

A Long Way Down

By

Andrew Whipple

Based on A Long Way Down by Nick Hornby

## Cast of Characters

- Martin: A 45 year old British man morning television host, who was recently released from prison for accidentally sleeping with a 15-year-old.
- Maureen: A 51 year old British woman who has had to care for her severely disable son for the past 18 years.
- Jess: An 18 year old British girl who is the daughter of the Junior Minister for Education. Her sister dissappeared a few years ago, and since then her family has started to crumble.
- JJ: A 23 year old American man who moved to England to be with his girlfriend, who promptly dumped him. Soon afterwards his band broke up, and now he is stuck working illegally at a pizza joint.
- Kid 1: A college-aged art student.
- Kid 2: Another college-aged art student.
- Chas: An 18 year old, slightly dimwitted kid. Used to date Jess
- Penny: A 35 year old British woman, the former cohost of Martin's show (who he is currently sleeping with.)

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

<u>Mr. Crichton:</u>	Jess's father, the Junior Minister for education.
<u>Linda:</u>	A newspaper reporter assigned to cover Martin and company.
<u>Matty:</u>	Maureen's 18 year old, severely disabled son. He is in a completely vegetative state.
<u>NotJen:</u>	A PA on Martin's new cable show, who happens to look something like Jess's lost sister Jen (albeit with blonde hair.)
<u>Jumper:</u>	A 30-something man who tries to kill himself.
<u>Theo:</u>	Martin's 20-something year old agent. Very eager.
<u>Daughters:</u>	Martin's two pre-teen daughters.
<u>Cindy:</u>	A 44 year old woman, Martin's ex-wife.
<u>Eddie:</u>	A 22 year old American, JJ's former bandmate.
<u>Lizzie:</u>	A 25 year old British girl, JJ's ex-girlfriend.
<u>Stephen:</u>	A blond male nurse assigned to help Matty.
<u>Sean:</u>	Another male nurse assigned to help Matty.

Scene

London, UK

Time

Now



ACT IScene 1

*An empty stage, the top of an apartment building in London. MARTIN enters, walking down to the edge of the stage. He dangles his feet over the edge, occasionally pulling from a hip flask while he talks*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Can I explain why I wanted to jump off the top of a tower block? Of course I can. It was a logical decision. Say you were, I dunno, an assistant bank manager in Guildford, and your were offered a job in Sydney. You'd probably weigh the pros and cons, like: CONS: leaving behind aged parents, friends, the country club, PROS: more money, better quality of life, sea, sunshine, etc, etc... No contest is it? You'd be on the phone in ten minutes!

*MAUREEN enters. She doesn't notice Martin.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

I told him I was going to a New Year's Eve Party. The moment I told him, I wanted to go straight to confession. I'd lied, hadn't I? Anyway, tonight the nursing home sent an ambulance to pick him up. You had to pay extra for that, but I didn't mind. It's not like I'd need the money tomorrow.... I'd never been to Topper's House before...

(Martin takes a big swig, and Maureen notices)

He's done things properly.

*Maureen walks up to Martin and taps him on the shoulder.*

MAUREEN

Are you going to be long?

MARTIN

Son of a bitch! What the hell are you doing?

*A moment of recognition.*

MAUREEN

I know you.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN  
How?

MAUREEN  
From the television.

MARTIN  
Oh, for Christ's sake, I was just about to kill myself,  
but never mind, there's always time for an autograph.  
What are you doing up here anyway?

MAUREEN  
I was...I was going to jump too. I wanted to borrow  
your spot.

MARTIN  
Be my guest

MAUREEN  
I'll wait until... Well I'll wait. You'll be wanting to  
do it on your own, I'd imagine.

MARTIN  
You'd imagine right!

MAUREEN  
I'll go over there.

MARTIN  
I'll give you a shout on the way down! (*Laughs*) Come  
on! It wasn't a bad gag, under the circumstances.

MAUREEN  
I suppose I'm not in the mood Mr. Sharp

MARTIN  
(*Laughing*)  
Oi! Do you want to swap places? See how you get on?

MAUREEN  
I want to be on my own too.

MARTIN  
You will be. 20 minutes, then I want my spot back.

MAUREEN  
You're not much of a gentleman.

MARTIN  
No I'm fucking not! That's one of the reason's I'm up  
here, isn't it?

(MAUREEN gives a blank stare, clearly  
confused)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN (cont'd)

What do you know about me?

MAUREEN

You used to be on the telly.

MARTIN

(Incredulous)

That's it?

MAUREEN

I think so. Weren't you married to someone in ABBA?

MARTIN

No, but that's all you can dredge up?

MAUREEN

Yes.

MARTIN

So why do you think I want to kill myself?

MAUREEN

I've no idea

JESS

Out of the way losers!

*JESS enters and charges towards the edge. Martin takes her down and pins her to the ground*

JESS

(To Audience)

I shouldn't have made the noise. That was my mistake.

JESS

(To Martin and Maureen)

So how come you two are allowed to kill yourselves and I'm not?

MARTIN

You're too young. We've fucked our lives up. You haven't yet.

JESS

What if I've murdered 10 people. Including my parents and, I dunno, my baby twins?

MARTIN

Well have you?

JESS

Yeah, I have!  
(To Audience)  
I haven't really.

MARTIN

Well then you've got away with it, haven't you? Get on a plane to Brazil!

JESS

What if I want to pay for what I've done?

MARTIN

Shut up.

*He motions over to Maureen.*

JESS

Just let me go, you old bastard pervert! You're getting a thrill out of this, aren't you?

MARTIN

(To Audience)  
That stung, under the circumstances  
(To Jess)  
If I let you go, will you behave?

JESS

Yes.

*Martin lets go*

JESS

(To Audience)  
I never had any intention of going onto the roof. Honestly, I'd forgotten about it until I started speaking to this guy at this shit party, but those 10 minutes I spent talking to a guy named "Bong" made history. Well, not history like 55 BC or 1939. But he mentioned how he was on suicide watch...and everything suddenly made sense. Because even though I'd been about to go home, I couldn't imagine what I'd do when I got there, and I couldn't imagine waking up in the morning. It was like a message from God.

*She runs for the edge again, Martin pins her again.*

JESS

(To Audience)  
Ok, it was disappointing that all God had to say to me was like, "Jump off a roof." But I didn't blame him. What else was he supposed to tell me?

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

Now what?

MARTIN

I don't bloody know.

(To Audience)

Why it didn't occur to any of us that a well-known suicide spot would be like Times Square on New Year's Eve, I have no idea. But at that point in the proceedings I had accepted the reality of our situation: we were in the process of turning a solemn and private moment into a farce with a cast of thousands.

*As if on cue, JJ enters with a pizza box.*

JJ

(Surveying the situation, confused)

Anybody order a pizza?

JESS

How would we have ordered pizzas?

JJ

On a cell.

JESS

What's a cell?

JJ

Fine, a mobile.

(To Audience)

Ok, you don't know me, so you'll have to take my word for it that I'm not stupid. I want you to know I read the fuck out of every book I can get my hands on. I like Faulkner and Dickens and Vonnegut and Dylan Thomas.

JESS

Are you American?

JJ

Yeah. What are you guys doing sitting on her?

JESS

They're sitting on me because this isn't a free country and I can't do what I want to do.

JJ

What do you want to do?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

She was going to jump.

JESS

So were you!

JJ

You were all gonna jump? The fuck?

JESS

The fuck? The fuck what?

MARTIN

In America, they're too busy to say "What the fuck."

MAUREEN

Would you watch your language please? We weren't all brought up in a pigsty!

JJ

Ok, let her go.

(Beat)

Hey, you fucking listening to me? Am I gonna to have to come over and make you listen?

MARTIN

(Backing off cowardly)

I think it's ok now Maureen...

*Another moment of recognition, from Jess this time.*

JESS

(To MARTIN)

You're that bloke! The breakfast TV bloke! The one who slept with a 15 year old! Martin Sharp. Fuck! (Beat) Martin Sharp was sitting on me!! You old pervert!

JJ

You kidding me? The guy who went to prison? I read about him.

MARTIN

Does everyone in America know too?

JJ

(Sarcastically)

Sure, I read about it in the New York Times.

(He rolls his eyes)

You used to host a talk show here, no one in the US has ever heard of you. Get real.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Give us some pizza then!  
(Reaches for the pizza box)  
Who wants what?

*She holds out the box, offering it to people.*

JJ

Great. Pizza. "A small, good thing on a night like this."  
(To Audience)  
Raymond Carver, as I'm sure you all know, but totally lost on this crowd.

JESS

Now what?

JJ

We eat our pizza.

JESS

Then?

JJ

Give it half an hour. Looks like things were getting undignified up here. 30 minutes. Is that agreed?  
(To Audience)  
I told a couple of people about that night, and the weird thing is, they get the suicide part, but not the pizza. They're all like, Oh ok, your band was fucked up, and you were at the end of the line with your music, which was all you wanted to do your whole life, plus you broke up with your girlfriend, who was the only reason you were in this fucking country in the first place...Sure I can see why you were up there. But then, they want to know what was up with the pizzas.

*They all nod in agreement. After a moment...*

JESS

I'm not sitting here for half an hour looking at your miserable fucking faces.

MARTIN

That's what you've just this minute agreed to do!

JESS

So?

MARTIN

What's the point of agreeing to do something and then not doing it?

(CONTINUED)

JJ

"Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative."  
(To Audience)  
Oscar Wilde, I couldn't resist.

*Jess glares furiously*

MARTIN

He's being nice to you.

JESS

Shut up!  
(Beat)  
Maybe we should talk.

MARTIN

What, share our pain?

*Jess flips him off as she turns away.*

JJ

I'm not sure what harm would be done by sharing our experiences.

MARTIN

Who's interested in your experiences? Your experiences are delivering pizzas.

JJ

Not mine then, yours.

JESS

(Beat)  
You were going to jump, weren't you?

MARTIN

Were you going to jump with the pizzas?

JESS

Gosh, you don't seem like the jumping type.

JJ

If you guys are the jumping type, I can't say I'm sorry.

JESS

Oh come on, let's talk. No need for pain sharing, just, you know, our names and why we're up here.

MARTIN

Ok, Maureen, you first.

*A beat.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

So I told them everything. About my son, Matty, who's in a coma, about the fake party, about the nursing home. Everything.

JESS

Oh that's a no brainer. Kill yourself. Trust your instincts.

MARTIN

Maybe she loves him.

JESS

What's there to love? He's a vegetable. Not even an awake one, a vegetable in a coma!

MARTIN

He wouldn't be a vegetable if he wasn't in a coma, would he?

MAUREEN

I love my son.

MARTIN

Of course you do.

JESS

Do you want me to kill him for you? I'll go down tonight if you want. Before I kill myself. No skin off my nose.

*Maureen starts to cry.*

JJ

What are you, a fucking idiot? Look what you've done!

JESS

Sor-ry! Just an idea!

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

But that wasn't why I was crying. I was crying because all I wanted in the world was for Matty to die. And knowing why I was crying made me cry more.

MARTIN

Well, everyone bloody knows everything about me, so I don't see the point in the lark.

JESS

We want to hear your side!

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

There's no "My side." I was an idiot, and I'm paying the price.

JJ

There are two sides to every story, and we've only heard the bad.

MARTIN

I didn't know she was 15. She told me she was 18, she looked 18. That's it. That's the "good side."

JJ

Bad luck.

JESS

Bad luck's got nothing to do with it!

MARTIN

(To Jess)

Oh for fuck's sake. Why d'you think I've been dangling my feet over the ledge! I screwed up. I feel so wretched I want to die.

JESS

I should hope so!

MARTIN

(To Jess)

Thanks.

(To JJ)

And thanks for introducing this little exercise. Very curative.

(To Audience)

And I couldn't even jump off a fucking tower block without fucking it up!

JESS

My turn! My name's Jess and I'm 18 and, see, I'm here because I had some family problems that I don't need to go into. And then I split up with this guy Chas, and he owes me an explanation. Because he didn't say anything. He just went. But if he gave me an explanation I'd feel better, I think, because he broke my heart. Except I can't find him. I was at the party downstairs looking for him and he wasn't there, so I came up here.

MARTIN

You're going to kill yourself because Chas didn't turn up at a party? Jesus...

JESS

I never said that!

MARTIN

Oh, so you're up here because you're owed an explanation then, is that it?

JESS

That's not it either. It might stop me, but its not why I'm here, like... We could handcuff you to those railings and that would stop you. But you're not up here because no one's handcuffed you to the railings, are you?

(Beat)

JJ

Well, I'm JJ and-

JESS

What't that stand for?

JJ

None of your business. Anyway-

JESS

I'll find out. I'll ransack your house until I find something that tells me, like a passport or checkbook. And If I cant find anything I'll take something you love and not give it back until you tell me.

JJ

(Stunned)

You'd rather do that than call me by my initials?

JESS

Yeah. Of course. I hate not knowing things.

(Beat)

So? Forgotten why you were gonna kill yourself in the first place?

JJ

No...I'm...

(To Audience)

I was gonna tell them the truth. About the band and Lizzie, but..I just felt a little queasy up there listening to the others guys. I mean their reasons were pretty solid. Maybe I was insecure because Martin took my spot. I was gonna be "shame and humiliation guy," but, well he'd been locked up for sleeping with a 15 year old, and I'd been dumped by a girl and my band wasn't going anywhere. Big deal!

(To Group)

I'm dying.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Well, you don't look great. What've you got?

JJ

This brain thing called CCR.

(To Audience, sheepishly)

Creedence Clearwater Revival, one of my favorite bands, but I figured none of them were big Creedence fans.

(To Jess)

Cranial corno-something

(Beat)

MARTIN

Well, here we all are then.

JESS

Now what?

MARTIN

You're going home for a start.

JESS

Like fuck I am! Why should I?

MARTIN

Because we're walking you there.

JESS

On one condition.

MARTIN

Go on.

JESS

You help me find Chas first. Or I really will kill myself. And you said I'm too young for that.

MARTIN

I'm not sure I was right about that. You're clearly very mature for your age.

JESS

Oh really? So it's ok if I go over?

*She walks to edge, daring Martin*

JJ

Come back.

JESS

I don't give a fuck you know. I can jump, or we can look for Chas.

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

I'm not going anywhere. I'm not coming down from this roof. They'll come for me.

JESS

Who?

MAUREEN

The people in the nursing home. I only paid for one night.

MARTIN

Do you have enough for more than one night?

MAUREEN

Of course!

MARTIN

Here.

*He pulls out his phone.*

MAUREEN

It's too late to call.

MARTIN

There'll be somebody on duty. Give me the number.

*Maureen hands him a crumpled slip of paper.*

JESS

(To Maureen, mockingly, like kids on the playground)  
Somebody loves you!

*Martin flips her off and unfolds the paper.*

MARTIN

Oh Christ, is this your suicide note?

JESS

Cool, read it out! Mine are crap!

JJ

Yours are crap? Meaning, like, more than one?

MARTIN

Anyway, I won't be reading this one out.

(Dials phone)

Hello? Sorry for ringing so late. Something's come up and Matty will be staying another night. Thank you.

JJ

So, Maureen's ok. That just leaves you Martin. Wanna join in?

MARTIN

Well, where is Chas?

JESS

I dunno, some party. Does that really matter, where he is?

MARTIN

Yes. I'd rather fucking kill myself than try to get a cab to go to South London at four in the morning.

JESS

He doesn't know anyone in South London.

MARTIN

Good.

JESS

(Reaching for Martin)

Give me your mobile, I'll make some calls.

*They all exit. BLACKOUT*

Scene 2

*The inside of a college art party in slovenly disarray. A few EXTRA PEOPLE, including TWO TEENAGED KIDS are milling about the room. The four walk onstage and look around the room for a moment. Jess runs around talking to some people.*

JJ

(To Audience)

Fucking art students. I mean, I'm a liberal guy. [I didn't want Bush to bomb Iraq, and I like a toke as much as the next guy,] but these people still fill my heart with fear and loathing.

KID 1

(Loudly, to KID 2, upon noticing Martin)

Martin Sharp! You know, off of breakfast telly!

KID 2

Oh yeah, good call!

KID 1

(Even louder, to Martin)

Oi! Sharpy!

(CONTINUED)

KID 2

(Walking over to Martin)  
People must say that to you all the time.

MARTIN

What?

KID 1

You know. "Oi Sharpy" and all that.

MARTIN

Well, yes. They do.

KID 2

Bad luck. Of all the people on TV, you end up looking  
like that cunt.

*Both kids laugh. Martin gives a shrug and they  
walk off.*

JJ

(To Martin)  
You ok?

MARTIN

C'est la vie!

*By this point, Jess has left. Martin exits to look  
for her.*

JJ

(To Maureen, walking towards the table  
with drinks)  
You want a drink?

MAUREEN

Where's Jess?

JJ

Looking for Chas.

MAUREEN

And then can we go?

JJ

Sure.

MAUREEN

Good. I'm not enjoying myself here.

JJ

(Holding two paper cups and a wine  
bottle)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JJ (cont'd)  
Me neither.

MAUREEN

(To Audience)  
It can't be hygienic, living in a place without rooms.  
Even people who live in bedsits usually have access to  
a proper bathroom, with doors and walls and a window.

(To JJ)  
Where do you think we'll go next?

JJ  
I don't know.

MAUREEN

But we'll all go together, do you think?

JJ

I guess. That's the deal, right? Until we find this  
guy.

MAUREEN

I hope we don't find him. Not for a while.

JJ

(Offering a cup and wine to Maureen)  
Cheers.

MAUREEN

Cheers.

JJ

Every New Year's is the same, huh? Warm white wine, a  
bad party full of jerks. And this year I'd promised  
myself things would be different.

MAUREEN

Where were you this time last year?

JJ

I was at a party at home. With Lizzie, my ex. You?

MAUREEN

I was at home. With Matty.

JJ

Right. And did you think, a year ago....?

MAUREEN

(Quickly)  
Yes. Definitely yes.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

(Awkwardly)

Right.

*Jess begins to cry loudly and runs onstage,  
followed by Martin.*

JJ

What happened?

MARTIN

Apparently good ol' Chas skipped off with another girl,  
and Jess here wants to go find her.

JESS

(Putting on a brave face through the  
tears)

It's ok. I know her. She probably just didn't know  
about me and Chas.

JJ

Well, what if she did know?

JESS

Well, I couldn't just let it go then, could I?

JJ

What does that mean?

JESS

I wouldn't kill her or anything. I'm not mad. But I  
might have to cut her a little.

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

When Frank, my fiancée, broke off our engagement, I  
certainly said some crazy things. I nearly did away  
with myself then. But, I guess I thought I could ride  
it out. [I thought things might get better.] Imagine  
the trouble I'd have saved if I had done it...

(To JESS)

Were you engaged?

JESS

*Engaged?* What is this, "Pride and fucking Prejudice?"

MARTIN

People do still get engaged. It's not a stupid  
question.

JESS

Which people get engaged?

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

(Quietly)

I did.

JESS

You did? Really. Ok, but what living people get engaged. I'm not interesting in people out of the Ark with like shoes and raincoats and whatever.

JJ

(To Audience)

I wanted to ask her what she thought we should wear instead of shoes, but I was starting to learn my lesson.

JESS

Anyway, who the fuck did you get engaged to? Did you shag him? I'll bet you did. How did he like it, eh? Doggy style? So he didn't have to look at you.

MARTIN

That's it.

*He grabs Jess by the arm and pulls her offstage. Maureen is in utter shock, looking as though she's about to faint. BLACKOUT*

Scene 3

*Spot lights come up downstage right, and Martin drags Jess out into the light.*

JESS

(To Audience)

When Martin pulled me outside, I did that thing where you decide to become a different person. I don't know why I said that stuff to Maureen, but I'm glad Martin pulled me away. I needed stopping. So from now on, I will be a better person. I swear not to swear, or spit, or ask harmless old ladies if they shagged doggy style.

MARTIN

(Furious)

You are a right bitch, and an idiot, you know that? What had she ever done to you?

JESS

(Looking at the floor)

Yes sir. Very sorry sir.

*She curtsies to Martin.*

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

What the fuck's this now? What's this "yes sir, no sir" business?

JESS

I'm going to stop being me, and you'll never see the old me again!

*Martin is dumbfounded, and walks back offstage.*

JESS

(To Audience)

I don't want them to get sick of me. People tend to, I've noticed. Like Chas, for example. Although I can kinda see now how yelling my head off about having a baby halfway through *Moulin Rouge* might have contributed. But I really need that to stop happening, otherwise I'll be left with nobody.

*Lights up on JJ standing near Maureen, who is sitting in a chair. He doesn't notice CHAS attempting to be inconspicuous under a table.*

CHAS

(Whispering)

Excuse me.

*JJ looks to find the voice. When he finds where it's coming from...*

JJ

You wanna talk to us, you come here.

CHAS

I can't come into the light.

JJ

And what might happen if you did?

CHAS

A nutter might try to kill me!

JJ

(Walking over to Chas)

How can I help you?

CHAS

You American?

JJ

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CHAS

(Laughing, in a bad southern accent)  
Oh. Howdy pardner! (*back to normal*) Listen, can you check if the nutter's gone?

JJ

What does he look like?

CHAS

Not he, *she*. Look, I know, but she's really scary! A mate saw her first and told me to hide here. I went out with her once. But not like "once upon a time." Just once. But I stopped because she's off her head, and...

JJ

(To Audience)  
This is too perfect.  
(To Chas)  
You're Chas, aren't you?

CHAS

How did you know that?

JJ

I'm a friend of Jess's.

*A look of pure and utter terror comes from Chas. He turns and stands on a table trying to scramble the wall.*

CHAS

Shit. Fuck. I'm sorry, shit, will you help me climb over?

JJ

No, I want you to come and talk to her. She's had...She's had a rough night, and maybe a little chat would help calm her down.

CHAS

(Laughs, but not a funny laugh. More a laugh of desperation.)  
You know I haven't had sex since the night we went out, don't you?

JJ

(Exasperated)  
No Chas, I didn't. How would I know that? Where would I have read that?

CHAS

I've been too scared. I can't make that mistake again. I don't mind, you know, never having sex again. I'm  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHAS (cont'd)  
twenty-two, and by the time you're, what, sixty you don't feel like it anyway, right? So only like forty years. Less! I can live with that. Women are fucking maniacs!

JJ  
You don't want to think that man. You've just had some bad luck.

(To Audience)

I said that because I knew it was the right thing to say, not because my experience told me anything different. Of course, it wasn't true that women were fucking maniacs. Just the ones Chas and I slept with.

(To Chas)

Look, if you came outside to talk, what's the worst that could happen?

CHAS  
She's tried to kill me twice. And got me arrested once. Plus I'm banned from three pubs, two galleries, and a cinema.

JJ  
My friend, better to die like a man than hide underneath tables like a mouse.

MAUREEN  
(Standing up)  
I'd try to kill you if I were Jess.

CHAS  
Who the fuck's this now?

MAUREEN  
I'm Maureen. Why should you get away with it?

CHAS  
Get away with what?

MAUREEN  
I thought you said you had sex with her?

CHAS  
Well, we had sex that once. But I didn't know she was a fucking maniac then!

MAUREEN  
So, once you find out that poor girl is confused and vulnerable, you run away.

(CONTINUED)

CHAS

I had to! She was chasing me with a knife!

MAUREEN

You have to talk to her.

CHAS

Fuck off!

*Maureen slaps Chas square in the face. Chas falls down to the floor, and JJ looks on with awe.*  
*BLACKOUT.*

Scene 4

*Martin, Jess, and Maureen are standing outside in a clump, looking over at JJ, who is silently giving Chas a bit of a pep talk.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

I had never hit anyone before, not in my whole life. But that night was different. I was in limbo, somewhere between living and dying, and it made me want to slap him again, just because I could. I didn't though. The once was enough.

*JJ turns Chas around to face Jess, and shoves him in her direction.*

CHAS

Hi, Jess.

JESS

Why wouldn't you talk to me?

CHAS

(Trying to sound nonchalant and failing miserably)

Yeah. Right. I knew you'd want to know that. And I've been thinking about it. I've been thinking about it very hard, and...and...I'm not happy about it it. It's weak, a weakness in me.

JJ

(To Chas)

Don't overdo it, man.

CHAS

No, right. So. First of all I should say I'm sorry, and it won't happen again, and that you're very attractive, and stimulating company, and..

(CONTINUED)

*JJ coughs loudly.*

CHAS

Oh, and...and it's not me, it's you. I-I mean, it's not you it's me!

(Looking over to Martin)

Hey, you look like that wanker off the telly, Martin Thing.

JESS

It is him!

CHAS

How the fuck do you know him?

MARTIN

Long story.

JESS

We were both just up on the roof of Topper's House. We were gonna throw ourselves off.

MARTIN

(To Audience)

And thus she managed to make a long story considerable shorter, and, to be fair, she pretty much covered most of the important bits.

*Chas thinks for a moment, trying to process.*

CHAS

(To MARTIN)

Because of that girl you shagged?

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Chas, I'm sure, has many attractive aspects to his personality. Quickness of wit was not one of them.

(To Chas)

Why don't you ask Jess why *she* was going to jump? Isn't that more relevant?

JESS

Shut up! That's private!

MARTIN

Oh, and my stuff isn't?

JESS

No, not anymore. Everyone knows about it.

(CONTINUED)

CHAS

(To Martin)

What's Penny Chambers like in real life?

JJ

Is that what we came out here to talk about, Chas?

CHAS

No. Right. Sorry. Just a bit distracting, having someone off the telly standing there.

MARTIN

Should I leave?

JESS

No, I want you here.

CHAS

Wouldn't have thought you'd be his type. Too old. Plus he's a cunt.

*Chas laughs and looks around to see if anyone laughs with him. Nobody does.*

CHAS

Oh, right. It's like that, is it?

JESS

(Beat)

You're a tosser. None of this has anything to do with you. Fuck off out of my sight.

*Jess kicks Chas, and he scurries away, terrified.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

And that was the end of Chas!

*Beat.*

JESS

(To Martin)

Sorry the little shitbag called you names.

MARTIN

I get called that a lot.

JESS

(To Audience)

This is actually true. By my estimate total strangers have called him cunt about 15 times, prick about 10, wanker about the same, and an arsehole approximately half a dozen. Also: tosser, berk, wally, git, shithead, and pillock.

(CONTINUED)

(To the group)  
So, now what?

*No response.*  
How about your place, Martin? I bet you've got jacuzzis  
and all sorts.

MARTIN  
No, we can't go there. Besides, my Jacuzzi days are  
done.

JESS  
No matter, as long as you've got a kettle and some  
cornflakes.

MARTIN  
Well I haven't.

JESS  
Oh come on, what've you got to hide?

MARTIN  
Nothing.

JESS  
(Beat, a moment of realization)  
Who was leaving you messages on your mobile earlier?

MARTIN  
Nobody!

JESS  
Would that be Mr. Nobody, or Miss Nobody?

MARTIN  
Just nobody!

JESS  
Come on, why won't you let us come?

MARTIN  
Because I don't know you!

JESS  
Right, like you didn't know that 15-year-old.

*Martin fumes for a moment.*

MARTIN  
Ok. Yeah. Let's go to mine. Why not?

*They all exit. BLACKOUT.*

Scene 5

*Outside Martin's apartment. They four enter and walk up to the doorway*

JJ

(To Audience)

Martin lived in this villagey part of Islington, right around the corner from Tony Blair's old house, and really not the kind of hood you'd choose if you'd fallen on hard times, as Martin supposedly had done.

MARTIN

(Turning around to the group)

Now listen.

JESS

I don't hear anything.

MARTIN

No, not that sort of listen. Listen, as in "Listen, I'm going to tell you something."

JESS

Well go on then!

MARTIN

It's very late, so just...be respectful of the neighbors.

JESS

That's it?

MARTIN

No. (*Inhales deeply*) There'll probably be someone in there.

JESS

Who?

MARTIN

I don't know what you'd call her. My date. Whatever.

JJ

You had a date for the evening?

(To Audience)

Jesus, what kind of night had she had?

MARTIN

(Very frustrated)

Yes, what of it?

(CONTINUED)

JJ

Nothing, just...

(To Audience)

We could leave the rest to the imagination.

JESS

Fucking hell. What kind of date ends up with you sitting on the fucking ledge of a building?

MARTIN

An unsuccessful one.

JESS

I should think it was fucking unsuccessful!

MARTIN

Yes, that's why I described it as such.

*Martin opens the door and walks in. Sitting in the living room is PENNY, who's obviously been crying for a long time.*

PENNY

(Trying to be light and casual, failing)

Where have you been?

MARTIN

Just out. Met some...

*He gestures to the others.*

PENNY

Met some who?

MARTIN

You know. People.

PENNY

And which people might they be?

JESS

You're Penny Chambers!

MAUREEN

(Totally starstruck)

Penny Chambers... *Rise and Shine with Penny and Martin.*

JJ

(To Audience)

I don't know much about British TV stars, but I think I got it. If Martin was Regis, then Penny was Kathy Lee. The British Regis was nailing the British Kathy Lee, than disappeared to kill himself. Pretty fucking hilarious, you have to admit.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Are you two going out?

PENNY

Ask him. He's the one who left in the middle of a dinner party.

JESS

(To Martin)

Are you two going out?

MARTIN

It's...Well it's....

(To Penny)

Can we talk later? In private?

PENNY

And when will that be?

MARTIN

Soon. But probably not immediately.

PENNY

Well, I think you should call Tom and Christine. They must think you're so rude.

MARTIN

I will, tomorrow.

JESS

Who are Tom and Christine? The people you were having dinner with?

PENNY

Yes.

JJ

What did you tell them?

PENNY

He said he had to use the toilet.

*Jess bursts out laughing. Martin glances over at her, and then briefly begins to smirk at his shoes. Penny is furious at this, and runs over to hit Martin, who grabs her wrists to prevent just that.*

PENNY

How dare you find it funny!

MARTIN

I'm sorry. No. Not funny in any way.

*Martin tries to hug her and she pushes him away.  
She sits down on a chair and sulks.*

MARTIN

Well, I think we need a drink. Would you mind if they stayed for one?

JJ

(To Audience)

I'll take a drink from anyone, but at the moment I was seriously considering declining. *(Beat)* But in the end, I was just too thirsty.

*Martin walks offstage to the kitchen. A brief awkward moment between everyone in the living room. A moment later, Martin re-enters bearing drinks.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

My immediate problem was how to explain my connection with Maureen, JJ, and Jess. What could we possibly be to each other? We didn't look like colleagues, or poetry enthusiasts, or clubbers, or substance abusers. The problem, it has to be said, is Maureen, on more or less every count. Of course, that's if failing to look like a drug abuser could ever be described as a problem.

*He walks back to the group and passes out the drinks.*

MARTIN

Sorry. Penny this is JJ, Maureen, and Jess. JJ, Maureen, Jess, this is Penny.

PENNY

But you still haven't told me who they are.

MARTIN

As in...?

PENNY

As in, how do you know them and where did you meet them?

MARTIN

Long story...

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Good.

MARTIN

Well... Maureen I know from... where was it exactly?  
Long time ago now....And JJ is one of...the old *Rise  
and Shine* crowd, and...Jess is his girlfriend.

*JJ timidly puts his arm around Jess.*

PENNY

(Beat)

You're seeing someone else, aren't you?

*A beat.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Seeing someone else? How on earth could that explain  
any of this?! Why would seeing someone else necessitate  
bringing home a middle-aged woman, a teenaged punk, and  
an American with a leather jacket and a Rod Stewart  
haircut?

PENNY

(Distraught)

You fucking bastard!

*She runs out the door and slams it shut behind  
her. Everyone but Martin jumps at the sound.  
There's an awkward moment of silence.*

JESS

You should tell her about the roof. She'd probably feel  
all sorry for you and you'd probably get a sympathy  
shag.

MARTIN

(Deflated)

I'm not sure that's quite how it works, Jess.

JESS

Why not?

MARTIN

If she found out about that, it would really upset her.  
She'd think she was responsible in some way.

JESS

Yeah, and?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

(Taking a drink)

And I'd have to spend hours holding her hand, and I don't feel up for that at the moment.

JESS

You'd still end up with a sympathy shag. I didn't say it would be easy!

(Beat)

Let's play a game!

MARTIN

Fuck off.

JESS

Miserable bastard!

MARTIN

Well yes. Exactly. At this particular stage of my life, and indeed on this particular night, "miserable" is a very appropriate adjective. I am very miserable bastard indeed. I thought you would've worked that out by now.

JESS

What, still?

MARTIN

(Laughing)

Yes, still! Even after all the fun we've had tonight. What would you say has changed in the last few hours? Have I still been to prison? Check! Did I sleep with a 15-year-old? Check again! Is my career still in pieces and am I still estranged from my children? Check and check! Despite attending a party with your amusing friends in Shoreditch and being called a cunt? What kind of malcontent must I be, eh?

JESS

I thought we'd cheered each other up.

MARTIN

Really? Is that really and truly what you thought?

JESS

Yeah.

MARTIN

I see. A trouble shared is a trouble halved, and because there are four of us, it's actually been quartered? That sort of thing?

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Well, you've all made me feel better.

MARTIN

Yes, well.

JESS

What's that supposed to mean?

MARTIN

Nothing. I'm glad you feel better. Your depression was clearly more...amenable than ours. Less intractable. Unfortunately, JJ is still going to die, Maureen still has a profoundly disabled son, and my life is still in complete and utter fucking shambles. To be honest with you Jess, I don't see how a couple of drinks and a game of Monopoly could possibly help. Fancy a game of Monopoly JJ? Will that help the old CCR, eh?

JJ

(Nervously)

I guess not.

JESS

I wasn't thinking of Monopoly. Monopoly takes too long.

*Maureen then turns and runs towards the bathroom, but misses and throws up on the floor (behind a table or offstage is perfectly acceptable)*

MARTIN

Jesus fucking Christ.

*Martin grabs a dish towel and runs off to help Maureen. JJ looks out the window. A beat.*

JJ

It looks beautiful.

*Martin and Maureen return to the group.*

JESS

You reckon?

JJ

Yeah. There's nothing out there to feel excluded from anymore. It's just a big city again. Look.

(He points out the window)

He's on his own. And she's on her own.

JESS

(Looking out the window)

She's a fucking traffic cop!

MARTIN

Yes, but she's on her own, probably with even fewer friends than me. But last night she was probably dancing on a table somewhere.

JESS

With other traffic cops probably.

MARTIN

And I wasn't even with other TV presenters.

JESS

Or perverts!

MARTIN

No, agreed. I was on my own.

JJ

Apart from the people at the dinner party. But yeah, I get where you're coming from. That's why New Year's Eve is so popular for suicides.

JESS

When's the next one?

MARTIN

December 31st.

JESS

Ha-ha, very funny. The next popular night?

MARTIN

That would be Valentine's Day.

JESS

What's that, six weeks? Let's give it six weeks then! We'll all probably feel terrible on Valentine's Day.

JJ

(To Audience)

Six weeks seemed all right. Six weeks... didn't seem too long. Hey, life could change in six weeks... Unless you had a severely disabled child to care for. Or your career had gone up in fucking smoke. Or unless you were a total nutjob.

MAUREEN

(To JJ)

Do you know how you'll be feeling in six weeks?

JJ

(To Audience)

Oh, yeah, and unless you had a terminal disease. Life wouldn't change much then either.

(CONTINUED)

(He shrugs)

So, are we gonna meet again before the six weeks are up?

MARTIN

I'm sorry, but when exactly did we become "we"? Why do we have to meet in six weeks anyway? What's to stop us from killing ourselves whenever we want?

JESS

Nothing.

MARTIN

Surely the point of this exercise is that somebody's stopping me.

JESS

Until the six weeks are up, yeah.

MARTIN

So when you said "Nothing" you actually meant the exact opposite.

JESS

Listen! I'm just saying, if we're a gang, we'll all try to live by the rules. Rule 1: We don't kill ourselves for six weeks. And if we're not a gang, then, you know, whatever.

(Beat)

So, are we a gang, or not a gang.

MARTIN

Not a gang.

JESS

Why aren't we?

MARTIN

No offense, but...

*He waves his hand in their general direction, hoping that will sufficiently explain the situation.*

JJ

(To Audience)

I hadn't felt like I belonged to this gang either, but now I belonged to a gang that Martin didn't like, and I was damn well committed to it.

(To Martin, angrily)

But what?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Well, you're not, you know, "My kind of people."

JJ

Fuck you! Like I usually hang out with assholes like you.

MARTIN

Well, there we are then! We should all shake hands, thank one another for a most instructive evening, and go out separate ways.

JESS

And die.

MARTIN

Quite possibly.

JJ

And that's what you want?

MARTIN

It's not a long-held ambition, grant you, but recently it's been looking like an attractive alternative.

*A beat.*

JESS

You know those films where people fight on top of the Empire State Building or whatever? And there's the bit where the baddie slips off and the hero tries to save him, but like, the sleeve of the jacket tears off and he goes over? That's what I want to do.

MARTIN

(Shocked)

You want to watch me plunge to my doom?

JESS

I'd like to know I made the effort. I want to show people the torn sleeve.

MAUREEN

I'd find it easier if we saw each other on a regular basis.

*Martin prepares to launch into a tirade, then hesitates. Finally, broken, he says...*

MARTIN

Oh, for fuck's sake.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

(To Audience)

I'm starting to tell with Martin. This time, he was using profanity because he knew he was beaten. Telling Maureen to go fuck herself took more moral courage than any of us possessed.

JESS

It's only six weeks. We'll throw you off the top on Valentines Day ourselves, if it makes you feel better.

JJ

(To Audience)

Well, except maybe Jess.

MARTIN

(Slowly shaking his head)

We'll all live to regret it.

JESS

Exactly! So, everyone all right with that.

*JJ shrugs, Martin wearily nods.*

MAUREEN

I'm not going beyond six weeks.

MARTIN

No one will make you.

MAUREEN

As long as we're clear from the start.

JESS

Excellent, so it's a deal!

*They all shake hands. Blackout.*

Scene 6

*Jess is sitting at the table, eating breakfast. MR. CHRICHTON, (Jess's father) walks in waving a newspaper, attempting (unsuccessfully) to be the forceful parent.*

MR. CRICHTON

What where you up to New Year's Eve?

JESS

Nothing.

(CONTINUED)

MR. CRICHTON

That's not what the papers seem to think!

JESS

Papers?

MR. CRICHTON

Yeah, apparently there's a story going on about you and Martin Sharp! Do you know Martin Sharp?

JESS

Yeah, well I, sort of, met him at a party, I guess?

MR. CRICHTON

What the hell kind of party is it where you meet Martin Sharp?

*An awkward beat.*

MR. CRICHTON

Did anything....?

JESS

Did I fuck him? No! Bloody hell, Martin Sharp? Ewwww, god no!

*(To Audience)*

It was fucking Chas. Had to be. He'd been trying for ages to sell me out to the papers, the little shit.

*A beat as Jess thinks. Finally...*

JESS

*(to MR. CRICHTON)*

Da-ad....

MR. CRICHTON

Oh no.

*(Beat)*

You better tell me everything!

JESS

Well, there's not much to tell, is there? I just went to this party, and he was there, and I had too much to drink, and we went back to his place, and... that's it.

MR. CRICHTON

That's it? As in end of story?

JESS

As in, dot dot dot...You don't need to know the details?

(CONTINUED)

MR. CRICHTON  
Jesus Christ...

*Mr. Crichton goes offstage.*

JESS

(To Audience)

Ok, if you're confused, what I thought was this: if it was gonna be all over the papers, it was better for Mum and Dad to think that I'd slept with Martin than to know the real reason we were together. The real reason would kill them. Literally. Obviously it'd be embarrassing, people thinking I'd fucked the sleaziest man in Britain, but it would be for the greater good, i.e. two alive parents. But now that I think of it, I didn't need to say I'd slept with him, did I? I could've said we'd snogged, or anything like that, but I guess I wasn't quick enough. I guess I thought, well if it's a choice between suicide and sex, might as well go with the sex. But those didn't really have to be the choices... I dunno what I thought, to tell you the truth. Probably not much, as usual.

*Mr. Crichton walks back on furious and sad at the same time, holding another newspaper. He just stands and stares at Jess.*

JESS

What?

MR. CRICHTON

(Reading from the newspaper)

"Martin Sharp and Junior Minister's Daughter in a Suicide Pact"

JESS

(To Audience)

So, the whole sex confession thing was a complete and utter fucking waste of time.

*Blackout.*

Scene 7

*JJ is sitting in his apartment, reading a newspaper and drinking a beer.*

JJ

(To Audience)

You know, this was the first time we ever found anything out about Jess's personal life, and I have to say it's pretty fucking hilarious. Her dad, an education minister! You've seen, this girl talks like

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JJ (cont'd)

she'd been brought up by a penniless, junkie welfare mother who was younger than her! And she acts like education was a form of prostitution, something that only the weird or the desperate would resort to.

(Beat)

Then I read the story, and it wasn't quite so funny. None of us knew about Jen... Apparently, Jess's older sister, Jen, had disappeared a few years ago, when Jess was 15, and borrowed her mother's car. And get this, they found it abandoned at a well known suicide spot down on the coast. They never found the body...I dunno what that could've done to Jess. Nothing good, I suppose...

(Beat, grabbing a second newspaper)

And then, the next day, it became a whole lot less funny. There was another headline, and it read...

(He turns the paper out to the audience)

"And Then There Were Four." The info clearly came from that asshole Chas. You could hear his whiny voice right through the British tabloid prose.

(Beat)

I'll tell you the honest truth here: I got off on the story a little. It was kind of gratifying, in an ironic way, reading about myself.

*A buzzer goes off, and JJ sits up with a start. He walks over to the intercom on the wall.*

JJ

Who is it?

LINDA

(From offstage)

Is that JJ?

JJ

Who is it?

LINDA

I wondered if I could have a few words with you? About the other night?

JJ

Where'd you get this address?

LINDA

I understand you were one of the people with Jess Crichton and Martin Sharp on New Year's Eve?

JJ

You understand wrong ma'am.

(To Audience)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JJ (cont'd)

This was the first sentence either of us said that didn't have a question mark at the end. A bit of a relief.

LINDA

Which bit have I got wrong?

JJ

All of it. Wrong apartment.

LINDA

I don't think so.

JJ

How do you know?

LINDA

Because you didn't deny you were JJ. And you asked how I got this address.

JJ

(To Audience)

Good point. They were professionals after all.

LINDA

Listen, was there a reason you guys came down?

JJ

Like what?

LINDA

I dunno, something to cheer our readers up.

JJ

(To Audience)

Was there anything inspirational in our quest to find Chas? I think not.

(To LINDA)

I dunno about that.

LINDA

I'm going to leave a card with my numbers on it, OK? Ring me when you feel ready to talk about this.

*She slides a card under the door. A beat. JJ picks it up, walks back to his chair and sits down.*

JJ

I almost ran out after her. I liked being the temporary center of her world. Shit, I like being the temporary center of my own world too.

(CONTINUED)

*A knock on the door. A women's voice booms in.*

VOICE

Immigration! Open up!

*JJ gives a look of panic. He drops the card and looks around for a way out.*

VOICE

Open up JJ! We know you're in there!

*He keeps freaking out, then all of a sudden has a realization.*

JJ

JJ?

*He heads over to the door and opens it. Jess walks in.*

JESS

Totally gotcha, didn't I?

JJ

What do you want Jess?

JESS

What's up?

JJ

Jess. Why are you here?

(Beat)

Also, how the hell did you find my house?

JESS

Easy. I followed you home.

JJ

(To Audience)

Fucking hell.

JESS

So what's up?

JJ

Um, nothing. Why?

JESS

Who was the lady in the van?

JJ

Oh.. just a friend.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Yeah right. She looked all official. You don't have official friends.

JJ

(To Audience)

Fuck it, the situation has gotten too fucking weird to spend any energy on lying.

(To Jess)

A reporter. She came to ask about New Years.

*He slumps back down the chair.*

JESS

A reporter! Sweet! Did you tell her anything?

JJ

No.

JESS

What was her name? Where was she from?

JJ

Some chick named Linda from.. I dunno, somewhere.

JESS

No one's come 'round to mine.

JJ

And I'm really torn up about that.

*She notices the card on the floor, and surreptitiously picks it up. JJ doesn't notice: he's stopped paying any attention to her.*

JESS

Anyway, the real reason I was here is we need to have a meeting. About this whole newspaper business. Like pronto.

(She gets a text)

Oh shit! That'll be my dad. Gotta run. I'll let you know when stuff gets sorted.

*She leaves in a hurry. JJ stands there for a moment, in awe of the situation.*

JJ

(To Audience)

Fucking hell.

*Blackout.*

Scene 8

*Jess stands alone on the stage.*

JESS

(To Audience)

Most people have a rope that ties them to someone, and that rope can be any size. Maureen's rope ties her to Matty and it's about six inches long and it's killing her. Martin's rope ties him to his daughters, and like a stupid dog, he thinks it isn't there. He goes running off somewhere, into a nightclub after a girl, up a building, whatever, and it suddenly brings him up short and chokes him and he acts surprised. JJ...he must be tied to that bloke Eddie he keeps talking about, the one in his old band.

(Beat)

I'm learning that I'm tied to Jen, not my mum or dad--not too home, which is where the rope should be. Jen probably thought she was tied them, and she thought if she kept walking she'd eventually get jerked back to safety. But here rope wasn't tied down properly, and she found out the hard way. I'm tied to Jen, but she isn't solid. She's floating, blowing around, no one knows where she is...she's sort of fucking useless, isn't she?

(She sits down on the ground)

You might be surprised we've stuck together, after all this. I mean, JJ and I get along fine, and Maureen was too lonely not to hang with us. But Martin? He didn't seem to like us that much.

(Beat, she looks in at Martin and the rest)

I guess his rope is tied to us too.

Scene 9

*JJ, Jess, Martin, and Maureen are all sitting in Maureen's living room, with MATTY sitting in a wheelchair in the corner, not moving. The room is nice, but rather plain. Like someone hadn't changed it since moving in...20 years ago.*

JJ

(To Audience)

Fucking Linda. She made me totally paranoid. They had found out my address in 24 hours, and if she wanted to, she could find out about the band in five minutes. And then she'd get ahold of Eddie and Lizzie, and then she'd find out I wasn't dying of anything... Plus she'd find out the disease I wasn't dying of was nonexistent...

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Jess, you wanted us to meet. Why don't you call us to order?

*Jess stands up.*

JESS

OK. We are gathered here today-

(Martin laughs)

Fucking hell! I've only done half a sentence. What's funny about that?

(Martin shakes his head)

No, come on. If I'm so fucking funny, I want to know why.

MARTIN

It's perhaps because it's something more usually said in church.

JESS

Yeah, I knew that. That was the vibe I was after.

MARTIN

Why?

JESS

Maureen, you go to church, don't you?

MAUREEN

I used to.

JESS

Yeah, see! I was trying to make Maureen feel fucking comfortable.

MARTIN

Very thoughtful of you.

JESS

Why do you have to fuck up everything I do?

MARTIN

Gosh, I can almost smell the incense...

JESS

Right, you can start it off then, you fucking-

MAUREEN

(Standing up)

That's enough. In my house. In front of my son.

*Martin and JJ stare at each other, hoping for the best...No such luck.*

JESS

In front of your son? But he's-

JJ

I haven't got CCR.

*He prepares for the onslaught.*

JESS

Oh, JJ! That's fantastic!

*A beat.*

JJ

*(To Audience)*

In the weird world of Jess, they had not only found a cure for CCR during Christmas, but delivered it to my front door sometime between New Year's Eve and January second.

MARTIN

I'm not sure that's quite what JJ is saying.

JJ

No, the thing is, I never had it.

JESS

No! Bastards!

JJ

Who?

JESS

The fuck-bloody doctors! You should sue them! Supposing you'd jumped? And they'd got it wrong?

JJ

*(To Audience)*

*Motherfucker!* Did it really have to be this hard?

MARTIN

*(Beginning to smile with sadistic glee)*

I'm not sure he's quite saying that either.

JJ

No, I'll try to be as clear as possible. There ain't no such thing as CCR, and even if there was, I'm not dying of it. I made it up, 'cause...I dunno. Partly 'cause I wanted your sympathy, and partly because I didn't think you'd understand what was really wrong with me. Sorry.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

You're a tosser.

MAUREEN

That's awful.

JESS

You asshole. So, why did you say it?

MARTIN

Yes. What were you attempting to simplify?

JJ

It's just...I dunno. Everything seemed so straightforward with you guys. Martin and the, you know. And Maureen and...

JESS

Wasn't straightforward with me. I was going on about Chas and explanations.

JJ

Yeah, but, no offense, but you were nutso. Didn't really matter what you said.

MAUREEN

So what was wrong with you?

JJ

I dunno. Depression, I suppose you'd call it.

MARTIN

Oh we all understand depression. We're all depressed.

JJ

Yeah, I know, but mine seemed too...too fucking vague. Sorry Maureen.

(To Audience)

How do people, like not fucking curse? How is it possible? There are all these, fucking, gaps in speech where you just have to put a "fuck." How could you not, if you're a human being?

MARTIN

Try us out. We're understanding people.

JJ

Ok, so the short version is, all I ever wanted to do was be in a rock 'n roll band.

MARTIN

Rock 'n roll? Like Buddy Holly?

(CONTINUED)

JJ  
No man, that's not...Like, I dunno, The Stones. Or--

JESS  
They're not rock 'n roll, are they? They're rock.

JJ  
Ok ok, all I wanted to do was be in a rock band. Like The Stones, or, or--

JESS  
Crusty music.

JJ  
Whatever. Jeez. And a few week before Christmas my band finally split up for good. And soon after we split, I lost my girl.  
  
A beat.

JESS  
That's it?

JJ  
That's it.

JESS  
That's pathetic. I see why you came out with all the crap about the disease now. You'd rather die than not be in a band that sounds like the Rolling Stones? I'd be the opposite. I'd rather die if I was. Do people still like them in America?

MAUREEN  
That's Mick Jagger, isn't it? The Rolling Stones? They were quite good, weren't they? Did well for themselves?

JESS  
Mick Jagger's not sitting here eating stale custard creams like JJ.

MAUREEN  
They were new right before Christmas. Maybe I didn't put the lid back on the biscuit tin/ properly--

JJ  
The Stones thing...That's kind of not important. That was just, like, an illustration. I just mean...songs, guitars, energy.

JESS  
He's about eighty. He hasn't got any energy.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

I saw them 10 years ago. A chap from Guinness took a whole crowd of us. He had a lot of energy then.

JESS

He was only seventy then.

JJ

Will you shut the fuck up? Sorry Maureen.

JESS

No one's stopping you. But you've got to make it more interesting.

JJ

Ok, all right.

(A beat)

We used to have this song, this little, like, Motown-y thing called 'I Got Your Back,' which me and Eddie wrote together, really together, which we didn't usually do, and it was like, you know, a tribute to our friendship and how far back we went and blah-blah. Anyhow, it was on our first album and it was like two minutes and thirty seconds. I mean, people who even bought the album didn't even notice it. But we started playing it live, and it kind of got longer, and Eddie worked out this sweet solo. And somethings, when we played around Chicago and we'd jam with friends onstage, and after a year or two it got to be like this, ten, twelve minute *showstopper*. And we'd open with it or close with it or stick it in the middle somewhere if we were playing a long set, and to me it became the sound of pure fucking joy, sorry Maureen, you know? Pure joy. It felt like surfing, or whatever, a natural high. You could ride these chords like waves. I had that feeling maybe a hundred times a year, and not many people get it even once in their lives. And that's what I had to give up, man. The ability to create that routinely, whenever I felt like it, as part of my working day.

(Beat)

You know, now that I think about it, I can see why I made up that bullshit, sorry Maureen, about dying of some fucking disease, sorry again. Because that's what it feels like. I'm dying of some disease that dries up all the blood in your veins and....

MARTIN

Yeah, and? You seem to have omitted the part about why you want to kill yourself.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

That's it. This disease that dries up all the blood in your veins.

MARTIN

That's just what happens to everyone. It's called 'getting older.' I felt like that even before I'd been to prison. Even before I slept with that girl. It's probably why I slept with her, truth be told.

JESS

No, I get it.

JJ

Yeah

JESS

Course I do. You're fucked. You thought you were gonna be someone, but now it's obvious you're nobody. You're looking at forty or fifty years of nothing. Less than nothing, probably. That's worse than having the brain thing, because what you've got now will take a lot longer to kill you. You've got a choice between a slow, painful death, or a quick, merciful one.

*A long beat.*

JJ

(To Audience)

She was right. She got it.

JESS

Can't we talk about what we're supposed to be talking about?

MARTIN

Which is what, exactly?

JESS

What we're going to do. Th papers and all that.

MARTIN

Do we have to do anything?

JJ

I think so.

MARTIN

They'll forget about us soon, you know. It's only because fuck all happens, sorry Maureen, at the beginning of the year.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

What if we don't want them to forget about us?

MARTIN

Why the hell would we want them to remember?

JESS

We could make some cash. And it's be something to do.

MARTIN

What would be something to do?

JESS

I dunno. I just..I get the feeling that we're different. That people would like us, and be interested in us.

MARTIN

You're mad.

JESS

Yeah, exactly! That's why they'd be interested in me. I could even play it up a bit, if you like.

MARTIN

I'm sure that won't be necessary. You're fine as you are.

JESS

(Smiling)

Thanks Martin! So are you. And you, they'd want to know how you fucked up your life with the girl. And you, JJ, they'd want to know about the pizzas and all that. And Maureen could tell everyone about how shit it is living with Matty. See, we'd be like superheroes, the X-men or whatever!

JJ

Yeah. Right on. I have the superpower of delivering pizzas. And Maureen has the superpower of a disabled son.

JESS

Well, 'superpower' is the wrong word. But, you know, some...thing!

MARTIN

Ah yes. 'Thing.' *Le mot juste*, as ever.

*Jess scowls, but moves on with her speech.*

JESS

And we could say that we still haven't decided whether we're going to actually top ourselves. They'd like that!

JJ

And if we, like, sold the TV rights to Valentine's Day maybe they could turn it into a *Big Brother* kind of thing. You could root for the person you wanted to go over.

JESS

I dunno about that... But you know about papers, Martin! We could make some money, couldn't we?

MARTIN

Has it occurred to you that I've had enough trouble with the papers?

JESS

Oh, it's always about you, isn't it? What about if there's a few quid in it for us?

JJ

But what's the story? There's nothing: we went up, we came down, that's is. People must do that all the time.

JESS

(Beaming)

I've been thinking about that. How about if we saw something?

MARTIN

Like what? What are we supposed to have seen?

JESS

Ok. How about if we saw an angel?

JJ

An angel.

JESS

Yeah.

MAUREEN

I didn't see an angel. When did you see an angel?

MARTIN

No one saw an angel. Jess is proposing we invent a spiritual experience for financial gain.

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

That's terrible.

JESS

It's not really *inventing*, is it?

MARTIN

No? In what sense did we actually see an angel?

JESS

What do you call it in poems?

MARTIN

I'm sorry?

JESS

You know. In poems. And in English literature. Sometimes you say something is like something and sometimes you say something is something. You know, my love is a fuck-bloody rose or whatever.

*Maureen cringes.*

MARTIN

Similes and metaphors.

JESS

Yeah. Exactly. Shakespeare invented them, didn't he? That's why he was a genius.

JJ

No

JESS

Who was it then?

MARTIN

Never mind.

JESS

So why was Shakespeare a genius? What did he do?

MARTIN

Another time.

JESS

Ok, anyway. So which is the one where you say something *is* something. Like, "You are a prick," even you're not actually a prick. (*Beat*) As in a penis. Obviously.

*Martin looks over to Maureen who is distraught beyond words.*

MARTIN

Oh for God's sake Jess.

JESS

Sorry! I didn't know if we had the same swearing rules if it was only for discussion of grammar.

MARTIN

We do.

JESS

Right, sorry Maureen. Ok, "You are a pig" when you're not a pig.

MARTIN

Metaphor.

JESS

Exactly. We didn't literally see an angel. But we sort of did metaphorically.

JJ

We sort of metaphorically saw an angel.

JESS

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, something turned us back. Something saved our lives. Why not an angel?

MARTIN

Because there wasn't one.

JESS

Ok, we didn't see one. But you could say that anything was an angel. Any girl, anyway. Me, or even Maureen.

JJ

Any girl could be an angel.

JESS

Yeah. Because of angels. Girls.

JJ

Have you ever heard of the angel Gabriel?

JESS

No.

JJ

Well he--*he*--was an angel.

JESS

Yeah?

MARTIN

What is this nonsense? Can you *hear* yourself, Jess?

JESS

What have I said now?

MARTIN

We didn't see an angel, literally or metaphorically. And, incidentally, seeing something metaphorically, whatever that means, is not the same as seeing something. With your eyes. Which, as I understand it, is what you're proposing we say. That's not embellishing. That's talking bullshit, sorry Maureen.

JESS

But say if we got on telly and get a chance to, you know, spread our message?

*They all stare at her for a beat.*

MARTIN

What the hell is our message?!

JESS

Well, that's sort of up to us, isn't it?

MARTIN

(To Audience)

How is one supposed to argue with a mind like this?

JJ

I have an idea.

*JJ pulls out his computer and turns up the sound.*

JESS

What's all that for?

JJ

Just listen. I think it'll help.

(To Audience)

I can see what Jess is trying, I think. Which is concentering, consider how her little mind works. She wants something to...pull us together. Because you could tell we were splintering. She was off the mark with the angels, but music man, that's what really brings people together. And if you've got the blues...man, you can't go wrong with Nick Drake. That guy just boiled all the melancholy in the world down its purest essentials.

(To the group)

Alright, are you guys ready?

(CONTINUED)

*He turns on the music, and 'River Man' by Nick Drake starts playing.*

*After no more than thirty seconds, Jess (predictably) reacts, making faces and putting her finger down her throat.*

JESS

But he's such a *drip!* He's like, I dunno, a poet or something!

JJ

(To Audience)

I think that's supposed to be an insult. I'm sitting with people for whom being a poet is seen as an insult.

MARTIN

I don't mind it. I wouldn't walk out if he was playing in a wine bar.

JESS

I would.

JJ

(To Audience)

I wonder if it would be possible to punch both of them out simultaneously. Music rage, it's like road rage, but more righteous.

MAUREEN

Have you not got ears? Can't you hear how unhappy he is, and how beautiful these songs are?

*A beat, as they all look at Maureen.*

JESS

(To JJ, sing-song)

Ha-ha, you like something Maureen likes!

MAUREEN

Don't pretend to be more foolish than you are, Jess. Because you're foolish enough as it is. Just listen to him for a moment, and stop blathering.

*Jess shuts up promptly, and they all listen for a while.*

MAUREEN

When did he die?

JJ

Nineteen seventy-four. He was twenty-six.

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

Twenty-six.

(A long beat)

People don't want to hear it, do they?

(Another even longer beat)

This is how I feel. Every day, and people don't want to know that. They want to know that I'm feeling what Tom Jones makes you feel. But I feel like this, and they won't play what I feel on the radio, because people that are sad don't fit in.

(Beat, they all stare at her in amazement)

It's funny, because people think it's Matty that stops me fitting in. But Matty's not so bad. Hard work, but...it's the way Matty makes me feel that stops me fitting in. You get the weight of everything wrong. You have to guess all the time whether things are heavy or light, especially the things that are inside of you, and you get it wrong, and it puts people off. I'm tired of it.

*They all look at Maureen, mesmerized.*

*Martin's phone buzzes, and he wordlessly gets up to take his call.*

*They keep listening to the song.*

*A few moments later he enters, furious. He makes a beeline for Jess.*

MARTIN

I just got a call from my agent. He wants to know why I hadn't told him that I'd seen an ANGEL, who looked like MATT FUCKING DAMON?!

*As Jess begins talking, Martin continues talking to his agent.*

JESS

(To Audience)

I admit I was a bit sneaky.

(She pulls out the card she stole from JJ)

Well, when I got home I called the paper.

(Beat)

Oh, the Matt Damon thing. She asked me what he looked like. The stupid thing to say would've been that he looked like a church angel, with wings and all that. That would give off the wrong signals, I thought. So I was like, 'he looked all modern. Like he could've been in a band or something' 'What kind of band?' she asked. 'I dunno, Radiohead, or, or Blur, or...you know, that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JESS (cont'd)

guy? In the film? Not married to Jennifer Aniston, they other one, the blond one. Matt?' And she was like 'the angel looked like Matt Damon?' And I was like 'sure.'

(Beat)

She seemed to like it. I got her to up to five grand in the end. I had to promise that she'd have the chance to speak to everybody though.

*Martin reenters, and again beelines for Jess.*

MARTIN

Thanks your imprudent display of fuckery, sorry Maureen, I have just been fired from my job.

JESS

Oh. Right. Sorry about that.

MARTIN

(Cringing)

But...I can keep my job if...and I cannot believe it has come to this...if I get you three on tomorrow for...an interview.

JESS

Well fuckin' hell, sorry Maureen! That's perfect!

MARTIN

You and I have different definitions of the word perfect.

JJ

(To Audience)

He'd done it. He'd walked into the cage that Jess had opened, inadvertently, as most things Jess does are. But then, we're all freaks now. When friends and family tune in tomorrow, they could come to one of two conclusions: we'd all gone nuts, or we were scam artists. Ok, strictly speaking, there was a third conclusion: that we were telling the truth. We saw an angel that looked like Matt Damon, who for reasons best known to himself told us to get down off the roof.

(Beat)

Just over two years ago, R.E.M.'s manager came to see Big Yellow and asked us whether we were interested in his company representing us, and we said we were happy with that we had. R.E.M.! Twenty-six months ago! We were sitting in this fancy office, and this guy, he was trying to persuade us, you know? And now I was sitting around with people like Maureen and Jess and Martin, taking part in a pathetic attempt to squeeze a few bucks out of someone, so long as we were prepared to totally embarrass ourselves. One thing the last couple

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JJ (cont'd)

of years has taught me is that there's nothing you can't fuck up if you try hard enough.

*Blackout.*

Scene 10

*JJ and Maureen are standing in the crappy TV studio. Jess is sitting, thinking she's being sneaky drinking from a hip flask, but truthfully no one cares. Martin is busy talking to a PA WHO DOESN'T LOOK LIKE JEN (aka, NOTJEN)*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

I don't think I'll ever be able to go back to church after this. I'd been thinking about it a bit; I missed it terribly, and I wondered whether God would really mind if I just sat in the back and didn't go to confession, sneaked out somehow before communion. But once I tell them I'd seen an angel, I know I'll have to keep away. I don't exactly what sin I'm committing, but I'm sure that sins involving making up angels were mortal.

(Beat)

I'm still going to kill myself when the six weeks are up.

JJ

I am not looking forward to this.

MAUREEN

I hate lies.

*JJ laughs, and Maureen realizes she has just called out JJ on his lying.*

MAUREEN

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm going to lie too. About the angel. And I lied to Matty. About going to a party on New Years. And to the people in the respite home.

JJ

God'll forgive you for those, I think.

(Beat)

What would it take to change your mind?

MAUREEN

About what?

(CONTINUED)

JJ

About, you know... Wanting to End It All?

*Maureen is unsure how to respond.*

JJ

If you could make a deal with God, kind of thing. He's sitting there, the Big Guy, across the table from you. And he's saying, ok Maureen, we like you, but we really want you to stay put, on earth. What can we do to persuade you?

MAUREEN

God's asking me personally?

JJ

Yeah.

MAUREEN

If He was asking me personally, He wouldn't have to offer me anything. If God in His infinite wisdom wanted me to stay on earth, then how could I ask for anything?

JJ

(Laughing)

Ok then, Not God. A sort of..cosmic, you know, president. Or Prime Minister. Tony Blair. Someone who can get things done. You don't have to do what Tony Blair says without asking for something in return.

MAUREEN

Can he cure Matty?

JJ

Nope. He can only arrange things.

MAUREEN

I'd like a holiday.

JJ

God, you're a cheap date. You'd choose to live out the rest of your natural life for a week in Florida?

MAUREEN

I'd like to go abroad. I've never been.

JJ

You've never been abroad? When was the last time you took a vacation?

MAUREEN

Just before Matty was born.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

How old is he?

MAUREEN

He's nineteen.

JJ

Ok, well as your manager, I'm going to ask the Big Guy for one vacation a year. Maybe two.

MAUREEN

You can't do that!

JJ

Trust me, I know the market. Cosmic Tony won't blink an eye. Come on, what else?

MAUREEN

Oh, I couldn't ask for anything else.

JJ

Say he does give you two week's vacation a year. Fifty weeks is a long time to wait, you know? And you don't get another appointment with Cosmic Tony. You got one shot.

MAUREEN

(After thinking for a moment)

A job.

JJ

You want a job?

MAUREEN

Yes. Of course.

JJ

What kind of job?

MAUREEN

Anything. Working in a shop, maybe. Anything to get me out of the house.

JJ

Ok, come on. Come on.

MAUREEN

Maybe a bit of a social life? The church has quizzes sometimes. Like pub quizzes, but not in a pub. I'd like a go at one of those.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

Yep, we can allow you a quiz.

*Maureen smiles, and JJ smiles back.*

MAUREEN

What about you? What would you say to Cosmic Tony?

JJ

Ha, I'm not sure man. Maybe, I dunno. Live the last fifteen years all over again or something. Finish high school. Forget about music. Become the kind of person who's happy to settle for what he is, rather than what he wants to be, you know?

MAUREEN

But Cosmic Tony can't arrange that.

JJ

No. Exactly.

MAUREEN

So you're worse off than me, really. Cosmic Tony can do things for me, but not for you.

JJ

No, no, shit, I'm sorry Maureen. I didn't mean to imply that. You have a...You have a really hard life, and none of it's your fault, and everything that's happened to me is just 'cause of my own stupidity and...There's no comparison. Really. I'm sorry I ever mentioned it.

*Martin walks over to Maureen and JJ and waves Jess over, who quickly and clumsily screws up the flask.*

MARTIN

What you've got to tell yourself is that no one will be watching.

JJ

That's one of your old pro tricks, right?

MARTIN

No. Believe me. Literally no one will be watching. I have never met anyone who has ever seen my show.

(To Audience, gesturing around the set)

Voila: the world headquarters of FeetUp!TV, known to its staff as TitsUp!TV, housed in a sort of... shed in Hoxton. Every morning, a woman called Candy-Ann sells cosmetics. I split Thursday afternoons with a man called DJ GoodNews, who speaks to the dead. The other afternoons are taken up by tapes of old dog races from

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN (cont'd)

the US. During the evening, two women sit talking to each other, in and usually about their underwear, while viewers send them lewd texts. And that's more or less it.

(Beat)

Attracting people of the caliber of Maureen, Jess, and JJ constituted something of a coup. That should tell you everything you need to know about my show.

(To the group)

Alright, the facts. We saw an angel, he looked like Matt Damon, he floated above the roof, and he was wearing a baggy white suit. Don't. Fuck. Around. With. Those. Bits. Sorry Maureen.

(To Audience)

Show time.

*Martin ushers the group onto the set, and the three other sit down on a couch. Jess looks around to see if anyone is watching, and, satisfied they aren't, takes a final big swig.*

*NotJen gives Martin a countdown.*

*Martin takes his seat on the chair next to the couch and puts on his best TV star smile.*

MARTIN

Hello, and welcome back to "Sharp Words." As mentioned earlier, today we have three very special guests who happen to be good friends of mine: JJ [LAST NAME], Jess Crichton, and Maureen [LAST NAME]. Now, let's get down to brass tacks. I'm sure you all have heard the media frenzy surrounding these three and, yours truly, on New Years Eve. Now, the newspapers are saying, rightfully, that we've seen an angel. An ethereal being.

(Jess grimaces)

Now, JJ, would you mind telling us what the angel was wearing?

JJ

(To Audience)

It didn't seem like it would be that hard. We'd grit our teeth, say we'd seen an angel, take the money, and try and forget it ever happened. But when you're staring down Martin fucking Sharp with his smug smile, and you're all agreeing with a straight face that this fucking angel looked like Matt Damon...loyalty seemed like the dumbest of all virtues.

(Beat)

Fuck it.

(To Martin)

Oh, he had on this great promo shirt for that Sandra Bullock flick, *While You Were Sleeping*.

(CONTINUED)

*They all look at JJ, confused. But after a moment, Jess seems to catch on.*

JESS

(Starting to get tipsy)  
Oh, I saw that one! The one about the bloke in coma!  
And she like gives him amnesia or something!

*She and JJ share a look and smile.*

JJ

No, they all *think* he has amnesia. He just has never met her.

JESS

But why'd they get married then if she doesn't--

MARTIN

If we can stick to the subject. Lots of people have seen *While You Were Sleeping*. Very few people have seen an angel.

JESS

Fuck off. No one's watching. You said.

MARTIN

That was just one of my old pro's tricks.

JESS

We'll be in trouble now, then. Because I just said 'Fuck off.' You'll get loads of complaints for that.

MARTIN

I think that our viewers are sophisticated enough to know that extreme experiences sometimes produce extreme reactions.

JESS

Good. Fuckofffuckofffuckoff.

*She waves apologetically at Maureen and at the camera.*

JESS

Anyway, watching rubbish Sandra Bullock films isn't a very extreme experience.

MARTIN

We were talking about the angel, *not* Sandra Bullock.

JESS

What angel?

MARTIN

The angel we all saw.

JESS

Oh yeah, I made that up. An angel that looked like Matt Damon? Fucking hell.

MARTIN

Perhaps it's time to go to a commercial break. We'll be right back.

*Jess turns around and for the first time notices NotJen. Jess takes immediate notice. Jess stares at her, and NotJen notices. She doesn't seem to recognize Jess, as this is, in fact, not Jen.*

JESS

(To Audience)

I know you've never seen her before, but I swear on my life that that girl looks exactly like Jen. Except for though, her hair. Jen would never have bleached her hair, however much she wanted to disguise herself.

*The girl gives Jess a funny face, as if to get her to stop staring. Jess gets up. Martin sees what's going on and grabs her arm.*

MARTIN

Oh no you don't.

JESS

(Brushing him off)

Fuck off.

*She gets up, and gets right in NotJen's face.*

JESS

Oi! What, don't like me staring?

NOTJEN

No, I don't. Now please, we have a show-

JESS

Oh, you'd like that wouldn't you?

NOTJEN

Excuse me?

JESS

(Grabbing her)

Why did you leave?

(CONTINUED)

NOTJEN

Excuse me?

JESS

Where are the earrings?

NOTJEN

What is wrong with--

JESS

AND WHY IS YOU'RE FUCKING HAIR BLONDE?

*NotJen shoves her off and she lands on the ground. The (metaphorical) gloves have come off now. Jess lunges for her with the ferocity of a wild dog. They get into a fight, one which clearly won't end well for NotJen.*

*Martin and JJ come in and pull them apart, JJ grabbing NotJen and Martin taking Jess.*

NOTJEN

Get this fucking bitch away from me!

JESS

How dare you!

MARTIN

Get out. Go.

*Jess looks at him, pauses, then turns to leave. Martin calmly walks out, the other direction. JJ, wearily, lets go of NotJen and walks out as well.*

*Martin doesn't know what to do.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

And there's the story of how I got fired from the shittiest job at the shittiest network in this whole fucking country.

*He walks out, leaving Maureen and NotJen alone in the studio.*

*Blackout.*

Scene 11

*Martin is sitting alone in his apartment, drinking. A knock comes at the door.*

JESS

Martin, open up.

MARTIN

No.

JESS

Can I at least talk to you?

MARTIN

No.

*She knocks again, and finally tries the door. As it turns out, Martin didn't bother to lock it.*

JESS

What's all this about then?

MARTIN

All what?

JESS

This...big sulk.

MARTIN

You think I'm sulking?

JESS

What would you call it then?

MARTIN

I'm sick to death of you.

JESS

What have we done?

MARTIN

Not you, plural. You, singular. *Toi*, not *vous*.

JESS

Because of yesterday?

MARTIN

Yes, because of yesterday.

JESS

Yeah? So get over it? Take a chill pill.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

I'm over it. I've taken one.

JESS

Looks like it.

*Martin puts down his drink and looks at her.*

MARTIN

I'm not going to be taken in. Get out of my house.

JESS

What have I done now?

MARTIN

Jess, I want a holiday. Most of all, I want a holiday from you.

JESS

What, do you want me to go get pissed and take drugs?

MARTIN

(Picking his paper back up)  
Yes, I want that very much.

JESS

Yeah right, and if I do I'll get a "talking to"

MARTIN

Nope. No "talking to." Just go away.

JESS

I'm bored.

MARTIN

So go find JJ or Maureen.

JESS

They're boring.

MARTIN

And I'm not?

JESS

Which celebrities have you met? Have you met Eminem?

MARTIN

No.

JESS

You have but you won't tell me.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

(Standing up)  
Oh for Christ's sake

JESS

What about a game of pool?

MARTIN

No

JESS

Sex?

MARTIN

No.

JESS

You don't fancy me?

MARTIN

No.

JESS

Some men do.

MARTIN

Have sex with them, then. Jess, I'm sorry to say it, but I think our relationship is over.

JESS

Not if I just follow you around all day it isn't.

MARTIN

And you think that would work in the long term?

JESS

I don't care about the long term. And I'd have thought you'd want to look after me. I could replace those daughters you've lost. And that way you could find inner peace, see? There are loads of films like that.

MARTIN

What about the sex you were offering? How would that fit in with you replacing the daughters I've lost?

JESS

This would be a different, you know, thing. Route. A different way to go.

*A beat.*

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Fine. Let's go out and do something.

JESS

Really?

MARTIN

Yes.

JESS

Fucking hell, that was easier than I thought.

MARTIN

You're very persuasive.

(He gestures to the door.)

After you. Let me grab my coat.

*Jess walks to the door. He waves her out, and promptly shuts and locks it behind her.*

JESS

Martin?

*He walks back to the chair, and picks up his drink again. She pounds on the door.*

JESS

Martin? Open up!

*He takes a long drink.*

JESS

Martin, you fucking shit, open up!

*He keeps sitting there.*

*Blackout.*

Scene 12

*JJ walks up on to the rooftop where the first met. It's Valentine's Day, the date of their meeting. He's the first to arrive, except for a man slumped in the shadows on the corner of the building. JJ doesn't notice him.*

JJ

(To Audience)

The last band I was in broke up after a show at the Hope and Anchor in Islington. We knew we were breaking up before we went onstage, but we hadn't talked about it. Anyway, after the show, we walked into this shitty little dressing room and sat down in a line, and then Eddie said "That feels like it."

(CONTINUED)

(Beat)

I had only known these four for a few weeks, but there was that same kind of feeling on the plane home. There as a breakup coming, and no one was saying anything.

(Beat)

It's been almost two weeks since the Canary Isles. For the most part I haven't done anything. Read a lot, wandered around Islington to see if there was any sign of a bad job for me. And now...Valentine's Day.

*Maureen walks in.*

MAUREEN

Hello JJ.

JJ

Hi.

MAUREEN

Do you know how long this is going to take?

JJ

I dunno. However long it needs I guess.

MAUREEN

I just don't really want to travel home that late.

*JJ smiles at her.*

JJ

That's nice to hear.

MAUREEN

Why?

JJ

Oh just...Last time you weren't gonna go home, you know? Not, like, on the bus anyway.

MAUREEN

On the bus?

JJ

(Pointing to the edge)

Last time, you were going to get off the roof the quick way. But tonight, it sounds as if you'll be taking the long way down.

MAUREEN

Oh. Yes. Well. I guess I've come on a bit. In my head, I mean.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

Right on.

*The stand there, awkwardly for a moment. Soon, Martin enters.*

MAUREEN

Hello Martin.

*He waves to her. JJ waves to him, he waves back. More awkward silence. A silence that, for once, isn't broken by Jess' entrance.*

MARTIN

(To Jess)

What was the point of this?

JESS

We were going to meet up and see how we were all feeling and all that.

MARTIN

Ah. Lovely.

(A long beat)

And how are we all feeling?

JJ

Maureen's doing good. Aren't you Maureen?

MAUREEN

I am.

JJ

How about you Mart?

MARTIN

Oh, you know. *Comme ç*i*, comme ç*a*.*

JESS

Tosser.

*Another beat. As they stand, Jess notices the man in the corner, but doesn't react.*

MARTIN

I read something I thought might interest you all.

JJ

Yeah?

MARTIN

I was wondering, maybe it would be good to talk about it somewhere other than here...In a pub say.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

Sounds good to me. I mean, maybe we should celebrate anyway, you know?

MARTIN

Celebrate?

JJ

Yeah, I mean, we're alive, and.....  
(A beat)  
Maureen?

MAUREEN

Yes, I don't mind.

JJ

It doesn't look like anyone's going to jump. Not tonight. Is that right? Jess?

*Jess continues staring at the man in the corner.*

JESS

Fuck me. Jesus Christ.

*They all notice the man on the edge. He notices them for the first time too.*

JJ

Hey man...Hey. Just stay there.

*JJ starts to walk towards him.*

JUMPER

(Panicked)

Please don't come any closer

JJ

We've all been there. Come on back over and you can join our gang. This is a reunion.

*He steps forward gingerly. No reaction.*

JESS

Yeah, look at us! We're ok. You think you're never going to get through the evening, but you do.

JUMPER

I don't want to.

JJ

Tell us what the problem is.

(He steps closer.)

I mean, we're all fucking experts in the field. Maureen here-

(CONTINUED)

*With that, the JUMPER jumps off the edge.  
Blackout. A few seconds later, the sound of a thud  
rings out. End of Act 1*

ACT 2Scene 1

*Martin, Jess, JJ, and Maureen are sitting around a coffee table in Starbucks.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

The guy who jumped had two profound and apparently contradictory effects on us all. Firstly, he made us realize that we weren't capable of killing ourselves. And secondly, this information made us suicidal again. This isn't a paradox, if you know anything about the perversity of human nature. Up until then, jumping had always been an option, a way out, money in the bank for a rainy day. And then suddenly, the money was gone...or more accurately, it had never been ours in the first place.

(Beat)

Why had we come down on New Years? To go look for some twit named Chas. I'm not sure we could've persuaded old matey, the jumper, to look for Chas. He had other things on his mind.

JJ

I was up all fucking night thinking about that guy. Man, what was going on there?

JESS

He was probably just, you know. A drama queen. A male drama queen. A drama king. He looked the sort.

MARTIN

That's very shrewd, Jess. In the brief glimpse we got of him before he plunged to his death, he didn't strike me as someone with serious problems. Nothing on your scale, anyway.

MAUREEN

It'll be in the local paper. They usually are. I used to read the reports. I used to compare myself to them.

MARTIN

And? How did you get on?

MAUREEN

Oh, I did ok. Some of them I couldn't understand.

MARTIN

What sort of things?

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

Money

JESS

I owe loads of people money.

MARTIN

Perhaps you should think of killing yourself.

JESS

It's not much. Only twenty quid here and there.

MARTIN

Even so, a debt's a debt. And if you can't pay, maybe you should take the honorable way out?

JJ

Hey, guys. Let's keep some focus, huh?

MARTIN

On what?

JJ

Let's focus on that guy.

MARTIN

We don't know anything about him.

JJ

No, but.. I dunno. He seems kind of important to me. That was what we were gonna do.

MARTIN

Were we?

JESS

I was.

MARTIN

But you didn't.

JESS

You guys sat on me!

MARTIN

But you haven't done anything about it since.

JESS

Well, we went to that party. And we went on holiday. And you know, there's been one thing after another.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Terrible, isn't it, how that happens? You'll have to block out some time in your diary. Otherwise life will keep getting in the way.

JESS

Shut up.

JJ

Guys, guys!

MARTIN

Like JJ, I have spent a long night cogitating.

JESS

Tosser.

MARTIN

And my conclusion is that we are not serious people. We were never serious. We got closer than some, but nowhere near as close as others. And that puts us in something of a bind.

JJ

I agree. We're fucked, sorry Maureen.

JESS

(Raising her hand)

I'm missing something.

MARTIN

This is it. This is us.

JESS

What is?

MARTIN

(Gesturing to the group)

This. This is it. There's no way out. Not even the way out is the way out.

JESS

Fuck that! And I'm not sorry, Maureen.

MARTIN

The other night, I was going to tell you about something I'd read in a magazine. About suicide. Do you remember? Anyway, this guy reckoned the crisis period lasts ninety days.

JJ

What guy?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

This suicidologist guy.

JJ

That's a job?

MARTIN

Everything's a job.

JESS

So what?

MARTIN

We've had forty-six of the ninety days.

JESS

And what happens after ninety days?

MARTIN

Nothing *happens*. Just..things are different. Things change.

JESS

Nothing's going to change for you. You're still going to be the geezer off the telly who slept with the fifteen year old and went to prison. No one will ever forget that.

MARTIN

Yes, well maybe it doesn't apply in my case, if that makes you feel better.

JESS

Won't help Maureen either. Or JJ. I might change though. I do, quite a lot.

JJ

We've noticed

MARTIN

My point is...

MARTIN

that we extend our deadline again. Because, well...

(To Audience)

A few days ago, in the immediate aftermath of the holiday, it had been perfectly clear that we no longer had much use for each other; now it was hard to imagine who else would be suitable company. I tried to imagine talking to...mothers with prams, people at the newsagents...They wouldn't want to hear about people jumping from tower blocks. No one would, apart from...

(To Group)

I'm not, you know, ready to go solo yet. It's funny, because I don't actually like any of you very much but...you seem to be..I don't know...what I need.

(CONTINUED)

A beat.

JJ

Thanks man. When's the ninety days up?

MARTIN

March 31.

JESS

Bit of a coincidence, isn't it?

MARTIN

What's your point?

JESS

Well. It's not scientific, is it?

MARTIN

What, and eighty-eight days would be?

JESS

More scientific. Yeah.

JJ

No, I get it. Three months sounds about right. Three months is like a season.

MARTIN

Very much like. Given there are four seasons. And twelve months in a year.

JJ

So we're seeing the winter through together. That's cool. Winter is when you get the blues.

MARTIN

So it would appear.

JJ

But we gotta *do* something. We can't just sit around waiting for three months to be up.

JESS

Typical American.

MARTIN

What should we do?

JJ

I dunno, man. I just know that if we spend six weeks pissing and moaning, we're not helping ourselves.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Jess is right. Typical bloody American. Self-help, you can do anything if you set your mind to it, right? You could be president.

JJ

What is it with you assholes? I'm not talking about becoming president. I'm talking about, like, finding a job waiting tables.

JESS

Great, lets not kill ourselves because someone gave us a fifty-pence tip.

JJ

No fucking chance of that in this fucking country. Sorry Maureen.

JESS

You could always go back to where you came form. That would change something. Also, your buildings are taller.

MARTIN

So, forty four days to go.

JJ

(To Audience)

When I'd invented Cosmic Tony for Maureen, I'd put limits because I thought we might see what kind of practical help Maureen needed. But...shit, take away the superpowers and you find out all kinds of other shit. We spend so much time not saying what we want but...Fuck, surviving in whatever life you're living means lying, and lying corrodes the soul, so take a break from the lies for one goddamn minutes

(To Group)

I want my band back.

JESS

Yeah, we all know.

JJ

(Louder)

I want my band back. And my girl. I want my band back and my girl back.

JESS

You just said that.

JJ

I haven't said it often enough. I want my band back and my girl back

(CONTINUED)

(Standing up)

I want my band back and my girl back. What do you want Martin.

MARTIN

(Standing up)

I want another cappucino. Anyone else?

JJ

Don't be such a pussy. What do you want?

MARTIN

And what good will it do me if I tell you?

JJ

I don't know. Say it, and we'll see what we see. Three wishes.

MARTIN

Ok, I wish I'd been able to make my marriage work.

JESS

Yeah, well that was never gonna happen. Because you can't keep your prick in your trousers. Sorry, Maureen.

MARTIN

And of course I wish I'd never slept with that girl.

JESS

Yeah, well...

JJ

Shut up.

MARTIN

I don't know. Maybe I just wish that I wasn't such an asshole.

JESS

Why don't you wish you'd slept with the girl and got away with it?

MARTIN

That wish wouldn't really solve the problem, though, would it? I'd still be an asshole. I'd still get caught for something else.

JESS

Well, why not wish that you never got caught for anything? Why not wish that you...What's that one with cake?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

What are you talking about?

JESS

Something about eating a cake?

MARTIN

Having it and eating it?

JESS

Are you sure? How can you eat a cake without having it in the first place?

MARTIN

The idea is that you get it both ways. You eat the cake, but it somehow remains untouched. So 'have' here means 'keep.'

JESS

That's mental.

MARTIN

Indeed.

JESS

How could you do that?

MARTIN

You can't. Hence the expression.

JESS

And what's the point of the fucking cake? If you're not going to eat it?

JJ

We're kind of getting off the subject here. The point is to wish for something that would make us happier. And I can see why Martin wants to be, you know, a different person.

JESS

I wish Jen would come back.

JJ

Yeah, ok. What else?

JESS

Nothing. That's it?

MARTIN

You don't wish you were less of an arsehole?

JESS

If Jen came back I wouldn't be.

MARTIN

Or less mad?

JESS

I'm not mad. Just confused.

*Not everyone is convinced.*

JJ

So you're just gonna waste two wishes?

JESS

No, I can use them up. Ummm...an everlasting supply of blow, maybe? And, I dunno....Oooh, I wouldn't mind being able to play the piano I suppose!

MARTIN

Jesus Christ...That's the only problem you've got? You can't play the piano?

JESS

If I was less confused, I'd have the time to play the piano.

JJ

How about you, Maureen?

MAUREEN

I told you before. When you said Cosmic Tony could only arrange things.

JJ

Tell everyone else.

MAUREEN

I wish they could find a way to help Matty.

JESS

You can do better than that, can't you?

MAUREEN

How?

JESS

No, well, see, I was wondering what you'd say. 'Cause you could have wished that he'd been born normal. And then you could've saved yourself all those years of clearing up shit.

*A beat.*

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

Who would I be then?

JESS

Eh?

MAUREEN

I don't know who I'd be.

JESS

You'd still be Maureen you stupid old trout.

JJ

That's not what she means. She means, like, we are what's happened to us. So if you take away what's happened to us, then, you know...

JESS

No, I don't fucking know.

JJ

If Jen hadn't happened to you, and all the other things...

JESS

Like Chas and that?

JJ

Exactly. Events of that magnitude. Well, who would you be?

JESS

I'd be someone different.

JJ

Exactly.

JESS

And that'd be fucking excellent.

*A beat. Blackout.*

Scene 2

*Martin and Theo, his agent are sitting at a table, eating lunch.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

A momentous occasion, to be sure. This is the first time I've spoken to Theo, my agent, face-to-face since getting out of prison. Apparently, there has been a "substantial" offer from a reputable publisher for an autobiography.

(CONTINUED)

(To Theo)

How much?

THEO

They're not talking money yet.

MARTIN

May I ask, then, in what way it could be described as substantial?

THEO

Well, you know, it has substance.

MARTIN

What does that mean?

THEO

It's real, not imaginary.

MARTIN

And what does 'real' mean? In real terms? Really?

THEO

You're becoming difficult, Martin. If you don't mind me saying so, you're not my easiest client in the best of times, what with one thing and another. And I've actually been working quite hard on this project.

MARTIN

But what did you have to do, Theo? If, as you say, someone phoned up and offered an autobiography, in some kind of indescribably substantial way?

THEO

Well, I phoned them up and suggested they might want it.

MARTIN

Right. And they seemed interested?

THEO

They phoned back.

MARTIN

With a substantial offer.

THEO

You don't really know much about the publishing world, do you?

MARTIN

Not really. Only what you've told me over this lunch. Which is that people have been phoning up with substantial offers.

(CONTINUED)

(Martin's phone buzzes)

Excuse me.

(He picks it up. Jess is on the other line)

Hello?

JESS

Emergency meeting. Starbucks. Basement. Four o'clock.

MARTIN

Why in the basement?

THEO

We musn't run before we can walk.

MARTIN

(To Theo)

Ok, agreed. Just tell me the walking part.

(To Jess)

Why the basement?

JESS

Because I've got private things to talk about.

THEO

No, you see, even the *walking* part is running. It's more, you know, tactical than that.

MARTIN

(To Jess)

What sort of private things?

(To Theo)

Walking is running now?

THEO

Softly softly, catchee monkey

JESS

Sexual things

MARTIN

(To Jess)

Oh Jesus Christ.

THEO

That reaction isn't very softly, softly, Martin

MARTIN

(To Theo)

Ssh!

(To Jess)

The others are going to be there, aren't they?

(CONTINUED)

JESS

You think I've got private sexual things I only want to tell you?

MARTIN

(To Jess)

I was hoping not.

JESS

Yeah, I like have fantasies about you all the time.

MARTIN

(To Jess)

I'll see you later, ok?

*She hangs up.*

THEO

Not softly, softly. That's noisy, noisy. Tetchy, tetchy even.

*Blackout.*

Scene 3

*Basement of a starbucks. Standing and sitting around are: JESS, with her parents (MR. & MRS. CRICHTON); JJ, with EDDIE and LIZZIE; MAUREEN, with MATTY in a wheelchair and two male nurses (STEPHEN and SEAN); and CINDY, Martin's two DAUGHTERS, and PENNY. There is a low murmur of conversation.*

*Martin walks in, confused for a moment. He sees everyone around the room, but lands on Cindy and his ex-family last. His daughters bound up to him.*

DAUGHTERS

Daddy!! Daddy!!

*They come up to hug him. He is overwhelmed. He walks them over to Cindy, waving at Penny half-assedly on the way.*

MARTIN

Hello. What brings you here?

CINDY

The mad girl there seemed to think it might help in some way.

*Martin looks over to Jess, and nods in understanding.*

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

Did she explain how?

*Cindy snorts.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

I get the feeling that snorting might be her preferred method of communication.

*He kneels down to talk to his kids, but as he does so, Jess stands on a chair and claps her hands. She addresses the group.*

JESS

I read about this on the internet! It's called an intervention! They do it all the time in America.

JJ

All the time. It's all we do.

JESS

See, if someone is fucked...messed up on drugs or drink of whatever, then the, like, friends and family and whatever all gather together and confront him and go, you know, 'Fucking pack it in.' Sorry Maureen. Sorry Mum and Dad. Sorry little girls. This one's sort of different. In America, they have a skilled...Oh shit, I've forgotten the name. On the website he was called Steve.

(She fumbles in her pocket for a piece of paper. Triumphantly, she reads from it)

A facilitator! You're supposed to have a skilled facilitator, and we haven't got one. I didn't know who to ask, really. I don't know anyone with skills. Also, this intervention is sort of the other way round. Because we're asking you to intervene. It's us coming to you, rather than you coming to us. We're saying we need you. We need your help.

(She looks at Matty's nurses)

Well, not you guys. You don't have to do anything. To tell you the truth, you're only really here to bump up Maureen's numbers, 'cause, well, I mean, she hasn't really got anybody, has she? It would've been a bit grim for you, Maureen, seeing all these reunions and standing there on your own.

(Maureen attempts a polite smile)

Anyway! Just so's you know who's who. In the JJ corner we have his ex, Lizzie, and his mate Ed, who used to be in his crappy band with him. I've got my mum and dad, and it's not often you'll catch them in the same room together, ha-ha. Martin's got his ex-wife, his

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JESS (cont'd)  
 ex-daughters, and his ex-girlfriend. Or maybe not ex-!  
 Who knows? By the end of the night, he might have his  
 wife, kids, and girlfriend back!

(Everyone but the Martin corner laughs,  
 but stops when they look over at Cindy)  
 And Maureen's got her son, Matty there, and the two  
 guys from the care home. So here's my idea: We spend  
 some time talking to our people. And then we swap  
 round, and go talk to some other person's people.

MARTIN

Why? What for?

JESS

I dunno. Whatever. Just for a laugh. And we'll learn  
 things, won't we? About each other? And about  
 ourselves? So? Who's going to to where?

*A few TEENAGED PUNKS come downstairs and try to  
 find a table to sit. Jess gives them a death  
 glare.*

JESS

Oi! Where do you think you're going? Upstairs, all of  
 you!

(They stare at her)

Come on! We haven't got all day! Go, go, go! *Schnell!*  
*Plus vivement!*

(They scurry away. A long beat)

Well? Get on with it! Let's talk!

*With that, they all, somewhat hesitantly, turn to  
 their corners to talk.*

*Everyone talks sotto voce, except for Maureen.  
 Over this next scene, Jess's conversation with her  
 parents slowly builds to an explosive finish.*

MAUREEN

(To Stephen and Sean)

Do you want a cup of tea?

SEAN

No, we're fine.

(A beat)

I've been trying to work it out, but I'm clueless.

MAUREEN

Yes. Well, it must be very confusing.

(CONTINUED)

SEAN

So come on, put us out of our misery. Steve here reckons you've got money troubles.

MAUREEN

Some of us have. I haven't.

SEAN

But you've got troubles?

MAUREEN

Yes, we've got troubles. But they're all...different troubles.

STEPHEN

(Pointing to Martin)

Yeah, well I know he's got troubles. The one off of the TV.

MAUREEN

Yeah, he's got troubles.

STEPHEN

So how do you know him? I can't imagein you go to the same nightclubs.

*A beat.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

And I ended up telling him everything. I didn't mean to. It just sort of came out. And once I'd started, it didn't seem to matter much what I'd told them.

(To Stephen)

You won't tell them back at the center, will you?

SEAN

Why would we tell them?

MAUREEN

Because if the found out that I'd been planning to leave Matty with them forever, they might refuse to take him again.

STEPHEN

How about this.

(He pulls out a piece of paper and writes down a number)

Here's a private care home, nicer than ours. If you're going to off yourself again, call them.

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

That sounds good.

SEAN

It's not that we don't want to know. And it's not that we don't want our center to be stuck with Matty. It's just that we don't want to feel that every time you call us up, you're in trouble.

*Maureen starts to smile.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

The funny thing is, this is what Jess was after with the get together. And she didn't expect me to get anywhere, she'd only asked them along because Matty couldn't have gotten here with out them, and in five minutes, they'd made me feel better about something.

*They continue taking, sotto voce. The focus shifts to JJ.*

EDDIE

Man, I heard you weren't doing too good, but look at you.

JJ

Yeah, well, something'll turn up.

EDDIE

Nothing's gonna turn up here. You gotta come home.

JJ

Look at you!

EDDIE

I never really wanted to look like I used to look. I looked like that because I was broke. And we never stayed anywhere with a decent shower.

(Beat)

I never pegged you for a quitter.

JJ

Hey, be careful what you say. This is Quitter's Club HQ.

EDDIE

Yeah, but from what I hear the rest of them had good reasons. What've you got? You got nothing, man.

JJ

Yep. That's pretty much how it feels.

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

That wasn't what I meant.

LIZZIE

Anyone want coffee?

JJ

I'll come along with you.

EDDIE

We'll all go.

*They cross to the counter and try to order their coffee. As they do so, Jess and her parents finally explode.*

JESS

(Screaming)

I NEVER TOUCHED ANY STUPID FUCKING EARRINGS!

*Everyone looks at Jess, and Martin and JJ look at each other. Jess storms out in a rage.*

EDDIE

Fuck.

JJ

Yeah.

*Switch focus to Maureen. She notices Penny sitting alone and walks over to her.*

MAUREEN

Do you want to join our corner?

PENNY

I'm sure you've got plenty to talk about over there.

MAUREEN

Not really.

PENNY

(Looking at Stephen)

Well, you've got the best looking chap in the place.

MAUREEN

So come on over and talk to him. He'd be pleased to meet you.

*Penny is unsure, but finally decides to head over. From this point on, the focus switches to JJ, as Penny begins chatting to Stephen.*

(CONTINUED)

EDDIE

You know, for people like us, rock 'n roll is college. We're working class guys. We don't get to fuck around like frat boys unless we join a band. We get a few years, then the band starts to suck, the road starts to suck, and having no money *really* starts to suck. So you get a job. That's life man.

JJ

So the point when everything starts to suck. That's like our graduation?

EDDIE

Exactly.

JJ

So when's it all gonna start sucking for Dylan? Or Springsteen?

EDDIE

Probably when they're staying in a motel that doesn't allow them to use hot water until six p.m. And anyway, knew Springsteen. Or at least, saw him live. And Senator JJ, you are no Springsteen.

JJ

Thanks pal.

EDDIE

Shit, JJ. What do you want me to say? Ok, you're Springsteen. You're one of the most successful performers in music history. You fill stadiums night after fucking night. You feel better now? Jeez, grow up man.

JJ

Oh, and you're all grown up because your old man took pity on you and gave you a job hooking people up with illegal cable TV?

*Eddie stews for a moment.*

JJ

What, nothing?

EDDIE

Fuck you.

JJ

You flew all this way to tell me that?

EDDIE

Fuck you.

LIZZIE

Stop it, the pair of you!

JJ

Listen, I come here a lot. You wanna kick my ass, then let's go outside.

*The three of them exit. Martin starts to notice Penny talking to Stephen, and gets up from his seat. He walks over to her.*

MARTIN

Thanks.

PENNY

Oh, that's ok. I wasn't busy, and Jess seemed to think it might help.

MARTIN

No. Not thanks for that. Thanks for standing here flirting in front of me. Thanks for nothing, in other words.

PENNY

This is Stephen. He's looking after Matty, and didn't have anyone to talk to, so I came over to say hello.

STEPHEN

Hi

MARTIN

(Glaring)

I suppose you think you're pretty great.

STEPHEN

I'm sorry?

PENNY

Martin!

MARTIN

You heard me. Smug git.

PENNY

(Quietly)

Go away, before you make an idiot of yourself.

MARTIN

It's easy, being a male nurse, isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

STEPHEN

Not very. I mean, it's rewarding, sure, but...long hours, poor pay. Night shifts. Some of the patients are difficult.

MARTIN

(Mocking)

Some of the patients are difficult. Poor pay. Night Shifts. Diddums.

STEPHEN

Sean, I'm going to wait upstairs.

MARTIN

You just wait and listen to what I have to say. I did you the courtesy of listening to you banging on about what a national hero you are. Now you listen to me. I hate people like you. You wheel a disabled kid around for a bit and you want a medal. And how hard is it, really?

*He grabs the handles of Matty's wheelchair and starts pushing it back and forth. He puts a hand on his hip effeminately.*

DAUGHTERS

Look at Daddy, Mummy! He's funny, isn't he!

MARTIN

There! How's that? Do I look more attractive to you again now?

(Shouting)

Hey everybody. Aren't I great? Aren't I great? You think this is hard, blondie? I'll tell you what's hard! Hard is....

(He has absolutely nothing to say)

Hard is when...

*A beat.*

STEPHEN

Have you finished, mate?

*Martin looks around, and decides to storm off, following Jess and JJ.*

*A long beat, as everyone looks at each other.*

MR. CRICHTON

Is that it, do you think? I mean, I don't want to..I don't wish to appear unsympathetic. And I know Jess took a lot of trouble organizing this. But well, there's no one really left, is there? Would you like us to stay, Maureen?

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN

I think Jess just wanted everyone to understand each other better. I'm sorry if that isn't what quite happened.

MR. CRICHTON

It's those bloody earrings.

MAUREEN

What earrings?

MR. CRICHTON

Jen had a pair of earrings. On her bedside table. They were there when she...disappeared. At least, for a few weeks, because they also..disappeared.

MRS. CRICHTON

It was Jess. She nevers owns up to it, but--

MR. CRICHTON

Now dear...

(He comforts her)

It's always a sore subject.

MAUREEN

Were they special to her?

MR. CRICHTON

To Jen? Or to Jess?

MAUREEN

I don't really know.

MRS. CRICHTON

They were her favorites.

MAUREEN

She came back for them.

MRS. CRICHTON

Who did?

MAUREEN

Jen. If she loved her earrings, then she probably came back for them. You know what girls of that age are like.

MR. CRICHTON

(A beat, amazed)

God...I'd never thought of that.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. CRICHTON

Me neither. But...that makes so much sense. Because, do you remember, Chris? That's when we lost a couple of other things too. That was when the money went missing.

*A beat.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

I didn't have the same feelings about the money. I could see there being another explanation for that.

(Mr. & Mrs. Crichton hug and smile and laugh.)

But I can see why it would make a difference to them. It would mean she'd disappeared, rather than the alternatives. You could wreck it all for them in a second, if you wanted to. What did it add up to, really? Jen could have come back because she wanted to die in those earrings. She may not have come back at all. But...now I know what you need to keep yourself going. Sometimes you just need to give things a tiny little...push.

*Maureen walks out, gesturing for Stephen, Sean, and Matty to follow. Blackout*

Scene 4

*This scene takes place in three different locations on stage, only lit if their characters are in focus.*

*Lights up on Jess, sitting, rolling a cigarette.*

JESS

(To Audience)

Everyone was having an ok time except me. I had a shit time. And it wasn't fair, because I'd spent ages organizing it all! And what did I get out of it? Fuck all! Why did I think that talking to my fucking father and my fucking mother would be any fucking use at all? I talk to them every day, and nothing ever changes.

(Beat)

We're never going to forget about those earrings. We'll be talking about them on her deathbed. They're almost like her way of swearing. When I'm angry, I say "fuck" a lot. My mum, she says "earrings."

(Beat)

My mum, she asked me what I wanted. How they could help. What they were supposed to do that they didn't. And...I didn't know. It was...sort of like the moment the guy jumped off the roof. You think, one day, if I can't handle it, I'll top myself. One day, if I'm

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JESS (cont'd)

really fucking up badly, I'll just give up and ask Mum and Dad to bail me out. But what can they do? Fuck all.

(The rolling papers slip out of her hand)

It'd be easy for me to be a nutter. Not, like, it would be all lollipops and roses and whatever. I just mean I have... a lot in common with some of the people you see swearing and rolling cigarettes on the street. Some of them seemed to hate people, and I hated just about everybody. They must have pissed off their friends and family, and I'd certainly done that. I'd thought about killing myself, for what? A laugh! Even if I'd jumped, it'd have been for a laugh too.

(Beat)

How many people could I piss off, and how many more places could I run away from? Not many.

*Lights go to half on Jess, and lights come up on JJ. He is standing outside, looking at Eddie. Lizzie is standing next to them.*

EDDIE

I don't want to hit you unless you hit me.

LIZZIE

You flew across the bloody Atlantic because JJ was in trouble, and now look at you! One conversation and you want to punch him!

EDDIE

Things have to go the way they have to go.

LIZZIE

Is that like 'A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do'? Because that sounds utterly meaningless to me.

EDDIE

He's on my side. So it doesn't matter what it sounds like to you. He understands.

JJ

No I don't. Lizzie's right. Why would you come all this way to punch me?

LIZZIE

It's like *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*. You want to sleep with each other but you can't because you're both so straight.

EDDIE

I really, really don't want to sleep with him. I really want to punch him. But he has to punch me first.

(CONTINUED)

LIZZIE

You see! Homoerotic with a bit of S&M thrown in. Just kiss him and be done with it.

JJ

(To Lizzie)

You trying to get me killed?

LIZZIE

Why don't you all just get back together? At least you've got all that mic-sharing and those great big electric penis substitutes.

EDDIE

Oh, that's why you didn't want him in a band. You were jealous.

LIZZIE

Who said I didn't want him in a band?

JJ

You got that dead wrong, Ed. She wasn't that deep. She dumped me precisely because I wasn't in a band. She wasn't interested in being with me unless I became a rock star and made a shitload of money.

LIZZIE

Is that whas you think I meant?

*JJ looks at her with amazement. There is a moment of revelation as JJ realizes something...something big. He smiles broadly.*

JJ

Everyone should get back with everyone. Every band that has ever come apart, every couple...There's too much unhappiness in the world as it is, without people splitting up every ten seconds!

*He waits for their response.*

LIZZIE

You're not serious.

JJ

(Trying to save face)

Nah. Well, you know, just an...an idea I had. A theory. Hadn't ironed out all the kinks yet.

EDDIE

How would that work with bands that grew out of other bands? Like, I dunno, if Nirvana got back together, then Foo Fighters would have to split up. They'd be unhappy.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

Not all of them.

LIZZIE

And what about second marriages? There are loads of happy second marriages?

EDDIE

There'd have been no Clash. 'Cause Joe Strummer would have had to stay in his first band.

LIZZIE

And who was your first girlfriend?

EDDIE

Kathy Gorecki! Ha!

LIZZIE

You'd still be with her.

JJ

Yeah, well. She was nice. That wouldn't have been a bad life.

EDDIE

(Laughing)

But she never gave nothin' up. You never even got a hand on her bra.

LIZZIE

I'm sure I'd have managed by now. We'd have been together fifteen years.

EDDIE

(Smiling)

Oh man. I can't punch you.

*Lights go to half on JJ, and come up on Martin. A chair is set on stage. He is sitting in the chair, with a drink, staring into nothing. A table with some envelopes strewn about are sitting in front of him.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

The cause of my problems is located in my head, if my head is where my personality is located. Cindy and others would argue my personality and source of troubles are located below, rather and above, my waist, but hear me out. I had been given many opportunities in life, and I'd thrown each one of them away, one by one, in a series of catastrophically bad decisions...each one of which seemed like a good idea at the time. And

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN (cont'd)

yet the only tool I had at my disposal to correct this disastrous course my life seemed to be taking was the very same head that caused me to fuck up in the first place. What chance did I have?

(He looks at the table and grabs an envelope. Words are scribbled on it. He reads them out loud)

"Why Horrible To Nurse? 1) Arsehole? Him? Me? 2) Hitting on Penny? 3) Good-looking and young--pissed me off? 4) Annoyed by people." I assume that last one was supposed to mean something brilliantly precise when I first wrote it.

(He puts that envelope down and grabs another, and reads it as well)

"Courses Of Action. A) Kill myself? B) Ask Maureen not to use that nurse anymore. C) Don't."

(Beat)

And C stopped there, either because I fell into a stupor at that point, or because "Don't" was a concise way of expressing a profound solution to all my problems. Think about it: how much better would things be for me if I didn't, wouldn't, and never had.

*Lights up on all three of them. As this scene with JJ plays out, Jess and Martin continue sitting, sulking.*

EDDIE

I didn't realize you felt that bad.

JJ

The suicide thing? That wasn't a clue?

EDDIE

Yeah, I knew you wanted to kill yourself. But patching things up with Lizzie and the band? That's a whole different level of misery, way beyond suicide.

*Lizzie and JJ both laugh.*

*Martin gets a call on his phone. He picks it up. It's Cindy.*

CINDY

Where have you been?

MARTIN

Cindy? At home. Drunk.

CINDY

Well I want to talk to you about this afternoon.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

What do you think it was all about?

CINDY

Well, you're unbalanced, aren't you? Unbalanced and a tosser. An unbalanced, poisonous tosser.

*Mr. Crichton walks in to the corner of Jess's scene. She doesn't notice him, but he seems to notice her. He doesn't do anything.*

LIZZIE

I never said anything about finishing with you because you weren't going to be a rock star. You know that, right?

JJ

So what did you say? Try again. And I'll listen real hard this time.

LIZZIE

Ok, what I said was I couldn't be with you if you weren't a musician.

MARTIN

Listen, I appreciate what you're saying, and I don't want to appear rude, but the 'unbalanced tosser' part I find less interesting than the 'poisonous' part. Could you talk more about that?

CINDY

Maybe you should pay someone to do this.

MARTIN

You mean a therapist?

CINDY

A therapist? No I was thinking more of one of those women who will pee all over you if you pay her enough. Isn't that what you want?

MARTIN

I don't think so. It's never appealed before.

CINDY

I was speaking metaphorically.

MARTIN

I'm sorry. I don't really understand.

CINDY

You clearly feel so awful about yourself that you don't mind being abused.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

It wasn't such a big deal to you at the time. You don't even like music that much.

LIZZIE

You're not hearing me JJ. You're a musician. It's not just what you did. It's who you are.

CINDY

You know why you turned on that poor guy, don't you?

MARTIN

No! You see, that's precisely why we need to talk!

CINDY

I mean, he was fifteen fucking years younger than you, and much better-looking. But it wasn't that. He'd done more with his life that afternoon than you've ever done with yours.

LIZZIE

And I'm not saying you're going to be a successful musician. I don't even know if you're a good one. It was just that I could see you'd be no use to anyone if you stopped.

CINDY

You ponce around on television and screw schoolgirls, and he pushed disabled kids around in a wheelchair, probably for minimum wage. It's no wonder Penny wanted to chat him up. For her, it was the moral equivalent of gonig from Frankenstein's monster to Brad Pitt.

LIZZIE

And look what happened. You break the band up, and five minutes later you're standing on the top of a tower block. You're stuck with it. And without it you're dead. Or you might as well be

MARTIN

Thank you! That's great.

JJ

So it was nothing to do with me being unsuccessful?

CINDY

Don't you dare put down the phone on me. I've only just started. I've got twelve years of this stuff.

LIZZIE

God, what do you take me for?

MARTIN

Oh, I'll be back for more, I promise. But that's plenty to be going on with.

*He hangs up, and starts cleaning up his apartment. As he does this, JJ goes over to hug Lizzie and Jess notices her dad looking at her. He holds out a cigarette to Jess. She looks up, and after a moment, takes it from the him. He holds out a lighter, and she takes it. Then he holds out his hand, and she takes it and stands up.*

*At the same moment, Jess and her dad, JJ and Lizzie and Eddie, and Martin all leave. Before he makes it offstage, Martin turns to the audience.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Ex-wives. Really, everyone should have at least one.

Scene 5

*Maureen is standing, alone in the center of the stage.*

MAUREEN

(To Audience)

I feel a bit daft explaining what all happened next, because it all sounds like too much of a coincidence. You may not believe it. But on the other hand, I don't care whether you believe it, because It's true. Here's what happened. Stephen and Sean helped me get Matty home. On the way Stephen said to Sean, "Have you got anyone else yet." And Sean said "No" and Stephen said "We'll get slaughtered." I didn't really understand what was going on.

(A beat. She smiles very broadly)

And then Sean said, "Any good at quizzes, Maureen? Fancy joining our team?"

(Beat)

Now, that's not the most amazing story you've ever heard. I listen to Jess and JJ and MARTIN, and that's the sort of thing that happens to them all the time. But if you don't go out, and never meet anyone, then nothing happens. How could it. So, instead of going home, we took Matty to the respite home, and met at the pub.

(She smiles even wider)

And the other person on the team? An older man named Jack, who owned a newsagents. And he offered me a job. It's not much of a job--three mornings a week. And it doesn't pay very well--4 pounds seventy five an hours.

(Beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAUREEN (cont'd)

We didn't win the quiz. We came fourth out of eleven.  
But they said I could come again.

(Beat)

Do you remember Psalm 50? "Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." I went to Topper's House because I had called and called and called and there was no delivery. But He did hear me, in the end. He sent me Martin, and JJ, and Jess. He sent me Stephen and Sean and the quiz. And He sent me Jack and the newsagents. He proved to me that he was listening. How could I have carried on doubting him, with all that evidence? So I'd better glorify him, the best I can.

*Blackout.*

Scene 6

*Martin is sitting at a small table with PACINO, a teenaged boy.*

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Who, you might ask, would call their child Pacino?  
Pacino's parents, Harry and Marcia Cox, that's who.

(To Pacino)

May I ask how you got your name?

*A beat.*

PACINO

Howjer mean?

MARTIN

Where did your name come from?

PACINO

Where did it come from?

MARTIN

Well, there's a famous film actor called Pacino.

PACINO

Is there?

MARTIN

You haven't heard of him?

PACINO

Nope.

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

So you don't think you were named after him?

PACINO

Dunno.

MARTIN

You never asked?

PACINO

Nope. I don't ask about no one's name.

MARTIN

Right.

PACINO

Where chorname come from?

MARTIN

Martin?

PACINO

Yeah.

MARTIN

Where did it come from?

PACINO

Yeah.

*Martin is at a loss.*

PACINO

See? It's a hard question. Don't mean I'm thick, just because I can't answer it. Otherwise you're thick too.

MARTIN

(To Audience)

Not a possibility that I felt I could rule out altogether.

(To Pacino)

Now, the book.

(To Audience)

His choice, a book about football. Interestingly enough, a particularly sappy book about how a girl with one leg overcame her handicap and her teammate's sexism to become the captain of the school team.

PACINO

(Disgusted)

She's going to score the winning goal, innit?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

I fear that might be the case, yes.

PACINO

But she's only got one leg.

MARTIN

Indeed

PACINO

Plus, she's a girl.

MARTIN

Yes, that she is.

PACINO

What school is thie, then?

MARTIN

You may well ask.

PACINO

I'm asking. I want to go up there with my mates and laugh at them for having a girl with one leg on their team.

MARTIN

I'm not sure it's a true story.

PACINO

No? Then I'm not fucking bothering with this then.

MARTIN

Good. Go choose something else. What are you interested in?

PACINO

Nuffink, really.

MARTIN

Nothing at all?

PACINO

I quite like fruit. My mum says I'm a champion fruit eater.

MARTIN

Right, that gives us something to go on then.

(To Audience)

What do you do? How does one begin to like oneself enough to want to live a little longer? And why didn't my hour with Pacino do the trick? It's a currency like any other, self-worth. You spend years saving it up,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN (cont'd)

and you can blow it all in an evening if you so choose. I'd done forty-odd years worth in the space of a few months, and now I have to save up again. I reckoned Pacino is worth about ten pence a week, so it'll be a while before I can afford another night on the town.

(Beat)

There you are. I can finish that sentence now. "Hard is teaching Pacino to read." Or even, "Hard is trying to rebuild yourself, piece by piece, with no instruction book, and no clue as to where all the important bits are supposed to go.

*Blackout.*

Scene 7

*Martin, Maureen, Jess, and JJ all stand up on the rooftop. It's March 31, the Ninetieth Day.*

JJ

(To Audience)

I guess Martin's suicidologist guy knew what he was talking about. Ninety days, and things had changed. They hadn't changed very quickly, or very dramatically, and maybe not even for the better, but they'd changed.

MAUREEN

I don't really want to stay up here tonight.

JESS

Why not?

MAUREEN

Because people kill themselves up there.

JESS

Duh.

MARTIN

Oh, so you enjoyed it on Valentine's Day, did you?

JESS

No, I didn't enjoy it exactly. But, you know.

MARTIN

No, I don't know.

JESS

It's a part of life, isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

MARTIN

People always say that about unpleasant things. You know what else is a part of life? Going for a crap. No one ever wants to see that, do they? No one ever puts that on film. Let's go and watch people take a dump this evening.

JESS

Who'd let us? People lock the door.

JJ

But you'd watch if they didn't?

JESS

If they didn't, it'd be more a part of life. So yes, I would.

*Martin rolls his eyes.*

JJ

But the reason people lock the door is, they want privacy. And maybe they want privacy when they're thinking of killing themselves.

JESS

So you're saying we should just let them get on with it? Because I don't think that's right. Maybe this time we can stop someone.

MARTIN

Looking at our track record, I'd say the chances are slim.

JESS

How about the pub downstairs? There's probably someone thinking about it in there.

*They think back to the pub downstairs.*

JESS

Eh, there was too much laughing.

JJ

Anyone who thinks texts are funny isn't gonna kill himself. Not enough going on internally.

JESS

I've seen some funny texts.

MARTIN

Yeah, well. I'm not sure that really disproves his point.

JESS

(Smiling)

Shut up! There was a bloke reading the paper? I think he was on his own. Probably the best we can do.

MARTIN

The best we can do? You're saying we have to dissuade someone from killing themselves whether they were thinking of it or not.

JESS

Yeah, well, the laughing cretins aren't going to come up here, are they? He seemed, like, more deep.

MARTIN

He was probably reading the Racing page of The Sun. Deep, he is not.

JESS

Snob

MARTIN

Oh, and who's the one who thinks you have to be deep to kill yourself?

JJ

We all do. Don't we?

*A long beat.*

JJ

I'm glad we're here.

JESS

Why?

JJ

I dunno. It just feels...right.

*Another long beat.*

JJ

It's gotta be a good thing, right? That we're still around.

JESS

Duh!

JJ

No. That wasn't rhetorical.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Tosser.

JJ

I mean, I really do want to know. I really do want to know whether it's...I dunno.

MARTIN

Better that we're here than we're not?

JJ

Yeah. I guess.

JESS

Better for your kids, Martin.

MARTIN

I suppose so. Not that I ever see them.

JJ

It's better for Matty.

*They all realize it's not really that much better for Matty either way.*

MARTIN

We've all got our loved ones, anyway. And our loved ones would rather we were alive than dead. On balance.

JESS

You reckon?

MARTIN

Are you asking me whether I think your parents want you to live? Yes Jess, your parents want you to live.

JJ

How come we didn't think of this before? On New Years Eve? I never thought of my parents once.

MARTIN

Because things were worse then. Family's like, I dunno, Gravity. Stronger at some times than others.

JJ

Yep. That's gravity for you. That's why in the morning we can, like, float, and in the evening we can't hardly lift our feet.

MARTIN

Tides then. You don't notice the pull when it's...Well, anyway. You know what I mean.

(CONTINUED)

JJ

If some guy came up here tonight, what would you tell him?

JESS

I'd tell him about the ninety days. 'Cause it's true, isn't it?

JJ

Yeah. It's true that none of us feel like killing ourselves tonight. But like..if he asked us why? If he said to us, "So tell me what great things have happened to you since you decided not to go over the edge?" What would you tell him?

MAUREEN

I'd tell him about my job. And the quiz.

*An awkward beat.*

JJ

Yeah, well, you...you're doing ok. But I'm still fucked.

MARTIN

And I'm failing to help the dimmest child in the world with his reading.

JESS

Don't be so hard on yourself. You're failing at loads of different things. You're failing with your kids, and your relationships--

MARTIN

Oh yes, whereas you, Jess, you're such a fucking success. You've got it all--

JJ

Sorry Maureen.

MARTIN

Yes, excuse me Maureen.

JESS

Well, my parents. With the earrings. That kinda sorted itself, didn't it?

MARTIN

Yes, let's tell our suicidal friend about the earrings. "If your parents suspect you of stealing your missing sister's jewelry, don't worry, they'll get a delusional answer to placate them soon enough."

JESS

Shut up. What did you want to bring all this up for, JJ? We were gonna have a good night out, and now everyone's all fucking depressed.

JJ

Yeah. I'm sorry. I was just wondering, you know, why we're all still here.

MARTIN

Thanks for that. Very curative.

*A long beat. They stare off into the London skyline.*

JJ

We don't have to decide right now anyway, do we?

MARTIN

'Course we don't.

JJ

So how about we give it another six months? See how we're doing?

*They all look at JJ, and one by one, they all nod. Blackout.*