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Closer: Breathing Life into Paper

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Colin Fisher

College: Arts + Sciences Department: Theatre

Faculty Mentor: Tony Cedeno

PROJECT TITLE: Close! Breathing Life into Paper

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Tony Cedeno, Faculty Mentor

Date: 5/3/02

Comments (Optional):

Colin's ability to look into a character and pinpoint what makes him "tick" is exceptional.

TC

Geoffrey Colin Fisher

Senior Honors Project

5/02/02

Closer: Breathing Life into Paper

Colin Fisher

Senior Project Abstract

Closer: Breathing Life into Paper

My project consists of taking the character Larry from the pages of the play *Closer* and turning him into a living, breathing person. I rehearsed the play for a little over four weeks in October and November of 2001. Work on the character began before the rehearsal period with homework assignments from the director, Suzan Erasmán. The actors were required to answer four thematic questions about the play and pick out 25 lines and ten repeated words that meant something to their characters. All this work will be included in the final paper, as well as a copy of the script and descriptions of any exercises we did to further our characters.

The heart of the paper will be a profile of Larry as I see him. This will be the closest thing I can put into text to represent what I gave our audiences. The reader should be able to understand any choices I made for the character based on both the rehearsal material discussed and any thoughts I came up with on my own.

Introduction

In November of 2001 I played the part of Larry in the play *Closer*, by Patrick Marber. This was an All Campus Theatre production in the Clarence Brown Lab Theatre. The other characters in the play are Anna, played by Morgan Scott; Dan, played by Ian Dunn; and Alice, played by Melanie Stephens. The director was Suzan Eraslan.

The play takes place over an indefinite amount of time; the playwright includes specific dates at the beginning of the script for the benefit of the actors but makes a note explicitly saying that these times should not be conveyed to the audience. According to these dates the play starts in 1993 and ends in 1997. It is, overall, a play about trust in relationships, both sexual and interpersonal. Dan and Larry both sleep with Anna and Alice when they're not supposed to and this is the source of the play's central conflict. The characters are forced to examine their relationships and decide what is true and who they can believe and rely on. In the end, they may not even be able to rely on themselves.

This paper will focus on the mental work I went through to develop Larry into a believable living creature. This is half the work required to create a character; the "head" part. The other half, the "body" part as I consider it, is much more difficult to put onto paper. Writing about stage embodiment is like whistling an opera. The basics can be explained but without seeing the product some work of the imagination is required. I will do my best to explain that half also. I was nominated for Best Actor at All Campus Theatre's Groundhog Awards for this part, so I'm assuming I did something right here.

The director asked the actors to do some homework assignments in the first week of rehearsals. These assignments were to answer four thematic questions about the play and pick out ten repeated words and twenty-five lines that mean something to our

characters or tell us something about them. This will be the core of the paper. It is recommended that the reader of this paper first read the play itself.

I. Thematic Questions

1. What is the significance of cigarette smoking in the play?

Every character except Anna, at one point or another, smokes in this play. (This was a new obstacle to me, a non-smoker). Larry has a few scenes where he has quit, only to relapse later. The typical image of a smoker is that of a person who is jaded or cynical, with a fair amount of street smarts or common sense. That is a great description of Larry and Alice and more or less fits Dan as well. Marber is using smoking as a cultural cue to the personalities of these people in order to flesh them out and help the audience figure out just who they are. As far as Larry's quitting is concerned, that shows where he stands in terms of self-esteem or responsibility. In the first scene he lets Alice borrow a cigarette so he is obviously smoking here. This is the first time we see Larry and already we have been given clues about his personality. Once he meets and begins seeing Anna he no longer smokes. The next scene in which we see him smoking is scene seven, the strip club, after Anna has left him. He is shattered here and no longer cares about edifying himself; his sole purpose is to regain Anna. We also see him smoking during the restaurant scene, scene eight. This is a tough moment for Larry because he has to finalize his relationship with Anna, plus he hasn't seen her for a while.

2. What is the significance of the aquarium?

Larry, by falling into a trap laid by Dan, meets Anna at an aquarium. She had previously told Dan that she enjoys aquariums; she finds fish relaxing. Larry tells Dan in scene ten that they (he and Dan) "should go back to the aquarium and evolve." This is a key line that will answer this question. That is the symbolism of the aquarium: evolution. When Larry meets Anna he says that people were once fish, before they were apes. This is a

funny moment of Larry straining for something interesting to say to this complete stranger who he is fairly certain wants to go somewhere with him to have sex. Another reference to evolution. One of the themes of the play, one of the questions that it poses, is can people actually pull themselves up and stop being so animalistic and petty? The characters' behavior in this can be easily compared to that of animals. They want sex when they can get it (see Larry's confession in scene six) and get very territorial about their mates. When Larry says they need to evolve he's talking about how men need to stop making such fools of themselves over women, "like some ancient ritual."

3. What is the significance of Alice's scar? Why a question mark and how did she actually get it?

Alice has a question mark-shaped scar on her ankle that is referred to several times in the play. The why is much easier to answer than how. Alice is an enigma. Dan is finally forced to ask her who she really is in his last scene with her. Her answer: "I'm no one." When Larry finds her in the strip club in scene seven he knows who she is; however, she has a wig and is going by a different name (Jane Jones). She refuses to admit that she is Alice from before and only after being pushed by Larry's breakdown does she even make reference to knowing who he is. Larry finally discovers that Jane Jones is her real name; Alice is a name she found on a memorial in a park dedicated to ordinary people who died saving the lives of others. In this case Alice Ayres died saving the lives of three children. This is a strong metaphor for her relationship to Dan, Larry and Anna. It is not until the final scene of the play that we realize what her real name is and gain closure in regards to her personality. The answer to how she got the scar is never clearly stated. Larry is certain that she did it to herself; as a dermatologist he has knowledge of people who do

such things. He says that the illness is “dermatitis artefacta” in scene ten. Dan thinks she got it when she fell off her bike when she wasn’t using training wheels, and she tells Larry herself that she got it when her parents’ car crashed and they were both killed. A clear reason for any answer is never given. Larry’s answer is given the most credibility since he is a dermatologist (and since I’m biased because he’s part of me) and knows how skin scars based on various inflictions.

4. What is the significance of the Church? Why is it called that and why do they go? Anna and Larry make plans to go to a new restaurant, “the Church,” in scene six. Before they get a chance to do so they scream obscenities at each other and part ways (that would be the segment I did for my final presentation). They finally do get a chance to meet there so Larry can sign the divorce papers. He complains about it (understandably) and Anna tells Dan that they met there for a joke. Larry himself has a telling comment about the restaurant in that scene: “The Church. We married in one and now we’re going to get divorced in one. It’s beautiful.” This is the significance of the restaurant and its title. It is a tidy irony to add flavor to the play.

II. Ten Repeated Words

1. Cunt: This is a very harsh word and I can’t count the times Larry uses it. I find this amusing and really quite endearing; it certainly made him fun for me to play. This shows that he’s not a very proper fellow. He’s also very British, as this word is used a bit more over there than in America. It has an even stronger meaning here. His most pointed use of the word comes in scene ten, when he calls Dan a cunt. I played this as a very sharp jab at Dan and it got laughs but almost in a startled manner. Larry values the working class in England and fancies himself a

member. In the very least he is from such beginnings; however, as Dan points out in scene ten, he has gone from such beginnings to a much less modest present in his well-furnished office.

2. Thank you: Larry makes it a point to thank people for things he often doesn't want to hear. This ties in to several key traits that will be discussed further in later points. He is a bit of a masochist, as can be seen in scene six when he thanks Anna for finally breaking in and returning his verbal assault. He then turns around and accosts Alice for saying thank you so much in the next scene, asking if that's some kind of rule. Remember this is the point at which he is broken in Anna's absence and returns to smoking. He seems to have also lost his previous interest in politeness, though not masochism.
3. Honesty: This is one of Larry's most important qualities: his search for the truth. In scene six he thanks Anna for her honesty. This honesty is what shatters Larry. However, he had to hear it. Dan has this in common with Larry. They both want to hear the truth, even if it is the most repulsive thing that could happen to them.
4. Clinical observer/observation: Larry says to Anna that he is a "clinical observer of the human race" in scene five. He tells Dan that Alice wants to be loved, stating that as "clinical observation" in scene ten. Larry values his position as a physician/scientist. He wants to see things objectively and be on top of situations as much as possible. This desire for cold objectivity doesn't hold up, of course, as he gets entangled in so many twisted personal relationships.
5. Whore: This ties in to Larry's use of the word cunt. It again shows his less proper side. He uses it most strikingly in scene 8 at the Church, telling Anna:

“Be my whore, and in return I will pay you with your liberty.” This was a creepy moment, as I played it tenderly and stroked her ear when I said it. She of course recoiled, as did the audience, but my point was made. Larry has some very abnormal tendencies running through his head. He also calls her a whore, essentially, in scene six. This is another great jab that often got a disturbed response from the audience.

6. True/truth: Larry just wants the truth. This is the central theme of the play: truth, fidelity, and honesty. And how they all get trampled. He says this several times in the play, right up there with cunt in number. He tells Anna to just tell him the truth in scene six when he’s interrogating her about her affair with Dan. He wants the truth from Alice in the next scene when asking her about her identity. An open-ended question here is: Is it a good thing to *always* know the truth?
7. Gorgeous: Larry calls Alice gorgeous in scene nine, the only scene in which we see them as a couple. It’s really more of a pet name here, like minx, the next word on the list. This shows the light nature of the relationship and the April/August correlation of their ages.
8. Minx: Larry says this twice to Alice in scene nine; once as a playful jab at her and once as a more serious jab directed towards Anna. This is a cute little pet name for a cute little pet, which Alice essentially is to Larry. He’s just taking care of her, something that she needs in this play constantly. They’ve both been damaged and rely on each other for support.
9. Kill: Larry says this in two varying ways. One is frighteningly serious and the other is a joke with a certain amount of truth to it. The first occurs in scene ten,

with Dan (this was one of my favorite scenes, behind scene six). He tells Dan, “If you go near her again, I promise I will kill you.” I delivered this with absolute deadly honesty in order to scare Dan into submission. This is one of the few physical threats in the play and I think it helps to show again Larry’s rough edge. The second reference comes in the final scene. Larry, upon finding out that Anna has a date, says “Who? I’ll kill him.” This is obviously a joke and nowhere near as serious as the previous use of the word, but there is certainly some jealousy evident here. That is to be expected between almost anyone that’s been in a serious relationship with someone else, especially if they were married as is the case here.

I could only find nine words that Larry used more than once for this assignment, so that’s all I prepared before the show. I credit that to his wide vocabulary (widely vulgar, that is).

III. Twenty-five Lines (referenced by page number)

1. You name it (25): Larry is a very human character. He doesn’t hold himself to incredibly high standards except when it comes to honesty and truth. His private sex life having nothing to do with either of those virtues, it gets a little weird. This line is a response to the question of what Larry masturbates to. He doesn’t seem to have many limitations here and goes into explicit detail about ex-girlfriends and their knot-tying skills. It’s interesting to see such a dichotomy between a man’s clean professional life and his dark bedroom life.
2. I look like a criminal in photos (33): This is Larry’s self-deprecation coming out (see number four also) and a slightly exaggerated version of how he sees himself.

He thinks he's a rough fellow, physically speaking, which isn't really true. He looks fairly respectable, like any normal 40-year old dermatologist. It's his interior that's rough, almost criminal in a way.

3. I know it's vulgar to discuss 'the work' at an opening of 'the work' but someone's got to do it (36): This is telling of Larry's personality. First off, he has little respect for conventions. He knows it's not proper to do what he's about to do. Second, he does it anyway, because he feels like it has to be done. Just like he feels that the truth has to be told, whether it destroys him or not. He's also not a huge art guy. He's a little out of place at this exhibition. He's more of a sit-at-home, have-a-beer kind of fellow (so he has a drink here instead).
4. A princess can kiss a toad (36): This is how Larry views himself and Anna: toad and princess. He worships her. Not as openly as Dan perhaps, but he does nonetheless. In comparison to her, he is just a lowly toad. This is also reflective of his comedic, self-deprecating style.
5. Pleasure and self-destruction—the perfect poison (37): I picked this line not so much because it's telling of Larry but because it's just a cool line. There are some great one-liners in this play, this being one of them. Not that this doesn't say anything about Larry. Almost every line of a character will tell you something about them. Pleasure and self-destruction—Larry takes pleasure in self-destruction at times. He used to be a smoker (still is, in the sense that an alcoholic is always an alcoholic no matter how long he's been off the bottle) and one thinks maybe a part of that was because he knew it was bad for him; it's his masochism coming out again.

6. I could have him (42): This shows Larry's playful side. Even though he's the oldest character in the play he can be the most immature. He knows that Anna's interested in Dan but he takes a primal pleasure in the knowledge that if it really came down to it, he could beat him up.
7. You forget you're dealing with a clinical observer of the human carnival (42): As mentioned in the previous section, this is how Larry likes to view himself; a cold objective scientist dealing with human beings. We know that he doesn't maintain this, but he tries with all his might and succeeds in that he sees more deeply into situations than the rest of the characters in the play.
8. I have in this moment become an adult (44): Again, Larry's playful side. He's much younger in spirit than he is in age, although he occasionally uses the age to his advantage. This endears him to both the audience and Anna.
9. Because I think you might be about to leave me and I didn't want to be wearing a dressing gown (50): Larry's on a downward slope to a low point here and he's trying to maintain as much dignity as he can; dignity that stems from his "working-class" upbringing. He knows this is going to be a bad conversation (just how bad though, he has no idea) and feels he should do what he can to save himself.
10. You did this the day we met; let me fucking hang myself, make me feel...humiliated, for your amusement (52): This is another sign of Larry's desire for dignity. He resents Anna to no end for hanging him out to dry like this.

11. Because I'm a fucking caveman (55): This is another one of those lines that I just loved. It shows that Larry is well-aware of the reasons behind his behavior and isn't really ashamed of his animalistic territorialism and his need for the truth.

12. THAT'S THE SPIRIT. THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HONESTY.

NOW FUCK OFF AND DIE YOU FUCKED UP SLAG (56): My favorite part of the play and one of my favorite moments from any play I've ever done. The build up to this line was seriously intense and it all just exploded at this point. As soon as I was done screaming the lights went out and we got off-stage; then it was intermission. The audience was left to ponder that for fifteen minutes and hopefully it took them that long to recover. I didn't make any contact with Morgan after that line. We went our separate ways to our dressing rooms and I was left to fume and try to stay in that moment because I needed that desperate energy for the next scene. I would go to the dressing room and listen to Nine Inch Nails to keep me in the mood. I think it worked well. As far as Larry is concerned, this line says a ton. He's shooting for the truth and for Anna to just finally dump on him. He wants to break her. She is a composed person and he wants to tear that down and bring her to his caveman level. When he finally does, he's hugely relieved and thanks her for it. However, what she says hurts him to the core; hence the "Fuck off and die you fucked-up slag" (which was up for Best Line at the Groundhog Awards). This is the paradox of his objective. Yes, he wants the truth, but the truth hurts him. He overrides the pain and goes for it anyway.

13. What a confusing, hilarious fucking universe (58): This is one of Larry's moments of clarity (ironically, he's very drunk). He's making a broad statement about the universe that really does ring true and is reflected excellently in this play. It's confusing (just try to figure out all the intrigues and betrayal in under two minutes) and at times hilarious.
14. I'm more turned on by the idea that you're conning the men into thinking you're enjoying yourself when really, you just want their money (60): Larry and the truth meet again. Alice is a deceiver in more ways than one and that danger attracts Larry in his dejected state. This is another example of his interesting, if not bizarre, sexual idiosyncrasies.
15. I love everything about you that hurts (64): Larry is a masochist, plain and simple. He's familiar with pain and is attracted to it. All through this scene there is an underlying element of joy and revelry in his utter soul-wrenching sense of loss and grief. He likes where he is and he likes that Alice has been there too and wants that to bring them together, which it eventually does.
16. Thank you sincerely for your honesty (66): Larry is on a quest for more truth. I have this line double-starred in my script because I knew it said so much about him. This ties in two different words of the ten-word list I made earlier, so it says a lot about him. Most of this has already been said though. At this point in the scene he has calmed down a bit from his earlier grief and desperation, and he really truly means what he says. I put a nice little pause before this line in the performance to show he was somewhat taken aback, but collected himself quickly.

17. I hate retro and I hate the future (70): This probably isn't completely true, because Larry is so absolutely bitter at this point that he probably hates his own mother for one reason or another. However, that being said, there's still truth to it. Larry's a simple man when it comes down to tastes and he hates trends. Retro is certainly a trend, as is futuristic. This line is also an example of his agitated state of mind. Note that it's not really connected to anything in the scene; he's so worked up and nervous about what's happening that he's just rambling. This happens a fair amount in the play.
18. I can't get over you unless you fuck me (71): This is an example of the prevalence of sex in this play and the important role it plays in these peoples' lives (and therefore in everyone's lives, according to the playwright). If Larry can't have Anna then he just wants to fuck her one more time. It's the old territorialism coming back. It's almost like he's trying to mark his territory through sex; if he does this one last time she'll be tainted for future use.
19. You know I'm a man of my word (71): Larry is again exhibiting the high regard in which he holds truth and honesty. When he says this he means it. There is very little that he says in this play that he does not mean down to his soul. Larry truly is a man of his word.
20. I am (79): Larry's being endearing here again, and showing his revelry in his bad behavior that was an undercurrent in scene seven. I said this with a slight smirk and made it a very glib, smarmy line. It worked well.
21. It's easier than loving you (80): This is another line that I just think is cool. It doesn't say as much about Larry as the others but it's such a good retort. And he

has a point. It is easier to hate someone. That doesn't require any responsibility or work. You don't need to grow as a person to hate someone. You need to grow to overcome that hate and at this point he's not very interested in growing. He's in the period after a breakup where bitterness presides and one doesn't always act in one's best interest; it's generally in the interest of getting back at the source of bitterness.

22. Ever seen a human heart? It looks like a fist wrapped in blood (89): Again, this is a strong contender for my favorite scene from this play. It's the only time we really see Dan and Larry interact one-on-one. We learn a lot about their characters here. In this case, pragmatic Larry is breaking down Dan's idealism by telling him that the human heart isn't about virtue and poetry; it's about raw meat and blood. When I delivered this line I put my fist up in Ian's face and made like I was going to hit him. It was a great moment for me and I believe for the audience as well.

23. I'm just not big enough to forgive you (93): I love this line. Larry is still in the bitter stage of not doing what he knows is probably best (he may have been in that stage for the past fifteen years); this time, however, it's directed at Dan and not Anna. He's acknowledging the fact that he's not really a stand-up guy and he's not really apologizing for it in the least. I think this is just really entertaining. I get a huge kick out of Larry sometimes and this is one of those times. The audience responded well to this closing moment.

24. Everyone learns, no one changes (103): I think Larry is finally accepting what I just discussed in the previous number. He's learned throughout his life what's

right and wrong, good and bad, healthy and fun. He hasn't changed accordingly though. He's stuck in these destructive habits that aren't really evident in this scene. This scene is very retrospective. The characters are for the most part separated from each other by now and have had time to think about all the things that have happened. Alice's death makes this retrospection that much more pressing.

25. I know (107): Larry is admitting that he's a coward. However, unlike the "I am" in scene nine (see number twenty), I didn't deliver any humor here. I delivered it with frustration at the fact that he is indeed a coward and anger that Anna would remind him of such a thing. There's no pleasure in being a coward for Larry. He imagines himself a brave man but knows deep down that he isn't, and Anna is preying upon this knowledge. In saying that he was ashamed of himself in scene nine he showed that he really wasn't, not to mention that someone can take pleasure in sleeping with someone half their age.

IV. Embodiment

As I mentioned earlier, there is only so much that can be gained from reading about physical actions and attitudes on stage. However, I will go into brief detail about some choices I made in regards to Larry's physicality.

Larry is a smart man. He is a proud man. This will bring his center high, into his chest and head. That's how I carried myself for the most part. This changed according to the situation, of course. For example, in scene seven, Larry is shattered and drunk, and a high topic on his mind is sex in general, specifically with Alice. I didn't stand in this scene, but slouched in the chair and kept my head low. Had I stood my pelvis would

have been put forward as my center and my shoulders would have sagged. I threw my arms around with much less control than I did in other scenes and tried to speak in a way to show drunkenness. This is a very hard condition for actors to play. You'll hear this a lot. Drunks don't try to act drunk, for the most part. They're trying to be sober, especially for scenes that would be heightened enough to make it into the concentrated reality of stage life. I was also helped by the fact that I was smoking in this scene and usually got a decent nicotine buzz (as I mentioned earlier, I don't smoke).

In contrast to scene seven, I was much more erect in scene ten with Dan. This is a tense scene with a great deal of conflict. I held myself high and straight in my chair when I sat and put my chest out when I stood. Dan was on my turf and I wasn't going to let him forget that or gain any ground on me. As the scene progresses, Larry and Dan loosen up a bit and talk more conversationally. My director said that if this situation hadn't happened between the two, and they just met at a bar and never slept with the other's mate, they'd probably be friends and talk the way they talk towards the end of the scene (about women and evolving, etc.). When I loosened up I leaned on the furniture and didn't bother so much with keeping him down physically.

V. Conclusion

So, that is how I developed Larry mentally. I read the script a few times before rehearsals began and throughout the course of the four weeks before opening night I addressed all these issues mentioned on stage. Sometimes I didn't even know they were present; it wasn't until after the play closed that I realized some of the things that were going on between these characters. These currents were played on more primal levels and didn't make it into my own mental preparation; that certainly doesn't mean they

weren't visible. There is far more to a character's believability than what an actor thinks about while he's preparing. Once that actor gets in front of an audience and plays off his partners' and the audience's energy, the character takes on energy of its own. The actor's job is just to ride this current and channel it into life.

Alice I don't eat children either. What's your work?

Dan Journalism.

Alice What sort?

Dan Obituaries.

Alice Do you like it . . . in the dying business?

Dan *Everyone's* in the dying business.

Alice Dead people aren't.

Beat.

Do you think a doctor will come?

Dan Eventually. Does it hurt?

Alice I'll live.

Dan Shall I put your leg up?

Alice Why?

Dan That's what people do in these situations.

Alice What is this 'situation'?

Beat.

Dan Do you want me to put your leg up?

Alice Yes, please.

He lifts her leg onto a chair.

Who cut off your crusts?

Dan Me.

Alice Did your mother cut off your crusts when you were a little boy?

Dan I believe she did, yes.

Alice You should eat your crusts.

Dan You should stop smoking.

Beat.

I've got a mobile, is there anyone you'd like to phone?

Alice I don't know anyone.

Beat.

Thank you for scraping me off the road.

Dan My pleasure.

Alice You knight.

Dan *looks at her.*

Dan You damsel.

Beat.

Why didn't you look?

Alice I never look where I'm going.

Dan I looked into your eyes and then you stepped into the road.

Alice Then what?

Dan You were lying on the ground, you focused on me, you said, 'Hallo, stranger.'

Alice What a slut.

Dan I noticed your leg was cut.

Alice Did you notice my legs?

Dan In what sense?

Alice In the sense of 'nice legs'?

Dan Quite possibly.

Alice Then what?

Dan The cabbie got out. He crossed himself. He said, 'Thank fuck, I thought I'd killed her.' I said, 'Let's get her to a hospital.' He hesitated, I think he thought there'd be paperwork and he'd be held responsible. So I said, with a slight sneer, 'Please, just drop us at the hospital.'

Characters

Alice, a girl from the town. *Early twenties.*

Dan, a man from the suburbs. *Thirties.*

Larry, a man from the city. *Late thirties/early forties.*

Anna, a woman from the country. *Mid-thirties.*

Setting

The play is set in London, 1993–1997.

Scene One: January 1993

Scene Two: June 1994

Scene Three: January 1995

Scene Four: January 1995

Scene Five: June 1995

Scene Six: June 1996

Scene Seven: September 1996

Scene Eight: October 1996

Scene Nine: November 1996

Scene Ten: December 1996

Scene Eleven: January 1997

Scene Twelve: June 1997

The above dates are for information only. They should not be included in any production programme or design.

All settings should be minimal.

Note

An alternative 'spoken' version of Scene Three appears at the end of this text.

Act One

Scene One

Hospital.

Early morning.

Alice is sitting. She is wearing a black coat. She has a rucksack by her side. Also a brown leather briefcase.

She rolls down one sock. She has a cut on her leg. *Quite bloody.* She looks at it. She picks some strands of wool from the wound.

Alice looks in her rucksack and finds a box of matches. She lights a match, watches it burn, blows it out.

She looks at the briefcase. *Thinks.* Looks around. Opens it. She searches inside. She pulls out some sandwiches in silver foil and a green apple. She opens the sandwiches and looks at the contents, smiles, puts them back. She shines the apple. She bites into it.

As she starts to chew **Dan** enters. He wears a suit and an overcoat. He stops, watches her eating his apple. He is holding two hot drinks in styrofoam cups.

Alice Sorry. I was looking for a cigarette.

Dan I gave up.

Alice Well, try harder.

Dan hands her a drink.

Alice Have you got to be somewhere?

Dan Work. Didn't fancy my sandwiches?

Alice I don't eat fish.

Dan Why not?

Alice Fish piss in the sea.

Dan So do children.

Alice Show me the sneer.

Dan sneers.

Alice Very good.

Dan We put you in the cab and came here.

Alice What was I doing?

Dan You were murmuring, 'I'm very sorry for all the inconvenience.' I had my arm round you, your head was on my shoulder.

Alice Was my head ... 'lolling'?

Dan That's exactly what it was doing.

Pause.

Alice You have the saddest looking bun I've ever seen. Can I have it?

Dan opens his briefcase.

Alice You'll be late for work.

Dan Are you saying you want me to go?

Alice No.

She puts her hand in the briefcase.

Dan You can have half.

She removes the bun, tears it in two and begins to eat.

Why were you at Blackfriars Bridge?

Alice I'd been dancing at a club near Smithfield. I went for a walk. I went to see the meat being unloaded.

Dan The carcasses?

Alice Yes.

Dan Why?

Alice Because they're repulsive. Then I found a tiny park ... it's a graveyard too. Postman's Park. Do you know it?

Dan shakes his head.

Alice There's a memorial to ordinary people who died saving the lives of others. It's most curious. Then I decided to go to Borough ... so I went to Blackfriars Bridge to cross the river.

Pause. Dan offers her the other half of the bun.

Alice Are you sure?

Dan Yeah, it's yesterday's sad bun.

Beat.

That park ... it's near here?

Alice nods.

Dan Is there a statue?

Alice A Minotaur.

Dan I do know it ... we sat there ... (my mother's dead) ... my father and I sat there the afternoon she died. She died here actually ... she was a smoker. My father ... ate ... an egg sandwich ... I remember his hands shaking with grief ... pieces of egg falling onto the grass ... butter on his top lip ... but I don't remember ... a memorial.

Pause.

Alice Is your father still alive?

Dan Just. He's in a home.

Alice How did you end up writing obituaries? What did you really want to be?

Pause.

Dan Oh ... I had dreams of being a writer but I had no voice - no talent. So ... I ended up in the 'Siberia' of journalism.

Alice Tell me what you do. I want to imagine you in ... Siberia.

Dan Really?

Alice Yes.

Dan Well ... we call it 'the obits page'. There's three of us; me, Harry and Graham. The first thing someone will say (usually Graham) is 'Who's on the slab?' Meaning did anyone important die overnight. Are you sure you want to know?

Alice Yes.

Dan If someone did die we go to the 'deep freeze' which is a computer containing all the obituaries and we'll find the dead person's life.

Alice People's obituaries are already written when they're still alive?

Dan Mmhm. If no one important has died then Harry – he's the editor – decides who we lead with and we check facts, make calls, polish the prose. Some days I might be asked to deal with the widows or widowers. They try to persuade us to run an obituary of their husbands or wives. They feel we're dishonouring their loved ones if we don't ... but ... most of them are ... well, there isn't the space. At six we stand round the computer and read the next day's page, make final changes, put in a few euphemisms to amuse ourselves ...

Alice Such as?

Dan 'He was a clubbable fellow', meaning he was an alcoholic. 'He valued his privacy' – gay. 'He enjoyed his privacy' – raging queen. 'She was a convivial hostess' –

Alice A pissed old slapper?

Dan Exactly.

Pause. Alice strokes Dan's face. He is surprised but not unwilling.

Alice And what would your euphemism be ...

Dan For me?

Alice Mmm.

Dan He was ... 'reserved'.

Alice A lonely old bastard?

Dan Perhaps.

Alice And me?

Dan You were ... 'disarming'.

Beat.

Alice How did you get this job?

Dan They ask you to write your own obituary ... and ... if it amuses, you're in.

They are close, looking at each other.

Larry walks past in a white coat. Dan stops him.

Dan Excuse me, we've been waiting quite a long time. Will someone come soon, do you think?

Larry I'm sorry, it's not my ...

He is about to walk away. He looks briefly at Alice. Pretty girl. He stops.

What happened?

Alice I was hit by a car.

Dan She was unconscious for about ten seconds.

Larry May I?

He gently puts her leg down.

You can feel your toes?

Alice Yes.

Larry What's this?

Alice It's a scar.

Larry (*smiling*) Yes, I know it's a scar. How did you get it?

Alice In America. A truck.

Larry Awful job.

Alice I was in the middle of nowhere.

Larry You'll be fine.

Alice Can I have one?

Larry *looks at her.*

Alice A cigarette . . .

She nods at his pocket. Larry takes out his packet of cigarettes and hands her one.

Larry Don't smoke it here.

Dan Thank you.

Larry *exits.*

Dan What were you doing in the middle of nowhere?

Alice Travelling.

Dan Alone?

Alice With . . . a male.

Dan What happened to this . . . male?

Alice I don't know, I ran away.

Dan Where?

Alice New York.

Dan Just like that?

Alice It's the only way to leave. 'I don't love you any more, goodbye.'

Dan Supposing you do still love them?

Alice You don't leave.

Dan You've never left someone you still love?

Alice No.

Pause.

Dan When did you come back?

Alice Yesterday.

Dan Did you like New York?

Alice Sure.

Dan Were you . . . studying?

Alice Stripping.

Beat. Alice smiles.

Look at your little eyes.

Dan I can't see my little eyes.

Alice They're popping out. You're a cartoon.

Dan Were you . . . 'good' at it?

Alice Exceptional.

Dan Why?

Alice I know what men want.

Dan Really?

Alice Oh yes.

Dan Tell me . . .

Alice Men want a girl who looks like a boy. They want to protect her but she must be a survivor. And she must come . . . like a train . . . but with elegance.

Beat.

What do *you* want?

Pause.

Dan Who was this . . . male?

Alice A punter. But once I was his he hated me stripping.

Dan *smiles.*

Alice Do you have a girlfriend?

Dan Ruth.

Beat.

What do *you* want?

Alice To be loved.

Dan That simple?

Alice It's a big want.

Dan Where are your . . . belongings.

She points to her rucksack.

Alice I'm a waif. I appeal to your manly instincts?

Dan (*smiling*) Yes, you do.

Alice You want to protect me from the ravages of the world?

Dan Perhaps.

Alice Join the queue, Buster. Anyway, you've got to see who's on the slab.

Pause.

Dan Will you meet me after work?

Alice Sure. Why don't you take the day off. I'll call in for you and say you're sick.

Dan I can't.

Alice Yes you can. Don't be such a pussy.

Dan I might be anyone, I might be a psychotic.

Alice I've met psychotics, you're not.

Dan You might be.

Alice You know I'm not.

She growls.

Phone.

Dan *hands her his mobile.*

Dan Memory one.

She punches in the number.

Alice Who do I speak to?

Dan Harry Masters.

Alice It's ringing . . . what's your name?

Dan Mr Daniel Woolf. What's your name?

Alice Alice. My name is Alice Ayres.

Blackout.

Scene Two

Anna's studio.

Late afternoon.

Anna's camera is on a tripod. Dan is sitting on a high stool. Anna is adjusting a lamp.

Dan What was this building?

Anna A refuge for fallen women.

Dan Wasn't there a river here?

Anna The Fleet. They built over it in the eighteenth century.

Dan A buried river.

Anna If you stand on Blackfriars Bridge you can see where it comes out.

Dan I think I will.

Anna crosses to Dan with her light meter.

Anna You must. It inspired an urban legend – a bit like the alligators in New York. People thought that pigs were breeding underground and then one day this big fat boar swam out into the Thames and trotted off along the Embankment.

Dan So it was true?

Anna No, it escaped from Smithfield.

Dan Pigs swim?

Anna Surprisingly well.

They look at each other. They kiss passionately.

I'm sorry. That was very unprofessional. I don't kiss strange men.

Dan Neither do I.

They kiss again.

It's summer madness.

Anna It's your book. I blame your book.

Dan You've read it?

Anna Your publisher sent me a manuscript, I read it last night. When's it published?

Dan Next year.

They kiss.

Why is the book responsible for this?

Anna Your anonymous heroine ... is she based on someone real?

Dan Yes, she's someone called Alice ...

Anna It's her fault. She does what she wants ...

They kiss.

Dan You're beautiful.

Anna No, I'm not.

She slowly crosses back to her camera.

Very still ...

She takes a photo.

You moved.

Dan Sorry.

Anna You twitched.

She crosses back to Dan. Stops.

Do you and this ... Alice ... live together?

Pause.

Dan Yes.

Anna 'She has one address in her address book; ours ... under "H" for home.'

Dan I've cut that line.

Anna Why?

Dan Too sentimental.

Beat.

Actually, she's coming to meet me here. Quite soon.

Anna How does she feel about you 'stealing' her life?

Dan *Borrowing* her life. I'm dedicating the book to her. She's pleased.

Anna And you're happy together?

Dan She's completely loveable and completely unleaveable.

Anna Well, there you go.

She begins to photograph him.

Chin up ... up ... you're a sloucher. To me ... smile ... half-smile ... you blinked. Focus on my hand ... now the lens ... good. Relax, I've got to reload.

Dan Are you married?

Anna Yes ... no ... yes ... separated.

Dan Do you have any children?

Anna No.

Dan Would you like some?

Anna Yes, but not today.

Beat.

Dan Can I smoke?

Anna Yeah.

Dan *lights a cigarette. He watches her reload.*

Dan Do you exhibit?

Anna Next summer.

Dan Portraits?

Anna Yes.

Dan Of who?

Anna Strangers.

Beat.

Dan How do your strangers feel about you stealing their lives?

Anna Borrowing. An image.

Dan Am I a stranger?

Anna No. You're a job.

Dan You're fantastic.

Anna As I say, you're a job. With a girlfriend.

Beat.

Dan Any thoughts ... on the book?

Anna The title ...

Dan Yes?

Anna It's shit.

Dan *(smiles)* Got a better one?

Anna 'The Aquarium.'

Dan You like aquariums?

Anna Fish are therapeutic.

Dan Hang out in aquariums, do you?

Anna When I can.

Dan Good for picking up strangers?

Anna *Photographing* strangers. I took my first picture in the one at London Zoo.

Dan Isn't it a bit dark for photography?

Anna It's all a question of exposure.

Dan But did you like the book?

Anna I could go off it.

Dan Why did you like it?

Anna It was ... optimistic.

Beat.

Dan I was in love.

Beat.

Anna Men are crap.

Dan But all the same ...

Anna They're still crap.

Dan *(close)* You've ruined my life.

Anna You'll get over it.

They look at each other. The door buzzer goes.

Your muse.

Pause. Dan exits to answer the door. The buzzer goes again. Anna begins to pack up her stuff.

Dan enters with **Alice**. Her hair is a different colour to Scene One.

Dan Alice ... Anna.

Anna Hi.

Alice looks at **Anna**.

Alice Hallo. I'm sorry if you're still working.

Anna No, we've just finished.

Beat.

Alice Was he well-behaved?

Anna Reasonably. Do you want some tea?

Alice No thanks, I've been serving it all day. Is there a ... ?

Anna Through there.

Alice exits. *Pause.*

Anna She is beautiful.

Dan Yes, she is. I've got to see you.

Anna No.

Pause.

Dan Why are you getting all ... sisterly.

Anna I'm not getting sisterly, I don't want trouble.

Dan I'm not trouble.

Anna You're taken.

Dan I've got to see you.

Anna Tough.

Pause. Alice enters.

Alice I'm a block of ice.

She goes to Dan who rubs her.

(To Anna.) Will you take my photo? I've never been photographed by a professional before.

Anna Well ... I ...

Alice I can pay you.

Pause.

Anna No ... I'd like to.

Alice *(to Dan)* Only if you don't mind.

Dan Why should I?

Alice Because you'll have to go away. *(To Anna.)* We don't want him here while we're working, do we?

Beat.

Dan I'll wait in the pub on the corner.

He kisses Alice.

Have fun. *(To Anna.)* Thank you. Good luck with your exhibition.

Anna Good luck with your book.

Dan Thanks.

Dan exits.

Alice You've got an exhibition?

Anna Only a small one.

She busies herself with the camera. Alice watches her.

Would you mind sitting over ... here.

Alice sits.

Anna I read Dan's book. You've had ... quite a life.

Alice Thanks.

Beat.

Are you single?

Anna Yes...

Anna *checks the light on Alice.*

Alice Who was your last boyfriend?

Anna My husband.

Alice What happened to him?

Anna Someone younger.

Alice What did he do?

Anna He made money. In the City.

Alice We used to get those in the clubs. Wall Street boys.

Anna So... these places were quite... up-market?

Alice Some of them. But I preferred the dives.

Anna Why?

Alice The poor are more generous.

Anna To me. What was it like?

Alice Like... nothing. But you know when you were a child and you used to steal or tell lies, it's a thrill. I liked being someone else. Deceit makes you feel alive.

Pause. Anna looks back into the camera.

Anna You've got a great face.

Beat.

And how do you feel about Dan using your life, for his book?

Alice None of your fucking business.

Pause.

Anna Sorry...

Pause.

Alice When he let me in downstairs he had... this... look. I listened to your... conversation.

Silence.

Anna I don't know what to say.

Pause.

Alice Take my picture.

Anna *focuses her camera.*

Anna To me. I'm not a thief, Alice.

She focuses.

Head up... you look beautiful. Very slowly turn to me...

She takes her shots. They look at each other.

Good.

Blackout.

Scene Three

Early evening.

Dan *is in his flat sitting at a table with a computer. There is a Newton's Cradle on the table. Writerly sloth, etc.*

Larry *is sitting at his desk with a computer. Larry is wearing a white coat.*

They are in separate rooms.

The scene is silent. Their 'dialogue' appears on a large screen simultaneous to their typing it.

Dan Hallo

Larry hi

Dan do you come here often?

Larry ?

Dan Net

Larry 1st time

Dan A Virgin. Welcome. What's your name?

Larry Larry. U?

Beat.

Dan Anna

Larry Nice 2 meet U

Pause.

Dan I love COCK.

Pause.

Larry *(speaking)* Good evening . . .

Larry *(typing)* Youre v. forward

Dan This is a web fuck site. Do you want sex?

Larry yes. where RU?

Dan London

Larry Me 2. describe u

Dan Mid 30s dark hair big mouth epic tits.

Larry define epic

Dan I want to suck you senseless

Larry be my guest

Dan Wear my wet knickers

Larry ok

Dan Well hung?

Larry 9¢

(Speaking.) Shit.

9"

Dan GET IT OUT

Pause. Larry considers this proposition. The phone on Larry's desk rings. Loud. He jumps.

Larry *(speaking)* Wait.

Larry *(typing)* wait

He picks up the phone. Dan lights a cigarette. Sips from a can.

(Speaking.) Hallo? What's the histology? Progressive? No, sounds like an atrophy. Bye.

He puts the phone down and goes back to his keyboard.

Dan *clicks the balls on his Newton's Cradle.*

Larry sorry, the phone rang

Dan *looks at his screen.*

Larry hallo?

Dan *looks at his screen.*

Larry *(speaking)* Bollocks.

(Now typing again.) anna?

Dan *looks at his screen.*

Larry *(typing)* ANNA? WHERE RU?

Dan Hey, big Larry, what do you wank about?

Larry *(speaking)* You name it.

Larry *(typing)* Anything

Dan eg?

Larry ex-girlfriends

Dan What do they do?

Larry tie me up, tease me, won't let me come. They fight over me, 6 tonges on my cock, ballls, etc.

Dan All hail the Sultan of Twat?

Larry *laughs.*

Larry Anna, wot do U wank about?

Beat. Dan considers.

Dan Strangers.

Larry details...

Dan They form a queue and I attend to them like a cum hungry bitch, 1 in each hole and both hands.

Beat.

Larry 5?

Dan mmm

Larry's phone rings. He picks up the receiver and replaces it without answering. Then takes it off the hook.

Larry then?

Dan They cum in my mouth arse tits cunt hair.

Larry *(speaking)* Jesus.

Larry *(typing)* then?

Dan i lik it off like the the dirty slut I am. Wait, have to type with 1 hand ... I'm cuming right now ... *(He types with one hand.)* ohohohohohohooooooj67r86709o78rt7uy45ws6teh4fnijykolhgugfyyrkjns5r6yuhkjgl,ov6tk8ijmogjulblhufkgmiyg

Pause.

Larry was it good?

Dan Unbelievable

Larry I'm shocked

Dan PARADISE SHOULD BE SHOCKING

Larry are you for real?

Dan Yes ... Meet me ...

Larry serious?

Dan Yes

Larry when

Dan now

Larry can't. I'm a Dr. Have to do my rounds.

Dan *laughs.*

Dan Don't be a pussy. Life without risk is death. Desire, like the world, is an accident. The best sex is anonymous. We live as we dream, ALONE. I'll make you come like a train.

Larry flicks through his diary.

Larry Tomorrow? 1pm?

Dan London Zoo. The Aquarium.

Larry 1pm

Dan And then a hotel

Larry how will i know U?

Dan bring white coat.

Larry ?

Dan No fuck without it.

Larry ok

Dan I send you a rose my love ...

Larry ?

Dan (@)

|
|
|

Larry thanks, bye anna

Dan bye larry xxxxx

Larry xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

They look at their screens.

Blackout.

Scene Four

The Aquarium.

Afternoon.

Larry *is waiting in the darkened room. He looks at his watch. He looks at the fish. He looks at his watch. He turns to go.*

Anna *enters. She is carrying her camera.*

Larry *stares at her. Smiles. She looks at the fish.*

Larry *unbuttons his overcoat and holds it open. He is wearing his white coat underneath.*

Larry I've got the coat . . .

Anna Yes, you have . . .

Larry The white coat . . .

Anna So I see.

Larry I'm Larry . . . the doctor.

Anna Hallo, Doctor Larry.

Larry I can't believe these things happen. I thought . . . if you turned up . . . that you'd be a dog . . . but you're bloody gorgeous. You've got a camera? For photographing your . . . 'strangers'?

Anna Yes . . .

Larry I'd prefer to remain anonymous.

Anna Fine.

Pause.

Larry Do you like fish?

Anna Yes.

Larry Romantic, isn't it? Is that a trout?

Anna Pike.

Larry Fish; seen one, seen 'em all. You've got to respect them though.

Anna Have you?

Larry Well, yes. We were fish.

Pause.

Long ago.

Beat.

Before we were apes.

Beat.

You mentioned a hotel . . . no rush.

Beat.

Actually, there is, I've got to be in surgery by three.

Anna Are you having an operation?

Larry No, I'm doing one.

Anna On who?

Larry It's confidential.

Anna I don't mean to offend but have you got some ID?

Larry Yuh . . . but you can call me . . . 'The Sultan'.

He hands her his wallet, she looks at a card in it.

Anna You really are a doctor?

Larry I said I was. You are Anna?

Anna Yes. I'm sorry, have we met somewhere?

Larry Don't play games, you nymph of the Net. Mrs Big Mouth, Miss Epic Tits. You were fucking filthy yesterday.

Anna Was I?

Larry 'Wear my wet knickers,' 'Suck me senseless,' 'I'm a cum hungry bitch typing with one hand ...'

Pause.

Why do I feel like a pervert?

Anna I think you're the victim of a medics prank.

Larry *considers.*

Larry Bollocks. No, we spoke on the Net but ... now you've seen me ... you don't - it's fine. I'm not going to get upset about it.

Anna Why are you upset then?

Larry I'm not, I'm frustrated.

Anna I don't even have a computer, I'm a photographer.

Larry So why did you let me burble on about sex like a lunatic?

Anna Because I thought you were a lunatic.

Larry Where were you between the hours of 5.45 and 6.00 p.m. yesterday?

Anna I was in a café seeing ... an acquaintance.

Larry Name?

Anna Alice Ayres.

Larry The nature of your business?

Anna Photographic business. Where were you between those hours?

Larry On the Net talking to you.

Anna No ...

Larry Well, I was talking to someone ...

Anna Pretending to be me.

Pause.

(Smiling.) You were talking to Daniel Woolf.

Larry Who?

Anna He's Alice's boyfriend. She told me yesterday that he plays around on the Net. It's him.

Larry No, I was talking to a woman.

Anna How do you know?

Larry Because ... believe me, she was a woman, I got a huge ... she was a woman.

Anna No she wasn't.

Larry She wasn't, was she?

Anna No.

Larry What a cunt. Sorry.

Anna I'm a grown-up, cunt away.

Larry Thanks.

Pause.

This bloke ...

Anna Daniel Woolf ...

Larry How do you know him?

Anna I don't know him really. I took his photo for a book he wrote.

Larry I hope it sank without trace.

Anna It's on its way.

Larry *(jubilant)* There is justice in the world. What's it called?

Anna 'The Aquarium.'

Larry *(furious)* What a prick. He's advertising.

Beat.

Why? Why would he pretend to be you?

Anna He likes me.

Larry Funny way of showing it. Can't he send you flowers?

Larry *disconsolately produces a single rose from his coat pocket. He hands it to Anna.*

Anna Thanks.

Beat.

Larry Is he in love with you?

Anna I don't know. No.

Larry Are you in love with him?

Anna I hardly know him, no.

Larry But you're sort of . . . interested?

Anna I think he's . . . interesting.

Pause.

Wonderful thing the Internet . . .

Larry Oh yes.

Anna The possibility of genuine global communication. The last great democratic medium.

Larry Absolutely, it's the future . . .

Anna Two boys tossing in cyberspace.

Larry *He* was the tosser. I'll say this for him, he can write.

Beat.

I'm truly sorry for the . . . verbal . . . sexual harassment.

Pause.

So what are you doing here?

Anna Looking at fish.

Larry *looks at her.*

Larry Are you all right?

Anna *nods.*

Larry You can tell me . . .

Anna Because you're a doctor?

Larry Because I'm here.

Pause.

Crying is allowed.

Anna I'm not allowed. Thanks, anyway.

Larry I'm famed for my bedside manner.

Beat.

Anna *(raising her camera)* Say cheese.

Larry *(covering his face)* Don't, I look like a criminal in photos.

Anna Please, it's my birthday.

Larry *(dropping his hands)* Really?

Anna *takes his photo.*

Anna Yes, really.

Pause. They look at each other.

Larry Happy birthday.

Blackout.

Scene Five

Gallery.

Evening.

Alice *is looking at a huge photograph of herself. She has a bottle of lager. She wears a black dress.*

Dan *has a glass of wine. A slightly shabby black suit. He looks at*

Alice *looking at the image.*

Dan Cheers.

She turns. They drink.

It's . . . piss.

Dan *looks at the photo.*

Looking good. You're the belle of the bullshit. You look great.

Alice I'm here.

Dan *looks at Alice, smiles.*

Alice A man came into the café this morning and he said, 'Hey, waitress, what are you waiting for?'

Dan Funny guy.

Alice And I said, 'I'm waiting for a man to come in here and fuck me sideways with a beautiful line like that.'

Dan What did he do?

Alice He asked for a cup of tea with two sugars.

Pause.

I'm waiting for you.

Dan To do what?

Alice Leave me.

Dan I'm not going to leave you. I totally love you.

Alice Then please let me come . . .

Dan *turns away.*

Alice I want to be there for you. Why are you ashamed of me?

Dan I'm not. I've told you I want to be alone.

Alice Why?

Dan To grieve . . . to think.

Alice I love you, you fucker, why won't you let me?

Dan It's only a weekend.

Alice We've never spent a weekend in the country.

Dan Well . . . we will.

Pause.

Harry's here, pissed as a newt. Wants me to go back to obits. Says they miss me.

Alice Poor Harry, you know he's in love with you.

Dan No he's not. Is he?

Alice Yes. Do you want to go back?

Dan We're very poor.

Alice What about your writing?

Dan *shrugs.*

Dan Look . . . I'm going to say hallo and goodbye to Anna and then I'll get a cab to the station, OK? Buster . . .

Dan *kisses her forehead.*

Alice Kiss my lips . . .

Dan Sorry,

He kisses her on the lips.

I'll call you as soon as I get there.

Dan *exits. Alice sits, lights a cigarette.*

Larry *enters. He is wearing a cashmere sweater. He has a bottle of wine and a glass. He is slightly drunk. Alice looks at him, curious.*

Larry Evening.

Alice Are you a waiter?

Larry No, I'm a refugee escaping from . . . the glittering babble.

He consults his exhibition price-list.

And you are . . . 'Young Woman, London.'

Alice *nods.*

Larry Fantastic photo, do you like it?

Alice Yes.

Larry Fucking sad. What were you so sad about?

Alice Life.

Larry What's that then?

Alice *smiles.*

Larry (*gesturing to the photos*) What d'you reckon?

Alice You want to talk about art?

Larry I know it's vulgar to discuss 'the work' at an opening of 'the work' but someone's got to do it. Serious, what d'you think?

Alice It's a lie. It's a bunch of sad strangers photographed beautifully. And all the rich fuckers who appreciate art say it's beautiful because that's what they want to see. But the people in the photos are sad and alone but the pictures make the world seem beautiful. So, the exhibition is reassuring which makes it a lie and everyone loves a big fat lie.

Larry I'm the artist's boyfriend.

Alice Bastard.

Larry Larry.

Alice Alice. You're Anna's boyfriend?

Larry A princess can kiss a toad.

Alice A frog.

Larry Toad.

Alice Frog.

Larry Fuck it – frog, toad, otter. They're all the same.

Alice How long have you been seeing her?

Larry Four months. We're in the first flush. It's paradise, all my nasty habits amuse her. You shouldn't smoke.

Alice Fuck off.

Larry I'm a doctor, I'm supposed to say things like that.

Alice Want one?

Larry No. Yes. No, fuck it, yes. No. I've given up.

He watches her smoking.

Pleasure and self-destruction – the perfect poison.

She looks at him, she knows he's flirting with her.

Anna told me your bloke wrote a book. Any good?

Alice Of course.

Larry It's about you, isn't it?

Alice Some of me.

Larry Oh? What did he leave out?

Alice The truth.

Pause.

Larry Is he here? Your bloke.

Alice Yes. He's talking to your bird.

Pause.

Larry So . . . you were a stripper?

Alice Yes, end of conversation.

Larry *sees the scar on Alice's leg.*

Larry Mind if I ask how you got that?

Alice You've asked me this before.

Larry When?

Alice Two . . . no, two and a half years ago. You looked at my leg, in casualty.

Larry How the fuck did you remember me?

Alice It was a memorable day. You didn't really want to stop but you did. You were off for a crafty smoke. You gave me a cigarette.

Larry Well, I don't smoke now and nor should you.

Alice So you used to go and smoke . . . on the sly?

Larry Yeah, in a little park near the hospital.

Alice Postman's Park?

Larry That's the one. And . . . the scar?

Alice A mafia hit-man broke my leg.

Larry Really?

Alice Absolutely.

Larry Doesn't look like a break . . .

Alice What does it look like?

Larry Like something went into it. A knife maybe . . .

Alice When I was eight . . . some metal went into my leg when my parents' car crashed . . . when they died. Happy now?

Larry Sorry, it was none of my business. I'm supposed to be off-duty.

Alice Is it nice being good?

Larry (*smiling*) I'm not good. I'm seeing my first private patient tomorrow. Tell me I'm not a wanker . . .

Alice You're not a wanker.

Larry Thanks. You take care.

Alice I will, you too.

Alice *exits.* **Larry** *watches her go.* **Larry** *exits as* **Dan** *enters*

elsewhere. **Dan** *has his coat and a small suitcase. He waits.* **Anna** *enters.*

Anna I can't talk for long.

Dan *looks at her.*

Dan Bit of a do, isn't it?

Anna Yeah, I hate it.

Dan But you're good at it.

Beat.

Anna I'm sorry about your book.

Dan Thanks, I blame the title.

Anna You must write another one.

Dan Why can't failure be attractive?

Anna It's not a failure.

Dan It's perceived to be therefore it is. Pathetically, I needed praise. A *real* writer is . . . above such concerns.

Anna Romantic tosh.

Dan Ever had bad reviews? Well, shut up then.

Pause.

Talk to Larry about photography, do you? Is he a fan of Man Ray or Karsh?

Beat.

He'll bore you.

Anna No he won't. He doesn't, actually.

Dan I cannot believe I made this happen.

Pause.

Anna How's Alice?

Dan She's fine. Do you love him?

Anna Yes.

Dan You're not going to marry him?

Anna I don't know.

Dan Don't. Marry me. Children, everything. You don't want his children ... three little stooges in white coats. Don't marry him, marry me. Grow old with me ... die with me ... wear a battered cardigan on the beach in Bournemouth ... marry me.

Anna I don't know you.

Dan Yes you do. I couldn't feel what I feel for you unless you felt it too.

Anna I haven't seen you for a year.

Dan Yes you have. We've bumped into each other in the street, twice. I manufactured it once, you the other.

Anna And you just nodded.

Dan I was scared you didn't feel it too. I felt guilty about Alice. Anna, we're in love, it's not our fault, stop wasting his time.

Anna I love him. He's a good man. He won't leave me.

Dan I won't leave you.

Beat.

I love your work by the way, it's tragic.

Anna Thanks.

Beat.

Dan I know this isn't ... appropriate, I'm going to my father's funeral - come with me.

Anna Stop. Your father died?

Dan It's fine, I hated him. No, I didn't, I don't care, I care about this. Come with me, spend a weekend with me, then decide.

Anna What about Alice?

Dan She'll survive. I can't be her father any more. You want to believe he's ... the one ... it's not real, you're scared of this.

Anna There is no 'this'. I love him, he's kind.

Dan Don't give me 'kind'. 'Kind' is dull, 'kind' will kill you. Alice is 'kind', even I'm 'kind', anyone can be fucking 'kind'. I cannot live without you.

Anna You can, you do.

Dan This is not me, I don't do this, don't you see? All the language is old, there are no new words ... I love you, I fucking love you. I need you. I can't think, I can't work, I can't breathe. Please. Save me. Look at me. Tell me you're not in love with me.

She looks at him. Pause.

Anna I'm not in love with you.

Pause.

Dan You just lied. See me next week. Please, Anna ... I'm begging you ... I'm your stranger ... jump ...

Silence. Larry has entered, he is looking at them. Dan nods to him. Larry nods. Dan goes to exit.

Anna Your coat.

Dan *picks up his coat and suitcase and exits.*

Larry Hallo, stranger.

Anna Hallo.

Larry Intense conversation?

Anna His father's died.

Beat.

Were you spying?

Larry Lovingly observing. With a telescope. He's taller than his photo.

Anna The photo's a headshot.

Larry Yeah I know, but his head implied a short body but in fact his head is deceptive.

Anna Deceptive?

Larry Yes, because he's actually got a long body. He's a stringy fucker.

Beat.

I could have him ...

Anna What?

Larry If it came to it, in a scrap, I could have him.

Anna *smiles.*

Larry Did you tell him we call him 'Cupid'?

Anna No, that's *our* joke.

She strokes his sweater.

Larry I've never worn cashmere before. Thank you. I'm Cinderella at the ball.

Anna (*charmed*) You're such a pleb.

Pause.

Larry I had a chat with young Alice.

Anna Fancy her?

Larry 'Course. Not as much as you.

Anna Why?

Larry You're a woman ... she's a girl. She has the moronic beauty of youth but ... she's got ... side.

Anna She seems very open to me.

Larry That's how she wants to seem. You forget you're dealing with a clinical observer of the human carnival.

Anna Am I now?

Larry Oh yes.

Anna You seem more like the cat who got the cream. You can stop licking yourself, you know.

Pause.

Larry That's the nastiest thing you've ever said to me.

Anna God, I'm sorry. It was a horrible thing to say. I'm sorry, it's just ... my family's here and friends ... I have no excuse.

Larry Forget it. I know what you mean. I'll stop pawing you.

Beat.

I met your dad.

Anna I know. He actually said, 'I like him.' He's never said that before about anyone. They all adored you. My stepmother thinks you're gorgeous. 'Lovely hands' she said, 'you can imagine him doing his stitching, very sensitively.'

Larry So ... they didn't think I was ... an oik?

Anna No. You're not ... you're you. You're wonderful.

Larry And you liked my folks? They loved you.

Anna Your mother's got such a ... kind face.

They look at each other.

Blackout.

Scene Six

Domestic interiors.

Midnight.

Anna *sitting on a chaise-longue.*

Alice *sitting on a small sofa. She is wearing striped pyjamas. She has a side plate with apple segments on it. She is dipping the apple in a jar of honey and eating, slowly.*

They are in separate rooms.

Dan *enters. He carries the brown briefcase seen in Scene One.*

Alice Where've you been? I was worried.

Beat.

What?

Dan Work. Had a drink with Harry. You never have one drink with Harry.

Alice Did you eat? I made some sandwiches, no crusts.

Dan I'm not hungry.

Pause.

Alice What?

Dan This will hurt. I've been with Anna.

Pause.

I'm in love with her. I've been seeing her for a year.

Alice *exits covering her mouth.*

On the other side of the stage: enter Larry. Larry has a suitcase, bags, duty-free carrier.

Larry Don't move. I want to remember this moment for ever; the first time I walked through the door, returning from a business trip, to be greeted by my wife. I have, in this moment, become an adult.

He kisses Anna.

Thanks for waiting up, you darling. You goddess. I missed you. Jesus, I'm knackered.

Anna Didn't you sleep on the plane?

Larry Nahh. Because the permed German sleeping next to me was snoring like a *Messerschmitt*. What's the time?

Anna Midnight.

Larry Seven. Time ... what a tricky little fucker. My head's in two places. My brain actually hurts.

Anna Do you want some food?

Larry Nahh, I ate my 'Scooby Snacks' on the plane. I need a bath.

Anna Shall I run you one?

Larry I'll have a shower. You OK?

Anna Mmhmm.

Larry Sorry I didn't phone. I mean, I did phone but you were out.

Larry *takes a bottle of Scotch from his bag of duty-free and swigs it.*

Anna How was the hotel?

Larry Someone told me ... that the beautiful people of 'The Paramount Hotel', the concierge and the bell-boys and girls ... did you know this ... they're all whores.

Anna Everyone knows that.

Larry I didn't. Want some?

Anna *shakes her head.*

Larry I love New York. What a town: a twenty-four-hour pageant called 'Shit your mind out'. They celebrate the sell-out. It's a fucking Mardi Gras of degradation. Then ... you arrive back at Heathrow, the first thing you see is this carpet ... this unbelievable carpet ... what the fuck colour is the carpet at Heathrow Airport? They must've layed it to reassure foreigners we're not a serious country. God, I stink.

Anna Are you all right?

Larry I don't suppose you fancy a friendly poke?

Anna I've just had a bath.

Larry I'll see to myself then, in the *Elle Decoration* bathroom.

Anna You chose that bathroom.

Larry Yeah and every time I wash in it I feel dirty. It's cleaner than I am. It's got an attitude. The mirror says, 'Who the fuck are you?'

Anna You chose it.

Larry Doesn't mean I like it. We shouldn't have . . . this.

He gestures vaguely about the room.

Anna Are you experiencing bourgeois guilt?

Larry Working-class guilt.

Pause.

Why are you dressed? If you've just had a bath.

Anna We needed some milk.

Beat.

Larry Right. You OK?

Anna Uhhuh. You?

Larry Yeah.

Larry exits. **Alice** enters. *She is wearing the same black coat from Scene One. Also her rucksack from the same scene.*

Alice I'm going.

Dan I'm sorry.

Alice Irrelevant. What are you sorry for?

Dan For leaving you.

Alice Why didn't you tell me before?

Beat.

Dan Cowardice.

Alice Is it because she's clever?

Dan No, it's because . . . she doesn't need me.

Alice Do you bring her here?

Dan Yes.

Alice She sits here?

Dan Yes.

Alice Didn't she get married?

Dan She stopped seeing me.

Alice Is that when we went to the country? To celebrate our third anniversary?

Dan Yes.

Alice At least have the guts to look at me, you cunt.

Dan looks at her.

Alice Did you phone her? To beg her to come back?

Dan nods.

Alice When you went for your long lonely walks?

Dan Yes.

Alice You're a piece of shit.

Dan Deception is brutal, I'm not pretending otherwise.

Alice How . . . how does it work . . . how can you do this to someone?

Dan I don't know.

Alice Not good enough. I'm going.

Dan It's late, it's not safe out there.

Alice And it's safe here?

Dan What about your things?

Alice I don't need 'things'.

Larry enters wearing a dressing-gown. Hands **Anna** a shoe box.

Larry The Sultan has returned bearing gifts.

Anna opens the box and takes out one shoe.

Dan Where will you go?

Alice I'll disappear.

Anna They're beautiful. Thank you.

Larry You could wear them to the do on Friday.

Anna grimaces.

Larry I've got to put in an appearance, I'm never there. I've got more private patients than BUPA. Shall we eat before or after on Friday?

Anna After.

Larry You wanted to try that new place, didn't you? Used to be a church.

Anna If you like.

Larry I'll book, what's it called?

Anna The Church.

Dan moves to **Alice**.

Alice DON'T COME NEAR ME. DON'T FUCKING COME NEAR ME.

Larry Hey, guess what. Alice was at the Paramount Hotel.

Anna What?

Larry They sell arty postcards in the lobby. I bought one to boost your sales.

He finds it in his bag and reads the back.

'Young Woman, London.'

He hands it to her.

And . . . I checked for your book in the Museum of Modern Art – it's there. Someone bloody bought one; this 'artsy' student in ridiculous spectacles. He was drooling over your photo on the inside cover – fancied you, the little geek. I was so proud of you, you've broken New York.

Anna You're wonderful.

Larry Don't ever forget it.

Larry exits.

Alice Change your mind. Please change your mind.

Pause.

Can I still see you?

Beat.

Dan, can I still see you? Answer me, you fucker.

Dan I can't see you. If I see you I'll never leave you.

Alice What will you do if I find someone else?

Dan Be jealous.

Alice Do you still fancy me?

Dan Of course.

Alice Do you want to fuck me?

Dan Yes.

Pause. She shakes her head.

Alice You're lying. I've been 'you'.

Beat.

Hold me?

Dan holds her.

Alice You did love me?

Dan I'll always love you. You changed my life. I hate hurting you.

Alice So why are you?

Dan Because . . . I think I'll be happier with her.

Alice You won't. You'll miss me. No one will ever love you as much as I do.

Dan I know.

Alice Why isn't love enough?

Pause.

I'm the one who leaves. I'm supposed to leave you. I'm the one who leaves.

Beat.

Make me some tea . . . Buster.

Dan exits. Anna and Alice are alone. Larry enters. He is dressed.

Larry Do you want some coffee?

Anna Why are you dressed?

Larry Because I think you might be about to leave me and I didn't want to be wearing a dressing-gown.

Pause.

I fucked someone in New York. A whore. I'm sorry.

Silence.

Please don't leave me.

Anna Why?

Larry For sex. I wanted sex. I wore a condom.

Anna Was it . . . good?

Larry *huffs and puffs.*

Larry Yes.

Anna Paramount whore?

Larry No . . . Forty . . . something street.

Anna Where did you go?

Larry Her place.

Anna Nice?

Larry Not as nice as ours. I'm really fucking sorry.

Anna Why did you tell me?

Larry I couldn't lie to you.

Anna Why not?

Larry Because I love you.

Beat.

Anna It's fine.

Larry Really? Why?

Anna Because . . .

She looks at her shoes.

Guilt present?

Larry Love present. Something's wrong . . .

Anna Yes.

Pause.

Larry Are you leaving me?

She nods.

Why?

Anna Dan.

Beat.

Larry Cupid? He's our joke.

Anna I love him.

Pause.

Larry You're seeing him now . . .

Anna Yes.

Larry Since when?

Anna My opening, last year. I'm disgusting.

Larry You're phenomenal . . . you're so . . . clever.

Beat.

Why the fuck did you marry me?

Anna I stopped seeing him. I wanted us to work.

Larry Why did you tell me you wanted children?

Anna Because I did.

Larry And now you want children with him?

Anna Yes. I don't know. I'm sorry.

Beat.

Larry Why?

Anna I need him.

Larry What the fuck does that mean?

Anna He understands me.

Larry You're mad. We're happy. Aren't we?

Anna Yes.

Larry Are you going to live with him?

Anna Yes. You stay here, if you want to.

Larry I don't give a fuck about . . . 'the spoils'.

Alice gets up and exits.

Larry You did this the day we met; let me fucking hang myself, make me feel . . . humiliated, for your amusement. Why didn't you tell me the second I walked in the door?

Anna I was scared.

Larry Because you're a coward. You spoilt bitch.

Larry moves towards her.

Dan enters with two cups of tea, he sees Alice has gone. He exits after her.

Larry Are you dressed because you thought I might hit you? What do you think I am?

Anna I've been hit before.

Larry Not by me.

Pause.

Is he a good fuck?

Anna Don't do this.

Larry JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION. Is he good?

Anna Yes.

Larry Better than me?

Anna Different.

Larry Better?

Anna Gentler.

Larry What the fuck does that mean?

Anna You know what it means.

Larry Tell me.

Anna No.

Larry I treat you like a whore?

Anna Sometimes.

Larry Why would that be?

Silence.

Anna I'm sorry. It's done. You're too -

Larry Don't say it, don't fucking say 'You're too good

for me.' I am but don't fucking say it. You're making the mistake of your life. You're leaving me because you think you don't deserve happiness. But you do Anna, you fucking do.

Beat.

Did you have a bath because you had sex with him?

Anna Yes.

Larry So you didn't smell of him? So you'd feel less guilty.

Anna Yes.

Larry And how do you feel?

Anna Guilty.

Larry Do you love me?

Anna Yes.

Larry Big fucking deal.

Pause. On the other side of the stage Dan enters, sits.

Did you do it here?

Anna No.

Larry Why not?

Anna Do you wish we did?

Larry Just tell me the truth.

Anna Yes, we did it here.

Larry Where?

Anna Everywhere.

Larry Here? In here?

Anna Yes.

Larry Where?

Anna Here.

Larry On this?

Anna Yes.

Larry We had our first fuck on this.

Beat.

Think of me?

Beat.

When? When did you do it here? ANSWER THE FUCKING QUESTION.

Anna This evening.

Beat.

Larry Did you come?

Anna Why are you doing this?

Larry Because I want to know.

Anna Yes I came.

Larry How many times?

Anna Twice.

Larry How?

Anna First he went down on me and then we fucked.

Larry Who was where?

Anna I was on top and then he fucked me from behind.

Larry And that's when you came the second time?

Anna Yes. Why is the sex so important?

Larry BECAUSE I'M A FUCKING CAVEMAN.

Beat.

Did you touch yourself while he fucked you?

Anna Yes.

Larry You wank for him?

Anna Sometimes.

Larry And he does?

Anna We do everything that people who have sex do.

Larry You enjoy sucking him off?

Anna Yes.

Larry You like his cock?

Anna I love it.

Larry You like him coming in your face?

Anna Yes.

Larry What does it taste like?

Anna IT TASTES LIKE YOU BUT SWEETER.

Larry THAT'S THE SPIRIT. THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HONESTY. NOW FUCK OFF AND DIE, YOU FUCKED-UP SLAG.

Blackout.

Act Two

Scene Seven

Lapdance Club.

Late night.

Larry is sitting. He is wearing a suit. He has a drink. He has had a few drinks.

Alice is standing. She is wearing a dress and black suede high heels. She is wearing a wig. She has a garter round her thigh, there is cash in the carter.

They are in a private room. Music in the distance.

Larry looks at her. She smiles. She is nice to him.

Larry I love you.

Pause.

Alice Thanks.

Larry What's this room called?

Alice The Paradise Suite.

Larry How many Paradise Suites are there?

Alice Six.

Larry Do I have to pay you to talk to me?

Alice No but if you want to tip me it's your choice.

He takes out a twenty and puts it in her garter.

Thank you.

Larry You're not allowed pockets?

Alice Correct.

Larry In case you hide the money?

Alice No. We have to wear garters, it's a little more elegant than stuffing the cash in our knickers.

Larry If you want to stuff my cash in your knickers, feel free.

Alice Thanks.

Larry Do you get to keep it all?

Alice Yes. But they encourage us to tip the DJs and security.

Larry I went to a place like this in New York. This is swish. Pornography has gone up-market – Bully for England. I used to come here twenty years ago . . . it was a punk club . . . the stage was . . . everything is a version of something else.

He takes a slug of his drink.

What a confusing, hilarious fucking universe. And what a bunch of cunts who own it. Twenty years ago, how old were you?

Alice Three.

Larry Christ, when I was in flares you were in nappies.

Alice My nappies were flared.

Larry Did you see that 'piece' in *The Sunday . . . Bollock* – some supplement where gassing on about Lapdancing – 'The new rock and roll.' What a silly bitch. This is honest progress, don't you think?

Alice England always imports the best of America.

Larry You have the face of a fucking angel.

Alice Thank you.

Larry What does your cunt taste like?

Alice Heaven.

Larry How long you been doing this?

Alice Three months.

Larry Straight after he left you?

Alice No one left me.

Beat.

Larry Been here already tonight?

Alice Yes.

Larry Who . . .

Alice A couple. A man and a woman.

Larry What did you do?

Alice I stripped, I danced, I bent over.

Larry You gave this couple a thrill?

Alice I think so.

Larry They were happy?

Alice Yes.

Larry Suckers, eh? What d'you talk about?

Alice About why I do this, about the payment structure, the lack of pockets, about whether I enjoy it or not.

Larry D'you tell the truth?

Alice Yes and no.

Larry Are you telling me the truth?

Alice Yes.

Larry And no?

Alice I'm telling you the truth.

Larry Why?

Alice Because it's what you want.

Larry Yes, it's what I want.

Beat.

d Closer

Nice wig.

Beat.

Does it turn you on?

Alice Sometimes.

Larry Liar. You're telling me it turns you on because you think that's what I want to hear. You think I'm turned on by it turning you on.

Alice The thought of me creaming myself when I strip for strangers doesn't turn you on?

Larry Put like that . . . yes. But only up to a point. I'm more turned on by the idea that you're conning the men into thinking you're enjoying yourself when really you just want their money.

She lights him a cigarette.

Alice I do want their money.

Larry So it's not sexual?

Alice What is sexual . . . ?

Pause.

Larry Are you flirting with me?

Alice Maybe.

Larry Are you allowed to flirt with me?

Alice Sure.

Larry Really?

Alice No, I'm not, I'm breaking all the rules.

Larry You're mocking me.

She sits opposite him.

Alice Yes, I'm allowed to flirt.

Larry To prise my money from me.

Act Two, Scene Seven (

Alice To prise your money from you I can say or do as I please.

Larry Except touch.

Alice We are not allowed to touch.

Larry Is that a good rule, do you think?

Alice Oh yes.

Beat.

Larry Open your legs. Wider.

Beat. He looks between her legs.

What would happen if I touched you now?

Alice I would call security.

Larry And what would they do?

Alice They would ask you to leave and ask you not to come back.

Larry And if I refused to leave?

Alice They would remove you. This is a two-way mirror.

She looks at the audience.

There are cameras in the ceiling.

Beat.

Larry I think it's best that I don't attempt to touch you. Lift your skirt.

Pause.

I'd like to touch you . . . later.

Alice I'm not a whore.

Larry I wouldn't pay.

Beat.

Why the fuck did he leave you?

Alice What's your job?

Larry A question. You've asked me a question.

Alice So?

Larry It's a chink in your armour.

Alice I'm not wearing armour.

Larry Yes you are. I'm in the skin trade.

Alice You own strip clubs?

Larry Do I look like the sort of man who owns strip clubs?

Alice Yes.

Larry Define that look.

Alice Rich.

Larry Close your legs. I don't own strip clubs.

Alice Do you own golf clubs?

Larry You know what I do. Why are you calling yourself Jane?

Alice Because it's my name.

Larry But we both know it isn't. You're all protecting your identities. The girl in there who calls herself Venus. What's her real name?

Alice Pluto.

Larry You're cheeky.

Alice Would you like me to stop being cheeky?

Larry No.

Beat.

Alice What's your name?

Larry Daniel.

Alice Daniel the Dermatologist.

Larry Doctor Daniel.

Alice Doctor Daniel the Dermatologist.

Larry You're strong.

Beat.

I never told you my job.

Alice I guessed.

Larry There's another one in there (judging by the scars, a recent patient of Doctor Tit) she calls herself 'Cupid'. Who's going to tell her Cupid was a bloke?

Alice He wasn't a bloke. He was a little boy.

Pause.

Larry I'd like you to tell me your name. Please.

He gives her £20.

Alice Thank you. My name is Jane.

Larry Your real name.

He gives her £20.

Alice Thank you. My real name is Jane.

Larry Careful.

He gives her £20.

Alice Thank you. It's still Jane.

Larry Your name...

He gives her £20.

Alice Thank you. Jane.

Pause.

Larry I've got another five hundred quid here.

He takes out the money.

Why don't I give you all this money and you tell me what your real name is. Alice.

He offers her the money. She tries to take it. He won't let go.

Alice I promise . . .

He gives her the money.

Alice My real name is plain . . . Jane . . . Jones.

Larry I may be rich but I'm not stupid.

Alice What a shame, Doc, I love 'em rich and stupid.

Larry DON'T FUCK AROUND WITH ME.

Alice I apologise.

Larry Accepted. All the girls in this hell-hole; the pneumatic robots, the coked up baby dolls – and you're no different, you all use stage names to con yourselves you're someone else so you don't feel ashamed when you show your cunts and arseholes to complete fucking strangers. I'm trying to have a conversation here.

Alice You're out of cash, Buster.

Larry I've paid for the room.

Alice This is extra.

Larry We met last year.

Alice Wrong girl.

Larry I know you're in grief. I know you're . . . destroyed. Talk to me.

Alice I am.

Larry Talk to me in real life.

Silence.

I didn't know you'd be here. I know who you are. I love your scar, I love everything about you that hurts.

He starts to cry.

I miss her. I love her. Talk to me.

He sobs.

You feel the same, I know you feel the same.

Alice You can't cry here.

Larry Hold me, let me hold you.

Alice We are not allowed to touch.

Pause.

Don't be weak, Larry. Fight for her.

Pause. Larry looks at her.

Larry Come home with me, Alice. It's safe. Let me look after you.

Alice I don't need looking after.

Larry Everyone needs looking after.

Alice I'm not your revenge fuck.

Larry I'll pay you.

Alice I don't need your money.

Larry You have my money.

Alice Thank you.

Larry Thank you, thank you. Is that some kind of rule?

Alice I'm just being polite.

Larry Get a lot of men in here, crying their guts out?

Alice Occupational hazard.

Beat.

Larry Have you ever desired a customer?

Alice Yes.

Larry Put me out of my misery, do you . . . desire me? Because I'm being pretty fucking honest about my feelings for you.

Alice Your feelings?

Larry Whatever.

Alice No. I don't desire you.

Silence.

Larry Thank you. Thank you sincerely for your honesty. Next question, if we were somewhere else . . . if I wasn't me and you weren't you . . . if we were just . . . 'Strangers' . . . if there wasn't history, yes . . . would you fuck me?

Beat.

Alice No.

Larry Do you think it's possible you could perceive me as something other than a sad fruit machine spewing out money?

Alice That's the transaction, Larry.

Larry Hey, we're in a strip club let's not debate sexual politics.

Alice This is a debate?

Larry You're asking for a smack, gorgeous.

Alice No I'm not.

Pause.

Larry But you are gorgeous.

Alice Thank you.

Beat.

Larry Will you lend me my cab fare?

Alice (*laughing*) No.

Larry I'll give it back to you tomorrow.

Alice Company policy, you give us the money.

Larry And what do we get in return?

Alice We're nice to you.

Larry And we get to see you naked.

Alice It's beautiful.

Larry Except . . . you think you haven't given us anything of yourselves. You think because you don't love us or desire us or even like us you think you've won.

Alice It's not a war.

Larry *laughs.*

Larry But you do give us something of yourselves: you give us imagery . . . and we do with it what we will.

Pause.

You don't understand the territory. Because you *are* the territory.

Beat.

I could ask you to strip right now.

Alice Yes.

Larry Would you?

Alice Sure. Do you want me to?

Larry No. Alice, have you told me one single intimate or truthful thing? Has this conversation cost you anything?

Alice You're the customer, I'm the service.

Larry Tell me something true.

Alice Lying is the most fun a girl can have without taking her clothes off. But it's better if you do.

Larry You're fucking cold. You're all fucking cold at heart.

Beat. He stares into the two-way mirror.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET A BIT OF INTIMACY ROUND HERE?

Alice Well, maybe next time I'll have worked on my intimacy.

Larry No, I'll tell you what's going to *work*. What's going to *work* is that you're going to take your clothes off right now and you're going to turn round very slowly and bend over and touch the fucking floor for my viewing pleasure.

Alice That's what you want?

Larry What else could I want?

She looks straight at him and begins to undress, slowly.

Blackout.

Scene Eight

The Church.

Evening / Lunch-time.

Dan *is sitting at a table with a coffee. Smoking. Anna joins him.*

Anna Sorry. I'm really sorry.

Dan It's OK. I've eaten.

Anna How was it?

Dan Lonely. So . . .

Anna We had lunch . . .

Dan Where?

Anna Here.

Dan Here? Why?

Anna For a joke, he hates it here.

Dan So do I. Then what?

Anna Then we left.

Dan And?

Anna There is no 'and'.

Dan You haven't seen him for four months, there must be an 'and'. What did you talk about?

Anna About him, us, you know.

Dan How is he?

Anna Terrible.

Dan How's his work?

Anna He's gone 'private'.

Dan How does he square that with his politics?

Anna He's not much concerned with politics at present.

Dan So he misses you?

Anna Yes.

Dan Was he weeping all over the place?

Anna Some of the time.

Dan Poor bastard. Was he . . . difficult?

Beat.

Anna Are you angry I saw him?

Dan No. I just don't understand why you did. I haven't seen Alice.

Anna You can't see Alice, you don't know where she is.

Dan I haven't tried to find her.

Anna He's been begging me to see him for months. You know why I saw him. I saw him so he'd . . . sign.

Dan You could've sent them to him.

Anna I did, he sent them back.

Dan So has he signed?

Anna Yes.

Dan Congratulations. You are now a divorcee. Double divorcee. Sorry. How do you feel?

Anna Tired.

Dan I love you . . . and I need a piss.

Dan *exits.*

Anna *reaches into her bag and pulls out the divorce papers.*

Larry *enters. He looks his best.*

Larry (*sitting*) Sorry I'm late.

Anna It's OK. You look well.

Larry I am well.

Pause. They look at each other.

'The Church.' We married in one and now we're going to get divorced in one, it's beautiful.

Anna I thought it would amuse you.

Larry It does, it amuses the crap out of me. Ho ho ho.

Anna At least it's central.

Larry I hate central, the centre of London's a theme park. I hate 'Retro' and I hate the future. Where does that leave me?

Pause.

Come back.

Anna You promised you wouldn't.

Larry Please, I'm going fucking mad. Come back.

Anna How's work?

Larry Oh Jesus. Work's shit, OK. It's fucking shit.

He looks around for a waiter.

Do they have waiters or just little choir boys to serve you?

Anna They're all busy.

Larry I love you, I fucking love you. Come back.

Anna I'm not coming back, sign this.

She spreads the divorce papers.

Larry No pen.

Anna *hands him a pen.*

Anna Pen.

She forces it into his hand. He holds her hand.

Give me back my hand.

He lets go.

Sign.

Larry I'll sign it on one condition; we skip lunch, we go to my sleek little surgery and we christen the patients' bed with our final fuck.

Beat.

I know you don't want to, I know you think I'm sick for asking – but that's what I'm asking. For old time's sake, because I'm obsessed with you, because I can't get over you unless you fuck me, because I think on some small level you owe me something, for deceiving me so . . . exquisitely.

Beat.

For all these reasons I'm begging you to give me your body. Be my whore and in return I will pay you with your liberty. If you do this I swear I will not contact you again. You know I'm a man of my word. I will divorce you and in time consider the possibility of a friendship. I'm going to the bar. Where is it?

She indicates.

I assume you still drink vodka tonic?

Anna Yes.

Larry exits. Dan returns.

Dan Do you want some food?

Anna I'm not hungry.

Pause. Dan looks at her.

Dan You fucked him, didn't you?

Pause.

Anna Yes. This afternoon. I'm sorry.

Pause.

Dan What do you expect me to do?

Anna Understand...?

Beat.

Dan Why didn't you lie to me?

Anna I never want to lie to you.

Dan What's so great about the truth? The truth hurts people, try lying for a change, it's the currency of the world.

Anna We said we'd always tell each other the truth. I did it so he'd leave us alone. I didn't *give* him anything.

Dan Your body?

Anna Before you there were other people. Trawl the convents, Dan, find yourself a virgin.

Dan It's different.

Dan reaches for his cigarettes.

Anna If Alice came to you ... desperate, in tears, and she said she needed you to want her so that she could get over you, you would do it. I wouldn't like it either but I would forgive you because it's ... a mercy fuck ... a sympathy fuck. Moral rape, everyone does it. It's kindness.

Pause.

Dan No, it's cowardice. You don't have the guts to let him hate you.

Beat.

Did you enjoy it?

Anna No.

Dan So you hated every second of it? Did you ... go down on him?

Beat.

Anna Yes.

Beat.

Dan Did you come?

Anna No.

Dan Did you fake it?

Anna Yes.

Dan Why?

Anna To make him think I enjoyed it, why do you think?

Dan If you were just his slag, why did you give him the pleasure of thinking you'd enjoyed it?

Anna I don't know, I just did.

Dan You fake it with me?

Anna Yes, yes I do. I fake one in three, all right?

Dan Really?

Anna I haven't counted.

Dan Tell me the truth.

Anna Occasionally ... I have faked it. It's not important. You don't *make* me come. I come, you're ... in the area ... providing ... valiant assistance.

Dan You make *me* come.

Anna You're a man, you'd come if the tooth fairy winked at you.

Dan *smiles*.

Anna Dan be bigger than . . . jealous. Be bigger.

Dan Don't talk shit. Be bigger.

Pause.

Anna Why won't you kiss me when we're fucking? You don't even like it when I say I love you.

Beat.

I'm on your side. Talk to me.

Dan It hurts. I'm ashamed. I know it's illogical and I do understand but I hate you.

Beat.

I love you and I don't like other men fucking you. Is that so weird?

Anna No. Yes. It was only sex.

Dan If you can still fuck him you haven't left him.

Beat.

It's gone . . . we're not innocent any more.

Anna Don't stop loving me. I can see it draining out of you.

Beat.

I'm sorry, it was a stupid thing to do. It meant nothing. If you love me enough you'll forgive me.

Dan Are you testing me?

Anna No. I do understand.

Dan No you don't. *He* understands. All I can see is *him* all over you. He's clever, your *ex*-husband, I almost admire him.

Silence.

Anna Where are you? Alice?

Dan I was reading the paper once. She wanted some attention. She crouched down on the carpet and pissed right in front of me. Isn't that the most charming thing you've ever heard?

Anna I was charmed by the battered cardigan on the beach. Why did you swear eternal love when all you wanted was a fuck?

Dan I didn't just want a fuck, I wanted you.

Anna You wanted excitement. Love bores you.

Dan No, it disappoints me.

Beat.

I think you enjoyed it. He wheedles you into bed . . . the old jokes, the strange familiarity . . . where was it?

Anna His new surgery.

Dan Nice?

Anna OK.

Dan I think you had a whale of a time. And the truth is . . . I'll never know unless I ask *him*.

Anna Well, why don't you?

Larry *returns to the table with two drinks. Vodka tonic for Anna, Scotch and dry for himself.*

Larry A hundred cunts at the bar and only one cunt to serve them. I hate this place. Some git was spitting in my ear about loft conversions.

Anna Drink your drink and then we'll go.

Beat.

I'm doing this because I feel guilty and because I pity you. You know that, don't you?

Larry Yes.

Anna Feel good about yourself?

Larry No.

Dan (to Anna) Sorry.

Anna (to Dan) I didn't do it to hurt you. It's not all about you.

Dan (to Anna) I know. Let's go home. I'll get the bill.

Dan exits. **Larry sits.**

Larry Will you tell him?

Anna I don't know.

Larry (helpful) Better to be truthful about this sort of thing . . .

Anna Sign.

Larry I forgive you.

Anna Sign.

Larry signs.

Blackout.

Scene Nine

Museum.

Afternoon.

A glass cabinet containing a life-size model of a Victorian child. A girl, dressed in rags. Behind her a model of a London street circa 1880s.

Alice is alone. She is wearing a cashmere sweater. She is looking at the exhibit. She is holding a small package.

Larry enters. He watches her.

Larry Hallo, gorgeous.

Alice You're late, you old fart.

Larry Sorry.

They kiss, warmly.

You minx.

Alice Why?

Larry tugs the sweater.

Alice The sacred sweater. I'll give it back.

Larry It suits you. Keep it.

Alice hands him the package.

Alice Happy birthday.

Larry Thank you.

Beat.

I'm late because I walked through Postman's Park to get here. And I had a little look at the memorial . . .

Alice Oh.

Larry Yeah . . . oh.

Pause. **Larry** looks at the exhibit. Smiles at **Alice**.

Alice Do you hate me?

Larry No, I adore you.

Alice Do we have to talk about it?

Larry Not if you don't want to.

She kisses him.

Alice Thank you. I've got a surprise for you.

Larry You're full of them.

Alice looks at **Larry's** watch.

Alice Wait here.

Alice exits. Larry sits. He opens his package. Looks inside, smiles.

Anna enters looking at her watch. She has a guide book and her camera. She is wearing the shoes Larry gave her in Scene Six. She sees Larry. Stops. Larry looks up, sees her.

Larry Oh fuck.

Anna Thanks. What are you doing here?

Larry I'm ... lazing on a Sunday afternoon. You?

Anna I'm meeting Alice.

Larry Alice?

Anna Dan's Alice, ex-Alice. She phoned me at the studio this morning ... she wants her negatives ...

Larry Right ...

Beat.

Anna You don't go to museums ...

Larry The evidence would suggest otherwise.

Beat.

Anna Are you OK?

Larry Yeah, you?

Anna Fine. It's your birthday today.

Larry I know.

Anna I thought of you this morning.

Larry Lucky me.

Anna Happy birthday.

Larry Thank you.

Anna Present?

Larry Yeah.

Anna What is it?

Larry A Newton's Cradle.

Anna Who from?

Larry My dad.

Anna Joe?

Silence.

Larry It's from Alice. I'm fucking her ... that's why I'm here. I'm fucking Alice. She's set us up. I had no idea you were meeting her.

Pause.

Anna You're old enough to be her ancestor.

Larry Yup, disgusting, isn't it.

Anna You should be ashamed of yourself.

Larry (*smiling*) I am.

Anna How ... ?

Larry Er ... she's ... I went to a club, she happened to be there.

Anna A club?

Larry Yeah, a club.

Anna You don't go to clubs.

Larry I'm reliving my youth.

Anna Was it a strip club?

Larry You know, I can't remember. Jealous?

Pause.

Ah well ...

Anna When did it start?

Larry Last month.

Anna Before or after I came to your surgery?

Larry The night before. She made me strip for her.

Anna I don't want to know.

Larry I know.

Anna You're sly.

Larry Am I?

Beat.

You love your guide books. You look like a tourist.

Anna I feel like one. Please don't hate me.

Pause.

Larry It's easier than loving you.

Pause.

Me and Alice . . . it's nothing.

Anna Nice nothing?

Larry Very. How's your soul mate?

Anna OK.

Alice enters.

Alice Hi, you two know each other I believe.

Larry I think I'll leave you to it.

Alice Good idea, we don't want him here while we're working, do we?

Larry (to Anna) Bye.

He kisses Alice.

(To Alice.) Later, Minx. *(To Anna.)* Nice shoes by the way.

He exits.

Anna How did you get so brutal?

Alice I lived a little.

Alice strokes the sweater, Anna looks at her.

Anna You're primitive.

Alice Yeah, I am. How's Dan?

Anna Fine.

Alice Just fine?

Anna He's well. He's been made editor.

Alice Of obituaries?

Anna Yes.

Alice How come?

Anna The previous editor died.

Alice Harry Masters?

Anna Yes. Alcohol poisoning. Dan was very upset, he sat with him for a week while he died.

Alice Did you tell him you were seeing me?

Anna No.

Beat.

Alice Do you cut off his crusts?

Anna Sorry?

Alice Do you cut off his crusts?

Anna What do you want?

Alice I want my negatives.

Anna gives her a large brown envelope.

Alice What's your latest project, Anna?

Anna Derelict buildings.

Alice How nice, the beauty of ugliness.

Anna What are you doing with Larry?

Alice Showing him a good time.

Anna Where are you living?

Alice Your house.

Beat.

A hotel. Aren't you going to say you're sorry?

Anna I am sorry.

Alice I'm stripping again.

Anna I know.

Alice You should come to the club sometime, show *everyone* what you've got.

Beat.

Larry used to wander around like a zombie, blubbing into his ashtray. We called him 'Happy Larry'. I wish you could've seen it. It might've helped you develop a conscience.

Anna I know what I've done.

Alice His big thing at the moment is how upset his family are. Apparently, they all worship you, they can't understand why you had to ruin everything. He spends hours staring up my asshole like there's going to be some answer there. Any ideas, Anna?

Beat.

Why don't you go back to him and we can all be happy again.

Anna And then would Dan go back to you?

Alice Maybe.

Anna Ask him.

Alice I'm not a beggar.

Anna Dan left you, I didn't force him to go.

Alice You made yourself available, don't weasel out of it.

Beat.

Anna Fucking Larry was a big mistake.

Alice Yeah, well, everyone fucks Larry round here.

Anna You're Dan's little girl, he won't like it.

Alice So don't tell him, I think you owe me that.

Anna *looks away.*

Alice You even look beautiful when you cry. The perfect woman.

Anna JUST FUCKING STOP IT.

Alice Now we're talking.

Anna Why now, why come for me now?

Alice Because I felt strong enough. It's taken me five months to convince myself you're not better than me.

Anna It's not a competition.

Alice Yes it is.

Anna I don't want a fight.

Alice So give in.

Beat.

Why did you do this?

Anna (*tough*) I fell in love with him, Alice.

Alice (*laughing*) That's the most stupid expression in the world. 'I fell in love.' As if you had no choice. There's a moment, there's always a moment; I can do this, I can give in to this or I can resist it. I don't know when your moment was but I bet there was one.

Anna Yes, there was.

Alice You didn't fall in love, you gave in to temptation. Don't lie to me.

Anna You fell in love with him too.

Alice No, I chose him. I looked in his briefcase and I

found this ... sandwich ... and I thought, I will give all my love to this stupid, boring, charming man who cuts off his crusts. I didn't *fall* in love, I chose to.

Anna Dan's cruel, you're deluded.

Alice He's not cruel, he's unhappy. He's like me, he's got no one.

Anna You still want him, after everything he's done to you?

Anna You wouldn't understand, he ... buries me.

Anna Hallo?

Alice He makes me invisible.

Anna What are you hiding from?

Alice Everything. Everything's a lie, nothing matters.

Anna Bollocks. Too easy, Alice, it's the cop-out of the age.

Alice Yeah, well, you're old.

Pause.

Anna I am sorry. I had a choice and I chose to be selfish. I'm sorry.

Alice Everyone's selfish. I stole Dan from ... what was her name?

Anna Ruth.

Alice Is that the ugliest name in the world or what?

Anna It's a nice name.

Alice She went to pieces when he left her.

Anna Did she ever come and see you?

Alice No, she was a faxer not a fighter.

Pause.

Anna I stole from you. I didn't want to hurt you.

Alice Whatever.

Beat.

Anna Larry told me what you said about my exhibition.

Alice At least your pictures are better than Dan's crappy novel. What a pile of cock. Even the title's shit.

Anna You think so?

Alice Why didn't he write about something that hurt him? He's such a wimp, he won't go near himself.

Anna It's easy to say that. I'm not being patronising but you're a child.

Alice You are being patronising.

Anna And you are a child. You can't even hear your clock ticking.

Beat.

Alice So, what are you going to do?

Anna Think.

Pause.

Is Larry nice to you, in bed?

Alice OK, Dan's better.

Anna Rubbish, at least Larry's there.

Alice Dan's there, in his own quiet way.

Anna They spend a lifetime fucking and never know how to make love.

Alice So eat pussy, Anna.

Anna Oh, I have.

Beat.

Alice I've got a scar on my leg, Larry's mad about it. He licks it like a dog. Any ideas?

Anna Dermatology? God knows. This is what we're dealing with; we arrive with our baggage and for a while they're brilliant, they're baggage handlers. We say 'Where's your baggage?' They deny all knowledge of it, they're in love, they have none. Then, just as you're relaxing, a great big juggernaut arrives with their baggage. It got held up. The greatest myth men have about women is that we overpack.

Beat.

They love the way we make them feel but not 'us'. They love dreams.

Alice So do we. You should lower your expectations.

Anna Who's 'Buster'?

Alice 'Buster'? No idea.

Anna He says it in his sleep.

Alice I've got to go.

Anna Don't forget your negatives.

Alice Oh yeah. Thanks.

She hands the envelope to Anna.

Must dash. Do the right thing, Anna.

Alice exits. Anna looks at the envelope.

Blackout.

Scene Ten

Larry's surgery.

Late afternoon.

On Larry's desk: laptop computer, phone, a Newton's Cradle. Also in the room, a surgery bed. Larry seated at his desk. Dan standing, distraught.

Silence.

Larry So...

Dan I want Anna back.

Larry Is that it then?

Beat.

Dan I owe you an apology. I fell in love with her. My intention was not to make you suffer.

Larry Where's the apology, you cunt.

Dan I apologise.

Pause.

If you love her, you'll let her go so she can be happy.

Larry She doesn't want to be 'happy'.

Dan Everyone wants to be happy.

Larry Depressives don't. They want to be unhappy to confirm they're depressed. If they were happy they couldn't be depressed any more, they'd have to go out into the world and live, which can be ... depressing.

Dan Anna's not a depressive.

Larry Isn't she?

Pause.

Dan I love her.

Larry Boo hoo, so do I. You don't love Anna, you love yourself.

Dan You're wrong, I don't love myself.

Larry Yes you do, and you know something; you're winning - you selfish people - it's your world. Nice, isn't it?

Dan glances round the sleek surgery.

Dan Nice office. She's come back to you because she can't

bear your suffering. You don't know who she is, you love her like a dog loves its owner.

Larry And the owner loves the dog for so doing. Companionship will always triumph over 'passion'.

Dan You'll hurt her. You won't forgive her.

Larry Of course I forgive her – without forgiveness we're savages. You're drowning.

Dan You only met her because of me.

Larry Yeah, thanks.

Dan It's a joke, your marriage to her is a joke.

Larry I like jokes. Here's a good one . . . she never sent the divorce papers to her lawyer.

Pause.

To a towering romantic hero like you I don't doubt I'm somewhat common but I am, nevertheless, what she has chosen. And we must respect what the woman wants. If you go near her again I promise –

The phone rings.

I will kill you.

He picks it up.

(Charming.) Hallo. Uh-huh. OK.

He puts the phone down.

I have patients to see.

Larry *takes his jacket off.*

Dan When she came here you think she enjoyed it?

Larry I didn't fuck her to give her a nice time. I fucked her to fuck you up. A good fight is never clean. And yeah, she enjoyed it, she's Catholic, she loves a guilty fuck.

Larry *grins.*

Dan You're an animal.

Larry Yeah and what are you?

Dan You think love is simple? You think the heart is like a diagram?

Larry Ever seen a human heart? It looks like a fist wrapped in blood. GO FUCK YOURSELF . . . you . . . WRITER – YOU LIAR. Go check a few facts while I get my hands dirty.

Dan She hates your hands, she hates your simplicity.

Pause.

Larry Listen, I've spent the last week talking about you. Anna tells me you fucked her with your eyes closed. She tells me you still cry for your mother, you mummy's boy.

Beat.

Shall we stop this?

Beat.

You don't know the first thing about love because you don't understand compromise.

Beat.

You don't even know Alice . . .

Dan *looks up.*

Larry Consider her scar, how did she get that?

Dan When did you see her?

Pause.

Larry Anna's exhibition. You remember. A scar in the shape of a question mark, solve the mystery.

Dan She got it when her parents' car crashed.

Larry When you leave . . . doubtless you will notice the beautiful girl in reception. She's my next patient. She has

an illness called 'Dermatitis Artefacta'. It's a mental disorder manifested in the skin. The patient manufactures his or her very own skin disease. They pour bleach on themselves, gouge their skin, inject themselves with their own piss, sometimes their own shit. They create their own disease with the same diabolical attention to detail as the artist or the lover.

Beat.

It looks 'real' but its source is the deluded self.

Beat.

Our flesh is ferocious, our bodies will kill us, our bones will outlive us . . .

He takes a roll of paper and makes a new sheet on the surgery bed.

I think Alice mutilated herself. It's fairly common in children who lose their parents young. They blame themselves, they're disturbed.

Dan Alice is not disturbed.

Larry But she is. You were so busy feeling your grand artistic 'feelings' you couldn't see what was in front of you. The girl is fragile and tender. She didn't want to be put in a book, she wanted to be loved.

Dan How do you know?

Larry Clinical observation. Don't fucking cry on me.

Beat.

Dan I'm sorry, I don't know what to do.

Larry You want my advice? Go back to her.

Dan She'd never have me. She's vanished.

Larry No she hasn't. I found her . . . by accident. She's working in . . . a club.

Beat.

Yes, I saw her naked.

Beat.

No, I did not fuck her.

Dan You spoke to her?

Larry Yes.

Dan What about?

Larry You.

The phone rings. Larry moves towards it gesturing Dan to sit down. Larry picks up the phone.

Yes. Yup. One minute.

He puts the phone down. He writes.

Dan How is she?

Larry She loves you . . . beyond comprehension. Here . . . your prescription. It's where she works. Go to her.

Dan Thanks.

Pause. Dan looks at the Newton's Cradle.

Where did you get that?

Larry A present.

Beat.

Still fucking around on the Net?

Dan Not recently.

Larry I liked your book by the way.

Dan Really?

Larry I'm not sucking your literary cock but I did quite like it – because it was 'human' and I'm bored with inhuman things. Anything with a 'cyber' before it I want to kill.

Dan You and I met in cyberspace.

Larry And I wanted to kill you.

Dan I thought you wanted to fuck me?

Larry Don't get lippy. You should write another one.

Dan Haven't got a subject.

Larry When I was nine a policeman touched me up. He was my uncle, still is – Uncle Ted. Nice bloke, married, bit of a demon darts player. Don't tell me you haven't got a subject, every human life is a million stories. Thank God life ends – we'd never survive it. You still writing obituaries?

Dan Yeah.

Larry Busy?

Dan Yup, old people die in the winter.

Larry We're the old people, Dan. Old men shaking our fists over these women, like some ancient ritual. We should go back to the aquarium and evolve. From Big Bang to weary shag, the history of the world.

Dan *smiles.*

Larry And if women saw one minute of our home movies, the shit that slops through our minds every day . . . they'd string us up by our balls, they really would.

Pause. They look at each other. Dan looks at the Newton's Cradle.

Dan Alice . . . gave me one of those.

Larry Really?

Beat.

Dan And yours?

Larry Oh . . . my dad.

Dan Your father?

Larry Yeah, he loves old tat.

He clicks the balls into motion.

Strange, isn't it? Everything our parents told us was good for us will kill us . . . sun, milk, meat . . . love. You shouldn't have messed with Anna.

Dan *gets up.*

Dan I know, I'm sorry. Thank you.

Larry For what?

Dan Being nice.

Larry I am nice. Your invoice is in the post.

Dan *goes to exit.*

Larry Dan . . .

Dan *turns.*

Larry I lied to you.

Beat.

I did fuck Alice. Sorry for telling you. I'm just . . . not big enough to forgive you.

Beat.

So go fuck yourself . . . Buster.

Silence. They look at each other.

Blackout.

Scene Eleven

Hotel room.

Late night.

Dan *is lying on the bed, he stubs his cigarette in the ashtray. Alice is in the bathroom offstage.*

Alice *(off)* What barks and fucks like a tiger?

Dan What?

Alice *barks loudly.*

Dan It's two in the morning. You'll wake the hotel.

Alice *enters in her stripey pyjamas.*

Alice Mad dog.

She jumps onto the bed.

Fuck me . . .

Dan Again? We have to be up at six in the morning.

Alice How can one man be so endlessly disappointing?

Dan That's my charm.

Alice *lies in his arms.*

Dan So . . . where are we going?

Alice My treat, my holiday surprise, my rules.

Dan Give me a clue.

Alice New York.

Dan Really? Great. How long's the flight?

Alice Seven hours.

Dan I can't fly for seven hours.

Alice The plane will do the flying. I'll protect you.

Dan With what?

Alice Free booze. Don't be scared of flying.

Dan I'm not, I'm scared of crashing. I'm scared of . . . you dying and me melting in my seat with half a head.

He kisses her.

Did you remember to pack my passport?

Alice Of course, your passport is with my passport.

Dan And where are those passports?

Alice In a place where you can't look. No one sees my passport photo. Hey, when we get on the plane we'll have been together four years. Happy anniversary, Buster.

Dan What about . . . the gap?

Alice We were still together, in spirit.

Pause.

Dan I'm going to take my eyes out.

Alice Brush your teeth as well.

Dan What was in my sandwiches?

Alice Tuna.

Dan What colour was my apple?

Alice Green.

Dan It was red.

Alice It was green, I ate it, I know. What colour were the chairs?

Dan Red?

Alice Orange. Show me the sneer.

Dan *sneers.*

Dan What were your first words to me?

Alice 'Hallo, stranger.' Where had I been?

Dan Dancing then Smithfield then the buried river.

Alice The what?

Dan You went to Blackfriars Bridge to see where the Fleet river comes out, the . . . swimming pig . . . all that.

Alice You've lost the plot, Grandad.

Dan *exits to the bathroom.*

Alice You forgot something else; I went to the little park, with the memorial.

Dan *(off)* Eh?

Alice The park where you once ate egg sandwiches with your dad, he had butter on his chin.

Dan *(off)* How do you remember these things?

Alice Because *my* head's not full of specky egghead rubbish. What was your euphemism?

Dan *(off)* Reserved. Yours?

Alice Disarming. Was your doughnut jam or custard?

Dan enters. *He is wearing glasses now.*

Dan No idea.

Alice Trick question, you had a bun.

Dan *You* are a trick question. Do you remember the doctor?

Alice No . . . what doctor?

Dan There was a doctor. He gave you a cigarette.

Alice No.

Pause.

I haven't been on holiday for . . . ever.

Dan We went to the country . . .

Alice That doesn't count, you were making sneaky calls to that . . . hussy we do not mention.

Beat.

Dan Do you think they're happy?

Alice Who?

Dan Anna and . . . Larry.

Alice No. Kip?

Dan I want a fag. How did *you* manage to give up?

Alice Deep inner strength.

Pause. Dan strokes her leg.

Dan How did you get this?

Alice You know how.

Dan How?

Alice I fell off my bike because I refused to use stabilisers.

Dan Really?

Alice You know how I got it.

Pause.

Dan Did you do it yourself?

Alice No.

Pause.

Dan Show me your passport.

Alice No, I look ugly.

Dan I don't want to see your photo.

Pause.

When are you going to stop stripping?

Alice Soon.

Dan You're addicted to it.

Alice No I'm not. It paid for this.

Beat.

Dan Tell me what happened . . .

Alice Dan . . . don't.

Dan Nothing you say can hurt me, I'm in love with you. You're safe.

Alice Nothing happened.

Dan But he came to the club?

Alice Loads of men came to the club. *You* came to the club. The look on your face.

Dan The look on *your* face. What a face. What a wig. I love your face . . . I saw this face . . . this vision . . . and then you stepped into the road. It was the moment of my life.

Alice *This* is the moment of your life.

Dan You were perfect . . .

Alice I still am.

Dan I know.

Beat.

On the way to the hospital ... when you were 'lolling' ...
I kissed your forehead.

Alice You brute.

Dan The cabbie saw me kiss you ... he said 'Is she yours?' and I said 'Yes ... she's mine.'

He kisses her.

So he came to the club, watched you strip, had a little chat
and that was it.

Alice Yes.

Dan You're not trusting me. I'm not going to leave you,
I'm never going to leave you again. Just tell me so I know.
I want to understand you.

Alice You do understand me.

Dan So trust me. If you fucked him you fucked him, I
just want to know.

Alice Why?

Dan (*tenderly*) Because I want to know everything because
... I'm a loony.

Pause.

Tell me ...

Pause.

Alice Nothing happened. You were living with someone
else.

Dan What are you justifying?

Alice I'm not justifying anything ... I'm just saying.

Dan What are you saying?

Alice I'm not saying anything. Please don't scare me.

Dan I just want the truth.

Alice I'm telling you the truth.

Dan You and the truth are known strangers. Did you
ever give him a present?

Alice No, come to bed.

Dan I'm going for some fags.

Alice Everywhere's closed.

Dan I'll go to the terminal. I'll be back soon.

He gets up, puts on his coat.

When I get back please tell me the truth.

Alice Why?

Dan (*angry*) Because I'm addicted to it. Because without it
we're animals. Trust me, I love you.

Alice (*calm*) I don't love you any more.

Dan What?

Alice You heard.

Dan Look ... I'm sorry.

Alice No, I've changed the subject, I - don't - love -
you - any more.

Dan Since when?

Alice Now. Just now. Go please.

She rummages in her rucksack and hands him his passport.

I don't want to lie and I can't tell you the truth so it's
over.

Dan You're leaving me?

Alice I've left. I've gone. I don't love you any more.
Goodbye.

Dan Why?

Alice Because I'm bored of loving a piece of shit.

Dan Why don't you tell me the truth.

Alice So you can hate me? I fucked Larry, many times, I enjoyed it, I came, I prefer you. Now go.

Pause.

Dan I knew that. He told me.

Alice You knew?

Dan I needed *you* to tell me.

Alice Why?

Dan Because he might've been lying. I had to hear it from you.

Alice I would never have told you because I know you'd never forgive me.

Dan I would. I have.

Alice Why did he tell you?

Dan Because he's a bastard.

Alice How could he?

Dan Because he wanted *this* to happen.

Alice But why test me?

Dan Because I'm a fucking idiot.

Alice Yeah, well, I'm bored of loving an idiot. You left me, Dan. You jumped ship. I would've loved you for ever. I was lonely and I fucked him, fuck you. Get out.

Dan Don't do this, Alice. Talk to me.

Alice I'm talking, fuck off.

Dan I'm sorry, you misunderstand, I didn't mean to...

Alice Yes you did.

Dan I love you.

Alice Where?

Dan What?

Alice Show me. Where is this 'love'? I can't see it, I can't touch it, I can't feel it. I can hear it, I can hear some words but I can't do anything with your easy words. So... please get out, or I will, which annoys the fuck out of me because this is my treat.

Dan Listen to me, please...

Alice Whatever you say it's too late.

Dan Please don't do this...

Alice It's done. Please go or I'll call... security.

Dan You're not in a strip club. There is no security.

She tries to grab the phone. Dan throws her onto the bed. They struggle.

Alice What are you going to do now? Beat me up? Rape me? Kill me?

Dan Why did you fuck him?

Alice I wanted to.

Dan Why?

Alice I desired him.

Dan Why?

Alice You weren't there.

Dan Why him?

Alice He asked me nicely.

Dan You're a liar.

Alice So?

Dan WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?

Alice I'M NO ONE.

She spits in his face. Silence.

Go on, hit me. That's what you want. Hit me, you fucker.

Silence.

Dan hits her.

Silence.

She stares at him. He looks away.

Alice Do you have a single original thought in your head?

Blackout.

Scene Twelve

Postman's Park.

Afternoon.

A summer's day. Anna is looking at the memorial. She has a guide book. Larry stands holding his white coat. He carries two styrofoam cups. He watches her. She turns.

Anna Spy.

Beat.

You've got the coat...

Larry Yes, I have.

Anna The white coat.

Larry I'm Larry, the Doctor.

Anna Hallo, Doctor Larry.

Larry hands a cup to Anna.

Anna Thanks. Have you read these?

She wanders back to the memorial. Larry sits on a park bench and lights a cigarette.

Larry I knew you'd like it.

Anna (*reading*) Elizabeth Boxall, of Bethnal Green ... died of injuries received in trying to save a child from a runaway horse. June 20 1888.

She turns to him.

How's Polly?

Larry Polly is great.

Anna I always knew you'd end up with a pretty nurse.

Larry Yeah? How?

Anna I just thought you would.

Larry Why not you?

Beat.

Anna I spoilt it. I knew you'd be off when someone nice turned up. Is she ... the one?

Larry I don't know ... no. Everyone learns, nobody changes.

Anna You don't change.

Pause.

Larry You ... seeing anyone?

Anna No. I got a dog.

Larry Yeah? What sort?

Anna Mongrel, she's a stray. I found her in the street, no collar, nothing.

Beat.

Actually ... I'm not seeing anyone but I've got a bit of a date.

Larry Who? I'll kill him.

Anna He's a vet.

Larry See, you can't escape the medics. Does he smoke a pipe?

Anna No.

Beat.

Do I look OK?

Larry You look fantastic, I'd give you one.

Anna Don't start.

Larry I would actually. Serious.

Anna Fuck off and die. You fucked-up slag.

Anna *smiles.*

Larry I never told you this . . . when I strode into the bathroom . . . that night – a bruised colossus, I banged my knee on your cast-iron roll-top trendy tub. The fucking bathroom ambushed me. I was hopping around in agony while you were weeping in the sitting-room. The mirror was having a field day.

Beat.

It's good to see you. And I hope you'll be thoroughly miserable with your tweedy vet.

Anna I'm sure I will be.

Beat.

Larry How's work?

Anna I'm having a break. I'm taking the dog to my parents, we're going to go for long walks.

Larry Good idea.

Pause.

Don't become . . . a sad person.

Anna I won't. I'm not. Fuck off.

He looks at her.

Larry Don't give your love to a dog.

Anna (*tough*) You didn't want it, in the end. There's always someone younger.

Silence. They look out at the memorial.

Larry How did she die?

Anna I don't know. Dan phoned this morning . . . all he said was, 'Alice died last night in New York.' He said he was flying out today and he wanted to see us before he left.

Pause.

Larry So they weren't together?

Anna No, they split up in January.

Larry How did they contact him?

Anna Maybe she wrote his name in her passport as next of kin. You're still in mine, in the event of death. I must remove you.

Pause.

Are you glad you're back at Barts?

Larry Yeah. Well, Polly refused to have sex with me until I gave up private medicine. What's a man to do?

Pause. Anna reads her guide book, looks up.

Anna Who put these here?

Larry George Watts.

Anna The artist?

Larry Yeah, it's the Watts Memorial.

Anna No, I mean do you think the families arranged them?

Larry I suppose. It's like putting flowers at the roadside. People need to remember. It makes things seem less ... random.

Pause.

Actually, I hate this memorial.

Anna Why?

Larry It's the sentimental act of a Victorian philanthropist. We remember the dead and forget about the living.

Anna You're a pompous cunt.

Beat.

Larry And you are an incurable romantic.

Pause.

Have a look for Alice Ayres.

Anna Larry, that's horrible.

Larry *takes the book. He finds the page.*

Larry *(reading)* 'Alice Ayres, daughter of a bricklayer's labourer, who by intrepid conduct saved three children from a burning house in Union Street, Borough, at the cost of her own young life. April 24 1885.'

Pause.

She made herself up.

Anna *(reading)* 'She rescued the three children and then stood at the window of the burning building ... "the crowd implored her to jump ... dazed and enfeebled she missed her leap and struck some railings".' She was impaled.

Beat.

'Proposing a national monument to ordinary civilians Watts sited the example of Alice Ayres ... "These deeds, happily far from uncommon, will more than anything constitute in the far future our claim to be considered a noble people.

The national prosperity of a nation is not an abiding possession, the deeds of its people are."'

Larry He was inspired by her ... the girl in the burning building ... romantic death. Was he a good artist?

Anna Not really.

Larry I'm not being callous but I've got a lot of patients to see. Give my apologies to Dan. I'm not good at grief.

Anna You're a coward.

Larry I know.

Anna Listen ... *(Reading.)* 'Watts wanted other cities to build similar memorials but none did. This is the only one. There are still ninety spaces left.'

Pause.

You do remember me?

They look at each other. Dan enters with a small suitcase (as seen in Scene Five) and a bunch of flowers.

Dan I couldn't get away from work, sorry.

Larry Dan ... I have to ...

Dan It's fine ...

Larry *exits.*

Dan *(to Anna)* You look well.

Anna So do you.

Dan *looks out at the memorial.*

Dan She mentioned this ...

Anna Come and sit down ...

Pause.

Dan This is where we sat.

Anna Who?

Dan Me and my father, didn't I tell you?

Anna No, wrong girl, you told Alice...

Dan Jane, her name was Jane Jones. The police phoned me, they told me that someone I knew called Jane had died... they found her address book. I said there must be a mistake... they had to describe her...

There's no one else to identify the body...

She was knocked down by a car... on 43rd and Madison.

I don't know why she died. I don't know if she...

I went to work today... I wanted to pretend everything was normal. Graham said, 'Who's on the slab?' I went out by the fire exit and just cried like a baby. I covered my face... why do we do that?

A man from the Treasury had died. I spent all day writing his obituary.

There's no space. There's not enough space.

The phone rang. It was the police... they said there's no record of her parents' death... they said they were trying to trace them...

She fell off her bike because... she refused to use stabilisers.

She said she fell in love with me because I cut off my crusts... but it was just... it was only that day... because the bread broke in my hands...

Thank you for being here. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Pause.

I bumped into Ruth last week. She's deliriously happy. Married, one kid, another on the way. She married a Spanish poet. She translated his work and fell in love with him. Fell in love with a collection of fucking poems. You know what they were called? 'Solitude'.

They laugh. Dan holds on to the flowers.

I have to put these at Blackfriars Bridge. I have to go, I'll miss the plane.

They stand. They look at each other. Pause.

Bye.

Anna Yes. Bye.

Dan and Anna *exit separately.*

Fade.

Appendix to Scene Three

In a production of *Closer* where production budget or theatre sightlines won't allow for a projected version of this scene it may be possible for the actors to speak their lines whilst typing. Permission, in this respect, must be sought from the author's agent when negotiating the rights for the production.

The following dialogue may be used:

Scene Three

Early evening.

Dan is in his flat sitting at a table with a computer. There is a Newton's Cradle on the table. Writerly sloth, etc.

Larry is sitting at his desk with a computer. Larry is wearing a white coat.

They are in separate rooms.

They speak their 'dialogue' simultaneous to their typing it. The actors should speak word by word, almost robotically, as if we are hearing the words coolly appearing on a screen. Thus making a distinction between 'typed' speech and actual speech (e.g. Larry on the phone).

Dan Hallo.

Larry Hi.

Dan Do you come here often?

Larry Eh?

Dan Net.

Larry First time.

Dan A Virgin. Welcome. What's your name?

Larry Larry. You?

Beat.

Dan Anna.

Larry Nice to meet you.

Pause.

Dan I love COCK.

Pause.

Larry You're v. forward.

Dan This is a web fuck site. Do you want sex?

Larry Yes. Where are you?

Dan London.

Larry Me too. Describe you.

Dan Mid 30s, dark hair, big mouth, epic tits.

Larry Define epic.

Dan I want to suck you senseless.

Larry Be my guest.

Dan Wear my wet knickers.

Larry OK.

Dan Well hung?

Larry Nine pounds. (Shit) Nine inches.

Dan GET IT OUT.

Pause. Larry considers this proposition. The phone on Larry's desk rings. Loud. He jumps.

Larry (*speaking*) Wait.

Larry (*typing*) Wait

He picks up the phone. Dan lights a cigarette. Sips from a can.

(Speaking into phone.) Hallo? What's the histology? Progressive? No, sounds like an atrophy. Bye.

Larry puts the phone down and goes back to his keyboard.

Dan clicks the balls on his Newton's Cradle.

Larry (*typing*) Sorry, the phone rang.

Dan looks at his screen.

Larry Hallo?

Dan looks at his screen.

Larry (*speaking*) Bollocks.

(*Now typing again.*) Anna?

Dan looks at his screen.

Larry (*typing*) ANNA? WHERE ARE YOU?

Dan Hey, big Larry, what do you wank about?

Larry (*speaking*) You name it.

Larry (*typing*) Anything.

Dan E.g.?

Larry Ex-girlfriends.

Dan What do they do?

Larry Tie me up, tease me, won't let me come. They fight over me, six tongues on my cock, balls, et cetera.

Dan All hail the Sultan of Twat?

Larry laughs.

Larry Anna, what do you wank about?

Beat. **Dan** considers.

Dan Strangers.

Larry Details...

Dan They form a queue and I attend to them like a cum hungry bitch, one in each hole and both hands.

Beat.

Larry Five?

Dan Mmmm.

Larry's phone rings. He picks up the receiver and replaces it without answering. Then takes it off the hook.

Larry Then?

Dan They cum in my mouth arse tits cunt hair.

Larry (*speaking*) Jesus.

Larry (*typing*) Then?

Dan I lick it off like the dirty slut I am. Wait, have to type with one hand... I'm coming right now... oh oh oh oh oh oh.

Pause.

Larry Was it good?

Dan Unbelievable.

Larry I'm shocked.

Dan PARADISE SHOULD BE SHOCKING.

Larry Are you for real?

Dan Yes... Meet me...

Larry Serious?

Dan Yes.

Larry When?

Dan Now.

Larry Can't. I'm a doctor. Have to do my rounds.

Dan laughs.

Dan Don't be a pussy. Life without risk is death. Desire, like the world, is an accident. The best sex is anonymous. We live as we dream, ALONE. I'll make you come like a train.

Larry flicks through his diary.

Dan clicks the balls on his Newton's Cradle.

Larry (*typing*) Sorry, the phone rang.

Dan looks at his screen.

Larry Hallo?

Dan looks at his screen.

Larry (*speaking*) Bollocks.

(*Now typing again.*) Anna?

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Dan Don't be a pussy. Life without risk is death. Desire, like the world, is an accident. The best sex is anonymous. We live as we dream, ALONE. I'll make you come like a train.

Larry flicks through his diary.

Larry Tomorrow? 1p.m.?

Dan London Zoo. The Aquarium.

Larry 1p.m.

Dan And then a hotel.

Larry How will I know you?

Dan *thinks.*

Dan Bring white coat.

Larry Eh?

Dan No fuck without it.

Larry OK.

Dan Bye, Larry, kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss.

Larry Bye, Anna, kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss.

They look at their screens.

Blackout.