

Instead of Beauty

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(Year of graduation: 2012)

April.

*Night, in a small town in Lincolnshire. **John** and **Matthew** are sitting on a bench, eating Chinese food out of takeaway trays. We can hear cars, bad live classic rock music, and drunk men singing in the distance. As they speak, they take spoonfuls of each other's meals.*

Matthew. Did you hear about Kayleigh?

John. Who hasn't?

Matthew. Tonight, I mean.

Matthew. She was hanging around outside Curry Palace, going up to any man that walked past from the Beerfest and saying 'I'll give you head if you buy me a pizza.' That's a direct quote.

John. What?! That's ridiculous!

Matthew. It's true.

John. A pizza? How much does a pizza cost?

Matthew. Depends what kind.

John. Meat feast?

Matthew. About £6.50... oh, hang on. You complete bastard, that's awful.

John. I'm not the one giving head for it. Don't shoot the messenger.

Matthew. I'm the messenger, I bloody told you.

John. Where were you, then? Sounds like you missed out.

Matthew. On Kayleigh? Christ – I'd rather get your face tattooed on my back.

John. Oh, come on. No you wouldn't.

Matthew. No, you're right, that'd look fucking horrible, I'd never do that.

John. But, Kayleigh. You would. Wouldn't you?

Matthew. She's like, fifteen.

John. Divide in two, add seven.

Matthew. That's fifteen and a half.

John. So?

Matthew. I don't know when her fucking birthday is! Anyway, it's still not legal.

John. Giving head in exchange for pizza probably isn't legal either, but it's happening, or it was.
Matthew. Out the back of the Conservative Club. They'd have a fit, wouldn't they. Immorality stalks the streets, yea, even here, in the tiny towns of England.

John. You're talking like a prick again. How much of that Strongbow did you have? After you gagged on it.

Matthew. About half the bottle. And I didn't gag, it was fizzy.

John. It wasn't that fizzy. *I* didn't gag.

Matthew. I'd taken the fizz off!

John. All right, whatever. How's your chow mein?

Matthew. Well, you tell me, you've eaten half of it.

John. And you've eaten half of mine. Share and share alike.

Matthew. Are you a Communist now?

John. What do you mean, now?

Matthew. As opposed to before.

John. I've been a Communist for years, mate. Years. Since I was ten. Remember when I tried to start a May Day riot?

Matthew. You were serious?

John. Of course I was.

Matthew. What were we actually going to do, anyway? Just the two of us. Throw a bin through the window of Woolworths?

John. Might as well have. It's been boarded up for months. We might have hastened their decline.

Matthew. By throwing a bin through the window?

John. It had to start somewhere. Well, there's always next year. You never answered me.

Matthew. It was all right. Finished it now, and I just feel kind of depressed and deflated. All the MSG, and then the low. It's weirdly post-coital.

John. Closest you'll get.

Matthew. Fuck off.

John. Closest you'll get tonight, then.

Matthew. Suppose so. Unless you put some Viagra in the Strongbow.

John. What? Why would I do that?

Matthew. You didn't hear?

John. Hear what? I know you want me, but -

Matthew. No, shut up. About James Lamprey. The appropriately named.

John. Mate, I have no idea.

Matthew. At Hannah's house party. You have to hear this. They were drinking wine, and they ground up a tablet of Viagra and put it in his glass when he went for a refill.

John. What the fuck?! Wouldn't he notice? Wouldn't it be all... milky?

Matthew. Christ knows. But anyway – apparently, it has to be 'activated'.

John. 'Activated'?

Matthew. Activated. So Hannah goes over to him and starts, you know, batting her eyelashes, stroking his knee. Sitting on his lap, telling him how sexy he is. Feeding him oysters.

John. Oysters?

Matthew. Not really, I just got carried away. But you know, stroking his thigh, pushing her tits out. However much it takes to gives him a raging boner.

John. Jesus Christ. Are you serious?

Matthew. Deadly.

John. Fuck! What happened after that?

Matthew. Well, he was just on for the rest of the evening. You know. Flying the flag. He just kept apologising. 'I'm really sorry, I don't know why this has happened.' *[Laughing]* Isn't that incredible?

John. I think it's horrible.

Matthew. What? Why?

John. Imagine if she did that to you.

Matthew. What? I'd love it if she did that to me!

John. No you wouldn't. Think about it.

Matthew. I'm thinking about it. Her hand on my knee. Sitting in my lap.

John. Yeah, and then afterwards, a massive fucking boner, all night. With no relief. You'd have balls so blue they could be painted by Picasso.

Matthew. Now who's talking like a prick?

John. Still you. It would be a bad idea, man. You would not enjoy it.

Matthew. I guess. Still, though – Hannah Drew.

John. Really? I don't see it.

Matthew. What's wrong with you?

John. What's wrong with *you*? She looks like a monkey.

Matthew. No she doesn't. All right, maybe a bit. But – sexy.

John. A sexy monkey?

Matthew. No! But... you know. Like – animal lust. She'd really fucking go for it. Like on a nature documentary.

John. This is some weird shit, Matt. Have you been whacking off to The Blue Planet?

Matthew. No, John, no, I haven't been doing that. Why would there be a monkey on The Blue Planet? It's under the fucking oceans, dipshit.

John. I dunno. Sea monkeys? Oh, Mum's text me. She's in the carpark, monkey-boy.

Matthew. I don't fucking – there's no monkeys involved! All right, whatever. Out of respect for your mother, I'll let this go quietly. But if you mention this tomorrow you're dying.

May

Lucy addresses a hall full of listeners. She is nervous, but mostly successful at not showing it.

Lucy. Hello, I'm Lucy, and I'm here to talk a little bit about the St Dunstan's International Youth Leaders Programme. It's a really great project – I've been involved all year, and by May I already know enough to be asked to come and give you a presentation on it, so it must be good training, mustn't it?

She giggles, a little awkwardly, then regains composure.

I found out about it from my minister around the time I was leaving school, so about this time last year. I told him I was taking a gap year, and I wanted to ask him for some advice on what I could do that would help people, something that wasn't just selfish, not just about me, and he suggested I look up St Dunstan's. Now, I'm not saying that if you don't do what I did, you're a bad person, or you're not doing something useful – it's great to travel, and learn about yourself, and how you fit into the world, but I wanted to help other people to do those things, and this seemed like a brilliant opportunity for me.

Um. I'll take some questions at the end, but first I wanted to – well, just to get on with it, really, and show you some of the things you could be doing. We provide relief from natural disasters in South Asia, and we do a lot of really valuable education projects, working in Africa in places affected by HIV/AIDS, and this is important, we don't judge how anyone lives their life – that's not our job. We just try to bring the love of Christ, and the help he wanted us to provide to the poor and needy, to as many places as possible.

Pause, while she looks at her notes.

And if that wasn't enough, I got to make friends with a tiger!

Another pause that goes on a little too long.

Anyway, enough from me, I'm sure you want to see for yourselves. Now, if I can just get this contraption to work, I can show you the first slide. Here it is. The first slide. I'll just get out of your way...

*The room goes dark and **Lucy** exits, a slide briefly blinks on and off, and then the lights come up on the next scene.*

June

***Matthew's** bedroom. **Matthew** lies in bed and **John** sits up in a sleeping bag on the floor. They are both experiencing the gradual fade of a long day's heavy drinking. A TV is on low, playing a late-night blockbuster movie.*

Matthew. I can't believe they're actually over, though.

John. Jesus. I can. What, was thirty-six hours not enough for you? Thirty-six hours. That's a *day* and a *half* of your *life*.

Matthew. Doesn't feel like that when you're in there, though.

John. It does for me. Shouldn't it feel longer for you, when you always finish with an hour to spare?

Matthew. I don't finish with an hour to spare, I have to write right up to the clock. My wrists kill.

John. Why? Wankers' cramp?

Matthew. You mean writers' cramp. Oh. Maybe not.

John. Do you ever get wankers' block?

Matthew. No. I can always think about your sister.

John. Oh, fuck off.

Matthew. Sorry. Don't do me in while I'm sleeping, will you.

John. Do you in? I'm not Nicholas Cage.

Pause.

Matthew. I'm turning the light off.

John. All right.

Matthew turns the light off. A few seconds of silence.

Matthew. Did you see Tracy earlier?

John. When?

Matthew. You'd know if you had. Running around the Well Head in a black bikini.

John. Oh. Don't think I missed much.

Matthew. She fell in the river. Her mum had to come out and take her home. The whole thing was a fucking mess, actually. Most people had gone home by three, I think. What's up with that?

John. I dunno. Maybe their tea was ready.

Matthew. Not exactly a massive celebration, was it? Two bottles of cava and some half-cooked burgers. Did you look at the packet? It worked out at 4p each. I paid him a pound for the fuckers.

John. Don't set your expectations too high. I thought I'd at least be getting a hand-job, we've all had our disappointments.

More laughter, then a pause.

Matthew. So I guess we're adults now.

John. Yeah. Adults. Like in the movies.

Matthew [*uncertain*]. Do you – wanna watch one?

John. What? A movie?

Matthew. Well, like... an adult movie. Porn.

John. What, with you? No, not really. What'd be the point?

Matthew. Suppose. Thought it might be funny.

John. I don't usually watch them to laugh, though.

Matthew. True. [*Beat.*] Do you ever feel bad, about it?

John. What for? Killing kittens?

Matthew. No, like – for the people in them. Cause, really, they're kind of, they're the same as

prostitutes, aren't they?

John. No, not really. I wouldn't go to a prostitute.

Matthew. Where did you go on the History trip, then?

John. I fucking *told* you, I was buying shower gel, all right! Jesus! How long are you going to bring this up for?

Matthew. All right, all right. Calm down. Sorry. *[Pause.]* Seriously, though. I mean – you're paying, for their bodies. And like... when you watch it on the Internet. You're not even paying. Not paying a prostitute – surely that's even worse. I mean, you couldn't do it. You'd get castrated, or something.

John. You think about this a lot, don't you?

Matthew. Well – sometimes. I just feel a bit guilty, that's all.

John. I don't think about it. I mean – I don't know them, do I?

Matthew. Be pretty bad if you did, wouldn't it?

John. No, that'd be great. Come on, man, you can't tell me you wouldn't like to see Susan Byers in a porn film. You know: champion horse rider, bites off more than she can chew.

Matthew. That's – kind of sick.

John. I don't mean that, obviously. But think about it.

Matthew. Yeah. I have actually. She'd never do it though. Far too rich already.

John. Oh, come on. She's a slag.

Matthew. On what evidence? Just rumours. I think it's all bullshit.

John. Sure it is. She's pure as the driven snow, mate.

Matthew. I'll drive your snow in a minute.

John. Not even going to ask. I'm going to sleep, Matt. It's been a long, long day.

Matthew. All right.

*There is silence for a few seconds – lines after this, until **Matthew** warms to his monologue, are delivered in mumbled, half-asleep undertones, **John** particularly drifting into sleep while **Matthew** becomes gradually alert.*

Matthew. I finished early today, actually.

John. Yeah? What did you do?

Matthew. I just looked around.

John. What at?

Matthew. People. It's funny watching people. The invigilators. Mr D. Cocking is a personal favourite. They're meant to stand behind the ugliest person in the room.

John. What, professionally?

Matthew. No, it's just a thing they have. *[Pause.]* Looked at the clock. Looked at Susan, for a while.

John. Yeah?

Matthew. Yeah. She was sitting a few rows away from me. To the right. If looks could kill. Jesus. If looks could fuck. I turned round so many times I got a crick in my neck. She was looking down, too much make-up, you could see a black bra through the white shirt, it didn't hide it at all.

John. Calm down.

Matthew. Go to sleep, then.

Pause.

Matthew. I wanted to tear it open then and there, to fuck her over the desk, in full view. Christ. I stared at her so much it must have been like infra-red, I'm surprised she couldn't feel it on her face. Like when they say your ears are burning – you know?

John grunts assent. Matthew takes a breath, making a decision, then continues.

Matthew. I felt as I wanted to crack open her skull. When she tucked her hair behind her ear her elbow just – *grazed* – her breast, and I thought, what if it was mine? Some people can lick their elbows. I wanted to lick hers. I had to keep drinking water. From the bottle I'd brought in. I don't usually, I'm glad I brought it today. Sports-cap, no screw-tops. I forgot what the word for 'shoe' was in German. Can you believe that?

He chuckles lightly, waits for a response, becomes sure he won't get one and carries on.

If she'd known what I was thinking she'd probably have left the room in terror. Lucky they can't. Ridiculous things. Unspeakable. If she could read my mind, God, I bet she'd never wear that skirt again. Or maybe she would. Just to spite me.

He looks around to see if John will react at all, but he simply snuggles further into the sleeping bag, apparently already too gone to hear. A very dim light appears on him as he continues speaking, looking up at the ceiling from his pillow, eventually rising to a sitting position.

I imagined the sound she'd make. When she came. Sort of spliced it together, from her voice when she laughed, and when she had a cough. On the last day, when someone sprayed her with a water-gun. It was like a remix.

I swear to God, if she'd licked her finger to turn a page, I could have lifted up the desk. It was almost telepathic. I thought, if I thought hard enough about it that the thing inside my brain would send its signals into hers until the walls of her head started vibrating.

In my head I had this vision of us nipping off into the toilets together, one after another, past Mr D Cocking. Up against the cistern, with the seat down. The cold white tiles and the smell of sweat and shit, and disinfectant, and her breathing in my ear like a hurricane. Her teeth were small and neat, but her tongue, it was like a living thing, all by itself. I saw it once and I wanted it to... explode in my mouth, like champagne. If she'd opened another button I think you could have seen the downy hairs on her neck.

She got up at the end and her legs moved and I wanted them around my neck, so tight I couldn't breathe, and my cock between her breasts, next to her heart. I forgot all the rules of anatomy, or logic. I guessed most of the answers without looking. I felt like I was a pornographer, scripting these little films in my head till the clock ran out. It was horrible and ugly, but my mouth had never been so dry.

I'm only telling you because I know you're not listening. I don't know why. Wanted to get it out, I guess. Kind of like coming again. But I wasn't jerking off or anything. Promise. Not that you can hear me. Well, never mind if you could. Nice to have a bedtime story.

July

Mary sits on the floor, cross-legged, with a glass of wine in front of her and a spliff in one hand. Her face responds to a question she has just been asked – she shakes her head, laughs a little, takes a long drag, breathes out, and then begins.

Mary. Well, if you really want to know. I mean, I feel a bit guilty, but you know, she's not here, is she. Don't tell her anything. Nadia, I mean. She's still off tickling elephants in Sri Lanka, or whatever she's doing. I think I was meant to go with her at some point, but you know, that was before. Sorry, I'm not very on-topic, am I? Maybe you should set a timer or something.

Right. We were in the dorm, in Redhouse – you know, the little attic room at the top, the prefects' bit. Just me and her, on a Thursday night. After sups. I don't know where Corinna was. Well, did we ever? Anyway. I suppose we'd both been drinking quite a lot; she smuggled in that blue vodka, or her brother brought it down, something like that. You know the one I mean, Kate, you threw half of it up into your hat in chapel the last time. I was trying to watch Friends on my iPhone, but I wasn't taking any of it in. The one where Joey's a rapist, or something. Anyway.

She comes up behind me, puts her arms around my neck. At first I thought she was trying to strangle me. But she just started stroking the necklace I was wearing.

Anyway. She had her hands around my neck, and she just – moved them down a little bit. Just a little bit. Sort of, step by step. To see how far she could take it. Well, I turned around, and there she was, and she didn't look like she was joking. I thought she'd look a little scared. I would have been. Like she was about to cry. But there was just this – determination. Dutch courage, I guess. Or Russian courage. Or wherever that blue shit came from. What would you have done? I had a strand of her hair in my mouth already. It was completely golden, in the light up there, and soft, and kind of sweet. She must have only washed it that morning. In that strawberry shampoo that everybody used to want to borrow.

Well, I took it out, just flicked it out with one finger, and she kind of brushed her nose against mine. As if she was asking a question. Her hands were still there, but now she had one finger on the top button, and the other one was taking the necklace off. I thought that was strange, at the time. She probably didn't want to be reminded. And then one of them was inside my bra, and she'd opened half the buttons before I even thought that I could stop her. But I didn't. I mean, it had been a while. I think we were all going a little crazy.

She tasted like the vodka. Of course she did. The whole room smelt of it for a week afterwards, I had to send Elena down to the village after CCF to buy a Glade air freshener. You know, from that fucking stupid advert. She tasted like the vodka, but also a little bit like the strawberries – her tongue, I mean. And she was really warm. I don't know why, I just didn't expect that.

And then I woke up with her knee in my eye. It was quite an experience. There. It's your turn, Kate.

August

John and Matthew are lying on their backs on the ground outside, bottles by their sides.

John. Would you rather -

Matthew. No.

John. You can't say no, I haven't asked yet.

Matthew. I don't want to answer, it's a no.

John. What if the question was 'would you rather fuck Scarlett Johansson or not?' You've already said no, what would you do then?

Matthew. You don't *have* Scarlett Johansson, do you?

John. What?

Matthew. It's a pointless question, isn't it, unless you're going to pull aside a curtain and suddenly reveal Scarlett Johansson my answer is basically meaningless.

John. Oh, Matthew! You used to be cool.

Matthew. There's nothing cool about this.

John. Your mum, or your dog?

Matthew. I'm not answering this.

John [*chanting*]. MUM OR DOG! MUM OR DOG!

Matthew. Neither.

John. Neither's not an option!

Matthew. What would you do?

John. Your mum, any day. She's been missing me lately. I touch her in places your dad can't reach.

Matthew. Fuck off. *Your* mum, shit-face, or it doesn't make sense. And it's your dog as well. What's your answer?

John. I don't answer the questions, I ask them.

Matthew. I'm not answering.

John. Drink, then.

Matthew. Why?

John. That's the rule.

Matthew. Since when has that been the rule?

John. Since you stopped answering the questions.

Matthew. Fine. I need it anyway.

He starts to drink.

John [*casually*]. Oh, I meant to tell you, I saw your mum the other night. On this bestiality website.

Matthew does not respond.

She was getting done by this *man*...

Matthew sprays his drink everywhere and starts hitting John in the arm. A brief struggle ensues, ending with John sitting on Matthew's chest.

John. I'm going to shit on your chest.

Matthew. If you do I'll kill you.

John. I'm not *really!* God.

He gets off and sits by his side again.

John. If the hottest girl in the world – the hottest girl in the *world*, Matthew, better than Scarlett Johansson, any day – wanted to fuck you, but she'd only let you do it if she could take a shit on your chest, would you do it?

Matthew. What?

John. Simple question.

Matthew. How is that a simple question?

John. Yes, or no?

Matthew. I don't know. I'd cross that bridge if I came to it.

Silence.

Matthew. Can there be a tissue?

John. No tissue.

Matthew. OK, end of this, talk about something else or I'm going home. I have to get a lift home at eleven.

John. *Eleven!?* Don't be a pussy.

Matthew. My mum's got work in the morning!

John. I'll have a word with her.

Matthew. Don't start. *[Beat.]* It doesn't feel like summer.

John. It's the evening.

Matthew. Fuck you. It doesn't feel like a summer evening.

John. Why not? It's hot enough.

Matthew. Yeah, I know. It's weird. I just thought it would feel like the end of something.

John. That's winter.

Matthew. No, like – you know. It's over. Consigned to the flames.

John. You talk some shit sometimes.

John takes a swig from his bottle.

John. Kiss me.

Matthew. What?

John. Kiss me. Go on. Just to try it.

Matthew. Are you serious?

John. Come on, man, we're leaving soon. You know you want it.

Matthew. No. You're drunk.

John. Fine, never mind. Thought it'd be a laugh.

Matthew. Ha, ha.

John. No need to be a dick about it, just thought we could try it.

Matthew. Try it? It's my sexuality, not a perfume sampler.

John. I'm just saying, relax.

Matthew. I don't know how to relax.

John starts to rub his shoulders. When he seems relaxed, John bends in to kiss him. Matthew jumps up and knocks him back.

Matthew. I said no!

September.

Matthew, Mary, Lucy and John are all on-stage. Matthew and Lucy sit in Lucy's room in facing chairs around a small table, from which Matthew occasionally turns around to talk at his computer via an online telephone service to John, who alternates between this position and sitting on a cushion next to Mary, against the wall of her flat, on the other side of the stage. When characters are not involved in the dialogue, they are frozen.

Matthew. Baptists do believe in Jesus, right?

Lucy. Right.

Matthew. Yeah. I thought so.

Lucy. Otherwise there wouldn't really be any need to baptise people, so -

Matthew. Yeah. I was just kidding.

Lucy. Really?

Matthew. Really.

Lucy. OK then. I'm not a Baptist, anyway. Catholic, born and bred. Bred carefully. Would you like some tea? I want to try out my kettle.

Matthew. Yeah, mine needs Christening as well. Oh – sorry. No offence.

Lucy. Why would I be offended by that?

Beat.

Matthew. It's a kettle.

Lucy. There's nothing sacrilegious about a kettle. As long as you don't actually baptise it.

*She smiles and walks off-stage. **Matthew** turns to the computer and speaks to **John** – their conversation is taking place a few hours later.*

John. She's a Christian? Whoops.

Matthew. What's that supposed to mean?

John. Well, good luck with that.

Matthew. I'm not trying to fuck her!

John. Sure you're not.

Matthew. I'm not!

John. Who was the last female friend you made that you weren't trying to fuck?

Matthew. It isn't like that.

John. Oh no. You haven't put her above it, have you? That's even worse.

Matthew. Christ, John, I only met her like two days ago. We didn't even properly speak until today.

John. You don't need to speak, mate. Let your body do the talking.

Matthew. Are you serious? Anyway, my body can't do the talking. It's usually just saying 'I want to go home'. Unless it's saying 'I can't stand up straight.'

John. Oh, Matthew. What did I teach you?

Matthew. You didn't teach me anything. You taught me how to put up a tent once. It blew away, I had to sleep under a bridge.

John. Don't get smart with me.

*He turns away and enters the scene with **Mary**. **Matthew** freezes.*

Mary. Have you got any Marlboros?

John. I've got some Camel Lights.

Mary. What the fuck? Fuck you and your Camel Lights, you nomad, I only smoke Marlboros.

John. How come you don't have any then?

Mary. I thought I'd rely on my natural wit and charm.

John. Sorry Mary. I'm out.

Mary. I'll give you a handjob.

John. I don't come cigarettes.

Mary. Fine. *[Beat.]* I'll do it anyway.

John. All right then.

They kiss.

John. Christ. This is the kind of thing that makes a man change his brand.

Mary unzips his flies.

Mary. They don't put that on the adverts.

They freeze. John stands up, zips his flies, and heads back to the computer.

John. I'm telling you, man. She's crazy. She'll be up for anything.

Matthew. Congratulations. Sounds like you had a better time than I did. You can't talk to people, they just get you drunk and throw you together and hope you'll collide if you just move fast enough. It's like CERN.

John. Do you think maybe that's the kind of banter that stops you being successful with women?

Matthew. Whatever. *[Pause.]* So... did you fuck her?

John. Nah. Not yet.

Matthew. Are you going to?

John. Sure. These things take time.

Matthew. Yeah. I guess. Every thing has its season.

John. What? Did you get that from your holy virgin?

Matthew. Hmm. I guess she is.

John. You guess?

Matthew. I didn't conduct a hymen check.

John. First rule.

Matthew shakes his head and turns away. Lucy re-enters bringing two cups of tea.

Lucy. I gave you milk. I hope that's all right.

Matthew. Yeah, sure. I, uh, also take honey.

Lucy. What?

Matthew. Honey. You know. Milk and honey.

Lucy. Oh. Hahaha!

Her laughter is not entirely forced.

Matthew. So – you were saying you did a gap year?

Lucy. Yes, that's right. Doing some charity work, and a bit of mission stuff.

Matthew. Oh right. How was that?

Lucy. Really rewarding. I really felt like I gave some people hope, you know?

Matthew. Hope?

Lucy. Yeah. You know. Hope that they can go to heaven, if they believe.

Matthew. So – you think you're going to heaven?

Lucy. Well – I can't *know*. No one can for certain. But yeah, I believe, if I love and trust in Christ.

Matthew. It's that simple?

Lucy. People don't always find it simple.

Matthew. Still. I never knew that before. That you had so much certainty. I'd love to be – sure, like that.

Lucy. It's a good feeling. Have you never felt God around you? Like, a numinous experience?

Matthew. What does that mean?

Lucy. When I feel God all around me. When I realise how tall and how wide and how deep the love of Christ is. All around me, on every side, like I'm hemmed in.

Matthew. Hemmed in? Is that a good thing.

Lucy. It's a great thing. I think it's the best thing there is.

Matthew. I don't know... it sounds like being in a room where the walls are closing in. Like being buried alive.

Lucy. It doesn't feel like that.

Matthew. It sounds like it to me.

Lucy. It shouldn't do. I mean, it's love. You know, love is all around – that's a good thing. It's the holy spirit. It's everywhere.

Matthew. The holy spirit. Whistling through the empty places in your skull.

Lucy. And the full ones.

Matthew. What?

Lucy. Everywhere. It doesn't just have to be like that.

*She freezes, and **Matthew** finishes his cup of tea and turns back to the computer.*

John. Intense.

Matthew. Tell me about it. When I closed the door I felt as if I'd slept with her.

John. Well, I suppose that's one way of doing it.

*He turns off his computer, and **Matthew** follows suit. He and **Lucy** leave the stage, and **John** returns to **Mary**. He tries to kiss her again.*

Mary. What are you doing?

John. I thought -

Mary. I'm not your girlfriend, John.

John. Didn't we -

Mary. That was earlier. Hey, lighten up. I'll make you a sandwich or something.
*She walks off and shouts from the wings – **John** sits on the cushion, looking confused.*

Mary. We don't have any bread! I'm going out to buy some bread! If I don't come back don't look for me – it's a dangerous city out there...

John. ...Bye?

*Nonplussed, he looks around her room. He feels under the cushion she was sitting on, and takes out a bag of pills in which only a few remain, clearly having been in frequent use. He deliberates for a few moments then takes one. **Mary** re-enters, carrying bread, and he starts trying to push them rapidly back where there came from, but he has no strength in his arms.*

Mary. Borrowed some from Chrissie – oh, what are you doing? You didn't take *those* ones, did you? Strictly intermediates only. You better not be frothing at the mouth.

John. ...Do they do that?

Mary. No. But you better not try to hump the wall either.

John. Huh?

Mary *[sighing]* Sit still.

She puts down the bread, takes the packet from his hands, takes a pill herself, kisses him again and takes his top off.

Mary. We're going to need that bread in a while.

October.

Matthew and Lucy stand in the kitchen at a party, with glasses in their hands.

Matthew. Juice. Adventurous.

Lucy. I'm not drinking.

Matthew. You're not *drinking*, or... you don't drink.

Lucy. I don't drink.

Matthew. Oh. Should I have known that?

Lucy. Maybe.

Matthew. Did you tell me?

Lucy. I don't know. It's probably come up.

Matthew. Any reason?

Lucy. I don't like to lose control.

Matthew. What happens if you lose control? Do you go mental or something?

He waves his hands to indicate 'going mental'. There is an awkward pause.

Lucy. Don't know. Never have.

John enters. He is clearly quite stoned, and walks in backwards, singing 'La Bamba' in broken Spanish. He wheels around, pointing his fingers in a manner that would be suave if he didn't trip slightly over his own foot.

John. Hellooo! Is there any wine left?

Lucy. There's half a bottle of red in the fridge. I think Mary said to take whatever.

Matthew. How do you know that?

Lucy. I'm a Catholic, Matthew, I'm not blind.

John laughs uproariously. Matthew blushes.

John. Dicked.

Matthew. I just meant, the juice was out. You might not have been in the fridge.

Lucy. There's other things in the fridge. I've been in the fridge.

Pause.

Matthew. Not really.

Lucy. What?

Matthew. Not like an ice person. Or, you know, Han Solo.

She laughs weakly.

John. Smooth.

Matthew. What?

John. I'm just admiring your technique. The... intellectual touch.

Lucy. Do you two know each other?

Matthew. This is John. We went to school together. He's an asshole.

John. I made him the man he is today.

Matthew. Through years of insults and casual beating.

John. You know I love you. Jesus, why are we in the kitchen?

Matthew. It's quiet. We're trying to talk.

John. About what? Han Solo?

Matthew. And other things.

Lucy. Matthew was telling me the history of his haircuts.

John. Thrilling stuff. Did you tell her about the time you let me shave you a mohican and then you were suspended for three weeks?

Lucy laughs. Matthew looks extremely unamused.

Matthew. No. I must have missed that one.

John. You looked like such a twat. And then Mrs Burgess crucified you.

Matthew starts frantically making the 'shut up' hand-across-the-throat signal.

John. Why are you doing the sign of the cross?

Matthew. John, why don't we go outside?

John. I like it in here.

Matthew. I want some fresh air.

Lucy. Can I come?

John. Sure.

Matthew. No need, I'll be back in a minute.

Lucy. But I'm tired of the kitchen. I don't want to stay in the kitchen.

John. We're all in the kitchen, Lucy, but some of us are looking at the stairs.

Matthew hustles him offstage as quickly as he can, leaving Lucy standing there on her own before she has a chance to object. She goes to follow but then Mary enters, cutting her off, carrying a bowl of tortilla chips.

Mary. These – are – fucking – horrible. Do you want some?

Lucy. Er... no, not really.

Mary looks mock-offended.

Lucy. Well, when you put it like that, how could I refuse?

She takes some politely, eats them, and tries not to make a face as Mary looks on.

Lucy. Thanks, Mary.

Mary. How do you know my name?

Lucy. We met, earlier. I'm Lucy. I guess you don't remember me.

Mary. Oh! Yes! Of course! John's friend's friend? Say that six times fast. Don't actually. Are you having a good time?

Lucy. Yes – great thanks.

Mary. Where is John? Have you seen him anywhere?

Lucy. Oh, er – he was just here, actually.

Mary. How did he seem?

Lucy. I think he was enjoying himself?

Mary. Good. That's fine then. That's absolutely fine.

Lucy. Why?

Mary. He's been at the bag.

Lucy. ...What's in the bag?

Mary. Well, not much now.

John and Matthew re-enter, mid-conversation.

John. They're herbal.

Matthew. What? That's worse, do they even work? Wait, of course they fucking work, look at you, you're out of your tiny mind. Do you know what's in them?

John. It's good, whatever it is.

Matthew. It could be anything. Rat shit and baking soda. Yeast.

Mary. Not yeast. They'd explode inside your throat. Strictly unleavened.

John. Un-what?

Lucy. Unleavened. Like manna.

John. I don't know what that is.

Matthew. ...Let's all sit down.

They do so, on chairs or on the floor. John sits on a table or work-surface, slightly raised.

Matthew. Herbal pills. Jesus. I remember when you were too scared to go on a ferris wheel.

Mary. They can be pretty scary places.

Matthew. Sorry, I didn't get your name?

Mary. Mary.

Matthew. Hi. I'm Matthew.

Mary. Oh, Matthew! I've heard so much about you!

Matthew. Really?

Mary. No.

John. Has anyone else here not met anyone else? Speak now, or forever hold my piece.

Awkward silence.

Mary. Smooth. Matthew, have you seen his tattoo?

Matthew. No? What tattoo?

Mary. What tattoo? The fucking eagle?

Matthew. Are you serious?

Mary. Would I make up a thing like this?

Matthew. Well, I don't know what the thing is like.

Mary. I think you'd better show him, John.

John. Fine.

*Slowly, with a pained expression, he lifts up his T-shirt, from the back. The audience cannot see the design – only the reactions of other three characters. **Matthew** is in hysterics, **Mary** quietly amused, and **Lucy** smiling only a little.*

Matthew. What did you do?

John. Well, Matthew, I went into a tattoo parlour, and I said, can you draw an eagle on my back? And they said, OK, yes, we'll do that. And then I gave them the money.

Matthew. You fucking idiot. Do you think it looks cool?

John. It's all right.

Matthew. It's all right? You've got an eagle scratched into the skin of your back for the rest of your natural life and it's *all right*?

John. I was quite drunk, OK?

Matthew. No. It's not OK. It's an eagle.

Lucy. Oh, come on. It's not that bad. I think it's quite sweet

John. Well at least someone appreciates me.

Matthew. She doesn't appreciate you. She appreciates the eagle.

John. Shut the fuck up.

Matthew. Have you given it a name?

Lucy. Oh, leave him alone.

Matthew. Me? Leave him alone?

Lucy. You're the one hating on the eagle.

Mary. There's more wine in the shed. Secret supply. Can you help me move it all in?

John grunts.

Mary. Didn't think so. Matthew, you're up.

Matthew looks worried at the prospect of Lucy and John being left alone together, but gets up to help, not wanting to seem rude, and leaves.

John. Does he treat you like this?

Lucy. Like what.

John. No better than a dog.

Lucy. ...I wouldn't say so, no.

John. It's only because he's secretly in love with me. He tried to kiss me once. Anyway. Are you the Christian girl?

Lucy. What? I mean... I'm *a* Christian girl. Does he call me that?

John. No, of course not. But are you?

Lucy. ...Yeah. I suppose so. You say it like it's a bad thing.

John. No I don't. Honest. Cross my heart and – oh. Shouldn't say that.

Lucy. You can say what you like. It isn't going to break me. And I don't think there's even anything wrong with that.

John. Well, well, well. These reformers -

Lucy. I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about.

John. Neither do I. Are you sure that you won't have a drink?

Lucy. It's not that I won't. I don't.

John. You don't have a drink? I can see that.

Lucy giggles, despite herself.

John. Just one little glass. You can have mine. I think I've had enough.

Lucy. I think so too.

John. Well then it's time to pass the baton. Or is it the bat. On. The baton. The bat, on.

Lucy. It's the baton. Like in running.

John. But what about cricket?

Lucy. It's nothing to do with cricket.

John. That's what they want you to think.

Lucy. Who?

John. The devil. Go on. Drink. It won't kill you.

Lucy. It will eventually.

John. So will everything.

Lucy. That's very Ecclesiastes of you.

John. What? Just drink it.

Lucy. All right, but I'm not getting drunk, you know.

John. I know.

She takes a sip.

Lucy. It tastes like that? I feel sick already.

John. This too will pass.

Lucy. John?

John. Yeah?

Lucy. This is probably a silly question, but... how does it feel?

John. What?

Lucy. To be -

John. On your own... with no direction home... like a rolling stone. Right?

Lucy. No. I mean -

John. I know. Pretty good. Pretty good right now.

Lucy. Do you -

Matthew and Mary re-enter and the conversation is instantly cut off, as if it had never happened.

Mary. Quiet in here.

John. This is the aftermath. We've just been engaged in some deep spiritual searching.

Matthew. About what?

John. You know. God and that. She's a fan. I'm open to suggestion.

Mary. You believe in God?

Lucy. ...Yes?

Mary. You can talk to him?

Lucy. When I pray -

John. She's not Doctor Doolittle.

Matthew. John!

Mary. Could you tell him to give me a bit more cash?

John. He doesn't do requests.

Lucy. He might. If you ask nicely.

Matthew. What's the sense in that, when there's people -

Mary. The Lord moves in mysterious ways, Matthew.

John. Not as mysterious as this.

He stands up and leaves, dancing, in the same unsteady ridiculous fashion in which he entered.

Matthew. Do you want to deal with that?

Mary. I think we all should.

Matthew. Should we make up a couch for him or something?

Lucy. I'll do it.

Matthew looks at her as if she's crazy.

Lucy. You enjoy the party. We've been talking anyway. Go on. I don't mind.

Matthew and Mary shrugs, and she leaves in the same direction as John.

Matthew [*awkwardly*]. So you and John, are you...?

Mary. No. [*Seeing his quizzical reaction.*] Well, sometimes. But no, not really. I'm free as a bird.

She caws like a raven. He looks completely bemused.

Mary. Have you had a tortilla chip? You should. They're really excellent.

Matthew. Oh. Maybe I will, then.

Mary. Do you want to come and dance?

Matthew. Not really. I thought I was eating.

Mary. Well, fuck you then. This is my favourite song, and I don't know where the hell John is, but I'm dancing with someone whether he likes it or not. Fuck him and his bag, he's not going to be any use tonight. I'll see you when you finally leave this kitchen, Captain Crisp.

He looks baffled again as she waltzes out, picks up the bowl, then puts it down abruptly and follows her offstage.

November

John and Matthew, sitting in Matthew's room.

John. You must have held her hand, though.

Matthew. No.

John. What? Even I've held her hand, mate.

Matthew. What? When the fuck did you do that?

John. At the party, later on. We sat down, chatted for a bit.

Matthew. You did what?

John. Christ, I didn't say I came on her face or anything. Anyway, I did some good work for you that night. I asked her if you or me was better looking.

Matthew. Hang on, how did you even bring this up?

John. And she didn't answer.

Matthew. Oh, great. How did you even construct that as a question?

John. She must think you're hot, cause let's face it, I am - and she thinks you're better.

Matthew. How do you know, if she didn't answer?

John. Just ask her!

Matthew. If she didn't answer... that means there is no answer. So you can't draw any conclusions.

John. I can infer.

Matthew. From what? From literally, nothing?

John throws his hands up.

John. I tried... I tried.

Matthew. How's your head?

John. What?

Matthew. After last night, how's your head?

John. It's fine. I was ill. But it's fine.

Matthew. Do you even know what you took?

John. Yeah.

Matthew. Could you tell me?

John. They don't print the ingredients on the back of the packets, I couldn't give you a chemical breakdown.

Matthew. You'll give yourself one.

John. That's not how it works.

Matthew. You don't know how it works! You don't even know what *it* is!

John. I know enough. They're safe. Safer than that condom in your wallet anyway.

Matthew. What? Old Smoky? Yeah, I don't think it's been in date for a year. I wouldn't even trust it for a decent wank.

John. Why is it still there, then?

Matthew. I don't know. A talisman.

John. You can't fuck with a talisman.

Matthew. The difference is elementary, really, isn't it?

John. Oh, don't be like that. I'll sort you out.

Matthew. Please don't.

John. Not like that.

Matthew. I know. But don't.

John. We'll come back to this. To be honest, I'm not doing much better. Mary's gone cold. Ice cold.

Matthew. Unpredictable, isn't she?

John. You're telling me. One day, about two weeks in, I woke up with her thigh in my face. Just sitting there. Right across my mouth. I opened my eyes and within about ten seconds – well, you know. Cunnilingus: the brighter way to start your day! The weirdest thing is, I know I locked my door. I don't sleep it with it open, my mum drummed it into me for months before I left. It's London, she said, big bad London, you'll get knifed if you don't sleep in a suit of armour and put a combination lock on your toilet. And she definitely didn't have a key.

Matthew. Jesus. What did I do two weeks in? I woke up at six to read a book about Kyrgyzstan.

John. Well, anyway. The next morning I was – well, not expecting, but hoping for the same treatment. It didn't happen, so I thought I'd surprise her. I didn't teabag her or anything – just sat on the end of her bed. She blinked once and set off a rape alarm. Had the whole fucking building outside in dressing gowns. We didn't speak for a week or so. *[Pause.]* I've had enough of talking about her. Have you heard from anyone else back home?

Matthew. Only a bit. You know you thought Stacey was pregnant?

John. Yeah?

Matthew. No, she's just got fat. What else? Declan and Janie got married. Eddy saw them in the park a few days after and texted me saying he'd seen the Swayfields. They're the Swayfields now.

John. That's fucking ridiculous.

Matthew. You think that is? Have you heard who's Head Girl? Kayleigh.

John. Well, that's appropriate.

They break down in giggles.

Matthew. And Chris sold his Gamecube. To pay for the abortion.

John. Doesn't a Gamecube cost more than an abortion?

Matthew. No one said he couldn't keep the change.

*They laugh again. Silence, then **John**, getting up to leave:*

John. I'll talk to her for you, man.

Matthew. Don't do it.

John. It's cool, I'll be subtle.

Matthew. You don't know the meaning of the word.

John. Fuck you, I kicked your arse at Scrabble.

Matthew. That's not how Scrabble works. And John?

John. Yeah?

Matthew. Stay off the crack, yeah?

*They both laugh, but not very much. **John** gives **Matthew** a bear-hug.*

John. Love you man.

Matthew [*squeezed*]. You too!

***John** leaves. **Matthew** sits, picks up a book, then rubs his ribs with a pained expression. He looks out at the door through which **John** has exited with a slight amusement fading to resentment as the lights go down.*

December.

***John** knocks at a door. **Lucy** opens it.*

John. Is Matthew in?

Lucy. No. Sorry. How did you know we were neighbours?

John. Your name's on the door.

Lucy. It's a common name.

John. There's a crucifix.

Lucy. It's a fairly common sign.

John. If you say so.

Pause.

Lucy. Tea?

John. Thanks. Milk no sugar.

Lucy. That was very efficient.

John. It saves time. I'm a busy man. So. Lucy. Where are you from?

Lucy. Dorset. Why?

John. I just thought we should probably get to know each other.

Lucy. No, no, I mean – we should, yeah. But why start with that?

John. Well, why not?

Lucy. Do you know me better now you know I'm from Dorset?

John. I know you don't have an accent.

Lucy. You knew that anyway.

John. Yeah – but now I know what accent you don't have.

Lucy. I don't have most accents. I don't sound South African either.

John [*putting on appalling accent.*] I do. Sometimes.

Lucy. No, you don't. But you're funny.

John. And you're a Christian. Why?

Lucy. What?

John. Simple question.

Lucy. How is that a simple question? You might as well ask me why I've got two eyes. I just do.

John. Yeah, but there's reasons for that. You know. Science.

Lucy. Do *you* know science?

John. A bit. I know about the apple falling off the tree. I think.

Lucy. That's got nothing to do with eyes.

John. Depends on how you look at it.

He gestures back and forth from his eyes to an imaginary apple.

Lucy. You've lost me.

John. So you can't say why?

Lucy. Can you say why not?

John. I don't know. Tsunamis and shit.

Lucy. It's a bit more complicated than that.

John. All right. God is love, and the children getting torn to pieces by the bears.

Lucy. There's so much context to that bit. I could explain but it might take hours.

John. I've got nothing better to do.

Lucy. Don't you do any work?

John. It's been a while.

Lucy. I think Matthew's worried about you.

John. What? What is there to worry about?

Lucy. I don't know. I shouldn't have said anything, but – he just hopes you're taking care of yourself.

John. Of course I'm taking care of myself! Bloody hell, I've taken a few pills, smoked a few joints, I'm not pumping raw heroin into my eyeballs. It's not like I've just lost control. I came round when he asked, for one thing.

Lucy. When's that?

John. Today.

Lucy. What day is that?

John. What do you mean what day is it? Look at the calendar.

Lucy. Sunday.

John. Oh. Shit. Isn't it Saturday?

Lucy. No.

John. Well it should be.

Lucy. Did you miss Saturday?

John. Christ. I hope not. Hey - do you want to try something?

Lucy. No... not really.

John. You do, though.

Lucy. How do you know what I want?

John. I don't. I just don't think you do either.

Lucy. What?

Pause.

John. I could just give you a blow-back. There's nothing in the Bible about a blow-back.

Lucy. How do you know?

John. My mate Simon invented it.

Lucy. No. I'm afraid he didn't.

John. What do you think? Just one.

Lucy. I have a lot of work to do.

John. You're not going to do it though, are you?

Lucy. Not if you blow a load of ash into my mouth, no.

John. Ashes to ashes... dust to dust...

Lucy. That's totally irrelevant.

John. You're irrelevant.

Lucy. You're stoned. Unless you're always like this. I haven't seen enough of you to tell. *[Pause.]* I should really get going. Sorry, but do you mind -

John. Lucy. Relax. Just sit down. Everything's intense with you. You need to unwind.

Lucy. I don't need to do anything.

John. What if you want to? Sit down. Come on. He won't be back for hours.

Lucy. I'm not going to sleep with you.

John. Jesus. You move fast, don't you?

January

Matthew. I thought you said John was coming too.

Mary. Well – he's not.

Matthew. Then why did you tell me he was?

Mary. I'm quite contrary, Matthew. I thought you'd have got that from the name.

Matthew. When's he going to be back?

Mary. I don't know. Sunday. He's gone home, I think.

Matthew. He didn't tell me.

Mary. Does he tell you everything?

Matthew. He used to.

Mary. And do you tell him?

Matthew. I don't have anything to tell.

Mary. Tell me something interesting about yourself.

Matthew. I don't know. I don't think there is anything.

Mary. You weren't born down a mine-shaft, you must have done something in your life. Though even that would be interesting.

Matthew. All right, fine. I have a pet ferret.

She laughs.

Mary. That's amazing. What's its name?

Matthew. Cookie.

She laughs louder.

Matthew. And that's the most interesting thing that ever happened in my life. It's your turn.

Mary. I used to get naked in front of my window. Does that count?

Matthew. ...What?

Mary. At home. When I was about sixteen. We have a house in the country and it's pretty big, but it's right opposite this petrol station. When I got up in the morning I used to open the curtains and take off my pyjamas and just stand there, and all these truckers would look across the road at me like their eyes were going to pop out of their sockets.

Matthew. ...Why are they telling me this?

Mary. I thought you'd like to know.

Matthew. Why did you stop?

Mary. Abatement order. This kid nearly fell off his motorbike. Someone said it was a public health hazard.

She flicks her hair over her shoulders dramatically.

Matthew. What did your parents say?

Mary. That's all you're interested in? What my parents said? It's not important.

Matthew. Well, I don't think mine would've liked it.

Mary. What do you think they said? You've been a bad girl, Mary, stop getting naked in front of the window. Don't you have any imagination?

Matthew. Does John know I'm here?

Mary. Who cares?

Matthew. Does he know?

Mary. Maybe. I don't see him any more.

She walks over to him and puts one arm lightly across his shoulders.

Matthew. I don't know if -

Mary. Sssh. You don't need to keep talking.

She kisses him. He looks terrified and breaks away.

Mary. Did I do something wrong?

Matthew. N-n-no.

She sits down. Lifts her dress a little up her thigh.

Mary. Would you like me to?

He looks frantically around the room for a trace of any remaining certainty. All he can see is her skin.

Matthew. I'm s-sorry, I just d-don't know...

She sits wearily upright.

Mary. What don't you know?

Matthew. It's all wrong. The - this, the – me, you – the way it's – what you're ... everything's wrong.

Mary. What? Is it the fucking curtains? Look -

She stands up and kisses him again. He backs away and starts coughing.

Mary. Jesus. Don't have an asthma attack. If I'd known you'd be this much work I'd just have watched Gladiator and saved you the bus fare. You're not interested, that's fine.

Matthew. I am, I mean you're very attractive, it's just -

Mary. Just what? I'm not wearing a rosary? There's no violins and no one's carrying a box of Milk Tray? I should have listened to John about you.

Matthew. Hey, come on. I can – look -

He tries to kiss her, unconvincingly. She pushes him off.

Mary. Don't be an idiot. I don't believe you. I've lost interest anyway. And don't get your cock out or anything, that's not going to help either.

He grimaces, not sure whether or not to smile, and then leaves as quickly as possible. She sighs and turns the TV on, pulling her dress fully back down. He opens the door again.

Matthew. You're not going to tell John about this, are you?

Mary. About *what*? No, of course I'm not. Run along now.

He leaves. She toys with her phone, puts it down, and looks at the door in disbelief.

Mary. A ferret. Jesus wept.

February.

*Lights up on **John** and **Matthew**, standing facing each other, already in mid-confrontation.*

John. OK. I fucked her. If you want to know the truth.

Matthew. Want to know – of course I want to – what?!

John. I fucked her. OK? Sorry.

Matthew. Sorry?! Jesus. How?

John. What do you mean how? I think you know the mechanics.

Matthew. Don't be a cunt. How did it happen? How did you get to this, what did you do to her?

John. I didn't do anything, it was her idea.

Matthew. What the fuck? What's wrong with you?

John. Look, I didn't mean for it to go that far, OK? I wanted to help you, I was trying to understand her, you know – get under her skin.

Matthew. Getting under her skin isn't the same as getting inside her! I mean, Christ, don't you have any concept of – of trust, of basic decency? She was – before I – I can't believe you.

John. Hey. Come on. Don't lay this all on me.

Matthew. What? What, do you mean it's my fault? Fuck's sake. What happens now?

John. I don't know, I thought we could -

Matthew. You don't know? How could you have done it if you didn't know -

John. Christ, she's not a saint, all right? She doesn't think we're going to be married for life. I don't have to be jealous of Jesus or anything.

Matthew. You are the biggest asshole I've ever met. I can't believe I know you. I can't believe I ever told you anything about my life, for you to go and fuck a massive fucking hole right through it.

John. You said you didn't even like her.

Matthew. I said a lot of things. And every night I fucking dreamt about her. Don't you think?

John. About anything other than myself? Sometimes, yes.

Matthew. What's that supposed to mean? Hey? Hey!

John. Nothing. Look, I'm sorry, I've got to -

Matthew. What was it like?

John. What?

Matthew. What was it like?

John. What do you want me to say? It was like flicking the switch on an electric chair. It was like a firework in a dark room. Honestly? It was nothing special. She had no idea what she was doing.

Matthew. Nothing special? I seriously think I'm going to fucking kill you.

John. This is exactly your problem, mate -

Matthew. Don't call me mate -

John. You make everything into the ultimate sacrifice. You know why you haven't lost your virginity? Because you treat it like it's the fucking Holy Grail. If someone brushes your arm on the stairs you start hearing wedding bells. No one's even human to you. They're just impossible fucking moving targets and you're scared of your own dick. She isn't the Virgin Mary, Matthew. She isn't

even a virgin.

Matthew runs at John and punches him square in the face. They fall to the floor and start struggling, Matthew screaming insults until John finally gets on top and knocks Matthew flat on his back. He staggers away, his lip bleeding, and sits back against a wall. Matthew stays lying where he is. A few seconds of silence.

Matthew. Any girl from school. If you could have had anyone. Who would it be?

John. What?

Matthew. Just answer the question.

John. Anyone?

Matthew. Anyone.

John. All right, fine. Kate. Kate Barker.

Matthew. What? Why?

John. I don't know. It just is. It isn't about 'why'. 'Why' doesn't have anything to do with it. It's just her, OK?

Matthew. I never knew that about you.

John starts coughing violently.

Matthew. Are you all right?

John. Not really. I can't breathe properly. You punched me in the face.

Matthew. And you fucking deserved it. Did you wear a condom?

John. I can't remember.

Matthew. How the fuck can you not remember? I never want to see you again.

John. You don't mean that.

Matthew. I don't. But it's going to be a long fucking while before I don't want to rip your head off.

John. You might not see me for a while. I'm dropping out.

Matthew. What? Why?

John. Too much smoking, not enough working.

Matthew. What? You told me you didn't have any work.

John. Everyone has work, Matthew. Everyone has something to do. I'm not just ploughing money

into a hole in the ground.

Matthew. Jesus. What are you going to do?

John. I don't know, something else. Anything else. There's other worlds, you know.

Matthew. Does Mary know?

John. Fuck Mary. Don't. That'd make it far too complicated.

Matthew. How's your lip?

John. How do you think? It's fucking bleeding. It's bleeding in the place where you hit it with your fist, you retard.

Matthew. I'm not getting you an ice pack.

John stands up and walks groggily to the door.

John. Look. I'm going soon, but – I'll see you at Easter, all right? We'll talk about it properly.

Matthew. There's nothing to talk about.

John. We already have, though. Haven't we?

Matthew. I don't know, John. I don't know what I know and don't know any more.

John. I'm sorry.

Matthew. Are you?

John. You've broken my nose before. Playing rounders. I tried to catch your ball, and it just... smashed. You remember, don't you? We had no idea where it was going. But it healed in the end. Good as new. Didn't it? *[Pause.]* I'll go.

John looks back once, nods, and leaves. Matthew watches him go. Turns on music, loud.

March.

Lucy sitting in a chair looking quietly forward. Matthew enters carrying two mugs of tea and gently sets them down.

Matthew. Lucy. Lucy?

Lucy. Oh. Hi.

Matthew. I brought you some tea. You can, er, probably see that.

She doesn't respond.

Matthew. It's cold in here, isn't it? Would you like me to put the radiator on?

Lucy. It's fine.

Matthew. Are you sure?

Lucy. It's fine.

Matthew. What about you?

Lucy. I'm fine. No need to worry.

Pause.

Matthew. Did he call you?

Lucy. Who?

Matthew. John. Before he – did he call you?

Lucy. No. Of course not.

Matthew. Well. I thought he might -

Lucy. I don't want to see him again.

Matthew. Not even to -

Lucy. No.

Matthew. Look, I know this is a bit intrusive, but did you get -

Lucy. What?

Matthew. You know, was it -

Lucy. Yeah. It's fine. No damage done. And no hard feelings.

Pause.

Matthew. Look – if there's anything -

Lucy. Not really. No.

Matthew. Do you want a hug?

Lucy. If you want.

*They share an awkward hug. **Matthew** takes a while to let go.*

Lucy. I guess I'll see you later then.

Matthew. Yeah?

Lucy. Yeah. Probably.

He walks to the door. Turns.

Matthew. Are you sure there's nothing -

Lucy. There's really nothing. Goodbye, Matthew.

Matthew. Goodbye.

He leaves the room. She stares out front for a few more seconds. Blackout.