

Older Woman: No.

Man: It rages. The farmer tries to fend it off with a cattle prod but it endures electricity tearing its body apart to get to its child. It breaks the pen, it screams and bleeds and scrabbles around. It takes hours for it to stop.

Older: All so we can drink milk.
Man: Yeah.

Older Woman: Cows are normally so … placid.

Man: Well, I’m like that. I won’t let him go.

Older Woman: Is this why you’ve come to see me?

Man: She’s trying to take him away.

Older Woman: Why?

Man: She says I abused him. Apparently he hurt his arm when he was out with me.

Older Woman: How?

Man: I don’t know.

Older Woman: How can you not know?

Man: I didn’t see …

Older Woman: Anyway, she doesn’t listen to me. There’s nothing I can do.

Man: You always said you liked me.

Older Woman: I thought you were good for her.

Man: I used to love Christmas at your house.

Older Woman: It was nice, wasn’t it? It was such a shame when you two …

Man: Do you think she misses me?

Older Woman: I’m sure she must. Somewhere. There must be something about you she’ll never find in anyone else. You’re a nice man, aren’t you?

Man: How can I stop her?

Older Woman: I don’t know. She’s not happy. But if he hurt his arm –
I don’t think that was with me.

You’re nice, but you’re not reliable, are you? Maybe you shouldn’t really be looking after a young boy by yourself. Even for an afternoon.

They swear at him.

I know. But –

Have you met Karl?

Yes.

What do you think?

He’s very rich, isn’t he?

Is he a good man?

I don’t know what he is.

Is he a good influence on my son?

From what I can tell, he looks after them both extremely well. You know they’re getting a new house?

Yes.

In Notting Hill.

Yes.

It’s got a roof terrace.

…

He gives them everything they need.

But is he a good man?

He has money. That’s good. He loves them both. That’s good. As for being a good man …

Morals.
Listen. There’s no point having morals if you keep letting people down. If you can’t afford to carry out the decisions you make.

I try.

That’s not enough.

Will you say something to her? Will you help me?

I don’t want to get involved. It won’t make any difference anyway.

Please.

I’m sorry.

I’m desperate.

No.

…

Can you leave now?

I’ll help you in return. I’ll come and visit and help you to stay. You won’t have to go into a home.

She wouldn’t like you coming here.

What can I do?

Nothing, nothing. You shouldn’t have come to me. It’s not right. This isn’t my business. Leave me alone.

It is to do with you. It’s your grandson. Don’t you care?

Look. I want you to leave now.

I won’t give up.

Can you leave my house? Please. Now.

Don’t you understand?
Older Woman: Get out.

Man: Look –

Older Woman: You’re frightening me.

I’m not frightening you. I’m trying to make you understand. You would never have given up your daughter. I’m just doing what is natural.

Older Woman: Stand further away. I can believe you abused him.

Man: What?

Older Woman: I can believe it. Waving your arms around.

Man: No.

Older Woman: Maybe you are a violent man.

Man: No.

Older Woman: She was right to leave you. I don’t know you at all. Get out.

She hits the Man. She goes to do it again. He grabs her arm.

Older Woman: I’ll scream.

Do you want to move out of here? To be sat in a home? In your own shit, until someone comes to change you? One of those people you see just sat there waiting to die?


I’m your only option.

Do you understand?

Older Woman: Hello.

Child: Hello.

Older Woman: I’m really glad you came to visit me.
Child: Yeah.

Older Woman: It can get a bit lonely here all by myself.

Child: Yeah.

Older Woman: What are you up to?

Child: What do you mean?

Older Woman: Well … at school.

Child: Um … not much. Gavin’s got a projector. We play games.

Older Woman: What’s a projector?

Child: I want one.

Older Woman: What is it?

Child: Will you buy me one?

Older Woman: I don’t know what it is.

Child: It projects stuff. Onto the wall.

Older Woman: I see.

Child: Will you buy me one?

Older Woman: You’ll have to ask your mother.

Child: What’s that smell?

Older Woman: I don’t know.

Child: I only smell it here. Smells like a toilet.

Older Woman: It’s rude to mention it.
Child: What is it? Have you wet yourself?

Older Woman: ...

Child: ...

Older Woman: Yes.

Child: ...

Older Woman: If you ask these things you must expect an honest answer.

Child: That’s gross.

Older Woman: That’s what it’s like being old.

Child: What’s wrong with you?

Older Woman: My bladder won’t hold in the urine.

Child: Sick.

Older Woman: Yes. I’m ill. Getting worse, too.

Child: Are you going to die?

Older Woman: Yes.

Child: When?

Older Woman: Soon.

Child: Now?

Older Woman: Maybe. Soon.

Child: I don’t understand.

Older Woman: Love.

Woman: Hang on.
Child  Mum.
Woman  What?
Child  I don’t get it.
Older Woman  Love.
Older Woman  Love.
Woman  What did you tell him?
Older Woman  The truth. Where is he?
Woman  He’s at a friend’s house now. He didn’t want to come again. You scared him last time.
Older Woman  How are you getting on?
Woman  Fine.
Older Woman  Do you see his father much?
Woman  Every Saturday.
Older Woman  It’s important a boy sees his father, isn’t it?
Woman  Not when his father is a dangerous twat, no.
Older Woman  You shouldn’t talk like that.
Woman  Please get over it, Mum. Watch some television. This is the twenty-first century. This is how we speak.
Older Woman  He may have his flaws but, well, he is the boy’s …
Woman  Two weeks ago, when my son came back, he had a bruise on his arm.
Older Woman  Well, you don’t know –
Woman  It’s still there. It isn’t going away.
Woman: It’s still there. It isn’t going away.

Older Woman: You don’t know –

Woman: I know enough. I’ve seen it. Why do you think I kicked him out?

Older Woman: I just think you shouldn’t try to stop him seeing his own son.

Woman: How did you know I wanted to?

Older Woman: I …

Woman: How did you know that?

Older Woman: …

Woman: Listen to me. How did you know?

Older Woman: I –

Woman: Stay out of my life.

Older Woman: I guessed that you would.

Woman: No.

Older Woman: …

Woman: From him?

Older Woman: Has he spoken to you? Visited you here?

Older Woman: He –

Woman: Fucking –

Older Woman: He was worried.

Woman: What did he tell you?
Older Woman: He just wants to keep in contact. He wanted me to have a word.

Woman: Why would you do that?

Older Woman: I –

Woman: Did you tell him I don’t give a shit what you think? Why would you even try?

Older Woman: I just thought –

Woman: I fucking hate you / for what you used to do to me.

Older Woman: Don’t swear.

Woman: Don’t you dare tell me how to be a parent. You were useless. What you did to me.

Older Woman: I looked after you.

Woman: You scared me. I used to hope Dad would get drunk because it might mean he stood up for himself. You made him small. When he died –

Older Woman: I don’t –

Woman: When he died, I bet his last breath was a sigh of relief that you had finally shut the fuck up.

Young Woman: Hello.

Man: Hello.

Young Woman: Looking for company?

Man: Yes.

Some company.

Young Woman: If you pay me. I don’t care.
Woman: If you pay me. I don’t care.

Man: Oh. Right. No. Sorry.

Older Woman: I still don’t think that you should ruin your son’s life for your own personal reasons.

Woman: I don’t want you near him any more.

Older Woman: Don’t say that.

Woman: You could only do bad things to us.

No. Please.

Older Woman: No.

Woman: He …

Older Woman: He threatened me. Held my arm tightly. Said if I didn’t help him, he would put me in a home.

Woman: He can’t do that.

Older Woman: I was confused.

Woman: He made me.

Man: She’s fucking lying. I didn’t do anything like that.

Woman: You went round to her house.

Man: Yes.

Woman: You wanted her to talk me into stopping proceedings.

Man: Yes.

Woman: Did you touch her?

Man: …

Woman: Did you touch her?
Man          Jesus.
Woman        Did you hold her arm?!
Man          She hit me and I restrained her.
Woman        She’s in a fucking wheelchair.
Man          She got upset.
Woman        Why?
Man          She thought … I don’t know.
Woman        Did you threaten her?
Man          I offered to help her.
Woman        She’s scared of you.
Man          I didn’t want to upset her.
Woman        This will count against you. She will tell them what you did.
Man          Please. You know me. You know I wouldn’t hurt anyone. I just want to see my son.
Woman        I don’t know what to do.
Man          Start again. Somewhere else. Without us.
Woman        No.
Young Woman  What shall I do?
Man          Just sit with me.
Young Woman  Okay.

...           ...
...           ...
Man          Just having you here makes me feel dirty. Sorry.
Young Woman  Doesn’t bother me.
Man          Are you happy? Doing … what you do?
Are you happy? Doing … what you do?

Selling DVDs?

No. I mean. This.

Of course not.

Do you have a boyfriend?

Yes.

Does he hit you?

No.

Do you take drugs together?

Sometimes.

Does he love you?

Very much.

Why do you do this then?

Our son is a baby. We have to live.

What’s your son’s name?

Nikolai.

Nikolai. You must love him very much. To do this.

Of course. I would die for him.

Of course you would.

…
... 

Man Actually ...

Young Woman ...

Man ...

Young Woman ...

Man ...

Young Woman Yes?

Man ...

Young Woman ...

Man ... can I have a blow job, please?

Young Woman Of course.

*She goes to give him a blow job.*

*After a few moments, she looks up at him.*

*Something’s wrong.*

Woman Where is he?

Child Where are we going?

Woman Where is he?

Child Where are we going?

Man Be quiet.

Child Where are we going?

Woman Where’s he gone?

Older Woman What?

Man I said shut up.

Woman It’s gone four o’clock.

Child Where are we going?
Child Where are we going?
Man We’re not going back home today.
Child What?
Woman Where is he?
Man We’re not going back.
Child Does Mum know?
Man No.
Child I want to go home.
Man You can’t.
Child I want to. You let me.
Man You can’t.
Child Let me go, you wanker.
Man Don’t swear.
Child Let me go. Now.

*The Man goes to the Child and ties his hands behind his back.*

Child Ow.
Child It hurts.
Woman Hello?
Man He’s fine. He’s with me.
Woman What the fuck are you doing?
Man He’s staying with me.
Woman Bring him back.
Man I can’t. He’ll be safe.
Woman You bring him back, or I’ll fucking castrate you. / I’ll take an axe to your skull.
Man You made me do this.
Child Mum.
Woman Is that him?
Woman Where are you?
Man You know why I had to do this, don’t you?
Woman You’re not clever enough. We’ll find you.
Man Do you want to say goodbye to him?

…
Woman …
      Yes.
Child Hello.
Woman I’m coming to get you.
Child Dad’s tied my hands up.
Woman Your dad’s being a wanker, but I’m coming to get you soon. Don’t worry.
Child All right. I love you, Mummy.
Woman I love you too.
Child Goodbye.
      Don’t say that.
      Don’t …
Woman Hello?
      Hello?
Child Where are we?
Man I can’t tell you that.
Child Are we in Britain?
Man I can’t tell you. I’m sorry.
Child I’m bored. I haven’t been outside for ages.
Man It’ll be a while yet.
Child You go out.
Man I go to get food.
Child I think Mum will find me.
Child: I think Mum will find me.

Man: What makes you think that?

Child: She’s clever.

Man: So am I.

Child: You’re stupid.

Man: No. How do you know that?

Child: What?

Man: What makes you think I’m stupid?

Child: You are.

Man: No. You’ve been told that I’m stupid. Mum told you that. Didn’t she?

Child: Yeah.

Man: You see.

Child: Because you are.

Man: No.

Child: You’re thick. I’ve seen you in shops. On the Tube. You don’t know stuff. People look at you like you’re special or something.

Man: Don’t say things like that. It’s horrible.

Child: So Mum’ll find you because she’s cleverer than you.

Man: We’ll see.

Child: I miss her.

Man: I’m sorry.

Child: I’ve never missed you.

Man: You’ve never really known me.

Child: I’ve been out with you every week of my life. I think I do.

Man: There’s loads of stuff you don’t know about me.

Child: Like what?

I got a first in philosophy from Bristol University.

I lived in America for two years.
I can make kites.
I used to be the best in my street at arcade games.
You probably don’t even know what they are, do you?

I was in the rugby A-team at school.
I used to own a motorbike –
I knew some of that already.
But not all of it.
No. But I don’t really care.
Don’t you want to get to know me?
No.
I don’t think I like you.
What do you like?
I don’t know.
Come on.
Having fun.
When do you have fun?
With my friends at school.
What do you do with them?
Stuff.
What else?
When we went to the wrestling.
Did Karl take you?
Yeah.
What did you like about that?
It’s cool.
Okay.

We was shouting at them, and one comes over to us, and says he’s going to rip
We was shouting at them, and one comes over to us, and says he’s going to rip Dad’s head off cos he said he was pussy.

Dad.

…

You call him ‘Dad’.

Yeah. He wanted me to.

…

Well, he is really, isn’t he?

No. He’s not.

Yeah, he is. Really. I mean, like you are, but … most of the time you’re not there so –

It’s different now.

No. Mum’ll find us. Or Dad will. He’ll find you and if he doesn’t kill you, you’ll get sent to prison.

Would you care?

If he killed you?

No.

I think you would a bit.

No.

Do you remember when we went out and had fun?

No. I’ve forgotten.

Do you remember going down the station and watching the trains? Counting the carriages. You used to love that.

No. I hated it. It was shit.

That’s not true.

Trains? God.

And we used to have races in the park.
Who could get from tree to tree first.

Child I know.

Man You liked it.

Child It was all right.

Man Yeah. Remember?

Child It was all right. It wasn’t that good. I was a kid.

Man Maybe we can have fun again, now?

Child No.

Man Somewhere in you, you still love me.

Child Shut up. No.

Woman I miss you.

Child I miss you too, Mum.

Man It’ll pass. It’ll get better.

Woman I don’t think we’ll find them.

Older Woman I’m sorry for what I did.

Woman I’m so scared.

Older Woman You can talk to me.

Woman I don’t want to.

Older Woman He’ll look after him.

Woman He’ll try. But I’m scared what will happen when he fails.

Older Woman He loves him.

Woman That’s not enough. You used to tell me you loved me.

Older Woman I do.

See?
Woman See?
Most people really have no idea.

I remember the night you were born. Your mother was all sweaty and tired. She was beautiful. We sat on the bed, with you in our arms. We named you, and I planned our future together. Maybe a brother or sister to come. A bigger house. Holidays. Grandchildren. She fell asleep, so did you, and I watched you both all night. I thought I had become someone different that night. I was a father, a grown-up. A man. I would protect you both for ever. I would always make sure you were safe. Both of you. Of course it turns out now she had already been sleeping with someone else. It turns out that maybe she was just a slut all along.

Woman I’m dreaming of you.

Man Are you?

Woman Not you.

Child Mum.

Woman You.

Child I’m dreaming of playing on the Xbox with you.

Woman Me too.

Child Are you?

Woman Who’s winning?

Child Me.

Woman Of course.

Child You’re a bit rubbish.

Man I wish I did that with you.

Woman …

Child …

Man Don’t you two remember the good times?

Woman There were a few.

Child When we went to that theme park.

Man Don’t they count for anything?

Woman No.
Man  Well, I’m starting something new.
Woman  I suppose you are.
Child  Mum.
Man  Are you awake?
Child  I want Mum. I want to go home.
Man  I’ll look after you.
Child  No. It’s not the same. What about my friends?
Man  You’ll make new ones.
Child  No. My arm.
Man  Is it still …?
Child  It’s gone black.
Man  Let me have a look.
Child  It’s getting worse. It really hurts.
Man  Did you go to a doctor?
Child  He said it was a sprain.
Man  Sprains don’t go black.
Child  What’s wrong with me?
Man  I don’t know.
Child  I should go to hospital.
Man  We can’t. You can’t leave the house.
Child  Don’t you care?
Man  Of course … but …
Child  I might die.
Man  If I let you go now, I’ll never see you again.
Child  Ever.
Man  What if I die?
Child: What if I die?
Man: That won’t happen.
Child: How do you know?
Man: We’ll give it a couple of days.
Child: Then what?
Man: We’ll give it a couple of days.
Child: Karl will be after you by now.
Man: I’m scared.
Child: He’ll find you.
Man: Will he?
Child: Yes. Why don’t you stop now? Give yourself up.
Man: No.
Child: You wouldn’t go to prison.
Man: Yes I would, and they would never let me see you again.
Child: Why do you want to see me? / I’m horrible to you.
   You’re my son.
Man: Why are you so horrible to me?
Child: You left us.
Man: Your mum kicked me out. I wanted to stay.
Child: You’re not very good. I want a dad that’s strong. And rich.
Man: Are those things really important to you?
   Yeah.
Child: You don’t even like football.
Man: No.
Child: So who would take me?
Man: Who do you support?
Child: You don’t even know.
Man I wanted you to read books. / To like art.

Child I don’t like books. They’re gay.
I’m good at art.

Man Are you?

Child Yeah. I showed you my picture. Don’t you remember?

Man Yes. Now I do. It was great.

Child I got an A.

Man I bet.

Child Yeah.

Woman It won’t be long before someone sees him. His photo was on the news.

Older Woman It’s sad.

Woman Karl’s out now. He says he’ll find him before the police.

Older Woman What will he do if he finds him?

Woman I don’t care. I want my son back.

Older Woman Are you all right, love?

Woman No.

Older Woman Come here.

Woman No.

Older Woman I’ll hug you.

Woman It’s too late for you to start that now.

Older Woman Maybe I’ve changed.

Woman …

Woman It’s not too late.

Older Woman Give me a chance.
Give me a fucking chance.

God.

Woman
Mum.
God.

Older Woman
You see, love.
I have changed.
I’ve been watching fucking television.

Child
We’re in Scotland.

Man
What makes you think that?

Child
I heard someone go past, first thing this morning.
They had a Scottish accent.

Man
Maybe.

Child
What’s that?

Man
A bandage for your arm.

Child
It’s worse.

Man
We’ll give it another day.

Child
I’ll shout all night for help.

Man
No one will hear you. Put this on.

Child
I just want it to stop.

Man
Swallow this. It’ll help the pain.

Woman
What about his arm?

Another Woman
I know him. I know that man. He looked …

Another Woman
Jesus.

Another Woman
Lonely.

Man
Does that feel better?

Child
Yes. Thank you. Thanks, Dad.
Man  I’m so sorry about all this. I really am.

Child  I know.

Man  Is there a bit of you that loves me? Somewhere?

Child  …

Man  Or at least feels sorry for me.

I do. I do feel sorry for you.

Maybe I love you. I don’t know.

I wouldn’t want to never see you again.

I do remember the trains.

Child  I didn’t enjoy it. Even then. I found it boring.

But I do remember it.

And I remember how much you liked it.

And at the time that made me happy.

The door of the room opens and Karl walks in, from outside.

Karl  So it is you.

Surprise.

Man  Stay in the other room.

Child  No.

What did your mum tell you when you were young?

Be kind?

Polite?

Karl  Well?

Well?

What did she tell you?

Man  She told me to be good.

Yeah.

Sit down.

Karl  Good.

Because we need to have a talk about –
Because we need to have a talk about –

**Man**

I’m not letting him go.

Um.

Sit down.

Good.

**Karl**

Because we need to talk, don’t we?

When I was young and I did something wrong, my dad used to hit me round the back of the head. That was a good lesson. It taught me about consequences. We know all about consequences, don’t we?

**Child**

Yeah.

**Karl**

That you have to take responsibility for what you do.

Do you agree?

**Man**

How did you find me?

**Karl**

Do you agree?

**Man**

Yes.

Good. I went to your flat the night you left. Just pushed open your door cos the lock’s not working. You should fix that. I checked your computer. And I found that it still had on it all the holiday homes in Scotland you’d been trying to book. So that narrowed it down.

**Man**

What about the police?

I took your computer with me.

**Karl**

I wanted to find you first. But they won’t be long now.

**Man**

Is she with you?

**Karl**

No.

**Man**

Does she know you’re here?

**Karl**

Not yet.

**Man**

What do you want, then?

**Karl**

You’re not taking him away.

**Man**

Yes.

**Karl**

But that’s not what we’re going to talk about now.
Man  No. He’s staying with me.

Karl  We’re going to talk about how you make it up to my wife. And me and my son.

Child  Dad …

Karl  My son.

Man  He’s not.

Child  Dad.

Man  Stop it.

Karl  His arm’s black.

Man  …

Karl  You left his arm to rot.

Man  No.

You left his arm to rot.

Karl  You are a lame cunt.

Aren’t you?

Man  Shut up.

Karl  So what are you going to do? To make amends.

Man  …

Karl  You’re going tell him that you hope his arm gets better. Then you’re going to say goodbye to my son.

Man  No.

Karl  You will. Or I’ll tear your arm off with my hands.

Man  No.

Karl  Say goodbye.

Man  No. Come here.

Karl  Stay there. Say goodbye.

Man  Fuck you.

Karl  Don’t swear in front of him.
Man
Now.

Karl grabs his arm, and twists it.

Say goodbye.

Karl
Say goodbye.
Say goodbye.

Child
Dad …
Say goodbye.

Karl
Say goodbye.
Say goodbye.

Child
Dad.

Karl
Go to the car.

Child
No. Dad. Stop it.

Karl
Get into the car now.

Child
Stop. Fucking stop.

He breaks up the two men.

It’s not right.

Karl
Your mum’s been crying. She’s probably crying right now.

Child
Yeah. But I don’t like it.

Karl
Go outside. Get in the car. I’ll be there in a minute.

Child
…

It’s all right. We’re just going to talk.

Karl
I thought you liked wrestling.

Child
…

Karl
Little pussy, aren’t you?

Child
No.

Karl
Go and get in the car, then.

Child
Okay.

Karl
You not going to say goodbye?
Man: I’ll see you in a minute.

Child: He’s going to kill you now, I think.

Man: I’ll see you in a minute.

Child: Goodbye, Dad.

Man:

Karl: Little pussy.

Man: Don’t call him that.

Karl: I’m doing him a favour. If he learns how life works now, he will be happy. He will be a success.

Man:

Karl:

Man: So what now?

When the police get here I’ll say you refused to let him go.

Karl: I did what I had to.

Stand up.

*The Man stands.*

Karl: Come here.

If you don’t I’ll make it worse.

*Karl hits the Man.*

*The Man falls to the ground.*

Karl: Stand up.

Come here.

*The Man stands. Walks towards Karl.*

*Karl hits him hard.*

*The Man falls to the ground.*

Karl: Stand up.

Come here.

*The Man stands. Walks towards Karl.*

*Karl hits him hard. Karl laughs.*

Stand up.
Karl hits him hard. Karl laughs.

Karl
Stand up.
Come here.

The Man stands, just.

Child
Dad. Stop it.

The Man rages. He tears up the room. He tries to beat up Karl. He throws every object at him. Karl just stands, watching. Occasionally pushing him away.

The Man beats and beats at Karl. Destroys everything in the room. Eventually there is nothing left that he can do and he runs out of energy and sits on the floor.

Are you all right?

Child
…
Dad?

Man
Yes.

Child
I told you he was tough.

Man
He likes wrestling.

Child
Yeah. I’m sorry he hit you.

Man
…

Child
Why did it take so long to fight back?

Man
I don’t agree with it.

Child
You have to fight back, or you get beaten up.

Man
Sometimes it’s best not to.

Child
And get messed up?

Man
Yeah.

Child
Doesn’t work. Your nose looks broken.

Man
Maybe …

Child
Look.

Man
Yeah. Where is he?

Child
He’s gone out. To make a phone call.

Man
I’m surprised he left you here with me.
Child: He’s not scared of you.
Man: No.
Child: Are you going to do anything else? To keep me here? Now.
Man: Like what?
Man: Would you like that?
Child: No.
Man: Then why ask?
Child: I liked it when you were fighting him.
Man: Why?
Child: It was good.
Man: Were you proud of me?
Child: Yeah.
It was like you were a wrestler. Going mental.
Man: I’m not proud of it.
Child: Okay.
Karl: It’s your mum. Want to talk to her?
Child: Mum?
Woman: Steven.
Child: Oh my God.
Woman: Oh my God.
The Child starts crying.
Child: Oh my God.
Woman: Are you all right?
Woman: Are you all right?
Woman: Are you all right?
Child: My arm still hurts.
Karl’s going to take you to a hospital now.
Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

What did he do to you?

Child
They had a fight.

Woman
I know.

Child
Dad, Karl, won easily.

Woman
Yes.

Child
But real Dad. He went mental too. It was good.

Karl
Come on.

Woman
Come here.

The Child runs from the Man to the Woman. Karl joins them.

Woman
You’re safe.

Man
…

Child
Mum.

Woman
Sweetheart

Child
Dad.

Woman
I know.

Goodbye.

Man
Bye.

Mum?

Mother
Yes.

Man
Why did you tell me all this?

Mother
All what?

That it is better to be polite. To put others first. Not to be violent. To turn the other cheek. Not to treat people as rivals but as friends. To try to be moral and good, and not selfish.

Man
To love.

Mother
Because it’s right.

No. It’s not.
Man  Look at me.
     It’s not how the world is.

     No. It’s not.

Father  But your mother and I are still agreed.
        That it’s right.

Man   But it doesn’t work.

Man   Does it?

Blackout.
Artefacts

For Mum
Thanks to Hassan Abdulrazzak and Abdul Karim Kasid for the Arabic translations; Chris Campbell, Ramin Gray, Ben Jancovic, Clare Lizzimore, Kate Packenham, Rachael Stevens, Lyndsey Turner, Rachael Wagstaff, Josie Rouke, the Bush Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre, Old Vic New Voices, Nabokov Theatre, and to all the actors who helped develop the play.

And particularly Emma Brunjes and James Grieve, without whom this play would never have been written.
Artefacts was first presented at the Bush Theatre, London, on 25 February 2008. The cast was as follows:

Kelly             Lizzy Watts
Susan             Karen Ascoe
Ibrahim           Peter Polycarpou
Faiza             Mouna Albakry
Raya              Amy Hamdoon

Directed by James Grieve
Designed by Lucy Osborne
Lighting designed by Hartley T A Kemp
Music composed by Arthur Darvill
Characters

Kelly
Susan
Ibrahim
Faiza
Raya

Note

/ means the next speech begins at that point.
– means the next line interrupts.
… at the end of a speech means it trails off. On its own, it indicates a pressure, expectation or desire to speak.

A speech with no written dialogue indicates a character deliberately remaining silent.

A blank space between speeches in the dialogue indicates a silence equal to the length of the space.
Part One

Scene One

Kelly stands with her bag.

I just wanted one of those Saturdays, one of those good rainy Saturday afternoons when you lie back, watch a film, call your mates, text a boy, yeah? But this afternoon had just been weird cos my phone wasn’t ringing, no one had plans, Mum’s stressed downstairs with work and I’m kind of trapped in my room cos it’s raining, I’ve homework to do which I know I’m not gonna and there’s nothing on TV but football and antiques. So all in all it’s kind of depressing?

He’s downstairs. Saw his coat.

And yeah, so I was walking in circles and I moved my furniture around and tried on different clothes in different combinations and I know what it’s all about, it’s cos of what I want to look like tomorrow cos tomorrow’s when I thought we were going to meet.

Susan enters.

Susan I heard you come in.

Kelly Did you. Well done.

Susan Love, he’s been waiting –

Kelly Not my fault.

Susan – and he has to go soon, he’s only –

Kelly Give me a minute.

Susan …

Susan goes.

She only told me yesterday. It’s Friday night, I’d got back from school and I’m going straight down the pub with my mate Sarah and this bunch of lads from St Nics – some of them are quite fit – and I was late but she stops me on the way out and says Kelly we have to talk. She always picks moments like that to stop me moments when it’s going to be a problem. What? What is it? And she says it’s your dad. He’s coming round on Sunday.

Er. I thought he didn’t want to see us?

He walked out on you, you hate him, you don’t know where he is, he’s probably dead. Well he’s not, Kelly. He’s coming for lunch. On Sunday. Turns out she had stayed in contact with him after all, but he lived abroad and hadn’t wanted to see me until now.
Why? She didn’t know. Where has he been then?
Get this.

Kelly
Iraq.
Jesus.
Baghdad.
What, does he work for a charity or …
No.
He’s from Iraq.
So I’m half Iraqi.
Shit man.
I said I had to go, went to the pub and got my pint and Sarah was asking me had someone died cos I wasn’t saying anything, which for me is unusual. But I was thinking – who is he? Does he have a family? Have I got a brother or a sister? Has he got a big tongue? Cos all my family have got small tongues but mine is massive, look …

She sticks her tongue out.

And Mum’s family are all good looking, all quite fit, but I’m not? So he’s probably –

Ibrahim enters.

Ibrahim Kelly.
Ugly.
Oh.
Kelly
Hi.
Dad.
Ibrahim I’m Ibrahim.

Will they hug? They move a little closer.
He puts out his hand.
She shakes it.

I’m pleased to meet you at last.

Yeah.

Kelly Sorry.

Sorry.

Ibrahim smiles slightly.
Kelly: Would you like a moment?

Yeah I would actually, thanks.

Thinking all these questions. Who would he be? Who would he expect me to be?

Kelly: Actually no. Fuck off. He left, twat. I’ve got nothing I need to prove. If I choose to see him then that’s y’know, that’s different. That’s my choice. I grant him that. I grant him an audience. You may see me now, Father. I’ll look like I look, I’ll wear what I want.

Ibrahim: Where do we start?

Kelly: Don’t know. Favourite colour?

Ibrahim: Am I … what you expected?

Kelly: Mum only told me you existed yesterday.

Ibrahim: Yes.

Kelly: So no.

You’re not what I expected.

Ibrahim: Who did you imagine I might be?

Kelly: A secret agent.

Ibrahim: A –

Yeah, I thought you were like James Bond or whatever and that if anyone knew that I was your daughter that would put me in danger. So even though it broke your heart you pretended I didn’t exist, to protect me.

Cos when I was little I didn’t understand why you weren’t there.

Ibrahim: I’m sorry.

Cos you could have written, couldn’t you?

Kelly: Mum asked, do I want to get him a present or something? Do I? No. Like what? He’s come from Iraq. I could probably give him a Mars bar and he’d be amazed. But no. Yeah. Maybe I should.

Ibrahim: Actually I did / write …

Something to help him get to know me. So I looked through my room trying to find something that would sum me up and then I got it and this is brilliant, cos in the back of my cupboard, there’s this old maths exercise book, from when I was thirteen. Now there’s not much maths cos that’s shit and I can’t do it but in the back are all these scribblings and hearts, stuff like ‘Paul Franklin is a penis’ and ‘Boredom equals Death’, whatever that is. And I reckon it would give him a good idea of who I am,
what I’m like. So I’m going to give him that.

Ibrahim: I did write, but your mother –
Kelly: What?

Ibrahim: She didn’t pass the letters on.
Kelly: Why not?

Ibrahim: She didn’t want you to know about me. / Not at –
Kelly: Why not? Are you a murderer?
Ibrahim: No.
Kelly: You haven’t killed anyone?
Ibrahim: No.
Kelly: I thought you was from Iraq?
Ibrahim: Yes, but –
Kelly: Weren’t you in the war?
Ibrahim: I didn’t fight.
Kelly: Why not? Scared?
Ibrahim: She didn’t pass on the letters –
Kelly: I’d be scared.
Ibrahim: – because maybe she thought you might go looking for me.
Kelly: What? In –
Ibrahim: Yes.
Kelly: I’m not going there.
Ibrahim: You –
Kelly: I’ll get my head cut off.
Ibrahim: Won’t I?
Kelly: I don’t know.
Ibrahim: On video.
Kelly: I suppose / that’s possible.
Kelly
Probably would do. Got a big mouth see? Just say what I think. Can’t shut up.

Ibrahim
Perhaps you get that from me.

Kelly
Nah, my uncle.

Ibrahim
Do you think we look alike?

Kelly
You and my uncle?

Ibrahim
You and me.

Kelly
Um … No.

Ibrahim
You’re passionate.

Kelly
I’m English.

Ibrahim
You are half Iraqi. You can have an Iraqi passport now.

Kelly
That’s not much use

Ibrahim
Would you prefer it if I had been an American?

No.

Kelly
Well, yeah. That would be better though, wouldn’t it? Cos an American passport’s worth loads. I could go there and work and stuff. But I told you I’m not going to go to Iraq, am I?

Susan enters.

Susan
You can come downstairs if you want.

Kelly
No thanks.

Susan
When do you want the taxi for? I’ll call now.

Ibrahim
Oh … ten minutes.

Kelly
Ten minutes?

Ibrahim
Thank you.

Susan
Right.

Kelly
This afternoon when I was bored I looked in the mirror cos, apparently, I’m half Iraqi.

Susan hesitates.

Susan
Are you sure you’re both / all right?

Kelly
But which bits?
Susan Up here?

Kelly Hips. / Hands.

Ibrahim Kelly?

Kelly I’ve got English legs. / Iraqi breasts.

Ibrahim I wish we could’ve / met earlier.

Kelly But my stomach is slightly potted.

Ibrahim Kelly?

Susan I’ll leave you to it.

Susan goes.

Kelly I have a little pot belly. Maybe this is the point they mix. The two countries. Where my genes got confused. This belly is not Iraqi or English. It’s Engraqi. Iringlish. I like my belly. Yeah.

She looks at Ibrahim. He is about to speak.

Yeah, and then I got bored of looking naked in the mirror so I put some clothes on but they seem fake? And my room felt small. Claustrophobic? So I went out shopping. Even though it was raining. Am I what you expected?

Ibrahim I tried not to expect anything.

Kelly But you did.

Ibrahim I imagined you might look like Kate Winslet.

Kelly This isn’t going very well, is it?

Ibrahim I don’t know.

Kelly Bit of a fucking disappointment for you.

Ibrahim No.

Kelly If you were after –

Ibrahim You are better than / Kate Winslet.

Kelly What do you want?

Ibrahim You are you.

Kelly Why are you here? Now. What do you want?

Ibrahim That we meet.
Kelly: Just that.
Ibrahim: Yes.
Kelly: You don’t want money?

Ibrahim: I run the National Museum of Iraq. In Baghdad. A number of our artefacts were stolen during the war. I was invited to come and give a lecture at the British Museum about the current state of our collection. That is where I have been today.

Kelly: So I’m not actually why you came at all.
Ibrahim: It is expensive to fly here. I will probably never come back to Britain. So I thought it best we meet.

Kelly: And I wanted to give you something.

Ibrahim: What?
Kelly: Yeah. I brought a present for you too.

Kelly gives him her maths book.

There.

Ibrahim: What is …?
Kelly: It’s my maths exercise book, from when I was thirteen. But I’m not good at maths, so I wrote loads of other stuff in it, like things about …

Ibrahim: (reading) ‘Paul Franklin is a penis.’
Kelly: Yeah, but other stuff. I thought you might find out who I really am.

Ibrahim: Thank you.

Kelly: Thank you.

Ibrahim reads the book.

I hate shopping on my own. I feel like such a Kelly-no-mates so I’ve given up but I didn’t want to go home. It’s better out. So I’m having a Coke, reading the Heat and my phone rings. It’s Mum. Jesus. I put it on silent, I think she’s mental, there’s this thing about the top ten fat legs. Charlotte Church is at three. They should have Fern Britton in that. She’s massive. Put another sugar in my Coke. There’s a picture of this girl with her tits out. My legs feel fat now. Look at people
opposite me, they look depressed. Then my phone’s ringing again. Mum. Jesus. Leave me alone. It’s seven o’clock. I leave. Walk. Hate London. Don’t care where I go. What did you get me?

_He smiles._

**Ibrahim** I brought you something very valuable.

_He lifts up his bag. Starts to unpack the box._

But it’s raining. And this guy with a megaphone is shouting at me in the street. He says, don’t be sinner be a winner. Yeah, OK – I’m not. He says, I’m fat, I’m evil, repent repent yeah yeah, shouldn’t let people like that out, I walk on. I want to get lost. But I can’t. I’ve lived here all my life. I know the streets too well.

**Ibrahim takes out a box.**

_Puts it on the table._

Unpack it.

But be very careful.

**Kelly starts to unpack it.**

My phone’s vibrating again, obviously it’s Mum, and now I’m just walking in the rain with nothing to do so I answer. What? You have to come home cos your dad has to get an earlier plane than he thought, so he’s come round tonight instead and he’s only got a couple of hours now so come back. And I’m about to say I’m busy but I know I’m not. There’s no way out of this so back I go.

**Kelly lifts out what’s inside. A very old Mesopotamian pot. She looks at it.**

Did you get this in Debenhams or something?

**Ibrahim** It’s one of the most ancient vases in the world.

**Kelly** Is it worth something then?

**Ibrahim** I’m not saying I’m going to sell it.

**Kelly** So it is, or …

**Ibrahim** It’s worth more than money.

**Kelly** Why have you got it?

**Ibrahim** I told you. I run the museum.

**Kelly** You stole it.
I have signed a form in Baghdad to say that it is on loan to the British Museum. I have then signed a form earlier today in London that confirms the change of plan and that this vase will stay in Baghdad. Therefore, officially it is in two places at once.

Kelly
You stole it /then.

Ibrahim
If anyone looks, it will not be found. It belongs to Iraq. I just want you to look after it while things are still …

Kelly
Sounds illegal.

Ibrahim
It’s what I want.

As your father.

Cancel your flight.

Kelly
That’s what I want.

As your daughter.

Ibrahim
Maybe you do not understand.

Kelly
Spend some time / with me.

This vase is Iraq, before Iraq it was Assyria, Mesopotamia. It is wisdom, it is beauty, its adornment is entirely unnecessary, and that makes it invaluable when your country is disappearing. We are fighting so that one day we will be able to appreciate this vase in peace.

Kelly
Why did you leave us?

Ibrahim
If you have this. You have me.

Kelly
Before I was born.

Ibrahim
…

Kelly

Ibrahim
My family was being threatened.

Kelly
We were your family.

Ibrahim
Then it was not long before / the Americans –

Kelly
We needed you.

Ibrahim
This is Britain. This is safe.

When I was fourteen I got beaten up by this gang from St Anthony’s. They kicked me to the ground. I still got a scar. I lost a tooth. I wanted my dad to go round and sort them out. But he wasn’t here.
I'm here now.

And you’ve got four minutes left. So what next?

She puts down the pot.

I don’t want it. What if we’re broken in?

No one knows it is here.

That is the beauty of this arrangement.

Arrangement?

This is the best way. I am killing two birds with one stone. Yes?

What?

Sorry. Not … killing two birds.

Nice, Dad, nice.

It will be a link between us. Maybe one day you will come and visit me. Visit your country.

I don’t know anything about it.

Find out.

I’ve got things to do too. Revision.

Ask me questions now. Let’s get to know each other.

You have to leave to get your plane. Unless you get one tomorrow. If you get one tomorrow I’ll pay.

It’s not the money. They have brought the flight forward. I didn’t know we would have such a short time. But Kelly –

Three and a half minutes.

Kelly, there must be things you want to know.

Loads.

Pick one for now.

Have I got a brother or a sister?

Yes. A sister.

What’s her name?
Ibrahim: Raya.
Kelly: How old is she?
Ibrahim: Thirteen.
Kelly: Do you want to see a picture?

Ibrahim gives Kelly a small picture of Raya.
Kelly: She’s very pretty, isn’t she?

Kelly looks at it.
Kelly: Didn’t you ever want a photo of me?
She hands back the picture.

Kelly: Didn’t you miss me?
Ibrahim: Sometimes.
Kelly: Every day?
Ibrahim: No.
Kelly: I thought about you every day.
Ibrahim: Kelly. You are happy.
Kelly: Here.

Susan enters.
Susan: You didn’t need me.

Ibrahim: Maybe you were better off with just your mum.
Kelly: You don’t get it? Do you?

Susan: The taxi’s outside.
Ibrahim: Thank you.
Kelly: Yeah. Good to meet you then, stay in touch, bye.

She picks up the pot. Looks at it. She is crying. Susan exchanges a look with Ibrahim and then goes.

Susan: Your mum has my address.
Ibrahim: We will write but I have to –
Kelly: You want to get out of here as soon as you can, don’t you?
Ibrahim: I don’t think it’s good to just cry.

Kelly turns back. Looks directly at him.

Kelly: I might smash the pot if you go.

Ibrahim: That would be up to you.

Kelly: If you just leave now, I will I’ll drop it.

Ibrahim: Don’t be stupid.

Kelly: Ibrahim goes to Kelly to kiss her goodbye. She moves away.

Ibrahim: You will come to visit me one day, yes?

Kelly: I’m serious.

Ibrahim: I have to go.

Kelly: I will.

Ibrahim: Goodbye.

Kelly: Don’t.

He turns.

Walks away.

She drops the vase on the floor.

It smashes into three pieces.

He looks at it.

They both stare at the floor.

Ibrahim

Kelly

He leaves.

Scene Two

Faiza is sitting by the table, reading a story to Raya in Arabic.

Kan ya makan. Kan honak ‘azef mizmar, ‘kadama ella ‘karya tamla’o ha alfeeran. Kall le’ahloha annaa’asta’tee’oo en atrooda alfeeran mogabel alef ‘kotta thahabiya. Fawafakoo wa ‘kaloo lahoo: na’ateek kool shii etha ab’adta alfeeran ‘annaa. Andatha nafakha al-azeefo fee mezmarehee fataba’hoo gameeoo alfeeran. Wa ibta’ada biha ‘an alkarya. Ahtafal ahloo alkarya wa saharoo teelka al-lella farheen. [Once there was a piper. He came to a village which had many rats and he said, I can take them all away for
one thousand gold pieces. The people of the village said, yes we will give you anything
to take the rats away. So the piper played his pipe and the rats all followed him and were
taken away from the village. The people of the village celebrated that the rats had gone.
They celebrated all night.]

Faiza

Mara esboo’, aada azeef almezmar leeistilam alalfoo ‘kottaa thahabeyia. Lakeen
sookan al’karya lem yedf’aoo lahoo le’annahoom la yemleekoon shii wa-la ahad
yazoor ‘karyatahoom. Lekkad akalat alfeeran kool ma yemlekoon min ta’am. Kanoo
fookaraa wa la ya’areefoon keef yedfa’oon almableegh ella azeef almezmar. Thaar
azeef almezmar lee-nafsah. Fa-nafakha fee mezmarh thanyia. Leem ta’atba-’hoo
hathehee almara alfeeran bel al-atfaal. Kool atfaal alkarya. Kadahoom al-‘azeef wa
abta-‘adda bihim an alkarya fa-akhtafoo ella alabbad. Ma-‘adda tefaal wahed lem
yesta-‘atee’al-eltahaaq bihim lemoshkila fee reglho fa-‘aad ella alkarya le-yokhbir
ahlaha.[A week later the piper came back and asked for his thousand gold pieces. But
the people of the village could not pay the money. They had nothing, because the rats had
eaten all their food, and no one had been coming to the village. The people were too
poor and they had not thought of how they would pay the piper. So the piper took his
revenge. And he played the pipe and all the children of the village came out and
followed him. The piper took all the children from the village away for ever. Except for
one boy, who could not keep up as he had a bad leg. He came back to the village and told
them.

Len taroon atfalakom thaanya. [You will never see your children again.]

Len taroon atfalakom thaanya. [You will never see your children again.]

Scene Three

Kelly sits at the table with Susan. They both have cups of tea.
The pieces of the vase and a pile of old letters are on the table.

I was on the sofa watching television. Going for Gold. That was on. He comes in and
switches it off: Says he’s leaving. He’s quitting his degree, and going back home to
start a new job at the museum. I thought it was a joke, but he spent an hour packing his
stuff and then walked out. I was left on the couch, with you, not yet born.

He got scared, Kelly. Lots of men do.

Susan The letters are because he felt guilty.

Come on. Look at me, sweetheart.

You’ve been better off without them.

Sweetheart.

We’re still all right, aren’t we?

Kelly You never loved him then?

Susan I –

Kelly I was a mistake.
Susan: No.
Kelly: I mean you didn’t want me … with him.
Susan: No. I suppose I didn’t want you with him. I wanted you with someone who would have stayed.
Kelly: Then I wouldn’t be me.
Susan: Is this all of them?
Kelly: Is this all of them?
Susan: Yes.
Kelly: I’m sixteen? Isn’t it up to me to know who he is, whether I want to see him or not?
Susan: I tried to protect you.
Kelly: Anything else you’re not telling me?
Susan: No.
Kelly: Anything else you’re protecting me from?
Susan: I brought you tea.
Kelly: How do I know you’re telling the truth?
Susan: It’s getting cold, sweetheart.
Kelly: I don’t give a shit about the fucking tea, yeah?
Susan: Kelly looks at the letters.

Ibrahim: Thank you so much for spending the time to meet me last night. It was very kind of you, and it all made so much more clear for me. I find it difficult to write in English.
Susan: It has been fun getting to know you. It is very boring at home. I still think of the fountain, that first week. Do you remember?
Ibrahim: We drank two bottles of whisky.
Susan: I miss you.
Ibrahim: Each.
Susan: You called me habib-tea.
Ibrahim: I carried you over my shoulder.
Susan  This feels serious, doesn’t it?

Ibrahim  Happy birthday.

Susan  I don’t think my mother had met anyone from Iraq before.

Ibrahim  Happy birthday, my princess.

Susan  Princess?

Ibrahim  I did not intend to fall in love. But it is perfect. You are perfect.

Susan  I can’t stop thinking about your body.

Ibrahim  But –

Susan  Thank you for your understanding while I have been away.

Ibrahim  What will happen when I finish my degree?

Susan  I miss your beard.

Ibrahim  Thank you for the photographs.

Susan  I know it is not what you want.

Ibrahim

Susan  And you must tell me the truth. What do you think? I will come back and we can stay together. Are you happy?

Ibrahim

Susan  You must be honest.

Ibrahim  This is a blessing. This is a wonderful thing. I look forward to seeing you.

Susan  I love you.

Ibrahim  This is a beginning.

Susan  Ibrahim, I don’t know if this is even the right address.

Ibrahim

Susan  I am just writing to your family home in the hope that it will reach you. I am obviously devastated, but I don’t want anything from you. I will not need you to raise our daughter. I have called her Kelly, and I will send you a copy of my Christmas letter each year so you know how she is. Apart from this I will not write again.

Ibrahim

Susan  My dear Kelly, on your fifth birthday, I hope you like this picture of a clown. I think it is funny. I hope you have had a lovely day. I think you start school this year. Work hard, because from what I understand, you are very clever indeed.
Dear Ibrahim,

I have no intention of passing your card on to our daughter. It has been five years. You have made it quite clear that you do not want to be part of her life. Have you thought how much more damage a single message like this every year will do? As Kelly grows up she will know that you can contact her, that you could visit, but that you are choosing not to. I am simply going to tell her that I don’t know where you are. She deserves better.

Mum.

Thanks for the tea.

Right.

Sorry.

Yes.

Kelly

Sorry I broke your pot.

Can you change your mind and come back now, please?

I would like to write to my sister.

Does she speak English?

Daddy?

It’s Kelly.

Your

Your little Kelly.
Part Two

Scene One

Kelly is sitting at a table, wearing her travelling clothes.

Kelly

So. Get me. I’m the shit. I’ve done my homework. And now I know all about it. They reckon this is Eden. Where we come from cos this is the cradle of civilisation, home to the world’s first proper society the Sumerians who had the hanging gardens of Babylon and then it’s the Mongols which is where that comes from you know ‘urrgh mongoloid’, and then at the end of the nineteenth century it becomes part of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire had control over the land that’s now Iraq, which at this point was these three kingdoms with three cities, Mosul in the north, Baghdad in the middle and Basra in the bottom, and that went on all the way up until the First World War. And it was actually officials of the Ottoman Empire, in the early part of the twentieth century, that first used the word Iraq, which either comes from a Sumerian city called Uruk, or is derived from the Aramaic for ‘the land along the banks of the rivers’, to describe these three areas, but at this point it was not. Right? Not a separate country or thought of in that way. Oh no. Got all this off Wikipedia. Learnt it.

Faiza enters

Faiza hands Arabic coffee to Kelly.

Kelly

That smells amazing.

Faiza picks up an Arabic–English dictionary.

Kelly drinks the coffee.

Hmmm.

She gives a thumbs up sign.

Good.

Faiza sits down.

A slightly awkward moment.

Then at the beginning of the First World War, Britain went into the southern territory and occupied Basra. They then took Baghdad and Mosul and over the next twenty years, with a lot of politics and the United Nations and stuff in 1932, Britain created Iraq. We made it up.
No one at home knows that but it’s so important. We’re all so ignorant. We’re all so lazy.

I’m also learning Arabic. Got a CD out from the library. Went up to the woman – ‘Um, excuse me do you have a course in Arabic?’ She looked well impressed. Got it on my iPod. Yeah? So –

Kelly looks at her. Clueless.

Faiza goes and looks up words in her dictionary.

Kelly But Arabic’s really difficult?

Faiza You.

Kelly So I used to put on Kanye West instead. Me?

Faiza Hot?

Kelly Hot?

Faiza No? Ha-ret-lech? [Hot?] Yes?

Kelly Oh yes.

Faiza Mistahya? [You’re nervous?]

Kelly Um. Shokran.[Thank you.]

Faiza Arabic?

Kelly Yeah. A bit.

Faiza Tamam. [Good.]


Faiza Treedeen teghisleen? [Do you want a bath? To wash?]

Kelly ?

Faiza looks up a word in the dictionary.

Er. You.

Faiza Wash?

No.

Kelly I’m OK.
Faiza

OK.

She looks up words.

I … will hot …
I will hot …
Water.
I will hot water.

She leaves.

I kept writing to Dad but he didn’t reply. So I just get on with my life, go on holiday to France, fall off a wall, nearly get pregnant, do my A levels and everyone’s amazed but I do all right. Got my place in Sheffield and now I got a long summer before I go. Then Mum gets a call. He wants me to visit. I’m like no. I’m busy. Fuck off please. But then we end up talking and it’s really important actually and I’m not doing anything so I don’t have an excuse, except obviously all the bombs and stuff, but somehow it gets sorted and a week later I go on a three-day safety course that Mum said she’d pay for where it’s me and all these journalists with moustaches giving me weird looks and that’s just the women.

Faiza comes in, holding a towel. She gives it to Kelly.

Faiza

Wash.

Kelly

Shokran. [Thank you.] Maybe later?

Faiza

No wash?

Kelly

Shokran. [Thank you]

Faiza

Hamatlech al-mayee. [I’ve heated the water.]

Kelly

Sorry … I don’t –

Faiza

Mo haramat. [I don’t want to waste it.]

Kelly

?

Faiza leaves with the towel.

Yeah, then we sort out the visa and the passport and check it’s all OK and make arrangements and before I know it I’ve flown over – London to Amman, Amman to Baghdad, and I’m in a car with security that I’ve paid for to get me from the airport to this house, and I’m looking out the window and it’s weird, cos I’ve got armour and security and I’m travelling through these streets like I’m going to be shot any moment but outside there’s people talking and mums with
Kelly pushchairs, and people shopping and stuff. You know. There’s traffic jams and traffic lights. It’s amazing. It’s normal. The driver points out places of interest. Old palaces and big houses and stuff. He keeps on saying ‘before’. ‘Before’ there used to be a market here. ‘Before’ kids used to play football, there was not this traffic ‘before’. There’s a bit of stone by the side of the road where there must have been a statue. I want to ask if it was of Saddam Hussein. But get this … I kept my mouth shut. Oh yeah. Mouth. Shut.

Faiza comes and sits opposite Kelly. They smile.

He says I’m very young. The driver. He asks how old I am. I tell him. Eighteen. He says ‘beautiful’ twice. Beautiful. Then he says, am I on a gap year? In a way. I’m visiting family. I tell him my dad’s Iraqi. I’m Iraqi. And the driver smiles and goes, have I been here before?

Kelly No.

Then he says, ‘You are coming home, yes? Welcome home.’

Ibrahim enters.

Ibrahim Rah-yentather-knee hell lella. [He’ll be waiting for me tonight.]

Faiza Sh’ged? [How long?]

Ibrahim Sa’aa. [An hour.]

Faiza Tamam. [Good.]

It’s amazing.

To be here.

Kelly Baghdad.

It’s properly life-changing.

Ibrahim Good.

Kelly Was it all right?

Ibrahim Yes.

Ibrahim sits. Kelly does the same.

Ibrahim You look older.

Kelly How?

Ibrahim You have grown up.

Kelly Thanks.

Ibrahim You look like a woman now.
Kelly: So do you.

Ibrahim: Look older, I mean. Got more grey hair. You can get stuff for that.

Kelly: I don’t normally like coffee. But this is / different …

Ibrahim: Arabic coffee.

Kelly: It’s sweet.

Ibrahim: Yes.

Kelly: I’ll get some to take home. Mum likes coffee and I’m always like, no, I’ll have tea, but if I bring this back …

Ibrahim: We’ll have something to eat in a minute.

OK.

I’m all right, thanks. Had something on the plane.

Kelly: No one at home thought I’d actually do it? First they thought I was joking they were like no way you can’t go there you’re not allowed, they thought I’d probably wuss out in the end or not be bothered but they were wrong. I’ll send them a postcard.

I love your house.

Ibrahim: Good.

Kelly: It’s really normal.

Ibrahim: I mean, I thought I’d be sat here thinking a bomb was gonna come through the window or whatever. That any moment the door would burst open and troops would come in but it’s not like that is it? From what you see on the TV, you think it’s really bad all the time.

Like every minute someone’s firing a gun at you.

Faiza: Arabic.

Ibrahim: Arabic?

Kelly: Yeah.
Ibrahim: Good.
Kelly: I learnt it off a tape so I’m / a bit shit –
Ibrahim: Say something in Arabic.

Faiza leaves.

Kelly: What?
Ibrahim: I would like to hear you.
Kelly: Nah, I can’t really – what?
Ibrahim: Whatever you’ve learnt.
Kelly: *Hathehee alsayarra kathera.* [This car is dirty.]
Ibrahim: ?
Kelly: Is that right? *Hathehee alsayarra kathera.* [This car is dirty.]
Ibrahim: You are saying your car is dirty?
Kelly: Yeah.
Ibrahim: Why did you learn that?
Kelly: It was on the tape.
Ibrahim: That is classical Arabic.
Kelly: Is it not right?
Ibrahim: It is a different dialect in Iraq.
Kelly: Don’t I get points for trying?
Kelly: No?
Kelly: Are you going to do it tonight?
Ibrahim: I wanted to pick you up today from the airport, but it sounds like you had it all planned –
Kelly: Yeah, I got all this security.
Ibrahim: Good.
Kelly: I don’t think I needed it.
Ibrahim: It is better you did. Anything can happen.
Kelly: Yeah.
Ibrahim: And you stand out.
Kelly: I tried to dress right.
Ibrahim: It is not your clothes. Not just your clothes.

Faiza enters with some food.

Ibrahim: Shokran. [Thank you.]

Faiza puts it down and sits with them. Offers some to Kelly.

Ibrahim: Matreed takol. [She says she does not want to eat.]

Faiza: Sawayena-ha alla-modha. [We made this for her.]

Ibrahim: Heyia hechi. [This is what she is like.]

Faiza: Mo mosh-killa itha matreed takool hesa. [It is not important. If she doesn’t want to eat now.]

Ibrahim: Asfa ya habib-tea. [I’m sorry, sweetheart.]

Faiza: Addnaa homoom akbar. [We have more important things to worry about.]

Ibrahim: Are you sure you don’t want to eat something?
Kelly: I don’t eat meat.
Ibrahim: This is not meat.
Kelly: Oh. It looks like it.
Ibrahim: You told us you were vegetarian. So this is for you.
Kelly: Thanks.
Ibrahim: Faiza made it for you.
Kelly: Oh. Thanks.

She takes a bit. They eat.

Faiza: Teshba-hek. [She looks like you.]
Ibrahim: La’. [No.]

Faiza: Titmana lo chanet ma teshbahek? [You wish she didn’t?]
Ibrahim: Inti thaycha min-ha? [You don’t mind her staying?]
Faiza: La’. [No.]
Ibrahim: Ayenha tal’aa. [She’s rude.]

Faiza: Ted haweel. [At least she is trying.]

Ibrahim: Ma-tesma’ al kalam. [She doesn’t listen.]

Faiza: Methlak. [So she is like you.]

Kelly: You’re going out tonight then?

Ibrahim: Yes. I do not want to waste time now that you are here.

Kelly: How old is she now?

Ibrahim: Fifteen.

Kelly: And do you know if she’s –

Ibrahim: No. We don’t know anything. How is your mother?

Kelly: What?

Ibrahim: Your mother.


Ibrahim: I thought she might try to stop you coming.

Kelly: No.

Ibrahim: But you said she was happy.

Kelly: She was fine.

Ibrahim: Yes.

Kelly: Sort of.

Ibrahim: ?

I mean she hid my passport. Called the


All that. Threw a biro at me. Locked me in the house.

Ibrahim: You told me she agreed.

Kelly: Yeah, she did, in the end.

She couldn’t stop me really.

Ibrahim: I would not have let you come. You said that she agreed.

Kelly: Exactly.
Ibrahim: It is up to her. You are her daughter.
And yours.

Kelly: Yours too.
And you said this was important.

Ibrahim: Yes.
Yes. It is important.

Kelly: So do you want to know what I’ve been doing?

Ibrahim: Did you bring it?

Kelly: Yeah.

Ibrahim: …
I was just wanting to say that I’m sorry.

Kelly: When I wrote.

Ibrahim: Can I see it?

Kelly *starts to unpack the pot*.

Kelly: Did you get them?

Ibrahim: What?

Kelly: My letters?

Ibrahim: Yes.

Kelly: Right, cos you didn’t reply.
So I wasn’t sure.

Ibrahim: Did you wrap the pieces separately?

Kelly: Did you even read them?

Ibrahim: It has to be complete.

Kelly *stops unpacking. Looks at him*.

Ibrahim: No. I didn’t.

Kelly: But you’ve still got them?

Ibrahim: Yes.

Kelly: I’ll have them back then.
Whatever you want.

I was worried you would take it to someone to fix it.

Wouldn’t that be better?

No, you would need an expert.

No, I didn’t take it to anyone.

Good.

She gets out the vase. It is crudely glued together.

She puts it on the table.

I did it myself.

He picks it up.

What with?

Superglue.

Shinnoo? [What?]

Shoofie! [Look at it!]

D-shoofie! [Look at it!]

I was trying to help.

I told you this was priceless.

Yeah.

Thousands of years old.

All right, I know it was a bit stupid, probably wasn’t the best way to do it, but I was only sixteen so …

It is a mess.

Everyone’s stupid when they’re sixteen, yeah? Bet even you were stupid then. It’s still worth something though, right?

You should have just given me the pieces.

Why didn’t you tell me you had done this?

I thought it might be good.
Ibrahim: Why wait till now?
Kelly: I thought you might like it.

Ibrahim: *Shoofie.* [Look.]
Kelly: *Yemkin may reedha.* [He may not want it.]

Faiza: *Lazem it-hawill.* [You have to try.]
Kelly: I was trying / to do the right thing.

Ibrahim: *Merah enhassel al kafi.* [He will not give us enough.]

Faiza: *Shin-sawi? Nith-terr nistelef.* [What else can we do? If we don’t get enough we will have to borrow the money.]

Ibrahim: *Min-men?* [Who from?]
Kelly: But it’s really / not about me, is it?

Faiza: *In-hawill.* [We’ve got to try.]

Ibrahim: *Shaa-sawi?* [I don’t know.] I don’t know what to do.
Kelly: Are you bothered at all that I’m here?

Ibrahim: You?
Kelly: Or is it just the pot?

Ibrahim: I am only thinking about Raya. I am only thinking that this was the one chance / we had to get enough money.

Kelly: You could’ve read my letters, couldn’t you? You didn’t even have to reply or whatever, but you could’ve at least read them.

Ibrahim: I told you how much this meant to me.
Kelly: Yeah, but –

Ibrahim: I offered you something as a gift.
Kelly: I know.

Ibrahim: But what you did –
Kelly: I know, but don’t I –

Ibrahim: It told me who you are.
Kelly: Don’t I get a second chance?

Ibrahim: It told me enough.
Ibraheem, kafee. Mo sooch-ha. [Ibrahim. Stop. It is not her fault.]

Maybe it was good I smashed it cos I’m not an arrangement. I’m your daughter? It’s not always all about what you want.

It was clear what you wanted.

Because I’m a person.

That is why I have not read your letters.

You …

I am very grateful you have come so quickly. But that is everything. You are an arrangement. That is it. You can go now.

My flight isn’t for five days.

Then stay, help us, but be quiet.

Ibraheem, shtad-gool elha? [Ibrahim. What are / you saying to her?]

Because I have to work and we must see to Raya when we get her back. We will not have time for you.

You haven’t even told me what happened.

It is not your business.

You just said she was gone.

Leech thaa’ jet? [Why is she upset?]

Treed to’roofeesh sar be Raya. [She wants me to tell her about Raya.]

Goolha. Goolha alla-mood teftihim. [Tell her then. Tell her about Raya. Then maybe she’ll understand why this vase matters, it will explain why we’re upset.]

Three weeks ago Raya was taken into a car from outside her school. A friend saw it happen. It was very quick. They knew who she was. They knew where she would come out of her school. They pulled up in a car, and they took her away. Two days later we have a note left on the gate. They know where we live. They think we are rich. And it is so much that they ask for. Fifty thousand dollars. They know this is too much and you do not have to pay them all of it, but near enough. That is why we need this now because we need to pay them so much money.

What happens if you can’t?
They leave her body on our doorstep.

Or maybe she is sold. She becomes a prostitute somewhere.

Or they just give her back.

All these things go on. It is how they make money.

What about the police?

They do not have the time. They tell us to pay.

Kelly  

What do you do?

Now that everything’s –

I run the museum.

Is it open?

No.

Then aren’t there more important things?

For many people the collection is very important.

Is it?

You take it for granted because you have so much. But we want to protect it.

Because people steal things?

Yes.

Like what?

Like –

Like old vases?

You can’t blame them, can you? I thought that when you saw all those people looting. When it comes down to it, you’ve got to eat.

If you really wanted to help you should go and hand stuff out. Give them
something to sell.

Faiza enters.

Kelly Because you spend your life protecting all this stuff but in the end even you, even you’ll sell it straight away if you have to look after your daughter. Course you will.

Ibrahim I have to go.

Ibrahim stands and picks up the pot.

Faiza Koon hather. [Be careful.]

Kelly What happens?

Ibrahim Teerga’ ellnna insha’ allah. [She will be back with us soon.]

Ibrahim I hope they will not mind … what you have done.

He holds the vase.

This is strong glue.

Kelly Superglue.

Ibrahim The British make good glue, don’t they?

Kelly Yes.

Ibrahim Because they are always breaking things.

He leaves.

Scene Two

Raya enters. She is wearing white clothes, but they are old and dirty. She has a bruise on her face.

Once there was a piper. He came to a village which had many rats and he said, I can take them all away for one thousand gold pieces. The people of the village said, yes we will give you anything to take the rats away. So the piper played his pipe and the rats all followed him and were taken away from the village. The people of the village celebrated that the rats had gone. They celebrated all night.

A week later the piper came back and asked for his thousand gold pieces. But the people of the village could not pay the money. They had nothing, because the rats had eaten all their food, and no one had been coming to the village. The people were too poor and they had not thought of how they would pay the piper. So the piper took his revenge. And he played the pipe and all the children of the village came out and followed him. The piper took all the children from the village away for ever. Except for one boy, who could not keep up as he had a bad leg. He came back to the village and told them.
You will never see your children again.
You will never see your children again.

Scene Three

**Ibrahim** stands with his bag.

**Kelly** watches from the doorway. He has not seen her.

**Ibrahim** takes his jacket off and sits down at the table.

He unpacks the bag.

He takes out the vase and puts it on the table.

**Kelly** What happened?

**Ibrahim** I thought you were asleep.

**Kelly** You said you had a buyer arranged.

**Ibrahim** Yes.

Didn’t he want it?

Was it the glue?

**Kelly** We can just smash it up again. Scrape it off, you know? Can’t be that difficult.

Or I was thinking, if it’s not enough, I’ll go home get an appeal going or something. Raise awareness for my little Iraqi sister who’s been kidnapped. I’ll go on the news. If we do it quickly, we can get people to notice. Give some money. Happens all the time. Could do it in a week.

**Ibrahim** It was not the glue.

**Kelly** What then?

**Ibrahim** What did he say?

**Kelly** What did he say?

**Ibrahim** Can you give me a moment?

**Kelly** And can you get me some water, please?

**Kelly** goes and gets **Ibrahim** a glass of water. She puts it down and sits at the table.

He drinks.

**Kelly** What went wrong?

**Ibrahim** We will talk in the morning.
Kelly: I won’t sleep. So –
Ibrahim: I must discuss this.
Kelly: Go on then.
Ibrahim: With Faiza.
Kelly: Discuss / what?
Ibrahim: Please. Go to bed.
Kelly: No.
Ibrahim: You don’t stop asking questions.
Kelly: No, I don’t.
   Why?
Ibrahim: Why are you asking?
   Why do you want to know?
Kelly: I’ve got a right to know.
Ibrahim: A right?
Kelly: You have no right to know about my family.
Ibrahim: She’s my sister.
Kelly: And I’m your father.
Ibrahim: Apparently.
Kelly: You should trust me that I will do the right thing. But you don’t. Do you?
Ibrahim: You think you know better. You have not been here a day yet. What makes you think you will know better than me?
Kelly: Maybe I don’t trust you. Not hard to work out why, is it?
   You suspect I am making a mistake of some kind.
   Don’t you?
Ibrahim: Really.
   If we are talking the truth.
Kelly: The pot’s not sold. Yeah, maybe you are.

Ibrahim: What makes you think what I am doing is a mistake?

Kelly: You’re that kind of man.

Ibrahim: Weak.

Kelly: Careless.

Ibrahim: And why do you think I am careless?

Kelly: I will tell you.

Okay, all right then, tell me what I think.

You come here and you see this city and you see me and my normal house. You see how poor we are and we don’t have the things you have. And you see on your news how the country is fighting itself. And you think we are all careless. No, not just careless, you think we are stupid. So this is why you’re asking what is going on, because you want to make sure that I am being civilised in what I am doing. That I am being intelligent—reasonable in how I am behaving. Because we Iraqis, you think, we tend to get things wrong all the time.

We allow our girls to be kidnapped.

We tend to mess things up.

That is really why you do not trust me.

Kelly: Cos I’m a racist.

Because you are English. And you don’t know any better. When you are a child in England you are still taught underneath that you should rule the world. How in the end Britain has always made the world better.

Ibrahim: You told me I’m half Iraqi.

Kelly: I am. Whether I like it not. I can’t choose.

Ibrahim: Yes, you can. You can choose where you belong.

Anyway that’s rubbish I don’t give a shit about Britain or England or whatever it’s none of that it’s just that you owe it to me cos it’s cost me a lot of time a lot of money to bring this pot here. Now it’s just sat on the table. Looks nice but that’s not the point is it?

Kelly: You’re just sat here.
Ibrahim

Kelly  And she’s waiting.

Ibrahim

Kelly  She’s waiting and you’re drinking a glass of water. So what’s going on?

Ibrahim

Unfortunately for you I’ll keep asking, cos actually I’m not very English, I’ve got a big mouth, you said I got it from you, so you’ve got to put up with it. I’ve got years of practice answering back saying what I want.

Kelly  So where have you been where have you been?

What happened?

Where have you been?

Ibrahim  Your mother was right.

Kelly  What did she say?

Ibrahim  That you never shut up.

Kelly  Did she?

Ibrahim  Yes.

Kelly  Please. Dad.

Ibrahim  You must try to understand.

Kelly  Yeah I will, but –

Ibrahim  You must listen.

Kelly  I left here. I started to drive to my friend who is going to buy this vase. And … Faiza and I, we have disagreed about this. We have argued but we have … I know I must sell it tonight. I have told Faiza I will. But on my way in the car I passed all the houses and the lights were on. I stopped the car and I sat and thought about these families. These children.

Ibrahim  Thought what?

Ibrahim  Then I came back.

Kelly  All that while your daughter’s being beaten up or tortured.

Ibrahim  Or something worse than that, I am sure.
You don’t know what they do to some of the girls.

So do you see?

You can get the money to pay for her. You said it yourself, everyone does it. That’s what people do.

Yes.

That’s what the police tell you to do.

This is what people do, yes.

Right.

They pay.

So get on / with it?

And as they pay things get worse and worse. Everything gets darker. The country falls apart. My friends are dead, their children are kidnapped. Our women must cover themselves. Because people give in. Because no one stands up and says it has to stop.

Except you.

Everything has to start somewhere.

OK.

Well done.

I’m really impressed.

You’re a real man.

You have not listened.

What world are you in where you get to be some hero you think you’re going to sort it all out – sort out your country with this yeah? Yeah maybe you will maybe you’ll suddenly get everyone to change what they’re doing and forget their families and think of their country. Maybe you’ll inspire them all.

Good luck, cos that’s not going to happen? But you’re going to leave your daughter raped and killed and you’re going to know you’ve done the wrong thing for the rest of
your life because it’ll be obvious that it hasn’t made any difference. So be a doctor or something if you want to be important. Join Oxfam? But make sure you sell the fucking pot first, yeah?

It is all about these small ways.

Ibrahim

Every time that things have changed it is through someone saying no. If ten families in a row do not pay, they will stop.

Kelly

If.

And this will be difficult for you, but listen. Listen and think. Sometimes if something is right we have to be ready to die. We have to be ready to sacrifice our sons and our daughters for what we believe.

Kelly

That sounds like a terrorist.

Ibrahim

No, I am not a terrorist, but if we are not as strong as them they will win.

You’re just doing the same thing again.

Kelly

Leaving another daughter. Putting an idea first.

Ibrahim

No.

Kelly

As I grew up, when bad things happened I used to hide under the blankets and I’d ask God for my dad to turn up that night and protect me. Look after us.

Ibrahim

We are not talking about you.

Kelly

But he never did.

Ibrahim

You want me to exchange my daughter for someone else’s.

That’s what fathers do.

Kelly

Dad.

That’s what they do.

They look after their own.

Ibrahim

Maybe your fathers do that. But important men, better men, look after everyone. They look after their country.

Faiza enters.

Ibrahim

They stick to what they believe.

She sees the vase.

Looks at Ibrahim.

Ibrahim

Ma’rah asawecca. Min fathelek. [No. I won’t do it. So please – ]
Faiza: Mo akhathna ‘karrar. [We made a decision.]

Ibrahim: La ma abee. [I don’t – ]

Faiza: Akhathna al-karrar soowa. [We made a decision together.]

Ibrahim: Chan mo saah. [It was wrong.]

Faiza: Bee ‘ahha. [Sell it.]

Kelly: What’s she saying?

Wallah atrookak. Inta andeck mas’oolieia itejah bintak wa aa’eelta. [I will leave. You will never see me again. You have a duty to me and your daughter and your family.]

Ibrahim: Let-hadeed-en-eee. [Don’t threaten me.]

Kelly: She agrees with me.

Ibrahim: Let-hadeed-en-eee. [Don’t threaten me.]

Kelly takes Faiza’s hand.

Ibrahim: She is a mother. It is for mothers to care. But it is for fathers to act. For everyone. To be responsible.

He sits.

La’ La’. [No. No.]

I’m not going to sell it. She knows the sort of man I am.

You’re not even looking at her now.

Kelly: I am.

And she’s been crying.

Faiza: Shloon day a’nid. [Look how stubborn he is.]

Kelly: I don’t think she trusts you.

Faiza: Rah ammalah. Hayetrokha lell-moat. [He has given up on her. Left her for dead. He is stupid.]

Kelly picks up Ibrahim’s car keys from the table.

We’ll go.

Take the car.

Kelly: The … sayarra? [Car.]

Take it ourselves. Us. Nahno. [Us.]
Go to bed. Both of you.

**Ibrahim**  
*Rooho na-mo.* [Go and sleep.]

*Na-mo.* [Sleep!]

Faiza. We’ll go. Us. *Nahno. Na’am.* [Us. Yes?]

**Kelly**  
*Yella.* [Come on.]

**Faiza looks at Ibrahim.**

*She goes to him and hits him.*

*He barely moves.*

Then **Faiza leaves.**

**Kelly waits.**

*She doesn’t know what to do.*

**Kelly**  
Where’s she gone?

**Ibrahim sits.**

**Kelly stares at him.**

**Kelly**  
Maybe all Iraqis are stupid.

**Ibrahim**  
What?

Maybe all Iraqis are stupid. They put Saddam Hussein in charge for twenty years let him kill thousands of people didn’t do anything about it. And in the end when we do get rid of him, they just start fighting each other when all the time if they just sorted themselves out they could get a country together. Cos you’ve got all that oil. You could be rich, yeah? You know that’s what a lot of people in Britain think? That you’re immature as a people. You’re medieval. All the time you’re proving yourself not clever enough, not civilised enough to even run an army, a police force or a government. You’re all corrupt. There are lots of people in Britain who want to say – grow up. And if they were here now they would look at you and they wouldn’t understand why you’re just sat at home, not looking after your daughter.


You’re stupid.

That’s the only reason I can think that you’ve come back without her.

**Ibrahim**  
In the morning I will take you to the airport and you will go.

**Faiza comes back in with her coat on. She picks up the keys, takes the vase.**
Faiza: *Whaeen ala’anwan?* [Where is the address?]

Ibrahim: *Inti –* [You – ]

Faiza: *Marah twagoofni. He-yeah saah. Itha inta matrooh. Ini, arooh.* [You won’t stop me. She is right. If you won’t go I have to. Where is it?]

Ibrahim: *Al’anwan bil sayarra.* [In the car.]

Faiza turns to go.

Kelly: I’ll come with you.

Faiza: No. Thank you.

No, I will. I’ll come with you.

Kelly: She doesn’t understand this. Your friends won’t either. They’ll think you were stupid. You’ll lose your wife. You’ll lose everything.

Ibrahim

Faiza makes to go.

Wait.

Dad. Last chance cos we’re going.

Kelly: Last chance.

Stand up.
Part Three

Scene One

Kelly is sorting through her things, putting some in bin-liners, others in boxes. Susan watches. Kelly hasn’t seen her. They both have cups of tea. When Susan speaks, Kelly doesn’t seem to hear.

I remember you had wanted to go by train, but I insisted on driving you and helping you in with your things. I hadn’t been to Sheffield before. We saw those huge towers by the side of the M1, do you remember? As we came down the slip road I thought I was taking you down, at the age of eighteen, into a northern hell where you’d bingedrink, smoke drugs and have lots and lots of very bad, unprotected, sex.

Because that’s what I did when I was eighteen.

But you aren’t like me any more are you?

I remember when you were little you used to follow me round the house as I cleaned, copying everything I did. You never clean now.

We got to the halls and I helped you get all your stuff in. All the other parents were doing it, but you wanted me to leave. You were embarrassed. I had this heavy box, full of books, and I got up the stairs and went into this little room, in the flat you were sharing with six strangers. I could hear them next door laughing. I put the box down on the bed and opened it. I thought I would help you unpack. And at the top of this box I’d opened was a photo of your father, with another woman and a girl.

You came in and found me looking at the photo, with the box open.

‘It’s all right, Mum,’ you said. ‘I’ll unpack, you can go back home if you want.’

‘If you want.’

I said I had to get back anyway. You kissed me. We hugged. I cried. Then I apologised. I could see it embarrassed you. It’s a long drive from Sheffield to London, and by the time I got home I had stopped at three service stations, kept on having to dry my eyes. It was dangerous.

And you stayed at university the whole year. Came home for Christmas, in the end. But you were happier there, weren’t you? Happier away.

Kelly  Mum …

Susan  Yes?

Kelly  holds up a tennis racket.

Kelly  Do you want this? I’ve got a new one.

Yes.
Yes I do.

Kelly   Right.

The last couple of years have been the same. We see each other now and again. Sometimes I tell you I’m unhappy. You said I should try to meet someone. I had no real reason to feel lonely. I was lucky, you said, living here. I had no idea. You thought I was moaning.

Susan   But we used to be friends.

I should never have told you how I felt. It made you feel guilty. So you stayed away more.

Kelly   holds up a big old CD Walkman.

Kelly   How were you supposed to go running with this strapped to your leg? It’s massive. Do you want it? It’s ancient.

Susan   It was a birthday present.

Kelly   When?

Susan   Don’t you remember?

Kelly   No.

Susan   You said it was what you wanted.

Kelly   Did I?

Susan   It was expensive.

Kelly   Doesn’t look it.

Susan   For us. At the time.

Kelly   Well, I’ve got an iPod. You can have it if you want.

Yes. Thanks. Keep it.

I came to the graduation, but I wasn’t sure what to do. You seemed to be having so much fun, and I was standing at the side of it all. All the other parents seemed to know each other. You didn’t introduce me.

You moved differently now. And you spoke like them.

I didn’t recognise you.

Kelly   You all right, Mum?

Susan   Yes. Of course.

Kelly   You’re staring again.
Am I?

Gone zombie.

Sorry.

Just a bit weird, you’re like …

*She does an impression.*

Having a think.

Yeah. Good. Keep it working. Don’t want you going mental.

No.

Don’t want to put you in a home.

No.

Not yet.

*Susan stares again.*

You sure you’re all right?

Yes.

But you would always say that, wouldn’t you?

To me. Even if you’re not.

What time do you have to be there?

Half-one. Under the clock.

It must be strange.

I’ve got to go, haven’t I?

No. You really don’t.

What are you going to do?


Then what?

That’s it. Then back on the train to Paris. It’s just a day trip apparently.

So we’re still on for tomorrow.
Kelly: Yeah.
Susan: You and me?
Kelly: Yeah, why?
Susan: Thought you’d forgotten.
Kelly: What do you mean?
Susan: You’re leaving on Sunday.
Kelly: I know.
Susan: And you’ve only just got back.
Kelly: I told you …
Susan: And now you’re packing everything up. Throwing it away.
Kelly: It’s what young people do. Everyone else’s parents are proud. They’re pleased their kids have got jobs. Making a start. But you …
Susan: I’m pleased.
Kelly: Cos you go to uni. Leave. If you’re lucky, you get a job. Have a life. La la. It’s what we’re supposed to do.
Susan: I miss having you around.
Kelly: We always used to shout at each other.

Susan *smiles.*

Susan: I know.
Susan: I’m quieter these days.
Kelly: So am I.
Susan: Don’t like it.
Kelly: Why not?
Susan: People change.
Kelly: That’s good.

No.

Susan: You will be careful today.
Kelly: Yes.
Don’t get upset.
I won’t.
You’ve got nothing to prove.
Do you want a wooden spoon?
Nothing to say. If you don’t want to.
Mum?
What?
Spoons?
Anything.
Anything of yours you don’t want, put down there, and I’ll have it.
If you’re going.
Cos I don’t know when you’ll come back, do I?
Stop it.
Remember I’m here.
Mum.
Come on.
You just need to move on. Everyone else has.
I know. What are you going to do with that?
Every time I’ve done a sort-out like this you go through before you throw it away, don’t you?
To check.
You hate me throwing things away.
Yes.
I worry you’ll forget.
Because these things.
They’re part of who you are, aren’t they?

Scene Two

The room in darkness. Ibrahim sits in a chair in Baghdad.

Although it is only three years later, he looks even older. He moves less and the light has gone
I want to tell you what has happened.

They say it is getting better now.

The Americans are leaving Baghdad. The British have left Basra. They say things are better. The number of attacks has gone down. They say that Iraqi forces have control. It will all be all right now.

This is a lie. Gangs still kidnap children, militia kill women. The Americans and British have not left because things are better. They have left because things are getting worse. They know many more people are about to die and they do not want the responsibility.

We reopen the museum tomorrow. Not because it is safe. Not because it is ready. But because things have to be seen to be getting better. We have been ordered to. It is like that everywhere. We are covering things up. We are making it seem like it is good. But underneath feelings are just as strong. And they will not go away.

This country has been broken into pieces and people are grabbing what they can. They are preparing for an even larger war. And when it comes, I think everyone will just look out for themselves. But no one will win, and the pieces of this country will become dust. The buildings will be destroyed. The museums will be emptied and the children will die. Iran and Syria and Turkey will get involved. It will become hell. It has all happened before elsewhere. India, Africa, Israel. Whenever the Americans and the British invade, fight, give up and go home.

I wanted to tell you all this because I hope you will understand now why I did not want to sell the vase.

I hope maybe you will see that sometimes other things are important.

Faiza left Baghdad a few months after you were here. I have not spoken to her since. She had some family in the south and they helped her to make a new start. Sometimes she writes and tells me how things are. She does not talk about the past. Perhaps she has forgotten. I have not seen her for three years. And I miss Raya. I miss her too.

And I know you want the truth. So I am sorry, I must tell you that I have tried, but I cannot forgive you. Not now. But if you write back, I will read it this time. I promise you that.

Because we both have to learn to listen, don’t we?

Scene Three

The British Museum.

On a stand are the broken pieces of the vase.

Raya and Kelly stand on either side of it.
Raya: History.
Kelly: Yeah?
Raya: Yes.
Kelly: Boring.
Raya: Not for me.
Kelly: We’re in the right place then.
Raya: Yes.
Kelly: Never liked it. Too dry. Too much to get your head round.
Raya: And we’ve got more than you.
Kelly: More?
Raya: More history.
Raya:
Kelly: When are you going?
Raya: In a few months.
Kelly: In Baghdad.
Raya: Yes.
Kelly: It’s still open?
Raya: Yes. But I wanted to travel first.
Kelly: How can you afford it?
Raya: My uncle. He said he would pay. He is making money.
Kelly: How?
Raya: I don’t ask.
Kelly: What do you think of London?
Raya: It is like I was told it would be.
Kelly: What were you told?
Raya: There are people on the streets begging. But no one gives them money.
Kelly: Yeah, they spend it on drugs.
Raya: How do you know?
Kelly: We give it to charities instead?
Raya: Do you?
Kelly: People do. I don’t have enough. I’m a student.
Raya: You are well dressed.
Kelly: Yeah?
Raya: You look very nice.
Kelly: Thank you.
Raya: I think you have enough.

I just want to have a good time, yeah?
Kelly: I thought once we’ve done this we’ll go on the London Eye, you know, the wheel? Then we’ll go to Parliament like you wanted to. And I thought we might go shopping? / Does that sound –
Raya: I don’t mind.
Kelly: Good.
Raya: Have you come and seen this before?
Kelly: This?
Raya: I didn’t even know it was here.
Kelly: You didn’t look.

‘A calcite vase from Mesopotamia, in three parts. Early Dynastic III, about 2600 BC. Grave PG-337. Believed lost from the National Museum of Iraq after the invasion by coalition forces in 2003. Recovered from a dealer a year ago, and held in trust by the British Museum on indefinite loan.’
Raya: It’s smaller than he described it.
Kelly: Do you see much of him?
Raya: We have started to write to each other now. I think it is important we do. I am learning a lot.
Kelly: How is he?
Raya
Lonely.
Kelly
He sent me a letter too.
Raya
Did he?
Kelly
He did not tell me.
Raya
What did he say?
Kelly
That there’s no hope.
Raya
He is right.
Kelly
Then why go to university there? Why don’t you get out? You could come here. Stay with me or something.
Raya
I would never live here.
Kelly
Don’t mention it.
Raya
And if there is a war I want to be at home.
Kelly
Why?
Raya
To protect the country.
Kelly
To fight?
Raya
If I have to.
Kelly
You sound like Dad.
Raya
Good.
Kelly
We saved your life.
Raya
Yes.
Kelly
So don’t waste it, yeah?
Raya
Tell me what happened with this.
Kelly
What do you mean?

When you brought this vase back. I hear from my mother that one thing happened and then our father writes and tells me it was different. But you were there. What did you do?
Kelly: Me and your mum tried to persuade Dad to sell it. But he didn’t do anything. Wouldn’t change his mind. So we took the vase and said we’d do it ourselves. When we were about to drive off he stopped us. He sold the vase, got the money and got you back.

Raya: Then my mother left anyway.

Kelly: Yeah.

Raya: She didn’t try.

Kelly: That’s not fair.

Raya: She shouldn’t have left. He was trying to do the right thing.

Kelly: What happened to you?

Raya: What was it like?

Kelly: What do you mean?

Raya: It is not important that I am alive.

Kelly: You think?

Raya: Many of my friends have lost brothers and sisters. We have grown up with our country at war, and we have been poor and we have had nothing. It is all falling apart. But we all have to take responsibility for what we have done.

Kelly: Shut up.

Raya: Other children were killed because you made him sell the vase.

Kelly: I wish he had been stronger.

Raya: I wish you had not been there.

Kelly: We did what we thought was right.

Raya: You came to Baghdad and straight away you were telling us what to do. You
Raya shouted. You didn’t listen. You didn’t know anything. And look at it now. Look at it.

Kelly Then I’m sorry. We didn’t just leave you to –

Raya This vase that meant so much to Dad is in here. In London. Can I have your bag?

Kelly Why?

Raya We are going to put these pieces in the bag and you will take them out.

Kelly We’re –

No.

Raya We’re going to steal them.

Kelly Then I will take them back and put them in the museum in Baghdad.

Kelly There’s alarms.

Raya Where they should be.

Kelly I’m not doing anything.

Raya It will help for you to say sorry to me.

Kelly I’m not.

Raya To my father. To your family.

Kelly I’m not sorry.

Raya You should be.

Kelly There’s guards. They’ll arrest you.

Raya Then I’ll tell them. When they ask what we’re doing, I’ll tell them we’re taking it home.

Kelly Does Dad know?

Raya Give me your bag.

Kelly He doesn’t, does he? I thought we were going to meet, have some coffee or something, get to know each other, I don’t want this.

Raya He is right in what he says about you.

Kelly What does he say?

That you have quick thoughts, not long ones.
That you have quick thoughts, not long ones.

Kelly

Don’t know what that means.

Raya

You think of the next minute. Of those people who happen to be around you. You cannot imagine anything bigger.

I tried so hard to be part of your family. I went all the way to Baghdad. I used all the money I’d saved when I could’ve travelled the world to deliver this back and when I got there … Dad hated me. We haven’t spoken since … but then you said you were coming and he wrote and I thought –

Raya

You thought maybe it was over?

Kelly

That we could make a new start. Yes.

Raya

It’s not over. Have you replied to him?

Kelly

Yeah. I was going to.

Raya

This will be your reply. He is not interested in what you say any more. It is what you do.

Kelly

How do you know what he wants?

Raya

I know him.

Kelly

So do I.

Raya

I grew up with him.

Kelly

Raya

Kelly

Kelly

He said if I write he’ll read it.

If I come home with this, he will know you care.

You have to work hard to be a good daughter.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I didn’t ask for any of this.

Neither did we.

I’m not stealing anything, and you’re not having my bag. If you want to go for coffee and hang out and stuff then fine, but I’m not waiting around while you do this. I’ve had enough. If this is what you’re going to do, I’ll just go home now.
and that’s it. Yeah? I won’t write, I won’t call again. You can tell him when you get back. I’ve had it.

Raya You’ll go shopping and not care.
Kelly Yes. I’ll go shopping and not care.
Raya Like everyone else.
Kelly Like everyone else. Not my fault.
Raya Are you sure?
Kelly Yeah.
Raya I feel sorry for you.
Kelly Don’t.
Raya You have nothing to fight for.
Kelly Yeah. I’m lucky. I’m British. I don’t need to fight.
Raya It is important to have something you would die for.
Kelly My mum.
Raya Anything else?
Kelly No.
Raya Then what are doing in your life? What are you living for?
Kelly 
Raya I think you’re right.
Raya I don’t think we’ll see each other again.
Kelly Maybe it’s for the best.
Raya Yeah.

They look at each other.

So you are leaving?
Kelly Yeah. Going shopping. You coming?

Raya No.
Kelly I have to do this.
Kelly

Raya I know.

Kelly puts her coat on.

Picks up her bag.

Fine.

I’ll leave you here. I’ll walk down the corridor and end up in the big square of the British Museum that’s covered in glass. It’ll be really bright. Then I’ll walk out and look back at this massive building, and maybe notice that no one here is actually British. This is the British Museum but everyone is a tourist. All the countries in the world come here and look at all this stuff except this one. Cos maybe we’ve got better things to do.

Raya takes the vase pieces and puts them in the bag and walks away.

Then I’ll walk out of the gates and go down towards Covent Garden. And it’ll be strange. Because I’ll know, somehow I’ll know for sure that I’m never going to hear from you again. I won’t need to have anything more to do with it all. Iraq. Dad. You. Faiza. And I should feel guilty. I should feel upset and worried and like I’ve let you down. But I won’t. I’ll feel lighter. I’ll feel happy. Normal. Because I can’t do anything about it all, and all it was doing was making me feel worse and worse. But now … it’ll be … gone. And I can be me.

I’ll look in the shop windows at the clothes, and Sarah will text me and I’ll call her back and we’ll decide we’re going to go to Koko tonight with Steve and the others, so I reckon I want to treat myself, buy something proper nice. And I’ll go through these glass doors and a woman will offer to help me and I’ll be shopping and I’ll be feeling great. I will feel so fucking normal. Shopping and eating and coffee and out and home.

It’ll be bright and it’ll be happy and it’ll be easy.

And I won’t need to worry.

Just me.

Just as I want it.

Just as it should be.
Contractions

For Dad
Thanks to Kym Bartlett, Emma Brutton, Sian Clifford, Dominic Cooke, Kelly Duffy, Nick Gill, Claire Grove, Ellie Haddington, Ruth Little, Clare Lizzimore, Duncan Macmillan, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, Claire Rushbrook, Sara Stewart, Simon Vinnicombe, Rachel Wagstaff, Sacha Wares, all at the Royal Court Theatre and particularly Lyndsey Turner.
Contractions was broadcast as a BBC Radio 4 Afternoon Play under the name Love Contract in 2007. It was produced and directed by Claire Grove. The cast was as follows:

The Manager  Ellie Haddington
Emma  Claire Rushbrook

Contractions had a development reading at Theatre 503, Battersea, in 2007, directed by Lyndsey Turner. The cast was as follows:

The Manager  Sara Stewart
Emma  Sian Clifford

Contractions was performed on stage at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 29 May 2008. The cast was as follows:

The Manager  Julia Davis
Emma  Anna Madeley

Director  Lyndsey Turner
Lighting  Nicki Brown
Sound  David McSeveney
Characters

The Manager, over forty, a woman
Emma, twenty-five to thirty-five

Note

/ means the next speech begins at that point.
– means the next line interrupts.
… at the end of a speech means it trails off. On its own, it indicates a pressure, expectation or desire to speak.

A speech with no written dialogue indicates a character deliberately remaining silent.

A blank space between speeches in the dialogue indicates a silence equal to the length of the space.

Any scene changes should be as short and sharp as possible.
An office. Real grey dull light fuses with neon. The Manager is sitting behind her desk. Everything is modern, designed and stylish.

Emma comes in.

Emma. Come in.
Manager Sit down.
How are you?
Emma Fine.
Manager Good. Good.
Emma How are you?
Oh me? I’m fine too. Thank you for asking.
Manager Thank you for asking Emma.
And how are things at work?
Emma They’re good. Thanks.
Manager Tell me.
Emma I’m settling in well. My sales figures started average and have been improving. Yes. I think it’s all going very well. Thanks.
Manager Good. And the office?
Emma The office?
Manager The office. You get on with everyone?
Emma I think so.
Manager No problems? No arguments?
Emma No.
Manager Disagreements?
Emma About what?
Manager Anything.
Emma Well there have been … I mean I have disagreed with some views. About sales. About our approach.
Manager  You have.
Emma    Yes. It’s part of my job. We all express our opinions. You know.
Manager And then you come to some kind of consensus …
Emma    Yes.
Manager And the work continues down that agreed route …
Emma    Yes.
Manager You have disagreements with others in the office. But they are resolved amicably.
Emma    Amicably yes.
Manager So you are all friends?
Emma    No. I wouldn’t call them all friends. But we get on.
        I see.
Manager Well that all sounds … fine.
        Emma?
Emma    Yes?
Manager I want to remind you of something.

The  Manager gets out a contract.
She gives it to Emma.
Manager This is the contract you signed when you joined the company.
Emma    Yeah.
Manager Sorry?
Emma    Yes.
Manager Did you read it? Before you signed it?
Emma    Yes.
Manager Good. Have a look at page three will you? Paragraph five.
Emma    Okay.
        She does.
Manager Does it start ‘No employee, officer or director …’?
‘No employee, officer or director.’ Yes.

Can you read it please?

reads it to herself.

A moment.

Can you read it out loud please? So we can discuss it.

Oh.

‘No employee, officer or director of the company shall engage with any other employee, officer or director of the company in any relationship, activity or act which is wholly, predominantly or partly of a nature which could be characterised as sexual or romantic, without notifying the company of said relationship, activity or act.’

Do you remember that paragraph?

Yes.

You read it?

Yes. I think … Yes. I did.

Good.

It exists to safeguard against unfair or discriminatory conduct.

To insure against favouritism.

Sorry. I don’t understand.

I wanted to draw it to your attention.

Why?

In case you had forgotten to read it.

What made you think I had?

We all miss parts of contracts sometimes.

So this is just normal practice? You remind everyone?

Oh.

Everyone?

No.

Why me then? Are you implying … something?

No.
Emma: Are you implying that I am having a romantic or sexual relationship with someone else in the company?

Manager: No.

Because you would tell me if you were, wouldn’t you?

Emma: Yes.

Manager: Good.

Emma: Sorry … Obviously I don’t understand.

Manager: I think you do. You’ve read it over. Out loud. We both heard you. So that’s alright now. It’s all very clear. Isn’t it?

Emma: Okay.

Manager: Good.

Emma: Would you like to take this opportunity to talk to me about anything else?

Manager: No.

Emma: Good. Well that’s all then. Thank you.

Manager: Right. Okay.

Emma: Thank you.

Emma: gets up and leaves the office.

Two

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Emma. Come in.

Manager: Sit down.

How are things?

Emma: Fine.

Manager: Since we last spoke. Good?

Emma: Yes. Thank you. Good.

Manager: Good. And in the office? All still friends?

Emma: Getting on with everyone, yes.
Manager: Everyone’s friends.

Emma: As I said before I think, I wouldn’t call them all friends.

Manager: What would you call them?

Emma: Colleagues.

Manager: Co-workers.

Emma: Colleagues.

Manager: You merely have a working relationship with them?

Emma: Not all of them. Some of them I would call friends. But not all.

Manager: You would describe the others as colleagues. They are all either friends or colleagues.

Emma: Yes.

Or both.

Manager: Or both. Yes. Good. That’s all as it should be.

Emma: Good.

Manager: Do you remember what we spoke about before?

Emma: Yes.

Manager: And have you got anything to tell me now?

Emma: What about? About relationships at work?

Manager: Just romantic or sexual relationships. Relationships per se are not my concern. I mean we all have those, don’t we?

Emma: So. Romantic or sexual relationships at work. Have I had any? Is that what you want to know?

Manager: Yes.

Emma: No. I haven’t.

I would have told you.

Manager: I thought it might have slipped your mind.

Why?

Emma: What are you saying?

Are you saying something’s going on?
Manager  Going on?
Emma     Yes.
Manager  Something romantic or sexual?
Emma     Yes.
Manager  No.
Emma     I’m not saying anything like that. No.
Manager  I’ve got a boyfriend.
Emma     That’s not my concern.
Manager  Well you’re implying I’m up to something with someone at work and I’m just saying that you don’t need to worry because I’ve already got a boyfriend.
Emma     You’re wrong Emma. I’m not saying anything. I’m not implying anything. I’m simply asking if you want to tell me anything.
Manager  Well I don’t.
Emma     That’s fine.
Manager  I don’t really understand what you’ve called me in here for.
Emma     Just a chat.
Emma     Alright.
Manager  Do you know what we mean by romantic?
Emma     Jesus.
Manager  I’m sorry?
Manager  Are you alright Emma?
Emma     Yes. I’m fine.
Manager  Good. Do you know what we mean by romantic?
Emma     Yes.
Manager  You are aware of our definition?
Emma     Your definition?
Manager  Yes.
Emma
Manager  The company. Yes. Do you want to read it?

Emma  Do I need to?

Manager  Have you seen it before?

Emma  No.

Manager  Then maybe you should.

She gives Emma a sheet of paper with a typed paragraph on it.

Emma  Do you want me to read this out loud too?

Manager  Why not?

‘In using the term “romantic” the company defines “romantic” as the following. Any gesture, indication, communication (verbal or otherwise), appearance, message, understanding or organised meeting or event which is perpetrated with a view to advancing the relationship toward love.’

Yes?

Manager  Is that all clear to you?

Emma  Perpetrated?

Manager  Yes.

Emma  It doesn’t sound at all romantic to me.

Well when you or I use the term romantic, we only mean a general idea – a feeling – a warmth maybe, a vague possibility. But as you know, this use of the word in the contract has legal implications in the event of an incident coming to our attention. So I am sure you agree that it is best the word is carefully defined.

Emma  It’s quite a broad definition.

Manager  No. It is precise. ‘Perpetrated with a view to advancing a relationship toward love.’ Very precise.

Emma  Could mean anything though.

Manager  No.

If you were to put your hand on my arm. Would that be romantic?

Emma  Yes?

No.
Manager  Because it is obvious and deliberate. It is out of context. You might put your hand on anyone for any number of reasons. That is not definitively romantic. That is not advancing the relationship toward love.

Emma  Oh.

Manager  But if we were out in the office with everyone else, and I were to ask you if you wanted a coffee from the machine?

Emma  Are there were other people in the room?

Manager  Yes. Lots. Everyone else.

Emma  But you just ask me if I want a coffee?

Manager  Yes.

Emma  I suppose there couldn’t really be any other way of reading that so, by your definition, that is romantic, yes.

Manager  Correct.

Emma  Is it clear now?

Manager  Is it clear now?

Emma  Pretty much.

Manager  We could run over it again.

   No. It’s fine. It’s clear.

Emma  Yes.

   Thank you.

Manager  So bearing all that in mind, is there anything else you wish to tell me?

Emma  No.

Manager  Alright.

Emma  Is that it then?

Manager  Yes.

Emma  Thanks.

Manager  Thanks.

Emma  Thank you.

Manager  Thank you.

Emma  leaves the office.

Three
The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Emma. Come in.

Manager

Sit down.

How are you?

Emma

Fine.

Manager

Good. Good.

Emma

Fine.

Manager

Good. And the office? Things are well?

Emma

Yes.

Manager

Good. You still have your friends, and your colleagues?

Emma

My friends and my colleagues?

She laughs a little. Thinks The Manager is joking.

The Manager is not.

Manager

Yes?

Emma

My friends and my colleagues. Yes. Thank you.

Manager

Good. I want to talk to you about Darren Glennister.

Emma

Okay.

Manager

Do you know Darren?

Emma

Yes. He works in my office.

Manager

Would you say that by your definition he is a colleague?

Emma

Yes.

Manager

But not a friend?

Emma

Look, I don’t want to be rude, but –

Manager

Of course.

Emma

I don’t want to be rude, but I don’t have to tell you who my friends are. Do I? There’s nothing in the contract about that.

No … but I mean … you’re quite right of course. You don’t have to tell me. I was just
Manager making conversation.

Emma Oh I see.

Manager That’s fine.

Emma What did you want to ask me about
Darren?

Manager Do you think you work well with him?

Emma Yes.

Manager You do?

Emma Yes.

Manager Good. And there is nothing you want to tell me?
About Darren.

Emma No.

I see.

Manager It’s just Darren. Darren has come to see me. And he has told me that you went out to
dinner.

Emma Has he?

Manager Yes.

Emma Okay.

Manager So would you like to tell me anything?

Emma No.

Manager Are you sure? Bearing in mind what Darren has said? Bearing in mind what we
discussed before?

Emma I don’t know why Darren has told you we went out for dinner.

Manager So you’re saying you didn’t go out to dinner?

Emma No. I’m not saying we didn’t go out for dinner, I’m saying I don’t know why he told
you we went out for dinner.

Manager He said he thought it was romantic.

Emma Did he?

Manager Yes.
Emma

Well I didn’t.

Manager

I see.

Emma

If I thought we had done something, anything, romantic I would tell you. As we discussed. As in my contract. But as far as I am concerned, I have never done anything romantic with Darren Glennister.

Manager

Alright.

Emma

I would tell you. If anything were to happen.

Manager

Yes.

Emma

But it hasn’t.

Yes.

Manager

Alright. I will have Darren back in and tell him that you didn’t think it was romantic. See what he says. Maybe we can come to some consensus on it.

Emma

Thank you.

Yes.

Manager

And Emma?

Yes?

Emma

I’d appreciate it if you didn’t speak to Darren about this. We don’t want to muddy the water.

Manager

You don’t want me to talk to him.

Emma

Not about any of this, no. I think that’s best, to keep it clear at this stage. Until it’s all sorted out.

Manager

Alright.

Manager

Good.

Emma

So you’re going to talk to him today?

Manager

Possibly.

Manager

That’s all. Thank you.

Emma leaves the office.

Four
The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Manager: Emma. Come in. Sit down. How’s things?

Emma: Good. Have you spoken to Darren?

Manager: Yes I have. Unfortunately he is convinced that it was romantic and he therefore should be telling me. He seems quite agitated about it. So he’s given me a few details to discuss with you.

Emma: Okay.

Manager: Apparently there was a candle on the table.

Emma: Is that it?

Manager: No. It’s not just that. Please. Emma. Let me finish. He says that there was a substantial amount of eye contact and that you, on a number of occasions, touched his arm.

Manager: He goes on. Later in the evening, after you had left the club, and you were in the taxi, you put your hand on his inner thigh, which caused him to become aroused. When you got out you kissed him goodbye on the cheek. This then became mouth to mouth kissing. You put your tongue in his mouth. And he did the same.

Emma: Is this all true?

Manager: I’m not saying that it is true, or it isn’t true, but the point is that I don’t think any of that would necessarily be romantic.

Emma: You don’t?

Manager: No. According to your description it is quite possible all those actions could be perpetrated not to increase the love in the relationship –

Manager: – but simply to attract the other person to have sex.

Emma: I see. But then that would a sexual relationship?

Manager: No. Because none of what you described were technically sexual acts. Nothing in your description went that far.

Manager: I see. So you are saying that these acts were done merely for the purpose of achieving sex? They were not in any way done out of love.
Well they might have been. I wouldn’t know. I am talking hypothetically.

I see. Well thank you for your suggestions.

I will put these to Darren. That all these acts that he had misconstrued as being to do with emotion or love, I will convey that you think that these acts might simply have been done to lure him into having sex. That, in fact, there was no love at any stage of the evening. No romance at all. I will put your suggestions to him. They might help to clarify it for him. Thank you.

And as before, I would be grateful if you didn’t talk to Darren about this until it is resolved.

Yes. Okay.

You can go now.

Right.

Thank you for your time.

No problem.

leaves the office.

Five

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Emma. Come in.

Sit down.

Thank you.

Have you spoken to Darren?

No. You said not to.

Good good. Quite right. Well …

I thought you would want to know the situation has been resolved. I put your explanation to Darren, as to why those acts he described might be done. He listened very carefully, and has thought it over and now, eventually, agreed that nothing romantic or sexual was happening between you.

Oh. Okay.

Just so that you know.

Yes.
Manager Alright?
Emma So can I talk to him now?
Manager What? About this?
Emma Yes.
Emma Yes but …
Manager Is everything alright?
Emma Yes.
Manager Good.
Emma So we just carry on?
Manager Unless there’s anything else?
Emma I –
Manager
Emma No.
Manager Good.
Emma Okay.
Manager Thank you.
Emma Thank you.
Emma leaves the office.

Six
The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Manager Emma. Come in.
Sit down. How are you?
Emma Good. Thank you. And you?
Manager I’m very well. Now, Darren has come to me and told me that you and him are having both a romantic and a sexual relationship. Is this right?
Right. Well I wonder if you could outline the history and nature of the relationship for me?

Okay. We went for dinner once, and I thought at that time that I just wanted sex from him. However, he was then subsequently told that this was all I wanted and consequently he backed away, but then a few nights ago, after work, we went to a pub —

The Wellington?

Yes.

Yes.

So Darren’s already told you all this?

He’s told me his side of the story.

Okay. Well we got very drunk and went back to mine. Where we had sex. We’ve been seeing each other for a week.

A week?

Yes.

But have waited until now to inform us.

We decided together.

You decided together to only tell us now. After a week’s work.

Yes.

Why?

Because we wanted to be certain of the definition of our relationship. We didn’t want any confusion.

We have been monitoring it carefully and it’s only now that we have been able to confidently define the relationship in the way outlined in the contract.

But you are now confident with the definition?

Yes. We both are.

You and Darren.

Yes. We came to an agreed definition last night.
Did you not discuss all this with Darren?

Manager: Yes.

Emma: Then why are we going over it again?

Manager: It’s important for us to have a truthful picture. To take all the views we can.

Emma: Alright, well, we are now both having a romantic and sexual relationship.

Manager: I see.

Emma: Yes.

Manager: Is that alright then? Now that I’ve told you?

Emma: How did you find the sex?

Manager: The sex. How would you describe it? Was it good?

Emma: I don’t need to tell you that.

Manager: It is important we know what kind of relationship you are having. A loving relationship with little or no sex creates an entirely different office dynamic to having co-workers in a relationship who have an enjoyable and regular sex life. So it is important for us to know how it was.

Emma: But I don’t have to tell you this?

Manager: No. If we don’t have the facts we will go on estimates. Assumptions. Would you rather I made assumptions?

Emma: It was good.

Manager: Okay.

Emma: Darren has said ‘excellent’. Can we compromise on, say, ‘very good’?

Manager: Okay.

Emma: Okay. I’ll put that to Darren to confirm. And how many times have you had sex this week?

Emma: Four.

Manager: Alright. Darren has said five.

Manager: He must be counting something else.

Emma: Something else we did.
Manager: What?

Emma: I beat him off.

Manager: Alright. Well. I don’t think that counts. I’ll put four – mention that to him as well – that you would say four not five.

Emma: Okay.

Manager: Do you love him?

Emma: Not yet.

Manager: Good. He said no too.

Emma: Right.

Manager: And how long do you see this lasting?

Emma: What did he say?

Manager: I’d rather you gave me an honest answer. Help us to get a truthful picture.

Emma: I don’t know. A year?

Manager: Right. He said a few weeks.

Emma: Oh.

Manager: Shall we split the difference and say six months?

Emma: Alright.

Manager: Which would make it last until mid-October?

Emma: It might not last that long.

Manager: Just keep me informed.

Emma: Okay.

Manager: I’ll tell Darren about October, alright? And last thing, are you thinking about children?

Emma: I ... no.

Manager: Please, Emma, please be honest. Have you ever thought in any way about having a child with him?

Emma: Yes. I have once.

Manager: Right. When?
When we went to a park at night. And he was sat on a swing. I thought he would make a good father.

But when?

Two nights ago. About one in the morning.

Alright.

What did he say?

I’m sorry?

What did he answer to that question?

I can’t tell you that.

You told me the others.

Yes, but it’s different with that question. It’s a matter of confidentiality.

Oh.

Good. So give me a minute. I have to add them up.

Right. Yes. Now I’ll need to confirm this, but I think judging on what you’ve told us, and the scores produced by that information, Darren will be relocated to Richmond.

That’s miles away.

It’s only thirteen miles away. Company policy.

I see.

Thank you for telling us though, Emma, at this stage. It makes things a lot easier.

Well I had to, didn’t I?

Yes, you did have to but thank you all the same.

That’s alright.

Are you going to tell him today?

Possibly.

Well.

Yes.

I think that’s everything.

Yes.
Manager  Thank you Emma.

Emma  Thanks.

Emma leaves the office.

Seven

*The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.*

Emma comes in.

Manager  Emma. Come in.

Emma  Fine.

Manager  And Darren?

Emma  Fine.

Manager  Good. Now. I haven’t seen you for a while. How’s things in the office?

Emma  Fine.

Manager  Getting on with everyone?

Emma  Yes.

Manager  You’ve been with us for what … eight months now. You’ll have your yearly review coming up. With a chance of promotion. And a pay rise.

Emma  Yes.

Manager  Will you be applying for those?

Emma  Yes. Well.

Manager  I need the money. I’m pregnant.

Emma  You knew?

Manager  Yes.

Emma  How? I only found out yesterday.

Manager  I think …

*The Manager consults a piece of paper.*

Manager  You told Sarah after the staff meeting this morning.
Emma: And she told you?
Manager: She brought it up earlier today as she thought, correctly, that it would be relevant for our staff projections.
Emma: Isn’t it up to me to tell you?
Manager: I assume you’ll be wanting to take maternity leave at some point?
Emma: Yes.
Manager: Then you can see how that will affect our staff projections.
Emma: Is something the matter?
Manager: No.
Emma: Good. Now what I wanted to speak to you about is next week.
Manager: Next week?
Emma: Next week is six months.
Manager: The 22nd of October. Six months since you and Darren informed us of your relationship.
Emma: Oh right.
Manager: And you told us that you both thought it would last six months.
Emma: Well –
Manager: I’m just checking that we are still on line for this, because we are very keen to bring Darren back here.
Emma: So you want us to split up?
Manager: As you said you were going to. On the 22nd of October.
Manager: Right.
Emma: It’s his baby.
Manager: So you’re not planning to end the relationship with Darren next week?
Emma: No.
Manager: As you told us you would.
Emma: We were guessing. Things have gone very well.
Right. The thing is, Emma, that your employment and position in this company is founded upon you being transparent in your dealings with us. You informed us that this relationship would last six months. Are you saying this wasn’t right?

About six months, yes, but not –

Well what is it now?

Sorry?

How long will it go on for now?

I don’t know. I mean, I’m pregnant, so I hope … for ever.

For ever?

Yes.

Right.

Okay.

Yes.

You see this is a problem, Emma. You know this really lands us in it. We have based the plans for the next year on Darren being back here at Head Office from October onwards. But if you and Darren are still having a romantic and sexual relationship then … well … we have a problem.

Sorry.

Right. Okay. I’m sorry Emma, but this is not acceptable, to just go back on this. I think you and Darren need to decide how you want to handle it because if things stay as they are we are going to dismiss you both for professional misconduct and fraud.

But …

Which means you will have a blot on both of your records, no reference and therefore as I think you will agree, you will find it very difficult to find alternative employment, the way things are these days.

Oh.

Jobs like this don’t just grow on trees.

No. I know.

Not these days.

No.
Manager: There are hundreds of applicants for every position, Emma.

Emma: I know.

Manager: So you should talk to Darren about what you want to do.

Emma: Yes.

Manager: But we don’t want to lose him. Or you.

Emma: No.

Can I go now?

Manager: Yes. Just come back when you’ve decided.

Emma: Alright.

Emma leaves the office.

Eight

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Manager: Emma. Come in.

Sit down. How are things?

Emma: It’s alright. I spoke to Darren and we made a decision.

Manager: Good.

Emma: We’ve split up. We don’t want to cause the company problems and we both want to stay.

Manager: It was what we agreed, wasn’t it? I’m very impressed by your and Darren’s commitment to standing by this.

Emma: Do you need to know what I said to him? What happened when I told him?

Manager: No.

We were having lunch in the canteen. He was eating lasagne, and I was having the vegetable curry. I told him what you had said, and he said we would have to leave.

Emma: That he couldn’t bear the thought of not being with me. He held my hand and told me that no one could pull us apart. He said he would protect me, and that we could live as a family. That we would make it work somehow.

The Manager looks down at a piece of paper.

But I said that with a baby, we can’t afford to be out of work, we just can’t, the way
Emma said we had to just split up, so that we could have money, because without money you can’t live any life, can you? He said he wouldn’t agree, but I just kept on saying that it was for the baby. That we had to think of the baby first. Then he started to cry and I took my hand away, and we sat for about five minutes not saying anything. Then he got up and walked away, and I think that was the decision made.

Maybe you didn’t need to know any of that. But I wanted to tell you anyway.

Manager: I’ve got that you sat together without saying anything for ten minutes.

Emma: What?

Manager: You said five.

Emma: It could’ve been ten, yes. How do you know?

Manager: The whole building is monitored for safety, and fair practice at work.

Emma: You monitor everything.

Manager: Everything relevant, yes. Just as well. So it was ten minutes.

Emma: Yes.

Manager: Good. Well thank you for coming and telling me that.

Is there anything else?

Emma: No. I just … wanted to tell you.

Manager: Yes.

Emma: But you already knew.

Manager: Yes. Thank you.

Emma: Thank you.

Emma leaves the office.

Nine

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Manager: Emma. Come in.

Sit down. How are you?

Emma: Okay.

Manager: And little … Steven … is it?
Emma: Yes. He’s fine too.
Manager: It’s good to have you back after what?
Emma: Seven months?
Manager: It’s good to be back.
Emma: And everything went well? The birth?
Manager: You don’t have to tell me. I’m just making small talk.
Emma: It all went fine. Thank you.
Manager: Good. And thank you for informing us about your pregnancy. It made life a lot easier for us. And you got your maternity leave.
Emma: Yes.
Manager: Yes.
Emma: Yes.
Manager: Full maternity leave.
Emma: Thank you.
Manager: And once again, I’m very sorry that the promotion didn’t work out.
Emma: Okay. That’s alright. Maybe next time.
Manager: Yes. Maybe.
Emma: It’s not easy. But his father gives us money.
Manager: Good. Darren isn’t it?
Emma: Yes.
Manager: That’s good. And he can afford it with all his hard work.
Emma: Darren sees Steven every week.
Manager: But there’s nothing happening that you feel you should tell me about?
Emma: No. We don’t speak to each other at all. Don’t worry.
Manager: What about when he collects the … Steven, sorry, Steven.
Well … yes. I see Darren then.

Right.

But we don’t do anything. Just talk for a couple of minutes.

Are you sure?

Yes.

Do you have children?

Just small talk.

The thing is, Emma, the reason I’ve called you in is that the company has looked at your and Darren’s situation and concluded that your relationship can still be characterised as ‘partly sexual’.

But it’s not. We don’t. We stopped. For you. You told us …

Please, Emma –

You told us to. / Remember?

Emma, let me finish. You see the presence of a child, produced through sex, means that this will not change. Darren is the father of your son. As long as this son continues to live, it is the embodiment, in the purest sense, of a continuing partly sexual relationship. Therefore …

As long as he continues to live?

What?

Oh. No.

Please.

What are you saying?

Please, Emma, no hysterics.

What do you want me to do? Kill him? Kill my son to finish the sexual relationship?

Please, Emma, don’t be ridiculous. No, we must assume that your son will continue to live and to live with you, and that the sexual bond between yourself and Darren will similarly continue.

Alright.

But we don’t want to lose you. Either of you.

Good.

You’re very good at your jobs.
Yes.

So we’re going to relocate Darren.

Again.

No. Is it?

She looks through some papers.

No.

Oh. Oh yes. Alright. Relocate him again. This will solve the problem. Reduce the risk of any favouritism or inappropriate behaviour. Unhelpful social contact in the workplace.

Where to?

I’m sorry?

Where are you going to relocate him to?

Oh.

Kiev.

Kiev?

Kiev.

Where’s Kiev?

The Ukraine.

Where’s the Ukraine?

Near Russia.

Russia?!

Russia. It’s …

I know where Russia is. For how long?

Indefinitely.

But he won’t be able to see his son.

That is true. That will help as well.

He won’t agree.

He already has. Short of dismissing you both which we really don’t want to do, this
Manager is the only option. Darren understood that.

Emma What about Steven?

Manager Who is Steven?

Emma My son. Darren’s son.

Manager Oh. Yes?

Emma He won’t see his father as he grows up.

Manager That’s not the company’s concern. That is a private matter.

No, it is the company’s concern. Because without access to his son, Darren will get … depressed and upset, and won’t work as well … His productivity will decrease. And I’ll have to deal with Steven missing his father, and that will cause me more stress, and perhaps my work won’t be so effective. So it is the company’s concern.

Our research doesn’t suggest any of that.

Manager We don’t think it will be a problem.

But we keep these things monitored as you know. If your sales figures started to decline, after Darren is relocated then –

Emma Then you might bring him back.

Then we can consider your suitability for this company.

Manager But I doubt that’s going to happen. Your sales figures are always excellent aren’t they, much like Darren. It would be a shame if anything were to affect them.

Emma Is that all you want?

Manager Yes and we’d be grateful if, as before, you didn’t discuss this with Darren. There’s no need and it will just complicate matters.

Emma Can I go now?

Manager Yes. Do come and see me if you have any problems.

Emma leaves the office.

Ten

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk.

Emma comes in.

Emma. Come in.

Manager
Emma: Thank you.
Manager: How are you?
Emma: Better.
Manager: We’re very sorry. We all are.
Emma: Yes. Thank you.
Manager: Did you receive the complimentary flowers?
Emma: Yes.
Manager: How was the funeral?
Emma: Small.
Manager: Just a few relatives.
Emma: I wish Darren could have been there.
Manager: Well. Yes. But obviously that’s impossible.
Emma: Why? Steven’s dead now. It doesn’t matter.
Manager: Steven?
Emma: My son.
Manager: Oh yes. Steven. That’s right. Well. Yes. This is actually it, Emma. You see we are simply desperate to bring back Darren from Kiev.
Emma: Back here?
Manager: Yes.
Emma: Oh.
Manager: We think that the company would benefit from his experience.
Emma: Yes.
Manager: And. You would appreciate him as a colleague again, wouldn’t you?
Emma: Yes.
Manager: You two always worked well together.
Emma: Yes.
Manager: But we have a problem. Which is this. We have to be seen to be consistent and as long as your and Darren’s son is alive, there exists a sexual bond between you which
Manager: long as your and Darren’s son is alive, there exists a sexual bond between you which complicates and jeopardises the work environment.

Emma: I told you. My son’s dead now.

Manager: So you say. But the thing is, we only know this because you have told us. Which isn’t really enough for our lawyers.

We require proof.

Emma: I’ll bring in the death certificate tomorrow.

Manager: Thank you, that’s very kind Emma, but I’m afraid legally – because we have to have consistent policy internationally and some countries’ certificates of death are less reliable than others, I’m sure you can imagine – I’m afraid legally that isn’t enough. We really require the actual body.

Emma: The body?

Manager: Yes. So that our scientists can check it’s the right child. Check that it is indeed deceased. Match its DNA against you and Darren.

Emma: You’ve got my DNA?

Manager: Oh yes.

Emma: All this is just a legal requirement really.

Manager: I buried him. He’s in the ground now.

Emma: Yes. I’m sorry. No one was available to deal with this at the weekend. Is there anything you can do to help us out?

Manager: You want me to dig him up?

Emma: I’m sure you wouldn’t have to do it yourself.

Manager: I can’t do that.

Emma: Because we really need Darren back and …

Manager: We think you do too.

To assist with sales, obviously.

Emma: Yes.

Manager: Do you want to make a few phone calls?

See what you can do?
Manager  Let me know how you get on.

Emma  Thank you.

She leaves the office.

Eleven

The office. It is exactly the same. The Manager is behind her desk. Emma comes in. She is carrying a shoe box. Her hands are muddy.

Manager  Emma. Come in.

Manager  Sit down. How are things?

Emma puts the shoe box on the desk.

Manager  What’s this?

She looks inside.

Oh.

She gets a pen and prods at it.

Then closes the lid.

Manager  You wanted to see it.

Yes. Thank you. Thank you Emma.

Manager  I’ll pass this on.

Now. As it turns out, I’m afraid Darren has decided to stay in Kiev.

Emma  What?

Manager  I know. He has decided he’d rather not relocate back here. He says he has nothing to come back for.

Emma  What?

Manager  Which we really don’t agree with. It’s a real pain.

Emma  But I’ve given you this. What you said you needed. Why don’t you order him?

Manager  We’re not the army, Emma, we don’t give out orders.

Emma  Well, I can go there now then. Now you’ve got what you want I can be relocated. I can move to Kiev.
Emma can move to Kiev.

Manager Emma, we don’t need you in Kiev. We need you here. We don’t just relocate people for fun.

I don’t have anything here now.

Emma My baby’s dead.

Do you know what that means? Do you care?

Manager You have excellent prospects.

Emma Do you care about me at all?

Manager Care? Yes. We have a duty of care to every employee, I can give you the leaflet / if you want to have a look.

Emma I can’t leave this company. As you said. I wouldn’t get another job.

Manager No.

So that would be the end.

Do you care?

I did it myself.

I dug him up myself. I went straight there last night, and I only had a little spade, but I dug all night, and brought out the coffin. Took him out. Brought him here. I did it all myself.

That was important.

But it’s not my baby now. It’s just meat, isn’t it? So do what you want with it. I don’t want it back.

Do you have children?

Manager I don’t see how that is relevant Emma.

Emma No.

Manager I think that’s it.

Emma Do you bleed?

Manager Can I go now?

Emma Yes. Are you alright Emma?

Manager If you wanted to see the company psychiatrist …

I’m not mad.
Manager  Not sure of what?

Emma  That you bleed.

Thank you.

Emma leaves the office.

Twelve
The office. As before.

Emma comes in.

Manager  Emma. Come in.

Sit down. How are things?

Emma stands still.

Manager  Is something the matter?

Emma is sick on the floor.

She leaves.

Thirteen
The office. As before.

Emma comes in.

Manager  Emma. Come in.

Sit down.

How are things?

Emma  I’m going to leave.

Manager  I see.

She gets out a piece of paper. Starts to write on it.

Why?

Emma  I hate you.

Manager  Alright. Why?

Emma  I don’t know who you are. You don’t tell me anything about who you are.
Emma: I don’t know who you are. You don’t tell me anything about who you are.

Manager: I’m your manager.

Emma: What’s your name?

Manager: Why do you want to know my name?

Emma: You know my name.

Manager: I’m your manager.

Emma: So why can’t I know your name?

Manager: It’s not relevant to know my name.

Emma: What do I call you? This is really important.

Manager: You don’t need to call me anything Emma.

Emma: I don’t know anything about you.

Manager: Emma.

Emma: Do you have children?

Manager: Emma.

Emma: I bet you’re not married.

Manager: Emma.

Emma: I bet you’re really fucking lonely.

Manager: You don’t have sex do you?

Emma: You just work.

Manager: Emma.

Emma: But I bet when you go to bed at night, I bet you’re lonely.

Manager: Just tell me the truth. You’re so lonely.

Emma: Aren’t you?

Manager: Emma. Calm down.

Emma: I am calm.

Manager: No.

Manager: Emma.
We’re worried about you Emma.

For some reason, losing your baby seems to have affected your judgement.

Why do you care?

We have a duty of care to all our employees.

Are my sales figures down?

You tap the side of your computer when you work. You’ve been touching your hair more often than usual. Your breathing has become … deeper.

Are my sales figures down though?

And now you say you want to leave altogether.

Yeah, but are my sales figures down?

It’s out of character.

Yes, your sales figures are down.

So would you like to talk to the company psychiatrist?

No.

Emma, please.

What?

You seem agitated.

I just want to get out.

That’s all I want to do.

stands by one of the walls.

I see.

There’s nothing wrong with me.

You have said you want to leave but –

There’s nothing wrong with me.

There is no reason for you to leave, is there?
Except that I want to.

It doesn’t make any sense.

But I want to.

Exactly. So you can see why I’m concerned.

Maybe you should see someone.

Let me go.

We can’t stop you leaving.

Right. Thank you.

Thanks.

Bye.

She gets up to go.

As soon as you’re well you can make a decision.

I am well.

You may think that.

I am well. I’m going.

I suggest that you see someone, then come back and we’ll have another talk.

You can’t stop me leaving.

No. I can’t.

Thank you.

opens the door.

But if you leave employment without an agreed resignation we will sue you for breach of contract.

You’ll sue me.

Yes.

You.

The company.

You.

The company.
No.
You.

Emma
You’re a person.
You could just let me go. If you wanted to.

Manager
This is policy.
Emma
No. You’re making a decision.
Manager
I’m following the policy.
Emma
You’re not well.
Manager
Yes I am.
Manager
That’s what you think.
Emma
How do you know what I think?
Manager
We’ve been monitoring you very closely, Emma.
Emma
So you think you know me better than I do?
Manager
We can see what’s wrong.
Emma
I know I’m fine.
Manager
You’re not.

Emma stands by the door for a long time.

Emma
Do I have to see someone?
Manager
I think that’s best.
Emma
What will he do?
Manager
Help you.
Emma
How?
Manager
He’ll help you to get over Darren. And the baby.
Manager
He’ll help you not to worry.
Manager
He’ll help you to focus.
Manager
He’ll help you to be a success.
Emma
Like you.
Manager: Isn’t that what you want?
Emma: No.
Manager: What else is there?

Emma shuts the door and sits down.

Manager: Alright then?
Emma: Yes.
Manager: Alright to see someone?
Emma: Emma?
Manager: Yes.
Emma: Good.
Manager: Quarter past six tomorrow? After work?
Emma: Alright.
Manager: Take this along.

Emma stands.

Waits.
Manager: Is there anything else?
Emma: No.
Emma leaves.

Fourteen
The office. As before.
Emma comes in.
Manager: Emma. Come in.
        Sit down. How are things?

Emma: Fine.

Manager: Good. Good. How are things at work?

Emma: Good, thank you.

Manager: Tell me.

Emma: My sales figures are back to normal after the meeting with the doctor. My concentration is far better now. I think it’s all going very well. Thanks.

        We do have a duty of care to our employees.
        Everyone gets ill occasionally.

Manager: It’s very important that you stay healthy. That the environment you work in is safe. That you feel comfortable, and secure. That you feel balanced, safe, and in control.
        Do you feel comfortable in the office now?

Emma: Yes.

Manager: You feel safe.

Emma: Yes.

Manager: You get on with everyone?

Emma: Yes.

Manager: No problems? No arguments?

Emma: No.

Manager: Disagreements?

Emma: No.

Manager: So you are all friends?

Emma: Yes.

        Good.

Manager: Well that all sounds fine.

        Would you like to take this opportunity to talk to me about anything else?

Emma: No thank you.
Manager    Good. Well that’s all then. Thank you.
Emma      Thank you.

She leaves.
Cock

For the Zona Rosa
Thanks to: Dominic Cooke, Jonny Donahoe, Elyse Dodgson, Ramin Gray, Clare Lizzimore, and especially Miriam Buether and James Macdonald.
Cock was first performed at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London, on 13 November 2009. The cast was as follows:

John  Ben Whishaw
M      Andrew Scott
W      Katherine Parkinson
F      Paul Jesson

Director James Macdonald  
Designer Miriam Buether  
Lighting Peter Mumford  
Sound David McSeveney  

Characters

John
M
W
F

The audience is raked down towards the actors.
There is no scenery, no props, no furniture and no mime.
Instead the focus is entirely on the drama of the scene.

Note

/ means the next speech begins at that point.
– means the next line interrupts.
… at the end of a speech means it trails off. On its own it indicates a pressure, expectation or desire to speak.
A line with no full stop at the end of a speech indicates that the next speech follows on immediately.
A speech with no written dialogue indicates a character deliberately remaining silent.
A blank space between speeches in the dialogue indicates a silence equal to the length of the space.
One

M You take it out that’s what you do you fucking take it out first otherwise what’s the point?

John Alright

It’s not alright it’s a fucking
Don’t.

M Don’t you fucking dare, put it down first
put it down.

John I can’t. I can’t. Not when you’re.

M I’m

OH!
Not when you’re like that standing over me watching everything I do you’re like a fucking.

John Pest.
Is that the word?
A fucking. Nuisance.

M Nuisance?

John Yeah look don’t mock me, now you mock the way I speak, first you mock what I’m doing,
what I’m making here, what I’m trying to do then you’re mocking the way I speak.

M You said it.

John I know.

M You spake it

John I don’t need this. Not now. Not … do you understand?

M Why am I being so nasty to you.

John Why are you being so nasty to me … yes exactly why why why?

M Because you’re like a brother to me.

John What?

M You’re like a brother.

John You’re playing now.

M But you are.
John: I’m not your

M: No I know you’re not. But that’s what you’re like, I’m mocking you like this, because that’s what brothers do.

John: But you’re not.

M: I’m not I know.

John: Fuck off now, go and watch your programme.

M: Why?

John: You’re pestering me.

M: Pester

John: If you don’t just don’t just I’ll I’ll

M: Look. All. I’m saying is. That you. Can’t fucking cook. Can’t fucking do anything with your hands.

John: Really?

M: Yes. Hands. No. Nothing. Nothing practical. Nothing that needs to be done. You’re all gestures and waving. Cutting the air, and flapping them up and down all the time, trying to make a point, it’s like EMPHASISING a WORD because you DON’T know how to use them and compensating with those fucking hands of yours have you seen them?

John: Have I seen my my hands?

M: They’re like tennis rackets on the end of sticks. Like satellite dishes at the end of fishing rods. They’re ridiculous.

John: Okay.

M: Ridiculous.

John: Okay.

M: I’ve missed you today.

John: Really.

M: Love you.

John: Right.

M: Really.

John: Right.

M: I’m like a puppy.
It took ten years off me. A shock like that.

M I know that’s not what they say that’s not the expression, but it did. I felt ten years younger after I picked myself up, and came to terms with the fact, with the fact I wasn’t dead.

John You felt glad to be alive.

M I felt more alive. I felt like a fucking child again. I wanted to

John Not dance.

M Like run around and find someone and kiss them.

John Who?

M Someone. Doesn’t –

John You know what I mean?

M You’re not trying.

John But you’re alright.

M I’m alright. Alright yes. Yes.

John Because I was worried.

M Of course.

John When you didn’t call.

M Then when I did call.

When you did call yes, then I became even more worried breathing down the phone like that I don’t want to be insensitive but you didn’t think about me did you? Even for a minute. That I’d be worrying, I’d be dying thinking what might’ve happened, you didn’t reassure me at all, the words you were using I thought you must have … I don’t know concussion or something like that something that made you mad.

M I didn’t

John You seem a bit

M I’m not mad I’m not mad this isn’t madness this is energy this is fireworks burning like on that one night of the year this is fingers up like sparklers this is eyes popping like fucking Roman candles this is the fucking bonfire in my

John In your

M In my I don’t know my chest my arms my legs, my fucking hair I don’t want to waste it,
what what what? Why can’t you go with me on this?

John I think we’re fundamentally different individuals you know that?

M I don’t

John Fundamentally different people.

M Are we.

John I mean we live under the same roof, we go to bed at night we fuck and chat and cook and eat and everything but I think only now, only now I’m beginning to realise yes, look at us, that we’re fundamentally different people. We’re like. I mean you’re eggs and I’m

M Cheese

John No what’s the opposite? I don’t know, I mean all the things we do they cover up the very basic fact that when it comes down to it, if you see something I don’t know, dangerous, like a man with a knife, in the street, you know suddenly he’s there, and you’ll take a step towards him.

M Yes.

John But I’ll run away.

M Yes.

John So do you see what I mean it’s like a fundamentally different thing? If I got hit by a car, I’d be in pieces literally probably literally you’d have to go to the hospital and collect me bit by bit and put me back together I mean I’d be a mess I’d be liquid you’d have to freeze me, solidify me before I could do or say anything you know okay I’m being dramatic and romantic but you know I’d be a fucking a fucking.

M I know.

John But you get hit by a car hit by a car like that and you’re … better.

M Yes.

John You’re more alive, like you say, you’re more … there.

M Exactly.

John And I think that reflects something fundamental about our relationship.

M You do.

John I do I do.

M Which is?

John There’s a gap.
M  Between? What? Us?

John  It’s not working. It’s nearly over. We’re both ignoring the fact that it’s only a matter of time before we’ll be

M  No.

John  On our own.

M  Don’t say that.

John  Just did.

M  It’s not true.

It is true because I just said it so there it is.

John  It’s out there, look there it is right there can you see it yes, there on the floor between us this thing I just said, not going away

M  This is all a bit.

John  This is, yes, all

For me. All a bit much a bit hyper today everything’s going so fast. I mean yes I feel better yes I feel like I appreciate everything more and that includes you yes before you say anything against it yes it includes you but I need something. Oh God I’m spinning, yes I need something to hold on to.

John  Not me.

M  You yes.

John  Not me. It’s over. Look. That thing I just said is there between us in the way.

M  It’s not.

It’s going to be in a week maybe it will be I can feel it. So we might as well – No no no no no don’t fucking. Stand over there by the fake dog. Stand over there where I can see you but there isn’t any danger you might. No.

John  There.

There.

M  Here.

John  Yes.

M  I’m alright here?

John  For now.
John You won’t.

M An illustration. Showing me the distance between us.

John If you like.

But you’re not showing me the distance, you’re creating it, you put me over here, put that thing there between us.

M And you’re saying it means.

It means we’re now

We’re

Yes?

John Well?

Finish what you were going to.

M What?

John Say.

Finish what you were going to say.

M You want to go.

Everything we say to each other we’re sinking.

John You and me.

I’m taking a lifeboat.

M Teddy bears waiting for a train. Very English.

John Right.

M Why this?

John It’s … kitsch

M It is that it is kitsch. You want to get back you want to get back with me, you make a big fuss, then you change your mind, and you want to get back so you bring me teddy bears.

John A random gesture full of humour and irony intended to provoke mutual feelings of goodwill, and find the giver endearing.

M Okay.

John So? Do you? Am I?
M You were –

John Endearing I mean.

M You were the one.

John I know.

M The one who

John I KNOW

M So what’s with the fucking bears. This offering. What? You think I don’t want you back.

John You didn’t

I didn’t. What? Say? No of course I didn’t fucking say a word, of course I didn’t. You say your piece and walk out I’m not going to beg you I’m not going to lower myself to asking why or asking you to stay we’ve always said, haven’t we, if you want to go if you need to go go. And there you went.

John And now I’m back.

With your teddy bears’ fucking embroidered … party.

M What is this, an apology?

John I suppose

M So what have you done?

John Nothing just what you know I’ve done.

Walk out on you, leave you, and stay away, and mess you around and now I want to

M This is covering something.

John No it’s smoothing.

No, more than that this is covering something up. You want to simply come back you have a change of heart something like that you want to come back in the normal way you buy me a bottle of wine or something I like, you buy me something simple, but you’ve had a had a longer.

John No come on.

A longer

Thought

Haven’t you.

What’s he going to say?
How can I make it seem like it’s normal. Distract him.
But distract him from?
From?
How can I persuade myself I want him?
I know!


Okay

Here it comes

Yes

Here it comes in the distance.

I I I

A revelation. Thirty seconds and counting.

So?

So?

I still whack off to you every night.

A true fucking worshipper standing in front of me. A true disciple, John, aren’t you? You whack off, no, you still whack off so you still, you still you see that implies a despite. We’re not there yet are we? You still whack off despite …

What?

Despite. You still whack off despite …

Despite nothing.

What?

Nothing.

Take it away.

What?

The bears the bears the bears I don’t want them.

I think I’m in love and I need help because she’s mad.
Bang! There it is.

Love?

Mad?

She?

John You can see why I’m confused.

M You want help.

John I need some straightening out.

M Sounds like you’ve already

John Not a joke that wasn’t a joke. I just mean I need to know what’s going on, because this woman this woman is

M You want your boyfriend’s help with the woman you’re sleeping with.

John Because really you’re the only person.

M Fuck off you fucked up little off my fucking land you get out get out now get out now

John You don’t mean that I know you I know

M I thought we were brothers.

John You said that but I never understood.

M That we would stick together, like glue like blood

John Blood yes.

M Yes

John And that’s what I’m asking. Yes. Together. No matter what.

M Exactly.

John And this is what.

Okay.

M Okay.

John Thick or thin we said and this is thin.

Okay.

Okay.
Stand further away and we might stand a

You look so different now.

Please please

A different person.

I’m not I’m really not.

Shush.

So.

Okay.

Tell me about it.

A week.

Lay it all out.

I am.

It was a week ago.

Thank you for the detail

I’m trying to be honest.

You’re always trying John, always trying, but have you ever actually done a thing in your life. Stop following me!

I’m not, but if you loved me like you’re supposed to you’d sit me down and we’d have a conversation

We’ve never sat down like we’re supposed to, I’m sorry but we’ve never had a conversation like this sitting down.

Yes we … have we definitely …

Not like what you’re saying, that’s never been how we worked never, but of course you’ve started, of course, making up fictitious and highly optimistic myths about our wonderful relationship which has since passed, about how fantastic things used to be and I’m sorry to disillusion you so soon into our reconciliation but we were not happy all the time, we rarely spoke to each other without doing something else and we always John, we argued all the fucking time.

Well I don’t want to argue.
M: You cheated on me
John: / Not cheated.
M: with a girl a woman a female a chick, / cow, bitch
John: Stop it I don’t want –
John: But –
M: Do you understand John? A STREAM.
John: I don’t think that means anything.
M: I want a RIVER!
John: I...
M: What?
John: I …
M: Yes?
John: I was going to say something.
M: Yes?
John: I’ve forgotten.
M: Jesus.
John: I do do things I bought you the picture.
M: Yes you did and no, no is the answer by the way I don’t find you endearing. Yes you did and no
M: Well.
John: Not for the things you think I do.

But there’s got to be something about me something that isn’t all like that, otherwise why are we still here, still talking, why do you let me back, why did you think of us like brothers, which by the way is a really fucking weird thing to say but I assume I hope you said it because you wanted to express our commitment to each other our closeness our love that was more than sex more than friends was more like unconditional this ideal love you normally only find in families based on the idea that whatever we did whatever we
M  I suppose yes I suppose and you’re holding me to it.

John  Only that, yes, this is whatever.

M  Big fucking whatever though isn’t it?

Pointing pointing.

John  No. No. I’ve remembered what I was going to say.

M  Oh glorious fanfare cymbals and drum roll here it comes.

John  You’re not as good-looking as you think.

M  Right.

Right. Yes. That’s.

John  You’re lucky to have me.

Okay?

M  Right. Well you’re probably right.

John  Hmm.

And finally some balls.

M  Finally a statement.

Now we stand a chance.

John  She must be obsessed.

M  I thought we said.

She’s always there. There’s nothing I can do nothing I can do this isn’t my doing alright. She’s just there. That’s why I didn’t tell you before I knew you’d be like this think it was me but

John  Maybe she’s outside right now.

M  Little fancy woman isn’t she?

John  Stop it.

M  Nice little bit of skirt you picked up you fucking lad.

John  Alright alright

M  Cuntmuncher.
John Very funny.

M Mingediving muffmining wanker.

John STOP. IT.

M What does she want?

John She thinks I’m straight.

Well you are from what you told me from the graphic detail you went into sounds a bit a lot like to me that you if you see what I mean that you are in fact yes yes not gay not that not gay but

M No I don’t think I’m, no I know I’m not.

John I’m not straight otherwise how would we still be doing anything?

M A supreme act of the will?

No no I like it I do as you know and I love you and I share everything with you in my head all the time, I still, I mean you give me a really big dick metaphorically or actually sometimes looking at you, or thinking of you coming home, or you know when I’m at work got your picture on my

desktop on my phone everywhere still now so no no.

I suppose I like both but that’s okay isn’t it that’s okay?

M That’s okay John yes it’s absolutely okay to like both

John Yes. Exactly.

M But not at the same time

John Do you know what an apology is? Do you know what it means to accept one? That’s what you did you accepted so the case is closed and we move on.

M Oh we do I see how awfully.

Shut the fuck up. Bloody fucking fuck.

John That’s you. I have a problem I have a really big problem, she’ll embarrass me if I I don’t know I have dinner with Mum and Dad and she comes over and starts talking or if she turns up at work and people ask questions.

M So deal with it.

John She’s following me. Maybe she’ll kill me.

A welcome gesture as far as I’m concerned

M I mean we mustn’t forget John, we mustn’t forget, you fucked and left her.
John  It wasn’t just a fuck
M  This is what women do, what do you mean not just a fuck?
John  Well I want to be honest.
M  You liked each other.
John  Yes, at the time there was something.
     Well maybe this is Disney, maybe this is high school the fucking musical and you’re meant to be together for ever and ever John, maybe she’s the one the one that you want yeah? The one you’re looking for then no?
John  No.
M  OH!
John  What?
M  Oh, do you think?
John  What?
M  Do you think she’s
John  What?
M  Would explain it.
John  No fuck off.
M  She might be.
John  She fucking is fucking not. You
M  Daddy
John  Cock.
M  Daddy.
John  Cock!
M  Daddy will you play with me?
John  How the fuck old are you you
M  Please Mummy why’s Daddy doing that with that other man
John  If you don’t close your fucking mouth before I even start counting to ten, I’ll kick you till your blood runs out till you fucking run out of blood.
All talk. You wouldn’t kick you wouldn’t do a thing. You’d try yes. You’d want to. You’d intend to like everything else but I’m safe because I know you John, and I’m sure your son will come to feel the same, nothing you want ever works out. You’re fudge all over.

There is no son yes no baby

You seem so sure but you never mentioned a condom / in your statement

Well we did we –

And was she good-looking?

She’s

A hot wet tight fuck?

Stop it.

Tall?

A bit.

Face?

Yeah.

Petite little thing that’s what you like with girls is it?

No. No. It’s finished it doesn’t matter.

And she was tall, I said. No not petite, more like a man really.

What?

Quite manly I suppose.

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

Soften the blow.

That she was manly?

Yes.

You have no idea.

No.

I don’t even believe that you would anyway. Is this a lie?

No.

I mean sexual feelings just don’t work like that. Manly? What? Big hands? Shoulders?
I mean sexual feelings just don’t work like that. Manly? What? Big hands? Shoulders? Penis?

John Maybe it’s all more complicated than anyone

M Maybe for you it is. Yes, maybe you’re the most complicated sexual being that ever existed. Because it doesn’t seem to be the same level of problem for most people.

John She was nice.

M I can tell.

John Yes.

M And now she’s following you.

John Yes.

M Lot of time on her big manly hands has she?

John I don’t

M Is she unemployed?

John Maybe.

Or

M Of course.

She’s retired.

John I was sat there, sat there in that coffee shop telling her she had to leave me alone, and it turned out she wasn’t following me, but it’s just we see each other on the way to work, and and I felt it you know

M Oh so fucking helpless.

John Well, I know what you’re implying with that but yes that’s how it felt, that I had these feelings and at least I’m not hiding it from you and there was nothing I could do

M Except fuck her.

John Yes

M Again.

John Yes, back to her place and

What are you? Most people seem to come together pretty well, their atoms hold, and you can look at them and go oh, that’s my mate Steve, that’s the queen, but you, you don’t seem to have grown coherently You’re a collection of things that don’t amount
You’re a sprawl
A mob.
You don’t add up.

Kiss me

Why should I that’s the one thing I have no intention, no reason to do absolutely no you’ve cheated on me twice and with a woman and I don’t know if that’s worse, and not just with a woman with some trannie

She isn’t

With some tall manly strange thing if we’re honest, we’ve uncovered this fetish of yours for Neanderthal women, and you’ve done it twice, you’ve put it in her considerable marshland more than once got exploring in the extensive rainforest she’s got hidden down there, you’ve splashed it around and now you come back and you want me to kiss you.

Forgive me.

Forgive you? No No No No.

Please.

Thank you.

Always, unfortunately John, for me, always. And I hope you realise what that means. That means that I will always be this unhappy because I have a feeling that as long as we’re together you will always do this to me, you will let me down, stand me up, cheat and lie and fail and cock things up like this, and then you’ll wonder why I tease you why I’m always going at you, being sarcastic well it’s the only way.

Then why are we

I don’t know.

Well

But we are.

Yes.

I mean I’m not going anywhere.

Okay.

But you have to make a decision you prick.

Are you going to kiss me again?

What?
No.

Okay. Sorry. I just thought.

Take your top off.

What?

For me.

Okay.

Thank you.

And the rest.

Why?

Because I’m about to make a decision for you, in your favour, and I want to remind myself of what we have, that we are so close, and I want to look at all of you and remind myself that I love all of you even the fat bits, because I think that’s the big difference between you and her – I’m I’m fascinated by her and I mean I think she’s just … wow! You know?

John why don’t you tell your mum all this, she’ll be pleased you’ve met a nice girl after all this time, well, I say girl.

Go on, take it off.

She always thought this was a phase and you’ve proved her right.

I think every inch of you is perfect.

Right.

And?

I like that bit at your hip where the skin looks really tight. I’m going to touch it.

So this is a decision yes?

I love all of you.

Okay.

So

So decision made yes decision made?

Decision. Yes. Yes.

I think
John  I think
Yes.
You think? For FUCK’S SAKE.
No. No I think.
I want some fucking commitment you

M  You.
Wet
Wet.
Fish.

John  Fish?
Maybe we should all meet up.
The three of us.

M  Finish it.
Yes, fish.
Fish, that’s what you are.

John  Oh look.

M  Yes, well it doesn’t mean anything.

John  Well.
This doesn’t mean we’re done about this.
It’s not over.

M  I don’t forget.
I’m like an elephant.
Like an elephant.

John  Yes.
Exactly what I was going to say.
I think we live close to each other.

What? Sorry. Sorry I’m sorry.

I think we must live quite, sorry I hope you don’t think this is scary but I see you often on the way to work, on the tube, then walking up towards the square. I recognise you, I think.

Sorry – is that weird? But I thought I might as well say.

No, no of course you recognise certain faces, there’s certain people you always see … there’s this one guy I saw must’ve been a student and he used to wear a long black coat, white make-up you know like a goth?

Yeah yeah.

And I’d see him every morning and what he was wearing was like fuck you to the world you know? and course he looked a bit stupid but I loved the fact he didn’t care.

Yeah.

I loved that, but then one day he got on the tube, and he was different, he’d had a haircut – and was wearing really normal, normal boring Topman clothes, everything about him had become like everyone else. I never noticed him again after that it was like he disappeared. Sorry that was a story wasn’t it? You didn’t ask for a story did you, just a oh look I recognise you, that’s all you expected a kind of passing, and look I’m still talking. Sorry I’m a bit.

It’s fine.

I’m a bit distracted.

Okay. It’s fine. Okay. You’re …

Yeah. Sorry.

Busy with … what? Work is it?

No no. Well yes, always, always busy with work but no

I split up with, my relationship finished. Two weeks ago.

I’m sorry.

And I’m still … It’s all I think about you know I expect you know what it’s like.

You want to get back.

No. No it didn’t work, it didn’t work at all it was horrible, I mean it’s like a, another
world now, already like another time, but ... you spend all that time sharing your life with someone else, and you don’t miss them because they aren’t physically there, you miss them because they’re not in your head, when you watch a film you don’t watch it with them any more, thinking of them, do you know what I mean? They’ve even left your own brain.

W I was married when I was twenty-three.

John Right.

W Divorced after two years.

John Yeah.

W I was a kid really I don’t know why I –

John But you’re not very – I know it’s not polite but how old are you now?

W Twenty-eight.

John Really?

W Twenty-eight?

John You look great.

W Thanks.

John Yeah yeah.

It’s weekends that are the problem. Weeks are fine, they’re great. Friday-night parties, after-work drinks this is when you’re in your element, you can do what you want, but it gets to Saturday afternoon and if you haven’t already planned to meet someone then you’re there on your own and you know that right at that moment there’s all these couples in the park, or going to Ikea you know? Sorting out the house. All these couples living the dream in their own world, doing things that couples do, doing the things they think they should do, but no no sorry that’s bitter I mean these couples want to set up home, you know, they’re thinking of the future. They’re trying out marriage. What would it be like, could we spend our whole lives together, and looking I’m going to be honest shit – Jesus I’m really talking here.

W I mean I’m so jealous of the ones that I think are really in love. I mean there’s that whole Bridget Jones thing of finding a man, but I’ll never do that I’ve been married, I’ve found a man, you know, but it didn’t work because it wasn’t right, I’ll never do it again I would rather be on my own than do that however fucking lonely I get. Ha!
John: So you do get

W: At the weekends yes, on a Saturday afternoon or the evenings if there’s nothing to do and your flat then seems very small and you’ve nowhere to go.

John: Yeah.

W: And you can’t really meet up with friends I mean you feel they’re doing it for your benefit. I’m not moaning here, you know that you do know that I’m just talking.

Well I suppose I’ve got all that to – I mean I agree it has to be completely right. I mean he always made me feel like I used to be, as I was when we met, and you know we met when I was twenty-one, twenty-two really young, and I was always the younger one and he wanted me to stay like that and it’s only now that I’ve realised, I’m a completely different person, and acting like that like twenty-two was making me so depressed I mean I just stopped talking, stopped having any real any real confidence.

W: It’s over now.

John: Yeah.

W: It’s good.

John: Yeah.

W: I know.

John: I know.

W: Fuck ’em.

Huh.

John: Yeah.

Huh.

W: Would you consider sleeping with a woman?

John: I see.

W: Well?

John: That’s

W: Yes.

John: I see.

W: It’s just a question. Please. We’re just talking.

John: That’s why you
No.

I don’t mind. That’s not why.

Some people might think you were scrawny but I think you’re like a picture drawn with a pencil. I like it. You haven’t been coloured in, you’re all Wire.

So what are you saying?

I have no idea.

It’s crossed my mind.

I noticed.

But I mean we’re …

But we’ve only just met.

Maybe we should.

Should?

Not.

Of course.

Ha ha ha ha you’re serious. I like it. Do I?

I don’t know.

Oh oops I’m scared.

I gave it away I’m shit-scared of you what do I say now?

Yes?

I’ve never found women attractive.

I’m not women, I’m me.

I know I know that I feel that.

So

I’ve never really looked at women I find them a bit like water when you want beer.

Or like a minimalist house with nothing in it.

When you’re someone who’s really into stuff.
Are you really into stuff?

John

There’s no

What?

John

Well.

Yes it’s different. Shall I just fuck right off where I came from.

John

No no no don’t fuck right off where you. Just

Just what just what then?

John

Just sit there and let me have a think of this all through.

Of course.

I miss him.

I’m sorry.

But maybe this is a way of

No. No. I don’t want to be a way …

No no.

Not a way, not a function. Only if it’s only about me.

Me.

Of course.

I really want to but I really am I mean I really am scared.

But we could give it a go couldn’t we, see what happens?

Whatever you want if it’s too soon. I mean I really like you I want to play a long game I certainly don’t want to rush you, but this feels

Important.

You know?

I certainly have biological feelings, things are happening without going into details when I look at you there’s definitely something going on.

For me too. Without going into details.

That’s good I

Gap on.

Gap on?
Gap. On?

W Yeah like a

John Yeah yeah I get it it’s funny.

W Huh.

Huh.

John I

Shall we go then?

W Yours or

John I don’t have a mine I mean mine is his, I’m on a sofa with with a friend so not mine we can’t go there so

W No problem.

John So we can’t go there.

W No problem.

All my life I’ve only really looked at men.
But this is.

John I mean actually now.
Now I’m looking at it.
It’s

W What?

John It’s quite nice.

W Like a Travelodge you mean?
Sounds like something you’d say about a hotel room quite nice.

John No I mean it’s got a shape. A sense to it.

W You can touch it if you want, but, and you may find this difficult, when you’re first starting – beginner’s guide this isn’t it? – but please try to be delicate.

John I didn’t think there’d be so much hair.

W There isn’t so much.

John No I didn’t mean it like –

W You can imagine I’m a man down there if it would make you feel more

John No. There’s nothing, nothing like this on a
No. There’s nothing, nothing like this on a

AAAHHH

Is that – was that a good aaahhh or a bad one?

Good one I think it’s just you’re it’s a bit, I mean, what are you doing?

Don’t really know.

No. Don’t stop. Don’t stop. Not saying it’s not –

It’s only it’s sort of odd. It’s a little bit like I’m a science experiment, you’re seeing how I respond to stimulae in different, when you … oooo

So circles are

Circles are … yes. good.

And what about in

In?

Inside

Yes in might be good in a minute if you just hang on for, or no, okay, if you do it now that’s fine.

I’m thinking all the time, though, you should know this, I’m thinking, I’m worried is there going to come a moment when I’m missing his cock. You know that I’m going to miss it like a world-class tennis player who gets to the final but had broken the racket he’s always

AAAHHH

Always played always won with and he doesn’t miss it until that big game, that big point, but at that moment, the moment of pressure that’s when he really

Okay. Okay. Shush now. How are you doing?

Hard at the moment. If that’s what you mean.

Yes, this is good.

Seems to be. I do like you.

So take them off. I want to see it.

Okay.

Okay okay okay. Yes. Yes.

Right. That’s.

That’s really
John: What you were expecting?

W: I mean you’re getting into this aren’t you?

Yeah. I really like you. I’m so happy, I was so worried that although that’s what I thought that I really was into sexually, romantically everything I was worried that actually it was just wishful thinking that maybe I wanted the children and the house and the life and what I considered normality, and that was really what I – but it’s not. It’s something really simple.

It’s this.

There it is, looking at it.

It’s simple.

I just fucking fancy you so much.

Yeah.

Look at it there.

Just look at it.

I won’t touch it for a moment.

I just want to appreciate it Twitching like that.

Sort of Throbbing

I just want to look at it.

Before it goes inside It’s good isn’t it?

And alright.

What if

Maybe now.

I just touch the end. The bit I know about. Just with my little finger. Nail. Just a very light

John: Aaaaagh.

W: Yes. And it twitches when I do that. Doesn’t it?

John: Yeah. Aaaaagh

W: It twitches. It wants to get inside.

John: Yes.

W: It wants to fuck me to bits.
W  It wants to fuck me to bits.

John  I think it really does actually yes.

Well here it is.
It goes in here.
So.

W  In it goes
Do your worst.
Oh.

John  Oh.

Yes

W  Oh

John  Yes

OH!

W  YES!

John  I don’t know how to explain but the thing is you have to stop following me.

W  Sugar?

John  Don’t call me

W  Do you want some sugar?

John  Right.

W  In your coffee?

John  I don’t want this coffee I only said yes to try and normalise the situation.

W  You head is very square I never noticed that before.

John  Can you please listen. I know you might be mad.

Oh come on. Mad? The situation? Don’t patronise me John. Following you? We have the same route to work, we always saw each other you messed me around thought we have something and you go back to him. I’m angry John, I’m really fucking angry. I’m not following you, we just can’t stop looking at each other.

I mean I think there’s still something
But you went back to him I hope you’re happy.

W  The problem is we can’t stop looking.
I think you are really really scared.
night, what you let yourself think for a moment that maybe it was okay, maybe it was allowed, and as I said before I’m just very honest and I have a feeling it’s only a matter of time before the things that’ve been nudged out of place in your head find a new a new pattern and you realise that, John, you can do what you like. It’s okay.

**John** You think I still like you.

**W** Because

**John** I don’t.

**W** But if you did

**John** I don’t.

**W** What would you

**John** I’m gay

**W** What would you

**John** I wouldn’t

You see you can’t even bear the question let alone the answer, you’re trapped with him, and what he thinks you are but I know John, I know there’ll come a time in a bit when you’ll need someone to catch you because when it hits your whole world will really go upside down, more than it did before.

**John** I’m in a relationship now.

**W** I know. You went back but you’re pretending.

**John** I love him.

**W** Like that. You’re accustomed. It’s what you’re used to, that’s all.

**John** Yes, I mean it’s only ever been

And I’m something so different.

**W** And you’re worried.

But you can’t stop looking.

**John** You’re very assured actually aren’t you?

**W**

**John** I said you were manly.

**W** Manly?
John: That’s what I told him.

W: I’m not.

John: I know.

W: I’m not manly.

John: I know but.

W: Why did you tell him that?

John: He asked what you looked like.

W: Is that what you think?

John: I didn’t mean – you’re not. It’s just.

W: You meant, what? My back? Shoulders?

John: I only said it to show him. To soften the blow, it’s stupid I know but when I’m with him I always start to say – I mean I don’t think you’re manly at all.

W: Right.

John: I just didn’t want to hurt him. If he thought you were.

W: It would’ve been better if you’d laid it all out. The truth.

John: I know.

W: Because you’re being a real wanker to both of us at the moment.

John: I still really like you.

W: I’m not following you.

John: I know.

W: You still notice me all the time on the platform on the tube, getting coffee.

John: You’re very noticeable.

W: Thank you.

John: And it scares me that’s true.

W: Yes.

Because if what you’re saying is right that I’m in the wrong place with the wrong person...
things we talked about –

John  Then...
I mean I’m so scared you’re right.
Because that’s what I feel.
I feel that you’re spot on.

So?

W  Sugar.
What are you going to do?

John

John  But whatever you can do.

W  You want me to look more manly.

John  No. I don’t mean

W  Strap my tits down, grow a moustache? What?

John  No, just not as feminine as you normally.

W  It’s insulting.

John  I’m sorry I’m sorry, but if, when you come round, he thinks I was lying on top of everything else.

I haven’t agreed to this, I haven’t even taken in what you’re asking I can’t work any of it out, you’re using all these words you’re throwing them all at me, and asking me to put them together why can’t you talk properly.

John  I don’t know, something to do with my brain

W  Got that right, something wrong with your brain, he wants me to come to dinner …

John  He wants me to invite you so we can talk.

W  We?

John  Yes to talk and we can see what should

W  There’s no we.

John  Well there is.

W  No there’s us us two but there isn’t a we a three people because I don’t give a shit about him you see, I don’t even know his name

John  It’s
It’s

I don’t want to know his name.

No.

Of course not. I only care about you. We spend every other day together have done for the last two weeks so where does he think you’re going what does he think you’re doing?

He thinks I’m coming here.

Then why doesn’t he leave you?

Or why don’t you leave me?

Because you told me you’d made a commitment a decision and now it’s dinner with the boyfriend so maybe I should, yes, leave you, you complete fuckwit – oh I’m sorry John don’t look like that but this time it’s true you needed to be stronger, why didn’t you say no, no Mr Boyfriend, that’s a completely fucked-up idea I think we should just call it a day.

I think he wants to understand it and we’ve been together for a long time you know so I feel I owe him something?

He wants to understand it why?

He wants to fight for me.

Him and me we must both be stupid what is it about you?

My eyes. That’s what people have always said, I’ve never had compliments about anything except my eyes I mean I don’t think I’m very good-looking, but my eyes.

Yes you’re right there is something about them.

You know I’d protect you, if anyone laid a finger on you ever I’d smash them I’d torture them, I promise no one’s ever going to do anything bad to you, I mean it.

Really.

When it comes down to it I’ll be there.

Yes. I do. I do know that of course I do I think that’s the thing.

It was never just the sex was it?

And as I said I don’t believe there’s only one in life, I mean I don’t believe that.

But I think you might be it.

For me.

The one.

That’s why I’m still here.

So. In that case. Please.
John Because if he meets you then he might see how in love we are and he might let me go.

W Let you go.

Jesus.

Jesus.

This is.

Look.

Maybe we should think about. We’re just going round in circles.

Maybe I shouldn’t see you again.

John Maybe.

I mean maybe I’m wrong.

And you aren’t the right person and I should give up.

Because there’s so much emotional crap that orbits you, you collect it like space junk and it’s always flying around you, and I’m tired, I’m tired of avoiding it all.

W I can see it now.

Floating about, round your head as I’m talking.

All this stuff.

So maybe we shouldn’t see each other any more.

John Yes. Maybe that’s best.

W Yes yes

John yes.

W

John
Three

M Are you going to get it?

John Maybe it would be better if you did. Maybe it would be better if you did. Show some willing.

M I’m cooking and she’s your guest, well I say she I mean I’m assuming she is technically a female even if she looks like Ray Winstone, no it’s your bit of fuckpuppetry John, you open the door to it.

It’s waiting.

Standing there – outside now

Knocking. Knock. Knock. What’s there? Does it have a name?

John Don’t call her ‘it’.

M I might I just might, I just can’t control my mouth, I’m on edge here John. You know that. And I just can’t I just can’t

John You invited her.

M Well I really want to know who turned your head.

Turned it right round like that girl from The Exorcist.

When are you going to tell her?

John Tell her?

M Tell her.

John Not before dinner.

M Dessert then?

John You said the whole point is that it won’t be so bad if she knows who I’m with. But if I tell her straight away she’ll turn round and leave so

M But you are going to tell her.

John Yes.

M Aren’t you you little bastard.

John She’ll think she’ll have the wrong house if I don’t go now.

M I think tonight might be your last chance.
M You can see how much I care about this.

John Of course.

M My hand is shaking with anger and nerves and God knows love for you and I’m having to go through this because despite what you say I have the feeling that I’m about to lose you and here I am trying to cut the fucking potatoes and I can’t because I’m shaking, and just now I cut my fucking finger because of you you prick.

John I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I promise I’m going to tell her, I’m never going to just leave you I promise you that isn’t what this is about.

M Well if you fuck this up I’m walking out. My own fucking flat you can have it I’d rather give you three hundred thousand pounds’ worth of flat than spend another moment waiting for you if you fuck this up.

John Okay.

M Now open the door before she punches a hole in it. I’m imagining a yeti that’s what I’m imagining I want you to know that, a kind of big horrible creature like she’s made by Jim Henson and operated by two men inside, deep voice, like she’s something from Labyrinth what’s that thing that thing I’m thinking of they had it on Blue Peter.

John Please.

M What’s it called?

John Ludo.

M Yeah. Ludo. Ludo!

John Go on then.

M Right right.

John Jesus.

Hi. Hi.

M Hi.


W Okay.

John You look really good.

W I tried to look less feminine.
Right.

I failed.

I can see that.

It’s difficult, I’m not going to shave my head, and I tried on these horrible jeans but whatever I did just looked stupid so in the end I thought fuck you John, I’m going to be proud of us, proud of you and look feminine, look really feminine.

No it’s perfect.

You’re completely right.

I love it.

Not manly at all.

Right.

Don’t you want to come in?

Not really

Right.

Can I take your coat?

Thanks. Is he?

He’s in the kitchen.

He’s cooking.

I said I would do it, but he wouldn’t have it he says I’m terrible at cooking.

I don’t think you’re terrible at cooking.

It’s not a competition.

Not terrible. You’re not

It’s not a competition please please it mustn’t be that.

Then what is it really?

He just wants to talk I think.

How’s he going to take it? I feel sorry for him actually I mean this is

Do you want to come through?

The living room.
John: Yes.

W: Is it yours? The flat.

John: Ours.

W: Great.

John: Shall we sit down?

W: Aren’t you going to introduce us?

John: Well … yes. Yes. Do you want a glass of wine?

W: Red or white?

John: Either, yes, which?

W: Whatever goes with the food, what are we eating?

John: I have no idea.

W: Okay.

John: I’ll find out. Oh. Well.

Oh.

M: Hello.

John: Here he is.

W: Hi.

M: Introductions.

John: Yes. This is

W: We’ve heard a lot about each other I’m sure.

M: You’re not manly.

W: No.

M: He said you were manly.

W: He lied.

M: I can see that.

W: I’m

M: Very feminine yes yes, that’s clear.
W Tits and everything sorry.

Tits and hips and everything don’t be sorry darling. Don’t be sorry. I’m sure he doesn’t mind. Well.

Interesting fabrication John.

Manly.

W Yes.

M An explanation?

John No.

M Right.

Well I don’t know what he told you about me but I can be pretty feminine too. Nice dress.

W Thank you.

M Glad you’ve made an effort. I did as well as you can see, but John seems to think this is an informal affair.

W I don’t think it really matters.

M Are you not going to enter into this conversation John? I mean it’s a really good one, I’m really loving it, don’t you want to take part?

John Look, she’s only just got here.

And already it’s awkward! Who’d have thought? Never mind. It’s beef we’re having beef so I would recommend red. I heard you through the walls can’t say a word in private in this house, but that won’t matter because tonight we’re all going to be very open and honest. Aren’t we?

W I hope so

M A full and frank discussion.

W Red please.

M Red it is.

W Thank you.

M I’ll go and find a suitable bottle, I’m sure you have this, you have different bottles suited to different occasions, some for when really very important guests are here.

W I’m happy with whatever.

M Others for when guests are less important.
John: Can you stop being so fucking bitchy.

M: BUT THAT’S WHAT THIS IS.

JOHN: ISN’T IT?
THE ULTIMATE BITCH FIGHT.

M: No.

JOHN: It doesn’t have to be.
You just wanted to meet her. That’s what you said.

M: Can I just confess I don’t know why either of us are even in this situation. I mean look at him. Look at that!

W: It’s a nice jacket.

M: I wasn’t pointing at his jacket sweetheart.

JOHN: Why are you calling her that? When did you get so fucking

M: He’s pathetic.

JOHN: Camp?

W: Well I don’t think he’s pathetic at all.


And neither do you really. You’re trying to make yourself feel better but you don’t need to be mean like this. I’m not mean. I appreciate him there’s respect maybe that’s what he went looking for.

M: Yeah but if you lived with him.

W: I don’t play games.

M: But if you lived with him.

W: Yes I’d like to.
I’d like to do that.

M: Red yes?

W: Whatever you think is appropriate.

JOHN: I’m sorry.

W: Don’t be.

JOHN: You like my jacket?

W: What?

JOHN: You said you liked it yes?
W Yes.
John And how do I look generally?
W Fine.
John No oh no don’t say fine. It’s not about fine, it’s about better than fine, it’s about being brilliant, being exciting. So
W I think you’re beautiful, very exciting John. I love your clothes. I love the bits of mess you have it’s all very you it’s a halo of disorganisation and I love it.
John Thank you.
M Red.
W Thank you.
M Shall we sit, dinner will be a little while.
W Alright.
Well.
M Shall we play a game?
John What?
M Cards?
John Discuss the news?
John No.
John What then?
John Talk.
M About?
John Get to know each other.
M We don’t like each other.
John You might get on.
W What do you do?
M Builder.
W Really?
W I’m a classroom assistant.
M Not a proper job.
W I like it.
M But really you want to be …
W I’m very happy.
M But really.
W Really.
M But really.

Yes alright maybe retake my A levels, train to be a doctor, in an ideal world that’s what I’d do.

Okay.

M What happened first time round?

M With your A levels.

M Tragedy or stupidity? It’s always one or the other.

Broken family, death of a parent, the child goes off the rails something like that, or alternatively they’ve always been a bit thick but no one’s ever told them, and then they get their results and it’s staring them in the face. D F E spells stupid. For them. So? Is that what happened? Stupid is it?

W I didn’t give a fuck.

M You didn’t give a fuck. Oh. You didn’t give a. That’s clever you didn’t give a fuck. Oh.

W I hated school so I got out, started my own business.

M Doing what?

W Tourist guides of the city.

M Tourist guides of the fucking city but now you’re a babysitter so

W Teaching assistant.
Yeah but that’s the same so it all fucked up did it?

Worked for ten years, then yes eventually it fell apart yes.

I’m in business.

Really?

Yes he is.

Broker.

Fulfilling?

Not the point is it ‘fulfilling’?

But you’re happy?


That bit was honest what I just said, John tells me I should point it out when I’m honest because it’s so rare but yes, actually, thank you for asking I’m actually genuinely happy.

Well that’s good.

Is it just me or does it feel like we’re all waiting for something to happen?

Why did you fuck him?

I thought it would be good, I don’t think that’s the surprising bit, it’s surprising I felt anything. It’s surprising it turned into a relationship and that we’re all here now.

In my flat.

In your very nice flat yes.

Yes. Okay.

Yes.

I think we have a lot in common.

Well we certainly have one fucking thing in common.

I’ll go and check on the food. But that’s just an excuse to leave really.

Honesty again there.

Music?

No.

I’m sorry. This must be horrible.
I’m not going to let you go John.

Thank you.

But you could contribute a little more.

You’ll break that.

Sorry.

What is it?

I don’t know it was on the side.

Is it yours?

I don’t know what it is, I’m sorry I’m not speaking, I’m sorry, I know it’s weird but I’m trying to work out how to handle this who to be because I’m two different people with the two of you when you’re separate and now I’m in the middle and no one.

Be yourself.

But I have absolutely no idea who that is, everyone else seems to have a personality a character but I’ve never, I’ve never – I used to do voices, I remember this, and I don’t think anyone can really understand it when I say it but I remember one moment when I couldn’t think what was my own voice, I’d been doing high voices and northern voices and men’s voices and impressions of the teachers and my dad, and people on the telly and everyone was laughing and I tried to go back to my own voice but I couldn’t remember what it was.

Sit down.

It’s alright.

And I always stand in front of the mirror for ages, every day I never know what to wear, when I go shopping for clothes I bring him and he says it’s up to you, what do you like, and I think I don’t know I don’t have a fucking clue just choose something that isn’t too strange, that means I don’t look like a fucking idiot.

I think you look lovely.

Thank you.

And it’s simple. You just need to pick the right moment.

For …

To tell him.

Right.

Then you’ll know exactly who you are.
John  Right …
Yes

W  You are going to tell him aren’t you?

John  Of course, otherwise you wouldn’t have –

W  That’s the only reason I’m here.

John  Exactly.

W  When?

John  Dessert?

W  Yes yes.
Sorry.
Yes.

John  Well?

M  What? What?

John  How is it?

M  It’s ready.

John  Okay well shall we sit down then, shall we make a start because I doubt any of us want this to go on all night.

M  No, we’ll wait.

John  For what?

M  We’re expecting one more.

John  I’m sorry?
I beg your sorry. We’re expecting …

This is private, you know what that means? Or is this something you’re orchestrating something you’re setting up is this a trick, or a trial or what? Is this a fucking shaming or an inquest? Who who who is it? Who is it?

M  It’s my dad.

John  Your dad?

W  Ha

John  Your dad? Why?
He’s been lonely since Mum died and he doesn’t get out much and I thought

**John**  COME ON!

Well I’m regretting it now if I’m honest I’m regretting it now, but when I didn’t know what she was like when I thought she might be a bruiser or eight feet tall you know you’d painted this picture and I thought it might be good to have some back-up. I thought it’ll be two against one, and I was talking to Dad about it and he offered to come round. Course now I’ve met her, of course I know I didn’t need to I mean no offence sweetheart but I’m not threatened but anyway he’s invited now and he’ll be here in a minute and we just have to deal with it okay?

**John**  So he knows.

**M**  Yes.

**John**  He knows about all of it?

**M**  …

**John**  You told him.

**M**  I was *upset*.

**John**  I’m sorry I’m really sorry I’m sorry you’re here for this, this is

It’s okay. I can see that it might be intimidating the two of us, and there’s only one of him, not that this is a fight, not that we’re fighting for you, but no I can see why he’s been invited.

**W**  You’re a fuck-up.

**M**  I’m not the cause. I’m not the cause of any of this.

Maybe we shouldn’t talk about it. When he gets here. Maybe we should just have dinner and talk about uncontroversial things like politics or religion or cricket he likes cricket doesn’t he?

None of us know anything about cricket.

**M**  Do we?

Unless you …

**W**  No.

No. Exactly. We all hate cricket. We can at least agree about that and anyway. You think we could all sit here for an hour and *not* talk about it? He’ll want to. He’s raring to go, because he loves you too John, he thinks we’re great together he’s completely disappointed in you for this. When I told him it was on the phone and it’s difficult to tell but I think he was really upset he said absolutely I absolutely want to come and back you up give John a piece of my mind that’s what he said so I don’t think there’s any stopping him.
Well this is a farce now, that’s what this has become. This was serious, now it’s parents and tarts and vicars and I think we should cancel I really think that we should

John. Calm down. I’m sure he’s a reasonable man. We’re all civilised.

He eats tinned food straight from the tin I don’t know.

I eat tinned food straight from the tin I think more people do that than you would imagine.

Oh God oh God oh God this is the worst night of my life.

John

I might check on the beef again.

NO. You know the beef is fine, you’re staying here and when he gets here you’re opening the door he’s your guest. Stay there.

John

You’ve nearly been crying all night like there now you’re nearly going now … see it does matter of course it does and for me, I mean if you really think about it tonight could change everything. I turn one way I have children and a normal family

Normal.

I turn the other way and I’ll always be wondering if I made the right decision. Our whole lives turn on tonight.

I thought you’d made your decision John.

Well I I I

Oh God.

Of course he hasn’t made a fucking decision he says it in the moment he says he knows what he thinks but really I mean why do you think I invited my dad?

You don’t know him as well as I do. He’s worse than you think. There’s all sorts of things you’ll come to realise.

Really?
Oh no. No.

Please.

Oh of course wonderful, and there he is. Fuck. Go on then answer it. Let’s get on with it. I might be cutting my wrists when you get back.

Dad.

Hell of a time getting here. Tubes. Tube tubes. Hello. How are you?

It’s good to see you.

Is she here?

They’re both through there.

Bought you some wine.

Thanks.

Red. Don’t know if it’s good. Hard to tell isn’t it, but it cost over seven pounds and that’s what they say isn’t it? If you go over seven pounds you can’t go wrong really.

Thanks Dad it’s very considerate.

Come here.

I’m sorry I’m sorry. It’s so difficult.

Come on.

I thought it was all set for. For ever but he’s sat there, he’s just sat there and I don’t know any more I don’t know if he cares.

Come on. We’ve got work to do haven’t we? Haven’t we? And I’m here. I’ll always be here for you.

But you won’t. Dad. Not in the end. That’s the thing, you won’t. You’ll die. But I always thought when you did at least he’d always be …

Well you’ve got me tonight at least. Shall we go through? Yes? Alright then.

You’re very understanding.

Well we can’t let this go can we. This is what you want?

Yes.

Well then. Off we go.

Into battle.

Through here?

Hello.
I’m his father.
Hello John.

John  Hi.

F  You must be the other woman.

W  I must be yes.

F  You’re not manly.

W  No I’m not.

F  He said you were manly tall with big hands that’s what he said.

W  A lie was told I’m afraid.

F  Not that it changes things.

W  No I agree I don’t think it changes anything.

M  Dad brought a bottle of red.

John  Oh. Did you? Thank you. It’s very kind.
It’s good to see you. I’m glad you’re here.

F  You are?

John  Well, all views are.

F  Yes well I have my views

John  Yes I’m sure.

F  I have my views can I sit here?

John  Yes yes.

F  Good. What are you cooking?

Beef. I thought we’d sit outside actually.

M  In fact, now we’re all here, shall we go straight through? Just through the doors at the back. I mean it’s a nice evening so … John will you show them? And I’ll bring dinner through in a second.

John  Alright.

F  Fine.

Through here?

John  Yes
Does it matter where I sit?

John: No anywhere anywhere you like.

F: Maybe you two should sit together?

W: I’ll sit here.

F:

John: Alright.

F:

He’s right.

W: Golden isn’t it? Like Spain or something. A really nice evening.

F: Well it’s nice weather but I don’t know if I’d go that far.

W:

F:

W:

F:

W:

F:

Look I think we should all be pleasant, I think that’s better for everyone.

F: But this isn’t pleasant at all, is it?

W: Even so, I do hate rudeness.

F: Really?

W: Whatever the situation, call me old-fashioned but I do prefer courtesy. Consideration. It’s how we get things done in a civilised way. Don’t you think?

F: Where did he find you?

W: Oh well. Didn’t last long. Rudeness it is.

F: John?

He didn’t find me, Jesus Christ, I thought you were supposed to be from the days people had respect or something.

He didn’t find me anywhere, we just always used to see each other around then eventually we got talking. Then we had sex and we discovered all the time that there was something there.

That we were falling in love.

Is that a fair summing up John?
John  Yes. Yes. That’s right.
W  And before you complain, no, he wasn’t in a relationship at the time.
F  That’s what he told you?
W  They had broken up, the relationship was over.
F  Well it isn’t over now.
John
F  John why don’t you speak up for yourself?
I really don’t know.
John

That’s the last apology I want to hear that won’t get us anywhere. And I think in the end this will come down to something very simple. You’re being selfish.
F  I think you need to work out what you are. Fast. I think you need to work out what you are.
M  There.
W  Smells great.
F  He’s a good cook.

There …
And there …
M  John do the wine.
Do start straight away when I’ve.
John  Red for everyone?
M  Yes.
F  Yes.
W  Thank you.
F  Good. Good. You don’t say grace do you?
I don’t think anyone does these days.
M  What do you …
We never said grace Dad. We never.
Well I do now.

Oh.

Since your mother died I’ve become a bit different, I think it changes you when you’re living on your own. Saw those children on the television in Bangladesh or wherever that flood was. You know and they don’t have food or water to drink, so these days I tend to say grace, not because I believe in God but because it’s good to remember how lucky we are.

I really agree with that.

You do?

Yes. I think that’s absolutely right.

Don’t try to flatter me.

I’m not.

I think that’s spot on.

Right

I’ve been on my own for a while too.

Have you.

Difficult sometimes isn’t it?

What are you doing?

Dad, do you want all the veg.

What?

Veg?

Oh yes, thanks.

So are you going to say grace? Or …

No it’s all been said now. And we have more important things to discuss really don’t we?

John

Right.

Please start, please do start.

You need to work out what you are don’t you?

That’s at the heart of all this.

Yes?
Because it’s certainly not his fault, and although I don’t know her, and I’m sure she had some hand in it, some kind of temptation whatever it was, well, we mustn’t blame her. It’s not her responsibility at the end of the day it’s yours. There will always be other people, as well you know, it comes down to your behaviour.

It’s down to you.

When you came home with my son, and you said you loved each other, it took some getting used to of course, I mean I’ve never thought it was wrong but it’s just not how you imagine your life turning out when you have an only child, of course you hope for grandchildren and not, you know you hope for biological grandchildren really, but we’re well past that now, we’ve had years to get used to, no not get used to, appreciate how lucky we are that our son is happy. And when my wife died that was her greatest happiness. That our son had found someone he loved. You John. You.

Please please don’t make me feel guilty I do know the situation I’m well aware of what’s going on and how important it is.

Hear me out John.

Yes hear him out please please don’t answer / anything.

The fact is that some of us like women and some like men and that’s fine that’s good in fact that’s good, a good thing, but it seems to me that you’ve become confused.

Yes?

I don’t know maybe you want children that’s understandable, maybe you’re having a crisis of confidence, maybe you think for some reason you want to be more … normal, in some way, but the thing is, and I want you to know this, is that I love you as you are.

You love my son, and you’re a wonderful person

I think you’ll both be happy for your whole lives.

So I see this as a blip, is what I’m saying.

I’m sorry love.

You’re a blip.

Love.

You’ve never been interested in women before. Said so yourself.

That’s right never before but

Well then. So this is obviously about something else. You’re subconsciously trying to prove something, and we won’t blame you for that, but you have to understand it has consequences for the people involved. Yes I think of course we grow in our lives, we evolve to some extent, from one year to the next, but we can’t deny that some things are fundamental some things are genetic. Baldness, or height, or sexuality. It’s built in. You don’t choose. I mean if we don’t accept that we’re back to what, how it was when I was growing up, prosecution, prison, cures, yes? Before your time but not for me, I remember it, when they thought something had gone wrong with people and we don’t believe that now, we don’t believe that something goes wrong or really in the end you have a choice, we think it’s simply down to the chemicals in your brain, they go one way you like girls,
they go the other way you like men and so on. It’s how you’re born.
No?
This is right.
Yes?

M  Yes.

John  I don’t know, I don’t – maybe it’s not a switch, one way or the other, maybe it’s more like a stew, complicated things bubbling up –

W  Did you plan that speech?

John  God…

F  This is what we call conversation actually, it used to be popular.

W  No, because you didn’t really seem to be thinking it, it was just coming out of your mouth. Your brain was elsewhere.

F  I don’t know what you’re talking about.

W  You kept looking at my breasts as you were talking there there you’re doing it now.

John  The Romans.

M  What?

John  The Romans just loved whoever they liked didn’t they? They didn’t have any of this.

M  The Romans fucked kids John, I’m not sure they’re our best examples.

F  Look /

M  They threw slaves to the lions.

F  I’m not easily offended.

John  What this feels like actually …

F  But I can’t let this go, I’m not looking at your breasts sweetheart don’t flatter yourself

W  What is it with sweetheart what year is this? / Sweetheart?

M  Does everyone like the beef?

John  Yes.

W  Yes it’s very good.

F  If I wanted to look at your breasts maybe I would but no thank you.

Your eyes flicker towards my body all the time. Scanning me up and down. I don’t think
men realise how obvious it is. All through what you just said, your brain was elsewhere, you were thinking actually she’s quite attractive thought she’d be a dog but things have changed now now she’s actually quite hot actually maybe you’re now imagining a situation tonight where John goes back to your son and I’m upset and need comforting and you walk me home one thing leads to another, doing me in the shower, up against the wall, the water over my naked body or something, / this is how your brain works, you’re a man, it’s fine.

I don’t believe this. Quite obsessed some nymphomaniac / you’ve found Nymphomaniac what a fucking pathetic fucking offensive sexist little fucking thing to say if you don’t mind me pointing it out but anyway it’s alright, there’s no need to be defensive, it’s not that I think a man of your age shouldn’t be thinking about sex, I think it’s very healthy, but maybe not when he’s giving a lecture about being faithful. Don’t pretend you’re on some kind of fucking high ground when actually you’re down here in the sexy fucking dirt with the rest of us looking at my tits.

I understand, you think you’re being shocking / but I’m not naive you have to understand, I’m really not.

I mean I take it as a compliment actually. It’s always nice to have attention.

Yes yes. / Alright.

I know you just care about your son.

Yes.

That’s right. I do.

Of course you do.

But you see what I’m getting at.

Glass house yes?

And I have a question. Was your wife gay?

My wife is dead.

Obviously I meant when she was alive.

No. She wasn’t gay.

You?

Look

Of course not.

Not secretly, looking at men in magazines

Please stop it. Now.
W  Or your father?
F  No.
M  John, tell her to stop.
W  How do you know he hasn’t ever looked at a man? He could’ve done. Nothing wrong
with it.
M  I think he would’ve mentioned it when I came out.
W  But your mum was alive then so
F  I’m not gay.
W  In that case, if it’s genetic where’s the gene?
Because I can’t see it.

Of course in the past, I’m sure the gene was there, of course, but was repressed in some
way, hidden, and that’s a shame, that’s not right. But luckily it’s different now and we can
be open about what we are, so, John.

John  I’m sorry.
F  You’re telling us you’re bisexual.
John  No.
F  It’s alright, there’s no judgement or –
John  No. I mean there’s never been any other women so

What then?
John?

Who are you really?
F  It’s alright.
Take your time.
Take your time.

I’ve had enough.
M  You’ve been sat there dribbling into this really nice food that I’ve prepared stirring it
around and around and we’ve all been trying to ignore the scratching and the mumbling
and all of that, and you obviously you would rather throw our whole lives away than
make a decision, yes?

John  Right. So I’ve had enough. I’m making a decision for you.
I don’t want you. Maybe I’ll find someone else, I don’t know, I don’t think they’ll be as right as you but I can see now that you’re never going to be happy never in your life, so go on go away with her and fuck it all up without me.

Now / hang on …

I’ve lost.
I’m the loser.
Out on the floor.
KO. I’m dead.

Just wait / … you’re getting.

Off you go.
Off you fucking trot.
Now.

Out
Out.
Out of my house please
Go on.

Really?
Yes.

Really though?

Alright.

No. I’m sorry.

What?

You can’t reject him. That isn’t fair. What am I supposed to do then?

I think you should stay out of this.
I think you should stay out of this.
It has to be John’s decision.

You understand that don’t you, really, you know it has to be down to him.
Because if he leaves now if you make it for him, you’ll never know, and I’ll never know, for sure.

Fuck.
Yes.

You’re right.

Yes.

Bitch.

You’re right.

But unfortunately that means we’re back to John.

Pass the wine.

There.

John?

What do you think?

It’s up to you.

John please –

Let him think.

I am that’s all he’s been doing but I want him to know that just because I’m not crying like your son or because maybe I can’t exactly articulate how I feel I am dying as well here.

He’s well aware of your feelings I’m sure.

He’s sinking.

Sinking?

Down down look at him quicksand the more he sits there and doesn’t do anything he –

Look … I …

Fuck. Oh fuck I’m losing you

Mad. / Mad

Okay. John.

I’m sorry.

It’s up to you.

John
It’s up to you.

Shit.
Okay
Sorry.

No.
I’ve.

Yes?

I love you.
I really do but sex with her is … better you have to, to know that I enjoy it more.

And we don’t argue, she doesn’t make me feel like I’m less than you, she makes me feel intelligent makes me think I can do things with how clever I am, win things, that I’m unusually clever and I’ve never felt that with you sorry but not in the same way do you understand that?

I understand / what you’re saying yes.

You always make me feel like shit because you’re so fucking insecure we’ve talked about that

We’ve talked about that yes we worked through exactly that / thing and I try

And we don’t have any plans for the future, you and me, you don’t like to speak about it, you close my mouth sew it shut whenever I mention it because you think we’re tempting fate or whatever but it means we’ve never progressed. And bringing your dad here, I mean what a fuck-up.

Her grass is fucking greener right now that’s / all.
You want to know what I am okay okay I don’t know okay.

When I was at uni and I finally decided I’d do it and come out, all these people hugged me and were proud of me and said how brave I was and suddenly people were touching me and I was wearing different clothes and I was part of a scene, even walking differently I think and everyone said the real me was emerging, that I’d been repressed, and so I thought I must’ve done the right thing then, but it didn’t feel like that to me. I had to make more of an effort than before, and yes I fancied men, a lot a lot but I never got why that changed anything other than who I wanted to fuck. What did it matter? Gay straight, words from the sixties made by our parents, sound so old, only invented to get rights, and we’ve got rights now so

Some rights, not enough and they’re under attack all the time and not properly defended in this country / even without people like you – how did we get on to this?

They’re horrible horrible words what they do how they stop you

and I can see now I can see that it’s about who the person is. Not man or woman but What they’re like. What they do. Why didn’t anyone say? I thought I thought your generation was all for that. Peace. Love. So why are you telling me that what I sleep with is more important that who I sleep with?

You love my son. That’s what’s / important.

Why are you telling me I have to know what I am? It doesn’t matter, I love him because he makes me toast in bed and he’s scared of cling film. I love her because she makes me feel as old as I really am.

She’s gentle.

You’ve never been that.

Gentle. No.

No.

No.

But then again.

Maybe you’re right, you might be the devil but at least I know what I’m getting into.

Yeah not a decision all that though is it?

I seem to be holding her hand don’t I?

If you say so.

Maybe you should both … go then. I … I need to get dessert.
John. No.

I don’t understand this.

John.

This isn’t you.

You’ll regret this.

I better check.

Come on. Let’s go.

John?

I just want to be happy.

We will be.

Yes.

You told him, he knows now.

Yes oh, but but they’re right everyone I’ve ever looked at or had sex with or anything has been a man so

/ That doesn’t matter

except you and you seem perfect but maybe I’m depressed ill

/ No

or probably this is just madness some emotional problem as he said no one else has these issues so maybe I need to –

You love me.

some psychosis caused by a homophobic society or something.

John you’re thinking everywhere.

Maybe they’re right, it’s what I’m born with, my genes, my my my nature, just men, just gay, clear and

This isn’t good for you. This house, him, look at how you are right now, he makes you feel young and small and stupid and it’s not about sexuality at all, in the end, it’s what he does to you.
John
Yes.

W
So now’s when you leave.

John
Thank you. Yes. Yes.

So the dessert was cheesecake here it is: cheesecake. I made your favourite John your favourite in all the world, a nice cheesecake I think it was going to be a tactic a final gesture in case things hadn’t gone well a final bribe or flourish or something a really big cheesecake but too late now and am I not pathetic? I spent all my time on this and look at it big and goopy I feel so fucking stupid bringing it out now, really really I do but Dad said I should show it to you, show you what I did, the effort all that. So there it is John. There’s your cheesecake, if you feel like staying with me for a bit you could have some we could share a piece if you like but you’re going with her aren’t you so you should probably fuck off now, and me and Dad’ll eat it instead. Bye.

John’s made his decision.
We’re leaving. Both of us.

W
Thanks for the evening.
I’m sorry it’s been so difficult.

John

M

W
John come on.

John
I’m supposed to make a decision what I am.

W
What?

John
What I am.

W
No, you don’t have to,

John
Yes.

W
Why do you –

John
I’m tired.

W

John
I’m … Sorry.
It’s …

M
John: I can’t.

M: Alright then.
I’ll get your coat.

Here.
Here you are.
Your coat.
Your coat.

F: Here
Here
Put it on.
He’s made his mind up.
We’ve had enough now.
All of us I think.
Here.
Oh!

M: Fuck! What the fuck are you –

W: You want me to go? / John?

M: Are you alright?

F / Yes

W: So I’ll go for ever, and me wearing your shirt, in a hotel in Paris, walking around
glimpses of what’s between my legs,

M / Fuck

all of that and everything else in the future, all leaving, all going, me pregnant eating
biscuits and then the hospital bed, everything you described to me, everything we
imagined, you holding my hand, and Jack’s born and grows up there he is, and later
Katherine and later their kids all six of them, gathered together to see us, all of us around
the table at Christmas see? We’re all smiling and I’m still looking great even though
we’re old, and everything about us both is beautiful until we die together and happy, all of
that is walking out the door and you’ll be left with him. Just him. And his fucking cake.

So last chance.

Good decision John. Well done. Fuck you.

Shit.

Look at me. Before I go. Look at me. Right.

Bye.

I’m sorry. I’m sorry she was –

It’s alright.

It’s alright now.

Isn’t it? We’re fine.

Come here.

No.

No. Go away stand further away.

Well fuck you I thought I was the one you. This isn’t what I want.

I just. I think this is easier.

Okay.

Dinner was excellent.

Thank you.

Do you want me to stay tonight?
Or shall I …?

Yes. Stay. The sofa bed. In the spare room.

You’ve done it before. You know where it is.

Yes.

Maybe I’ll leave you, go upstairs, sort myself out.

Okay.

Good.

Love you both.

Thank you.

I mean it.

Huh.

Thanks Dad.

So.

You can help me take these through.

After seven years I wasn’t just going to let you go.

If you want children we can have children and Christmas and whatever all of that, we can have that ourselves, you know we can do anything you want we can.

Are you going to help?

No.

You see, there’s your nature. Coming through.

That’s genetic

Laziness.

Right there.

Can you go away, go away back inside the house and close the door and leave me out here for the evening on my own please.

You’ve made a decision now.

You can’t go back.

I KNOW.

I’m your fucking trophy.
Yes?
John?
John?
You fucking prick I’ll go I’ll go but I just need a yes from you.
Cushions and lights.
Yes?
One little word. One little word and I’ll.
Come on say it.
Say it.
Yes.
Say it.
Say it.
Yes I’ll bring them in when I come and switch off the lights.
Yes.
Say it.
Say it.
Say it.
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