



FIGHTING WORDS

The write to right.

Wicklow Young Playwrights 2019-2020

The Plays

1. Sanctuary by Freya Rothwell
2. The Fork Story by Sophie Mangan
3. Familiar by Áindreas Fallon Verbruggen
4. Fever by Samuel Ferrie
5. Appetizer by Molly Robinson
6. These Council Estate Birds by Emily Murray Nelson
7. Training by Laura Molloy

Sanctuary

Duologue by Freya Rothwell

Setting: A non-distinct, empty space with two chairs that are back-to-back.

I want the audience to imagine the location themselves and leave it up to personal interpretation, but there are gentle nods towards a clinical or dystopian environment throughout the piece.

LYDIA: A young woman, early to late twenties. She feels a disconnect between her mind and her body. She is independent and afraid of committing to others, slow to trust their intentions with her. She is unsure whether her deteriorating mental health is something that needs to be 'fixed'. She doesn't know what to do with her life at this point. She finds an unlikely friend in DREW after he listens to her story.

DREW: A man, in his early thirties to forties. He is observant and grows bored easily. He can come across as insensitive, but he eventually warms to LYDIA once she opens up to him. He uses self-deprecating humour as a reflex. He doesn't trust whoever is keeping them in their room, and doesn't want them to use his empathy against him.

MATT: A young man, early to late twenties. Ideally played by the same actor for DREW. He is agitated and fidgety. Once he is able to voice his thoughts, he finds it hard to stop talking. He is afraid of the unfamiliar surroundings and finds a bit of comfort in LYDIA's words.

Two chairs are centre stage, back-to-back. DREW sits in one of the chairs, and softly mutters a mantra.

DREW

Those who don't find peace find me. I invite them in for a cup of tea. Silence is a word in another conversation. Behind my back and lost in translation.

LYDIA enters, far more reserved, and sits in the empty chair. She folds her arms and crosses her legs, staring straight ahead. DREW remains animated.

LYDIA

... I don't recognise you.

DREW stops humming.

LYDIA

I didn't mean to disturb. Did I hit a nerve or something?

DREW

Or something. I'm just surprised someone else here can talk, is all.

LYDIA

Oh... So, are you new?

DREW

Actually, no. I'm not. But I do know you.

LYDIA

Me? Hardly.

DREW

We all knew each other at some point. I know of you, at least. You in particular tend to come and go - like a rash.

LYDIA

That's because they keep thinking I'm better and send me home.

DREW

But you're not better, are you?

LYDIA

That's up for debate, I'm told. I'm still me, in a sense. Just... faded. It's confusing. What about you?

DREW

Solitary confinement. I was let out on good behaviour.

LYDIA

And what is that supposed to mean?

DREW

I. Was. Let. Out. On -

LYDIA

I heard you the first time. Am I to expect you to be like this in the foreseeable future?

DREW

...

LYDIA

Oh, joy. Now we're roommates.

Lights dim. They both stand up and swap chairs. Lights come back on. They are still sitting back-to-back, staring into the wings.

LYDIA

Sometimes I forget this is an officially run building and not just a bad dream.

DREW

Still seeing that doctor?

LYDIA

Still being nose-y?

DREW

He keeps planting things in your pretty little head. You do know he's only pretending to be your friend, right? That's his job. He's not on our side.

LYDIA

"Our side," ha! You've never met him. You don't know him like I do.

DREW

I know that he's bought you perfume. What is that? Rose petal? It's pretty potent, even from over here.

LYDIA

Screw you. And it was a gift. For my birthday. I think he felt sorry for me...

Brief pause. LYDIA sniffles.

DREW

Oh, don't get all emotional on me, for God's sake. Focus on surviving this room, not cake and candles.

LYDIA

What's your problem? It's perfume, don't get triggered over it - it reminds me of home. And don't tell me you're allergic, because that's a bullshit excuse.

DREW

The perfume isn't what's bothering me.

LYDIA

Then what is it? I've only been here a few weeks, have I become such an annoyance already? 'Cause if it is me, you can shut up; we're stuck together, whether you like it or not.

Beat.

DREW

Don't you understand? No one has a birthday in this place, it doesn't matter. You know what some of the assistants call him fondly? Do you? "Executioner," who rumour has it, is pretty fucking good at executing!

Beat.

DREW

Open your eyes, Lydia. You can't let anyone manipulate you and get the better of your emotions, otherwise you'll...

LYDIA

What? I'll what?

DREW

You signed up for this. No one forced your hand to sign the entry papers. If you get hurt, you're weak. If you're weak, you become a target. That doctor that you're so fond of? He doesn't care about us. He cares about results.

LYDIA

You don't really think that.

DREW

Happy Birthday. Just stop spraying that awful perfume everywhere. It's making me nauseous and seeing things.

Dim lights. Once again, they swap chairs.

Lights back on. LYDIA bounces her leg.

DREW

So, how are things? I miss our small talk.

LYDIA

His name was Spencer.

DREW

... I think I'm missing something here.

LYDIA

I don't think about him anymore, but I want to. I was really bad in social situations, even as a kid. "You don't do playdates," my mum would always tease, "You do disappointment appointments." I don't like the forced politeness, the nodding and smiling - the whole beginning of a relationship thing makes me cringe. But when you reach a certain age though, you start to make yourself do things even if you know you won't like it.

Beat.

LYDIA

There was a party at a club near where I lived, and I wore a smile as a mask for the evening. A crowd of buzzing faces, and I was the most miserable looking one there. And Spencer approached me - me, of all people.

DREW

No, I mean I think I'm missing something here. Was that door always so far to the left?

LYDIA

He asked me if I wanted to go and have a dance. I said fuck off, but he laughed and took me by the arm anyway.

DREW

... Yeah, no, but like seriously. The door.

LYDIA

And that boy was so persistent. Wanted to know all about me. He said he was an artist - I could've guessed from his hair alone.

Unruly and dip dyed pink tips. I liked the energy he gave off, and offered to buy him a drink but he insisted on a bottle of water.

Water, at a party where everyone was drunk and high, just so he would be sober enough to remember my name. I saw him the following Friday.

DREW

That fucking door.

LYDIA

He took me hiking, told me it'd be good for my skin and grumpy face. He never asked about the dark circles under my eyes, or why I got so quiet or anything. Spencer respected my boundaries and gave me the space to breathe. A couple months into the new year and we were sitting on an abandoned bandstand that still rots in the park to this day. I thought he was gonna let me down easy - y'know. Tell me about some girl or guy he was seeing behind my back, and do it somewhere private and quiet, so I wouldn't make a scene, and I could go on in life without him.

LYDIA sounds nostalgic, wistful.

LYDIA

But he kissed me. And I asked him why he'd do such a stupid thing when I'm me and he's... him.

DREW

And he said it's because you looked like you needed it.

LYDIA

He said it's because I looked like I needed it! And I hated it, and - and I hated him, but he numbed the aches I had - and all of a sudden, when I looked at him, I could only feel the sea's waves in between my ribs.

DREW

Maybe that was just your asthma though.

LYDIA

And I wanted him to hold my hand, and kiss me again, because for once I felt that cosy buzzing of feeling something else. It felt like-like dipping your hand into a bath of lukewarm water, but it smells like lavender so it's sickly-sweet, yet inviting. He was not a cure, but something to ease the pain. A temporary solution to a terminal problem. For a brief moment, I felt like I was being selfish, but... Spencer let me, encouraged me, even. I'm thankful for that, for him.

A beat.

LYDIA

I didn't love him.

DREW

Didn't you? Seems like you did.

LYDIA

I'm not stupid. If things had just been a bit more different.

DREW

Different. Right.

LYDIA

Pauses.

And don't get me wrong, the whole concept of being loved and loving another person sounds something sublime... But that's all it is; a concept. And I can't do the real thing when there are things that are so wrong. So many things are so, so wrong! I'm what's wrong, it's me and I can't stop it! It... It won't ever just stop.

DREW waits a moment for LYDIA to calm down.

DREW

What happened?

LYDIA

Not much because I was an outright coward. I said something harsh, he cried, I cried. He moved back to his parents'. I returned to my solitude.

She gestures vaguely around her head.

Because although it's not safe, it is familiar. Not soothing, but home. I wasn't brought up religious... but I swear I had found God in the curve of his lips, the wrinkles by his eyes and the gap between his teeth. And then, within an instant, I lost faith.

Beat.

DREW

You didn't love him.

LYDIA

No, never.

DREW

But did you want to, at least?

LYDIA

Yes. Once.

DREW

Well, as a wise man once said, break open as many doors as you can, because there might be something behind it you weren't expecting. Explore. Experience.

LYDIA

Who is this wise man you speak of?

DREW

Me. The wise man is me. I am a wise man.

LYDIA

Alright, Drew.

DREW

What I'm saying is, like you, he probably had stuff going on as well, maybe just hid it with his hair and smile and whatnot. I don't know. Just- just next time, take a breath and think it through before doing anything rash or hurtful. It's not fun to be on the other side of that door.

LYDIA

Fine. When I'm out of here, I'll start anew. Apologise to Spencer.

A beat. DREW has a revelation and snorts.

DREW

Spence-her? I don't even know her!

LYDIA

... How long had you been thinking of that?

DREW

Too long.

LYDIA

You seem awfully proud of yourself for a half-assed pun. Just proves we're different.

DREW

Exactly. We are. Be grateful you're you, Lydia.

LYDIA

Y'know what, Drew? You're alright.

LYDIA's arm closest to the audience drops by her side, her hand stretching back towards DREW.

DREW

I always thought so too.

DREW hesitates before taking her hand, both of them still looking straight ahead into the wings.

DREW

I thought so too.

Long pause. They both drop the other's hand. Dim lights, swap chairs. Lights back on.

LYDIA
Your shirt.

DREW
My shirt?

LYDIA
It's new.

DREW
It's clean.

LYDIA
It's... nice.

DREW
I'm to be buried in it when the time comes. So, soon, I assume.

LYDIA
Must you always be so depressing? It's bleak enough here as it is.

DREW
Come on, you'd be robbing me of like, half my personality!
Pause.

DREW
... How are you feeling?

LYDIA
I'm... not myself.

DREW
Who are you then?

LYDIA
Someone who doesn't want to be here anymore. I don't like this room, these same four walls. I feel like a stranger in my own body. I want to be the words in a conversation. It's much easier then.

DREW
That's why you like talking to him, isn't it?

LYDIA
I don't like this place. I don't like it. I like you, though.

DREW
Oh really?

LYDIA
You're a rare exception.
Beat.

DREW
Hey, will you do me a favour and look after the room for me? And will you keep an eye on the door - I think it moved again. Just until I get back.

LYDIA

Why? Where are you going?

DREW

I was granted a session with your doctor.

LYDIA

He's very nice, and honest too.

DREW

That's what I'm afraid of.

LYDIA

You're still awfully cryptic, even after all this time.

DREW

What can I say? I live to be an enigma.

LYDIA

Drew, why are you going to the doctor?

DREW

I'm getting worse.

LYDIA

I haven't noticed any change in you.

DREW

That's because I don't let you see it, my friend.

For the first time, DREW looks at the audience. He looks like he's searching for one person in particular, and his gaze might land on someone in the front row briefly. He frowns, blinking slowly and shudders a sigh. He looks back into the stage wing.

DREW stands up and walks off stage in the direction his chair was facing. Lights dim and LYDIA swaps seats. Lights turn back on. She's facing ahead, not unlike DREW in the beginning. Her tone is distant and sad.

LYDIA

Those who don't find peace find me. Sever the chains to set you free. A step for us all in the right direction. On our own path and lost in translation.

Enter MATT, nervous but reserved. He sits in the empty chair, back-to-back with LYDIA.

MATT

Y-you must be new too.

LYDIA stops her humming.

MATT

Never mind, forget I said anything. I tend to say things without thinking, it's an old tick, that's why I'm here, you see. They think I talk too much and that I annoy everyone because of it, but I just get nervous and if I don't talk it's like I'm holding my breath underwater and the urge to resurface kills you, it really does, and if I don't, it all goes black like I'm drowning and -

LYDIA

No, no! I'm just... surprised you're able to talk. That sounds awful.

MATT

It is. It hurts. Everything I touch in this place just hurts and stings, like nettles.

MATT briefly laughs but it sounds forced and he swallows hard. LYDIA shakes her head in sympathy.

LYDIA

I know. I know. But hey, you got me now, okay? Shh... Listen to my voice. And to answer your question, no, I'm not new. But you, you tend to come and go... like...like a...

MATT

What? Like a what?

LYDIA

A rash.

LYDIA lets out a shaken breath and dares to look over her shoulder at him. She touches his shoulder, gently prompting him to face her. She takes in a sudden breath.

Fade to black.

The Fork Story

By Sophie Mangan

AOIFE - Mid to late 20's. Brown hair. Plain Dublin accent- not posh, but not rough. Always slightly guarded. She's been through a lot- she's tough. She's independent, and she's used to doing everything for herself. She'd like to be completely independent, but she sometimes has to rely on other people to couch surf, etc. She doesn't like this. She's always slightly tired, but not in a mopey tired way.

JACK - Mid to late 20's. Black hair. Slightly dopey but lovable. A gentle soul. Doesn't get bothered by much. He's chill, and a bit quiet. He feels comfortable around Aoife and can be himself more. He's come from a privileged background, but doesn't act obnoxious, or arrogant. He doesn't know how to cook. He went to an all-boys school.

Scene 1 - The Apartment

JACK walks onstage, set as a kitchen. He goes to a press, which has two bowls. He takes one and goes to another press, which has only a sad looking box of Cheerios. He then goes to the fridge, which contains a carton of milk and half a jar of mustard. He takes the milk and puts it on the table. He then goes to the cutlery drawer, which contains one fork and one knife. He pours himself a bowl of cereal, takes the fork, and starts to eat.

AOIFE enters with a bag.

AOIFE

I got some food. Chinese. You know the Chinese at the corner besides Tesco's? I got you some too. God, takeaway is my kryptonite.

JACK

I'll have it in a while, I'm just having some cereal.

AOIFE starts to unpack the bag.

AOIFE

I stopped off at Tesco's and got some toothpaste. Own brand, but sure you can't tell the difference. We should be stocked for a while, so.

JACK nods, his mouth full.

AOIFE

Jesus, I'm starving. It's been a long day.

AOIFE puts the Chinese in the bowl from the press. Then opens the cutlery drawer. She takes out the knife, then looks at the fork JOHN's using.

AOIFE

Are you eating cereal with a fork?

JACK

Beggars can't be choosers.

AOIFE

Yeah, yeah.

Pauses

It's just that see, we only have one fork, and I need it for my Chinese.

JACK looks at her.

JACK

But that's not fair.

AOIFE

How's that not fair?

JACK

I got here first.

AOIFE

Only cos I had to stop off to get food, which you're not even eating.

JACK

Yeah, but you were in Tesco's, you could have bought cutlery.

AOIFE

Yeah, no, they don't sell cutlery in Tesco's.

JACK

They do.

AOIFE

They don't.

JACK

They do.

AOIFE

They don't.

JACK

They do.

AOIFE

Maybe in the big Tesco's, but I was in the Tesco express.

JACK

But why didn't you go to the big Tesco's?

AOIFE

Because it was out of my way, and I wasn't expecting to be using the fork.

JACK

Well, I'm using it, you can wait until I'm done.

AOIFE

But the Chinese will be cold.

JACK

It's fine. It's nearly nicer cold. It... firms up?

AAOIFE

Listen, I did a nice thing for both of us. I got us food, I got us toothpaste. It's only fair you give me the fork.

JACK

Theoretically, if I do give you the fork, how would I eat my cereal?

AOIFE

Use the knife.

JACK

The knife?

AOIFE

Yeah, the knife.

JACK

Ok, fine. Here's the fork.

AOIFE

Here's the knife.

They swap cutlery.

AOIFE sits down beside JACK, and they both eat their food, facing the audience. AOIFE looks satisfied, JACK dubiously tries to balance his cereal on his knife.

AOIFE

You're right, Chinese is nicer cold.

JACK

My Cheerios are soggy.

Scene 2- The Car.

Two chairs together.

AOIFE and JACK drive in silence for a few seconds.

AOIFE

I told you so.

JACK

Shut up.

AOIFE

I know I said I wouldn't say it, but I told you so.

JACK

That Tesco's was understocked.

AOIFE

Bullshit. We went up to the assistant and specifically asked if Tesco's stocked cutlery. They don't. I was right.

JACK

I know. Can you stop gloating?

AOIFE

I will never let you forget this.

JACK

Here, I admitted defeat, I told you I was wrong, I'm driving you to Ikea to get cutlery, what more do you want from me?

AOIFE

Ugh, fine!

JACK

And remember, when we go into Ikea, no buying useless things that we never use.

AOIFE

Says you! You've got four hard-boiled egg slicers, and no cutlery.

JACK

Look, when we get in there, just keep your eyes down, and don't look up until we get to the cutlery area.

AOIFE

Ok. Can we get hotdogs before we leave?

JACK

Sure. We can eat them using our new cutlery.

AOIFE

Are you sure you won't miss eating everything with a knife?

JACK

Those days are long gone.

AOIFE

You were actually quite good at it.

They continue driving for a few seconds, before the stage fades to black.

Scene 3 - The Apartment

AOIFE enters, mail in hand. She leafs through the letters, until she takes out one in a fancy envelope and puts it on the table.

AOIFE

Jack, mail!

JACK enters, on his phone. He puts down the phone, takes the letter and opens it.

JACK

Holy shit.

AOIFE

Still leafing through the mail.

What?

JACK

I got in, holy shit, I got in!

AOIFE

You got in? Jack, you got in!

JACK

I applied for it, but I never thought..... It's abroad as well. Imagine! Me, in college. In America! I thought this gap year would never end.

AOIFE

Gap years. You must have impressed them with your application essay-

Mocking

"My Mother- My Inspiration."

JACK

Jokingly

Shut up! Anyways, it was my mum who came up with that title, not me. She practically rewrote the whole thing for me when she looked over it. That woman is the definition of a pushy parent.

They sit down at the table.

AOIFE

But no, seriously, how did you get in, I thought you were on the waiting list?

JACK

I guess someone must have dropped out or died or something. Come on, let's celebrate.

AOIFE

Someone's death?

JACK

If that's what finally got me into college, then yeah!

AOIFE

I dunno, seems a bit morbid. That's all.

JACK

Can we celebrate already? You don't seem very excited. I thought you'd be happy for me.

AOIFE

I just don't think celebrating someone's death is very respectful.

JACK

Why do you keep talking about dead people? Most likely I got in because someone dropped out. Listen, I'm sorry I even bothered trying to celebrate with you. It's obvious you don't care.

AOIFE

Jack, that's not true. It's just... I know this whole flat setup was only ever temporary, but if you move out, I have to move out too.

Stage fades to black.

Scene 4- The Apartment

AOIFE is lying on the table when JACK walks in.

JACK

Why are you lying on the table?

AOIFE

Why not.

JACK

It's just a bit weird.

Beat.

JACK lies on the table beside AOIFE.

JACK

What are you thinking about?

AOIFE

I dunno.

They lay in silence for a bit.

AOIFE laughs suddenly.

AOIFE

Remember how we met.

JACK cringes.

AOIFE

I saw your Facebook roommate ad, the rent was way too low!

JACK

I thought 200 quid a month was normal. It's not like I've had tons of experience with rent prices. Anyways, it wasn't about the money. Mum wanted me to move out, become more independent.

AOIFE

God, you're so lucky. I'd kill to be able to take a gap year whenever I wanted.

JACK

It's actually kinda boring.

AOIFE

And you're set up for life!

JACK

Yeah, but I'd love to make something of myself on my own, without help from anyone else.

AOIFE

Why?

JACK

Cos I've never felt I've earned anything.

Silence.

AOIFE

What would you want to work as if money and parents weren't part of the equation. Your dream job.

JACK

I'd like to be a crane driver.

AOIFE starts to laugh.

Why?

JACK

I dunno, being in a little box all day, looking out onto the horizon, no one to bother me.

Pause.

JACK

You're lucky. You don't have that pressure.

AOIFE

Jesus, maybe not parental pressure, but financial pressure, stress, workload. You're the lucky one.

JACK

I'd love to switch lives with you, just for a day to see what it's like.

AOIFE

Do a Freaky Friday on it!

They laugh.

JACK

It just shows though, the grass is always greener.

AOIFE

Yeah, yeah.

Said in that Irish way, all in one breath.

Scene 5- The Apartment

AOIFE and JACK are packing boxes full of their possessions onstage. The house is otherwise bare. JACK's box is full of trinkets and ornaments, AOIFE's box contains the bare minimum.

JACK

I hate this. Packing up, moving house.

Beat.

It's weird. I get attached to houses. It's like they're people almost. They all have character, anyway.

AOIFE

You should do what I do. Don't decorate your room, don't hang up pictures, don't lug around ornaments. Makes it easier to move on. *AOIFE gestures at JACK's full box.*

That, my friend, is an amateur's move.

They pack in silence for a few seconds.

AOIFE goes to the cutlery drawer and takes out a fork.

AOIFE

For you. To remember me by. I'm sure your friends across the pond will be very impressed with your cereal eating skills.

JACK

Thanks, but it's yours. You won the Tesco's bet.

AOIFE

No, consider it a farewell present.

JACK

Ah cheers Aoife.

Beat. JACK looks at the cutlery.

JACK

Why did it take us so long to buy cutlery?

AOIFE

This house was only ever going to be temporary. No point clogging it up with junk. Makes the moving process harder.

JACK

Cutlery is hardly junk.

AOIFE

Gestures to the box.

I don't think you're exactly qualified to talk about what's junk and what's not.

She picks out an old ceramic duck.

I mean, why do you have this?

JACK

Takes it back.

This was my granny's.

They pack in silence for a few seconds.

JACK

I'm gonna miss this place.

AOIFE

Yeah, me too.

They pack in silence for a few seconds.

AOIFE

Sometimes it's nice to come home and not have to root around a cardboard box to find the kettle, you know?

JACK

I can't say I do.

AOIFE

You know that saying, a rolling stone gathers no moss.

JACK

Yeah.

AOIFE

I've rolled so much there's no moss. No fucking moss.

Pause.

JACK

Aoife, where are you going to live when I leave?

AOIFE

I can couch surf for a couple of weeks until I find somewhere.

JACK

But what if you don't find somewhere?

AOIFE

I always do.

Beat.

JACK

Have you ever considered going to college?

AOIFE

No. I was never the studious type. I manage with the odd jobs I get.

JACK

You manage, but you're not fulfilling yourself.

AOIFE

I don't have time to be fulfilled. And spare me the lecture. I'm surviving. If I can afford my rent, and the odd takeaway, then I'm grand. I'll find a nine to five job eventually. As for housing, I can't afford to take out a loan for a bike, let alone a house.

JACK

And social housing?

AOIFE

Not enough. Anyway, I wouldn't qualify for it. My parents are still alive, they have a spare bed in their house. On paper, I could go home any time I like.

JACK

And would you? Ever live with them again?

AOIFE

Hardly. The minute I was 18, I was outta that hellhole.

Long pause: JACK waits for AOIFE to elaborate - she doesn't.

JACK

I feel like shit. I'm swanning off to college, while you don't even have a proper place to live.

AOIFE

It's fine. I'm fine. You've worked hard to get accepted to college. I'm sorry. Moving day is sad enough without me putting an extra dampener on everything.

JACK hugs AOIFE. AOIFE smiles.

AOIFE

I swear to god, as your best friend, if you come back as a frat boy with an American accent, I'm never speaking to you again.

JACK

Sure, I'd expect nothing less from you. Are you all packed up?

AOIFE

Yeah, I'll meet you outside in a minute.

JACK

Okay.

JACK walks off stage, humming the tune of "Party in the USA" and holding his box of belongings.

AOIFE looks in her box, then sits down at the table, and rests her head in her palms.

AOIFE

Mutters.

Fuck.

AOIFE looks up, takes her box of possessions, and walks to the door. She turns to the audience, crying silently. She holds on to the door frame as she looks around the room, before turning off the light and walking offstage.

Familiar

By Áinréas Fallon Verbruggen

Characters:

PAUL MACCRIE - 21, Student, School of Economics, UCD. Raised in Kildare, lives currently in the Merville Student Residences with two flatmates DAVID SKELLY and RICHARD BURKE, DAVID is on the same economics course as PAUL and RICHARD is in his final year in veterinary. Currently he hopes to be able to move to America, the farther away from people he knows, the better. Fears dying alone.

CHRIS STAPLES - 25, Bachelor degree of English Studies from Trinity College.

Came out of college becoming a consultant for PwC. Raised in Arklow, now lives in the Sandford Lodge Apartments with one of his college friends, CHLOE HINCH, and constantly has her boyfriend up to their apartment which means that CHRIS needs to go elsewhere for some privacy. Would love to do something more creative in his future but he also needs to pay the rent. Fears working in a loveless job.

Setting:

A South Dublin hotel room.

The stage is of minimal design. Only a single door placed in the middle of the stage. Two characters come out from opposite sides of the stage. PAUL comes out from stage left and CHRIS comes out from stage right. PAUL sits with his back against the door and his head in his hands while CHRIS places his hand on the door, staring at the ground. The sound of an ambulance siren goes by, CHRIS rests his head against the door. The siren fades out. The scene opens.

CHRIS

Are you okay in there?

PAUL doesn't respond.

CHRIS

If it means anything, it is nice to see you again.

Beat.

It's been a while.

Pause.

Have you gotten taller?

No response.

CHRIS

Just me?

CHRIS forces a chuckle before clearing his throat. He places his hand on the door and looks towards PAUL.

CHRIS

Is there anything I can do?

PAUL raises his head to answer.

PAUL

Anything?

CHRIS

Anything that helps.

PAUL

Now that you mention it, you could do one thing for me.

CHRIS

What?

PAUL

You can fuck off.

CHRIS sighs.

CHRIS

Is there someone I could call maybe? Maybe your parents?

PAUL

Don't you fucking call anyone!

CHRIS

Okay! Christ.

PAUL's head sinks into his hands. CHRIS turns around and rests his back on the door.

CHRIS

Can you at least tell me how long you're gonna be in there?

PAUL

I just... I just need a minute.

CHRIS

You said that fifteen minutes ago.

CHRIS looks at his watch.

CHRIS

I don't want to rush you but I can't stay here forever and I can't exactly pay for

the room if you're locked in the bathroom.

Beat.

And if I'm being honest, I could use a piss.

PAUL

Fine. I'll leave but you need to go first.

CHRIS

Why?

PAUL

Do I really need to explain?

CHRIS

Look, I know you're a little embarrassed.

PAUL

A lot more than a little.

CHRIS

But you can talk to me about all of this, I won't judge.

PAUL groans in frustration as CHRIS sits down and puts his ear to the door.

CHRIS

Just let it out.

PAUL takes a deep breath in.

PAUL

Okay then, let's start with the obvious. Why didn't you have a profile picture?

CHRIS

What?

PAUL

Your dating profile, why didn't you include a picture of yourself on it.

CHRIS

Why?

PAUL

Well, it might've been useful for me to have known what you look like, so I wouldn't have agreed to hook up with my fucking cousin!

There is a pause of silence as PAUL glares at CHRIS through the door.

CHRIS

Ah, I see where you're coming from.

PAUL

Well?

CHRIS

I mean, I quite like my privacy, don't want to reveal any unnecessary information. Besides, you're one to talk considering the only thing on your

profile was "5'10, 21". How come you didn't put one in yours?

PAUL

Cause obviously I didn't want anyone to know!

CHRIS

Oh, like you were going to see anyone you knew.

PAUL

I matched with you.

CHRIS pauses.

CHRIS

Fair point.

Beat.

Try and look at it this way, in a couple of years we'll all be laughing about this.

PAUL

Oh yeah, "Uncle Paul, tell the one about how you and Uncle Chris almost got together. That one's always a barrel of laughs!"

CHRIS

To be fair, it may be a good few years.

PAUL hits his head against the back of the door.

PAUL

We can't tell anyone about this, ever! Especially parents.

CHRIS

Agreed. However, I think you should maybe tell your parents about...

PAUL looks through the door at CHRIS.

PAUL

About what?

CHRIS

Well, the fact you're gay?

PAUL

Am fucking not!

CHRIS

Then why are you here?

PAUL pauses before speaking.

PAUL

I like meeting new people.

CHRIS

Oh really?

PAUL

Yep.

CHRIS

Just want to make some new friends?

PAUL

Yup.

CHRIS

Through an app called 'Hunkules'?

PAUL hesitates and then chooses not to answer.

CHRIS

Paul it's okay, if anything I'm happy for you. I only wish you came to me sooner.

PAUL

Please shut up.

CHRIS

Just come on out and we can grab a coffee and talk about this.

PAUL

I'm not going anywhere, especially with you.

CHRIS

Why not?

PAUL

It's been a shit enough year already. I don't need you making it worse!

CHRIS

But I can help.

PAUL

Look, you're sound but I just need space.

CHRIS

I understand what you're going through though.

PAUL

It's not the same Chris, I'm me and you're, you know... you.

CHRIS

What's that supposed to mean?

PAUL

You know what I mean.

CHRIS

No, I don't think I do.

PAUL

Sighs

You're allowed to be you, I can't.

CHRIS

Elaborate?

PAUL

Ah Chrissy, like it's easy being a bit queer when you already went and studied shite like-

Pauses to think.

-English studies.

CHRIS

There's nothing gay about the art of literature!

PAUL

True, but calling it the 'art of literature' does raise some flags.

CHRIS begins to slowly sit down beside the door.

PAUL

Let's be honest, you weren't a surprise to anyone when you came out. Like you've always been... one of the girls, if you know what I'm saying. You didn't have to change anything, it's not like that for me. I've got so much on the line; you wouldn't even begin to understand.

There is a long silence as they both sit; taking in what they just heard.

CHRIS

I can try? Can you at least let me try?

PAUL rubs his face and breathes a sigh.

PAUL

Fine.

CHRIS

Can I ask, what are you so afraid of?

Beat

What do you actually think is going to happen if you come out?

PAUL hesitates.

CHRIS

Are you afraid you'll turn out like me?

PAUL

No, it's not like that.

CHRIS

Is it your friends? Do they scare you?

PAUL

Chris please just stop.

CHRIS

Is it your parents? Surely Aunty Sarah wouldn't care that you're gay?

PAUL

Stop! Just stop.

Pause.

CHRIS

Are you afraid of the word?

Pause.

PAUL

I don't want to change?

CHRIS

But you're not changing.

PAUL

Obviously, I am.

CHRIS

Not if this was who you were. Like when was the first time you knew?

PAUL mumbles "Seven years" but CHRIS can't hear him. CHRIS presses his ear closer to the door.

CHRIS

Sorry I didn't hear that.

PAUL takes a deep breath out.

PAUL

Seven years ago.

CHRIS

Seven years!

PAUL

Or something around that, I don't know.

CHRIS

Oh Paul, that's such a long time. Why didn't you come to me?

PAUL

Don't do that.

CHRIS

Do what?

PAUL

If you know what it's like, you should know why I didn't come to you; it's fucking hard just saying... it. I've been thinking about how I can explain it. So people will understand.

CHRIS

Okay. How would you explain it?

PAUL

Do you really want to hear it?

CHRIS

I do, make it quick though, for my bladder's sake.

PAUL takes a second to re-compose himself.

PAUL

I've never told this to anyone before so it might come out weird.

CHRIS

I'm sure it's fine. Just go ahead.

PAUL

Okay.

Pause.

Have you ever had a chicken fillet roll?

CHRIS is confused by the question and hesitates before answering.

CHRIS

What?

PAUL

Yes or no.

CHRIS

Eh. Yeah, I've had one or two.

PAUL breathes out a sigh of relief.

PAUL

Okay grand, you should be able to follow this then. So everyone knows what they like in their roll, some like cheese, some like stuffing. Everyone's got their preferences. You get me?

CHRIS

Sure?

PAUL

So I knew what I wanted in my roll, I knew what made me tick. But one day, I'm giving those sundried tomatoes the eye. You know just a few glances at first, I didn't want to act on it because I already knew what I wanted. Or did I? 'Cause after a while, I kept looking at the sun-dried tomatoes. Thinking about them, dreaming about them.

CHRIS

Wait, go back a bit.

PAUL ignores this and carries on with his analogy, getting more and more emotionally driven as he continues.

PAUL

It was just curiosity at first. I thought it was just a phase. But then I thought to myself 'What if I could go out with a sundried tomato? You know, take them to the park, to the cinema, to see my family.' And that's when it hit me. My

curiosity had turned into an affection!

CHRIS covers his mouth to stop him from laughing.

CHRIS

Oh, my good Lord!

PAUL

But everyone already knows what roll I was, chicken, stuffing, and lettuce. It was the usual, it was accepted. If I came sauntering out with chicken, stuffing, sundried tomato, would they feel betrayed? Would the lettuce feel betrayed?

PAUL turns to face CHRIS.

PAUL

But like, you get where I'm coming from Chris, don't ya? You know what it's like just wanting to fill your roll up with those sundried tomatoes. Please Chris, tell me you know what it's like. I don't want my new... tastes... to hurt anybody.

CHRIS

Oh God, Paul you shouldn't have done that.

PAUL looks scared.

PAUL

Ah I fucking knew; you must think I'm a freak.

CHRIS

No, no. It's just that -

Takes a breath out.

- I almost pissed myself while laughing there.

CHRIS puts his hands behind his head.

CHRIS

For someone who is so at odds with literary studies; your use of metaphor is quite phenomenal.

PAUL rests his head against the door; disappointed.

CHRIS

Is the breaded chicken the foundation of a loving relationship perhaps? Or am I reading too much into it?

PAUL

Ah enough Chris.

CHRIS

It is in the strange that we find the beautiful, and that was quite strange but very beautiful.

PAUL

Fuck off.

CHRIS

What? I'm just being honest.

Beat.

It's really quite funny, a bit over dramatic though.

PAUL

What do you mean?

CHRIS

Well, you talk about 'sundried tomatoes' as if you think people are going to care. But they won't.

PAUL

How do you know?

CHRIS

Well, I've been in the sundried tomato business for quite some time, I've seen it change from being something that, yes, would've been looked down on to something that's just normal. I remember going through those exact thoughts, those exact fears, it's almost part of the process.

Pause.

CHRIS

A lot is just inside your head. You don't have to do anything if you're not ready and I won't tell anyone. Just know that you are, well, loved; loved no matter what you want from life, or the deli counter.

PAUL and CHRIS both sit with their backs against the door. There is a short silence.

PAUL

Huh, that 'art of literature' seems to be doing you well.

Wipes a tear from his eye.

Maybe a little too well.

CHRIS smiles.

PAUL

Thanks though, I do mean it.

CHRIS

No problem, can you do something for me though?

PAUL

What?

CHRIS

Can you get out of the bathroom? I'm holding on for dear life here.

PAUL

Oh yeah, Christ.

Both men get up and PAUL brushes himself down. PAUL opens the door and immediately gets a hug from CHRIS.

CHRIS

Pushing Paul aside.

Okay now move.

CHRIS goes off stage left while PAUL takes out his phone. He turns it on and swipes through it.

PAUL

To himself.

Fucking Hunkules.

PAUL aggressively taps the phone and deletes the app. He takes a minute and ponders to himself. He looks out towards the audience before taking out his phone and typing a text message. He finishes the text before hovering his thumb over the 'Send' button. CHRIS re-enters and opens the door. PAUL sheepishly puts his phone away.

CHRIS

Needed that. The offer of a coffee and chat is still available.

Looks at Paul.

You doing okay?

PAUL

Yeah. Just been a weird day.

CHRIS

You can say that again. I'll never walk into a Spar the same again.

CHRIS pats PAUL on the shoulder and walks past him. PAUL looks out towards CHRIS, then back at the phone. He smiles and sends the message. He puts the phone back in his pocket. CHRIS comes back on stage.

CHRIS

You good to go?

PAUL

Yeah! Yeah, let's go.

PAUL and CHRIS both exit centre stage right. The lights dim slowly as the scene fades to black.

End scene.

Fever

By Samuel Ferrie

Characters:

BOBBY: Male, 23.

MAM: Female, 54.

SARAH: Female, 24.

DAMIEN: Male, 30.

STRANGER: Male, 21.

Beginning of 'Creep' plays as we see BOBBY alone on the stage. A light illuminates a path from him to a tall mirror standing upstage. He stands facing the mirror and takes a moment to survey himself. He moves slowly towards the mirror. His movements are methodical. As he makes his way upstage, we see a ballet bar, blocking his way. He holds onto it and looks away from himself. As he finds the courage to look back, the song cuts off.

Lights shift to BOBBY's house. Enter MAM with a large suitcase and a Boots bag.

MAM

I wasn't sure what you needed, so I got seven.

BOBBY

Seven?

MAM

Well, you can never be too safe.

BOBBY

They won't fit in the case!

MAM

Don't be silly, of course they will!

BOBBY

Why will I need seven different sun creams?

MAM opens the Boots bag, takes each bottle out one by one and hands them to him.

MAM

Quickly

Garnier factor 50, L'Oreal factor 50, La Roche-Posay factor 50, Nivea Sun

factor 50, Eucerin factor 50, Boots own brand factor 50, and something called Cocoa Brown.

BOBBY

That's fake tan.

MAM

Perfect, then you won't burn yourself trying to get a real tan.

BOBBY

I don't want a real tan. Or a fake tan!

MAM

You say that now but, who knows, in a few weeks you might take a notion!

BOBBY

I won't be taking any notions.

MAM

Look, we'll put it in anyway, sure you can never be too prepared.

BOBBY reluctantly opens the case and stuffs the bottles in. He struggles to close it.

MAM

I'll jump on.

BOBBY

I have it.

MAM

Bobby, it'll close easier if-

BOBBY

Forceful

I said I have it!

Beat

MAM

With disbelief

Well, this is thanks I get.

BOBBY

I didn't-

MAM

I try to help and all I get is abuse.

BOBBY

I wasn't-

MAM

I don't ask for much, all I ask is that I'm not abused for trying to help.

BOBBY

I know I'm-

MAM

No need to apologise now, it's fine!

BOBBY

Defiant

Fine.

BOBBY zips the case closed and pulls out the handle to leave. She intercepts him.

MAM

Now, are you sure you don't want a lift?

BOBBY

I'm sure.

MAM

I don't mind, it doesn't bother me one way or another!

BOBBY

Flat

Great.

MAM

But if you're sure you should take a jacket 'cause it's supposed to be lashing.

BOBBY

The forecast on the Six One said it would be clear all day.

MAM

Ah you know what they're like, take a jacket.

BOBBY

It's in the case.

MAM

Not that one, that's too light, you need a proper coat.

BOBBY

It's a grand coat, and it's not going to rain.

MAM

Well, look who controls the weather now!

BOBBY

If I need a jacket, I'll take it out, but if I don't leave now I'll miss the train.

MAM

I'll drive you so.

BOBBY

The traffic is horrendous, it's faster if I walk.

MAM

Not if we go my route.

BOBBY

Your route is just as slow.

MAM

It shaves off at least three minutes.

BOBBY

Mam, I have to go!

MAM

Stalling

Are you certain you don't need the Cocoa Brown?

BOBBY

Yes.

MAM

Do you have everything you need? Have you double and triple checked?

BOBBY

I'm certain I have everything!

MAM

Well, there must be something you're forgetting, I know what you're like!

BOBBY

I have everything I need! I'm ready, can I just go?

Long pause. BOBBY stares straight at her, impatient.

MAM

What in God's name has compelled you to get on a boat and sail halfway around the world?

BOBBY

It's a yacht, and you know full well why I'm going.

MAM

Yes, and if he told you to throw yourself off a cliff would you do that too?

BOBBY

What do you have against Damien?

MAM

He's taking you away from me for starters!

BOBBY

I chose to go with him. It's a chance to escape this shithole, Mam. I want to live a little, before I have to start my life.

MAM

You started your life twenty-three years ago, Bobby. No one gets to start all over a quarter of the way through and pretend it's brand new.

BOBBY

Easy for you to say!

Pause. MAM walks upstage and holds the bar for support, clearing BOBBY's path.

BOBBY

I'll be leaving so.

No response.

BOBBY

Goodbye Mam.

BOBBY exits and MAM is left alone. She wipes her eyes. A thought pops into her head.

MAM

Fecking passport!

'Creep' begins to play again as she exits. The bar is rotated to be perpendicular to the audience. BOBBY appears next to it. The song is swallowed by the noise of a busy train station as SARAH rushes on stage on the opposite side of the bar, startling BOBBY.

SARAH

I thought I missed you.

BOBBY

I'm only after getting here myself, I was almost late.

SARAH

Can't you come over and say goodbye properly?

BOBBY

The ticket machine won't let me back out.

She grabs BOBBY over the bar and hugs him tight.

SARAH

When will I see you again?

BOBBY

I'll be back in May.

SARAH

That's six months from now!

BOBBY

I'll call you! There is Wi-Fi, you know.

SARAH

Well, I'm happy for you.

BOBBY

Thank you?

SARAH

Shut up you, you know what I mean. So, are you excited?

BOBBY

Excited to get away from here, I might finally get some space to breathe.

SARAH

You've always been a bit too eager to run off on me. You'd swear you didn't like me or something.

BOBBY

Would you shut up, you know you're the only one around here who makes this place somewhat bearable.

We hear a muffled announcement.

BOBBY

Shit, that's mine, sorry.

BOBBY reaches for his things but hesitates. He looks up at her.

BOBBY

I really appreciate everything you've done.

SARAH

It was no prob-

BOBBY

You don't know how much I appreciate it. You- you can't- what I mean is, knowing I could trust you, that you were still there for me afterwards, it means more than you can ever understand.

SARAH

I'm glad then. I suppose I'm still useful for something.

BOBBY

Don't sell yourself short.

SARAH

Alright, enough with the dramatics! Go on then, get yourself out of this shithole.

BOBBY starts to gather his suitcase and coat. SARAH gets a text.

SARAH

Wait, it's your mam.

BOBBY

That woman will be the death of me.

SARAH

“Will you make sure Bobby has his passport?”

BOBBY

For god’s sake mother!

BOBBY rifles through his suitcase’s front pockets, then his coat pockets, then his trousers pockets. They look at each other worriedly.

SARAH

You do have your passport, don’t you?

He reaches for his back pocket and finds it.

SARAH

You put the heart crossways on me.

BOBBY

I really have to run.

He reaches over the barrier for one last hug. It lasts a little too long. He lets go and smooths his clothes, then stands looking at her.

SARAH

The train?

BOBBY jolts and quickly gathers his things.

BOBBY

I’ll wave as I’m leaving!

He runs off and SARAH is alone. The noise fades out and ‘Creep’ resumes. She hesitates for a moment, debating whether to stay. She exits.

BOBBY enters as the lights once again illuminate the mirror. The bar is moved downstage. BOBBY appears, catches himself in the mirror and takes a moment to examine himself. The song is interrupted by the arrival of DAMIEN. Lights shift away from the mirror to create the boat. We hear seagulls and a faint sound of the sea.

DAMIEN

Booze!

BOBBY joins DAMIEN downstage and takes a cocktail glass from him. They stand leaning on the bar, looking out at sea.

BOBBY

Thanks.

Pause.

BOBBY

It’s so calm today.

DAMIEN

You're lucky. It was supposed to be fairly choppy.

BOBBY

I must be very lucky so!

He laughs a little. Awkward pause.

BOBBY

It's a beautiful boat.

DAMIEN

Yacht.

BOBBY

Yes, of course, yacht! Sorry.

DAMIEN

Don't apologise.

Beat.

DAMIEN

Do you like your drink?

BOBBY quickly sips it.

BOBBY

Mhmm, it's delicious. Sex on the beach?

DAMIEN

Taken aback

Excuse me?

BOBBY

As in the cocktail! You know, 'sex on the beach!' I didn't mean-

DAMIEN

It's fine. It's a tequila sunrise.

BOBBY

Oh! Right.

Long pause.

BOBBY

That reminds me when me and the lads went to Magaluf, there was this waitress in one of the pubs and Stephen went up to her-

DAMIEN

Head faced down.

Bobby, I can't come with you.

BOBBY

What?

DAMIEN

You can still go, everything is paid for, I've made all the arrangements-

BOBBY

Why can't you come?

Beat. No response.

BOBBY

What, is it work or something? Because I don't mind pushing it back if it doesn't suit.

No response, DAMIEN still does not turn to BOBBY.

BOBBY

Did someone die? Oh my god, please tell me no one died?

DAMIEN

No one died, Bobby.

Beat

BOBBY

Well, what is it then?

DAMIEN

Look, I've been thinking, and I didn't want to hurt you, cause you're a good guy. But you deserve someone who's committed, who's willing to give you more than you're asking of me.

BOBBY

Where is this coming from?

DAMIEN

I've realised that I don't need you anymore and that's not your fault. You can't give me anything more right now, and I don't expect you to. It's not fair on you to drag this out past its expiration date.

BOBBY

What do you-

DAMIEN

It's not fair on either of us, we both want different things.

BOBBY

I never said I wanted anything, this trip was your idea!

DAMIEN

It's not the trip, Bobby, you're clearly more invested here than I am.

BOBBY

Oh, so this is my fault?

DAMIEN

That's not what I said, don't twist my words.

BOBBY

You're just leaving after everything I gave up for you?

DAMIEN

I didn't ask you for anything, whatever you think you 'gave up', that's on you.
I didn't force you to-

BOBBY

Twenty-three years I was fine pretending to be normal, then you turned up
and it felt like starting all over again from scratch.

DAMIEN

That was your choice, don't try to put that on me.

BOBBY

What was all this for then? Three months of being led on only to be
abandoned on a boat?

DAMIEN

A yacht!

Beat. BOBBY turns away from him and holds onto the bar.

DAMIEN

I should go.

BOBBY

Yeah, I think you should.

He goes to leave but hesitates.

DAMIEN

If you're not going on the trip, can you let me know because I can still get the
deposit back if I can explain...

No response. DAMIEN exits.

*We hear 'Creep' again as the lights change to show only BOBBY and
the mirror. The bar is taken from under him, and he stumbles to stand
upright. As the song reaches its crescendo, the mirror moves and starts to
circle BOBBY. As the mirror returns to its original position, the lights shift to
show BOBBY sitting alone on the harbour, his suitcase next to him. We hear
the water lap against the harbour wall as a harsh sodium light shines down
on him. A STRANGER enters, visibly drunk.*

STRANGER

Here, do you know which one of these is the party boat?

BOBBY quickly stands and wipes his face.

BOBBY

No, sorry.

STRANGER

I'm sure it's along here somewhere.

BOBBY

Maybe it left?

STRANGER

Fuck's sake, I knew I shouldn't have gone to the jacks.

Pause. BOBBY is still clearly upset.

STRANGER

You doing okay, pal?

BOBBY

Long day.

STRANGER

Gesturing towards the suitcase

Off on your holidays?

BOBBY

Oh. Yeah, something like that. It's all just a bit... complicated recently.

STRANGER

Don't talk to me about complicated.

He sits down. BOBBY remains standing.

STRANGER

This was meant to be my last night of fun. My moth's up the duff.

BOBBY

Oh, congrats.

STRANGER

She's due next week so me and my mates rented this boat to go all out.

BOBBY

Sounds fun.

STRANGER

It was going well until I went to piss and couldn't find them again.

BOBBY

I'm sure they didn't leave without you.

STRANGER

I fucking hope not or I'll the bate the head off them.

Pause

STRANGER

So where are you off to?

BOBBY realises the stranger is harmless and relaxes. He sits down next to him.

BOBBY

Oh, I'm going on this- Well, I was supposed to be going on this trip, with my partner.

STRANGER

Very romantic.

BOBBY

Except they broke up with me right before we left.

STRANGER

Shit one.

BOBBY

And now I can't go home and there's no one I can call- I don't even know anyone who lives around here.

STRANGER

If you need fare for a taxi, I can spot you. I don't mind, honestly.

BOBBY

You're alright, don't worry-

STRANGER

Or if you need somewhere to crash for the night you can come back to mine, I swear I'm not an axe murderer or anything.

BOBBY

It's not that. I can get home no bother, I'm just a bit embarrassed that if I do everyone will say they told me so.

STRANGER

Right.

BOBBY

Thank you for the offer though, but I think I'll stay out for a while.

Beat.

STRANGER

Are you still gonna go? On your trip, like? I mean I know it's not the same when your moth leaves you, but it's still a chance to get away from this shithole.

BOBBY

I don't know, I worry that if I go alone and people find out it'll look like I'm trying to prove something. Like I'm too scared to admit that I was wrong.

STRANGER

Fuck it, sure you're only young once.

BOBBY

I mean I wanted an escape but not like this. It just feels like everything up to now has been a waste, like I'm a kid again except there's no one telling me what to do anymore. I never thought I'd miss my mam telling me what to do.

STRANGER

Then start again. The past is only a waste if you don't take something from it.

It's like a hangover: yeah, you feel like shit and you kinda wish you were dead sometimes but at least you know not to mix vodka, triple sec, and tequila.

BOBBY

So, life is just like one long hangover?

STRANGER

No, not life, just this moment. 'Cause you know you'll feel better and you know why you feel shit, but you can't change it right now. You've just got to wait it out and power through and eventually, after a bit of puking, you'll start to feel better. And if someone hands you something and says "Here, this will help," you take it if you trust them.

BOBBY

You're a very wise drunk, if you don't mind me saying.

STRANGER

Yeah, I should be the Taoiseach, but only when I'm pissed.

They laugh. He stands with some difficulty balancing.

STRANGER

You should go on that trip. It'll do you good.

BOBBY

Yeah, maybe.

STRANGER

I better go find that fucking boat. If those gobshites wreck it I'm gonna kill them. See you, buddy.

BOBBY

Good luck.

STRANGER

Cheers, you too.

BOBBY

Cheers.

STRANGER exits. BOBBY stands up.

'Creep' plays its final verse. The bar is moved back downstage. BOBBY turns to the mirror. There's nothing to hold him back. He walks right up to it, unflinching, unafraid. He reaches out to touch it. He lays his hand against his reflection. A spotlight shines on him alone. He takes his hand off the mirror and clutches it close to his chest. Lights fade out as we hear the final line. "I don't belong here."

Appetizer

By Molly Robinson

Characters:

Actor 1:

SETH. Early to mid-20s. Makes an effort with his appearance. Still evidently not well off.

LEVI. Early to mid-20s. Perhaps monotone, unconventional appearance.

Actor 2:

KATIE. Early to mid-20s. Dressed for work.

Scene One

*A covered entryway to the right. KATIE paces the stage in anticipation.
Enter SETH.*

SETH

Are you coming to dinner?

KATIE

Yeah, but not yet, I'm not done.

SETH

They're gonna close.

KATIE

I won't be long.

SETH

Will I just bring you something back?

KATIE

Aren't you going to help me?

SETH

I would, but I'm starving.

KATIE

If I rush it, it's pointless. Can you pay the rent this month?

SETH shakes his head.

KATIE

Then you'll have to wait.

SETH

What's the hold-up?

KATIE

It's not ready yet.

SETH

How does it even work?

KATIE

It's kind of a mystery.

SETH

What if it's aliens, or something religious?

KATIE

I'll have to stay then. Those guys are very
secretive.

SETH

You think so?

KATIE

You really believe in aliens?

SETH

I don't know, I can't think. I wish I brought a picnic.

KATIE picks up the adder stone from the floor, and peers through it.

KATIE

I can see through. Just a little closer I'd say.

SETH

Got any snacks in there?

KATIE

I only saw a lake, and it was stagnant.

SETH continues to look worried.

SETH

Are you not going to get lost?

KATIE

I won't be alone.

SETH looks resolute, gets to his feet. KATIE continues to pace the stage.

SETH

I told you, I'm not going.

KATIE

We'll just look then, how's that?

SETH thinks for a moment.

SETH

No, I'm not even going to look. I don't want to get trapped there; you don't know if it's safe.

KATIE

You're jealous.

SETH

You're the jealous one. You're jealous of your own potential. But maybe jealous isn't the word.

KATIE

Either way, this is way too important, we need the money.

SETH

Think of everywhere else we could go. Tangier, Japan, Israel. So many places we haven't seen yet. Mississippi! We can go there, some other time, and you could paint it.

KATIE

Just one go, and then we can leave.

SETH

Yeah, if you don't lose your mind.

SETH stands before the entryway.

SETH

Doesn't it scare you?

KATIE

I want to see it more than I'm afraid.

KATIE crosses the stage to meet SETH, before the entryway.

KATIE

It can't be that dangerous to just look, right?

SETH

And what if you do get lost?

KATIE

Well, I thought we'd use hot and cold.

SETH

What?

KATIE

So if I see anything decent, you say 'hot', and if I get lost you say 'cold'. Got it?

SETH

Yeah, ok, fine. I just wish we could go eat first though.

KATIE

It won't take long. I promise.

SETH

It's still dangerous.

KATIE

And?

SETH

How will I know if you're lost or not?

KATIE

Following the link between it all, and if it's not right you'll feel it.

SETH

In other words, listen to your gut.

KATIE

Exactly. Where else could I get material like it?

SETH laughs.

SETH

I can think of a few ways.

KATIE

If you're going to be like that, you may as well leave.

SETH

Relax, will you? You need to get out more.

KATIE

So you can wait a bit longer?

SETH

I think we've got a few more minutes. But like I said, I'm not going to look.

KATIE

This is why we're friends.

SETH

Well, better start, before I change my mind.

SETH pulls back the cloth to reveal a lit entryway. Low music begins to play. KATIE faces into the entryway.

SETH

Whenever you're ready. See anything?

KATIE

Not much. A coffee cup at a train station, in the sun. Wind burn. Cherry blossom bathwater.

SETH

Uh, cold.

KATIE

It's a lightning storm. He's here, with a bow and arrow. He's a punk, and an opera singer. He looks younger.

SETH

Hot, Katie.

KATIE

I'm a kite, yes, I'm from the hill, sign my lighter. I'm a brandy hole, a lollipop, there are politicians in the lavender fields... they're buying flights to Florida...and it's starting to rain.

SETH

Cold.

KATIE

It's not the same as before. There are hot knives, and shallow rivers, and they're watching us. Who are these preaching statues? These marooned women?

SETH

You're getting cold! Go back to the field.

KATIE

There's a cross, with a pinwheel. Somebody has driven a pike through it. It's leadership. It plays like a piano.

SETH

Hot.

KATIE

Here is the feral fireside dance of the fairy people, it's glorious heat on mannequin skin.

SETH

Cold, careful.

KATIE

I'm alone now, under a yellow streetlamp. On the stairs, near a river... It's warm here. There's someone there, across the water. Oh, they're waving. Who is it?

KATIE raises a hand and falls silent.

Beat

SETH

Katie? Who is it? Katie?

Lights fall dark. Exit KATIE. Entryway moves to the opposite position than before. LEVI alone onstage. Lights come back up.

Scene 2

LEVI catches sight of KATIE through the entryway.

LEVI

Who's that? As if I don't have enough going on. Invite yourself in, why don't you! Make yourself at home! I know I have a key for that somewhere-

LEVI goes about as if looking through shelves for a key. He finds one.

LEVI

Aha!

LEVI rushes to the entryway but doesn't lock it in time and stops short.

LEVI

Great, I think they've seen me. Best play along.

LEVI gives a half-hearted wave to the entryway, then dodges to the side, out of its view.

LEVI

This is no place for loitering. I have things that need done. If you trespass, you better be ready to stay.

KATIE passes through the entryway and moves slowly across the stage. LEVI watches on, moving stealthily downstage.

KATIE

I remember this from last time Seth, the streetlamp, and the sun...Seth?

KATIE turns to find herself through the entryway.

KATIE:

Oh. Well, I'm guessing you can still hear me.

KATIE makes her way across the stage, looking around in interest, eventually noticing LEVI, sitting on the floor.

KATIE

It's you!

LEVI

It's you.

KATIE

I'm Katie.

LEVI

Yeah, I know.

KATIE

I wasn't expecting to see anyone here, you know? Neither were you by the look of things...

LEVI

You're mistaken, I'm not anyone at all, you see, I'm a rosebush.

KATIE laughs.

KATIE

Clearly not. Since when do rose-bushes talk?

LEVI

Who are you to say what a rosebush can do? What can they do, anyway?

KATIE

Do you live here?

LEVI

You didn't answer my question. And I wouldn't call it live. I am here. What do you call that?

KATIE

You ask a lot of questions.

LEVI

I'm here, you're there, may as well take a look around. Just stay out of the mud. And don't step on my plants!

KATIE

I guess I will take a look then. Maybe by the time I get back your roses will be in bloom, and you'll be in a better mood?

LEVI

Take your time then.

Exit KATIE.

LEVI

This is my chance to get some answers. She can't ignore me any longer.

LEVI moves the entryway in order to conceal it from KATIE.

LEVI

I've been spinning, around and around, for so long. Too long! There are things I want to know. Need to know. I deserve to know, don't I?

Enter KATIE from offstage.

KATIE

Have you brightened up? This is too wonderful a place to be gloomy.

LEVI

What you see is what you want to see.

KATIE

Do you believe that?

LEVI

Here's another question - why don't you want to go for dinner with Seth?

KATIE is taken aback, and offended.

KATIE

Maybe you are a rose bush after all, full of thorns.

LEVI

Come on, I don't charge an entrance fee to this place, do I? All I ask is that you be honest with me, with yourself.

KATIE

You don't really get visitors, do you?

LEVI

What's a visitor? Nothing but a nuisance. If they were anything more than a passing nuisance, we would call them something different. Vis-i-tor. Like doctor, or jan-i-tor. So clinical, so sterile. No, I don't get visitors. But I do have friends.

KATIE

Friends?

LEVI

Friends! You know, like your friend Seth.

KATIE

Of course I know what friends are. I mean what friends have you got? No offense, but you're not all that friendly.

LEVI

We have a lot in common. We should be much better friends, us two. Give me some of your time. Let's talk like real friends. Then maybe you will tell me why you don't want to go to dinner.

As LEVI is talking, KATIE notices that the entryway is not where she left it. She cannot find it, and thinks for a moment, before turning to face LEVI.

KATIE

I'll tell you something.

LEVI

Now we're getting somewhere.

KATIE

I'll tell you something, and then you tell me where the door is, yeah? Is that your game?

LEVI

You know where it is already.

KATIE

What's that supposed to mean?

LEVI

You underestimate yourself; did you even really look?

KATIE

Of course I looked.

LEVI

Look at me. Tell me what you see.

KATIE

Why?

LEVI

When I look at you, I just see myself, that's all. And I want to know if it's the same for you.

KATIE

There's no way I see myself in you.

LEVI

You know why you say that? Because you want to hear it, you want to believe it.

KATIE

Ok, what are you trying to say, I haven't got long.

LEVI is smug.

LEVI

I'm not saying anything, I'm just waiting.

KATIE

For what?

LEVI

For you to tell me something, like you promised.

KATIE

I just told you, I don't see myself in you. Isn't that enough?

LEVI

No! You haven't told me anything, you told me a not-thing, that doesn't count.

KATIE grows frustrated.

KATIE

A not-thing? That's not a thing!

LEVI

You're contradicting yourself.

KATIE

Out with it then. What's made you so nosy? What do you want to know so bad?

LEVI

I already asked you. Why haven't you gone to dinner yet?

KATIE

How can I go, when you're hiding the way out?

LEVI

I'm not hiding it, you're hiding from it. Avoiding it.

KATIE

Why are you saying this?

LEVI

You came here to me; I'm just telling you what you came to hear.

KATIE

That's not true.

LEVI

Then why are you here?

KATIE

To see what I need to see, for art, for my work! I paint what I see.

LEVI

And is that all? Nothing more?

KATIE

That's it.

LEVI

I know you come here to get away. All this around us is just a distraction.

KATIE

Who are you to say why I do anything? God, why don't you get a life?

LEVI

You're only annoyed because it's true.

KATIE

What about you? Why are you here then?

LEVI

Act like you don't know me, that's fine. But I'm always here. And you're always here.

KATIE

Do you think we know each other?

LEVI

I know you. You know me, but you ignore me.

KATIE

I don't believe you.

LEVI

That's up to you. You need answers, not me.

KATIE

That's not true. Why would you be asking if you didn't want to know? This isn't about me at all. It's about you.

LEVI thinks for a moment.

LEVI

There's a thought.

KATIE

But it doesn't change anything, you know?

LEVI

Well-

KATIE

The answers are the same either way. I don't want to go for dinner, just the same as you won't admit to living here.

KATIE

You said when I came, you are here, but you don't live here. That's your problem, not mine.

LEVI

It's not the same.

KATIE

It is.

LEVI

How do you know if the answers are the same?

KATIE

Oh, come on. It's written all over your face. You do live here, only you're not really living, are you? You just exist. That's why you're so nosy.

LEVI

Say I am nosy, what's the harm in that? It doesn't explain why you come here.

KATIE

Why shouldn't I keep here and there separate?

LEVI

You can't just leave your life at the door. It comes with you, shaping what you see.

KATIE

No, you've made that up.

LEVI

If I'm making this up, why can't you find your way out?

KATIE

Because you moved it.

LEVI

You won't go for dinner, because it's not just dinner, is it? It's the rest of your life.

Pause.

KATIE

At least I have a life. You still need to find yours.

LEVI

It's around here somewhere.

KATIE

You better not waste it.

LEVI

So we are the same, after all.

KATIE

What are you going to do now you have your answer?

LEVI

I always find something.

KATIE

Are you going to go somewhere?

LEVI

Are you going to stay here? You can, you know.

KATIE

I can't stay. I have dinner to get back to.

LEVI

That's a pity. But I'm glad you're going, in a way.

KATIE

I think I know how to get back.

KATIE finds the entryway and turns back before passing through it.

KATIE

Until next time.

LEVI

Well, goodbye.

LEVI watches on. Exit KATIE through the entryway. LEVI does a victory dance.

LEVI

I knew it! I knew I was right. I'm always right. I wonder who will be next?
Better to stay here. That Katie's a real pain, yeah. Indecisive, annoying, but
you'd miss her. I wonder if she'll go?

*LEVI settles in front of the entryway to watch. Lights go down.
Entryway is moved to first position. SETH and KATIE resume positions.*

Scene 3

*Lights up. After a few moments, SETH re-covers the entryway. Music
fades out.*

SETH

What happened, what did you see? You went all quiet-You didn't hear

anything? You sounded far away.

KATIE

There was so much to see, I guess I got in over my head.

SETH

What then?

KATIE sits on the floor, distracted.

KATIE

Are we late?

SETH

NO, we still have time. Are you ok?

KATIE

I feel like I could melt.

SETH takes KATIE by the hands and pulls her to her feet.

SETH

I don't know what any of it meant, what you were saying. Something about a rosebush?

KATIE

You'll see it all in the paintings.

SETH

Did you get enough material?

KATIE

Enough to pay the rent.

SETH

Can you leave it now?

KATIE

It's so addictive. I had the strangest experience.

SETH

What happened?

KATIE

Nothing happened really. It's more...it all seems so obvious.

SETH

Can't you be happy knowing it's there? This will eat you alive if you keep at it.

KATIE

I wish we could map it out, every corner.

SETH

You can't colonise inspiration.

KATIE

We barely know any more than when we started. It felt like seconds.

SETH

Here is a good place to start then.

KATIE

Start what?

SETH

Shouldn't we share it? Isn't that the idea?

KATIE

We only know it exists, but how can we share it?

SETH

In one way or another. We're not the first to do it. No one better than you for the job.

KATIE brightens up somewhat. KATIE and SETH walk away from the entryway while talking.

KATIE

Yeah, let's do it. Where did you say, Israel, Mississippi? Let's do it all!
Let's travel the world! I'll go anywhere.

SETH

We could talk about it over dinner? Can't do much of anything on an empty stomach.

KATIE

Now that I can agree with!

End Scene.

These Council Estate Birds

By Emily Murray Nelson

Characters:

The two sisters are from a working-class family from Little Bray. They live in a council estate. Their mother is not a constant thing in their lives. They have Bray accents.

AOIFE O'Brien, 22. AOIFE is the older sister out of the two. She looks after her younger sister DEE and has done since she was younger. AOIFE is the breadwinner of her family and has been working at Supervalu since she was seventeen. She wanted to go to college but realised quickly that it was too expensive and she had responsibilities at home. She is very protective of DEE and is desperately pushing DEE to follow her dream of becoming a writer. She is a bright and happy person despite her circumstances. She is very confident and has never had an issue fitting in or attracting people. She loves to dance and is always moving or fidgeting. She loves going out to town with her mates and would be considered a bit of a party girl around their estate. AOIFE is in love with the idea of love. She wants to get married and have the stereotypical white picket fence life.

Deirdre "DEE" O'Brien, 15. DEE wants to become a writer. She goes to every workshop and joins every club that she can to try to improve her abilities. DEE gets imposter syndrome when she goes to these events as she's usually the only person there from a "disadvantaged area". She's insecure of her abilities and is the more timid of the two. DEE is very unsure of herself as many fifteen-year-old girls are. She feels like she doesn't belong in a writers' room because she's "common" but doesn't feel like she belongs in her community in the estate since she doesn't wholeheartedly fit the stereotype. DEE's whole life is based in her council estate, which she loves; however, she knows that if she wants to follow her dream, she will have to leave. She is more open about how she feels than AOIFE, who always puts on a happy face and prefers to just "move on"(run away). She loves her sister more than anything and is equally as protective as AOIFE. She does not see AOIFE as a mother figure, even though AOIFE has taken on that role.

The lights come on. AOIFE is sitting in the middle of a sofa in the middle of the stage. The telly is directly in front of her. There's a microphone on a stand in the corner of the stage. The telly is on but AOIFE's not paying attention to it, she's on the phone to her mate. She's tapping her feet

AOIFE

On the phone.

He's lovely... ah he was such a gentleman... don't laugh! The restaurant was so fancy... hardly, I'm a lady... ah he's such good craic though. You'll all love him, he's so sound... I haven't told Dee yet, ye know what she's like... Me ma will be thrilled, she's still nagging me that Chantelle O'Conner has got married before me... I know that's what I said... I've been too busy with my career... Who says being a cashier isn't a career? ... Excuse you I have a great set up down there... I get all the stuff past the sell by date... I have about fifty packets of chicken noodles there in the press left over from Chinese New Year... I'm getting off track here, but yeah Jamie's lovely... Ye know he still goes to the dentist?... I know!... I haven't been to the dentist since primary school...

He's not posh! He's just rich... They're not the same thing!... He's from BlackRock what do you expect... Well, I don't care, I like him... Stop laughing!... I swear to-

Noise of a front door slamming

AOIFE

I'll chat to ye later, Dee's just got home... yeah... yeah... ok... ok bubyee... yeah... bye.

DEE walks on stage in a huff. She lets her bag drop to the ground. She walks behind the sofa to see what AOIFE is watching. She tilts her head sideways. AOIFE turns around to look at DEE.

AOIFE

How was school?

DEE

Still looking at the telly.

Grand.

AOIFE

Mimicking Dee.

Grand.

DEE

You're on my side of the sofa. Scootch your bootch.

AOIFE moves to the left side of the sofa and turns off the telly. DEE plops down beside her.

AOIFE

How was the poetry thing?

DEE

I didn't go.

AOIFE

Shocked

Why?

DEE

I don't want to be a writer anymore.

AOIFE sits up straighter, as if she's been threatened.

AOIFE

Are ye messing?

DEE

No

AOIFE

Is someone bothering ye?

DEE

No

Defensively

AOIFE

What is it then?

DEE

Nothing! I just don't want to

AOIFE

Using hand gestures to try prove her point.

But like... Dee O'Brien is such a good writer name.

DEE

I'll go by Deirdre then.

AOIFE makes a face.

AOIFE

Where's all this coming from?

DEE

Mr Walsh is after putting me off.

AOIFE

What did that curly headed eejit say to ye?

DEE

Doing air quotes with her hands.

He said it's "unrealistic" and I should pursue something more "achievable."

AOIFE

Copies DEE's hand gestures

"Achievable"? Like what?

DEE

I don't know, like a chef or something.

AOIFE

A chef? Sure, ye can't cook for your life.

DEE

Now smiling

An accountant?

AOIFE

How are ye going to be an accountant when ye got a D in your maths Junior Cert?

DEE

Fair enough... A hairdresser?

AOIFE

Do I seriously need to remind you of the DIY bangs incident from last year?

DEE

Yeah, that one was a stretch. I'm still growing them out... I'll just get a cleaning job.

AOIFE

Laughing

Are you serious? You'd be sacked after five minutes! Your rooms a kip up there!

DEE

Well then, I don't know what to be doing.

AOIFE

Of course, ye do. You've wanted to be a writer since you were a fat little eight-year-old who put Maltesers in her spaghetti.

DEE

Wow... thanks.

AOIFE

It's not my fault you were a little hunger hole.

DEE

Yeah, it is! You were the one making me dinners.

AOIFE

Stop trying to change the subject! Why do you care what Mr Walsh says?

DEE

I don't, it's just this one thing that's getting to me.

AOIFE

But Dee ye love writing, don't ye?

DEE

Yeah, but what if I'm just not good?

AOIFE

Pauses

Read me your poem.

DEE

I told ye I didn't go to the poetry thing.

AOIFE

Yeah, but I know you and I bet you've already written one.

DEE

Am I that predictable?

AOIFE

To me? Yes. Now gowan and read me your poem.

DEE

Roses are red, Violets are blue, Sugar is sweet, The fecking state of you.

AOIFE

Sarcastically.

Ha. Ha. ha. You're hilarious.

DEE

I know.

AOIFE

Read me the actual poem.

DEE takes out a crumpled piece of paper, she looks at it for a moment.

DEE

It's so bad though.

AOIFE

Get up and read it... And do it properly... like ye have an audience.

AOIFE gestures to the audience.

DEE stands up with her piece of paper. She walks to the corner of the stage to the microphone on a stand. She confidently grabs the microphone, and the stage goes completely dark except for a spotlight on DEE. She's completely in her own head and in her own element. She says the poem as if she's performing for an audience. She takes a deep breath and begins.

DEE

Spray painted walls, Community centre halls, Bright orange streetlights,
behind buildings people fight, all the kids running around playing, Women
watch from doorsteps, their thin hair greying, Every curb is marked with a cry,
a memory or a death, Every house is filled with some lie, some love and a shit
tonne of debt, Were all a bit messed up, but were messed up together,
These council estate birds, are all birds of a feather. It's a beautiful thing, the
life of the working class, something special that my words could never really

surpass, In-between the stress and the broken hearts, There's friendship, family and love when you take it all apart, I can't even do it justice, this beautiful place I live, Because I know that it really does have so much more to give.

DEE lets out a breath and the stage returns to normal. AOIFE looks at DEE, shocked.

Well...

Wow... that was shit.

Shut up!

Laughing.

I'm only messing with ye. I take it that's about the estate.

Yeah.

How'd ye come up with that?

Granda.

What?

Granda told me to write down what I see.

That's what you see?

DEE nods her head.

Ye make this place sound a lot nicer than it is.

Well, it's a lot nicer than people think. Ye just have to look at it differently.

Well now ye have to go be a writer.

Why?

AOIFE

Ye said it yourself ye see things differently, sometimes people need that.

DEE

When did you get so wise?

AOIFE

I'm always wise, it just comes out more when I'm high.

DEE

Aoife! Are you being serious?

AOIFE

Never, anyway my mam would kill me if she caught me

DEE

Mam's not here though.

AOIFE

I know.

DEE

Mam's never here

AOIFE

And? We're grand on our own.

DEE

I know...

AOIFE

Will ye promise me something?

DEE

What?

AOIFE

Promise me you'll keep writing. Promise me you'll write down everything and anything and if you can promise me that then I can promise you that I'll get you out of here.

DEE

You that desperate to get rid of me?

AOIFE

Yeah, I am if it means you get to go to college and travel and live abroad and be all rich and successful and-

DEE

And do all the things you want to do.

AOIFE

Yes... now promise.

DEE

But I don't want to leave. I love this place.

AOIFE

Look... If things don't work out, ye can always come back but you'll regret it if you stay here.

DEE

Do you?

AOIFE

What?

DEE

Do you regret staying here?

AOIFE

Pauses

I don't know.

DEE

You do.

AOIFE

Maybe? ... This place... It's an ok place to start... but that's what it is. It's a start, it's a beginning. And people don't stay at the beginning forever.

DEE

You didn't answer my question.

AOIFE

It's too early to ask me that. Ask me that if I'm still here when I'm thirty five... And ye get my point?

DEE

Yeah... I'll think about it.

AOIFE

No.

DEE

But-

AOIFE

No. Ye already think too much. Ye need to stop living in your head and take some risks. Anyway, this is something I've already decided that you're doing.

DEE

Frustrated.

There's no arguing with you.

AOIFE

You know I'm right... Ye do I can tell. Now promise me.

AOIFE sticks out her pinky finger.

DEE

Fine...

DEE pinky promises with AOIFE.

DEE

I promise to get out of here if you promise to come with me. I can't do anything without you.

AOIFE

Don't be stupid, of course ye can. Anyway, I can't leave here. I'm fixing up the community centre.

In a funny voice.

Think of the children.

DEE holds AOIFE's hand.

DEE

But sure, I'll miss ye.

AOIFE

Right... hold on.

AOIFE runs offstage and DEE huffs in exasperation.

DEE

To offstage.

I was trying to have a moment there!

AOIFE walks back in and flicks DEE on the ear. DEE swats her hand away.

AOIFE

Stop being a sap.

DEE

I was being nice.

AOIFE

Right well so you don't miss me when you're all famous, ye can have this.

AOIFE hands DEE a necklace with a ring on it.

DEE

I can't take this, Nannie gave it to you, and it's your signature -

Looking for a word.

- thing

AOIFE

Well Nannie gave it to me and now I'm giving it to you, it can be your signature "thing". And you'll have a piece of me to carry around when you're gone.

DEE

Look who's being a sap now.

AOIFE

That's what happens when you hang around your nerdy little sister too much.

DEE

Shut up! I'm not nerdy.

AOIFE

Sarcastically

Mmmhmm, of course not.

DEE

Oh! Leigh's having a gaff on Friday, she wants to know if you're going.

AOIFE

Sighs.

She's gonna kill me.

DEE

Why?

AOIFE

I couldn't go to the last one she had and now I can't go to this one.

DEE

Why? Where are ye going on Friday?

AOIFE

I'm going to a concert with my friend.

DEE

What friend?

AOIFE

Ye don't know them.

DEE

I know all your mates.

AOIFE

Not this one. It's a new friend.

DEE

A boy friend?

AOIFE

So, what if it is?

DEE

Angrily.

Well, if it is, I want to meet him.

AOIFE

I knew you'd get like this.

DEE

Sarcastically.

Oh, I wonder why?

AOIFE

Dee... He's a really nice lad.

DEE

Why didn't you tell me?

AOIFE

Because Dee! Believe it or not, I am the adult in this situation and I don't have to tell you everything!

DEE

But we don't do secrets! That's what you always say!

AOIFE

I didn't want to freak ye out!

DEE

Is he gonna start living with us?

AOIFE

Hardly! I've only been going with him for about two months.

DEE

Two months! You- What? - Two months!

AOIFE

Dee! Chill out, I'm taking things slow.

DEE

Is he?

AOIFE

He's following my lead.

DEE

Is he... the type?

AOIFE

What type?

DEE

Your type!

AOIFE

I don't have a type.

DEE

Yeah, ye do.

AOIFE

And what type is that?

DEE

Arseholes.

AOIFE

No-

DEE

Yes! Dennis! Lee!

AOIFE

Laughs.

Trust me, he's not like that. Fine then, he's not my usual cup of tea.

DEE

What is he then?

AOIFE

He's a hot chocolate.

DEE cringes and AOIFE laughs.

DEE

Smiling.

That was so bad.

AOIFE

Why ye laughing then?

DEE

Cause you're laughing.

Their laughter dies down.

DEE

Just- I don't want you to get hurt again.

AOIFE

Ye have to get hurt sometimes. That's how ye know your heart works.

DEE

Sarcastically.

How profound.

AOIFE

Dee, I don't know what that means.

DEE

Laughing

Don't worry about it. Is there anything good on the telly?

AOIFE

I recorded Derry girls.

DEE

Well stick it on there! What's for dinner?

AOIFE

We have noodles, or we can have noodles. Your pick.

DEE

How about noodles?

AOIFE

Good choice.

The light on the stage gets dimmer. 'Dreams' by the Cranberries plays lightly in the background. The two girls lean back on the sofa and relax. DEE puts her head on AOIFE's shoulder and AOIFE grabs DEE's hand. The stage goes dark and the music fades.

Training

By Laura Molloy

Office. A smartly dressed politician (JOHN) is under the desk playing with a toy train. He makes train noises. A teenage boy (ETHAN) enters with a coffee.

ETHAN

Minister?

JOHN continuously makes train noises as ETHAN looks for him.

Minister is that you?

Train noises reduce to a whisper.

Minister?

Whispering continues as ETHAN tucks a chair under the desk.

JOHN

OW!!

ETHAN jumps back startled.

Cheers for that Ethan!

JOHN rubs his shoulder in pain.

ETHAN

Are you alright?

JOHN

I'm fine.

ETHAN

What are you doing under there?

JOHN

I'm looking for something.

ETHAN

Looking for what?

JOHN

It doesn't matter.

ETHAN

Well, do you want a hand?

JOHN

No, it's fine, I found it.

ETHAN

Is that...is that a train?

JOHN

Yes.

ETHAN
Where did you get it?

JOHN
I can't remember.

ETHAN
Right. So, what's it for?

JOHN
Nothing in particular.

ETHAN
Well why do you have it?

JOHN
Just-

ETHAN
Just what?

JOHN
Just do, don't I?

ETHAN
Why are you on the floor?

JOHN
Didn't realise we were playing the fucking why game!

ETHAN
I'm just asking why you-

JOHN
Exactly! EVERYBODY'S ALWAYS ASKING WHY!! WHY'D YOU FUCK UP THIS?
WHY'D YOU FUCK UP THAT? IT'S NEVER THANK YOU. YA KNOW, THANKS
FOR GETTING US ACCREDITED GRADES. IT'S ALWAYS FUCKING WHY?

ETHAN
You didn't get the accredited grades.

JOHN
You think I'd be in this job if I did?

ETHAN
I mean you didn't bring them in.

JOHN
Of course I did!

ETHAN
You weren't in government.

JOHN
Excuse you. Opposition can bring change in too.

ETHAN
You lost your seat in the election. You weren't in at all.

JOHN resumes playing with the train.

Right well, I brought you a coffee.

JOHN

Pass it here. CHOO CHOO.

ETHAN

Aren't you getting up? You don't look comfortable.

JOHN

Well, I am, now give it here. Thank you.

JOHN takes a sip then spits it out in disgust.

ETHAN

John are you alright?

JOHN

What is this?!

ETHAN

It's-

JOHN

Let me tell you what it is. It's shit.

ETHAN

It's a flat white!

JOHN

Do I look like a hipster to you?

ETHAN

No?

JOHN

Exactly. I'm a politician! A Senior Minister!

Throws the cup into the pool of spilt coffee.

I don't drink that hipster shit.

ETHAN

It's not shit! It's coffee and you've just wasted it!

JOHN

Relax, it was only a few quid.

ETHAN

We aren't all on a minister's salary.

JOHN

I'll refund you.

ETHAN

It's fine.

JOHN resumes playing with the train.

JOHN

This is worse than when you ordered pancakes for lunch.

ETHAN

What was wrong with that?

JOHN

CHUGA CHUGA CHOO CHOO!!

ETHAN

Oi! I said what's wrong with that?

JOHN

Pancakes are for breakfast. Not lunch.

ETHAN

They were the only thing I liked on the menu.

JOHN

Real men eat real food.

ETHAN

Who burst your bubble last Pancake Tuesday?

JOHN

I just have standards.

ETHAN

Notions you mean.

JOHN

Do you want to keep this job?

ETHAN

Job? I'm a TY on work experience.

JOHN

Can still ask you to leave.

ETHAN

Wish you would.

JOHN

You were lucky to get this opportunity.

ETHAN

Was I?

JOHN

Yes! You should be grateful.

ETHAN

Me? Grateful? Have you heard yourself recently?

JOHN

What does that mean?

ETHAN

You've all these people helping you. You'd never once thank them.

JOHN plays with the train.

You're always so rude.

JOHN

I'm one of the nicest people you'll ever meet.

ETHAN

You told someone to stuff their vote yesterday.

JOHN

They asked a stupid question.

ETHAN

She asked if you'd reduce the cost of childcare!

JOHN

People won't listen to screaming kids all day for free. CHOO CHOO.

ETHAN

It's too expensive.

JOHN

Why do you care? It hardly affects you.

ETHAN

Doesn't it?

JOHN

Oh, you haven't...

ETHAN

Haven't what?

JOHN

What's her name?

ETHAN

Sorry?

JOHN

Forget it. Why are you stressing over childcare? You're 16. Just chill.

ETHAN

Chill?

JOHN

Why would you be worried about childcare?

ETHAN

Maybe because my parents can't afford it?

JOHN

Aren't you a bit old for a babysitter?

ETHAN

My four-year-old sister isn't.

JOHN

Can't you mind her?

ETHAN

I do but it never leaves much time for study.

JOHN

Why are you wasting your time here then?

ETHAN

I didn't have a choice.

JOHN

Well, you should have applied somewhere else.

ETHAN

Picking up the pile of leaflets.

Forgive me if I'm not excited by delivering these. I feel like the postman.

JOHN

Welcome to elections. CHOO CHOO.

Phone rings.

ETHAN

You going to answer that?

JOHN

Probably just some oul' one moaning.

ETHAN

Could be important.

JOHN

Doubt it. CHOO CHOO.

ETHAN folds his arms.

What's the problem?

ETHAN

You! Acting like you don't care about anybody.

JOHN

How dare you! I do care.

ETHAN

Really? You ever do any work?

JOHN

I work exceptionally hard for this country.

ETHAN

You're the worst minister we've ever had!

JOHN

Then why did you ask for work experience with me.

ETHAN

I didn't

JOHN

You did!

ETHAN

I didn't

JOHN

Then who wrote the email?

ETHAN

My mum.

JOHN

Why did she want you to work here? CHOO CHOO.

ETHAN

Thought I might get on the news at six.

JOHN

Slim chance. Maybe the nine o'clock news though.

Both laugh.

ETHAN

She thought it might get me interested in politics.

JOHN

Are you?

ETHAN

All you people care about is keeping your job.

JOHN

Doesn't everyone?

ETHAN

There are more important things.

JOHN

Like?

ETHAN

Family.

JOHN

Family? You don't think that matters to us? Why do you think we worry about losing our jobs?

ETHAN

Money, I assume.

JOHN

Yes, to provide for my family.

ETHAN

But you don't have to do a good job.

JOHN

Of course we do!

ETHAN

As long as you sound good, you're fine.

JOHN

That's not true.

ETHAN

Isn't it? Is that why 58 percent of DEIS students don't have access to laptops? I'm sure that was handy during lockdown. Oh, and I'm sure things are splendid for the 1,789 children living in Direct Provision.

JOHN

That's precise!

ETHAN

There's more than 7,000 people in total living in Direct Provision in case you didn't know.

JOHN

We're ending.

ETHAN

What about the 10,300 people that are homeless? There's actually more than that.

JOHN starts playing with the train again.

Or the 126,300 people who are unemployed? What about all the sixth years that were messed about during the pandemic?

JOHN

You act like we've done nothing.

ETHAN

Because you haven't.

JOHN

What about legalising same-sex marriage?

ETHAN

Are you being serious?

JOHN

Don't tell me that wasn't good.

ETHAN

Allowing people to marry those they love?

JOHN

.. Yes?

ETHAN

That should have been brought in years earlier.

JOHN

Look, these things take time.

ETHAN

That's the problem. You're too slow to change things. Too slow to care. Unless an election crops up.

JOHN

We've to make more of an effort then yes.

ETHAN

God knows you'll need to this year. Your polls are plummeting.

JOHN

Chuga Chuga choo cho. Chuga chuga choo choo.

ETHAN picks up leaflets.

ETHAN

These leaflets won't drop themselves. When are we leaving?

JOHN

Seven. The others should be here soon.

ETHAN

Let's hope the doors are a bit kinder tonight.

JOHN

I know things are bad. The education system is in shambles. I was a student once.

ETHAN

Yeah, in some private school.

JOHN

What?

ETHAN

Acres of land.

JOHN

No.

ETHAN

Top teachers.

JOHN

I wasn't in a private school. Far from it.

ETHAN

I always just assumed-

JOHN

Because I'm rich now? It wasn't always like this.

He stops playing with the train.

The big house, cushy cars, private chauffeurs.

ETHAN

What was it like?

JOHN

Similar to yours I imagine. Troubled about money. . .

ETHAN

It is a concern.

JOHN

I was the same. My parents always struggled paying bills. My father pulled pints for a living. What about yours?

ETHAN

Dad's a mechanic. Mum's a barista. What about your mum?

JOHN

Took one look at parenthood then fled.

ETHAN

I'm sorry. I didn't know.

JOHN

How could you? I wasn't the worst off. There was one girl in my class called Sophie. Tiny. I don't think she was ever fed.

ETHAN

Did your friends come from money? I mean, if you had any.

JOHN

Oh, I had them all right.

ETHAN

But not anymore.

JOHN

No, they didn't come from money. No, we went out to play. Very fond memories.

ETHAN

Did you ever get toys?

JOHN

Occasionally. The Christmas before Mum left, she gave me a train set.

ETHAN

Pointing to the train in John's hands.

Is that part of it?

JOHN

Yes, this came with it.

ETHAN

Were you big into trains?

JOHN

I loved building new worlds.

ETHAN

Should have done engineering.

JOHN

Well maybe if I'd got accredited grades I'd be in a different job. It was more a mental thrill. There was no limit. I could create anything. My resources were unlimited. Anything was possible.

ETHAN

Even though the train sets came with a set number of pieces?

JOHN

If I ran out of pieces I used other stuff. Anything I felt that worked. I wanted to help people.

ETHAN

Well, you haven't.

JOHN

I know. Government isn't as simple as train sets.

ETHAN

Why are you running again then?

JOHN

I want to prove myself. To my family. Myself. You.

ETHAN

Me?

JOHN

I don't disagree with what you said earlier.

ETHAN

You can't. They're facts.

JOHN

Things are going to change.

ETHAN

Yeah, whenever this country gets a decent Cabinet.

JOHN

And God knows when that'll be.

ETHAN

You doubt yourself already?

JOHN

You've seen the polls.

ETHAN

There's still time for them to change.

JOHN

Sounds like you want them to.

ETHAN

Be a bit embarrassing if the TD I chose to work with didn't get elected.

JOHN

We could do with someone like you in the branch.

ETHAN

I doubt it.

JOHN

I'm serious. You're young, intelligent, driven. You'd be an asset.

ETHAN

You trying to bribe a vote out of me?

JOHN

You're under 18.

ETHAN

Didn't think of that.

JOHN

Think about joining us. I think you'd enjoy it.

ETHAN

I'll see.

JOHN

I know you said your mum signed you up for this, but you've done great work.

ETHAN

Thank you.

JOHN

You should be proud of yourself. I'm serious.

ETHAN

I'm not promising anything.

JOHN

Not asking you to.

ETHAN

Thanks.

JOHN

For what?

ETHAN

Listening.

JOHN

It's my job, isn't it?

Door buzzer.

And so the madness begins.

ETHAN

So it does.

JOHN

Do me a favour and buzz them in.

ETHAN

Maybe you should move for once.

JOHN

I will in a minute. Anyway, you're already standing.

ETHAN watches JOHN for a moment and then exits to open the door while JOHN starts playing with the train again.

JOHN

CHUGA CHUGA CHOO CHOO.